Arms Control and International Relations

PPOL 5550, Fall 2026
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology







Class Schedule

Date	Lecture / Activity
09/03	Unit 0. Introduction
09/10	Unit 1. Concepts in Arms Control and Security Studies Unit 2. Calculation of National Interests in Arms Control
09/17	Unit 3. Strategic Stability Unit 4. Strategic Stability -- Accidents and Miscalculations
09/24	Unit 5. Beyond National Security Unit 6. The Constructivist Views
10/01	Holiday
10/8	No class
10/15	Unit 7. Domestic Politics in Arms Control Unit 8. Arms Control and International Law
10/22	Midterm
10/29	Unit 9. Trust but Verify
11/05	Unit 10. Nuclear Security and Non-proliferation Unit 11. Nuclear Arms Control and Disarmament Essay on Debate Topic due Debate Preparation
11/12	Debate
11/19	Unit 12. Missile and Space Issues Unit 13. Arms Control Related to Cyber & AI

11/26	ICON activity

Course Description

In an era where global security is increasingly intertwined with technological advancements and complex international dynamics, understanding the intricacies of arms control and its implications on national and global security is essential. This course, *Arms Control and International Relations*, offers an in-depth exploration of how states assess their national security interests, the factors driving arms races, and the pivotal role of arms control in maintaining strategic stability. We will delve into traditional and non-traditional security concepts, exploring how states navigate the delicate balance between power and cooperation in an increasingly interconnected world.

Through this course, students will engage with key themes such as the risks and motivations behind arms races, the impact of domestic and international factors on arms control decisions, and the intersection of international law with arms control efforts. We will also examine how different types of arms control measures apply to a range of technologies, from nuclear weapons to emerging domains like cyber, space, and artificial intelligence.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will:

1. **Understand the Current Arms Control Landscape**: Gain a comprehensive overview of contemporary arms control agreements and the challenges they face in today's geopolitical environment.
2. **Analyze National Security Calculations**: Learn how states determine their national security interests and the factors that influence these decisions.
3. **Evaluate the Role of Arms Control in Global Security**: Explore how arms control initiatives contribute to both national and global security through international cooperation.
4. **Assess the Factors Influencing Arms Control Decisions**: Understand the domestic and international elements that drive states to pursue or resist arms control measures.
5. **Develop Arms Control Policies**: Learn how to craft effective arms control policies that balance national security needs with global stability.
6. **Examine the Regulation of Emerging Technologies**: Investigate how international frameworks can be applied to regulate emerging military technologies like cyber, space, and AI.
7. **Engage with International Relations Theories**: Familiarize with the theories that underpin the study of international relations and their relevance to arms control.

Student Activities:

This course is designed to be interactive and engaging, offering students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios through a variety of activities:

1. **Live Debate**: Students will participate in a structured debate, defending opposing viewpoints on a contentious issue in arms control. This exercise will sharpen their analytical and rhetorical skills, as well as their ability to critically engage with complex topics.
2. **ICON Simulation**: In this activity, students will assume the roles of state representatives, negotiating a solution to an international crisis. This hands-on experience will enhance their understanding of the diplomatic process and the challenges of multilateral negotiations.

This course is an opportunity for students interested in the intersection of international relations, security studies, and the rapidly evolving landscape of military technologies. By the end of the semester, participants will be well-equipped to navigate and contribute to the complex discussions surrounding arms control and global security.

Contact

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Disclaimer

While most of the content is definitive, the schedule of this course might undergo minor modifications which will be communicated in advance.
Some readings are already included and new one will be added soon.

Assignment and Breakdown of Grade

There will be a midterm exam to check your theoretical knowledge on the materials learned. The date will be confirmed later.

We will hold a debate session where students will be divided in two teams and where each team will support opposite sides on a topic. A specific grading rubric will be made available to students before the debate so that they understand how they will be evaluated.

A crisis simulation will be held where groups of students will represent different states during a crisis negotiation. The goal of the exercise will be for states' representatives to negotiate, and if possible, sign and ratify an arms control agreement. The object of this agreement will be decided later, possibly with the participation of the students.

Breakdown of grade:

Debate: 30%
ICON Simulation: 30%
Midterm exam: 30%
Attendance and participation: 10%

Readings:

Required readings:

Larsen, Jeffrey A., ed. *Arms Control: Cooperative Security in a Changing Environment*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002

(Introduction; Part 1; Part 2; Part 3, Chap. 15 only ; Part 4)

Williams, Paul D., and Matt McDonald, eds. *Security Studies: An Introduction*. 4th ed. London: Routledge, 2023

(Part1: Chap. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, Part2: Chap. 9, 10, 11, 12, 15; Part 3 : 18, 19, 20, 22 ; Part 4 : Chap. 26, 29, 30, 32, 36, 38, 39, 40)

Recommended readings:

https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/how-emerging-technology-breaking-arms-control