

Fighting for Status in International Politics

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Description: The course examines the relationship between wars and social status in international politics. From sociology and psychology we know that people are willing to bicker, quarrel, or even fight to gain higher status or to modify a perceived lack of status. The same also seems to be true about states (and other actors) in international politics. Focusing on key theories and cases, we will survey scholarship that questions why states fight because of status, whether they receive more recognition from participating in them, and who the relevant audiences for such belligerence are. You will develop an understanding of core debates and concepts on social status in International Relations and the myriad of potential ways that status-concerns influences, limits, and exacerbates conflict in international politics. This course is available to candidates for the POLIS M.Phil. and to any other postgraduate student for whom it is a permitted option.

Course organization and expectations: In the reading lists that follow, core (i.e. compulsory) readings are separated from supplementary readings. You are expected to come to class having done the core readings. Supplementary readings are included for students who may want to read further on each topic and may also come in handy when you are writing your assessment essays. *Do note that this reading list will be updated up to the start of Lent Term; please make sure you have the final version of the paper guide.* The course will be taught as a seminar, meeting 1.5-2 hours each week. Regular attendance and participation are expected (and very much appreciated) but not assessed.

Assessment: You will be assessed via a 3000-word essay at the end of the term. I do love a good essay. And I really want you to write great ones. We will therefore spend some time in the seminars discussing paper ideas and topics. My inbox is always open for a good pitch or questions regarding a potential essay idea.

Background Reading: There are many reference books you can consult before or during the course for contextualizing the issues we will discuss in the seminars. Each have different strengths and weaknesses. Having at least one at hand as a reference book is recommended, especially if your background is not in IR. Below is a list of books that I think are quite good introductory books:

- Baylis, John, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics*. 5th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds.). *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Jackson, Robert and Georg Sørensen. *Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

For more general theories of social status in world politics please consider reading the brilliant edited volume *Status in World Politics* by Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth. It was groundbreaking when it first came out and remains one of the best pieces of academic literature written about social status to this date.

Week 1: An introduction to social status in world politics

From realism we learn that the international system is an anarchic and that the pursuit of power is the key motivation in states' foreign policy. In this seminar we flip the realist mantra on its head: the world is hierarchic, and status and recognition are the key constitutive elements of the international realm. We will explore the bold statement in detail by discussing how hierarchy could potentially permeate most social bonds that traverse world politics, leading to a constant struggle for recognition of states' own social identity and their position within formal and informal institutions.

Core reading:

- Ringmar, E., 2014. Recognition and the origins of international society. *Global Discourse*, 4(4), pp.446-458.
- Hobson, John M., and Jason C. Sharman. "The enduring place of hierarchy in world politics: Tracing the social logics of hierarchy and political change." *European Journal of International Relations* 11.1 (2005): 63-98
- Larson, Deborah Welch, T.V Paul, and William C. Wohlforth. 2014. Status and World Order. In *Status in World Politics*, edited by T.V Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, Chapter 1: pp. 3–29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Larson, D.W. and Shevchenko, A., 2010. Status seekers: Chinese and Russian responses to US primacy. *International security*, 34(4), pp.63-95.

Supplemental reading:

- Strömbom, L., 2014. Thick recognition: Advancing theory on identity change in intractable conflicts. *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(1), pp.168-191.
- Adler-Nissen, R. and Zarakol, A., 2021. Struggles for recognition: The liberal international order and the merger of its discontents. *International Organization*, 75(2), pp.611-634.
- Røren, P., 2019. Status seeking in the friendly Nordic neighborhood. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 54(4), pp.562-579.
- Duque, M.G., 2018. Recognizing international status: a relational approach. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(3), pp.577-592.
- Murray, M. (2018). *The Struggle for recognition in international relations: status, revisionism, and rising powers*. Oxford University Press.
- Zarakol, A. ed., 2017. *Hierarchies in world politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seeking 'Legitimate' Great Power Status in Post-Cold War International Society: China's and Japan's Participation in UNPKO. *International Relations*, 22(1), 45–63.

Week 2: Why do nations fight?

States fight with each other for various of reasons. In recent years, we have learned that the prospect of increased status is a significant motivator for states to engage in military intrastate conflicts. In this seminar, we will dig deeper into the historical record of how wars start and

the social and psychological mechanisms that make states willing to gamble money, resources, and lives to achieve prestige, reputation, and social status.

