

Fall 2020

## HSS 404-101: War and Misperception

Karl Schweizer

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HSS 404-101  
Capstone  
WAR AND MISPERCEPTION, 1648-1945

Fall 2020

Office hours: TBA

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Instructor: Dr. K.W. Schweizer

Federated Dept. of History, JIT/Rutgers

Class times: Tuesdays 6 – 8:50 pm

**Course Description:** Misperception involves the discrepancy between the psychological environment of decision makers and the “operational”, fact-based environment of the real world. Decisions may be determined (and all too often are) by the former; effects or consequences constrained by the latter. (Images are not conceptualized as misperceptions because they involve normative judgments or idiosyncratic responses for which there exist no empirical, rational or objective standards of evaluation).

This course will examine in detail the relationship between misperception on the part of decision makers and the processes leading to particular wars during the period 1648-1945. Conceptually, the course will question the rational models of conflict constructed by generations of military historians which work from the assumption that leaders accurately perceive external threats and opportunities and select policies based on rational calculation in order to advance national interests. Attention will be devoted to the impact of ideas and identifiable personal factors on the course of event as well as the relationship between the human element and the conventions, structures, ethical precepts, and institutions that distinguished European societies during this period and help explain the pattern of interstate relationships and conflict.

The first part of the course consists of weekly discussions of the salient literature on the subject including extracts from international theory, systemic empirical research, crisis resolution and historical studies of decision-making and crisis behavior.

Section two will extract key theoretical perspectives from this literature and apply these to concrete case studies of selected crisis situations leading to actual war. These case studies will form the basis of research papers presented and discussed by students in class.

**Course Goals:** By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the intricate dynamics behind high-level decision making (in both military and diplomatic realms) and how these relate to the perennial incidence of war.
- Clarify the role of personality, values, perception and belief systems as opposed to empirical “reality”—objective reasoning—in key policy decisions.
- Acquire enhanced understanding of contemporary world politics and be enabled to think more critically and creatively about war as a global cultural phenomenon and one integral to world history; defying attempts at accurate prediction, manipulation or control.
- Acquire enhanced analytical thinking and compositional skills by doing the extensive reading and writing that is involved in this course.

Assignments:

On Canvas there will be 7 written assignments throughout the course; each assignment will be 2 to 3 pages in length and will be based on the class lecture, assigned readings, and occasionally online links. The assignments will equal 70 percent of the final class grade.

- 1) Posted Tuesday, September 15 – due on or before September 29.
- 2) Posted Tuesday, October 6 – due on or before October 13.
- 3) Posted Tuesday, October 13 – due on or before October 20.
- 4) Posted Tuesday, October 20 – due on or before October 27.
- 5) Posted Tuesday, November 3 – due on or before November 10.
- 6) Posted Tuesday, November 10 – due on or before November 17.
- 7) Posted Tuesday, November 24 – due on or before December 1.

Marks:

Written assignments:	70%
Final Quiz:	20%
Class Attendance and Participation:	10%

Grading Scale for Assignments and Participation:

A = 85 – 100	B+ = 80 – 84.5	
B = 75 – 79.5	C+ = 69.5 – 74.5	
C = 65 – 69.5	D = 50 – 64.9	F = 49.9 – 0

Class texts: (required readings)

Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, (NY, 2001)  
 R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (2017).  
 Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma* (McMillan: London, 2007).

## Semester Schedule:

**Tues., Sept. 1, Sept. 15:** Introduction: War and Misperception: Theoretical Perspectives and Analytical Problems.

Readings: Jervis, Introduction, ch. 1; K.W. Schweizer, War and Misperception: Synthesis of the Literature (to be supplied).

**Sept. 22, Sept. 29:** Common Forms of Misperception.

Readings: Jervis, chs. 1, 4; Van Evera, chs. 1; Booth, Introduction.

**Oct. 6:** Declining Power and Preventative Motivation for War.

Readings: Van Evera, ch. 3; Booth, ch. 3.

**Oct. 13, Oct. 20:** Key Variables: First Move Advantage and Systemic Instability.

Readings: Van Evera, ch. 3; Jervis, ch. 9; Booth, ch. 2.

**Oct. 27:** Diplomatic Configurations.

Readings: Van Evera, ch. 3; Booth, ch. 6; Link: K.W. Schweizer, "Diplomacy's Seamless Web," [www.https://dx.doi.org/10](http://www.https://dx.doi.org/10)

**Nov. 3:** Balance of Military Technology: Impactive Forces

Readings: Jervis, ch. 6; Van Evera, ch. 4

**Nov. 10:** Cognitive Dissonance and International Dynamics

Readings: Jervis, chs. 4, 11; Van Evera, ch. 6; Booth, ch. 4.

**Nov. 17:** Offensive-Defensive Theory

Reading: Jervis, ch. 6; Van Evera, ch. 6; Booth, chs. 4, 7.

**Nov. 24:** Domestic Politics and Perception/Misperception

Readings: Jervis, ch. 6; Booth, ch. 2.

**Dec. 1:** Misperception and the Origins of World War I

Reading: Van Evera, ch. 7; Booth, ch. 4.

**Dec. 8:** *Final Quiz*

## Course Requirements:

- HSS 404 requires students to prepare 7 brief, written assignments submitted on Canvas at intervals as the course progresses. Each assignment will be 2 to 3 pages in length and each will be worth 10 marks, totaling 70 percent of the final grade.
- There will also be a final quiz worth 20 percent. The final quiz will be on the last evening of class, December 8.
- Class attendance and participation will be worth 10 percent.

## Policies:

- This is an **intellectually demanding course** and all students will be expected to do all the readings listed in the syllabus and start work on their written assignments as soon as they are posted.
- Attendance will be taken during each class and attendance and class participation will be worth 10 percent of the final class grade.
- It is the **student's** responsibility to ascertain that all assignments have been duly submitted and all required term work completed **prior** to the end of the semester.
- There will be no “make-up” final quiz. If you miss the final quiz you will have to supply medical proof through the Dean of Students’ office.

***“Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.***

*Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu)”*