

# **History, Strategy, and Statecraft: Historical Methods for International Relations**

**Spring 2017  
Professor Francis J. Gavin  
Wednesdays 2-430  
BOB 410**

## **Overview**

What is history? And can a better understanding of the past allow us to pursue wiser, more effective strategy and statecraft?

There are a variety of ways to study and try to understand foreign policy and international relations. Social scientists, such as economists and political scientists, attempt to isolate variables, measure and aggregate observations, identify causality, locate generalizable trends, and develop theories for what shapes and drives international relations over time and space. Statesman and practitioners often rely on their personal experience and training in diplomacy to understand and manage the world around them. Historians look to the past, uncover and assess new evidence, and examine both the long and short-term causes of important global events and phenomena, focusing on their context while weighing their significance and uniqueness and arguing over their meaning. This course aims to explore all three practices, to see when and how they overlap and inform each other, and to see if the interaction can be more fruitful, with a particular emphasis on historical study.

The primary goal of this course is to familiarize advanced students of foreign policy and international relations with both historical methods and to develop what I call a historical sensibility. This can be challenging. The past provides few clear rules or lessons, it is often contested and controversial, and can easily be misused. History eschews forecasts, rarely isolates variables, and makes few general claims. Unlike many intellectual endeavors, there is no one shared “how to” guidebook to being a historian. Furthermore, the academic historical community has become, for reasons we will explore during the course, less explicit about their methods, assumptions, and research designs, and more ambivalent about engaging both strategy and statecraft. For their part, policymakers and strategists often overlook the power (and perils) of historical insight to inform our understanding of the world we live in. At first glance, the busy decision-maker may find little of immediate value or promise by engaging history. The relationship between these communities can be awkward, even strained. This is, to my view, less than optimal. Historians, strategists, and statesman can and should do more to engage each other. This course will explore how historical knowledge and historical skills can be used to better understand policy (with a focus on U.S. national and international security) and lead to more thoughtful discussion and debate about the pressing global challenges we face. It will also suggest how historians can better sensitize themselves to the realities decision-makers face.

Throughout the semester, we will examine the different ways history is practiced, both within and outside of the academy, with a focus on the history of foreign policy and international relations. We will also explore ways in which a familiarity with historical analysis and methods improve our understanding of world politics, strategy, and statecraft. We will do this by discussing important works of history and historiography, as well as looking at the ways history is used in the larger public discourse. A key feature of the class will be conversations with scholars and scholar-practitioners, who will share their insights and experiences on the benefits and cautions of historical reasoning and its application to policy.

Perhaps more than other courses, where a certain literature, skill or subject is mastered cumulatively over the semester, this class will be more like an intensive, structured dialogue. Broad, and often unanswerable questions of epistemology and historiography will often cast a shadow. This can be frustrating at times, and such an approach is not to everyone's taste. Furthermore, the syllabus/readings may be flexible, as opportunities to bring in guest scholar/practitioners present themselves. The hope is, however, that these conversations, both in the class and with our guests, will deepen our understanding and appreciation for historical insight.

Students will be evaluated in two ways. First, even more than most courses, class participation will be vital. Each week, student(s) will be responsible for laying out the key questions/issues in the readings and engaging in thoughtful dialogue and debate. Second, each student will write a seminar paper (20-25 pages), due at the end of the semester. You have three options for this paper:

- Exploring an important historical question, involving a foreign policy/international relations issue that interests you, using primary sources
- Engaging a key historiographical question/controversy in the history of international relations, -- the July 1914 Crisis, the origins of the Cold War, the U.S. military role in Vietnam, etc – with an eye towards evaluating the historical evidence, logic, and arguments
- Applying historical insight/historical lessons to a current/future policy question, including examining the use/mis-use of historical analogies

We will discuss each option in class, and I will meet individually with each student to craft proposal that both fit the goals of the course and the intellectual interest of the student.

