

# Research project:

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## Grand Strategy in the 21st Century



**January 2015, version 3.3.**

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Plenary Session	Wednesday; 10:00-13:00
Place	<b>REC B3.10</b>
Office hours	On appointment, or: Tuesdays; 14:00-15:30 Thursdays; 14:00-15:30

## Course overview

Over the past decade successive political and economic crises have accelerated longer-term changes in the international distribution of power, making the strategic environment less stable and more complex than at any time since the Cold War. Great power competition has seemingly returned, as seen in the relative decline of American power, the (economic) rise of China, a newly assertive Russia, and the emergence of various regional powers. Yet, this does not seem a full return to 19th century IR. The current redistribution of power is taking place within a global order that is increasingly politically, financially, and economically transnationalised. This adds to the overall complexity of the environment and reconciling these two major trends is therefore one of the premier analytical and policy challenges of the contemporary era.

In this research project students will investigate these difficult issues for their Master's theses through both theoretical and empirical work, the latter in the form of in-depth case studies, comparative work, or quantitative research. The range of subjects that fit in this theme are broad and include: alliance politics and balancing behaviour in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere; regional crises as power in global system is redistributed; technological innovations with societal and military applications; civil-military relations and resurgent nationalism; and the strategic use of existing international institutions.

To illustrate, policymakers and analysts face the following, varied questions: which alliances and international institutions are likely to be enduring in the coming decades; which types of force are likely to be most effective; can and will the US maintain a global strategy; how will China assert itself to gain greater political influence; how will the US strategic 'rebalancing' towards the Pacific impact European security; in what ways will a resurgent Russia impact European security, and specifically NATO; how do non-state actors relate to these global shifts in power; are certain domestic systems inherently unstable; how do small and medium powers respond to the shifts in regional global power; and how will regional powers such as India, Brazil, South Africa and Turkey rise? These are all demanding contemporary issues. Students participating in this research project will be well prepared for the analytical and professional work of the period to come.

## **Objectives**

The overall aim of this seminar is the design and completion of a thesis to a satisfactory MSc standard under the supervision. This implies building on the cumulative knowledge and skills of the BA and Master phases to develop a valid research question combined with appropriate case selection, the production, presentation and defence of a successful research design embedded in the relevant conceptual literature debates, and undertaking empirical research employing methodology(ies) appropriate to the project and cases selected. Students will thereby enhance their data research and analysis skills in relation to the field and their research design. The student will also learn to respond to supervisory guidance and to benefit from intellectual interaction with peers in the seminar. The course will also assist students in developing their knowledge of the major contemporary issues in international relations and international security in both empirical and conceptual terms, of critical research and analytical skills, of communication and presentational skills in defence of a scholarly argument in the context of the research design, and will reinforce their understanding of and application of scholarly methodologies and concepts in support of valid research. Emphasis will be placed on helping students to access and interact with an interdisciplinary range of literature from strategic studies, security studies, and international relations.

## **Recommended prior knowledge**

This course may prove difficult without a basic knowledge of the International Relations and security studies literature. Most students should have acquired the necessary knowledge at the undergraduate level, but may wish deliberately to supplement this in their choice of MA elective courses.

## **Format of the project**

The first seminar meetings (8 meetings in total) will be designed to provide the necessary background for work on the thesis. The first 4 sessions will be devoted to discussing (a) contemporary strategic issues; (b) theories and existing work that can help us make sense of these issues; and (c) how to think about research in general. During this stage, students should move towards identifying the specific topic of their thesis in cooperation with the instructor and writing a literature review. The next 2 sessions will be devoted more specifically to (d) the elements that make

up a good research design. The final session is going to be spent on presenting the research design in class for a peer review.

Throughout this stage seminar meetings will be interactive but led by the instructor and incorporating lecture elements and Q&A. Moreover, weekly assignments will help you gradually structure the research design and prepare you for the research. It is of course possible throughout this period to meet with the lecturer to discuss, under the condition that you have prepared for the discussion. The expectation is always that you, the student, are the person responsible for the quality of the content of your thesis.

Please note that handing in the weekly assignments on time and complete is mandatory. Attendance at all the meetings is also mandatory. Missing either can lead to immediate expulsion from the course.

The last two-thirds of the semester will largely be devoted to exchanging the information and experiences gained from work on the theses as well as to guidance in the process of research and writing. Seminar meetings will be organized to review the progress of the work. Participants can additionally meet one-on-one with the instructor as often as required to discuss the more specific aspects of their individual thesis work. Throughout the research period of the semester, you will be expected to hand in versions of the chapters at regular intervals, and a complete first draft weeks before the final evaluation date (June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

## **Criteria and expectations regarding the thesis**

Please read the thesis manual 2014-2015 for the criteria and expectations regarding the thesis:

<http://student.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/studentensites/fmg/politicologie-master/rules-and-regulations/thesis-manual-2014-2015.pdf?2817414256500>

### **Session 1. 04/02/2015**

**Discuss: topics and questions; search for literature**

**Discuss: Grand strategy and multipolarity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

#### **Readings (Content)**

- ...

