

**University of Montana
Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center
Defense Language and Security Studies Program (DLSSP)**

Regional Expertise and Culture (REC) Offerings

As of 15 September 2026

Table of Contents

Indo-Pacific

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM)

Middle East & Central Asia

U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM)

Europe & Turkey

U.S. European Command (USEUCOM)

Africa

U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM)

Central & South America

U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM)

Mexico

Part of U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM)

Transnational National Security Issues

Indo-Pacific

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility



China

Geography & Geopolitics

1. Issues in Chinese Geography

Some say that geography is destiny when it comes to nation states and this adage is certainly true of China. In this course students learn about China's physical and political geography. They also understand how China's physical terrain and climate have shaped its evolution as a strong, centralized state, its culture, and its economy. The strengths and weaknesses of China's location are examined at length in addition to its various territorial and maritime disputes.

Length: 1 hour

2. The Geopolitics of Great Powers

China's dramatic rise from the ashes of its 1970s-era Cultural Revolution to the second largest economy in the world is the most significant geopolitical development of the post-Cold War era. This presentation traces those sources of Chinese power, including population, land area, natural resources, agricultural productivity and overland neighbors as well as its economic dynamism and rapidly modernizing military. Some argue that China's lack of uninhibited access to the world's oceans represents a significant weakness; however, Beijing is making up for this by building a modern, power expansion navy and accelerating the development of overland communications with its fourteen neighbors.

Length: 1 hour

3. China's Belt and Road Initiative: Mackinder's Revenge

In 2013 Chinese leader Xi Jinping unveiled his 'strategic vision' for Chinese foreign policy. Entitled One Belt, One Road – later simplified to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - Xi's ambitious plan embraces a broad program of overseas 'strategic investments' in railways, highways, ports, gas pipelines, airports, telecommunications facilities, energy grids, and canals to facilitate international trade and commerce. This presentation examines the BRI from the perspective of China's geopolitics. A large state located in the heart of Asia, China nonetheless suffers from several important disadvantages, including inhibited maritime access to overseas resources and markets. The BRI's land component, consisting of road, rail, energy and telecommunications investments exploits China's access to 14 neighboring countries, not to mention additional markets in greater Asia, Africa, and Europe for Chinese products. At the same time, though, China is cognizant of the central role that maritime trade will continue to play in its future: the maritime component of BRI focuses on developing port infrastructure to facilitate trade throughout the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, and Mediterranean basins. The BRI both entices and alarms China's neighbors. On the one hand many welcome Chinese investments in their domestic infrastructure development. On the other, Asian, European and African states are equally wary of China's rising power and what this could mean for their own economic health and security.

Length: 1 hour

4. China's Water Crisis

After decades of unprecedented economic growth, China has entered the ranks of middle-income states; however, this growth has come at a cost both to society and the environment. Northern China has always been relatively dry compared to the south, yet government policies have emphasized economic development in the north, including the exploitation of coal as a cheap energy resource for electricity generation. As a consequence, water in northern China is increasingly scarce and what little remains is often filled with pesticides, fertilizers, and other pollutants. The government is trying to meet this challenge through 'mega projects', such as an \$80 billion program to divert water from southern to northern China. This presentation analyzes China's many water challenges; it also examines whether existing government policies will be effective over the long term.

Length: 1 hour

5. China's Maritime Disputes

China's ongoing confrontation with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands spotlights two sets of maritime disputes in both the East and South China Seas. This course briefly examines these separate disputes from the perspectives of history and geography. It then proceeds to explore

how China's political, economic and military stakes in both seas are inextricably linked to its national security needs and its sense of great power status.

Length: 1 hour

6. China and South China Sea Disputes

This presentation explores China's to virtually all the waters and land features of the South China Sea. Comparisons are made to international maritime law as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Students understand the motivations behind China's extensive claim, including national prestige, national security concerns, and economic strategy. Finally, the presentation emphasizes the impact of China's conflicting claims on both regional and international security.

Length: 1 hour

7. China and the Mekong River: Water for Leverage

The Mekong is the twelfth longest river in the world. From its headwaters in eastern Tibet the river flows through Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam before terminating in the South China Sea. Since the 1980s, China has built eleven dams on the Upper Mekong, and in the process of doing so it has built up a fresh water reservoir roughly equivalent to the size of Chesapeake Bay. In 2019, some researchers began linking ongoing drought-like conditions in the Lower Mekong to the upstream Chinese dams. By continuing to maintain its vast Upper Mekong reservoir, China has gained valuable new political and economic leverage over its downstream neighbors.

Length: 1 hour

8. Geopolitics of the World's Maritime Straits

Living in a continent-sized superpower with uninhibited access to the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans most Americans do not focus on those straits and canals that link the global economy today. This brief examines the importance of maritime trade and those critical straits and canals that facilitate it. Each of these possesses geopolitical importance in its own right; a few have global significance given the extensive traffic that flows through them. Any disruption to commerce could have a significant – and certainly negative – impact on the global economy. A maritime power confronted by geographical and political constraints, China is acutely aware of its vulnerabilities when it comes to the straits and canals covered here. Not surprisingly, then, China is also the most active power-seeking land-based alternatives to maritime trade.

Length: 1 hour

Culture and Regions

1. China: A Cultural Overview

China is the oldest civilization in continuous existence. This course tackles the complex topic of Chinese culture from the following perspectives: history, ethnicity, philosophy, belief systems, the arts, customs, values, and governance. As each facet is examined, it becomes clear that continuity and change are the dominant themes in Chinese history and culture. On the one hand there have been undeniable and profound changes that have taken place in China, especially over the last century; however, at the same time, there are certain aspects of Chinese culture which endure and define its unique character and genius.

Length: 4 hours

2. China's Ethnic Minorities

The People's Republic of China is over 90% Han Chinese, i.e., native speakers of Chinese in all of its dialects and forms. That still leaves an estimated 140 million people (or 10%) of the country who are non-Han in ethno-linguistic terms. This lecture briefly examines some of the largest ethno-linguistic minorities in the PRC, such as the Tibetans, Uighurs, and Mongolians. Each faces difficulty retaining the unique features of its heritage in the face of a Party and government that is suspicious (at best) of non-Han cultures, traditions, and religious faiths. The challenges facing these minorities is compounded by the fact that their traditional homelands lie on China's northern (Mongolians) and western borders (Tibetans and Uighurs). Therefore, they are inevitably caught up in China's diplomatic relationships with neighboring states amid doubts about their ultimate loyalties.

Length: 1 hour

3. Whither Tibet?

The status of Tibet has been an ongoing source of controversy for the People's Republic of China since it was forcibly assimilated into China in 1951 and subjected to colonization and cultural suppression. This presentation examines Tibet from a number of perspectives, including its geopolitical importance, history, politics, and culture. Students are also exposed to the two general conflicts that revolve around Tibet: (1) its often turbulent internal politics; (2) the potential for increased tensions between China and neighboring India. The presentation then weaves together some conclusions regarding the future of Tibet, its people, and their unique culture and religion.

Length: 1 hour

4. China's Xinjiang Province: Sources of Uighur Unrest

Xinjiang – or the “New Frontier” – occupies 1/6th of China’s land area and contains significant natural resources, including oil and natural gas. It also serves as Beijing’s ‘window on Central Asia’ as it shares borders with eight countries, most of whom are energy rich and/or politically volatile. China’s rulers face an ethnic and religious challenge in Xinjiang from the indigenous Uighur (or “Uyghur”) people, who have long resented Beijing’s promotion of Han immigration to their homeland. The result has been a volatile ethnic dynamic, pitting a restless and often marginalized Uighur Muslim population against Han immigrants, who are generally more prosperous and ignorant of local customs. This presentation examines Xinjiang from the perspectives of its geopolitical significance, its recent history, the nature of Communist Party rule there, and the dynamic of a militant Islamic ideology imported from neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Length: 1 hour

5. An Introduction to Taiwan

What is the status of the Republic of China on Taiwan and why is it such a contentious issue in Sino-American relations? This lecture answers these and other questions by exploring Taiwan’s geography, economy, history, politics and international relations. The lecture concludes with an assessment of Taiwan’s future by focusing on its economic integration with mainland China, China’s rapidly modernizing military capabilities, and US-Taiwan relations.

Length: 1 hour

6. China, Taiwan and Reunification

The status of Taiwan has been a source of contention between the People’s Republic of China and the United States since the early 1950s. On occasion this simmering dispute has boiled over prompting both Beijing and Washington to deploy forces to the area in an attempt to persuade and deter the other. This presentation examines the Taiwan confrontation from the perspective of both Beijing and Taipei. What lies at the heart of China’s determination to pull Taiwan into its political and economic orbit? What are Taiwan’s views on reunification? What is the likelihood for conflict between China, Taiwan, and the United States?

Length: 1 hour

History

1. A History of China

The obvious challenge for any student of Chinese history is its sheer depth and breadth. Where do we begin? What factors, personalities and events are more ‘meaningful’ than others? This course is geared for those students who need a basic understanding of the key events, personalities and themes of modern Chinese history. The course therefore touches briefly on dynastic history and focuses instead on the impact of European imperialism, China’s revolutions, Mao’s China, and the reforms of the 1980s that have dramatically shaped the China that we know today. At the end of the course, students examine the themes that pervade Chinese history such as the quest for political unity, the unifying factor of culture, and the powerful memory of former greatness.

Length: 4 hours

2. Critical Events in Twentieth Century China

Continuity and change certainly mark China’s millennia-year-old history as a civilization and nation state; however, this presentation argues that events of the twentieth century have profoundly changed Chinese politics and society. We examine those crucial junctures in recent history that help us understand modern China in terms of its strengths and its weaknesses. Among the events examined are the rise of Chinese nationalism and the 1911 Revolution, the Civil War period, Japanese occupation, the Great Leap Forward, and the traumas associated with the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. We also explore some unresolved identity issues that lie at the heart of China’s ongoing, often traumatic, transition to modernity.

Length: 1 hour

Domestic Policy

1. The Rise of Xi Jinping

Since becoming President of China in 2013, Xi Jinping has altered his country’s foreign and domestic policies with a noticeable assertiveness on the world stage, and increased authoritarianism at home. This lecture examines the rise of Xi Jinping from the perspective of China’s domestic politics. It explores how he is dismantling the collective leadership put in place after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. It examines the consequences of Xi’s growing personality cult for China’s long-term stability and prosperity. The lecture concludes with an assessment of how Xi’s dominance impacts the country’s domestic and foreign policies.

Length: 1 hour

2. The Chinese Communist Party: Who Says Lenin is Dead?

With over 90 million members the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the largest political party in the world. Still, when we consider the country's population of 1.4 billion people, CCP membership is actually a privilege granted to relatively few. There is no automatic entrance to the CCP: applicants are subject to a rigorous background check and a series of examinations on Communist theory. This lecture examines how the CCP runs China from the most senior levels of the Party in Beijing to individual Party cells in neighborhoods, factories, and farms. It also demonstrates how the CCP's bureaucracy is fine-tuned for control of what is, in fact, "a civilization masquerading as a country".

Length: 1 hour

3. The Chinese Communist Party: Demographics of a Political Elite

On 1 July 2021, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) turned 100. That same year, its membership rolls exceeded 95 million. The CCP exercises an absolute monopoly on political power primarily through its rigid control of its membership, propaganda, and coercive instruments such as the People's Armed Police and the People's Liberation Army. This lecture examines the demographics of the CCP. It breaks the Party down by such factors as age, gender, and ethnicity to determine what is a "typical" CCP member. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the average Party official overwhelmingly male and Han Chinese. This dominance over the Party organs is starkly apparent at the most senior levels of Party administration, namely the Central Committee, Politburo, and Standing Committee.

Length: 1 hour

4. The Future of "Uyghuristan" East Turkestan's Path to Independence

The brief provides a detailed overview of Xinjian Autonomous region of China, the home of ethnic Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities. It describes the history of the region and its people, China's long-lasting efforts to control separatism, and the issues that arouse from that. The brief analyzes specific "reeducation" and assimilation policies implemented by the government that led to ethnic and religious discrimination of Uyghurs and the rise of a radical Islamic group ETIM/TIP notorious for its collaboration with Al Qaeda and ISIS.

Length: 1 hour

5. Renewable Energy in China: Achievements, Issues, Prospects

A look into China's efforts for energy independence through the shift towards solar and wind power production. The brief analyzes China's internal policies and conditions as well as certain global economic, political, and environmental trends that lead to China's domination of

renewable energy market. The brief describes China's current standing and potential in renewable energy production. It, also, examines a set of growing problems related to renewables, such as power transfer, waste recycling and Photovoltaic Heat Island Effect, and China's measures to address it.

Length: 1 hour

6. China's Demographic Challenges

Demographers have commented that 'Japan got rich before it got old'. In other words, Tokyo's post-World War II 'economic miracle' was built on a baby boom that transformed Japan from the ashes of war to a leading industrial power. The situation in China is somewhat different: many believe that China is getting old before it gets rich enough to support its elderly population. Thanks to government social engineering projects such as the One Child Policy and the resettlement of 400 million+ people from rural to urban areas, China confronts a rapidly aging population that is going to soar over the next half century. It's a 'guns versus wheel chairs' dilemma pitting China's desire for the weapons of a superpower state against the growing need for geriatric care, expanded pension plans, nursing homes, and more medical professionals. This presentation examines these and other problems associated with China's shifting demographics, such as the so-called Little Emperor syndrome afflicting some of its children and the economic and political consequences of a shrinking labor force.

Length: 1 hour

7. Snapshot of the Chinese Economy: The Challenges of Deflation

During the first decade of the twenty-first century the Chinese economy grew at an average of 8-9% per year. Starting with the 2008-2009 global financial meltdown, sparked by the collapse of U.S. financial markets, Chinese economic growth began to taper off. This gradual ebb was aggravated by overproduction in the Chinese property market, a key destination of individual savings, and an attendant drop in consumer confidence. Nearly a decade later, the property market continues to slump, with many condominiums and shopping malls empty or incomplete. In macro policy, the government is trying to accommodate slowing growth by exporting more products, including electric vehicles and other machinery. By 2025, there was a growing consensus overseas that China's economic model was unsustainable: Beijing would have to do more to stimulate domestic demand rather than endlessly subsidizing industries whose output was exceeding Chinese consumer demand.

Length: 1 hour

Foreign Policy

1. China in Africa: ‘Win-win’ or ‘Win-lose’?

China has made considerable inroads in Africa in recent years, dominating the continent’s foreign trade and foreign direct investment. At the same time, China’s diplomatic influence and military presence on the continent have been growing as well. This presentation locates China’s African policy in recent diplomatic history and Beijing’s national goals and strategies. China sees Africa as a crucial source of natural resources for its industrialization. Africa is also viewed as a top priority market for Chinese goods and a source of labor for Chinese companies. The presentation concludes with a brief analysis of how China’s growing African role is perceived by many Africans.

Length: 1 hour

2. China in Africa Part II: Promoting Xi Jinping Thought

China is promoting Xi Jinping Thought as an “alternative development model” to Western liberal capitalism in Africa. This lecture examines how and why Beijing is using the “Thought” of its supremo as a way to curry influence in the African continent. It also assesses whether this strategy is succeeding.

Length: 1 hour

3. China’s Interest and Investments in Africa

The brief describes in detail China’s economic profile on the African continent, its interest in natural resources, main areas of investment, BRI infrastructure projects and African countries various responses to that. It also assesses regional conditions and the role of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in China’s growing military presence on the continent. It also describes Chinese PMC’s mode of operation and their interaction with Russian counterparts.

Length: 1 hour

4. China and Russia: Short-Term Allies/Long-Term Rivals?

China’s recent dramatic rise as a global economic and military power has enabled a new multipolar order to emerge. New coalitions are emerging, such as the growing rapprochement between Russia and China, which is clearly aimed at counterbalancing U.S. power and influence. Official Chinese and Russian rhetoric proudly trumpet the emergence of this apparent alliance, however, a closer glance reveals that the Beijing-Moscow relationship is very much a compact of unequals, where Russia finds itself in the uncomfortable – and unprecedented – position of junior partner.

Length: 1 hour

5. Russia and China: No Limit Frenemies

The brief provides a close look at a history of relations that have been developing between the Soviet Union/Russia and China. It explains how ideological allies early on ended up as fiercest enemies later, confronting one another on all fronts, and the new era of reconciliation over common political and economic tensions with the West. The brief describes mutual trade, China's dependency on Western markets, and joined efforts to replace dollar as a global trade currency. It analyzes the role of BRI and Russia's natural resources in the growing ties between the two countries and an expanding military cooperation because of that.

Length: 1 hour

6. China and Pakistan: The Price of Influence

When the Chinese leader Xi Jinping unveiled his "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) in 2013, the goal was to increase Chinese influence via large-scale investments in energy, transportation, and communications infrastructure in Eurasia and Africa. China's ally, Pakistan, was to be one of the largest beneficiaries of the BRI with nearly \$62 billion committed to building electrical power plants, ports, roads, railways, and fiber-optic networks. But loans aren't free, and by 2018 Pakistan had found itself increasingly in debt to China. Moreover, Pakistan risked selling its political sovereignty to China too as an IOU for loans that it could not service. Nowhere is this more apparent than in China's repression of its Uighur and Kazakh minorities in Xinjiang: Pakistan's elites are conspicuous by their collective silence as China orders its Muslims to shave their beards, remove veils, and refrain from Islamic holidays.

Length: 1 hour

7. The China-India Border Dispute: Great Power Conflict in Asia

In April and May 2020, Indian and Chinese forces clashed along a disputed border in the Himalayas. At least twenty Indians and possibly as many Chinese soldiers died because of these confrontations. The incident spotlights the fact that the entire China-India border is disputed, and further clashes are inevitable. This lecture provides a broad outline of India-China relations before delving into some of the recent "hot spots" such as Pangong Lake, the Doklam Plateau, and the Galwan Valley. The stakes are high, and the India-China relationship easily transcends disputed border markers in remote mountainous regions. As the two largest states in Asia both seem destined for competition in the coming century.

Length: 1 hour

8. Wolf Warrior Diplomacy: China Confronts the World

In the years immediately preceding the COVID 19 pandemic, small countries bore the brunt of a marked shift in Chinese foreign policy from accommodation and dialogue towards confrontation and ultimatums. Indeed, this foreign policy even had a name – “Wolf Warrior Diplomacy” – which was a reference to a blockbuster movie in China about a Chinese Rambo who saves the world from its many demons. Under Xi Jinping, “Wolf Warrior diplomats” presented an image of a China increasingly intolerant of any foreign criticism, while stridently insisting that China received the respect it was owed. This lecture explores China’s world warrior diplomacy through several cases studies. It also explains how domestic policy sets the stage for China’s foreign policy especially where China’s “core national interests” are believed to be at stake.

Length: 1 hour

9. China in Latin America

The People’s Republic of China stresses economic ties in its Latin America strategy. It seeks access to the abundant natural resources of Latin America and new markets for Chinese products. Over time China has become the top trading partner of most Latin American countries, including Brazil, Chile, and Peru. Latin America also plays a role in a broader Chinese strategy to set new international technology standards and increasingly dominate certain high technology markets. China also tries to curry favor with Latin American governments in order to build international support for Chinese positions on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and the South China Sea.

Length: 1 hour

10. Chinese Views of the U.S.: Condescension, Arrogance and Unease

Numerous open sources from former U.S. officials and international journalists to academic conferences point to a Chinese official narrative that is often arrogant, condescending, hostile, and even smug toward the United States. There is a common portrayal of an America in terminal decline. There also seems to be a growing perception that a cornered, weakened America is likely to lash out in a violent manner. Beijing seems convinced that Washington has hostile intentions toward China and seeks to contain China’s rise. Public opinion polling suggests a more nuanced picture of American strength and weaknesses.

Length: 1 hour

9. U.S.-China Relations

This full-length, 3-credit course examines the history of U.S.-China relations. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, when U.S. interest in the Pacific basin first became manifest, the course

explores U.S. policy toward China, including the treatment of Chinese immigrants in the Western United States, the involvement of American businessmen in the opium trade, and the so-called “Open Door Policy”. Much of the course is focused on the Twentieth Century, when China and the United States went from being close allies against Imperial Japan to the bitterest of Cold War foes, only to rediscover common security interests, starting in the late 1960s. Finally, the course delves into the bilateral relationship as it struggles to adjust to the shifting power balance between the two countries in the twenty-first century. The course examines several prominent themes in the U.S.-China relationship, including condescension and awe, disillusionment, pragmatism, curiosity, ignorance, and envy.

Length: 1 hour

11. Trouble Down Under: China-Australia Relations

For the past quarter century or so an awkward paradox has occupied center place in Australian foreign policy: while Australia’s most important trading partner is the People’s Republic of China, the United States remains Australia’s most important ally. As long as U.S.-China relations were on a relatively even keel, Australia could successfully navigate this paradox and benefit greatly from its growing volume of trade with China and its military alliance with the United States. Lately, though, things have changed. Much of this is due to China’s formidable military power and foreign policy assertiveness, which have alarmed the Australian defense establishment.

Length: 1 hour

12. China’s Role in the Ukraine War

China is trying to “have its cake and eat it too” in the Russo-Ukrainian war. On the one hand, Chinese leader Xi Jinping enjoys the benefits of his loose knit “alliance” with Russia, which has brought him many national security benefits. On the other, Beijing is pretending to be a “neutral” party in this war, one with a valuable role to play in any peace settlement. This lecture examines China’s perceptions, goals, and strategies in Ukraine. It also explores the roles that Taiwan and North Korea are playing in shaping China’s strategy toward Russia and Ukraine. It concludes on the rather bleak note that China is likely to be the single greatest beneficiary of the war, regardless of how it ends.

Length: 1 hour

13. China and the Middle East

China’s goals for the Middle East include ensured access to energy resources, secured maritime trade routes to Africa and Europe, enhanced trade, and increased political and diplomatic influence. As the world’s number one importer of oil, China is the largest consumer of Middle

East energy. This motivates Beijing to assert a more prominent role in the region. At the same time, China tries to avoid entanglement in the Middle East's many conflicts. This lecture examines the extent of China's political, economic, and military influence in the region. It cautions against overinflated expectations of Chinese influence while concluding that Beijing's current "honeymoon" with the region's elites and publics is not bound to last. Sooner or later China will have to start making hard choices especially if the United States continues to disengage from regional security.

Length: 1 hour

14. China's Goals and Strategy in the Middle East

The brief investigates China's engagement with the Middle East by reviewing an expansion of Belt and Road Initiative projects with the United States' long-term regional allies. The brief analyzes China – ME economic trade dependencies, industrial development of the Middle East, natural resources and energy cooperation, China's weaponry export, and de-dollarization efforts through increasing bilateral trade and currency swap. The brief, also, looks at expanding ideological confrontation between Middle East and the West (including Israel-Palestine issue) and China's role in it.

Length: 1 hour

15. China and Israel: Weapons, BRI, and Technology Cooperation

The brief provides a detailed overview of the history of relations between China and Israel, early contention points, the unlikely alliance of the Cold War era, the current cooperation extent in technology (particularly in military equipment and weaponry production) and AI, China's efforts to expand BRI in Israel as seen in the case of Haifa Port, and the counteraction by the US. It also analyzes China's position on Palestine and an attempt to exploit Gaza conflict for Global South leadership ambitions.

Length: 1 hour

16. China in Central Asia: From Economic Control to Political Manipulation

The brief describes relations between five Central Asian republics and China as it slowly replaces Russia in a strategically important region. The brief assesses the role of Belt and Road Initiative, Central Asia's natural resources, economic trade, industrial potential of the region, military cooperation, and political alignment that contributed to the change of power balance and the growing anti-Chinese sentiments among the public in Central Asia. The brief also discusses China's buyout of the local autocrats which enables political control and economic exploitation of the region.

Length: 1 hour

17. China and Central Asia: Imperial Expansion & Imperial Contraction

The five republics of Central Asia once constituted the Soviet Union's weak, southern underbelly. Conquered by the Russian Empire in the Nineteenth Century and then absorbed by the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, the so-called "Stans" became independent in 1991. Although Russia still regards Central Asia as its backyard, China has been making steady inroads here. China's single greatest asset is money, which it uses to buy influence and build infrastructure that links the region ever more closely to Beijing. It is still too early to talk about a new "Great Game" but the growing power disparities between Russia and China suggest that sooner or later both will clash openly for influence over the heart of Asia.

Length: 1 hour

18. Central Europe and Balkans in China's Crosshairs

The brief analyzes China's political, economic, security cooperation with Central European countries and its geostrategic implications for the West. An integral part of BRI, Central Europe and Balkans present a particularly high value to China by providing an access to European market. China's exploitation of regional economic and political vulnerabilities contributed not only to worsening relations with the EU for countries like Hungary and Serbia but also to a potential loss of a territory and critical infrastructure components to China for others like Montenegro and Greece.

Length: 1 hour

19. The Defense and Political Potential of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The brief discusses the prerequisite of SCO creation, its objectives, organizational profile, an early attempt of cooperation with NATO, and the divergence with the West in recent years. It examines the opportunities and motivation of the organization's most unordinary current and prospective members such as Iran, India, and Turkey. It also analyzes internal conflicts, geopolitical rivalry, and incompatible interests of SCO's members which put under question the organization's Global South leadership ambitions.

Length: 1 hour

20. China and North Korea: "Teeth and Lips"?

The Chinese leader Mao Zedong likened his country's relations with North Korea as "lips and teeth": not only were they neighbors sharing similar political systems but military allies as well. Still, Chinese-North Korean relations are strained, and much of this is due to Pyongyang's

chronic xenophobia, development of nuclear weapons, and pursuit of close ties with Russia. This lecture examines the North Korea-China relationship from Beijing's perspective. It examines national objectives and the strategies China employs to achieve them such as diplomacy, trade, sanctions, and intelligence exchanges. In the end, though, China has learned an awkward fact: it has relatively little influence over North Korea, and it certainly cannot persuade its wayward neighbor to relinquish nuclear weapons short of an actual war.

Length: 1 hour

21. The Quartet of Instability

Starting with the first Trump Administration in 2017, the Western world has entered a period of turbulence, doubt and anxiety. Even as Washington (apparently) demonstrated a greater willingness to jettison its foreign alliances, a new network of adversaries loomed over the horizon. Dubbed the "Quartet of Chaos" or the "Axis of Upheaval", this strange combination of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea is only bound by a shared determination to weaken the West in general and the U.S. in particular. This lecture probes the realities of this "alliance", assessing it critically in terms of shared goals and divergent perspectives. Perhaps this "alliance's" greatest strength is also its weakness: the absence of any formal commitment on the part of one member to defend the interests of another.

Length: 1 hour

22. China and the 2026 Iran War

China neither anticipated nor welcomed the 2026 war between Iran, Israel, and the United States. Nonetheless, Beijing was better prepared than most for the consequences of the war, especially in the area of energy self-sufficiency. The war has weakened a Chinese regional ally; however, China did relatively little for that ally during the conflict other than some diplomatic gestures. From Beijing's perspective, one positive outcome of the war has been the shift in U.S. resources away from the INDOPACOM theater. Moreover, the war presented China with an invaluable intelligence opportunity for China to assess how the U.S. fights and the performance of U.S. weapons. Many of these lessons learned have direct applicability to Taiwan Strait scenarios. Still, in the end, the war reemphasized the fact that the PRC's objectives in the Middle East are still primarily economic, at least for the short term.

Length: 1 hour

23. China's United Front Work Department

The United Front Work Department (UFWD) is an arm of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Subordinated to the CCP's powerful Central Committee, the UFWD's primary missions are influencing the Chinese public, linking the Party to the Chinese diaspora, cultivating "friends of

China” overseas, disseminating Party propaganda at home and abroad, countering critics of the PRC overseas, and collecting intelligence on dissidents and stealing industrial secrets.

Length: 1 hour

National Security

1. China’s National Security Strategy

This course examines China’s national security strategy through the lenses of threat perceptions, national objectives, and the strategies employed to achieve those objectives. The course incorporates the lessons of modern history as perceived by the Chinese themselves to illustrate Beijing’s perspectives of the world. National objectives are deduced from the existing secondary literature as well as statements by the Chinese leadership. The strategies are broken down into their diplomatic, information, military and economic elements. The course concludes with some predictions of how China will behave in the future particularly in the East and South China Seas.

Length: 4 hours

2. China’s Strategic Forces Modernization

China regards nuclear weapons as an essential pillar of its drive for great power status. Beijing’s strategic forces modernization program roughly coincides with the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 and subsequent investment in a National Missile Defense (NMD) program. China’s strategic forces modernization is built around road mobile inter-continental ballistic missiles, a sea-borne deterrent of six ballistic missile submarines, and a modernized medium bomber. China has also developed a fractional orbital bombardment system and a hypersonic glide reentry vehicle. This lecture offers an introduction to China’s strategic forces modernization by investigating new systems development and possible changes in Beijing’s no first use doctrine.

Length: 1 hour

3. Chinese Military Modernization

Over the last thirty years the People’s Liberation Army and its component naval, air, and strategic forces arms have been transformed by new doctrine, weapons, and training. This presentation examines how and why China transformed its strategy from insurgency-based tactics of mass militias to a more modern, streamlined and capable force. It explores changes in Chinese nuclear doctrine and the recent overhaul of the navy and air force. Finally, the presentation briefly assesses some of the strengths and weaknesses of the PLA.

Length: 1 hour

4. Taiwan Strait Military Factors

At one time the Taiwan Strait was one of those definitive Cold War ‘hot spots’ that embroiled two Cold War rivals: the United States and the People’s Republic of China. More than three decades after the Cold War came to an end, the Taiwan Strait remains the locus of a potential war between the United States and China. This presentation examines possible scenarios involving Beijing’s use of military force in the Taiwan Strait. It analyzes the Republic of China’s armed forces and their declining capability to deter aggression by the People’s Republic of China. Although it acknowledges several scenarios involving the PRC’s use of force against Taiwan like blockade and selective missile strikes this presentation focuses heavily on the invasion scenario. The presentation systematically breaks down China’s military modernization program in the Taiwan Strait region and its growing ability to project power across the Strait. It explores some of the strengths and weaknesses of a cross channel assault from Beijing’s perspective. The presentation concludes with an assessment of Taiwan’s crucial role in the broader geopolitical power struggle between the United States and China.

Length: 1 hour

5. The Day After: The Implications of “Losing” Taiwan

What if China “won” in a Taiwan crisis? What would be the implications of a Taiwan under Mainland control for the United States and its allies? This lecture examines how a PRC-controlled Taiwan could significantly alter the balance of power in the Western Pacific and likely lead to further Chinese military moves in the region. It also examines how a Taiwan “victory” could affect Beijing’s and Washington’s domestic politics as new narratives of “victors” versus “losers” are formed.

Length: 1 hour

6. Taiwan Besieged

Starting in 2020 and escalating in succeeding years, the land, air, and sea elements of the People’s Liberation Army have been vigorously training for a cross-Taiwan Strait invasion. As the operational tempo of the PLA in airspace and waters adjacent to Taiwan increases, the Taiwanese military has been increasingly stressed to meet the challenge. One Taiwanese admiral has likened the spike in operational activity to an “anaconda strategy” whereby Beijing systematically intimidates, coerces, constricts, and limits Taiwan. Others see this as a prelude to an informal “quarantine” of the island, which eventually will amount to a full blockade. In any case, it represents a significant change in PLA behavior toward Taiwan and could represent a key stepping stone toward 2027: the year Xi Jinping wants his military to be ready for an invasion of the island.

Length: 1 hour.

