

GVPT 409N

Seminar in IR and World Politics: The United States and the United Nations



Dr. Ken Conca

Fall 2008

Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:45
0111 Tydings Hall

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This seminar examines the relationship—complex, multifaceted, and often troubled—between the United Nations and the United States. Why is the UN so often criticized in American political discourse? Do these criticisms have merit? Why do so many political actors and observers outside the United States feel that the UN is excessively responsive to American demands and preferences, while so many within the United States argue that it is inattentive to, and perhaps even hostile to, American interests and values?

To examine this relationship, we will study the origins, activities, and impact of the United Nations. The UN has been described in many ways: as a prototype for global government, as a membership organization of national governments, as an autonomous agent with its own goals and agendas, and as a weak and ineffectual body with little impact on world affairs. Some support it as the world's best hope for achieving a peaceful, fair, and prosperous world order, while others have criticized it as a tool of the United States, a cozy club dominated by the great powers at the expense of the majority of humanity, or an out-of-control organization that seeks to erode the sovereignty of free peoples.

Among the questions we will examine are the following: Why was the United Nations created? How is it organized legally, politically, and administratively? What does it do? How has it changed over time? What impact does it have in world affairs? Has it performed as its founders expected? Why is

the UN so controversial, in the United States and elsewhere? Why is there so much talk about 'reforming' the UN?

In the process, we will also cover several specific controversies within the US-UN relationship, including Iraq, the Security Council, UN finances, the UN reform debate, sovereignty issues, the so-called 'oil-for-food' corruption scandal, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Throughout the semester, we will use a range of conceptual tools from political science, sociology, and organization theory to address these topics. We will also read a wide range of commentaries, opinion pieces, and points of view on the UN and the US-UN relationship, sampling from across the spectrum of current political discourse.

EXPECTATIONS AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS: You should expect me to be in class, on time, enthusiastic about teaching and learning, and fully prepared to play an active role in the class. I expect the same of you.

Your grade will consist of four equal components:

(1) **Participation** in class discussions. You must come regularly and participate actively in class discussions. Although consistent participation is expected, the participation component of your overall course grade is **not** based primarily on the number of words you speak. The occasional good question or thoughtful comment on the material being discussed will serve us all better than a steady stream of unsupported opinions. I use the following criteria to assign participation grades:

A = Highly effective participant: insightful questions/comments; clearly does the reading.

B = Consistent participant: thoughtful questions/comments; clearly does the reading.

C = Occasional participant: regularly attends class, sporadic involvement in discussions, often based more on personal opinion than analysis of class material.

D = Observer: regularly attends class but does not get involved in class discussions.

F = Occasional observer: sporadic attendance, no participation.

If you find class participation difficult or face particular challenges, I can help. Let's talk about it **early** in the semester. I will gladly work with you to make your class participation less stressful and more effective—but I can only do this if we discuss the situation.

(2) A **midterm exam** held in class on October 16.

(3) A **final exam** held on the scheduled day and time for the Tuesday/Thursday 12:30 time slot. The final will cover the material following the midterm only and will consist of a mix of short-answer and essay questions.

(4) A **research paper** on a UN specialized agency, organization, program, conference, or other organized activity. As part of the paper assignment you will also prepare a PowerPoint briefing presentation and make a short presentation of your paper to the class. An assignment guide for the paper and the briefing will be distributed early in the semester. Grades will be based on the quality of your reasoning, the clarity of your writing, and your ability to follow the guidelines regarding format, content, and due dates.

COURSE MECHANICS

Reading materials: All reading material for the class will be available on the class CD (distributed in class), on the Internet, or through the electronic periodicals collection of the UMD library. Although it is not required and I will not assign reading from it, a handy reference text is *Basic Facts about the United Nations* (ISBN: 9211009367).

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-3:15, Thursdays 11:00-12:15, or by appointment. My office is 3114-J Tydings (phone 301-405-4125; e-mail kconca@gvpt.umd.edu). I encourage you to stop by not only to discuss the class material, but also if you'd like to talk about other courses, your major, a career in international relations, grad-school opportunities, or any aspect of world politics that interests you. You do not need an appointment to drop in during the office hours listed above; they are open-door times. If you stop by during office hours and I am already talking to someone, please interrupt us to let me know that you are waiting. If you have a schedule conflict at these times, contact me by e-mail or see me in class to schedule another time to meet.

