INTERNATIONAL POLITICS THROUGH FILM

Political Science 19-2
Spring 2020
Mon. 11 am – 11:50 am, Haines 110
Syllabus Vers. 1.0 (Interim, subject to revision)
Professor Arthur Stein

Course description:

The course will explore key historical episodes and themes of international politics through films. Although I have intentionally decided to avoid documentary films in this course, many of the films deal with key historical events and illuminate critical decisions including the debate in Britain in 1940 as to whether to fight Germany or negotiate a peace with Hitler; and US policymakers dealing with the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962. Some of the films are fictional but illustrate critical issues in international relations including the origins of US involvement in Vietnam, and an accidental nuclear confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union and attempts at a resolution before all-out nuclear war.

In addition to depicting historical events, the films illuminate concepts and arguments of international politics, including appeasement, colonialism, counterinsurgency, intervention, deterrence, crisis management, etc.

The films are quite good, but vary in length and rating. Of the nine films you will watch on your own and then discuss in class, seven received Academy Award nominations, and six of them received at least one Oscar. They range from a PG rating to an R one. They vary in length from 101 to 217 minutes, so set aside enough time to watch each film in its entirety.

Do be aware that we will watch, read, and discuss material that may include explicit language, controversial topics, and sensitive matters. I hope that you will allow the material to challenge you and force you to consider other perspectives and alternative points of view. It is also absolutely imperative that you show respect for your classmates!

Two sets of movies deal with great powers relations. One set deals with the decision to fight and go to war rather than acquiesce to the demands of others. *Tora! Tora! Tora!* depicts Japan and the US in the run up to Pearl Harbor, and *Darkest Hour* portrays the struggle in the British government over negotiating with Hitler or continuing to fight while retreating.

The second set dealing with great power relations has to do with negotiations and crisis management and how great powers come to the brink of war but work to avoid it. *Bridge of Spies* depicts the small challenges of international hostility and how one set was resolved at the height of the Cold War. *Thirteen Days* depicts the Cuban Missile Crisis and how the US and the Soviet Union avoided a direct confrontation. Finally, *Fail-Safe* is a fictional account of how things can get out of hand and all-out war can still be avoided.

Two sets of movies deal with the relations between great powers and weaker poorer countries which they control or in which they intervene. One set deals with colonialism and the reactions it generates and great power efforts to retain control. *Lawrence of Arabia* captures British involvement in the Middle East during and immediately after World War I. *Battle of Algiers* depicts the resistance to Western colonialism in the case of the Algerian struggle for independence from France.
The second set deal with great power intervention in developing nations. *The Quiet American* captures the early days of US involvement in Vietnam, and *Charlie Wilson's War* illuminates US assistance to Afghan rebels.

**Films to be viewed and discussed:**

Mar. 30, 2020: **Darkest Hour.** 2017. Directed by Joe Wright. 125 min. (PG-13)
   In May 1940, the fate of Western Europe hangs on British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who must decide whether to negotiate with Adolf Hitler, or continue to fight knowing that it could mean a humiliating defeat for Britain and its empire. Nominated for six Academy Awards including Best Picture, won for Best Actor.

April 6, 2020: **Tora! Tora! Tora!** 1970. Directed by Richard Fleischer, Kinji Fukasaku, and Toshio Masuda. 145 min. (G)
   In 1941, following months of economic embargo, Japan prepares to open its war against the United States with a preventive strike on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor. Nominated for five Academy Awards, won for special effects.

April 13, 2020: **Bridge of Spies.** 2015. Directed by Steven Spielberg. 141 min. (PG-13)
   During the Cold War, an American lawyer is recruited to defend an arrested Soviet spy in court, and then help the CIA facilitate an exchange of the spy for a captured American U2 spy plane pilot. Nominated for six Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and won for Best Actor.

April 20, 2020: **Thirteen Days.** 2000. Directed by Roger Donaldson. 147 min. (PG-13)
   In October 1962, the Kennedy administration confronts the existence of Soviet missiles on Cuba.

April 27, 2020: **Fail-Safe.** 1964. Directed by Sidney Lumet. 112 min.
   When a computer error results in the launching of SAC nuclear bombers which cannot be recalled from their journey toward Moscow, the heads of the U.S. and Soviet governments must decide how to save the world from annihilation.

May 4, 2020: **Lawrence of Arabia.** 1962. Directed by David Lean. 217 min. (PG)
   The story of T.E. Lawrence, the English officer who successfully united and led the diverse, often warring, Arab tribes during World War I in order to fight the Turks. Winner of seven Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Director. Nominated for three more including Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor.

   In the late 1950s, fear and violence escalate as the people of Algiers fight for independence from the French government. Nominated for three Academy Awards including Best Director and Best Foreign Language Film.

May 18, 2020: **The Quiet American.** 2002. Directed by Phillip Noyce. 101 min. (R)
   Set in early 1950s Vietnam and revolving around events that led to the increased military involvement of the United States in Vietnam. Nominated for Best Actor.

June 1, 2020: **Charlie Wilson's War.** 2007. Directed by Mike Nichols. 102 min. (R)
   Texas congressman Charlie Wilson spurs US covert assistance to Afghan rebels fighting Soviet military intervention in their country. Received Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor.