

POL312: Canadian Foreign Policy

Instructor: Dr. William O'Connell

Instructor email: william.oconnell@utoronto.ca

Lecture: Tuesday, 6:00pm - 8:00pm

Office Hours:

TA:

TA email:

Course description

This course will examine the key actors and institutions involved in foreign policymaking in Canada, in both historical and contemporary contexts, and will introduce students to the basics of foreign policy analysis. We will discuss how Canada's foreign policy shapes and is shaped by the world through the lenses of trade, security, and development, as well as Canada's involvement in regional and multilateral institutions.

The course will be divided into four sections. The first will set the historical and ideational context. The second will analyze the actors and institutions through which foreign policy is mediated in Canada. The third will apply insights from the first two sections to contemporary issues in Canadian foreign policy, including the Indo-Pacific Strategy, Arctic sovereignty, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The final section will review Canada's evolving relationship with the United States and the prospects for the future.

The objectives of this class are threefold. The first is to understand basic approaches to analyzing Canadian foreign policy, and, more generally, to better understand Canada's place in the world. The second is to understand the process of foreign policymaking in Canada, as it is mediated through various institutions, actors, and layers of governance. The third is to develop practical career skills in synthesizing complex problems into policy-relevant insights, and to build confidence in briefing and making recommendations to superiors.

Each session will consist of a lecture with occasional breakout discussions on applied issues. Assignments will consist of two exams and a policy brief on a contemporary foreign policy issue.

Assignments

Mid-term exam (30%) In-class on October 14th

Briefing note (20%) Due at 5pm November 21st

Briefing presentation (10%) Due at 5pm November 21st

Final exam (40%) Scheduled during the regular exam period

Assignments description

The mid-term and final exams will entail short- and long-form prompts for you to discuss topics we have covered, drawing from lectures and the required readings. The mid-term will take place during our scheduled class time, while the final exam will take place during the University's regular exam period.

The briefing note assignment will have you write a 4-page policy brief on any topic related to Canadian foreign policy aimed at the relevant minister. Generally, this will be a topic of federal jurisdiction aimed at a federal minister, but you may choose to instead brief a provincial premier if this suits your topic. You may choose any topic discussed in class, or another relevant topic provided it is approved by the instructor. The brief will outline a specific policy problem which may be addressed through government action and will include background information, Canada's or your province's interests in this area, possible allies, policy recommendations, alternatives, and a discussion of potential risks from both proposed action and inaction. A template for standard Government of Canada briefing notes will be provided online. You will then submit a 4-minute presentation of your note as if you were briefing the intended minister or premier in the form of either a video or a PowerPoint presentation with accompanying audio. We will set aside class time to discuss how to write a briefing note and what to consider in briefing a senior minister. Key to this assignment is persuading the intended audience that your proposed policy action is in Canada's national interest.

A 24-hour cooling period will be in effect following the release of any grades for this course. Once you receive a grade, you must wait a full 24 hours before you may email me or [TA name] asking for clarification or additional feedback. Emails sent within the 24-hour period will be disregarded.

Due dates, extensions, and late policies

The briefing assignment is due at **4:59pm on Friday, November 21st**. -5% will be deducted per day for work handed in after the deadline. Extensions will only be granted in the event of unforeseeable circumstances (e.g. mental or physical health issue, family emergency, etc.), a commitment exogenous to your own time management (e.g. religious observance), or for a documented accessibility reason. Extensions will not be granted for computer-related problems (be sure to back up your work!) **or** deadlines for other courses (since you are given the above deadlines well in advance) **or** external work or social commitments. Extension requests are more likely to be accepted if made in advance. Extension requests made after the deadline are less likely to be accepted.

Will the lectures be recorded or streamed?

No. Slides will be posted online in advance of each session to facilitate studying and note taking but lectures will not be recorded and will not be livestreamed. Accordingly, you are expected to be in class, in person, for each session. In the event you are unable to attend,

be sure to do the reading, take appropriate notes, review the slides, and ask your classmates about any material you may have missed.

Lecture content is proprietary and, accordingly, you may not record, photograph, or reproduce the lecture or discussions yourself without the written consent of the instructor. Failure to obtain this consent is a copyright violation and is prohibited.

Textbook and readings

There is one textbook for this course:

Nossal, Kim Richard, Stéphane Roussel, and Stéphane Paquin. 2015. *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy*. McGill-Queens University Press. Fourth Edition.

The textbook is available online via the U of T library system. The individual chapters on the syllabus will be posted to Quercus but you are strongly encouraged to read the other chapters.

Other readings will also be made available on Quercus. You are expected to complete these readings before class. Doing so is essential to performing well on course assignments and exams.

Office hours

My office hours are listed above. I strongly encourage you to make use of them. Note that one hour a week will be in-person, and one hour will be virtual, via Zoom. A sign-up sheet will be posted on Quercus in 10-minute blocks during the specified times. I may hold additional office hours near assignment due dates – I will post about these on Quercus. Given the volume of students in the course, I **will not** schedule ad hoc appointments to discuss course content.

Outside of the context of the course, I am also happy to discuss grad school, career options, or undergrad theses in political economy or international relations. You are welcome to attend office hours to discuss these matters (though ideally not before major assignments when demand is high).

