Power, Institutions and Norms:
Does the US Still Lead the Global System?

With turmoil in the Middle East and the rise of China, current debates in Global Affairs focus heavily on the issue of possible US economic, political and military decline. Embedded in this debate is a discussion about the relative importance of power, institutions and norms as explanations of behavior by both state and non-state actors. In this course, we examine the relevant literature, and when policy initiatives are likely to be not only formulated but also enforced, in attempting to combat a variety of challenging problems such new security issues and global economic crises. Our objective is to understand and assess how different the present conditions are from the past, and the US’ current capacity to achieve its policy goals in this new era.

Goals of the Course

This course has three major goals:

- To inform students about the content and substance of debates in global affairs concerning the relationship between different forms of power, and between theory and action.
- To develop an individual student’s professional verbal and written skills for either a professional policy or academic career.
- To help students develop the skills to conduct independent research.

Requirements

Students will be graded according to two criteria: Class participation and written papers. Class participation and presentations will account for twenty-percent of a student’s grade. This component is composed of a combination of their contribution to class discussion of the readings; their individual presentations; and their feedback to other students presenting their research. Students are expected to attend and participate in all classes. The written component constitutes eighty-percent of the final grade, to be assessed by evaluating the project proposal, update, intermediate report and final paper. The proposal paper will constitute a two-page assessment of the central question in a specified area of research to be addressed in their paper; An two-page update report on the status of their research; the summary paper will provide a maximum five-page preliminary assessment of the research findings to be distributed a few days prior to their presentation. The final papers will be approximately twenty-five to thirty double-spaced pages long. It will offer
an observation, a statement of a puzzle, a presentation of an argument based on the existing literature and an evaluation of the evidence.

There are no required purchases for this course. All readings should be available on blackboard.

**Course policies:**

For this course, neither G nor I grades will be granted. Failure to complete all assignments will result in a failing grade.

Students in this course will be expected to comply with Rutgers University’s Policy on Academic Integrity.

**Readings**

1. **September 3. Intro:**

   **Key Issues:** Thinking about themes for the course.

   a. Power, Institutions and Norms
   b. Material and Social power
   c. How they link together
   d. What it means for policy
   e. Assessing the Rise of China.

2. **September 10. On power – material and social.**

   **Key Issues:** The complexity of the concept of power, where it is located, how it is used, and how it relates to policy outcomes.

   Steven Lukes (1974), *Power: a Radical View*
   Colum Lynch and Ty McCormick, ‘Obama to World: Bad News. The American Empire is Dead,’ *Foreign Policy*, September 24, 2013,
3. September 17. Military Power and the Shifting Contours of the Global System

**Key Issues:** How do realists define power? How does the distribution of power influence policy choices? What are the limits of power?

Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, chapters 3-5.

**NB.** The student deadline to submit a two-page paper topic proposal is the start of class for week 4.


**Key Issues:** How do liberals define power? What is the source of power for a liberal? How does legitimacy influence strategy? And what are the constraints on exercising power in a world of transnational threats?


5. October 1. Social Power, Legitimacy and Norms:

**Key Issues:** How does a constructivist define power? What’s the source of power? What’s the relationship between power and global governance in an age where states are purportedly in decline as agenda setters?

Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow, *Good-bye Hegemony!* Chapters 1, 2 & 3.
Section 2: From Theory to Policy

6. October 8. Overstretch and Retrenchment

**Key Issues:** Is the US an Empire? How can we think about America’s role in the aftermath of the Great Recession?

Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of the American Empire*, Chapters, 1 & 3

7. October 15. Keeping the Faith in American Power

Joseph S. Nye, Jr. *Is the American Century Over?*

Students to present a two-page paper and summary to class regarding the status of their research project

8. October 22. The New Grand Bargains:

**Key Issues:** How should America think about its role in the world? What are the available options and which are the most advantageous?

Steve Weber and Bruce Jentleson, *The End of Arrogance*, Chapters 1, 2 and 5.
Reich and Lebow, *Good-bye Hegemony!* Chapter 6

9. October 29. Considering the Future

**Key Issues:** How powerful is America today? What are the sources of its power? How do the answers to these questions relate to public policy?
Section 3: The Challenge to America’s Role in the Global System

10. November 5. Realism: China as a Rising Challenger

Key Questions: Is China a threat to American power? What should a proactive strategy look like?

Christopher Layne, ‘China’s role in American Grand Strategy: Partner, Regional Power or Great Power Rival?’ in Jim Rolfe (ed.), Asia-Pacific in Transition, pp. 54-80
John Lee, ‘China won’t be a ‘Responsible Stakeholder,’
http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704722304575037931817880328

11. November 12. The Optimistic View

Key Issues: Can China be effectively incorporated into the dominant community of nations? If so, how?

http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67479/charles-glaser/will-chinas-rise-lead-to-war
Richard Ned Lebow and Simon Reich, Good-bye Hegemony! Chapter 5.
Carla Norloff and Simon Reich, ‘American and Chinese Leadership during the Global Financial Crisis: Testing Kindleberger’s Stabilization Functions,’
International Area Studies Review, March 2015, pp. 1-23,


**Key Issues:** Is China a status quo power? What are its goals and likely policies?


Zheng Bijian, “China's Peaceful Rise to Great-Power Status,” Foreign Affairs, 84, no. 5, (September/October 2005), pp.18-24


No Class on November 26 due to the Thanksgiving holiday


Note that five page summaries are due by 10am on Monday November 30.

14. December 10. Conclusion and handing in of final papers