MPhil in International Relations

Geopolitics [1453] 1600-1871

Prof. Brendan Simms and Dr Patrick Milton

Assessment: 2000 word practice essay, 3 hour invigilated exam
Teaching:

1 hour weekly lecture – 10-11am Thursdays (S1)
1.5 hour weekly seminar – 3pm - 4.30pm Thursdays (S2)

13 lectures and seminars (12 topics)

The course will show how some of the themes which dominate international politics today have their roots in the old European balance of power as it evolved into the global system we know today: the German question, British exceptionalism, colonialism, maritime versus continental hegemony, the Muslim threat, conditional sovereignty, the Rise of Russia, slavery, and humanitarian intervention. Each seminar will involve the discussion of primary sources as well as secondary literature.

Required Texts

It is desirable that you tackle this background reading in advance, and alongside the reading listed for individual lectures/seminars. It would also be very helpful if you invested in a historical atlas. Students who read German or French and want to consult additional literature, please email plm29@cam.ac.uk.

Brendan Simms, Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy (New York, 2013)
Joachim Whaley, Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, 1495-1806 (Oxford, 2011)
Peter H. Wilson, The Holy Roman Empire: A Thousand Years of Europe’s History (London, 2016).
Brendan Simms, Britain’s Europe. A thousand years of conflict and cooperation (London, 2016).
Useful journals to consult include: International History Review, Historical Journal, Diplomatic History, Diplomacy and Statecraft.

LECTURES AND SEMINARS

The primary sources listed here are all available on Moodle. Some of the secondary sources are also on Moodle, those that are not are for additional reading.

Lecture 1. The emergence of the European system, 1453-1555

This lecture will provide a thematic outline of the emergence of the multipolar European state system following the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. It will address developments which remained important for many centuries, such as the great rivalry between France and the House of Habsburg, the centrality of the Holy Roman Empire to the state system, the Protestant Reformation, and the European conquest and colonisation of the Indies.

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Thomas A. Brady, *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400-1650* (Cambridge, 2009), chs. 7, 10-11.


Palmira Brummett, ‘Foreign Policy, Naval Strategy and the Defence of the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century’ *International History Review*, 11 no. 4 (1989), 613-27

Egil Grislis, ‘Luther and the Turks’ *The Muslim World* 64 (1974).


Lecture 2. 1555-1600

During the second half of the sixteenth century, European geopolitics was characterised by several regional rivalries or balances which formed part of the overall balance of power. These included the Franco-Habsburg rivalry and the Spanish-Dutch conflict in the west, the struggle for supremacy in the Baltic, and the Ottoman threat in south-west Europe. Where all these rivalries and conflicts intersected was the Holy Roman Empire at the centre of the European system. Its members had successfully forestalled serious sectarian civil war (unlike the French) at the Peace of Augsburg (1555), which established effective confessional co-existence for several decades. However, by the end of the century, growing confessionalisation and religious strife was beginning to paralyse this crucial polity at the heart of Europe.

Primary Sources

Religious Peace of Augsburg 1555, transl.
William of Orange’s Apologia 1580

Secondary Sources

Geraldine McKendrick, ‘To defend your empire and the faith. Advice on a global strategy offered c.1590 to Philip, King of Spain and Portugal, by Manoel de Andrada Castel Blanco’

Lecture 3. 1600-1634

Growing religious and political tensions within the Empire from the turn of the century and the confluence of European rivalries in central Europe explain why a local rebellion in a peripheral territory of the Empire could rapidly escalate into the greatest conflict of early modern Europe, the
Thirty Years War (1618-1648). This lecture will address the origins of the war and its first half, including the interventions by Denmark and Sweden (1625 and 1630).

**Primary Sources**

Acceptance of the Bohemian crown by Elector-Palatine Frederick V, 1619 (Peter H. Wilson, ed., *The Thirty Years War: A Sourcebook*, 47ff).

Swedish Manifesto of Gustavus Adolphus justifying the intervention in the war, 1630 (ibid, 122ff).

Hugo Grotius, *De iure Belli ac Pacis* (1625), Book II, ch. 25.8

House of Commons declaration for the recovery of the Palatinate, 4 June 1620

**Secondary Sources**


Peter H. Wilson, ‘New Perspectives on the Thirty Years War’ – review article


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**Lecture 4. 1635-1660**

This lecture will cover the second half of the Thirty Years War, a stage when it became irreversibly internationalised, following the French intervention against Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor in 1635. The lecture will focus on the Peace of Westphalia, a result of the first multilateral peace congress, which ended most of the numerous sets of conflict constituting the Thirty Years War (the Franco-Spanish war continued and renewed war in the Baltic erupted in the later 1650s). The aftermath of Westphalia will also be discussed, including the successful application of its mutual guarantee clauses as a system of collective security for central Europe.

**Primary Sources**
Instructions to the Imperial, French, and Swedish envoys to the Congress of Westphalia (Wilson, *Sourcebook*, ch. 17; and *Acta Pacis Westphalicae*)


*Secondary Sources*


Ronald G. Asch, *The Thirty Years War: The Holy Roman Empire and Europe, 1618-1648* (Harlow, 1997)


Derek Croxton, *The Last Christian Peace*.


*Lecture 5. 1660-1688*

By 1660 Europe was finally peace with the end of the last major constituent conflict of the Thirty Years War (the Franco-Spanish war, 1635-59) and the conclusion of the Peace of Oliva (1660) in the North. The peace soon broke down with the rise of French King Louis XIV’s policy of aggressive geopolitical expansion towards the Low Countries and Germany from the late 1660s. This lecture will explore the early wars of Louis XIV, including the War of Devolution (1667-68), the Dutch War (1672-78), and the War of Reunions (1683-84).

