

**PSCI 4801-B**  
**Selected Problems in Global Politics: The Rise and Fall of American Hegemony**  
**Monday 11:35am – 2:25pm**

Please confirm location on Carleton Central

**Instructor:** Dr. Brian C. Schmidt  
**Office:** D687  
**Office Hours:** Monday 3-4, Tuesday 10-12  
**E-mail:** [brianschmidt@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:brianschmidt@cunet.carleton.ca)

## **I. Course Description and Objectives**

By most accounts, American hegemony is, once again, on the wane. There have been earlier periods when American hegemony has been questioned, such as during the 1980s, but with the rise of China, and a plethora of domestic and international issues besetting the United States, the decline debate has greatly intensified. This course examines the nature and character of American hegemony. Students will be introduced to the terms of debate on whether American hegemony is coming to an end. We will look at the post-WW II foundations of American hegemony that many argue led to the creation of a liberal international order (LIO). Next, we will examine the evolution of American hegemony up to the present day. This will allow us to conclude by examining the question of whether American hegemony is coming to an end.

The main objective of the course is for students to comprehend the past and present character of American hegemony. This will, in part, be facilitated by reading *The Great Delusion* by John J. Mearsheimer. This leads to the second objective of understanding the theoretical underpinnings of, and debates about, American hegemony. By actively participating in this seminar, and by reading the course material, students will become familiar with the current debates and issues about American hegemony.

## **II. Course Format**

This class will be “face to face” meeting on Mondays from 11:35am to 2:25pm. Since the course is a seminar, you are required to participate actively in class discussions. The reason for this is simple; seminars do not work if there is no student participation. Therefore, you must be fully prepared for each class. During the semester, I will be available to answer your questions, discuss the material, and address any of your concerns or issues.

## **III. Learning Outcomes**

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

- Recognize historical facts, details, and information about American hegemony.
- Describe and interpret the history of American foreign policy.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the theoretical issues and debates about the rise and fall of American hegemony.
- Identify distinct periods and the accompanying characteristics of American foreign policy.
- Assess the current debates about American hegemony and US foreign policy.
- Critique and defend different interpretations of American hegemony.

#### IV. Course Texts

There are two required texts for the course, both are available for purchase at the Carleton University Bookstore. The books are also available on Amazon as well as from the publishers. The required texts have been placed on reserve at the Carleton University library.

- Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony: The Unraveling of the American Global Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). \$47.99hb
- John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2019). \$28.95pb

The weekly reading assignments have been placed on reserve in the library. You can access many of the assigned journal articles by using JSTOR and other search engines that are available on the Carleton University library website (<https://library.carleton.ca/>). All the assigned readings can be directly accessed through ARES, which can be found on the course Brightspace page.

#### V. Course Requirements and Grading Policy

All assignments are to be submitted via Brightspace.

- A. Class Participation.....15%
- B. Research Paper Proposal .....15%  
**Due Date: February 6**
- C. Book Review Assignment.....20%  
**Due Date: March 12**
- D. Research Paper.....40%  
**Due Date: April 8**
- E. Oral Presentation.....10%

#### VI. Explanations

A. Your presence and active participation in class is an integral part of this course. Since the course is a seminar, you are required to participate actively in class discussions. The reason for this is simple; seminars do not work if there is no student participation. It is necessary that you complete all reading assignments prior to coming to class so that you are fully prepared to engage the assigned material. We will be discussing the assigned material in class and if you fail to participate in class discussions and do not engage the assigned material this will be taken as a sign of inadequate preparation and result in a grade reduction. Attendance is mandatory and missing class will result in a grade reduction. In addition to attendance, your class participation grade will be determined by both the quantity and quality of your comments in class. After each class, I will note whether you participated at a high, medium, or low level.

B. You are required to submit a 3-4 page research proposal that identifies and explains the topic that you will be researching this semester. The proposal should also include a bibliography of sources that you will be using for your research. There are a wide variety of topics to choose from, and the ideal topics will be related to the course theme of the rise and fall of American hegemony. Your topic can be historical, theoretical, policy relevant, or empirical. In addition to identifying and explaining your topic, you should also indicate your

preliminary argument or thesis. You should also indicate how you will be supporting your argument or thesis: case study, literature review, historical analysis, theoretical interpretation, statistical analysis.

