

Course information 2026-27

IR3140 Security in International Relations

General information

MODULE LEVEL: 6

CREDIT: 30

NOTIONAL STUDY TIME: 300 hours

MODE: Locally Taught, Independent Learner Route and Online Taught

Summary

This course provides insights and understanding of order and stability both within and between states. A common misunderstanding is to equate security with the defence of states. But the security agenda now encompasses much more than this. Security is increasingly also concerned with individual human security, the ways in which sub-state groups may affect security (such as in intrastate wars), transnational threats to security (such as terrorism), as well as regional and global security dynamics. In addition to questions of force and military preparedness, security has extended to new policy sectors such as the economy, health, the environment, and migration. What students take away from this course is a holistic understanding of security as a core requirement for human life and an awareness that security policies will vary depending upon how one answers the key questions: security in (or of) what; security from what; and security by what means.

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 the course is to:

- Introduce students to the central concepts in security studies.
- Develop students' comparative skills of analysis of differing security policies in practice.

- Promote critical engagement with the security studies literature and enable students to display this engagement by developing their ability to present, substantiate and defend complex arguments.

Learning outcomes

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

- An ability to apply theories and concepts from security studies to relevant empirical examples.
- A critical understanding of the issues involved in security policy decision making.
- An awareness of the contexts, pressures and constraints with which security policymakers have to deal.

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. Communication skills
2. Decision making
3. Complex problem solving

Essential reading

IR3140 requires you to read two essential books as you work through this course. The two essential books for IR3140 are:

Buzan, B. *People, states and fear: an agenda for international security studies in the post-cold war era*. (New York and London: ECPR 1991; reissued ECPR 2007, 2016) second edition [ISBN 9780955248818]. (Please note that the second edition has been reissued multiple times and so may appear under various dates.)

Williams, P. and McDonald, M. (eds.). *Security Studies: An Introduction*. (London: Routledge 2018) third edition [ISBN 978-0415784900].

A third book is recommended for use as a reference for the case study on intervention (part four).

Economides, Spyros and Mats Berdal (eds) *United Nations interventionism, 1991–2004*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) first edition [ISBN 9780521547673].

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

Assessment

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

Syllabus

Part 1 – Key concepts and theories of security

The first part of the course is an introduction to the key concepts and theories of security. It locates International Security Studies (ISS) as a distinct sub-field of International Relations with a specific focus of debate that draws insight from a range of theoretical approaches.

Part 2 – Deepening security

The second part of the course examines the ways in which our understanding of security has ‘deepened’ since the end of the Cold War to include global, regional, intra state, and transnational dynamics.

Part 3 – Widening security

The third part of the course examines the ways in which our understanding of security has ‘widened’ since the end of the Cold War to include a range of new policy areas such as the environment, economics, migration, and health.

Part 4 – The Problem of Intervention

The final part of the course is an in-depth case study of intervention to further elucidate the competing logics of security as they manifest themselves in this most controversial of security practices.