7. Sea Mines in Chinese Strategy

Although they lack the appeal of other naval warfare specialties (think carrier aviation), mines are an ideal weapon for anti-access/area-denial zones and the containment of large blue water navies. China views naval mine warfare as essential to its ability to protect its homeland from U.S. attack, enforce blockades, and compel states like Taiwan to submit to Beijing's will. This lecture discusses mine warfare in Chinese maritime strategy. It discusses existing Chinese capabilities and analyzes several scenarios where China might employ mines against the U.S. and its allies. The lecture concludes on a cautionary note: unless the U.S. Navy recapitalizes its mine warfare programs it will face the real prospect of operational and even strategic failure in a future conflict with China.

Length: 1 hour

8. China's Technological Assent: Capabilities, Challenges, and Geopolitical Contest with the United States

The brief analyzes China's governmental policies and programs aimed to transform the country into a technological powerhouse. The brief describes Chinese government various developmental initiatives that are focused on Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, Advanced Weaponry, Semiconductors, and Space Program. It discusses China's intensified efforts of modernization and informatization of People's Liberation Army, growing military-civil fusion, and wider AI application in the battlefield. The brief, also, overviews certain challenges that China meets along the way.

Length: 1 hour

9. Chinese Space Power

As it waxes powerful in the military and economic realms, the People's Republic of China has grown more ambitious in its space research and development goals. Indeed, Chinese strategists increasingly view space as a vital aspect of their country's global power goals: an arena for the projection of national influence, prestige, and recognition. This lecture examines China's space program from the perspectives of history and current and future capabilities. It concludes with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of that program.

Length: 1 hour

10. Inside the People's Liberation Army: Capabilities and Corruption (Implications for Taiwan)

The presentation reviews the reform and modernization of Chinese military that started in 2015. It focuses on PLA's technological and combat capabilities as well as the growing global reach through expansion of PLA NAVY and Rocket Force. The briefing analyzes ongoing logistical and joint operations' challenges and the ways PLA tries to address them. The presentation also assesses how corruption scandals and Xi Jinping's purge of the military leadership effects PLA's combat readiness as it prepares for potential invasion of Taiwan.

Length: 1 hour

11. China's String of Pearls: Naval Bases from Gwadar to Djibouti

The briefing looks into China's naval expansion into Indian Ocean and beyond. The "String of Pearls" concept is scrutinized through implications for the US naval operations and security of Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC). The briefing reviews in detail the potential and strategic significance of established and planned Chinese naval bases from Asia to Africa. The briefing also analyzes the countermeasures taken by India as it's confrontation with China is heating up.

Length: 1 hour

12. The Nine-Dash Line: South China Sea Militarization

The presentation reviews China's territorial claims in South China Sea (The Nine-Dash Line concept) and conflicts with affected countries in the area. It describes Chinese strategy of expanding military presence through the construction of artificial islands in contested waters and the use of gray zone warfare. The presentation assesses how China's militarization of South China Sea affects Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOP) and threatens the US allies in the region.

Length: 1 hour



Korean Peninsula

Geography and Geopolitics

1. Issues in Korean Geography

It is axiomatic that geography shapes the history, culture and politics of human societies. This is most certainly true of the Korean peninsula, where a combination of terrain, rivers, climate and seas has forged the country's unique culture and complex foreign policy. This course examines Korean geography through the portals of physical and political geography as well as the impact of geography on Korean history, military operations and culture.

Length: 1 hour

2. The Korean Peninsula and Great Power Politics

It has been the curse of the Koreans that their homeland is situated at the epicenter of great power confrontations in East Asia throughout history. This course examines how Korea became the arena for the competing interests of its formidable neighbors (Russia, China, and Japan). Each of these states is examined in detail with regard to its interests, goals and strategies in the Korean Peninsula. The course drives home the lesson that Korean reunification will require the concurrence of several regional and global powers whose interests are often in conflict.

Length: 1 hour

Culture and Regions

1. Korean Culture

Along with the Poles and Vietnamese, Korea epitomizes a ‘survivor culture’ – a people who have endured countless invasions and occupations throughout their history and somehow manage to preserve their language, culture and customs. This course offers an extensive overview of Korean culture in many of its facets, including ethnicity, belief systems, philosophies, values, customs, and the arts. The sad truth, however, is that following the division of the Korean Peninsula after World War II, the two Korean states have been divided not only by opposing political and economic systems but subtle shifts in culture and language as well. This lecture examines those differences as each state has moved down socio-economic and cultural paths that are often at variance with each other and the past.

Length: 1 hour

2. The Demographics of the Korean Peninsula

The Korean Peninsula is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with over seventy million people occupying a land area roughly equivalent to that of Minnesota. At the same time, like their Japanese and Chinese neighbors, both Korean states are confronting the social, economic and political challenges posed by rapidly aging populations. This lecture examines the demographics of the Korean Peninsula and the impact they are having on labor productivity, social welfare, and military capabilities.

Length: 1 hour

3. Korean Belief Systems: An Introduction

Korea has sometimes been called the ‘melting pot of religions,’ because of the tendency of its people to adapt to and integrate aspects of different faiths in their personal religious beliefs. This presentation provides a brief overview of those religious beliefs and value systems that have left an indelible mark on Korean culture: Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. The briefing concludes with a concise overview of the state of religious belief in the two Koreas today.

Length: 1 hour

4. Culture, Society and South Korean Identity

North and South Korea represent two of the most culturally homogeneous societies on Earth in terms of language, shared history, customs, values and worldview. This presentation introduces the student to the ‘building blocks’ of modern South Korean identity. We explore how language,

faith, history and common social traits have contributed to modern South Korean nationalism. At the same time, though, no society is static and completely impervious to change. Over the last century or so the Korean consciousness has been shaped and altered by socioeconomic change and the infusion of external cultures and value systems. The challenge for South Korea today is accommodating change while preserving those features of ‘old Korea’ that help bind the culture and society together.

Length: 1 hour

History

1. An Introduction to Korean History

This course offers a broad overview of Korean history. It briefly examines the earliest kingdoms, but greater attention is devoted to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when modern Korea was born. It was during this period that Korea suffered Japanese invasion, occupation, exploitation as well as world war, decolonization, partition, civil war and Cold War confrontation. The course concludes with a survey of those common themes that pervade Korean history from its earliest days to current realities.

Length: 2 hours

2. History Lessons from a North Korean General

This innovative course teaches the ‘North Korean perspective’ via instructor role play. The fictitious North Korean general takes the students on a journey through the last century of Korean history with a focus on the bitter legacy of Japanese occupation (1910-1945), the Fatherland Liberation war of 1950-1953, repeated clashes with the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, the ‘Imposed Famine’ of the 1990s, and nuclear North Korea. The goal of the course is not to ‘convince’ students of the North Korean point of view but rather to expose them to different perspectives.

Length: 1 hour

3. Early History and Faiths

Geography usually means location, and location is an indelible factor in shaping a society’s history and traditions. Wedged between China, Japan, and Russia, the Korean Peninsula has seen more than its share of invaders and occupiers throughout the millennia of its recorded history. Yet at the same time, Korea has served as a ‘transmission belt,’ transferring ideas, technologies, religions, philosophies, and artistic expressions from China to Japan and vice versa. This lecture offers a brief introduction to the early history of the Korean Peninsula as seen through the lenses

of religious faith. We examine how Shamanism, Confucianism, and Buddhism have each played an important role in shaping the historical foundations of modern Korea.

Length: 1 hour

4. The Korean War

With the possible exception of late-night M*A*S*H reruns, the Korean War is fading fast from the American collective conscience, even though 35,000 Americans gave their lives for a country that few of their fellow citizens could find on a map. Fewer still are even aware of the fact that, legally, the Korean War is not over despite the fact that general hostilities ceased nearly seventy years ago. This presentation offers a brief introduction to the Korean War. We examine the conflict's origins, the northern invasion, Douglas MacArthur's 'drive to the Yalu', the Chinese intervention, and the 'attrition war' that ultimately killed over two million people while inflicting mental and physical scars on countless more. The statistics of death and human suffering can be numbing, but the fact remains that the Korean War never really ended and manifests itself today in two opposed Korean states of dramatically different political temperaments yet with a common language, history and cultural identity.

Length: 1 hour

5. Post War History: South Korea

Dubbed by President Harry Truman as a 'police action', the Korean War of 1950-1953 was incredibly destructive for the Korean people on both sides of the conflict. At war's end the Republic of Korea – or South Korea – was a desperately impoverished, scarred and wasted land. International development experts gave it little chance of recovery let alone prosperity. Indeed, South Korea was to remain a ward of US humanitarian aid for years after the conflict ended. Under a military dictatorship led by Park Chung-hee, South Korea embarked on an ambitious program of crash industrialization and rural reform. In a little less than twenty years – from 1960 to 1979 – South Korea's gross domestic product per capita skyrocketed from \$100 to \$7,500 per person. With that prosperity came a renewed drive for political reform, and by the early 1980s, the military dictatorship looked increasingly brittle and under siege. In 1987, on the eve of hosting the 1988 Olympic Games, South Korea held its first fair and free presidential election. Since then, South Korea has become one of the world's largest and most prosperous economies. But some old and new challenges loom large including a rapidly aging population, income disparities, fears of a rising China, the uncertain faith of nuclear-armed North Korea, and the future of the US alliance.

Length: 1 hour

6. A History of North Korea

North Korea – or the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) – is a cold war relic that has survived into the twenty-first century with its sclerotic political system intact. This lecture traces the history of North Korea from its birth as a Soviet satellite after World War II to the rise of Kim Jong Un as Supreme Leader in 2012. Just as South Korea’s prominence as a global economic powerhouse has been touted as a “miracle,” so too does North Korea’s sheer survival and development of nuclear weapons seem like nothing short of miraculous considering the odds. As this lecture details, North Korea survived a catastrophic war with the U.S., disastrous economic policies, a nuclear standoff with the world, a mass famine, not to mention the foibles and idiosyncrasies of the “royal family” that rules it.

Length: 1 hour

Domestic Policy

1. Politics in North Korea: All in the Family

There are several examples of ‘presidents-for-life’ attempting to pass on power to their offspring, including Iraq, Egypt, Bulgaria, and Libya; however, few have actually succeeded in doing so. Cuba, Syria and North Korea are the outstanding modern examples whereby family members have successfully inherited the mantle of power. This presentation first examines the Kim family in North Korea from the broader perspective of comparative politics. Then it focuses on how Kim Il-Song, the patriarch, was able to ensure that his son, Kim Jong-Il succeeded him as the supreme leader of the North Korean republic. The presentation explores how the North Korean regime employs myth, history, Korean culture, and pseudo-ideology to justify a family dynasty in an otherwise ‘socialist republic.’

Length: 1 hour

2. Escaping North Korea

Human Rights Watch describes North Korea as the ‘world’s largest prison camp,’ and it remains one of the most isolated societies in the world. Every year thousands of North Koreans try to flee their ‘workers’ paradise’ to South Korea. Tragically, many – if not most – are apprehended by the Chinese security services and forcibly repatriated to North Korea where they extended periods of forced labor in concentration camps (at best) or execution after torture (at worst). For the 30,000 or so who have successfully escaped to South Korea in recent decades a new set of challenges awaits including culture shock, alienation, and a new life in a society that is widely regarded by its own citizens as hyper-competitive and stressful.

Length: 1 hour

3. North Korea and the ‘Digital Revolution’: Is State Survival Really at Stake?

It has become conventional wisdom that access to a variety of information sources is one of the essential foundations of a pluralistic, democratic society. It is also assumed that modern totalitarian states like North Korea can be destabilized if their ‘captive citizens’ can access more information that is not censored by the state. This presentation briefly examines the impact that ‘old-style’ media forms like radio and television have had on North Korea, including regime-approved outlets or illicit ones. It then explores how the digital revolution – with its emphasis on compression and portability – has impacted on North Korea’s ability to deny its citizens access to information. Does greater access to information – whether this is ‘facts’ or ‘entertainment’ translate into greater willingness to challenge the state’s prerogatives?

Length: 1 hour

Foreign Policy

1. North Korea Eyes Its World

Often referred to as the ‘Hermit Kingdom’ and the occasional butt of jokes in American comedy, North Korea is a poorly understood yet dangerous country that poses formidable challenges for U.S. national security. This lecture tries to ‘lift the veil’ on this enigmatic country by asking students to look at the world through the eyes of a senior North Korean official. The result is a glimpse of a world shaped by threats and opportunities. Key issues are addressed such as the likelihood of a military coup or a revolution, the genesis of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, and the challenges posed by the information age to the country’s political and social stability.

Length: 1 hour

2. North Korea and Iran: Dimensions of an Unlikely Military Alliance

In February 2002 then-US President George W. Bush designated Iraq, Iran and North Korea as constituent members of what he termed an ‘axis of evil’. More than twenty years later, Iran and North Korea are still called ‘rogue states’ by US officials. Since they share a common U.S. adversary it should not surprise us that Pyongyang and Tehran have cooperated in a number of fields including ballistic missile development, naval weapons and, probably, weapons of mass destruction. This presentation offers an overview of the North Korea-Iran partnership as seen from the perspective of their respective national security interests.

Length: 1 hour

3. Why Can't They Be Friends? South Korea, Japan and US Alliance-Building

Repeated U.S. efforts to spur an enhanced trilateral alliance with the Republic of Korea and Japan have encountered several setbacks. On paper there is much that should unite Japan and the ROK: both are advanced, industrial economies who happen to share the same (uncertain) ally in the United States. They also have similar threat perspectives which encompass North Korea, China, and Russia. Yet historical issues dog them in ways that frustrate American policymakers. South Korea dwells on 'inadequate' Japanese apologies for an occupation that began over a century ago, while Japanese politicians so far have apparently failed to make the magnanimous 'grand gesture' to assuage Korean sensitivities. This presentation examines some of the historical and cultural issues that hinder U.S. alliance-making in Northeast Asia.

Length: 1 hour

4. The Progression and Meaning of Russia – North Korea Relations

The brief analyzes the renewed relations between the two countries in the light of Western sanctions, war in Ukraine, military cooperation, and Juche ideology. It discusses the fragility of ties in the post-Soviet era as seen in infrastructure projects, trade, and politics. The brief describes the rapidly changing trends in relations with the start of war in Ukraine, particularly in mutual military assistance and ongoing issues that might have a wider effect on the Korean peninsula.

Length: 1 hour

5. China and North Korea: "Teeth and Lips"?

The Chinese leader Mao Zedong likened his country's relations with North Korea as "lips and teeth": not only were they neighbors sharing similar political systems but military allies as well. Still, Chinese-North Korean relations are strained, and much of this is due to Pyongyang's chronic xenophobia, development of nuclear weapons, and pursuit of close ties with Russia. This lecture examines the North Korea-China relationship from Beijing's perspective. It examines national objectives and the strategies China employs to achieve them such as diplomacy, trade, sanctions, and intelligence exchanges. In the end, though, China has learned an awkward fact: it has relatively little influence over North Korea, and it certainly cannot persuade its wayward neighbor to relinquish nuclear weapons short of an actual war.

Length: 1 hour

6. The Quartet of Instability

Starting with the first Trump Administration in 2017, the Western world has entered a period of turbulence, doubt and anxiety. Even as Washington (apparently) demonstrated a greater

willingness to jettison its foreign alliances, a new network of adversaries loomed over the horizon. Dubbed the “Quartet of Chaos” or the “Axis of Upheaval”, this strange combination of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea is only bound by a shared determination to weaken the West in general and the U.S. in particular. This lecture probes the realities of this “alliance”, assessing it critically in terms of shared goals and divergent perspectives. Perhaps this “alliance’s” greatest strength is also its weakness: the absence of any formal commitment on the part of one member to defend the interests of another.

Length: 1 hour

National Security

1. North Korea’s National Goals and Strategies

What are the goals of the North Korean leadership, and what strategies does it employ to achieve them? This lecture examines Pyongyang’s assessed national objectives, including regime survival, deterred attack and preservation of national sovereignty. It then details the strategies used to reach those objectives such as an arguably brilliant diplomacy of belligerence and (apparent) conciliation as well as an ability to play on the stability fears of its adversaries and its friends. There is no question that North Korea remains a notoriously difficult state for foreigners to understand. This presentation has the modest goal of casting some light on the aspirations and policies of the so-called ‘Hermit Kingdom’.

