**Nuclear Culture and Strategy**

**AY 2025 Syllabus**

**Instructor: Dr. Todd Robinson**

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**Course Description:** This course serves as an introduction to the contemporary nuclear strategies of the nine nuclear-weapons possessing states. It adopts a comparative perspective, in that it focuses on the differences and similarities between them, in order to facilitate the development of an understanding of both how states make decisions about their nuclear strategies and why they do so. This course will also introduce students to the study of strategic culture, which will provide a lens with which to analyze the various nuclear strategies covered in the course.

**Security Clearance Requirement**: none (open to all students)

**Desired learning Outcomes:**

1. Understand the role of nuclear strategy in the broader national security strategies of the states that possess them
2. Develop an understanding of the differences and similarities in the nuclear strategies of the various nuclear weapons possessing states and how they inform each other
3. Develop an understanding of the role of strategic culture in the making of nuclear weapons strategy

**Deliverables and Evaluation:**

1. Class Participation: 20%
2. Editorial: 20%
3. Response Papers: 60%

**Deliverables Explained**

**Class Participation (20%):** Students must complete the readings before each seminar and contribute to the weekly class discussion in a thoughtful, meaningful way.

**Editorial (20%):** Students will be asked to write a tightly argued op-ed style essay on the topic of their choosing (in consultation with the instructor). Each article should not exceed 800-1000 words and in double-spaced format, 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins. The purpose of the exercise is to have students learn to construct a tightly argued presentation on a large topic of concern in a brief form.  **DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE LAST LESSON**

**Response Papers (60%):** The second requirement of this course is a series of four response papers (each worth 15% of the course grade) focusing on the supplemental readings found in the course schedule below. These papers force the students to critically analyze the topics addressed in class broaden their exposure to the literature on the subject by incentivizing students to explore and comprehend additional material available on given subjects. Papers may be turned in during any four class sessions of the term. For example, a student could respond to the first four supplemental readings listed in the course schedule and be done for the duration of the course. Alternately, a student could choose to space out the papers and explore different topics in-depth.

Papers are required to be between two and three pages in length, double-spaced, using 12 point Times New Roman font. Papers are due at the beginning of class and should be submitted through the assignments feature on canvas. If canvas is unavailable, they can be emailed to me directly at todd.robinson.4@au.af.edu. No papers will be accepted late. These papers are to be your own original analyses.

In drafting your response papers, think about what the author is saying (or trying to say) and try to critically evaluate their argument. To help you in this task, it may be helpful to think about the following five questions:

1. What is the central question the author(s) is/are trying to address or answer?

2. What is the central argument (or the author’s answer to the question)?

3. What is one plausible alternative argument (an alternative answer to the question)?

4. What evidence does the author give in support of his argument?

5. Do you find that evidence convincing? Why or why not?

In drafting your responses, focus on presenting your argument in a logical, concise, and well-thought out manner. For each sentence you write, you should ask yourself, “is this the best way that I can say this?” If something seems unclear to you, it will most likely seem unclear to me. You do not need to cite the author formally, simply put the page number in parentheses.

Papers should include a header at the top right that lists student name, the class period topic, what number response paper this is for you, and the date. The student should also include a page number centered at the bottom of your paper. **DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON THE EL CORRESPONDING TO THE PAPER TOPIC**

**Texts:**

1. Adamsky, Dmitry Dima. The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War. Stanford University Press, 2023.
2. Freedman, Lawrence, and Jeffrey Michaels. The evolution of nuclear strategy: New, updated and completely revised. Springer, 2019.
3. Futter, Andrew, ed. *The United Kingdom and the Future of Nuclear Weapons*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.
4. Khan, Feroz. Eating grass: The making of the Pakistani bomb. Stanford University Press, 2020.
5. Kroenig, Matthew. *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy: Why Strategic Superiority Matters*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
6. Narang, Vipin. *Nuclear strategy in the modern era: Regional powers and international conflict*. Vol. 143. Princeton University Press, 2014.
7. Panda, Ankit. *Kim Jong Un and the Bomb: Survival and Deterrence in North Korea*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
8. Rubin, Lawrence, and Adam N. Stulberg, eds. *The End of Strategic Stability?: Nuclear Weapons and the Challenge of Regional Rivalries*. Georgetown University Press, 2018.
9. Sarkar, Jayita. Ploughshares and swords: India's nuclear program in the global Cold War. Cornell University Press, 2022.

Additional Essays and readings available through on-line delivery system.

***Course Schedule and Reading Assignments***

**August 14, 2024**

**EL 1 – Course Overview and Introductions to the Comparative Study of Foreign Policy and the Study of Strategic Culture**

*Lesson Overview:* This introductory lesson presents an overview of both the comparative study of foreign policy and the concept and study of strategy culture.

*Required Readings:*

* Lanits, Jeffrey S., and Ryan Beasley, “Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2017.
* Lantis, Jeffrey S. “Strategic culture and national security policy.” *International Studies* Review 4, no. 3 (2002): 87-113.
* Uz Zaman, Rashed. “Strategic culture: A ‘cultural’ understanding of war.” *Comparative Strategy* 28, no.1 (2009): 68-88.