At some point in the semester, each student is to visit an archive – approved after consultation with me – appropriate to your research. You will be required to register, spend the day, and bring back at least one document to share with the class. In addition, you should identify at least one online source for primary materials and bring in at least one document to share with the class.

## Schedule

### **February 1<sup>st</sup> - Introduction**

“The Umbrella Man,” by Errol Morris, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000001183275/the-umbrella-man.html>

“Thinking Historically: A Guide to Strategy and Statecraft,” by Francis J. Gavin,

<https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/thinking-historically-a-guide-for-strategy-and-statecraft/>

Arthur Krystal, “Age Of Reason: In his hundred years, Jacques Barzun has learned a thing or two,” October 22, 2007,

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/10/22/071022fa\\_fact\\_krystal](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/10/22/071022fa_fact_krystal)

“Folly’s Antidote” By Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. Published: January 1, 2007

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/01/opinion/01schlesinger.html>

### **February 8<sup>th</sup> - What is History? Part I**

E. H. Carr, *What is History?*

Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past*

### **February 15<sup>th</sup> - How Historians Think and Work**

GUEST: James Graham Wilson, U.S. Department of State, Historian’s Office

Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method*

## Recommended

Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*

Appendix I: Identifying the Scholarly Literature, Supplement to Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History* (Princeton University Press, 2006), Last revised: January 30, 2013

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/methbk/AppendixI.html>

Appendix II: Working with Primary Sources

Supplement to Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, Princeton University Press, 2006  
Last revised: January 2013  
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/methbk/AppendixII.html>

**February 22<sup>nd</sup> - What is History, Part II**

John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*

Recommended:

Bernard Bailyn, *Sometimes an Art: Nine Essays on History*

**March 1<sup>st</sup> - How is History Used and Misused?**

GUEST: Eliot Cohen, SAIS-JHU

Eliot Cohen, "The Historical Mind and Military Strategy," *Orbis*, Fall 2005

Ernest R. May, "*Lessons of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy*"

Recommended:

Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History*

**March 8<sup>th</sup> - History and Policy, Part 1**

GUEST: Jim Steinberg, Maxwell/Syracuse University  
Former Deputy Secretary of State (2009-2011)

James B. Steinberg, "History, Policymaking, and the Balkans: Lessons Imported and Lessons Learned," in Hal Brands, ed, *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft*

Philip Zelikow, "The Nature of History's Lessons," Hal Brands, ed, *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft*

Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age*, pp. 1-29

Francis J. Gavin and James B. Steinberg “Mind The Gap: Why Policymakers And Scholars Ignore Each Other, And What Should Be Done About It,”  
[“http://carnegie.org/publications/carnegie-reporter/single/view/article/item/308/](http://carnegie.org/publications/carnegie-reporter/single/view/article/item/308/)

\*\* PROPOSAL DUE: 5 page proposal for research paper due. I will meet individually with each student to discuss after it has been turned in

**March 15<sup>th</sup> - Archive Visit**

Each student will choose an archive related to their interests to visit. Fortunately, the Washington DC metro area is blessed with many such facilities. We will have James Wilson from the historical office of the United States Department of State in earlier to discuss archival work

**March 29<sup>th</sup> - History and Policy, part II**

Drew Faust, “To Be “A Speaker of Words and a Doer of Deeds:” Literature and Leadership, March 24, 2016, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, <http://www.harvard.edu/president/speech/2016/to-be-speaker-words-and-doer-deeds-literature-and-leadership>

William C. Inboden, “Statecraft, Decision-Making, and the Varieties of Historical Experience: A Taxonomy,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 2013

Ernest May, “When Government Writes History, <http://hnn.us/articles/11972.html>

Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds, “Introduction,” May and Zelikow, *Dealing with Dictators: Dilemmas of U.S. Diplomacy and Intelligence Analysis, 1945-1990*, pp. 1-13

Melvyn P. Leffler, “Austerity and U.S. Strategy: Lessons of the Past,” *The Fifth Annual Ernest May Memorial Lecture*