Web site: To access the course web site, go to Dr. Conca's home page at www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/conca and click on the link for GVPT 409N. In addition to the usual course materials, assignments, etc., you will find a document with a large number of useful web sites related to the UN, intergovernmental organizations, and global politics. I encourage you to go beyond the assigned course material to explore your own particular interests using these sources, and to make use of these sources when writing your paper. This page of web links is also included on your course CD.

Disabilities: Every possible effort will be made to accommodate students with learning disabilities, physical challenges and other special needs. If you have a documented disability, you should contact Disability Support Services (0126 Shoemaker Hall). Each semester students with documented disabilities should apply to DSS for accommodation request forms, which you can provide to your professors as proof of your eligibility for accommodations. The rules for eligibility

and the types of accommodations a student may request may be reviewed on the DSS web site: http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/receiving_serv.html

Academic Integrity: You **must** observe the basic rules of the University Code of Academic Integrity:

- (1) No **cheating** (“intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise”);
- (2) No **fabrication** (“intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in any academic exercise”);
- (3) No **facilitating academic dishonesty** (“intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another violate any provision of the Academic Code”);
- (4) No **plagiarism** (“intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise”).

See me if anything about these rules is unclear to you, or visit the web site of the Office of Student Conduct at <http://www.inform.umd.edu/jpo/> Be aware that professors are **required** to bring all cases of suspected violation to attention of OSC. The penalty for a first offense typically includes (at a minimum) automatic course failure and an explanatory note on the student’s transcript indicating that he or she has violated university rules of academic integrity.

Religious observances. This class will comply with the university policy on religious observances, which is that students not be penalized or disadvantaged for practicing their religion. It is also university policy that it is your responsibility to inform me of any religious observance that will cause an absence from class or affect your ability to complete work on time. Please speak with me well in advance if such a situation will arise during the semester, so that we can make alternate arrangements.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNED READING

Please note: You are expected to do the reading for each topic **before** coming to the class. Some of the numbered items below will require multiple sessions. I will announce in class each week what to read for the following week’s session.

Also note:

- Items marked @ may be accessed directly from the Internet at the URL indicated in the syllabus.

- Items marked **Ⓞ** are on the course CD, which will be distributed during the first class session.
- Items marked **E** may be obtained through the electronic journals collection of the UMD library. Go to the library web page <http://www.lib.umd.edu/>; select 'research port'; choose the College Park campus; enter the barcode number from your photo ID and your last name; choose the 'E-journals' tab; and type in the name of the journal you want.

A. THE UN: BACKGROUND, CONCEPTS AND OVERVIEW

1. Intro and course overview

Be sure to read this syllabus carefully!

2. A quick tour of the UN

@ UN web site www.un.org [We'll use it extensively as the semester proceeds. For now, just get a general sense of how the site is organized.]

@ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations* <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/> [Please read the Preamble and Chapter I. What is noteworthy or surprising here? What are the organization's core principles? Are there any possible tensions among the core principles?].

@ United Nations Audiovisual News, "Year in Review 2007" <http://www.un.org/av/unfamily/yir2007.html> [To view this 15-minute video, click on "View Year in Review" at lower right.]

Ⓞ United Nations, "60 Ways the United Nations Makes a Difference" [A brief brochure highlighting the many different types of UN activities, projects, and programs Which of these activities seem most surprising, given your reading of the charter summarizing the UN's core missions? Which would you expect to be the most controversial politically, and why?]

Ⓞ United Nations, "The United Nations System: Principal Organs" [This is the UN organizational chart--you may want to print this and have it available during future class sessions.]

3. Origins of the UN

⓪ Jean Krasno, “The Founding of the United Nations: International Cooperation as an Evolutionary Process.” Academic Council of the United Nations System, Occasional Papers 2001 no. 1. [Fascinating account of the talks that produced the UN. What were the main political disputes surrounding the creation and design of the UN? Do these seem to be an artifact of that particular moment in history, or do they still resonate in today’s world?]

