

Course information 2025-26

IR2137 Foreign Policy Analysis

General information

MODULE LEVEL: 5

CREDIT: 30

NOTIONAL STUDY TIME: 300 hours

MODE: Locally Taught and Independent Learner Route (not available for Online Taught students).

Important

Please note that this course has been replaced by IR2214 Foreign Policy Analysis in 2024/25. The last opportunity to be assessed in this course is 2023/24.

Summary

The study of foreign policy is referred to as foreign policy analysis, and its focus is the intentions and actions of (primarily) states aimed at the external world and the response of other actors (again, primarily states) to these actions. This course is not designed to give students detailed exposure to the changing foreign policies of any particular country, though of course students will have many opportunities to learn about the foreign policies of major, middle and small powers through the reading material. It is aimed at giving students the tools to analyse, interpret and, ultimately, understand the dynamics of foreign policy generally so that they might apply these to their study of the role of states in international affairs.

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 this course is to:

- introduce students to the central concepts in foreign policy analysis,

- develop students' comparative skills of analysis of differing foreign policies in practice,
- promote critical engagement with the foreign policy analysis 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:

- Identify and critically assess the processes involved in foreign policy decision making.
- Discuss the contexts, pressures, and constraints with which foreign policy makers have to deal.
- Contrast and compare the strength of theoretical approaches used in foreign policy analysis.

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. Complex problem-solving.
2. Leadership.
3. Creativity and innovation.

Essential reading

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

Alden, C. and A. Aran, Foreign Policy Analysis – New Approaches (London: Routledge 2017) 2nd edition. [ISBN 978-1138934290]

Smith, S., A. Hadfield and T. Dunne, Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases (Oxford: OUP 2012) 2nd edition [ISBN 978-0198708902]

Assessment

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

Syllabus

This course examines the key concepts and schools of thought in foreign policy analysis, concentrating particularly on the process of decision making, the internal and external factors which influence foreign policy decisions, the instruments available to foreign policy decision makers and the effect of changes in the international system on foreign policy. The course combines a discussion of these theories with their application to selected countries in the North, the South, international organisations, and transnational actors.

The principal themes to be addressed by the course are:

- The role and relevance of foreign policy in the era of globalisation.
- How different theoretical approaches to FPA shape our understanding of foreign policy.
- The role of leadership, the bureaucracy and interest groups in setting the state's foreign policy agenda.
- What challenges democratising states face in constructing a new foreign policy.
- The scope for affecting change in the international system by non-state actors.