International Relations in the Two World Wars, 1914-1945

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Course Description

The era of the two World Wars persists in fundamentally informing the contemporary imagination, providing powerful tropes and guideposts for thought. In Western Europe and North America, the Second World War (WWII) is portrayed as the ‘good’ war, fought to defend civilization from barbarism and catastrophe. Its events, symbols and personalities are invoked repeatedly in public and governmental discourses. If this ‘Thirty Years’ Crisis’ (1914-45) has become a defining experience in the evolution of 20th century world politics, its influence in the social sciences is nowhere greater than on the fields of International Relations (IR). The Crisis represents the paradigmatic moment in the formation and subsequent trajectory of disciplinary. This course offers students an introduction to tumult of the 1914-1945 years through the prism of debates (and conspicuously absent debates) within the field of IR.

Aims and objectives

The aim of the course is to introduce students to specific issues and events in the history of the 1914-1945 years, while also engaging with key historiographical debates and theoretical approaches, particularly as viewed from the perspective of International Relations (IR). Focusing on core themes and debates addressed in the conventional historiographical and IR literatures, an objective of the course will be to simultaneously problematizes these issues in pushing analyzes toward the often ‘hidden’ sources of inter-state rivalries of the age. This traces the historically unique economic, political, and cultural roots of putatively discrete ‘geopolitical’ phenomenon. The aim then is to go beyond conventional understandings of the Crisis years as yet another saga in the timeless inter-state struggle over the European balance of power in uncover the deeper sociological sources of the geopolitics in era of the two World Wars.

The course is intended for the non-specialist audience unfamiliar with the either history of the period or a background in political science. Students should, however, come prepared to read heavily in both history and theory.

Seminar Objectives

The seminars will be a venue for more in-depth discussion of the lecture materials and seminar readings. Seminars will focus on exploring a specific event or theme of the period as covered in particular readings assigned for each seminar. Students will be asked to participate in discussion employing the theoretical and conceptual frameworks covered in the lectures. All students will be encouraged by the seminar coordinator to engage in an informed and constructive multilateral discussion and debate of the issues.
Evaluation of student's seminar performance will be made on the following criteria:
- General level and quality of student engagement
- Ability to critically absorb seminar and lecture readings as evidenced by:
  (a) summary of main arguments of the reading;
  (b) contextualization of the article within the wider extant historiographical and theoretical debates;
  (c) creative use of the theoretical and conceptual content of the readings.

The course will be formed of 12 Lectures and 8 Seminars.

Lectures

Lecture 1: The Thirty Years’ Crisis in World Historical Context
Lecture 2: Origins of the First World War: German ‘Sonderweg’ or ‘Slide into War’?
Lecture 3: US Entry into War and Its Aftermath: The Thought and Practice of Wilsonian Diplomacy
Lecture 4: The Making of the Versailles Treaty: Carthaginian or Wilsonian Peace?
Lecture 5: The Failure of World Communist Revolution: Rapid Industrialization and the Dilemmas of ‘Socialism in One Country’
Lecture 6: The ‘German Problem’ and the Reconstruction of European Capitalism
Lecture 7: The Weimar Republic and its Destruction
Lecture 8: British Appeasement Policy of the 1930s: Class, Security and War
Lecture 9: Under the ‘External Whips’: Social Change, Conflict and War in the Asia-Pacific
Lecture 10: Fascism and the Coming of the Second World War
Lecture 11: The Nazi War Economy and the Immediate Causes of the Second World War
Lecture 12: Review Lecture

Seminars

Seminar 1: Causes of the First World War: Debates and Controversies
Seminar 2: Wilson versus Lenin: ‘European Civil War’?
Seminar 3: Isolationist Retreat or Imperial Expansionism? US Foreign Policy during the 1920s
Seminar 4: The Significance of October 1917 and Its Consequences
Seminar 5: The Meaning and ‘Lessons’ of the Great Depression
Seminar 6: An Interwar ‘Cold War’?
Seminar 7: What causes Fascism?
Seminar 8: What was the Second World War?

General Readings

David Calleo (1978) The German Problem Reconsidered: Germany and the World Order, 1870 to the Present
E.H Carr (1939) The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations
Sandra Halperin (2004) War and Social Change in Modern Europe: The Great Transformation Revisited
Lecture 1: The Thirty Years’ Crisis in World Historical Context

Essential Readings

Frank McDonough (1997) The Origins of the First and Second World Wars, Ch 1


Recommended Readings


Further Readings


Lecture 2: Origins of the First World War: German Sonderweg or ‘Slide into War’?

Primary Readings


Recommended Readings


**Further Readings**


**Lecture 3: US Entry into War and its Aftermath: The Thought and Practice of Wilsonian Diplomacy**

**Essential Readings**


George Kennan (1951) *American Diplomacy*, Ch 4

**Recommended Readings**


Hans Morgenthau (1952) *American Foreign Policy: A Critical Examination*.


**Further Readings**


**Lecture 4: The Making of the Versailles Treaty: Carthaginian or Wilsonian Peace?**


**Recommended Readings**


**Further Readings**


**Lecture 5: The Failure of World Communist Revolution: The Dilemmas of Soviet Industrialization and ‘Socialism in One Country’**

**Essential Readings**

Isaac Deutscher (1951) *Stalin: A Political Biography*
Recommended Readings

E.H. Carr (1979) *The Russian Revolution From Lenin to Stalin, 1917-1929*


Further Readings

Robert Service (1997) *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*


Lecture 6: The ‘German Problem’ and the Reconstruction of European Capitalism

Essential


Recommended Readings


Further Readings


**Lecture 7: The Weimar Republic and its Destruction**

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Further Readings**

Hans Mommsen (1995)*The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy.*


**Lecture 8: British Appeasement Policy of the 1930s: Class, Security and War**

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


Paul Kennedy *The Realities Behind Diplomacy*, Chapter 5.


**Further Readings**


**Lecture 9: Under the ‘External Whips’: Social Change, Conflict and War in the Asia-Pacific**

**Essential Readings**


Michael Barnhart (1988) *Japan Prepares for Total War*, Ch 1

**Recommended Readings**


Further Readings

Walter Lafeber (1997) *The Clash*

Akira Iriye (1965) *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in East Asia, 1921-1931*

Y-L Sun (1993) *China and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1931-1941*

Lecture 10—Fascism and the Coming of the Second World War

Essential Readings


Recommended Readings


Further Readings


Lecture 11: The Nazi War Economy and the Immediate Causes of the Second World War
Essential Readings


Recommended Readings


Further Readings


Lecture 12: Review Lecture

[review readings - tba]

Seminar 1: Causes of the First World War: Debates and Controversies


Seminar 2: Wilson versus Lenin: ‘European Civil War’?


Seminar 3: Isolationist Retreat or Imperial Expansionism? US Foreign Policy during the 1920s


Seminar 4: The Significance of October 1917 and Its Consequences

E.H.Carr (1979) *The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin, 1917-1929*

Seminar 5: The Meaning and ‘Lessons’ of the Great Depression


Seminar 6: An Interwar ‘Cold War’?


Seminar 7: What causes Fascism?


Seminar 8: What was the Second World War?