Length: 1 hour

2. North Korea’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs

North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons has put the international spotlight on a small, pariah state, whose very existence has often been called into question. This lecture examines the motives, origins and development of Pyongyang’s nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs as well as their delivery systems. The presentation also delves into North Korea’s role in proliferating WMD technologies to Syria, Iran, Egypt and Libya.

Length: 1 hour

3. North Korea’s ICBM Program

On 28 July 2017 North Korea achieved a long-cherished objective, namely the ability to reach the United States with an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). In a single test, North Korea hoisted a two-stage, liquid propellant, missile into a lofted trajectory which, if conducted along a ‘normal’ ICBM path, would have exceeded 9,000 km. This would bring much of the west coast of the United States within range of North Korean missiles. This presentation outlines the history of North Korea’s quest for nuclear weapons and the missile systems deemed necessary to deliver

that deterrent. Although limited by open-source materials this lecture also grapples with the critical question: has North Korea successfully developed a nuclear warhead for its ICBM? The presentation concludes by examining the new strategic constraints imposed on the U.S. should Pyongyang succeed in producing a viable, reliable, nuclear-capable ICBM that can reach most – if not all – of the continental United States.

Length: 1 hour

4. North Korean Ballistic Missiles: The Search for Longer Reach

Nearly concurrent with North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons has been its development of surface-to-surface missiles such as the SCUD series and the Hwasong-15 ICBM. This lecture briefly examines the technical and doctrinal origins of North Korea's ballistic missile program before examining how missiles fit into the country's national goals and strategy. Brief technical outlines of each missile are offered as well as an order of battle assessment. Finally, the implications of Pyongyang's pursuit of an intercontinental ballistic missile program are examined in terms of US national security.

Length: 1 hour

5. Korean People's Army: Quantity over Quality

With over one million men and women under arms North Korea maintains one of the largest armies in the world. This presentation examines the Korean People's Army (KPA) in light of North Korea's national goals and military strategy. Lecture content includes a breakdown of the KPA's order of battle, anticipated wartime missions, strengths and weaknesses, and capabilities.

Length: 1 hour

6. Life in the Korean People's Army

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea maintains one of the world's largest armies on a population base of 22-25 million. How can Pyongyang maintain such numbers even as many of its people are chronically underfed? The short answer is that it can't; however, thanks to generous Chinese food assistance, decade-long conscription terms, and the recent intake of women conscripts the Korean People's Army manages to maintain its formidable size. This briefing uses defector accounts to delve into the life of a conscript in the KPA. It examines issues that affect nearly every soldier, including malnourishment, beatings, sexually transmitted diseases, bribery, and extortion. Outsiders ask: 'why don't they revolt against the madness?' But this study highlights the regime's reliance on fear and collective punishment to discourage dissent. Anyone contemplating revolt can be certain that failure will trigger punishment that not only affects the perpetrators but their family, relatives and friends as well.

Length: 1 hour

7. North Korean Special Purpose Forces

North Korean propaganda extols the size and capabilities of its so-called ‘Special Purpose Forces’; however, exaggerations aside, there are few reliable open sources on the true capabilities of North Korea’s SPF. This brief overview examines the SPF from the perspective of size, organizational structures, and missions. It also studies the formidable challenges confronting the infiltration of North Korean SPF into South Korea during peace and war. The presentation concludes by noting that North Korea’s estimated 100,000+ special forces are uneven in terms of effectiveness and weapons.

Length: 1 hour

8. The North Korean Air Force: Outmatched and Obsolete

This presentation places the North Korean Air Force (NKAF) within the broader spectrum of North Korea’s national objectives and military strategy. Pyongyang has allowed its air force to atrophy in recent years as it emphasizes the acquisition of nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems. The NKAF order of battle is detailed as well its overall strengths and weaknesses.

Length: 1 hour

9. The North Korean Navy

North Korea’s Navy employs an aging fleet of surface platforms and a potentially lethal inventory of fleet and midget submarines as well as swimmer delivery vehicles. This presentation examines the Korean People’s Navy (KPN) in terms of its various missions including coastal defense, special forces’ insertions and extractions, amphibious landings, and maritime enforcement. Platforms aside the presentation delves into several weapons systems known to be in the KPN inventory such as sea mines, coastal artillery, and coastal defense cruise missiles.

Length: 1 hour

10. North Korea’s Cyber Wars

Ever since Sony Pictures was hacked in 2014 by North Korean agents there has been considerable media attention focused on North Korea’s burgeoning cyber capabilities. This presentation offers an unclassified overview of North Korea’s cyber war program. It places it within the overall context of Pyongyang’s national objectives and strategies while examining the known players such as the Reconnaissance General Bureau and the General Staff Directorate. Students then review some examples of North Korea’s cyber ‘handiwork’ including distributed

denial of service attacks against South Korean banks and media outlets, the Sony Pictures incident and the more recent ‘wannacry’ cyber extortion scheme that affected more than 150 countries. The presentation concludes with a discussion of possible US responses to North Korea’s cyber threat.

Length: 1 hour

11. North Korea’s Surveillance State

The North Korean state has survived many predictions of its imminent demise. Some of the key factors contributing to North Korea’s survival “success” include ideology, fear, and surveillance. This lecture briefly examines the elaborate state security surveillance system that was created in North Korea during the early years of its existence. From the national government down to the local level, North Korea is a “snitching” society, where people are encouraged to report on their families, neighbors and co-workers. Ultimately, the system’s mythology as “all-seeing” and “all-knowing” constitute a powerful deterrent against would be coup plotters.

Length: 1 hour

Economies

1. The Economies of the Korean Peninsula

Even when we consider the impressive growth of the Chinese economy in recent years, South Korea is still the byword for stunning economic performance, since reforms were first implemented in the mid-1960s. At the same time, the state-owned economy of North Korea has been descending on an opposite trajectory. This lecture explores the economic policies adopted by both Korean states and their consequences. The South’s ‘Economic Miracle’ is examined as well as the North’s initial economic success that was followed by decay, decline, mass famine and tentative reform. The lecture concludes with an analysis of what a reunited Korea could mean for future economic growth and prosperity.

Length: 3 hours

2. North Korea’s Economy

Long regarded as the epitome of a Stalinist, command economy, North Korea has undergone a surprising albeit belated economic transition in the last decade or so. An informal market economy now commands 60% to 70% of national income, according to Western experts. Still, it has been a long and difficult road for North Koreans, especially when a disastrous famine in the 1990s not only killed 10% to 15% of the population but forced fundamental changes in the state-run economy. The lecture concludes on a cautionary note: for a country neighboring three of the

most dynamic economic powers in the world (China, Japan, and South Korea) North Korea's dismal economic performance is quite staggering.

Length: 1 hour

3. South Korea's Economic Crises: Trends, Issues, and Prospects

The brief discusses "The Miracle on the Han River", namely the extensive structural reforms and tremendous growth of South Korea's economy after the Korean War and the social foundation of intensified challenges it experiences lately. The brief analyzes the sacrifices of the Korean people to make the country prosperous, including harsh labor conditions, gender and age discrimination, "gwarosa" or death from overwork, soaring elderly suicide rates, and an aging crisis. The brief, also, describes government's efforts to address these issues through changing social protection policies and recalibration of economy.

Length: 1 hour



Indonesia

Geography and Geopolitics

1. Indonesia: Asia's Critical Pivot State

A vast country of growing importance in global affairs Indonesia has long suffered from relative neglect in the United States. This lecture offers a useful introduction to Indonesia by examining its geopolitics, cultures, history and economy. A democratic success story in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has the fourth largest population in the world and a booming, trade-based economy. Finally, its vital location astride the world's most heavily trafficked maritime trade routes will ensure Indonesia's continued importance as the 'pivot of Asia'.

Length: 1 hour

2. Geopolitics of the World's Maritime Straits

Living in a continent-sized superpower with uninhibited access to the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans most Americans do not focus on those straits and canals that link the global economy today. This brief examines the importance of maritime trade and those critical straits and canals that facilitate it. Each of these possesses geopolitical importance in its own right; a few have global significance given the extensive traffic that flows through them. Any disruption to commerce could have a significant – and certainly negative – impact on the global economy. A maritime power confronted by geographical and political constraints, China is acutely aware of its vulnerabilities when it comes to the straits and canals covered here. Not surprisingly, then, China is also the most active power-seeking land-based alternatives to maritime trade.

Length: 1 hour

Culture and Regions

1. Sources of Indonesian Unity

Indonesia is the fourth largest country in population. It is certainly one of the most diverse states in the world in terms of ethnicity, language, culture, customs, and religion. How did such a diverse and geographically complex country come about? How has it remained united in spite of centrifugal forces that threaten to drive it apart? This presentation examines Indonesia through the lens of nation-building. It explores how Indonesia developed as a concept, an idea in the early twentieth century by nationalists who sought to replace the Dutch East Indies with a united, centralized, multi-ethnic state. Key to the longevity of Indonesia has been a common language, the Dutch colonial legacy, and a loose-knit, consensual ideology called Pancasila.

Length: 1 hour

2. Islamic Aceh: The Veranda of Mecca

For over a decade opinion polls have suggested that a growing number of Indonesians favor the imposition of *Sharia* (Islamic) law in their country. Many point to the province of Aceh in northern Sumatra where *Sharia* was implemented several years ago as a test case for the country as a whole. This presentation argues, however, that Aceh is not the best example of ‘*Sharia* in action’ since is a tradition of Islamic identity in Aceh that predates the creation of the Indonesian state and European colonization. The presentation concludes on a cautionary note: the imposition of *Sharia* could very well by the singular explosive ingredient that tears Indonesia apart.

Length: 1 hour

3. Unrest in Papua: Origins and Indonesian Responses

In summer 2019, Indonesia’s Papuan provinces were beset by waves of demonstrations, riots, and police crackdowns. The immediate trigger of unrest was alleged discrimination against Papuans studying in Java yet, as this presentation points out, the origins of Papuan discontent are much deeper than racism. Western Papua was forcibly incorporated into Indonesia in 1963, an act that ostensibly ‘validated’ by a ‘national referendum’ in 1969 that included only 1,000 electors. Jakarta’s heavy-handed policies have only aggravated an already disgruntled native population on Papua and calls for a referendum on national independence are spreading.

Length: 1 hour

4. Indonesia’s Militant Islamists

As the world’s largest Muslim state, Indonesia has not been immune from the intra-civilizational struggles being waged in the broader Muslim world today. A traditional, diverse, and relatively

tolerant society is engaged in an ideological struggle with a fundamentalist, orthodox, and often intolerant movement aimed at ‘cleansing’ and ‘purifying’ Islam. This presentation examines some aspects of this power struggle including its global nature as well as its Indonesian context. It examines some Indonesian fundamentalist movements such as Dar al-Islam, *Jemaah Islamiyah*, and *Jemaah Ansharut Towhid* and the campaigns they have waged to create an Islamic State in Indonesia.

Length: 1 hour

5. The Peoples of Indonesia

A quick glance at any map of the world will demonstrate that Indonesia is an ‘impossible country’. Not only is it comprised of hundreds of ethnic groups speaking innumerable languages and dialects, the Indonesian population is scattered across thousands of islands. This lecture series is intended to introduce the student to several of the larger ‘sub-nationalities’ that make up modern Indonesia. Each group is analyzed in terms of its size, geographical location, dominant religion(s), recent histories, traditional occupations, and stereotypes.

The Javanese. Numbering over 100 million, the Javanese are the largest ethnicity in Indonesia. They dominate the country politically and economically to such an extent that they risk being equated with ‘Indonesia’ in the eyes of others even though neither the Javanese language nor culture are considered ‘national’ or ‘official’ in strictly legal terms.

The Batak. The Batak are numerically the fourth largest ethnic group in Indonesia. Speakers of a related family of Austronesian languages, the Batak inhabit northern Sumatra and were traditionally organized on a tribal basis rooted in patriarchal lineages.

Length: 1 hour

History

1. Indonesian History Highlights

It goes without saying that even a cursory knowledge of a country’s history reveals a lot about where it has been, its present status, and its future. In the case of Indonesia, we must gain a better understanding of its ‘fundamentals,’ such as European colonization, the independence struggle, the enigma of Sukarno, and the Suharto dictatorship in order to make educated guesses about the state’s integrity. This introductory lecture hits the ‘highpoints’ of Indonesian history by focusing on these events that best explain the Indonesia of today and its prospects for the future.

Length: 1 hour

Foreign Policy

1. Indonesia's Foreign Policy: 'Walk softly and carry a small stick'

For decades Jakarta's foreign policy has been summed up by the following expression: 'A million friends and zero enemies'. Then and now Indonesia favors multilateral diplomacy and ASEAN constitutes the foundation of Indonesia's approach to regional affairs. In more recent years, as China has grown more assertive in the South China Sea, Indonesia has resisted overtures by its ASEAN partners to take a firmer stance toward Beijing. Under President Joko Widodo, Jakarta emphasized a 'maritime policy' that would protect the country's declared sovereign waters, fisheries, and seabed resources. This led to several clashes with Chinese fishing vessels and, most recently, coast guard ships near the Natuna Islands. Greater assertiveness in Indonesian policy toward China will require closer links to at least two of its ASEAN partners – Vietnam and the Philippines. It will also necessitate higher defense spending on Indonesia's navy and air force. Still, Indonesia has no shortage of suitors interested in closer defense ties. Among these we find the United States, India, Japan, and Vietnam.

Length: 1 hour

National Security

1. Indonesia's Maritime Security

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago state with over 17,000 islands and the world's second-largest coastline after Canada. Paradoxically, though, the Indonesian Navy has often been neglected in favor of the dominant Army when it comes to procurement of new capabilities. This presentation examines Indonesia's formidable maritime challenges and the more recent policies Jakarta has implemented to try and meet them. Ultimately, Indonesia's ability to secure its immense maritime frontier will continue to be hampered by an aging yet modest Navy, battling civilian bureaucracies with overlapping responsibilities, and budget constraints.

Length: 1 hour

2. Indonesia's KOPASSUS: Guardians of the State

Unlike many countries which develop special operations units primarily for show, Indonesia began building indigenous special operations forces from the earliest days of independence. Urgent need – not status – drove the creation of army- and air force-centered commando units employed against Moluccan secessionists, army revolts, and a Java-based Islamist revolt. Indeed, from the beginning KOPASSUS and its lineal ancestors have constituted the spear head of an Indonesian state that sought to expand its frontiers to neighboring islands while, at the same time, neutralizing secessionist forces inside its own borders. This presentation places

KOPASSUS within the broader context of Indonesian history as various regimes employed it to defend state interests in Malaysia, Netherlands New Guinea, East Timor, and Indonesia itself.

Length: 1 hour

3. Indonesia's Intelligence Community

Maintaining national unity has been a persistent challenge for Indonesia's leaders since independence. At times the Army has stepped in and used coercion to hold the state together. Sometimes civilian leaders have invoked democracy and a set of common principles called Pancasila to unify the state. Among the least understood pillars of Indonesian national unity, yet a stalwart member of the so-called Indonesian 'deep state,' is the Indonesian Intelligence Community (IIC). This presentation examines the IIC from an historical perspective. It traces the IIC's development at the birth of Indonesian independence through the tumultuous Sukarno and Suharto eras to the rise of democratic reforms after 1998. Consistent themes include the competition between civilian and military authorities for control of the IIC, near-total military domination of the IIC for much of its history, and the role the IIC plays in enforcing national unity – often at the expense of the country's human rights record.

Length: 1 hour

4. Indonesians in ISIS

On 13 May 2018 an Indonesian family of six attacked three churches in Surabaya and killed at least 22 in a so-called 'martyrdom operation'. Subsequent investigation revealed that the family had previously travelled to Islamic State-controlled areas in Syria in order to witness 'Islam in action'. This presentation demonstrates that Islamic State's impact on Indonesian Islamic discourse extends well beyond the 'returnees from Syria' phenomenon to embrace Indonesians who never leave their country yet are radicalized by online jihadi propaganda and 'self-recruitment' programs. Like many other states Indonesia has learned the hard way that battling jihadist ideology involves more than just the use of kinetic force, but must also embrace a sophisticated mix of educational inducements, counter-narratives, and close monitoring of vulnerable communities.