Communications

Beyond my office hours, I am available via email. I will do my best to respond within 48 hours **on weekdays**. If you email me over the weekend, I will not respond until Monday. Note that this means if you email me the day an assignment is due you are unlikely to receive a response before the deadline.

Please email me from your university account otherwise it may end up in my spam folder, in which case I will not see it and will not reply, and please put the course code in the subject line.

Before emailing me, please check the syllabus and any assignment-related documents posted online as often the answers to your questions will be there.

Academic dishonesty

Students are expected to understand and comply with the University's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#). Additional information on the Code and strategies to avoid violations are provided here: <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>. Academic dishonesty is a serious offense and the consequences, as noted in the Code, can be severe. A few high-level considerations:

The most common violations are presenting some else's work as your own, copying material directly from sources without proper citation, insufficiently paraphrasing material that is cited but not quoted, using the same material for multiple assignments without prior discussion with the instructor, or falsifying sources and/or information.

Ignorance of the rules is not an excuse, nor is a lack of intent. It is your responsibility to know the rules and to adhere to them. If you have any questions do not hesitate to reach out and/or to consult the above website.

The University provides instructors with discretion on the appropriate use of AI in their classrooms. For this course, I consider the use of **any** generative AI technology for **any** component of your course work to be an "unauthorized aid" and therefore strictly prohibited under the Code.

Normally, students will be required to submit their assignments to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their assignments to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Accessibility

I intend for this course to be an inclusive and accessible space. If you have an accessibility consideration that may require accommodation, please refer to Accessibility Services. I recognize that sometimes the wait for Accessibility Services appointments can be quite long or circumstances that require accommodation may be temporary in nature. If you do not have official documentation but have accessibility-related concerns, you are encouraged to discuss those with me.

Schedule

Session One, September 2nd: Context I: Introduction

This session will introduce the course, review the syllabus, and will discuss the broader themes of Canadian foreign policy.

Readings:

Nossal et al. Ch 1 “Introduction: Analyzing Canadian foreign policy”

Wilderman, Jeremy and Adam Chapnick. 2024. “Canada at a crossroads in twenty-first-century global affairs: or, an independent Canadian foreign policy for what?”. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*. 30(2): 206-215.

Session Two, September 9th: Context II: Ideas and status

This session will explore and reconstruct the dominant ideas which underlie Canadian foreign policy as it has been practiced throughout history and will discuss Canada’s place in the world in both a practical and an ideational sense.

Readings:

Nossal et al. Ch 2 “Canada’s international location” and Ch. 5 “Dominant ideas in foreign policy”

Midzain-Gobin, Liam and Heather A. Smith. 2020. “Debunking the myth of Canada as a non-colonial power”. *American Review of Canadian Studies*. 50(4): 479-497.

Session Three, September 16th: Institutions and actors I: The Prime Minister

More than other areas of Canadian government, individual leaders have an outsized influence in the arena of foreign policy. This session will discuss the role of the Prime Minister, focusing specifically on how both the priorities and practices of Canadian foreign policy have shifted (or not!) through successive governments.

Readings:

Nossal et al. Ch. 6 “The Prime Minister and foreign policy”

Chapnick, Adam and Asa McKercher. 2024. “Justin Trudeau and an increasingly dangerous world, 2015 -”. In *Canada First, Not Canada Alone: A History of Canadian Foreign Policy*. Oxford University Press.

Session Four, September 23rd: Institutions and actors II: Cabinet and the bureaucracy

Despite the pre-eminence of the Prime Minister in Canadian foreign policy, other federal actors and institutions play a key supporting and/or constraining role. Key among these are Cabinet and its associated executive agencies, who both advise on and enact specific policies.

Readings:

Nossal et al. Ch. 8 “Widening the circles: other ministers” and “Ch. 9. “The foreign policy bureaucracy”

McKenna, Peter. 2022. “Bullies, busywork, and bureaucrats: Inside ‘Fort Pearson’ during the Harper years”. In McKenna, Peter (ed.) *Harper's World: The Politicization of Canadian Foreign Policy, 2006-2015*. University of Toronto Press.

Session Five, September 30th: Institutions and actors III: Canada’s other governments

We have thus far focused on the federal level of Canadian politics. Yet Canadian sovereignty is contested by non-federal actors who share responsibility for governing specific sections of the population, and whose interests may diverge from those of the central government. This session will explore the roles of provinces and indigenous peoples in the making of Canadian foreign policy.

Readings:

Nossal et al. Ch. 11 “The provinces and foreign policy”

Lightfoot, Sheryl. 2018. “A promise too far? The Justin Trudeau government and indigenous rights”. In Hillmer, Norman and Philippe Lagassé (eds.) *Canada Among Nations 2017: Justin Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

King, Hayden. 2017. “The erasure of indigenous thought in foreign policy”. *Open Politics*. 31 July. <https://opencanada.org/erasure-indigenous-thought-foreign-policy/>

Session Six: October 7th: Institutions and actors reversed: Society, diaspora, and immigration

The preceding three sessions focused on the role of government(s) in developing and, chiefly, implementing Canadian foreign policy. But we live in a democracy, where voters and interest groups shape what those governments look like and whose preferences they serve. This session will seek to understand the role of civil society in Canadian foreign policy. We will place a particular emphasis on Canada’s shifting landscape regarding

immigration and the role of diaspora communities in shaping how Canadian foreign policy interests are defined and updated.