@ UN pictorial history timeline <http://www.un.org/UN50/Photos/intro.html>
[Browse the roughly 120 photos, organized by decade].

4. Perspectives on the US-UN relationship from across the American political spectrum

⓪ Jesse Helms, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Address before The United Nations Security Council, January 20, 2000.

@ Richard Perle, “Thank God for the Death of the UN.” *The Guardian*, Friday March 21, 2003.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,918812,00.html>

@ Robert C. Johansen, “Does the United States Need the United Nations?” Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2003. <http://kroc.nd.edu/events/unusneed.shtml>

@ Tom DeWeese, Address to the Republican Women’s Club, Bloomfield, Michigan, November 15, 2005.
<http://www.americanpolicy.org/un/nov1505.htm>

@ Phyllis Bennis, “United Nations v. United States.” TomPaine.com, November 28, 2006
http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/11/28/united_nations_v_united_states.php

[What are the main points of contention among these thinkers? What implicit assumptions does each article make about the world system, the possibilities of cooperation, and the nature and sources of conflict? Any errors of fact or reasoning here that we should flag?]

5. Public opinion and perceptions of the UN in the United States

@ Polling data on the UN found on the “America and the World” web site, http://www.americans-world.org/digest/global_issues/un/un_summary.cfm

[Click on and read the text for the seven links on the left side of the page (“General attitudes toward the UN”, “The UN and the Use of Military Force”, etc.). Don’t just read the paragraph summaries on the main page—click these links to view the actual polling data. You are not required to review the material in the “related links” box at the lower right, which surveys global public opinion toward the UN, but feel free to do so].

B. THE FIRST PILLAR: “To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”

6. The Security Council in theory and practice

@ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*. Chapters V, VI, and VII. <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

@ Read the latest monthly informational report on Security Council activities put out by the independent organization Security Council Report, found at <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org> Note: It’s easier to read as a PDF file by clicking on “full forecast in PDF format” than to maneuver through all the individual links on this page. [How does the Security Council spend most of its time? What sorts of concerns seem to dominate its agenda?]

7. From peacekeeping to peacebuilding

@ Executive Summary, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, August 2000 (a.k.a. “the Brahimi report”). http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/ [What are the chief criticisms offered here of UN peacekeeping/peacebuilding initiatives?]

E Mohammed Ayoob, “Third World Perspectives on Humanitarian Intervention and International Administration,” *Global Governance* vol. 10 no. 1 (January-March 2004): 99-118. [What possible objections to humanitarian intervention, or to how it is currently practiced, does the author offer? Who objects? Are these objections persuasive?]

E Mats Berdal, “The UN After Iraq,” *Survival* vol. 46 no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 83-102. [Compare this to the Brahimi report—are the concerns similar?]

8. US-UN tensions in the Security Council: Iraq

E Michael Glennon, "Why the Security Council Failed." *Foreign Affairs* vol. 82 no. 3 (May/June 2003). [Does Glennon persuade you that the council failed?]

@ David Malone, "Iraq and the Security Council: Lessons from the Past, Suggestions for the Future." Lecture at University of Pittsburgh School of Law, November 29, 2006. <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/monitor/2006/11/iraq-and-un-security-council-un.php> [Please watch this 51-minute lecture. If you are interested in Malone's ideas, check out his recent book, *The International Struggle over Iraq: Politics in the UN Security Council, 1980-2005*. It provides a fascinating window inside Security Council politics over the past few decades, from a senior Canadian diplomat].

9. US-UN tensions in the Security Council: Israel and Palestine

@ Browse UN web page "Question of Palestine at the United Nations." <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/index.html> [Note how this page defines the problem, and keep this in mind when reading the three readings below, which were chosen to show the range of debate on the UN's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict].

@ Anti-Defamation League, "Anti-Israel Bias at the UN." http://www.adl.org/international/Israel-UN-1-introduction.asp?m_flipmode=1 [NOTE: be sure to read the additional sections after this introductory page: "Early UN biases," Resolutions 242 and 338", etc.]