Length: 1 hour

Other East Asian States

1. Mongolia: Stuck in the Middle with You

A small state wedged between two superpowers (China and Russia) Mongolia is often neglected and ignored by the United States. Yet it presents an intriguing case of balance-of-power politics and the imperative of diplomacy as the central element of national strategy. This lecture

examines the founding of the modern Mongolian Republic at the beginning of the twentieth century and traces its development up to the present day. Although much has changed in Russia, China, and Mongolia over the last century, geopolitical realities remain the same. Mongolia is, at bottom, a landlocked state with a tiny population (3 million), whose existence is directly linked to its pivotal location as a buffer between Russia and China.

Length: 2 hours

2. Challenges of Preserving Sovereignty and Democracy in Mongolia

The brief provides a detailed overview of the “invisible” country of Mongolia. It analyzes the country’s attempt to preserve independence and neutrality as it engages in very intricate relations with China and Russia. A former Soviet satellite, Mongolia’s strong dependency on Russian energy and economic cooperation with China prevent the country from escaping political manipulations of the two powerful neighbors transforming it into a platform for growing geostrategic rivalry.

Length: 1 hour

3. Thailand: Building a Nation State

In the late nineteenth century, the Thai monarchy made a conscious decision to adopt certain aspects of European culture, ideology, and technology in order to ward off aggressive Western imperialist powers. The monarchy grafted the European idea of a nation state onto Thailand in a process of “modernization” built around a common language, a national faith, the adoption of national symbols, emphasis on a common heritage, and the imposition of national conscription. This lecture discusses how the Thai state systematically built a Thai nation in a process that continued throughout the twentieth century. We examine how Thailand’s Chinese minority struggled to adjust to national “norms” even though they often (but not always) spoke a “different” language and drew on “other” cultural traditions to sustain them. Although the Chinese are now seen as well-integrated members of Thai society the same is not true of Thailand’s other ethno-linguistic minorities.

Length: 1 hour

4. The Southwest Pacific: Trouble in Paradise

Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa, the Solomon Islands: for some Americans these names conjure up images of tropical paradise or perhaps long-forgotten World War II battles. But each is a nation state in its own right with a national capital, a UN seat, and a flag. As this lecture details, the dozen or so countries of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia face a common set of challenges in governance and development as well as relatively small populations and economies. All are confronted with the implications of climate change in the form of rising sea levels and storms of

greater frequency and intensity. In recent years, this long-neglected part of the world has been the focus of increased rivalry between the U.S. and Australia on one side and a rising China on the other. A new generation of Americans is gradually becoming acquainted with Pacific islands that an older one knew so well: Guadalcanal, Nauru, Truk, and Tarawa...

Length: 1 hour

5. Russo-Japanese Relations: The Kurile Islands Dispute

Russia and Japan are not only neighbors they also possess mutually complementary economies. Japan imports virtually all of its energy while Russia is a top energy exporter. Russia desperately needs foreign investment to recapitalize its Soviet-era infrastructure, while Japan is a major source of foreign direct investment around the world. Nonetheless, neither country ranks very high on the other's list of trading partners. As for diplomatic relations, the tone is cordial but rather frosty. So, what is the problem? As with many things in this part of the world the Second World War still looms large. At the very end of that conflict the Soviet Union invaded, occupied, and annexed the Kurile Islands chain which border on the Pacific Ocean. Japan has never acknowledged Soviet/Russian sovereignty over four islands in the southern part of the chain. As a consequence, the Kuriles remain a major obstacle to improved Russo-Japanese relations. This lecture examines not only the origins of the Kurile Islands dispute but its consequences for East Asian security as a whole.

Length: 1 hour



India

Geography & Geopolitics

1. The Geopolitics of Great Powers

What makes a great power great? How can we quantify and qualify those ‘ingredients’ that go into making one set of nation states substantially different from others in terms of their relative strength? This presentation series examines those factors which define certain great powers from up-and-comers as well as former great powers. It uses a combination of factors to measure power. Some factors, such as land area, population size, physical terrain, and natural resources, are relatively easy to measure and can be quantified in a measure of a state’s strength. But there is another factor – namely, ‘national will’ or ‘will to power’ that is equally important in measuring great power strengths and weaknesses, yet it is notoriously difficult to quantify in any meaningful manner.

India. While China’s rise attracts considerable attention another Asian giant has also taken significant – if rather hesitant – steps toward global influence. As this presentation demonstrates, India has many of the core attributes of a great power, including a favorable climate for agriculture, large land area, population size, growing economic clout, and a powerful sense of what can best be described as ‘civilizational confidence’. At the same time, though, India must grapple with the reality that it has been all but encircled by two of its greatest rivals – Pakistan and China – who also happen to be allied with each other.

Length: 1 hour

History

1. The Partition of British India: Ambition, Incompetence, and Tragedy

Some warn that the next nuclear war will take place in the Indian Subcontinent, pitting India versus Pakistan. What often goes unexplained, however, is the reasons for their mutual antipathy. This presentation uses a dramatic event in history – the 1947 Partition of British India into India and Pakistan – as a starting point to understand the depth and breadth of Indo-Pak hostility. We examine why and how the subcontinent came to be partitioned the way it was, the driving forces behind Partition, and the long-term consequences of that great divide. Although history cannot provide all the answers, it indisputably is the essential place to start our examination of the Indo-Pakistan conflict.

Length: 1 hour

Domestic Policy

1. India Under Modi: Whither Democracy?

Guaranteeing minority rights while avoiding majority tyrannies has challenged many of the world's oldest democracies including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and India. As the largest democracy in the world (with over 900 million eligible voters in the 2019 parliamentary elections) multicultural India has repeatedly struggled with safeguarding the rights of its many minority peoples. In recent years the constitutional notion of India as a 'secular' state has been under repeated assault from the rising forces of Hindu nationalism which espouse a more exclusive national identity centered on India's Hindu majority. As this presentation argues, Hindu nationalism as represented by India's dominant Bharatiya Janata Party threatens not only the future of Indian democracy but the unity of the state as well.

Length: 1 hour

2. The Crisis in Indian Kashmir

On 5 August 2019 the Indian Government initiated a legal and bureaucratic process that eliminated seventy years of autonomy for the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The impetus was a recent victory by Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party in national elections, but the elimination of Kashmir's 'special status' within the Indian constitution has long been a central demand of India's powerful Hindu nationalist movement. New Delhi's attempts to downplay the political significance of this act have failed, and the result has been rising internal dissension in a state that has already seen far more than its share of violence in recent years. Modi's move probably will escalate tensions between India and Pakistan, and the risk is that such escalation could ultimately trigger nuclear war between these states. This presentation places the 5 August

2019 declaration within the broader fabric of Indian politics and Indian-Pakistan relations. It concludes with a proposed solution to the seemingly never-ending ‘Kashmir Problem’.

Length: 1 hour

Foreign Policy

1. China-India Border Dispute: What’s at Stake?

Although China has made strenuous efforts over the past two decades to resolve its many border disputes, it has made no progress in settling its border with India. This presentation examines the background to the China-India border dispute. It puts this conflict in the larger context of great power relations by exploring how India is very much the 21st Century ‘prize’ in the struggle for power in Asia.

Length: 1 hour

2. The China-India Border Dispute: Great Power Conflict in Asia

In April and May 2020, Indian and Chinese forces clashed along a disputed border in the high Himalayas. At least twenty Indians and possibly as many Chinese soldiers died because of these confrontations. The entire China-India border is disputed, and this means that clashes are inevitable. This lecture provides a broad outline of India-China relations before describing some of the recent “hot spots” such as Pangong Lake, the Doklam Plateau, and the Galwan Valley. China seems to be ready for a deal that would entail mutual recognition of the “line of actual control” as the de jure border; however, India has so far rejected such a “land swap” as a valid path for peace. The stakes are high, though, and the India-China relationship easily transcends disputed border markers in remote mountainous regions. As the two largest states in Asia both seem destined for competition in the coming century.

Length: 1 hour

National Security

1. Strategic Forces Modernization

China and Russia view nuclear weapons as essential pillars of their drive for great power status. Therefore, it is not surprising that both are devoting considerable resources to updating their strategic forces with road-mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, hypersonic glide re-entry vehicles, new ballistic missile submarines, supersonic cruise missiles, and stealth bombers. The United States faces a major force modernization of its own, having postponed or cancelled many programs as part of the post-Cold War ‘peace dividend’. In addition to the three “great powers”,

this presentation examines the strategic nuclear capabilities of the United Kingdom, France, Israel, India, and North Korea.

Length: 2 hours

2. The Kashmir Conflict

The unresolved 72-year-old dispute over the region of Jammu and Kashmir has caused several wars between India and Pakistan; it likely will generate tensions between these South Asian giants in the future. This presentation examines the Kashmir Conflict in detail, focusing on the origins of the dispute before proceeding to the respective interests of each of the contesting parties: India, Pakistan, and China. Is Kashmir a symptom or cause of Indo-Pakistan conflict? In other words, should Kashmir be treated as a subset of larger misunderstandings between India and Pakistan or would solving this dispute substantially end the decades-old conflict that has plagued both countries since 1947?

Length: 2 hours

3. India and Pakistan: Prospects for Peace

At first glance, the prospects for peace in South Asia seem dim. India and Pakistan have fought four wars since 1947, they are mired in a never-ending dispute over Kashmir, both possess nuclear weapons that are aimed at each other, while mutual suspicion and hostility run deep in their societies. Yet there are some glimmers of hope too, since both India and Pakistan are democracies and share a long history of both conflict and joint endeavor. This lecture outlines the imperative for peace by first assessing those things that divide India and Pakistan. It then details specific areas where compromise could help build momentum toward a sustained peace process. Such a process would include specific agreements on shared waters and crisis management as well as a much broader and more ambitious effort to break through intellectual barriers imposed by extremists on both sides.

Length: 1 hour

Middle East & Central Asia

U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility



Middle Eastern Region

Geography and Geopolitics

1. Geography of the Arab World

This course emphasizes the diversity of the Arab world in terms of physical and human geography. Although for many Westerners the Arab world conjures up images of vast, arid deserts, Arab countries actually possess a diversity of climates from the high Atlas Mountains of Morocco to the humid, intensely cultivated Nile delta, and the marshes of southeastern Iraq. This course also delves into political geography by examining how the borders of the modern Arab states were created and the numerous border disputes that have plagued their relations ever since.

Length: 1-3 hours

2. Maps of the Middle East: A Speculative Study

At time it seems as if the map of the Middle East is on the cusp of rapid change. When the so-called Arab Spring began in 2011, states like Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen were plagued by religious, ethnic, and secessionist violence. Islamic State terrorists claimed they were redrawing the map as they eliminated borders separating Syria from Iraq. Meanwhile, Yemen's fragile unity has been shattered amid religious and tribal violence. This presentation examines the map of the Middle East from ancient history to the present. The binding theme is continuity and change. Despite the considerable changes taking place in many countries, some states like Iran and Egypt have occupied the same ground for thousands of years. The presentation concludes by examining some possible future maps of the Middle East.

Length: 2 hours

3. The New Arab Cold War

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was forged in the early 1980s as a quasi-alliance consisting of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchies. For decades the GCC served a limited but useful role in shielding the smaller and weaker Gulf Arab states from regional predators like Iran and Saddam's Iraq. In the second decade of the twenty first century, GCC unity seemed to be all but shattered because of Saudi intransigence and the excessive ambitions of a small, but incredibly wealthy emirate called Qatar. Their feud not only undermined GCC unity but also attracted the unwanted attention of Iran and Turkey, large regional powers who have long sought to divide and conquer the Arab world.

Length: 1 hour

4. China and the Middle East

China's goals for the Middle East include ensured access to energy resources, secured maritime trade routes to Africa and Europe, enhanced trade, and increased political and diplomatic influence. China is the single largest consumer of Middle East energy, and this seems to motivate Beijing to seek a more prominent role in the region. At the same time, though, China has tried to avoid any entanglement in the Middle East's many conflicts. This lecture examines the extent of China's political, economic, and military influence in the region. It cautions against overinflated expectations of Chinese influence while concluding that Beijing's current "honeymoon" with the region's elites and publics is not bound to last. Sooner or later, China will have to start making hard choices especially if the United States continues to disengage from regional security.

Length: 1 hour

5. China's Goals and Strategy in the Middle East

The presentation analyzes Beijing's calculated expansion into the region as a strategic maneuver to secure energy resources, advance its geopolitical influence, and challenge American hegemony. It explores the complex dynamic of both Iran and Saudi Arabia welcoming Chinese engagement despite their rivalry, highlighting how Gulf States are increasingly drawn to China's non-interventionist stance, which contrasts sharply with the ideological pressures from the West exemplified by the Arab Spring and the War in Ukraine. The analysis details the tangible economic gains for Middle Eastern nations through Belt and Road Initiative projects, burgeoning oil trade, and collaborative dedollarization efforts, alongside the strategic role of the Israel-Palestine conflict in fostering a shared platform for Sino-Arab cooperation. The presentation further examines the significant growth in China's weaponry sales to the Gulf States and concludes with a critical discussion on the potential for a comprehensive, all-around alliance, assessing the opportunities and limitations of this deepening partnership for reshaping the global order.

Length: 1 hour

Culture

1. Arab Culture 101

The Arab world is distinguished by its diversity of dialects, local customs and histories. Yet there are also numerous elements of culture, history, language, religion, and society that subtly link each of the countries together in a framework called *al-Arabiyya*. This course provides an introduction to Arab culture as a whole: value systems, family life, gender, governance, negotiating patterns, arts, social interactions, social class, etiquette, the role of tribes – all of which are studied at length, with an eye both to the ‘Arab whole’ as well as regional differentiation. The overarching and seemingly contradictory themes of the course are diversity and unity, tradition and change, and the stresses of globalization and political liberalization.

Length: 7 hours

2. The Kurds: Between a Rock and Hard Place

The Kurds have been described as the largest ethnic group in the world without a state of their own. Divided among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and other countries in the region, the Kurds have endured decades of repression and suppression of their language and culture. This presentation examines the Kurds in terms of their language, culture, customs, and history. It then delves into the separate Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, and the challenges each faces in asserting an identity as a people apart. The lecture concludes by examining the prospects for a Kurdish independent state in light of recent events such as the collapse of the Asad regime in Syria.

Length: 2 hours

3. The Druze

The Druze are a small (around 2 million) religious sect found in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan. Although they have been players in Lebanese and Syrian politics for decades, little is known about the Druze in the West. This presentation offers an introduction to the Druze, their origins, key tenets of their faith, and the major challenges confronting them as the Levant region undergoes its worst humanitarian crisis in over a century.

Length: 1 hour

4. Minorities of the Middle East

The Middle East has been described as the “cradle of faiths,” for it was here that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam first emerged. Leaving the ‘big three’ aside, this region has also given

birth to a host of smaller sects, such as the Alawites, Yazidis, Druze, and Zoroastrians. Each has struggled to retain its identity over centuries of persecution; however, nothing equals the existential threat posed by Islamic State, a group dedicated to purifying Islam and eliminating so-called apostate faiths. This presentation examines several of the religious minorities of the Middle East and how they suffered under Islamic State. It also examines possible futures for these sects, many of which are on the verge of disappearing altogether.

Length: 1 hour

History

1. Pre-Islamic Arabia

The culturally rich worlds of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula offer valuable insights into the world of the Prophet Mohammed and early Arab culture. This lecture presents an introduction to some of the early pre-Islamic civilizations of the Peninsula, including the Bedouin, Sabeans and the Nabataeans. Students learn about the rich maritime traditions of the Arabs, which later helped spread Islam to India, Southeast Asia and East Africa. The presentation the cultural, historical and economic dimensions of Arabia before Islam. The picture that emerges is of sophisticated trading powers linked not only to each other but also to the other great civilizations of their day: Rome, China and India.

