

Course information 2026-27

IR2214 Foreign Policy Analysis

General information

MODULE LEVEL: 5

CREDIT: 30

NOTIONAL STUDY TIME: 300 hours

MODE: Locally Taught, Independent Learner Route and Online Taught

Summary

The study of foreign policy is referred to as foreign policy analysis, and its focus is the intentions and actions of (primarily) states aimed at the external world and the response of other actors (again, primarily states) to these actions. This course is not designed to give students detailed exposure to the changing foreign policies of any particular country, though of course students will have many opportunities to learn about the foreign policies of major, middle and small powers through the reading material. It is aimed at giving students the tools to analyse, interpret and, ultimately, understand the dynamics of foreign policy generally so that they might apply these to their study of the role of states in international affairs.

Conditions

Please refer to the relevant programme structure in the EMFSS Programme Regulations to check:

- where this course can be placed on your degree structure; and
- details of prerequisites and corequisites for this course.

You should also refer to the Exclusions list in the EMFSS Programme Regulations to check if any exclusions apply for this course.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this course is to:

- Introduce Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and its examination of foreign policy processes, actors and instruments.
- Identify key issues and problems arising in foreign policy making and implementation.
- Introduce the key FPA concepts required to analyse these key issues and problems.

- Illustrate how these concepts can be applied to address the key issues identified.
- Show how the foreign policy process and foreign policy actors address the key issues identified.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course and having completed the essential reading and activities students should be able to:

- Understand how foreign policy decision making is central to developing an understanding of the sources of state conduct in the international system.
- Assess rational and public choice approaches to analyse foreign policy.
- Explain the significance of cognition, psychology and personality in shaping foreign policy decision making by leaders and advisory teams.
- Describe how bureaucratic politics influences the foreign policy making process through its formative and implementation phases.
- Understand the dynamics between state and society, including constitutionally mandated structures regime type and informal rules of conduct, and how these impact on foreign policy.
- Identify and recognise the role of transnational actors as sources of influence on foreign policy.
- Explain the differences between major, middle and small powers as foreign policy actors and the impact that emerging powers' diplomacy has on existing structural hierarchies in the contemporary international system.
- Describe the significance of changes in global media and the rise of digital diplomacy and social media as a source of influence on foreign policy.
- Explain how identity politics and post-colonialism approaches to foreign policy challenges, reinforces or provides an alternative to conventional foreign policy analysis.

Employability skills

Below are the three most relevant employability skills that students acquire by undertaking this course which can be conveyed to future prospective employers:

1. Complex problem-solving
2. Leadership
3. Creativity and innovation

Essential reading

For full details of additional essential readings, please refer to the reading list.

Alden, C. and A. Aran, *Foreign Policy Analysis – New Approaches* (London: Routledge 2017) 2nd edition. [ISBN 978-1138934290]

Smith, S., A. Hadfield and T. Dunne, *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: OUP 2012) 2nd edition [ISBN 978-0198708902]

Assessment

This course is assessed by a three-hour and fifteen-minute closed-book written examination.

Syllabus

1. Introduction to foreign policy analysis (FPA):

Origins of FPA and its core concepts. Definition of the situation. Evolution of field. Realism and Rationalism, Behaviourism, Institutionalism/ Bureaucratic Politics, State-Society relations and Pluralism. FPA's relationship to International Relations.

Part 1: Foreign policy decision-making

2. Foreign policy analysis (FPA) – origins in realism and rationalism:

Realism and systemic sources of FPA. Power and foreign policy in a realist system. Rationalism and foreign policy decision-making. Game theory and foreign policy choice. Instruments of foreign policy, diplomacy, economic statecraft, subversion, military, soft power. Critique of realist-rationalist model, influence of Simon, Kahneman and Tversky on FPA.

3. Foreign policy decision-making: psychology, cognition and personality:

Leader as foreign policy decision-maker. Role of psychology. Role of cognition. Unpacking personality's influence on foreign policy. Use of historical analogies and metaphors in foreign policy decision-making and public mobilisation. Examples, Cold War, Gulf War, Afghanistan. Small group decision-making.

4. Bureaucratic politics and crises:

Foreign policy institutions and foreign policy decision-making. Allison's three models. Critique and revision of bureaucratic politics. Foreign policy implementation as influence. Crises, leadership and institutional responses. Examples, US and Cuban missile crisis, Sino-Indian border war.

5. Domestic environment and foreign policy – state and society relations:

Theories of the state, state-society relations and impact on foreign policy. Role of regime type. Formal and informal state structures. Pluralist competition, interest groups, public opinion and old/new media. Role of selectorate in authoritarian regimes. Neglected aspects of domestic environment, including political parties.

Part 2: Foreign policy actors and international structures in flux

6. Major, middle, small and emerging powers:

Power hierarchies in the international system. Major powers and foreign policy, material attributes, hegemony. Middle powers and foreign policy, bridge builders, niche diplomacy, multilateralism, followership. Small powers, alliance and coalitions, multilateralism. Emerging powers and structural change in the international power hierarchies.

7. Transnational actors:

Non-state actors, including multinational corporations (MNC) and international non-governmental organisations (INGO), and those which challenge the legitimacy of states. Hill's typology focusing on aims and processes. Integration of norms cycle literature (Barnett, Finnemore) into foreign policy change. Intergovernmental organisations as sites for foreign policy action, coalition building, norms promotion and collective action. Complex interdependency as a model for foreign policy decision-making in an era of globalisation. Examples, Kimberley process, anti-land mine campaign.

8. Revisiting the external environment:

Geopolitics redux, resource wars and resurgent nationalism. Examples of securitisation of trade and supply chains indicate the shift to 'geo-economics'. Rise of environmental challenges to stability, role of intergovernmental organisations as sites for collective action on climate change. Role of summitry and foreign policy, including new North-South debate and emerging geography of risk (environmental, territorial, migratory, food security).

9. Foreign policy and change:

Foreign policy decision-makers and prospect theory (Welch). Learning and foreign policy change at institutional level, role of bureaucratic entrepreneurs. Absence of learning (Lindblom). Transitional regimes and foreign policy, work of Huntington, Linz and Stanger. Cybersphere, digital diplomacy and new security challenges, social media and non-state actors' impact on foreign policy.

Part 3: Foreign policy analysis (FPA), new approaches and futures

10. FPA through another lens – identity politics and post-colonialism:

New approaches to understanding state conduct in the international system. Identity politics and foreign policy, including insights from feminist IR and gender studies. Post-colonialism's insights into race and foreign policy. Islam, orientalism and occidentalism. Examples, women in diplomacy, Western humanitarian intervention and Responsibility to Protect (R2P), Chinese diplomacy and mobilising the Chinese diaspora.

11. Conclusion:

Review of durability of key tenets of FPA, including foreign policy decision-making and concentric circles of influence on foreign policy within and outside state apparatus. Deceleration of globalisation, digital trends and assertion power politics. FPA's future research agenda.