Course: Strategic issues of contemporary world politics

I] Course description:
This course is a survey of the contemporary geopolitical agenda. It aims at addressing the main issues currently discussed in the international security academic community. Therefore, it is divided in three main parts:
- The 1st part focuses on the idea of "great powers" and its contemporary relevance: what are the main players of the international system? How can we assess their up-to-date strategic resources? By the end of this part, students shall have an accurate overview of the global balance of power.
- The 2nd part deals with regional issues, and more particularly with three areas: the African continent, the Middle East and South Asia. These sessions will underline the roots of conflicts (civil wars, disputes over territories, terrorism etc.) and their structural effects (among others: the failed state's issue in Africa, the internal stability of Pakistan).
- The 3rd and last part will introduce thematic issues which fuel the contemporary strategic debate among policy experts: some classical topics will be covered like terrorism and deterrence but also an emerging subject such as the strategic consequences of climate change.

Then, by the end of the semester, students should be able to get an in-depth strategic knowledge awareness of today's world.

II] Teachers:
Lecturer: Dr. Jean-Loup Samaan, policy advisor, Ministry of Defense (Delegation for Strategic Affairs).
Teaching assistant: Hugo Meijer, PhD student at Sciences Po/CERI.

III] Course validation:
1. A mid-term research paper (40% of course assessment): Each student will write a 1 000 word essay to fulfill the final paper writing assignment. The paper will be a take home final exam. The exam questions will be released to the students on Week 4. All papers must be MS Word documents, double spaced, in 12 point, Times New Roman font, with one inch margins. Direct quotations or outside sources must be footnote. The papers will be due to the professor, either electronically or in paper format, by Week 7. LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

The aim is twofold: to assess your ability to exploit some of the preliminary knowledge you would have acquired by then and to evaluate your ability to conduct autonomous research and synthesize it with a brief analytical paper.

2. An end of term exam (60% of course assessment). This written exam will consist of 2 questions covering all aspects of the course. You will be required to answer to 1 of the 2 questions in 2 hours.

IV] General reading:
(required for a fundamental understanding of international security issues)
V] Reader:
As each case of strategic studies has to be explored in details, a reader has been constituted for the class. It can be purchased at the Reprographie.

The idea of the reader is to ease your understanding of some specific questions (e.g. the evolving relation of France toward NATO, the military balance in the Middle East). Readings are compulsory to prepare each session in order to have a lively discussion based on informed assumptions.

Plan for the term

1st class: Introduction to strategic studies

11. Actors and grand strategies
12. Assessing power in the strategic sphere
13. Characterizing the international system


Suggestions for further readings
Richard Haas, "The Age of Nonpolarity", Foreign Affairs, May/June 2008

Part I: Great Powers in the 21st Century

2nd Class: Does France still matter in international security affairs?

21. French grand strategy, now and then.
22. The alliance framework between NATO and ESDP
23. French deterrence in today’s world.

Debate: Why has France decided to reintegrate NATO’s military structures?
Questions to consider as you read include

1. The consequences of France’s return in NATO’s integrated military command for Europe’s defense integration
2. Does the notion of “capability gap” provides an accurate description of the transatlantic alliance?
3. What drove France’s proposal for “Euro-Deterrence”? 
4. To what extent is a “Euro-Deterrence” feasible?

Suggestions for further readings

3rd class: The end of the American hegemony?

31. The American uncertainties from 1989 until 9/11.
32. The fallouts of the "Global War on Terror".
33. The prospects for the American defense posture.

Debate: Is the US a declining power?

Questions to consider as you read include

1. What are the key challenges to the US status in world politics? (traditional and non-traditional threats)
2. How does the globalization of technology affects US power?
3. The consequences of 9/11 for US defense posture?
4. What is the unipolar moment? Is it over?
5. Is Restraint a new isolationism?

Suggestions for further readings

4th class: The Rise of China

41. The “peaceful rise” of the Chinese armed forces.
42. The issue of Taiwan.
43. China, a global actor?

Debate: China’s military modernization

Questions to consider as you read include
1. What are the strategic/geopolitical consequences of China’s economic rise for the United States?
2. The consequences of China’s military modernization for US defense posture in East Asia
3. What are the drivers of China’s military modernization? Taiwan? The securitization of its sea lanes of communications?