C. You are required to write a 5-page review of Mearsheimer's *The Great Delusion*.

There are two main aspects of the assignment. First, you should provide a concise summary of the book (the main argument, the theoretical framework, organization of the book, type of evidence employed). Second, you should provide your own reaction – positive or critical – to the book. What are the strengths and weaknesses, what are the key insights, how convincing are the arguments, what does it say about American foreign policy? These are some of the questions that you may wish to consider as you write your book review.

D. You are required to submit a 12-15 page research paper on a topic or theme related to the course material: the rise and fall of American hegemony. The focus does not necessarily have to be exclusively on the United States because we will also be considering the rise of other potential hegemonies such as China. You could identify a topic or gap in the literature that you want to explore. Your paper can focus on something contemporary, what is happening at this moment, or it could be historical. You can focus on security, economics (trade), human rights, war, the environment. In short there are many potential topics, and you should select something that you find interesting or puzzling.

E. Oral Presentation of your research paper.

In 10-12 minutes, your main task is to describe and explain the topic that you have investigated. You should explain your argument or thesis. Finally, you should illustrate how your research topic is related to the theme of the course.

## VII. Other Guidelines

- To obtain credit in this course, students must meet all the course requirements. Failure to complete all the assignments will automatically result in a failing grade for the course.
- Late assignments will be downgraded one letter-grade category per day. For example, a B+ paper, one day late, will receive a B.
- “As our understanding of the uses of AI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, students are required to discuss their use of AI in any circumstance with the course instructor to ensure it supports the learning goals for the course.”

## VIII. Course Schedule and Assigned Readings

### Week One (January 5)      Course Introduction

- “Is it America’s fate to decline and fall? Here’s what history says,” *Washington Post* October 12, 2025

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/10/12/america-roman-empire-decline-fall/>

### Week Two (January 12)      Conceptualizing Hegemony

- Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, chs. 1-2.
- Brian C. Schmidt, “Hegemony: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis and its Application to the Debate on American Hegemony.” In *Hegemony and World Order*, edited by Piotr Dutkiewicz, Tom Caiser and Jan Aart Scholte (New York: Routledge, 2021): 32-47.

- Tom Casier, “Unraveling Power and Hegemony: Why Shifting Power Relations do not Equal a Change of International Order.” In *Hegemony and World Order*, edited by Piotr Dutkiewicz, Tom Caizer and Jan Aart Scholte. New York: Routledge, 2021: 48-64.

### **Week Three (January 19)    Liberalism**

- Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, chs. 1-4.

### **Week Four (January 26)    American Hegemony**

- Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, ch. 5.
- G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), ch. 5.
- Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), ch. 2.

### **Week Five (February 2)    The Rise and Fall of American Hegemony**

- Michael Cox, “Whatever Happened to American Decline? International Relations and the New Hegemony,” *New Political Economy* 6, 3 (2001).
- Christopher Layne, “This Time It’s Real: The End of Unipolarity and the *Pax Americana*,” *International Studies Quarterly* 56, 1 (March 2012): 203-213.
- Michael Cox and Doug Stokes, *US Foreign Policy, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ch. 25.

### **Week Six (February 9)    The Crisis of the LIO**

- Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, chs. 6-7.
- G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), ch. 8.

### **Week Seven (February 16)    Reading Week – no class**

### **Week Eight (February 23)    Hegemonic Decline Today**

- Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, chs. 3-6.
- Nicholas Kitchen and Michael Cox. “Power, Structural Power, and American Decline.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 6 (2019): 734-752.
- Andrew J. Bacevich, “The Reckoning that Wasn’t,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, No. 2 (March/April 2023): 6-21.

### **Week Nine (March 2)    Trouble Ahead: The Rise of China**

- Christopher Layne, “The US-Chinese Power Shift and the End of the Pax Americana.” *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 89-111.
- Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, “After Unipolarity: China’s Visions International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline,” *International Security* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 41-72.
- David C. Kang, Jackie S.H. Wong, Zenobia T. Chan, “What does China Want?” *International Security* 50, 1 (Summer 2025): 46-81.