Readings:

Nossal et al. Ch 4 “Society and foreign policy”

Singh, Milan and Anita Singh. 2014. “Diaspora, political action, and identity: A case study of Canada’s Indian diaspora”. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. 17(2): 149-171.

Triadafilopoulos, Triadafilos and Zack Taylor. 2024. “The changing contours of migration governance in Canada”. In Banerjee, Kiran and Craig Damian Smith (eds.) *Migration Governance in North America: Policy, Politics, and Community*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Session Seven, October 14th: Mid-term

****Mid-term exam****

Session Eight, October 21st: Applied issues I: Arctic sovereignty

While most of Canadian border politics is focused south, as the ice caps melt Canada’s northern frontier has grown in importance. This session will discuss the unique institutions which govern the Arctic and the myriad ways in which Canada has historically asserted sovereignty in this region. We will also devote time to discussing the briefing note assignment.

Readings:

Roberts, Kari. 2021. “Geopolitics and diplomacy in Canadian Arctic relations”. In Carment, David and Richard Nimijean (eds.) *Canada Among Nations 2020: Political Turmoil in a Tumultuous World*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Sidorova, Evgeniia. 2024. “Canadian foreign policy analysis and Inuit within Canada”. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*. 30(3): 248-263.

****Reading week****

Session Nine, November 4th: Applied issues II: The Indo-Pacific Strategy

Implicit in many of the prior sessions is a view of Canadian foreign policy as having been historically influenced by and directed towards the West. Several successive governments have attempted to change this given the rise of Asia in global affairs. This has entailed

efforts to assert a vision of Canada as a Pacific power and to diversify trade towards emerging markets. The latest such effort can be seen in the “Indo-Pacific Strategy” which has emerged since 2022.

Readings:

Zhu, Yuan Yi. 2024. “China and the Indo-Pacific: The end of delusions”. In Hillmer, Norman, Philippe Lagassé, and Vincent Rigby (eds.) *Canada Among Nations 2023: Twenty-First Century National Security*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Lim, Preston. 2020. “Sino-Canadian relations in the age of Justin Trudeau”. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*. 26(1): 25-40.

Session Ten, November 11th: Applied issues III: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Perhaps the most controversial political issue of the present-day centers on the escalation of violence in Israel-Palestine. While Canada’s direct influence on this conflict is relatively limited, how Canada has positioned itself on the question of Palestinian and Israeli sovereignty has been at once consistent and yet inherently contradictory. This session will explore the history and contemporary questions associated with Canada’s foreign policy as it has changed throughout this decades-long struggle for peace.

Readings:

Wildeman, Jeremy. 2021. “Assessing Canada’s foreign policy approach to the Palestinians and Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding, 1979–2019”. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*. 27(1): 62-80.

Arsenault, Amelia C. and Costanza Musu. 2021. “Canada, the United Nations, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*. 27(1): 98-116.

Dyer, Evan. 2025. “How Canada's relationship with Israel went from 'best friend' to breakdown”. *CBC News*. 24 May. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-israel-friendship-gaza-1.7541957>

Session Eleven, November 18th: The United States

Looming over each topic we have discussed so far is the shadow of the United States. While Canada is nominally a sovereign country, in practice Canada’s economy and security is dependent on American cooperation. This session will discuss various perspectives on this relationship, how to navigate an increasingly erratic and hostile neighbour, and Canada’s place in a world no longer characterized by American hegemony.

Readings:

Nossal et al. Ch 3. "Power and status: Canada's international influence"

Massie, Justin. 2007. "Canada's (in)dependence in the North American security community: The asymmetrical norm of common fate". *American Review of Canadian Studies*. 37(4): 493-516.

****Briefing note and presentation due Friday, November 21st****

Session Twelve, November 25th: The past and future of Canadian foreign policy

As the previous session made clear, the prospect of becoming the 51st state is not new, only newly urgent. Where else Canada might turn has been a recurring question in Canadian foreign policy. This session will wrap up the course by examining how Canada's past efforts at true independence from the United States may inform the present and future. In doing so, this course will also constitute an exam review by reconstructing prior debates through this lens.

Readings:

Chapnick, Adam and Asa McKercher. 2024. "Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the reimagining of 'Canada First,' 1968-1984". In *Canada First, Not Canada Alone: A History of Canadian Foreign Policy*. Oxford University Press.

Mérand, Frédéric. 2025. "How Canada could get much closer to Europe". *Policy Options*. 14 March. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/march-2025/canada-eu-option/>

Pavone, Tommaso. 2025. "A realistic dream: The pragmatism of Canada-EU integration". *Response to Frédéric Mérand's proposal for Canada to join the European Union*. 20 March. <https://www.ecsa-c.ca/post/a-realistic-dream-the-pragmatism-of-canada-eu-integration>