Length: 1 hour

2. Islamic History: Abbasids to Ottomans

This lecture examines the flowering of Islamic civilization after it expanded from the Arabian Peninsula into North Africa, southern Europe, Central Asia, and the Indian Subcontinent. We begin with the rise of Baghdad as the new center of a powerful Islamic civilization infused with Arab and Persian culture. Indeed, at its peak, Baghdad was the most powerful city in the world in terms of science, technology, medicine, philosophy, and the arts. The lecture then examines how the Crusades and Mongol invasions led to the collapse of the Abbasid Empire and the growth of new dynasties in Mamluk Egypt followed by the Ottomans in Anatolia. The presentation ends with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and the rise of modern Arab states.

Length: 4 hours

3. Arab Political Thought

In the early years of the twentieth century most of the Arab world was under the control of European powers. From Morocco to Iraq, the British, French and Italians had divided up the Arab lands between them and forged new states whose borders remain with us today. This lecture examines how several generations of Arab and Muslim scholars grappled with the decline

of their civilization and the reality of European domination. Several ‘schools’ of thought emerged in diagnosing the causes and cures of this decline, including Arab nationalism and Islamism. Students are introduced to the thinking of Qasim Amin, Michel Aflaq, Gamal Abd al-Nasser, Rashid Rida, Mohammed Abduh, Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and others. Each of these scholars struggled to define why their societies failed and how they could be reformed; their prognosis and prescriptions are still very much in play throughout the Arab world today.

Length: 1 hour

4. History of the Arab World: Twentieth Century Upheavals

The Arab world experienced a protracted identity crisis throughout much of the twentieth century, and this was manifested in universities, cafes, barracks, and on the battlefield. This lecture explores how European powers defined the borders of the Arab world after World War I and set in motion a turbulent era of anti-colonialism. Among the topics examined are the 1950s revolutions in Egypt and Iraq, the creation of the state of Israel, followed by the various Arab-Israeli wars, the rise and fall of Arab nationalism, the unsolved tragedy of Palestine, Lebanon’s civil wars, the Iran-Iraq war, and the growing popularity of Islamism.

Length: 6 hours

5. The Rise and Fall of Arab Nationalism (1952-1991)

The map of the modern Middle East and North Africa was largely drawn up by European colonial powers. In many respects Arab nationalism and Islamism were indigenous responses to European political, economic social and cultural dominance. For several decades in the mid-twentieth century, Arab nationalism was ascendant, cresting a wave of political change that swept away colonial rule and toppled several Arab monarchies. But a series of military defeats, culminating in the 1990-1991 DESERT STORM campaign shattered the illusions of Arab unity, leaving many to contemplate Islamism as the only viable alternative. This lecture provides a brief introduction to the Arab nationalist movement and traces its development from the 1952 coup in Egypt to the madness of Saddam Hussein’s brutal Baathist regime in Iraq.

Length: 1 hour

National Security

1. Security and Intelligence Services of the Near East and South Asia

Security and intelligence services often constitute the most powerful domestic players in many countries of the Near East and South Asia. This lecture briefly examines the services of four important regional powers: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan. The impact of each country’s respective security and intelligence services is examined with respect to human rights,

democracy and the conduct of foreign policy. The presentation concludes that while security services can provide much-desired stability in the short-term, they often aggravate domestic social and political problems by denying necessary reforms over the long-term.

Length: 2 hours

2. Iran – Saudi Arabia Rivalry: Ideology, Proxies, and the Role of China

The presentation offers a comprehensive examination of the deep-seated conflict between the two regional powers, tracing its historical and sectarian roots back centuries while focusing on key modern inflection points. It analyzes how the 1979 Iranian Revolution fundamentally reshaped the rivalry, setting the stage for decades of tension exacerbated by the Iran-Iraq War, the 1987 Hajj crisis, and a fleeting reconciliation during President Khatami's tenure. The brief details how the fall of Saddam Hussein, the rise of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the regional upheaval of the Arab Spring fueled a new era of proxy warfare, vividly illustrated by the conflicts in Syria and Yemen and culminating in the full break of diplomatic ties following Shia protests in Saudi Arabia in 2015. Ultimately, the presentation assesses the path to the landmark 2023 reconciliation, critically evaluating China's unprecedented diplomatic role in mediating between Tehran and Riyadh and what these developments signal for the shifting geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

Length: 2 hours

Economies

1. Arab World Economies

Conventional wisdom has it that the future of much of the Arab world rests on the continued export of oil and natural gas; however, as this presentation emphasizes, hydrocarbons are found in only a few Arab states. The remaining economies are based on agriculture, services, and light industry. In fact, oil has been both a blessing and a curse for those states which can export it, and the future of all Arab countries will depend on their ability to diversify, reform and open up their economies. Other relevant topics covered by this lecture include corruption, bureaucratic reform, taxation, and attracting foreign investment.

Length: 3 hours

North Africa

1. Egypt after the Arab Spring

In early 2011 a series of revolts shook the Arab world, leading many to conclude that political change had arrived at last. Egypt was expected to be the trend setter in all this, and she did not disappoint. What began as localized protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square soon expanded into a nation-wide demand for change. Long-serving President Hosni Mubarak stepped down, elections were held, and then things began going backward. This lecture examines the events immediately leading up to and following Egypt's spring. It studies the causes of the revolt and traces political developments that brought about a Muslim Brotherhood President, followed by a military dictatorship. The lecture concludes with some assessments of Egypt's future, fusing together demographic and economic data as well as broader developments in the region.

Length: 2 hours

2. Egypt's War in Yemen, 1962-1967

In 1962 a coup d'état ended nine hundred years of by a religious monarchy in Yemen. Almost immediately, the new regime created a republic and called on Egypt to aid in suppressing a counter-revolution led by royalists and powerful tribal coalitions. In many respects, Yemen was Egypt's 'South Vietnam': Cairo intervened in the conflict with a battalion but, as the conflict escalated and the stakes mounted, it eventually committed three divisions to Yemen. This brief examines one aspect underpinning Egypt's unsuccessful COIN efforts in Yemen, namely the lack of good intelligence sources. Ultimately, Egyptian decision-making was shaped by poor intelligence sources which, in turn, fed into inaccurate assessments of the Yemen war, the strength of the counter-insurgents, and the determination of the opposition's foreign backers.

Length: 1 hour

3. What is the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

Founded in 1928 by an Egyptian schoolmaster, the Muslim Brotherhood has become one of the largest Islamist groups in the world, with chapters in countries throughout North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. This lecture examines the Brotherhood from the perspectives of history, organization, and leadership. It also deals with the thorny question of whether the Brotherhood has links to terrorist groups or is largely a peaceful organization (as its proponents insist).

Length: 1 hour

4. What is Al-Azhar (and why does it matter)?

Al-Azhar is the oldest and most prestigious institution of higher Sunni Muslim learning in the Islamic world today. Located in Cairo, the university has been subjected to much of the turbulence of recent Egyptian history, including the Arab nationalist period under President Gamal Abd al-Nasser. It was this latter who attempted to “broaden” Al-Azhar’s curriculum to include such “modern” topics as engineering and the physical sciences. Nasser’s legacy continues today: al-Azhar and its leadership remain under the firm control of the Egyptian government.

Length: 1 hour

5. Egypt: The Land

From space, Egypt’s geographic dilemmas stand out in stark detail. A thin, green serpent seems to wind its way across a brown expanse from south to north, before it enters the Mediterranean Sea. This “serpent” is the Nile River and the “brown expanse” is the Sahara Desert. The Nile has defined Egypt’s existence throughout recorded history. Since it provides over 98% of the country’s freshwater, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that Egypt would not exist without the Nile River. This lecture examines Egypt from the perspective of its physical geography and its geopolitics. Following this presentation, students should have a better understanding of Egypt’s unique role as an historical bridge between Africa and Asia.

Length: 1 hour

6. Egypt on the Precipice: Ten Year of al-Sisi

From 2011 until 2013, Egyptians enjoyed a brief respite from centuries of authoritarianism and despotism. President Mubarak was deposed after three decades in power, free-and-fair elections were held for the first time in the country’s history, and a Muslim Brotherhood candidate was elected President. Then everything fell apart: General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi seized power in a military coup and restored military rule to the country. This lecture examines the first decade of al-Sisi’s rule. Amid apparent prosperity (thanks to billions of unaccountable dollars from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) al-Sisi’s Egypt has unfortunately reverted to its secret police roots characterized by regime attacks on civil society’s remnants and obviously rigged elections.

Length: 1 hour

7. Libya 101

Libya has been immersed in internal conflicts since the Arab Spring first erupted here in February 2011. Its mercurial dictator, Muammar al-Qadhafi, is long gone; however, the future of

the Libyan state is still to be determined, and its politics remain in a state of flux. This presentation examines Libya from a broad perspective. It is meant to give students a basic, ‘nuts and bolts’ overview of the country, including its geography, history, and politics. The lecture also examines several future scenarios, ranging from state breakup to ongoing civil war.

Length: 4 hours

8. Algeria: Identities in Conflict

Algeria is not only the largest Arab state it is also the largest country in Africa. Moreover, it is endowed with extensive oil and natural gas reserves. Strangely, Algeria historically has received little attention from US policymakers who tend to see it as a subset of ‘French Africa’ and a domain best left to Paris. This presentation examines Algeria’s importance for US national and energy security policy. It demonstrates how Algeria’s brutal civil war in the 1990s can be explained in part by an ongoing quest for cultural and national identity: what is an Algerian? What is the optimal political system for Algeria? Should Algeria be a secular nation state or an Islamic one? Such an identity crisis is not unique to Algeria; few, however, have suffered the terrible consequences of that struggle as Algeria has: from 1992 to 2004 over 100,000 Algerians died in a civil war.

Length: 1 hour

9. Morocco: Berm Strategy in Western Sahara Conflict

It is seemingly axiomatic that guerrillas who enjoy safe havens are nearly impossible to defeat. Just as the Viet Cong enjoyed a nearly invulnerable supply and training depot in North Vietnam, so too did the Afghan mujahedin enjoy access to training camps and hospitals in neighboring Pakistan. When Morocco confronted a highly mobile insurgent group called the POLISARIO in the dispute Western Sahara in the 1970s it too faced an opponent with a safe haven in Algeria. To combat the POLISARIO’s maneuverability and limit its access to the territory, Morocco built a sophisticated series of sand berms, reinforced concrete bastions, minefields, and support roads that ran the length of the Western Sahara’s borders with Algeria and Mauritania. Although the effort proved very costly in terms of resources, it ultimately deprived separated the POLISARIO from much of the native population and produced a de facto Moroccan victory.

Length: 1 hour

Levant

1. Who are the Alawites?

For several years from 2011 to 2016 it seemed as if the post-World War I map of the Middle East was being redrawn as militant groups demolished borders and declared new caliphates. But

the new ‘states’ that emerged were highly sectarian, driven by a utopian vision of a perfect Islamic State that tried to exclude or eliminate the ethnic and religious minorities that inhabit Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. This presentation examines Syria’s Alawite community, a branch of Shi’a Islam, which is under siege by various Sunni extremist groups and whose future is far from certain. The course also explores how the Alawites came to dominate Syria from the colonial period until 2024.

Length: 1 hour

2. The Heart of the Matter: Jordan’s Geopolitics

Jordan is often overlooked by the media; however, within the U.S. Government it is no secret that Jordan occupies a vital place in policy-making and is of abiding concern to the U.S. Intelligence Community. This lecture examines Jordan’s critical location at the center of several Middle East conflicts and how the Kingdom survives despite considerable odds. The presentation shows how Jordan survives because none of its neighbors can afford to see it collapse.

Length: 1 hour

3. Lebanon: The Politics of a Small State

Lebanon is a country cursed by geography, size, and a very diverse population. In the decades since their 1943 independence, Lebanese have struggled to define their identity. Are they Arab? Are they Lebanese? What does being “Lebanese” mean? Are they exclusively These lectures course explain how Lebanon is a fragile balance of power, where 18 sects exercise more authority than the central government. When there is a threat to the equilibrium, factions often unite to restore the balance. Unfortunately for Lebanese, their country is often pulled into broader conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli wars, the Israel-Syria power struggle, and the competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran for control of the Middle East.

Length: 3 hours

4. Hezbollah: Party, Militia, Terrorist Group

Ever since its founding in the early 1980s by the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah (‘Party of God’) has been a thorn in the side of the U.S. and its allies. For decades until 2024, U.S. and Israeli strategists have struggled to find a successful strategy to overcome Hezbollah’s rather unique blend of political party, militia, and terrorist group. This presentation traces the development of Hezbollah and its separate but interlinked roles as a force in domestic Lebanese politics, powerful militia with regional ambitions, and global terrorist organization. It also examines how Hezbollah rose and fell as a result of its involvement in the Syrian civil war.

Length: 1 hour

5. Lebanon: Into the Fire

In 2019, the elaborate Ponzi scheme of the Lebanese banking system finally burst. Many Lebanese lost their savings, banks were forced to freeze accounts, and the economy went into freefall. Since then, Lebanese politicians have done nothing to address the country's serious financial and economic problems. Stuck in a web of patronage ties that are closely linked to Lebanon's complicated sectarian politics, the National Assembly is unwilling and unable to implement necessary economic and political reforms. As a consequence, the standard of living for many Lebanese has virtually collapsed. Lebanon does not exist in a vacuum: problems in Syria and the Gaza Strip have an immediate impact on Lebanese foreign and national security policy. Another important factor to consider is that Lebanon is home to large numbers of Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Finally, Israel's 2024 military campaign against Hezbollah has revived an unwelcome dilemma in the Lebanese political establishment: what to do about the political party/militia called Hezbollah.

Length: 1 hour

6. Israel: The Perils of Disproportionate Retaliation

Since its birth in May 1948, Israel has used disproportionate retaliation to deter and, ultimately, defeat its enemies. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) historically believed that any damage inflicted on Israel and its citizens should be met with air strikes, artillery attacks, and infantry assaults into neighboring states. For example, on two separate occasions, 2006 and 2024, Lebanese Hezbollah raids into northern Israel triggered a massive Israeli response in the form of air strikes and a ground invasion of southern Lebanon. The Israeli objectives were to coerce the Lebanese government into restraining Hezbollah and deter Hezbollah from repeating its harassment. This presentation looks at Israel's disproportionate retaliation strategy from an historical perspective: each episode is measured in terms of the first and second order effects of Israel's retaliation against Arab states, liberation movements, and terror organizations.

Length: 2 hours

7. Kurdish Rojava: The Dream is Over (for now)

When the Syrian uprising broke out in spring 2011, that country's long-suppressed Kurdish minority created an autonomous zone called 'Rojava'. Rojava was a bold – if flawed – experiment in gender equality, democracy, and inter-ethnic conflict resolution. In October 2019 the Rojava dream came to a temporary end as Turkish tanks rolled into northern Syrian towns and put hundreds of thousands of Kurdish civilians to flight. The apparent death of Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria does not necessarily mean the end of Rojava: the Kurds have faced

more than their share of repression and war in recent years, yet this seems only to further encourage the idea of Kurdish autonomy.

Length: 1 hour

8. *Syria 101*

The Syrian Civil War may well go down as the greatest single human-generated catastrophe of the twenty-first century if only because of the sheer, numbing figures involved: 500,000+ killed and over half the pre-war population either internally displaced or living in foreign exile. This presentation is intended to provide some necessary context to this conflict by examining the origins of the Syrian state, its complex ethnic and sectarian mosaic, and the role that the Ba'ath Party played in welding the state together. It leaves the student in 2011, the year in which the so-called Arab Spring toppled Arab republics in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Only Asad of Syria seemed to survive, although as his December 2024 flight to Moscow showed, the eventual collapse of the Ba'athist regime was a foregone conclusion.