**August 28, 2024**

**EL 2 – Introduction to Nuclear Strategy**

*Lesson Overview:* What is nuclear strategy? This lesson serves as an introduction to the study of nuclear strategy in a modern context. It seeks to build on decades of research into the role that nuclear weapons play in the national security strategies, and foreign policies more broadly, of the states that possess them. Particular attention will be paid to classical concepts in the study of nuclear strategy, such as deterrence, compellence, counterforce vs. countervalue targeting, the stability-instability paradox, and mutually assured destruction, and whether they translate to modern strategy-making and implementation.

*Required Readings:*

* Narang, Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era, pgs. 1-54.
* Freedman and Michaels, Evolution of Nuclear Strategy, 1-100.

**September 4, 2024**

**EL 3 – The United States of America**

*Lesson Overview:* This lesson explores how the United States’ nuclear strategy has changed in response to emerging global threats, with a particular focus on the most recent Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and the role it has played in the US’ subsequent approach to force deployment and modernization.

*Required Readings:*

* SKIM the 2022 National Security Strategy and the Nuclear Posture Review **EL**
* Gavin, Francis J. “Rethinking the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons and American Grand Strategy.” *Texas National Security Review* (November, 2018). **EL**
* Kroenig, Matthew. *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy*, pgs. 1-38, 81-110.

**September 18, 2024**

**EL 4 – The Russian Federation**

*Lesson Overview:* As the second-oldest nuclear power, the Russian Federation occupies a unique role amongst the nuclear weapons states of the world. It is both a legacy power, in that its actions have helped create, in part, the rules of the road, as far as what might be considered acceptable nuclear strategy and behavior is concerned, but also an emerging threat, due in large part to its somewhat abnormal behavior over the past decade. This lesson explores both what Russia has done with its nuclear arsenal over the past decade and what it might do over the next and why.

Required Readings:

* Adamsky, Dmitry Dima. The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War. Stanford University Press, 2023.

**September 25, 2024**

**EL 5 – The United Kingdom**

Lesson Overview: This lesson explores the peculiarities of the British nuclear deterrent and investigates why, when presented with the same set of threats as the United States, it arrives at a fundamentally different approach to the deployment of its nuclear forces. It investigates whether any “forks in the road” existed in the past that led it to adopt its current deterrent posture and will also explore the challenges that might exist in continuing to rely on a single-legged nuclear force structure. An understanding of the effects of Brexit on the future of the future of the UK nuclear deterrent will also be explored.

*Required Readings:*

* Futter, Andrew 2016. The United Kingdom and the Future of Nuclear Weapons. Chs. 2-4, 5, 8, 11, & 12, pgs. 19-74, 107-120, 155-190.

**October 2, 2024**

**EL 6 – The French Republic**

*Lesson Overview:* France’s decision to “go it alone” has long been a source of contention between it and its NATO partners. This lesson will explore the ongoing ramifications of this decision, as well as drivers of its particular strategy. Students will develop an understanding of how French culture, particularly, affects both its nuclear strategy and posture.

* Narang, Chp. 6, pgs. 153-178.
* Yost, David, “France’s Evolving Nuclear Strategy,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 47, 2005 – Issue 3 pgs. 117-146.
* Mills, Claire, “The French Nuclear Deterrent,” *House of Commons Library Briefing Paper* Number 4079, 29 June 2016.

**October 9, 2024**

**EL 7 – The People’s Republic of China**

*Lesson Overview:* The PRC’s acquisition of nuclear weapons was once considered an “atomic-bomb” to the stability of the international order. It is therefore somewhat of a surprise that, for decades, China did little with its capability. Chairman Mao even called it a purely “political” weapon. That being said, there is real concern now that, after decades of relative inaction, the PRC has shown newfound interest in developing a robust nuclear capability, perhaps on par with the capabilities of the other nuclear powers. This lesson will explore what a rising nuclear-powered China might look like and to what extent the Western world should be concerned by its actions.

Required Readings:

* Narang, Chp. 5, pgs. 121-152.
* Talmadge, Caitlin. "The US-China nuclear relationship: why competition is likely to intensify." Global China series. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution (2019). “EL”
* Talmadge, Caitlin. "Would China go nuclear? Assessing the risk of Chinese nuclear escalation in a conventional war with the United States." International Security 41, no. 4 (2017): 50-92. “EL”
* Cunningham, Fiona S., and M. Taylor Fravel. "Assuring Assured Retaliation: China's Nuclear Posture and US-China Strategic Stability." International Security 40, no. 2 (2015): 7-50. “EL”
* Zhao, Tong. "China and the international debate on no first use of nuclear weapons." Asian Security 18, no. 3 (2022): 205-213.