Suggestions for further readings

5th class: Russia and the West

51. Assessing Russia two decades after the fall of the USSR.
52. Russia & its western side: the complicated relation with Europe
53. Russia & its eastern side: the axis of convenience with China

Debate: Russia: A Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?
Questions to consider as you read include
1. Is Russia a threat to Europe’s energy security?
2. Is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation a prelude to a Russia-China alliance? (Russia-China relations: arms, oil, migration and trade)
3. How has NATO’s enlargement affected Europe’s relations with Russia?

Suggestions for further readings
Charles King, "The Crisis in the Caucasus", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2008)

6th class: The European Union a strategic actor?

61. The original ambition of the European Security & Defense Policy.
Debate: Does the ESDP reflect a distinctive European conception of power?


Questions to consider as you read include
1. Can the ESDP exist outside NATO?
2. What distinguishes the ESDP from national defense policies?
3. How does the integration of Europe’s defense industry affects the prospects for a common defense policy?

Suggestions for further readings

Part II: Regional issues

7th class: Africa, a lost continent?

71. Political authoritarian, civil wars and the logic of regional conflicts in Africa.
72. The end of the "Françafrique"?
73. China & the USA in Africa: the Grand Chessboard revisited?

Debate: Africa a new Chessboard for great powers?


Questions to consider as you read include
1. How would you characterize Chinese and Indian policies toward the African continent?
2. How do these approaches differ from the US and the French ones?
3. To preserve stability in Africa, is the intervention of old powers (e.g. France, UK) unavoidable in the context of weak States? If not, what would be the key actor?

Suggestions for further readings
8th class: The Middle East: a new center of gravity?

81. The Israeli-Palestinian issue
82. The Iranian conundrum
83. The Turkey factor.

Debate: Containment and the case of a Nuclear Iran

Questions to consider as you read include
1. Would a nuclear Iran be a stabilising or a destabilizing factor for the Middle East?
2. How would you assess the implications for the international system?
3. What are the limits of a containment approach?

Suggestions for further readings
Christoph Bertram, Rethinking Iran: From Confrontation to Cooperation, Chaillot paper, 2008

9th class: The Fragile Balance of Power in South Asia

91. The War in Afghanistan: origins & prospects.
92. Transnational terrorism in South Asia.
93. The issue of Pakistan.

Debate: Is the war in Afghanistan a continuation of regional issues?

Questions to consider as you read include
1. What is the role of Pakistan in the war in Afghanistan?
2. How does the war in Afghanistan influences Pakistan-Indian relations?
3. What are the roots of the India-Pakistan nuclear rivalry?

Suggestions for further readings
George Perkovitch, *India's Nuclear Bomb. The Impact on Global Proliferation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999

**Part III Thematic issues**

**10th class: Understanding Terrorism**

101. The ancient origins of terrorism  
102. The debate on terrorism’s rationality  

**Debate:** The rationality of terrorism


Questions to consider as you read include

1. How would you characterize terrorism as a social phenomenon?  
2. Do you agree with Pape’s view on the logic of suicide terrorism?  
3. What are the implications for policymakers of such an assumption on the rationality of terrorists?

**Suggestions for further readings**


**11th class: Deterrence in the 21st century**

111. The challenge of nuclear proliferation  
112. Nuclear deterrence versus Ballistic Missile Defense  
113. Is the logic of deterrence universal?

**Debate:** Is a "world without nuclear weapons" a dangerous idea?

1. What is the linkage between missile defense and a world without nuclear weapons?  

Questions to consider as you read include

2. What is the rationale behind the Obama administration’s goal?  
3. What is the linkage between non-proliferation efforts and a world without nuclear weapons?

**Suggestions for further readings**

Alexander Montgomery, "Ringing in Proliferation", *International Security*, Fall 2005  

12th class: The strategic implications of climate change

121. The geography of climate change
122. Assessing the idea of resource wars
123. The case of the Arctic

**Debate:** Is climate change an issue for strategic studies?


Questions to consider as you read include

1. Will the battle over scarce resources characterise future global security?
2. What are the potential strategic consequences of the Arctic meltdown?
3. Is climate change a threat to national security?

**Suggestions for further readings**