Length: 1 hour

9. *The Syrian Civil War: Descent into Madness*

In March 2011 decades of regime repression, corruption, and economic stagnation came to a head in Syria when video footage of tortured Syrian boys at the hands of the secret police were uploaded to the Internet. Public outrage galvanized a protest movement, which began with peaceful demands for justice, bread, and jobs. Syrian leader Bashar al-Asad, however, responded with force, and the result was catastrophic for nearly all concerned. This presentation traces the evolution of the Syrian civil war from the earliest days in the city of Dara'a to the near annihilation of Aleppo in 2016. It shows how government forces seemed to recover from the brink of almost certain disaster by 2017. Much of this 'success' could be attributed to Syria's friends in Russia and Iran, who not only bankrolled Asad's recovery but also provided him with the military force to do so. Nonetheless, when neither Iran nor Russia could provide the Baathists with the financial and military means, the writing was on the wall: in December 2024, Bashar al-Asad fled to Moscow and Syria entered a new phase of its existence.

Length: 1 hour

10. *The Golan Heights and Regional Conflict*

The Golan Heights epitomize the phrase "strategic real estate." An 1,800 sq km upland region that includes the region's highest mountain, the Golan Heights straddle the borders of Israel, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Moreover, the Golan Heights contribute to the headwaters of two rivers in a thirsty region: the Jordan and the Yarmouk. The Golan Heights have been under Israeli occupation since the 1967 war. Although Golan has been the subject of occasional

negotiations between Israel and Syria, both remain in a state of war. In recent years, a new dimension was added to the Golan conflict: the arrival of Hezbollah and Iranian forces intent on continuing their war for Israel's eventual destruction.

Length: 1 hour

11. Crisis in the Gaza Strip

On 7 October 2023 the terrorist group HAMAS shocked the world by successfully circumventing an Israeli security wall around the Gaza Strip and killing or kidnapping over 1,400 Israeli civilians. Indeed, this "raid" was the single bloodiest day since the 1948 creation of the State of Israel. This lecture briefly examines the recent history of Gaza before delving into the goals and strategies of the Israeli state and HAMAS. It explores the possibility of a wider regional war erupting from the Gaza crisis as well as the fundamental challenges facing Israel's leaders in fashioning a post-HAMAS government. It concludes on a cautionary note: while Israel may defeat HAMAS militarily inside Gaza it will not succeed in defeating the HAMAS ideology with military force alone.

Length: 1 hour

12. Refugee Crisis in Jordan

The presentation delves into the profound and multi-faceted challenges confronting the Kingdom as it grapples with one of the world's most significant refugee influxes. It outlines the background of the problem, identifying the main countries supplying refugees and detailing the ongoing demographic strain that has overwhelmed Jordan's limited resources, including housing, jobs, healthcare, and critically, food and water. The analysis explores the initial reception of refugees by both the government and local population, tracing how this has evolved into growing social tensions as competition for scarce resources intensifies. The presentation further examines the severe hardships faced by the refugee communities and the measures taken by the government to manage the crisis, culminating in an assessment of how the freshwater shortages and economic pressures directly contribute to the foundation of growing anti-government protests within the host country, potentially threatening the nation's stability.

Length: 1 hour

13. Tribalism in Jordan

The presentation explores the complex and evolving role of traditional tribal structures within the modern Hashemite Kingdom. It begins by establishing a foundational understanding of the tribes themselves, delving into their history, social organization, and specific characteristics, before examining their multifaceted relationship with the state. The analysis traces how this dynamic has been reshaped by forces such as rapid urbanization and a changing national landscape that

initially seemed to marginalize tribal influence. Key areas of intersection are scrutinized, including the tribes' critical role in the military, their enduring power in parliamentary politics, and their ambivalent stance toward progress and modernization. The brief pays particular attention to the contemporary tensions between the tribes and King Abdullah II, investigating how the dual pressures of the Arab Spring—which amplified demands for reform—and pervasive corruption and severe economic problems have strained this historic alliance, testing the loyalty of this foundational bloc and creating a pivotal challenge for the monarchy's stability.

Length: 1 hour

14. Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Lebanon and the 2026 Iran War

Ever since the modern state system emerged in the Middle East following the Second World War, Lebanon has been a pawn in regional power politics. Partly as a consequence of its unfortunate geopolitics, Lebanon's politics and economy have been paralyzed for years, and the stagnation has cut deeply into the lives and welfare of most Lebanese. Their fears of a return to civil war, such as characterized Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s, are exploited by neighbors who also attempt to drive wedges between Lebanon's myriad sects. Ultimately, it is Hezbollah, Iran's handmaiden, which aggravates most of Lebanon's problems. Iran is willing to sacrifice both Hezbollah and Lebanon itself for the sake of its own regime survival. The Lebanese know this, much to their regret, but there is little they can do about it. For its part, Israel is determined to dominate Lebanon, and that means getting rid of Hezbollah. Talk of annexing southern Lebanon only dooms Israel to more wars and justifies Hezbollah's continue existence as a "resistance". It will also further isolate Israel in the international community.

Gulf Cooperation Council

1. The Modern History of Saudi Arabia

These lectures offer a brief overview of modern Saudi history. They begin in the early twentieth century when Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud created the modern Saudi state by suppressing tribal enemies and forging shrewd diplomatic treaties with great powers. The presentations then examine how the discovery of vast oil reserves set the Saudi Kingdom on a new course in the middle of the Twentieth Century. The briefs focus on how the Saudi monarchy survived several domestic and regional challenges including the rise of Arab nationalism, Arab-Israeli wars, the 1979 Iranian revolution, the diffusion of militant Salafi ideology, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and America's post-Cold War propensity to intervene directly in regional affairs.

Length: 4 hours

2. Saudi National Security

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) faces some unique security challenges in the early 21st Century, including: (1) a large land area rich in energy resources; (2) under-population relative to its neighbors; (3) a particularly nasty neighborhood that lies at the hub of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, spiraling populations, and sectarian hatred; (4) rule by a single family. This presentation examines Saudi Arabia's threat perceptions, national goals, and the strategies it employs to meet those goals. The lecture concludes on a cautionary note: while many experts have written off Saudi Arabia in the past, it nonetheless survived considerable turbulence in a dangerous neighborhood. Bearing that in mind, the KSA and its rulers nonetheless face a troublesome new array of threats at home and abroad that are taxing their diplomatic, financial, and military resources.

Length: 1 hour

3. The Kingdom of Bahrain: Navigating Perilous Waters

Bahrain is the smallest Arab state in terms of land area, but it is located in the middle of one of the most contentious waterways of the world: the Arabian Gulf. For the United States, Bahrain is important because of its proximity to largest oil fields in the world. It also happens to house the headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet. Bahrain is one of only two Arab states to have a Shiite Muslim majority (the other is Iraq). Unlike Iraq, though, Bahrain is ruled by a Sunni Muslim royal family which has not hesitated to exploit the Kingdom's volatile sectarian politics to maintain its grip on power.

Length: 1 hour

4. The United Arab Emirates: This is Sparta!

When the United Arab Emirates was first forged in 1971 by the farsighted leader of Abu Dhabi, the motivation was a perceived threat posed by Saudi Arabia. Since then, however, the UAE has grown markedly in economic strength and raw military power. Saudi Arabia is now an ally (albeit one with reservations), while the UAE's rivals include Iran and Turkey. Under Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed, the UAE has become the Sparta of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a small state that is nonetheless well-armed, well-trained, disciplined and increasingly prone to projecting that power not only in the Persian Gulf but the Horn of Africa and the Mediterranean as well.

Length: 1 hour

5. Oman: The Dhofar Insurgency

Some COIN experts believe two decades are necessary to fully defeat an insurgency. In the case of Oman's Dhofar insurgency, the time factor seems to be about right: from 1962 until 1978 the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces, with the assistance of seconded British officers and the 22nd Special Air Service regiment, struggled to defeat an insurgency based in neighboring Marxist South Yemen. Ultimately, the Dhofar insurgency was defeated, albeit with substantial outside assistance including an entire brigade from the then Imperial Iranian Army, the British Royal Air Force, and the SAS.

Length: 1 hour

6. Sultanate of Oman: A Small, Stable Gulf State

Oman has sometimes been described as 'the invisible state of the Arabian Peninsula' for its propensity to avoid controversy and mediate conflict within the Gulf region. Yet a quick glance at any map of the Middle East demonstrates how important Oman is to global security, given its location astride the Strait of Hormuz through which 15-20% of the world's oil flows on any given day. This presentation examines the nature of Oman's ability to navigate the perils of its neighborhood while maintaining an enviable degree of internal stability. Under Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said (r. 1971-2020), Oman was able to achieve the diplomatically impossible: straddle the growing divide between Iran and its Gulf Arab neighbors and serve as a base for US and British air and naval operations in the region. At the same time, with the exception of unrest in 2011-2012, the Sultanate has been able to maintain a significant degree of internal stability and cohesion. Still, as this presentation concludes, there are some warning signs on the road ahead for Oman and its allies including declining oil reserves and virtually one-man rule.

Length: 1 hour

7. United Arab Emirates and Russia: The Bromance of the Century

The briefing examines the partnership between the United Arab Emirates and Russia that is evolving into one of the most consequential non-Western alignments in contemporary geopolitics. The presentation analyzes how Putin's "pivot to the East" strategy—designed to circumvent Western sanctions and diversify Russia's partnerships found an eager partner in the UAE, whose permissive financial regulations and opaque banking sector created a mutually beneficial grey economy that underpins deeper strategic cooperation. The briefing documents strong Russia-UAE mutual political support, occurring simultaneously with Abu Dhabi's strategic distancing from Washington. A shared objective of combating political Islam is central in cooperation between Russia and UAE, where Russia's struggles against Chechen separatism and Central Asian extremism align perfectly with UAE's existential fear of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements that threaten monarchical stability. Particular

attention is given to how UAE's military intervention in Yemen that led to tactical rapprochement with Iran mediated partly through Russian channels. The briefing concludes by examining the substantial growth in Russia-UAE trade that has accelerated dramatically since 2022, assessing whether this "bromance" represents a temporary alignment of convenience or signals a fundamental strategic realignment.

Length: 1 hour

8. The Gulf Cooperation Council

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is the most successful of the sub-regional groupings within the Arab world. Created in 1981 it includes all of the Arabian Peninsula states except Yemen. Ostensibly designed to foster greater political and economic unity among all of the Gulf Arab states, the GCC has long been hampered by the fact that one state – Saudi Arabia – is clearly the *primus intra pares* and plays a dominant role in influencing GCC decisions. The Council also has an anemic military wing called the Peninsula Shield, whose effectiveness is limited by mutual rivalries and suspicions among the GCC's kings, emirs, and sultans.

Length: 1 hour

9. Weathering the Storm: The Gulf Arabs and the Iran War

Since the United States and Israel started bombing Iran on 28 February 2026, the Iranian government has punished the Gulf Arab states. Collectively, these countries have received a disproportionate share of Iranian drone and missile strikes. Tehran apparently calculates that if it can inflict enough damage on the Gulf Arabs, they will pressure the United States to stop bombing Iran. In fact, the Gulf Arabs are caught in a proverbial rock and a hard place: Iran looms vengefully across the Gulf while the U.S. remains, at best, an uncertain ally who might be tempted to stop its war, curb its losses, and pull out. The Gulf Arabs' security dilemma translates into split messages. Privately, their leaders are urging the U.S. to persist in bombing Iran while publicly they are insisting on their desire for peace.

Length: 1 hour

10. United Arab Emirates: Setting Its Own Course

The United Arab Emirates is a very wealthy but underpopulated federation of seven sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf region. Foreign workers outnumber actual Emirati citizens by a factor of 9 to 1. Under its dynamic President, Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan ("MBZ"), the Emirates has been engaged in a major military buildup in recent decades. More significantly, it has been projecting military power in Yemen, Sudan, and Libya either directly or via regional proxies. The UAE has slowly been breaking with a regional Gulf Arab security consensus established by Saudi Arabia. Abu Dhabi has increasingly allied with the United States and Israel, while Riyadh

has been aloof. Most recently, the UAE has conducted air strikes against Iran during the wider U.S.-Israel-Iran War and opted to quit the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Length: 1 hour

Yemen

1. The Geography of Yemen

Yemen is a vital ‘hinge’ state that not only occupies the divide between Asia and Africa, but also dominates the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb which separates the Red Sea from the Indian Ocean. Yemen’s rugged mountainous terrain has also played a prominent role in its history, politics and economic development. Once called *Arabia Felix* (or ‘Happy Arabia’) because of its fertile, rain-fed lands, Yemen has been home to commodities like frankincense, myrrh, coffee and the narcotic plant, Qat. Yemen is a richly diverse human society that has thrived for millennia. By studying its geography, terrain and climate we gain a good foundation for further research into this country’s history, politics, and future prospects.

Length: 2 hours

2. History of Yemen

We can tailor this course to match the needs and time constraints of our customers. For those who have more time, and wish to delve deeper into Yemen’s history, we offer an extended version of this course that examines Yemen’s ancient past, the legacies left by colonial occupiers like the Ottoman Turks and the British, the ‘Two Yemens period’ and Unification. For those with less time and prefer a ‘just-the-basics’ overview we have also condensed the history course into an abridged version.

a. Early Yemeni History

Yemen is the oldest society still existing on the Arabian Peninsula. With a history dating back to the pre-Islamic and even the pre-Judaic era, southwestern Arabia has benefitted from millennia of civilizations some of which are known to us through such biblical figures as the Queen of Sheba. This presentation briefly examines ancient Yemen by starting with the Sabeian and Himyarite civilizations. Next it explores the coming of Islam to Yemen and the rise of the Zaydi Shia Imamate which dominated at least the upland areas of western Yemen for nearly 1,000 years.

Length: 1 hour

b. Colonial Occupation

Yemen has never treated its colonial occupiers particularly well. Although the Ottoman Turks were able to impose their rule on coastal Yemen for centuries they rarely succeeded in subduing the highland areas for long. Consequently, the Zaydi Imamate survived several invaders throughout its thousand-year-long history. Another colonial occupier was the British who established a colony in the port of Aden to support their empire in India. Over time, however, the British were obliged to conclude a variety of treaties with inland sultans and, as a result, inherited responsibility for a large area of southern Arabia. In the end, Arab nationalism rang the death knell both for the Imamate and the British possessions in South Arabia.

Length: 1.5 hours

c. Republics & Unification

Neither North nor South Yemen was politically stable in the first decade of their existence. The North struggled to defeat a Zaydi insurgency, and its independence was nearly smothered by the Egyptian army in the process. The South made a great show of ‘extinguishing tribalism’ only to fall prey to fierce intra-party disputes that erupted in fighting and near-civil war-like conditions in 1986. Both Yemens relied heavily on foreign powers for support: the North leaned on the Saudis and the United States while the South depended on Soviet aid, including weapons and development assistance. When the Soviet Union began to disintegrate in the late 1980s the stage was set for a surprise Yemeni unification in May 1990.

Length: 2 hours

d. The Reign of Ali Abdullah Saleh

When Ali Abdullah Saleh became President of North Yemen in 1978 few (if any) predicted he would serve for more than thirty years let alone preside over a united Yemen. Yet he did, and the secrets to his success are the topic of this presentation. Saleh presided over an unprecedented economic boom in North Yemen’s history as remittances from guest workers in the Gulf Arab countries flowed in. Then came the discovery and commercial exploitation of oil which provided Saleh with the means to buy off his opposition. In 1990 Ali Abdullah Saleh took advantage of the end of the Cold War by successfully carrying out unification with a South Yemen that was still reeling from its 1986 internal war and the loss of its Soviet patron. From the start unification was a poorly planned, haphazard business, and the mistakes made at its inception contributed to the 1994 Yemen civil war, the Houthi rebellions and resurgence of South Yemeni irredentism. Just as Ali Abdullah Saleh played an important role in unifying his country,

so too did his misrule ultimately jeopardize national unity and the foundations of the state he founded.