**October 23, 2024**

**EL 8 – The State of Israel**

*Lesson Overview:* The “strategic ambiguity” nuclear posture of the State of Israel stands out amongst the world’s nuclear powers in that it is the only one that refuses to acknowledge its existence. Similarly, just as there is no direct, publicly available evidence that its program exists, neither is there publicly available writing detailing its nuclear strategy. Thus, much of what we know about Israel’s program is from second-hand accounts. Taking this into consideration, this lesson will explore the roots of Israel’s nuclear strategy and will investigate how current issues may be impacting its deployment of nuclear weapons and the strategy that informs it.

* Narang, Chp. 7, pgs. 179-206.
* Bar, Shmuel. "Israeli strategic deterrence doctrine and practice." Comparative Strategy 39, no. 4 (2020): 321-353.
* Barak, Oren, Amit Sheniak, and Assaf Shapira. "The shift to defence in Israel’s hybrid military strategy." Journal of Strategic Studies 46, no. 2 (2023): 345-377.
* BenLevi, Raphael. "The evolution and future of Israeli nuclear ambiguity." The Nonproliferation Review (2023): 1-23.

**October 30, 2024**

**EL 9 – The Republic of India**

*Lesson Overview:* India’s detonation of a nuclear device in 1974 and a fully-fledged weapon in 1998 both stood as major disturbances in the stability of the international community and resulted in widespread condemnation and the imposition of far-reaching economic sanctions that were intended to force it to reverse course. Twenty plus years later, India is considered a responsible nuclear weapons state and has even received exemptions from laws designed to punish states that proliferate outside of the non-proliferation regime. Its strategy has long focused on balancing against its two principle adversaries, China and Pakistan, with whom they both share disputed borders and also both possess nuclear weapons. This lesson will explore the effect of these dynamics on the future of the India nuclear strategic deterrent, paying particular attention to the recent border skirmish with China and what it says about India’s willingness, or lack thereof, of using its nuclear weapons to resolve its outstanding foreign policy issues.

*Required Readings:*

* Sarkar, Jayita. Ploughshares and swords: India's nuclear program in the global Cold War. Cornell University Press, 2022.
* Narang, Vipin. “India’s nuclear strategy twenty years later: From reluctance to maturation.” *India Review* 17, no. 1 (2018): 159-179.

**November 6, 2024**

**EL 10 – Islamic Republic of Pakistan**

*Lesson Overview:* While India’ detonation of an atomic bomb took many by surprise, Pakistan’s conduct of its own nuclear tests shortly thereafter demonstrated, conclusively, that a state does not necessarily have to have a robust resource base to successfully acquire nuclear weapons. Done so in large part as a counter to India’s own nuclear arsenal, Pakistan’s nuclear strategy has been, for the entirety of its history, solely targeted on one state and one state only. Might this trend continue into the future? Are there things that Pakistan might desire to do with its deterrent besides continuing to stalemating its more conventional superior principal adversary? This lesson seeks to answer these questions by exploring how Pakistan’s unique history and culture informs its nuclear strategy and posture and whether it is likely to continue into the future.

*Required Readings:*

* Narang, Chp. 3, pgs. 55-93.
* Anderson, Robert S. "Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence." *Pacific Affairs* 89, no. 1 (2016): 215-217.
* Clary, Christopher, and Ankit Panda. “Safer at Sea? Pakistan’s Sea-Based Deterrent and Nuclear Weapons Security.” *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2017): 149-168.

**November 13, 2024**

**EL 11 – Democratic People’s Republic of Korea**

*Lesson Overview:* The Hermit Kingdom is the world’s most recent nuclear power and presents, perhaps, a case study in modern nuclear weapons acquisition and development. This is because, despite the best efforts of much of the international community, it was able to acquire nuclear weapons and continues to possess them. The question, for many, continues to be what, exactly, it intends to do with its capability. This lesson will explore possible paths that the DPRK may take in the future and what role its nuclear capability might play.

*Required Readings:*

* Panda, *Kim Jong Un and the Bomb*, All.

**November 27, 2024**

**EL 12 – The N+1 State: Islamic Republic of Iran?**

*Lesson Overview:* The general consensus, at least in US strategic circles, is that the next most likely nuclear weapons possessing state is the Islamic Republic of Iran. This lesson will explore what Iran’s nuclear strategy might look like and what impact it would have both regionally and globally. It will identify challenges and opportunities that the United States may adopt when dealing with a nuclear-armed Iran and investigate just how necessary, if at all, it is to prevent the Islamic Republic’s acquisition of nuclear weapons.

*Required Readings:*

* Kahl, Colin H., and Kenneth N. Waltz. “Iran and the Bomb: Would a Nuclear Iran Make the Middle East More Secure?” *Foreign Affairs*. 91 (2012): 157.
* Waltz, Kenneth N. “Why Iran should get the bomb: Nuclear balancing would mean stability.” *Foreign Affairs* (2012): 2-5.
* Wolf, Albert B. “After JCPOA: American grand strategy towards Iran.” *Comparative Strategy* 37, no. 1 (2018): 22-34.