## **Readings (Proposal)**

- Thesis manual 2014-2015:  
<http://student.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/studentensites/fmg/politicologie-master/rules-and-regulations/thesis-manual-2014-2015.pdf?2817414256500>
- Gerring, J. (2011) How Good Is Good Enough? A Multidimensional, Best-Possible Standard for Research: Political Research Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3, pp. 625-636

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## **Session 2. 11/02/2014**

**Discuss: topics and questions; search for literature**

**Discuss: theory in general and realist theory in particular**

## **Readings (Content)**

- ...

**Proposal: what is a good research question**

## **Readings (Proposal)**

- King Keohane Verba: major component of a research design (see dropbox)

**Assignment: reformulate research question and identify relevant literature**

- Formulate a research question, including academic motivation
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.

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## **Session 3. 25/02/2015**

**Discuss: literature review and theories**

**Discuss: 21<sup>st</sup> century themes**

## **Readings (Content)**

- ...

## **Readings (Proposal)**

- NA

## **Assignment: reformulate research question and identify relevant literature**

- Reformulate research question
- List at least 20 articles and/or books relevant to your topic
- Group these according to parts of the research you think are relevant – how do they help you investigate the topic?
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.

## **Session 4. 04/03/2015**

### **Discuss: theoretical framework, grand vs midrange theory, concepts**

### **Discuss: 21<sup>st</sup> century**

## **Readings (Content)**

## **Readings (Proposal)**

- Walt, Stephen, and John J. Mearsheimer. "Leaving Theory Behind: Why Hypothesis Testing Has Become Bad for IR." HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP13-001, January 2013. <http://web.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/citation.aspx?PubId=8723>

## **Assignment: literature review and research question**

- Write a solid literature review in which you review at least 10 articles or books
- Identify major rival arguments and strengths and weaknesses
- Identify a theoretical or empirical gap in the existing research
- Identify a research question, and, if necessary, subquestions
- 4-5 pages
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.

## **Session 5. 11/03/2015**

**Discuss: theoretical framework - causation; hypotheses**

**Discuss: 21<sup>st</sup> century specific developments**

### **Readings (Proposal)**

- Chapter 4 Gerring, J. 2001 (2008 ed). Social Science Methodology. A Criterial Framework. Cambridge University Press, New York. (See dropbox).
- Chapters 5 and 7 Gerring, J. 2001 (2008 ed). Social Science Methodology. A Criterial Framework. Cambridge University Press, New York. (See dropbox).

### **Assignment: identify, define and operationalize major concepts**

- Identify and define major concepts according to literature and relevant for your research
- Can the concepts be delineated; are they consistent; etc .
- Operationalise concepts; how can they be measured?
- 2-4 pages
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.

### **Assignment: hypotheses**

- Identify your argument and rival arguments
- What would prove your argument?
- What would disprove your argument (falsification)?
- 2-4 pages
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.

## **Session 6. 18/03/2015**

**Discuss: methods**

**Discuss: NA**

### **Readings**

- In the group, discuss literature you are using, theory

## **Readings (Proposal)**

- Chapters 8 and 9 Gerring, J. 2001 (2008 ed). Social Science Methodology. A Criterial Framework. Cambridge University Press, New York. (See dropbox).

## **Assignment: identify appropriate methods and data**

- Based on your literature review, identify methods most commonly used
- Are these methods appropriate for your argument?
- Is there already relevant data available?
- If not, how will you collect data?
- 2-4 pages
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.

## **Session 7. 25/03/2014**

### **Assignment: present research proposals for peer review**

- Working title; research question; motivation; literature review; theoretical framework; research design; probable outline chapters.
- 10 pages minimum
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.

## **Session 8. 01/04/2014**

### **Assignment: present research proposals for peer review**

- Working title; research question; motivation; literature review; theoretical framework; research design; probable outline chapters.
- 10 pages minimum
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.

### **Deadline 1. 17/04/2015 (deadline might be moved)**

- Chapters 1 (preliminary introduction) and 2 (reworked question; motivation; literature review; theoretical framework; research design) OR
- Chapters 1 (preliminary introduction; reworked question; motivation; literature review; theoretical framework) and 2 (research design)
- 15 page minimum
- Handed in by 15:00.

### **Meeting 9. 22/04/2015 (session might be moved)**

- Discuss chapters in group

### **Deadline 2. 15/05/2015**

- 2 empirical chapters

### **Meeting 10. 20/05/2015**

- Discuss preliminary findings in group

### **Deadline 3. 15/06/2014**

- Full Draft