**April 5<sup>th</sup> - Contemporary History, Revisionism, and the Dangers of Certainty**

GUEST: Philip Zelikow, University of Virginia

Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History*, “The Nature of Contemporary History,” pp. 9-42

Simon Critchley “The Dangers of Certainty: A Lesson From Auschwitz,”

[https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/the-dangers-of-certainty/?action=click&contentCollection=Middle%20East&module=MostEmailed&version=Full&region=Marginalia&src=me&pgtype=article&\\_r=0](https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/the-dangers-of-certainty/?action=click&contentCollection=Middle%20East&module=MostEmailed&version=Full&region=Marginalia&src=me&pgtype=article&_r=0)

watch [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x20ohne\\_bbc-ascent-of-man-11-knowledge-or-certainty\\_tv](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x20ohne_bbc-ascent-of-man-11-knowledge-or-certainty_tv)

Nicholas Lemann, A Call for Help: *What the Kitty Genovese story really means.*  
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/10/a-call-for-help>

Kevin Kruse, The Pitfalls of Writing the First Draft of History November 30, 2016  
<http://www.processhistory.org/the-pitfalls-of-writing-the-first-draft-of-history/>

Adam Gopnik, Does it Help to Know History, August 28, 2014  
<http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/help-know-history>

Charles Leerhsen, “Who Was Ty Cobb? The History We Know That’s Wrong,”  
<https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/who-was-ty-cobb-the-history-we-know-thats-wrong/>

#### **April 12<sup>th</sup> - Historical Controversy and Debates**

“New Light on 1914,” paper by Marc Trachtenberg, correspondence with Stephen Schuker, Bruce Kuklick, and Robert Jervis (to be handed out)

Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, preface, pp. 1-110, 415-629

#### **April 19<sup>th</sup> - Historians and Social Science, Part 1**

Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*

Vijayendra Rao, Simon Szreter, and Michael Woolcock, “How and Why History Matters for Development policy,” in C.A. Bayly, Vijayendra Rao, Simon Szreter, and Michael Woolcock, eds., *History, Historians and Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue*, pp. 3-38

Robert Jervis, *International Politics and Diplomatic History: Fruitful Differences.* Columbia University. Published by H-Diplo/ISSF on 12 March 2010  
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-diplo&month=1003&week=b&msg=OLrFM9nnxPGikulcX67Bjw&user=&pw=>

**April 26<sup>th</sup> - Historians and Social Science, Part II**

Selections from Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds, *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists and the Study of International Relations*

Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman “Introduction: Negotiating International History and Politics,” pp. 1-36

Jack Levy, “Explaining Events and Developing Theories: History, Political Science, and the Analysis of International Relations,” pp. 39-84

Stephen Pelz, “Toward a New Diplomatic History: Two and a Half Cheers for International Relations Methods,” pp. 85-110

Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George, “Case Studies and Process Training in History and Political Science: Similar Strokes for Different Foci,” pp. 137-166

John Lewis Gaddis, “In Defense of Particular Generalizations: Rewriting Cold War History, Rethinking International Relations Theory,” pp. 301-326

Deborah Welch Larson, “Sources and Methods in Cold War History: The Need for a New Theory-Based Archival Approach,” pp. 327-350

William C. Wolforth, “Postscript: Historical Science and Cold War Scholarship,” pp. 351-358

Robert Jervis, “International History and International Politics: Why are they Studies Differently,” pp. 385-402

Paul W. Schroeder, “International History: Why Historians Do It Differently than Political Scientists,” pp. 403-416

H-Diplo/ISSF Forum on “What We Talk About When We Talk About Nuclear Weapons.” Published by H-Diplo/ISSF on 15 June 2014

<https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Forum-2.pdf> and <https://issforum.org/forums/what-we-do-and-why-it-matters-a-response-to-fks>

**May 3<sup>rd</sup> - History and Strategy – A Critique**

Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger*

**May 10<sup>th</sup> - RESEARCH PAPER DUE**