Solving Foreign Crises
POL-V53.0795.001
Spring 2020
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The purpose of this course is to explore the use of logic and evidence as the best means to find solutions to foreign policy problems, whether they are economic, political, or social in nature. Classes will be divided roughly into 1-1 ½ hours of lecture and 1 hour of discussion with an effort to focus on specific and timely foreign policy issues. Each student will select a foreign policy issue/crisis to work on, meaning first, the specification of the precise decision or set of decisions that must be taken to resolve the issue; second, identifying the range of feasible outcomes; third, identifying the individuals or groups who are critical to shaping the decision(s) that must be made (that is, the players); fourth, specifying the strategic environment in which actions leading to an outcome must be chosen (that is, a game model); fifth, identifying the costs, benefits, risks, and any uncertainties confronting each of the players so that these values are combined to estimate the expected utility of each player at each terminal node of the game they are in; and sixth, solving the game for its relevant equilibrium or equilibria (Nash, subgame perfect Nash, Perfect Bayesian Nash, or other, such as Markov Perfect Nash equilibrium) as well as identifying any feasible changes that might improve the outcome from the perspective of a player that is not getting its most desired outcome.

There are samples of student projects from previous semesters posted on CLASSES to give you a more concrete sense of what your final course project might look like. I am open to alternative topics, I would like to run an experiment with this class by not leaving topic selection open ended. Rather, I propose – and we will discuss on the first day of class – that students select a project to do from among:

Each project should explore strategies and tactics to resolve the chosen foreign policy problem(s). The final product will be a PowerPoint presentation designed to take no more than 15 minutes. Solutions will need to be defended in terms of logic and evidence, not personal opinion, partisan preferences, rhetorical flourish, ideology or wishful thinking. We will see that logic and evidence in the form of careful, systematic analysis can guide our selection of the means to achieve desired goals more effectively than personal tastes or wishful thinking ("if only people would . . .") or exhortations for others to do better.

The required readings include Ethan Bueno de Mesquita (EBdM), *Political Economy for Public Policy* and Macartan Humphreys' *Political Games* as well as several journal articles, identified in the syllabus. All readings and all lecture presentations will be made available on Classes.

The forecasting software that I use to help governments and private businesses solve policy problems will be available for download from incidepro.com. Access to the software costs $60 per student for a one-year license. It is not required and cannot be used alone to produce your final analysis and

presentation but it can be used to complement or provide an alternative view to the game model you design. The software comes with sample data sets, a user's manual and an Excel add-on program to manage the extensive output, facilitating its interpretation. I reiterate that this is available but is not required.

Assignments:
Assignments should be emailed to me as pdf attachments. The pdf title should be your lastname_firstname_your topic (as in North Korea or NAFTA or SouthChinaSea)_assignment_number_ (as in 1 or 4 or whatever). The subject line of each email to me should be Solving Foreign Crises 2020 and the assignment number.

I will ask for two volunteers for each class to present, summarize and discuss the week's readings from Macartan Humphreys' book. The focus of presentations should be on the depth of lessons conveyed by the week's assignment. I want you to lead discussion that emphasizes what we can learn from these readings in designing our projects.

To help in the development of your final project, you will be asked to submit very brief written responses to the questions posed below during each week. Most of these assignments will take a very short time to do but they will be crucial to your framing the problem that you decide to study and they will provide you with guidance on how to construct a strategic (game theoretic) model to work out possible ways to resolve the issues involved.

Grading:
Each student begins with a grade of A. Each graded assignment will have a predetermined weight. I will report to you after grading each assignment both your grade on that assignment and how its grade and weight affect the intermediate calculation of your final grade. Hence, everything will be graded on a 4 point scale.

Each project will be outlined in a short, two page paper and will receive detailed input and critiques from me. The last three weeks of the semester will be devoted to in-class presentations. These will consist of a discussion of the foreign problem; specification of the issues examined; identification of the data used to analyze the issues; results including prospective strategies or tactics for solving the issues as informed by the theories and methods studied in class. The final presentation should also address limitations to the approach taken; and why it is nevertheless the preferred approach. The final report and class presentation will take the form of a PowerPoint briefing as if you were addressing the president, secretary of state or some other government's equivalents. Presentations should be sent to me not later than 3PM on the Friday before the presentation is given in class. Given the number of students and the time available for presentations, they will be strictly limited to 15 minutes per student! Therefore, the class presentation will be a shorter version of the final report and will emphasize the critical elements to persuade a decision maker that the proposed approach is best. You should keep in mind that with only 15 minutes it is probably not prudent to provide more than minimal background to set the framework of the problem being studied. Most of the 15 minutes should be devoted to explaining the strategic structure of the situation, the basis for estimating payoffs, and explaining the solution. Everyone cannot present in the final week so if I do not get enough volunteers for the earlier presentations I will choose students based on my judgment of how far along their projects are.

There will be no exams.

January 27:   EBdM, Introduction & Chapter 1 (Normative Frameworks); Humphreys, #7.
February 3:   EBdM, Chapter 2 (Collective Goals, Arrow); Humphreys, #8, #9.
Assignment 1: What problem will you tackle? What are the specific issues that must be resolved to resolve the overall problem? Note: An issue is something that must be decided upon and not something amorphous.
February 10: EBdM, Chapter 3 (Pareto Concepts); Humphreys #s 14-16.
Assignment 2: Rank the issues that you have identified in terms of their priority (1 is highest) in solving the problem. Ties, of course, are allowed. Justify your ranking.
February 17 President's Day
February 24: EBdM, Appendices A and B (Game Theory); Humphreys, Introduction & #s 1-6.
Assignment 3: Who are the players that influence the decision? What information (variables) is critical to know about them to solve for how they will solve the issues?
March 2:   EBdM, Chapter 7 (Strategic Adjustment, Endogeneity); Humphreys #s 17-19, 21-22.
Assignment 4: What choices confront the players? Is there a natural order in which they move to try to influence others? What is that order
March 9:   EBdM, Chapters 4-5 (Externalities, Coordination, Collective Action Issues); Humphreys, #s 27-30; Powell, Bargaining Theory and International Conflict Annual Review of Political Science 2002.
Assignment 5: Present a preliminary model for solving the issues. Discuss briefly its strengths and weaknesses. What have you included that is not essential? What have you excluded that is essential?
March 16: Spring Break
March 23:   EBdM, Chapters 6 (Commitment, Public Goods)
Assignment 6: Submit 2 page paper outlining your planned research project. Due at beginning of class.
March 30:   Spring Recess, No Class.
April 6:   EBdM, Chapters 8-9 (Timing & Information); Humphreys, #s 23-26
               BBdM, "A New Model for Predicting Policy Choices", CMPS, February 2011.
               BBdM, "Judging Judgment;" Philip Tetlock, "Reply," both in *Critical Review,* December 2010.
Assignment 7: Find your model's equilibrium outcome. Briefly explain your first-cut effort to solve the problem. What do you see as its strengths? Its weaknesses?
April 13:   EBdM, Chapter 11 (Selectorate Theory); Humphreys, #38-41
April 20:   BBdM & Smith, "Political Survival and Endogenous Institutional Change," *Comparative Political Studies* 42, 2 (February 2009): 167-197.
April 27:   Bdm & Smith Group Politics. START FINAL PRESENTATIONS
May 4   Final Presentations
May 11:   Final Presentations, Last Class