

GVPT 409N

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



Dr. Ken Conca

Fall 2009

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 many political actors and observers outside the United States feel that the UN is excessively responsive to American demands, while many within the United States argue that it is inattentive or 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 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 to the detriment of most of the world's nations, 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 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

Expectations: 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.

Grades: Your grade will consist of four components:

(1) **Participation** in class discussions (10 percent of your grade). 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 13** (30 percent of your grade). We will discuss the format and content of the exam in class and a study guide will be available on the class web site.

(3) A **final exam** held on Friday, December 18, 1:30-3:30 PM (30 percent of your grade). 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 (30 percent of your grade). 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), or 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. My E-mail is kconca@gvpt.umd.edu and my phone number is 301-405-4125. 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 under 'teaching.' In addition to the usual course materials 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 interests using these sources, and to make use of them when writing your paper.

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/>

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.jpo.umd.edu/ForStudents_Academic.aspx 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 sessions.

How to access the reading materials:

- 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. These are materials from the public domain.
- 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; log in; 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. Notice the entry portals for each official UN language. Go in and browse!]

@ 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 2008" <http://www.un.org/av/unfamily/yir2008.html> [To view this 12-minute video, click on "Download" at lower right. Be patient, as the site can be slow. What does the UN publicize as its most important accomplishments? How does the organization portray itself? Bonus question: George Clooney...?!]

Ⓞ 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>
[Look at the roughly 120 photos, organized by decade, to get a sense of the history of the UN family of organizations and some of their major milestones.]

4. The US-UN relationship: Perspectives 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>

@ Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations. "A New Course in the World, a New Approach at the UN." Remarks at New York University's Center for Global Affairs and Center on International Cooperation, August 12, 2009
http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/press_releases/20090812_163.html

@ 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

@ Polling data on US public attitudes toward the UN, from World Public Opinion.org

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 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: Rather than maneuver through all the links, you may wish to read the report as a PDF file by clicking on “full forecast in PDF format” (found directly under the substantive links). [How does the Security Council spend most of its time? What sorts of concerns dominate its agenda? What specific actions did the council take in the past month?]

7. US-UN tensions in the Security Council: the case of 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 and former Canadian ambassador to the UN].

8. From peacekeeping to peacebuilding

@ *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/ Read the first two sections of the report: “Executive Summary” and “Summary of Recommendations.” [What are the chief criticisms offered here of UN peacekeeping/peacebuilding initiatives? Do the recommendations make sense in light of the critique that the report develops?]

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?]

9. 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>

Ⓞ 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? Browse these materials for ideas that you would support or oppose, and be ready to explain why. Think about both the substantive content of reform measures and the politics of striking a deal on reform.]

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

10. 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

11. 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.

⓪ 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.

E 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 understand the method, make note of the principal findings, and jot down any questions or criticisms you have about the research design, method, or interpretation of results.]

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

12. 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/>

⓪ 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?]

13. The International Court of Justice

@ International Court of Justice, “The Court” <http://www.icj-cij.org/court/index.php?p1=1> From this page, read the various sub-pages in the gray shaded box to the left: “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 ICJ’s name: In what sense is this body international? Is it a court? Is this justice?]

14. 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>
[Schaefer reflects some of the criticisms that were voiced in US political discourse, particularly by conservatives, during the treaty negotiations for the International Criminal Court. Given what we will cover in class on the court’s constitution, jurisdiction, rules, procedures, and activities to date, do Schaefer’s concerns have merit?]

E Jamie Mayerfeld, “Who Shall Be Judge? The United States, the International Criminal Court, and the Global Enforcement of Human Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* vol. 25 no. 1 (Feb 2003): 93-129.
[Mayerfeld takes a more theoretical approach, contrasting multilateral and unilateral enforcement mechanisms on human rights violations. What is Mayerfeld’s core argument, and do you find it persuasive?]

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

15. 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/>

[Looking at the charter and knowing what you do about the UN organization chart, what would you guess would be some of the challenges of making the UN bureaucracy function effectively?]

@ UN Millennium Project, “Fast Facts: The Faces of Poverty”
<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/3-MP-PovertyFacts-E.pdf>

@ UN Intellectual History Project, “The UN and Human Development.” Briefing Note 8, July 2009. <http://www.unhistory.org/briefing/8HumDev.pdf>

[Does the idea of Human Development provide an effective framework for tackling poverty? How does it differ from other conceptions of the means and ends of promoting ‘development’? Should support for this idea be tallied as a major UN accomplishment?]

16. 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.

E Maria Ivanova, “Moving Forward by Looking Back: Learning from UNEP’s History,” in Lydia Swart and Estelle Perry, eds., *Global Environmental Governance: Perspectives on the Current Debate* (New York: Center for UN Reform Education, 2007).
<http://www.centerforunreform.org/node/251> (select chapter by Ivanova from table of contents)

[Is the UN well organized to address global environmental challenges? Does the strategy sketched in the task force document seem up to the task? Does UNEP?]

F. US-UN controversies

17. The financial relationship between the US and the UN

⓪ Dialogue on Globalization, “Financing the United Nations.” Fact sheet, 2009.

@ Global Policy Forum, UN financial tables

Total UN System Contributions

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

The UN Finance in Comparative Perspective

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

US vs. Total Debt to the UN

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/un-finance/tables-and-charts-on-un-finance/27418.html>

[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? Note any important trends or relationships in the data—we'll discuss in class]

18. The US, Israel, Palestine, and the UN

@ 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, “Israel at the UN: Progress amid a History of Bias.” 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>

[What are the key sources of controversy here? Can we view the Un as a whole when assessing the controversy, or do we need to break it down into its component parts?]

19. 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/>

Ⓞ Independent Inquiry Committee, *Report on Programme Manipulation*. Please read chapter 1.

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

[Compare how the IIC and Gordon define the problem. Something went very wrong here—but what, exactly, and who or what is responsible?]

G. THE FUTURE OF US-UN RELATIONS

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

Ⓞ 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>

[If implemented, would the vision of then-Secretary General Annan for strengthening the UN be likely to improve US-UN relations? To introduce new tensions? Does Malloch Brown’s criticism of the US seem reasonable?]