Core reading:

- Lebow, R.N., 2010. *Why nations fight: Past and future motives for war*. Chapters 3 and 4. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dafoe, Allan, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth. "Reputation and Status as Motives for War." *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 371-393.
- Renshon, J., 2015. Losing face and sinking costs: Experimental evidence on the judgment of political and military leaders. *International Organization*, 69(3), pp.659-695.
- Yarhi-Milo, K. 2018. *Who Fights for Reputation: The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict*. Chapter 2 and 3. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Supplementary reading:

- Mälksoo, M., 2021. Militant memocracy in International Relations: Mnemonical status anxiety and memory laws in Eastern Europe. *Review of International Studies*, 47(4), pp.489-507.
- Lindemann, T., 2014. Interest, passion,(non) recognition, and wars: a conceptual essay. *Global Discourse*, 4(4), pp.483-496.
- Wohlforth, W. (2014). Status Dilemmas and Interstate Conflict. In T. Paul, D. Welch Larson, & W. Wohlforth (Eds.), *Status in World Politics*. Chapter 5 pp. 115-140. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Markey, D., 1999. Prestige and the origins of war: Returning to realism's roots. *Security studies*, 8(4), pp.126-172.

Week 3: Status performance and war

Are states who are dissatisfied with their status more likely to fight with other states? In this seminar we discuss concepts as anxiety, humiliation, dissatisfaction, and immobility in relation to social status. We particularly focus on and explore what happens when states and their leaders do not feel they receive the recognition they deserve and the reason why such a feeling emerges.

Core reading:

- Renshon, J., 2016. Status deficits and war. *International Organization*, 70(3), pp.513-550.
- Smith, H., 2014. Russia as a great power: Status inconsistency and the two Chechen wars. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47(3-4), pp.355-363.
- Barnhart, J., 2017. Humiliation and third-party aggression. *World Politics*, 69(3), pp.532-568.
- Greve, A.Q. and Levy, J.S., 2018. Power transitions, status dissatisfaction, and war: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. *Security Studies*, 27(1), pp.148-178.
- Ward, S., 2017. *Status and the challenge of rising powers*. Chapter 1 and 2. Cambridge University Press.

Supplementary reading:

- Røren, P. and Beaumont, P., 2019. Grading greatness: evaluating the status performance of the BRICS. *Third World Quarterly*, 40(3), pp.429-450.

- Hafner-Burton, E. M., & Montgomery, A. H. (2006). Power positions: International organizations, social networks, and conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50(1), 3-27.
- Ward, S. (2013). Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s. *Security Studies*, 22(4), 607-639.
- Freedman, J., 2016. Status insecurity and temporality in world politics. *European Journal of International Relations*, 22(4), pp.797-822.
- Barnhart, J., 2016. Status competition and territorial aggression: evidence from the scramble for Africa. *Security Studies*, 25(3), pp.385-419.

Week 4: Happy to fight, will travel

States need not necessarily be anxious, humiliated, or dissatisfied with their current status in order to fight for higher standing. We zoom in on a couple of small and middle powers to understand how fighting for status can lead to states receiving higher recognition from certain other high status actors. The grace of great powers in the form of status recognition is beneficial to these smaller states' security and standing in world politics.

Core reading:

- Pedersen, R.B., 2018. Bandwagon for status: Changing patterns in the Nordic states status-seeking strategies?. *International peacekeeping*, 25(2), pp.217-241.
- Jakobsen, P.V., Ringsmose, J. and Saxi, H.L., 2018. Prestige-seeking small states: Danish and Norwegian military contributions to US-led operations. *European journal of international security*, 3(2), pp.256-277.
- Nina Græger, "From 'forces for Good' to 'Forces for Status'? Small State Military Status Seeking," in Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann, ed., *Small States and Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 86-107
- Massie, J. and Zyla, B., 2018. Alliance Value and Status Enhancement: Canada's Disproportionate Military Burden Sharing in Afghanistan. *Politics & policy*, 46(2), pp.320-344.

Supplementary reading:

- Oma, I.M. and Petersson, M., 2019. Exploring the role of dependence in influencing small states' alliance contributions: A reputation mechanism argument and assessment. *European security*, 28(1), pp.105-126.
- Pedersen, R.B. and Reykers, Y., 2020. Show them the flag: status ambitions and recognition in small state coalition warfare. *European security*, 29(1), pp.16-32.
- Gannon, J.A. and Kent, D., 2021. Keeping Your Friends Close, but Acquaintances Closer: Why Weakly Allied States Make Committed Coalition Partners. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65(5), pp.889-918.
- Banka, A., 2021. Reclaiming a good ally status: Baltic coping strategies in the America First world. *European security*, 30(2), pp.159-177.