@ Michael S. Ladah & Suleiman I. Ajlouni, "Mr. Bush, What About Israel's Defiance of UN Resolutions?" *Media Monitors Network*, September 29, 2002. <http://www.mediamonitors.net/michaelsladah&suleimaniajlouni1.html>

@ Gregory Khalil, "Just Say No to Vetoes," *New York Times*, July 19, 2004. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/israel-palestine/2004/0719noveto.htm>

10. The Security Council reform debate

@ James Paul and Celine Nahory, "Theses Towards a Democratic Reform of the UN Security Council." *Global Policy Forum*, July 13, 2005. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/reform/2005/0713theses.htm>

⓪ Thomas G. Weiss, "Security Council Reform: Problems and Prospects in September 2005." Policy Brief no. 9, United Nations Association of the USA, 23 June 2005.

@ United Nations Association in Canada, National Capital Branch, "Roundtable on Security Council Reform"
<http://www.ncrb.unac.org/unreform/roundtables/SCreform.html>

[If you were charged with redesigning the Security Council, what would you propose?]

C. THE SECOND PILLAR: "The dignity and worth of the human person"

11. Human rights and the UN

@ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948.
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> [What is your reaction to the declaration? Which rights contained herein are most likely to prove most controversial? Is this an inspiring and cutting-edge document, or a statement of the last common denominator?]

E Shashi Tharoor, "Are Human Rights Universal?" *World Policy Journal* vol. XVI no. 4 (Winter 1999/2000): 1-6. [Well, are they? Still think so after rading Odinkalu and Hassan, below? Do the controversies lie in the concepts of human rights, the practices of human rights organizations, or both?]

@ Chidi Anselm Odinkalu, "Why More Africans Don't Use Human Rights Language." *Human Rights Dialogue*, series 2 no. 1 (Winter 2000).
http://www.cceia.org/resources/publications/dialogue/2_01/articles/602.html

@ Bahey El Din Hassan, "The Credibility Crisis of International Human Rights in the Arab World." *Human Rights Dialogue*, series 2 no. 1 (Winter 2000).
http://www.cceia.org/resources/publications/dialogue/2_01/articles/606.html

12. The UN's human rights record and the new Human Rights Council

⓪ Anne Appelbaum, "The U.N.'s Human Rights Rituals," *Washington Post*, April 16, 2003, p. A-27.

Ⓞ Irene Martinetti, “The Shift From The Human Rights Commission To The Human Rights Council. A Butterfly Or A Caterpillar In Lipstick?” UN Reform Watch, Report no. 14, June 19, 2006.

Ⓔ James H. Lebovic and Erik Voeten, “The Politics of Shame: The Condemnation of Country Human Rights Practices in the UNCHR,” *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 50 no. 4 (December 2006): 861-888. [This is a good example of political science research using statistical methods. Try to get through it, and make note of any questions or criticisms you have about the method and research design—we’ll discuss in class.]

D. THE THIRD PILLAR: “Justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law”

13. The UN as an instrument and source of International law

@ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*. Chapter XIV.
<http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

Ⓞ Charlotte Ku, “Global Governance and the Changing Face of International Law.” John W. Holmes Memorial Lecture, Academic Council of the United Nations System, June 2001. Note: The tables for Ku’s article are in a separate PDF file on your CD. [Try to summarize Ku’s main argument as an ordered series of statements. Does Ku persuade you? If you were debating her, how would you respond?]

14. The International Court of Justice

@ International Court of Justice, “The Court” <http://www.icj-cij.org/court/index.php?p1=1> [Note: From this page, read the various sub-pages in the left-side menu: “History,” “Members of the Court,” etc. Pay particular attention to “History” and “How the Court Works”]

@ International Court of Justice, “Statute of the International Court of Justice.” <http://www.icj-cij.org/documents/index.php?p1=4&p2=2&p3=0>

[In class, let’s unpack the name: In what sense is this body international? Is it a court? Is this justice?]

15. The International Criminal Court

@ Brett D. Schaefer, "The International Criminal Court: Threatening U.S. Sovereignty and Security." Heritage Foundation, Executive Memorandum no. 537, July 2, 1998.