*Primary sources*

Sardan de Paul - Europe a slave, unless England break her chains

Misc. Parliamentary debates and statements, 1677-78, 1680

*Secondary Sources*

Lecture 6. 1688-1714

This lecture will focus on the later, more epic wars of Louis XIV and the efforts of the Grand Alliance to contain the French threat during the Nine Years War (1688-97) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14), as well as the important peace settlements which ended these. Other important events such as the Dutch intervention in England (the Glorious Revolution, 1688) and the Anglo-Scottish Union (1707) were driven by the geopolitical security imperative of the French threat. The struggle for supremacy in northern and eastern Europe during the Great Northern War (1700-21) was largely fought independently of the contest in the west and south of the continent.

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Michael Hochedlinger, Austria’s Wars of Emergence (New York, 2003), chs. 6-7.


Lecture 7. 1715-1740

The period after the peace treaties of Utrecht-Rastatt-Baden in 1713/14 was marked by rapidly shifting alliances, small-scale conflict and revanchism, abortive congresses, and numerous other peace initiatives designed to forestall cold wars becoming hot conflicts, such as the antagonism between Austria and the Anglo-French alliance and between Russia’s tsar Peter the Great and George I of Britain-Hanover (in personal union from 1714). After the death of Louis XIV, France was tamed and pursued a mainly pacific policy, but began to reassert her bid for European supremacy by the 1730s during the War of the Polish Succession.

Primary Sources

Charles Townshend to Charles Dubourgay, Whitehall, 1 June 1725, concerning discussed intervention in Poland over the Thorn crisis (National Archives, Kew, State Papers 90/19)

Report from the congress of Soissons by James Stanhope and Horace Walpole to duke Newcastle, 30 Nov. 1728 (British Library Manuscripts room, Add. MSS. 32759, fols. 244-254).

Secondary Sources


A. Wess Mitchell, The Grand Strategy of the Habsburg Empire


Andrew Thompson, Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest, 1688-1756 (Woodbridge, 2006).

Brendan Simms, Three Victories and a Defeat. The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire (London, 2007), chs. 3-10.


Lecture 8. 1740-1763
In 1740 a new player burst onto the scene of great power European geopolitics. Prussian King Frederick the Great’s invasion of Austrian Silesia inaugurated a long period of more or less open hostility and antagonism between the two major German powers, which was to last for over a century. This lecture focusses on the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48) and the Seven Years War (1756-63) and explains why, as in the previous century, a German civil war quickly drew in most European powers to become major systemic, and indeed global, conflicts.

Primary Sources
Frederick II’s political testament of 1752.
Political Testament of Maria Theresia, 1749

Secondary Sources
Michael Hochedlinger, *Austria’s Wars of Emergence* (New York, 2003), chs. 11, 14

Lecture 9. 1764-1792

The period after the treaties of Paris and Hubertusburg (1763) saw the definitive solidification of the Pentarchy in the European state system, in which geopolitics were dominated by the five great powers France, Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia. International politics was driven by several key features, including the continuing Austro-Prussian dualism in the Empire, Britain’s relative withdrawal from an active engagement in Europe, and related to this, the rise of the eastern powers Prussia, Austria, and especially Russia as the dominant forces in the European system prior to the French Revolutionary Wars.

Primary Sources
Memoranda by Frederick II and Joseph II on the partition of Poland 1772

Secondary Sources
H. M. Scott, *Aping the Great Powers. Frederick II and Prussia’s international position 1763-86*

Michael Hochedlinger, Austria’s Wars of Emergence


Lecture 10. The French Bid for Mastery, 1789-1815

This lecture charts the cataclysmic impact of the French Revolution and subsequent founding of the French Empire on European geopolitics, including, perhaps most dramatically, the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire (1806). It explains how the ancien regime tried and repeatedly failed to overcome the unprecedented threat of continental domination during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.

Primary Sources

The Declaration of Pillnitz, 1791

The Brunswick Manifesto, 1792

Secondary Sources


Lecture 11: Concert of Europe, 1815-1848
This lecture will address the Concert of Europe established after the restoration of the ancien regime at the congress of Vienna, an unusually peaceful period in European history during which conservative monarchical regimes cooperated in resolving conflict and supporting each other in the suppression of their subjects’ liberal-nationalist aspirations.

Primary Sources

Misc. Documents in Mack Walker (ed.), Metternich’s Europe


Secondary Sources


Lecture 12: The Era of Unifications, 1848-1857

This lecture addresses the co-opting of the nationalist element of the popular liberal-nationalist upheavals that shook the old regimes in 1848, by the autocratic regimes of Prussia and Piesmont-Savoy.

Primary Sources

“Austria, Prussia and Germany, 1806-1871”, edited by Jon Breuilly

LaMartine, Manifesto to Europe

Secondary Sources

Paul W. Schroeder, The international system, 1848-1862


**Lecture 13. 1858-1871**

This lecture covers the wars of unification in Germany and Italy culminating in the geopolitical reordering of the centre of Europe and a major shift in its balance of power.

*Primary Sources*

The Pact of Plombieres, 1858

Misc. documents in Breuilly, *Austria, Prussia and Germany*

*Secondary Sources*

Paul W. Schroeder, *The international system*, 1862-71

Derek Beales and Eugenio Biagini, *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* (Harlow, 2002)


Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War: Austria’s War with Prussia and Italy in 1866* (Cambridge, 1996)