Week 5: Status symbols of war

.Expressed at its broadest, status symbols are the intermediary mechanisms - things, attributes, rights, privileges, or behavior - that actors acquire, embody or practice that signal or constitute their social status. Status symbols often come in the form of tools of war, like aircraft carriers or nuclear weapons. To be sure, they both serve military functions, but

perhaps more important are their symbolic effects and the status they generate as tokens of war.

Core reading:

- Gilady, L., 2018. *The price of prestige: Conspicuous consumption in international relations*. Chapters 1-3. University of Chicago Press.
- Sagan, S.D., 1996. Why do states build nuclear weapons?: Three models in search of a bomb. *International security*, 21(3), pp.54-86.
- Haynes, S.T., 2020. The power of prestige: Explaining China's nuclear weapons decisions. *Asian Security*, 16(1), pp.35-52.
- Murray, M., 2010. Identity, insecurity, and great power politics: the tragedy of German naval ambition before the First World War. *Security Studies*, 19(4), pp.656-688.

Supplementary reading:

- Pu, X., & Schweller, R. L. (2014). Status signaling, multiple audiences, and China's blue-water naval ambition. In *Status in World Politics*, edited by T.V Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, Chapter 6: pp.141-162. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Neill, B. (2001). *Honor, symbols, and war*. University of Michigan Press.
- Musgrave, P. and Nexon, D.H., 2018. Defending hierarchy from the moon to the Indian Ocean: Symbolic capital and political dominance in early modern China and the cold war. *International Organization*, 72(3), pp.591-626.
- Paikowsky, D. (2017). *The Power of the Space Club*. Cambridge University Press.

Week 6: Do states get higher status from fighting?

Is it really worth fighting for status? The answer largely depends on whether states actually receive more recognition from others after having gone to war. In this seminar we survey the literature that has made an effort exploring this issue and the critics of this effort.

Core reading:

- [Refresh reading] Renshon, J., 2016. Status deficits and war. *International Organization*, 70(3), pp.513-550.
- Ward, S., 2020. Status from fighting? Reassessing the relationship between conflict involvement and diplomatic rank. *International Interactions*, 46(2), pp.274-290.
- Mercer, J., 2017. The illusion of international prestige. *International Security*, 41(4), pp.133-168.
- Røren, P. 2022. Status orders and War. *Under Review in International Security*.
- Hironaka, A. (2017). *Tokens of power: rethinking war*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1 and 2

Supplementary reading:

- Naylor, T. (2018). *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilised Nations to the G20*. Chapter 1 and 2. Routledge.
- Barnhart, J., 2021. The consequences of defeat: the quest for status and morale in the aftermath of war. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 65(1), pp.195-222.
- Renshon, J. (2017). *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*. Princeton University Press.

Week 7: The Russo-Ukrainian War and Social Status

We end by putting our theoretical tools to good use by discussing to what extent the current Russian war in Ukraine could be said to involve notions of social status. We will also discuss what the aftermath of the war will mean for both Russia and Ukraine's social status within world politics.

Core reading:

- Wohlforth, W.C., 2009. Unipolarity, status competition, and great power war. *World politics*, 61(1), pp.28-57.
- Heller, R., 2020. Russia's Power Politics Towards Ukraine: Social Status Concerns and the Role of Emotions. In *Russia in the Changing International System* (pp. 169-186). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Iver B. Neumann, "I Remember When Russia Was a Great Power," *Journal of Regional Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2015), pp. 5–16
- Elias Götz, "Russia, the West, and the Ukraine Crisis: Three Contending Perspectives," *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2016), pp. 249–266
- Götz, E. and Staun, J., 2022. Why Russia attacked Ukraine: Strategic culture and radicalized narratives. *Contemporary Security Policy*, pp.1-16.

Supplementary reading:

- Nitoiu, C., 2017. Aspirations to great power status: Russia's path to assertiveness in the international arena under Putin. *Political Studies Review*, 15(1), pp.39-48.
- Nadibaidze, A., 2022. Great power identity in Russia's position on autonomous weapons systems. *Contemporary Security Policy*, pp.1-29.
- Moulioukova, D. and Kanet, R.E., 2021. Russia's self-image as a great power . In Moulioukova, D. and Kanet, R.E. (eds) *Russia and the World in the Putin Era* Chapter 1 pp. 11-33. Routledge.