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/EM537.cfm>

@ Robert C. Johansen, "U.S. Opposition to the International Criminal Court: Unfounded Fears." Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Policy Brief no. 7, July 2001.

<http://www.nd.edu/~krocinst/polbriefs/PolBrief7.pdf>

E Hans-Peter Kaul, "Construction Site for More Justice: The International Criminal Court After Two Years," *American Journal Of International Law* vol. 99 no. 2 (April 2005): 370-384.

[Break down the implicit debate between Schaefer and Johansen, which is typical of the discussion in the US when the ICC was founded. Where do they disagree? What assumptions does each make about the court, US interests, and the nature of international relations? Fast-forwarding to the Kaul article, does the debate look different in the light of our experience with the ICC thus far?]

E. THE FOURTH PILLAR: "Social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom"

16. Functional activities of the specialized agencies and UN programs

@ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*. Chapters IX, X, XV.

<http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

@ UN Millennium Project, "Fast Facts: The Faces of Poverty"

<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/3-MP-PovertyFacts-E.pdf>

17. Case study: The UN Environment Programme

⓪ United Nations, *Environment and Human Well-being: A Practical Strategy*. Summary Report of the Environmental Sustainability Task Force of the UN Millennium Project.

@ Environment Canada, "United Nations Environment Programme."

http://www.ec.gc.ca/international/unorgs/unep_e.htm [This Canadian governmental web page presents a useful, short overview of UNEP].

⓪ Friends of the Earth International, "The Need for Strengthened International Environmental Governance." Position paper for the 8th

Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council /Global Ministerial Environment Forum, March 2004.

E Matthew Heimer, “The UN Environment Programme: Thinking Globally, Retreating Locally.” *Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal* vol. 1 (1999): 129-136.

18. Controversy: The financial relationship between the US and the UN

⓪ Dialogue on Globalization, “Financing the United Nations.” Fact sheet, April 2006.

⓪ Congressional Research Service, “United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues.” CRS Report for Congress, updated September 17, 2007.

@ Global Policy Forum, UN financial tables

US vs. Total Debt to the UN: 2006

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/finance/tables/core/un-us-06.htm>

Total UN System Estimated Expenditures, 1986-2004

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/finance/tables/system/tabsyst.htm>

The UN Finance in Comparative Perspective

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/finance/tables/fincomp.htm>

[Should US funding be made conditional on UN behavior? What is the proper level of funding? Does the US give too much or too little, and does it ask too much or too little in return? Does the CRS report take a narrowly American perspective?]

19. Controversy: Management reform and the ‘oil-for-food’ scandal

@ Browse the website of the Independent Inquiry Committee into the UN Oil-for-Food Programme: <http://www.iic-offp.org/>

⓪ Independent Inquiry Committee, *Report on Programme Manipulation*. [Please read chapter 1. Compare how the IIC defines the problem to Gordon’s take, below. Something went very wrong here—but what, exactly, and who or what is responsible?]

E Joy Gordon, When Unilateralism Is Invisible: A Different Perspective on the Oil-for-Food Scandal, “*Global Governance* vol. 13 (2007), 59–77.

F. THE FUTURE OF US-UN RELATIONS

20. Toward the future: Scenarios for improved US-UN relations

⓪ Kofi Annan, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Security, Development and Human Rights For All*. Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, March 2005. Read sections I, V, and VI.

@ “Power and Super-Power: Global Leadership in the Twenty-First Century.” Speech of UN Deputy Secretary Mark Malloch Brown to the Century Foundation and Center for American Progress--Security and Peace Initiative, New York, 6 June 2006
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/dsgsm287.doc.htm> [Does Malloch Brown’s criticism of the US seem reasonable?]

@ UN Association of the United States of America, “U.S.-U.N. Engagement: A Compilation of UNA-USA Position Statements.” Policy Brief, April 28 2004.
<http://www.unausa.org/site/pp.asp?c=fvKRI8MPJpF&b=471529> [What do you think of their recommendations? Which would be the most controversial politically in the US, and why? Anything missing?]