1 Course Description

Who “won” the Cuban Missile Crisis? Did the U.S. provoke it or can this be explained by Soviet or Cuban expansionism? Did President Kennedy truly cause Khrushchev to back down? What impact did it have on US-Soviet relations? How much did Kennedy’s psychology affect the way he handled the crisis? This course uses the Cuban Missile Crisis — a pivotal event in US and international history — to explore different theories of international politics and crisis decision-making. We will investigate the crisis itself, its place in history, the lives and psychologies of the key leaders, as well as the aftermath and its effects on the Cold War. In doing so, you will gain familiarity with the crisis as well as prominent theories that purport to explain this particular event as well as larger patterns in the international system. We will discuss a broad range of theories of decision-making, including ones focused on emotions, culture, honor, cognitive biases, historical analogies and bureaucratic politics.

This course is an advanced undergraduate seminar. It does assume some background knowledge of international relations. It also requires a commitment to keep up with the readings, which will be more intensive than they would be in a beginning lecture course. Because the course is a seminar, it will also require a commitment to consistently participate in discussions, which count for a healthy part of your final grade. The primary assignment in the course is a research paper (10-15 pages). This will require some independent research by you, though I will provide guidance throughout the semester on this project.

2 Guidelines

For this specific class:

- If you have a question, or want to know if a reading is available, please check my website for any announcements and download the latest copy of the syllabus before emailing.

- If you ever have any questions, or are confused about something, please do not hesitate to come to office hours and meet with me. Please also consider making an appointment
just to introduce yourself and tell me how the course is going. Office hours are Tuesdays between 10:15-11:45 AM, and you can make an appointment at the following website: https://calendar.wisc.edu/scheduling-assistant/public/profiles/jSWjsloX.html. If you are unavailable at that time due to a conflict with another class, you can email me to schedule an appointment.

• You are responsible for the readings listed under each class.

• If you are not presenting that class, then you are **not** responsible for reading the *Presentation Readings*

• If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance, please contact me early in the semester so that we can consider accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities.

• Obviously, academic misconduct is not tolerated. Please make sure you are familiar with the policies outlined by the Dean of Students.

• If you have any questions about anything related to the course, email me and I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.

• One exception: I will not respond to emails sent the night before an assignment is due.

Some general guidelines that probably apply to any class you take:

• Do the readings in preparation for each class. If you miss one, don’t ignore it and move on, but make an effort to catch up.

• Come to class on time.

• It’s fine to use a computer to take notes, but please don’t bring your computer so you can write emails and read the news during class (it’s much more obvious than you realize).

• There are legitimate reasons to have to miss class, but if you must, please email me ahead of time to let me know.
3 Assignments

1. Weekly discussion questions

Each week (except for the first and last class), you will be expected to submit one discussion question on any of the readings assigned that week by no later than 5:00pm on Monday (the day before class). I will not evaluate the content of these questions, but they should either be a clarification question or a substantive question on the assigned readings that you think would be useful to discuss in class. The discussion leader will also use these questions as they prepare comments for our seminar. These can be turned in via the course’s Learn @ UW course dropbox.

⇒ Due each week by 5:00pm on Monday.

2. Sign up for one class as “class discussion leader”

Each week, one student will be assigned to lead discussion for the first half of class. This student will be responsible for the following:

(i) reviewing the readings assigned to the whole class plus the designated discussion reading
(ii) reviewing discussion questions submitted by their classmates (I will send those)
(iii) preparing a presentation to make to the class
(iv) moderating discussion for the first part of the class
(v) meeting with me during office hours to discuss your presentation (meeting can be day of presentation or week before)

3. Memo on “most important lesson of the crisis” (1-2 pages),

A short assignment due for the last substantive class, this is designed to get you thinking about lessons from the course. We will use these memos as a basis for class discussion on December 8th.

⇒ Due Tuesday, December 8th.

4. Final research paper (10-15 pages)

Topic: Was the Cuban Missile Crisis an example of high quality decision-making? Make your argument with a comparison to at least one other international crisis.

We will discuss this assignment in detail in class, but the basics are as follows:
(i) Sign up for at least one appointment at office hours to discuss your paper (but feel free to sign up for more!). It is highly recommended that you bring an outline of your paper idea to the appointment.
(ii) Turn in a 1 page overview that I will provide feedback on.
(iii) Write the actual paper!

⇒ 1 page overview due Tuesday, November 10th
Paper due Tuesday, December 15th

5. Final presentation of your research paper

On the last day of class, you will be responsible for presenting your research paper to the class. Each student will get about 10 minutes for their presentation plus 5 minutes for answering questions.

4 Grading

Your final grade will be composed of:

- 45% - Class Participation (includes being discussion leader for class)
- 15% - Weekly discussion questions + memo on “lessons learned”
- 40% - Research paper + presentation of paper

5 Readings Used in the Course

Journal articles and edited book chapters - These are generally available through the UW Library website. If they are not accessible online, then there will be a clickable link on the syllabus.

Books (to purchase)

1. *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Robert Kennedy (W.W. Norton & Company, 1969). Please get one of the newer versions, if possible (newer versions have a foreword by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.)

Schedule

1. Introduction
   [September 8]

2. Prelude: Origins of the Cold War
   [September 15]

Discussion reading(s):

3. The standard story
   [September 22]

Discussion reading(s):
4. Bureaucracies and Organizations

[September 29]

  - Model II: Organizational Behavior
  - The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Second Cut
  - Model III: Governmental Politics
  - The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Third Cut

Discussion reading(s):


5. Group Decision-making

[October 6]

  - The Groupthink Syndrome, pp. 174-197. [link]
  - The Cuban Missile Crisis, pp. 132-159. [link]
  - Some Possible (and Possibly Dangerous) Malfunctions of the Advisory Process, pp. 121-136. [link]
  - Presidential Management Styles and Models, pp. 145-168. [link]
  - The Devil’s Advocate: Uses and Limitations, pp. 169-174. [link]

Discussion reading(s):


6. Domestic Politics

[October 13]


Discussion reading(s):


7. Fear, Anger and humiliation

[October 20]

  - The Thesis: The Shattered Crystal Ball, pp. 3-10 [link]
  - The Facts: Some Results of the Critical Oral History of the Cuban Missile Crisis, pp. 11-24. [link]
– Looking Backward: The Adaptive Role of Fear in the Cuban Missile Crisis, pp. 149-168. [link]

Discussion reading(s):


8. Decision-Making: Analogies and Prospect Theory
[October 27]

  – Analogical Reasoning in Foreign Affairs: Two Views, pp. 3-18. [link]
  – The AE Framework, pp. 19-46. [link]

Discussion reading(s):


9. Nuclear weapons and crises
[November 3]

– The Origins of Accidents, pp. 11-52. [link]
– Nuclear Weapons Safety during the Cuban Missile Crisis, pp. 53-116. [link]

Discussion reading(s):


10. Intelligence

[November 10]


Discussion reading(s):


11. Another perspective: Soviet and Cuban Dimensions of the CMC

[November 17]

  – “I think we will win this operation,” pp. 438-465. [link]
  – Cuban Missile Crisis, pp. 465-492. [link]

Discussion reading(s):

12. Movie Screening: Dr. Strangelove (or: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb) [**November 24**]

No readings! Have a happy Thanksgiving!

13. Reputations and the Aftermath of the CMC [**December 1**]

  – Theories of Credibility, pp. 8-42. [link]

Discussion reading(s):

14. Lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis [**December 8**]


⇒ **Memo on “biggest lesson of the CMC” due**

15. Presentations  
[December 15]

⇒ **Final research paper due**