POLI 212
Introduction to International Politics

Session 1 – INTRODUCTION TO INTERNATIONAL POLITICS - POLI 212

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Session Overview

– Overview

– Introduction and orientation to the use of the Sakai Learning Management System (LMS) and the available tools for the course.

- student will be introduced to International politics

- Some basic concepts will be explained to students
Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

• Topic One: what is international politics?
• Topic Two: some basic concepts in international politics
Reading List


Topic One

What is international politics?
What is International Politics?

• There are several definitions of international relations in the literature. What is clear in these definitions is that, international relations involve the interactions between sovereign states on a number of issues.

• As a field in Political Science, international relations or international politics studies the political, economic, social, cultural, historical, and other interactions between sovereign entities or countries.
We can say that international politics is an interdisciplinary subfield in political science because it embraces other disciplines to provide explanations in the studying of its subject matter.

International politics specifically investigates the policies of one government in relation to other governments in the international system.

However, the spread and importance of intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the European Union means that international politics studies their activities especially in relation to that of states.
Similarly, the importance of international nongovernmental organizations, such as business organizations and nonprofit organizations operating in several countries, has attracted the attention of scholars of international politics.

In addition to the above, there are a number of policy and issue areas that have received attention in international politics.
Sample Questions

- Explain international politics in your own words.
- Why are intergovernmental organizations relevant in international politics?
Topic Two

SOME BASIC CONCEPTS
Basic Concepts

• **The State, Nation, and Nation-State**
  
  • Both students in Political Science and other academic disciplines use the state, nation, and nation-state interchangeably.
  
  • Nevertheless, there are differences between these concepts. It is very important for students in international relations to understand these concepts.
  
  • The **state**, also called country, denotes a clearly defined area with its own government that exercises authority over its population. This means the boundaries between two states can easily be identified since each has a defined area and a population to pass laws to control. Ghana and Nigeria are examples of the many states we have in the international system.
• The **nation** denotes a group of people traceable to particular historical descent or background and living in different parts of the world. Some members of the nation may be in Africa, while others may be Asia and North America.

• People typically talk about the Jewish nation to imply that Jews are scattered in the world and traceable to Abraham. Quite a number of them are in the United States and Israel, yet there are some in Ethiopia, the Russian Federation (Russia), and other European countries.

• Nations are not common in the world. There are some who talk about the Islamic or Christian nation just to indicate Muslims and Christians are found in several countries and have common ancestry background because of their specific religious affiliations.
The **nation-state** is a combination of the nation and the state. It indicates the group of people traceable to a particular background living in the same country. Let us assume there is a Jewish nation. If all Jews were living in Israel, Israel would then be called a nation-state.

**Sovereignty**—in global politics, it means states are independent of one another and that each state can pursue the course of action or policy that it deems important. In other words, states have the exclusive right to exercise control over their territories in the way they want it.
Basic Concepts (Contd.)

• **Low politics**-denotes a type of politics between governments and people that focuses on economic, social welfare and human wellbeing, environmental, and human rights issues. When actors meet and are talking about poverty alleviation and promoting education at all levels in the world, they are talking about low politics.

• **High politics**-suggests the type of politics especially between governments that centers on military, security and defense issues.

• **Soft power**-implies countries using their ideas, culture, and values to influence other countries and people around the world. As a result of these ideas, they are able to come up with inventions that many people use in our world.

• **Hard power**- indicates countries using their military and economic strength, rather than values or culture, to shape the global system. With hard power, countries often defer to certain countries out of fear of their military and defense postures.
Basic Concepts (Contd.)

- **National interest** - this basically means what countries want for themselves. Some scholars are even quick to point out that it is just what countries uncaringly want for themselves. Who determines what countries want for themselves? The answer to this question is not that simple.

- **Unipolarity** - implies the existence of only one center of military and economic power in the world. It is both military and economic power because countries need a strong economy to be able to maintain a strong military.

- **Bipolarity** - suggests the existence of two centers of military and economic might in the international system. The Cold War world was a typical example of bipolarity with the United States and the Soviet Union trying to outdistance the other in the race for dominance in the community of states.
Basic Concepts (Contd.)

• **Multipolarity**—has to do with the presence of at least three centers of military and economic power. The period between World War 1 and World War II is perhaps the best example of multipolarity. At this time the following countries were all centers of power—United States, Soviet Union, Italy, Germany, France, and Britain.

• **Isolationism**—is the tendency for countries to withdraw or not involve themselves in the affairs of other countries.

• **Unilateralism**—this denotes countries undertaking certain policies alone without the help of other countries.

• **Just-war theory**—the theory posits that under certain circumstances it is justified for countries to go to war. Some of these circumstances are self-defense and genocide or mass killings in countries. The theory has its roots in Christianity and more especially the Catholic Church.
Conclusion of Session 1

- The session has briefly introduced students to the meaning of international politics and some of the basic concepts in international politics.
References