### **Week Ten (March 9)    Trump and American Decline**

- Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, ch. 7.
- Eliot A. Cohen, "America's Long Goodbye: The Real Crisis of the Trump Era," *Foreign Affairs* 98, 1 (January/February 2019): 138-146.
- Doug Stokes, "Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order," *International Affairs*, 94, 1 (2018): 133-150.
- Rubrick Biegon, "A Populist Grand Strategy? Trump and Framing of American Decline." *International Relations* 33, 4 (2019).

#### **Week Eleven (March 16)**

#### **What to Do?**

- Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, ch. 8.
- Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, ch. 8.
- G. John Ikenberry, "The Next Liberal Order: The Age of Contagion Demands More Internationalism, Not Less," *Foreign Affairs* 99, 4 (July/August 2020): 133-142.
- Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press, "Reality Check: American Power in an Age of Constraints," *Foreign Affairs* 99, 2 (March/April 2020): 41-48.
- Stephen G. Brookes and William C. Wohlforth, "The Myth of Multipolarity: American Power's Staying Power," *Foreign Affairs* 102, 3 (May/June 2023): 76-91.

#### **Week Twelve (March 23)      Student Presentations**

#### **Week Thirteen (March 30)      Student Presentations**

#### **Week Fourteen (April 6)      Student Presentations**

## REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

### Student Mental Health

As a university student, you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

### **Emergency Resources (on and off campus):**

<https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

#### **Carleton Resources:**

Mental Health and Wellbeing:

<https://carleton.ca/wellness/>

Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>

Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>

Academic Advising Centre (AAC):

<https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>

Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS):

<https://carleton.ca/csas/>

Equity & Inclusivity Communities:

<https://carleton.ca/equity/>

#### **Off Campus Resources:**

Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or

TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>

Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>

Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389,

<https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>

ood2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>

The Walk-In Counselling Clinic:

<https://walkincounselling.com>

### **Academic consideration for medical or other**

**extenuating circumstances:** Students must contact the instructor(s) of their absence or inability to complete the academic deliverable within the predetermined timeframe due to medical or other extenuating circumstances. For a range of medical or other extenuating circumstances, students may use the online self-declaration form and where appropriate, the use of medical documentation. This policy regards the accommodation of extenuating circumstances for both short-term and long-term periods and extends to all students enrolled at Carleton University. Students should also consult the [Course Outline Information on Academic Accommodations](#) for more information. Detailed information about the procedure for requesting academic consideration can be found [here](#).

**Pregnancy:** Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, please contact Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC) at [equity@carleton.ca](mailto:equity@carleton.ca) or by calling (613) 520-5622 to speak to an Equity Advisor.

**Religious obligation:** Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

### **Academic Accommodations for Students with**

**Disabilities:** The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, please request your accommodations for this course through the [Ventus Student Portal](#) at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). Requests made within two weeks will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. For final exams, the deadlines to request accommodations are published in the [University Academic Calendars](#). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally scheduled exam (if applicable).

**Survivors of Sexual Violence:** As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>.

**Accommodation for Student Activities:** Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for

academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

### PETITIONS TO DEFER

Students unable to write a final examination because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control may apply within **three working days** to the Registrar's Office for permission to write a deferred examination. The request must be fully supported by the appropriate documentation. Only deferral petitions submitted to the Registrar's Office will be considered. [See Undergraduate Calendar, Article 4.3](#)

### INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s). Permissibility of submitting substantially the same piece of work more than once for academic credit. If group or collaborative work is expected or allowed, provide a clear and specific description of how and to what extent you consider collaboration to be acceptable or appropriate, especially in the completion of written assignments.

### WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's official withdrawal dates

### OFFICIAL FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's Official Exam Period (may include evenings & Saturdays or Sundays)

**For more information on the important dates and deadlines of the academic year, consult the [Carleton Calendar](#).**

### GRADING SYSTEM

The grading system is described in the Undergraduate Calendar section [5.4](#).

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is an essential element of a productive and successful career as a student. Students are required to familiarize themselves with the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

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### PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*" This can include:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*"

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when