Length: 1.5 hours

3. Yemen: Culture & Society

On the face of it, Yemen's civil war is inexplicable: how a country with one language, one cultural and historical heritage, and one religion tears itself to pieces defies logic. This presentation attempts to answer questions that persist about Yemen and its identity: What is Yemen? What is a Yemeni? Why has Yemen become the byword for civil war and political instability? We examine modern Yemen from several perspectives in our search for answers: (1) the broad population trends in Yemen including an exploding population growth rate; (2) Yemen's fractious and often competing identities including different perspectives on Islam, tribalism, and its vibrant regional differences. Perhaps appropriately, the presentation concludes by asking even more questions: Can Yemen survive? Should there be more than one Yemen? What kind of government is best suited to Yemen's political temperament?

Length: 3 hours

4. Yemen's Complicated Politics

Yemen's descent into civil war and near-state collapse is something of a paradox when we consider those forces that bind this country together. After all, unlike Syria or Iraq, the vast majority of Yemenis speak roughly the same language for mutual understanding. Moreover, they share the same faith and a common history that extends back over millennia. Yet we cannot ignore those centrifugal forces pulling the country apart, including sectarianism and powerful regional identities. This presentation briefly examines governance in Yemen and how successive regimes in Sana'a (and Aden until 1990) failed to build enduring institutions and a strong national identity. Considerable time is devoted to the disastrous policies of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh whose ability to 'dance on the heads of snakes' (as he put it) nonetheless obscured his inability or unwillingness to build his country into something greater than the sum of its myriad parts.

Length: 2 hours

5. Yemen's Civil Wars

In 2011 the Arab Spring ousted regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and threatened regime stability in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. The Yemen crisis arguably began before 2011, in fact to the early 1960s and the foundations of the Yemen Arab Republic. Moreover, we cannot talk of one civil war in Yemen, but several occurring at roughly the same time. The lecture employs two approaches in its study of Yemen's war: one is chronological, dividing the conflicts into six

phases. The other dissects the Yemen wars by examining domestic, regional and international actors in terms of their goals and strategies.

Length: 2 hours

6. Will There Be Another South Yemen?

The briefing examines whether Yemen's catastrophic civil war will ultimately result in the country's partition, analyzing the deep historical, tribal, sectarian, and socioeconomic fault lines that have plagued this impoverished nation. The presentation traces Yemen's complex origins from the post-Ottoman collapse through Britain's contradictory colonial legacy culminating in the establishment of Marxist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the South creating an unbridgeable cultural and political chasm with the conservative North. The briefing details how the hasty 1990 unification, driven more by economic desperation than genuine national consensus, quickly deteriorated into the 1994 Civil War embedding resentments that still fester today. The analysis examines President Saleh's kleptocratic rule that exacerbated regional inequalities contributing to rise of the Houthi Shia movement and their transformation into an Iranian-backed insurgent force. The presentation chronicles post Arab Spring power vacuum and the followed all-out proxy war. Critical attention is given to the fatal contradictions within the anti-Houthi coalition, revealing how coalition partners pursue incompatible goals that undermine military effectiveness.

Length: 1 hour

Iraq

1. Iraq: An Historical and Political Overview

Iraq and its myriad crises continue to intrude on American politics long after the 2011 withdrawal of most U.S. forces. This lecture provides an introduction to the modern history of Iraq by examining the post-World War I origins of this country, the rise and fall of Arab nationalism in Iraq, and the consequences of the 2003 US invasion. Students then explore Iraq's complicated ethnic and sectarian politics which continue to threaten the very survival of the state. This course also situates Iraq in the broader framework of Middle East power politics by examining its relations with Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Length: 2 hours

Iran

Culture and Regions

1. Iran: Ethnic & Religious Minorities

Iran is an ethnically and religiously diverse state bound by a shared culture and the legacy of 1,500 years of history. This presentation examines Iran's ethnic and religious minorities in terms of their histories, numbers, and grievances. It analyzes Iran as a *civilization* - a multi-ethnic entity bound by ties of culture and history. Finally, the presentation delves into Iranian ethnic and religious separatist movements, including their goals, capabilities, and success (or lack thereof). The ultimate question, of course, is whether Iran will continue to thrive as a unified state in the twenty-first century.

Length: 1 hour

2. Iran's Ethnic Power Keg: Azeris, Kurds, Baloch, and Arabs

The briefing analyzes ethnic diversity of Iran and the potential for the US military to engage with some of the minority groups in the country. The briefing focuses on specific characteristics of each group (history, identity, religion, demographics), strategic importance of their inhabited geographic area, grievances with the Ayatollahs' regime, and the insurgency threat assessment. The briefing describes various political and militant groups, including PDKI, Jaish al-Adl, ASMLA and others and the extent of their confrontation with Tehran.

Length: 1 hour

3. Iranian Cultures through Folklore

Folklore is the ways we express our affiliations and identities through songs, stories, performance, customs, and traditions, which we then pass down through the generations. As such, folklore can teach us much about the places, peoples, and cultures from which they originate. This course will introduce students to the functions and types of Iranian folklore, its rich historical and socio-cultural contexts, and its continuing relevance in the world today. Through completing this course, students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Iranian cultures and traditions (such as oral epic, folk narratives, proverbs, jokes, and customs), and improve their ability to communicate cross-culturally in Persian/Farsi-speaking world.

Length: 1 hour

History

4. Critical Events in Modern Iranian History

Few countries have experienced a more turbulent recent history than Iran. Only one hundred years ago Iran was a stagnant, agricultural economy ruled by a decaying dynasty with little will or capability to reform itself or the country. But then came a period of staggering changes, both constructive and destructive. From 1925 until 2025 Iran has had only four rulers. Yet those four rulers presided over a period of dramatic political, economic and social changes whose consequences are still being played out in Iran today.

Length: 1 hour

5. The Iran-Iraq War: The Iranian Perspective

The 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War was the longest conventional conflict of the twentieth century. Consuming up to a million lives on both sides, and injuring many more, the war scarred a generation while sowing the seeds for future wars in the region. This presentation examines the war from the Iranian perspective. It explores the war's origins and analyzes how it continued to influence Iranian politics, society and military strategy decades later. From a historical perspective, the Iran-Iraq War was a decisive moment in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Length: 1 hour

Domestic Policy

1. Iran: Who's Afraid of a Velvet Revolution?

Ever since the 1979 Revolution ushered in the Islamic Republic of Iran the state has been rocked by periodic mass protest movements and the occasional insurgency. Since the late 1990s the regime has become obsessed with what it terms 'velvet revolutions' – mass citizen disobedience that could swamp the internal security system and overthrow the government. As a result of this focus on peaceful protests for regime change, the Islamic Republic has honed an internal security strategy that revolves around a pervasive, layered security apparatus and the manipulation of publicly available information. It has tried to delegitimize most forms of dissent as 'un-Islamic' and 'CIA-backed'. This presentation examines Iran's velvet revolution fears and places them in the broader context of recent events in that country's history.

Length: 1 hour

2. Sources of Iranian Behavior

Ever since the 1978-79 Islamic Revolution Iran has been a frustrating enigma for U.S. policymakers. This course explores some of the factors underpinning Iran's behavior in the international arena, including its powerful sense of former greatness, its perceived entitlement to regional (if not international) leadership, and the role that Shi'a Islam plays in framing this worldview. The course focuses heavily on those Persian cultural elements of which Iranians are justifiably proud such as poetry, the arts, architecture and aesthetics in general. All of these have shaped a country that is at once intensely proud – even boastful – of its accomplishments and yet hypersensitive on matters of national honor.

Length: up to 8 hours

3. The View from Tehran

What if you had the opportunity to meet an Iranian diplomat and gave him or her an hour to outline Iran's perspective on the world? This course incorporates a role-playing scenario whereby the instructor/senior Iranian diplomat presents a savvy, sophisticated *tour d'horizon* that includes Iranian perceptions of the US, Iran's view on the global nuclear weapons 'monopoly', Israel and its right to exist, and Tehran's approach to the international system.

Length: 1 hour

4. Who Rules Iran?

Iran has an 'opaque' political system where crucial decisions are often made behind the scenes. This presentation tries to get to the bottom of the thorny question: *Who rules Iran?* It does so by differentiating between formal and informal decision-making centers. The picture that emerges is one of a highly complex, nuanced and unwieldy power structure with numerous 'nodes' of authority such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the Supreme Leader's office, parastatal foundations called the Bonyads, and key elements of the clerical establishment.

Length: 1 hour

5. A Survey of the Current Iranian Leadership

This lecture examines the biographies and personalities of several key Iranian leaders. It does not explain the system of Iranian government, but rather attempts to focus on personalities, rivalries, and friendships among the elite. The following individuals are investigated: (1) Ayatollah Ali Khamenei; (2) Ayatollah Ali Jannati; (3) President Masoud Pezeshkian; (4) IRGC commander Mohamed Pakpur; (5) Ali Larijani. Conclusions are offered regarding the personal style of Iranian leadership and those areas of major differences over policy.

Length: 1 hour

6. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was born in the crucible of the 1979 Revolution. It grew in size, missions, and influence throughout the eight-year war with Iraq. When that war ended in 1988, the IRGC was sufficiently large and influential that it escaped plans for its dismantling. To the contrary, the peacetime IRGC extended its tentacles into the national economy while developing Iran's weapons of mass destruction and honing an unconventional warfare capability that is the envy of its neighbors. The IRGC's power today has reached such proportions that some foreign observers have begun to talk about a de facto 'IRGC takeover' of the state itself.

Length: 1 hour

Foreign Policy

1. The Greater Prize: Iranian Policies toward Iraq

From its birth in 1922 as a British Mandate Iraq has always played an outsized role in Iranian foreign policy. This is due to a common border (Iran's longest), shared history and faith, and an ethno-linguistic conflict that goes back centuries. This presentation examines several topic areas: the geography of a shared border, the dynamics of shrine cities, seminaries and the Shi'a faith, and Iran's national security dilemmas in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The presentation concludes on a cautionary note: Iran's ability to manipulate and influence the course of Iraqi politics should not be overestimated. Indeed, if there is one thing the United States should have learned from its 2003 to 2011 military involvement is the notorious complexity of Iraqi politics and the fractious nature of its people. Although the importance of Iraq for Iranian national security should not be gainsaid, Iran's actual ability to shape events in its neighbor is actually quite limited.

Length: 1 hour

2. Iran in Syria: Friends in Need, Friends Indeed?

In late 2011, as revolts swept most of his cities including his capital, Damascus, Syrian President Bashar al-Asad called on his Iranian ally for assistance. The Qods Force Commander, Major General Qassem Soleimani, soon was a regular visitor to Damascus, where he enjoyed access to key Syrian decision-makers. Indeed, Iranian aid let Asad weather the multiple crises that imperiled his regime since 2011. This presentation examines the nature of the Iran-Syria alliance and its origins. Both countries derived significant advantages from this relationship, although the locus of power is now heavily in favor of Iran. Still, in light of Asad's December 2024 removal from power, the future of Syria's presumed debts to Iran is very much in doubt.

Length: 1 hour

3. Iran and Afghanistan: Myths and Realities

Throughout much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Iraq played a more prominent role in Iranian foreign policy than Afghanistan. Still, Tehran would ignore its eastern borders at its peril, especially in the aftermath of the Taliban's triumphant return to power in 2021. This lecture examines Iran's relationship with Afghanistan from the perspective of geography, history, Iran's national interests and goals, and the broader context of Iran's relations with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, India, and China.

Length: 1 hour

4. Iran and North Korea: Dimensions of an Unlikely Military Alliance

In February 2002 then-U.S. President George W. Bush designated Iraq, Iran and North Korea as constituent members of an 'axis of evil'. Nearly twenty-five years later, Iran and North Korea are still called 'rogue states' by U.S. officials. Since they share a common adversary in the United States it should not surprise us that Tehran and Pyongyang have cooperated in a number of fields, including ballistic missile development, naval weapons, and weapons of mass destruction. This presentation offers an overview of the Iran-North Korea partnership as seen from the perspective of their respective national security interests.

Length: 1 hour

5. One Iranian Perspective on America: A Role Play

Sometimes when assessing another country's strengths, weaknesses, and behavior patterns it is useful "to put ourselves in their shoes" for a moment and look at the world around us. This lecture tries to depict the United States from the perspective of a senior official in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Intelligence Directorate. As the narrative unfolds in a role play, Colonel Ali Reza Haghiatdoost, informs his leadership about the growing weaknesses of the United States in 2025. The intent of the presentation is not intended to provoke – far from it. If we allow ourselves to look at the world from another's perspective we must, by necessity, suspend our own judgements. The lecture draws on recent speeches by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as source material for its findings.

Length: 1 hour

6. Iran and Russia: "The Enemy of My Enemy..."

Persia and Russia are old rivals. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they fought wars that ultimately cost Iran dearly in lost lands. Their rivalry extended to the twentieth century as

well, after Iran joined a pro-Western alliance aimed at containing the Soviet Union called the Central Treaty Organization. Moscow warmly greeted the 1979 Iranian Revolution, believing wrongly that it would be the primary beneficiary. Iran-Russia relations improved in the 1990s, although several things needed to happen first, including the end of the Iran-Iraq War (1988), the death of Ayatollah Khomeini (1989), and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991). A new relationship emerged built purely on national interests. Indeed, there is very little actual trust or warm sentiment here. Those shared interests include a common enemy – the United States – the benefits of trade, and mutual diplomatic support.

Length: 1 hour

National Security

1. Iran's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs

Iran has consistently been in the spotlight mainly because of its pursuit of nuclear weapons. This course examines the likely rationale for Iran's research into and possible production of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems. Using publicly available information, each WMD program is carefully detailed both in terms of infrastructure and potential wartime use.

Length: 1 hour

2. Iran's Axis of Resistance: The Proxy Warfare from Lebanon to Yemen

The presentation describes Iranian "belt of security" established by Tehran through financing, training, and supplying various militant groups in the Middle East. The presentation looks into command, control, and coordination tactics employed by Iran to advance its strategic goals and synchronize response to the US and Israeli security measures. The presentation reviews in detail the potential and connections between Iran and its main proxies, including Hezbollah, Iraqi PMF, Houthis, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and others.

Length: 1 hour

3. The Strait of Hormuz in Iranian Strategy

Up to 20% of the world's oil traffic transits the Strait of Hormuz on any given day. Given its dominant position astride the Strait, Iran has periodically threatened to close the Strait in the event of a crisis with the United States and/or its allies and partners. Can Iran close the Strait and, if so, for how long? What would the US need to do to lift the siege? This presentation attempts to answer these and other questions as it places the Strait of Hormuz in the larger context of Iranian national security strategy.

Length: 1 hour

4. Iranian Intelligence Organizations

The Islamic Republic of Iran has one of the largest intelligence communities in the Middle East. As is the case in many other countries, Iranian intelligence is hampered by overlapping missions and fierce bureaucratic rivalries. The primary mission of the Iranian Intelligence Community (IIC) is internal security in general, but the safety of the clerical regime in particular. To that end, the IIC conducts intelligence collection at home and abroad, counterintelligence, and covert operations. This presentation offers an introduction to Iranian intelligence and its evolution from the Shah-era SAVAK to the dual-agency system that exists today. At the apex of the IIC are the Intelligence Ministry and the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Organization. It is no coincidence that both are run by clerics.

Length: 1 hour

5. Topics in Iranian Geography

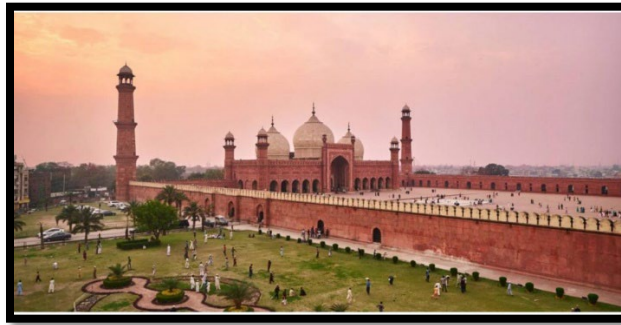
A glance at any terrain map of Iran reveals a country dominated by several large mountain chains, two expansive internal deserts, and a general lack of rivers or lakes. This forbidding geography has not prevented the Iranians from creating advanced civilizations on their arid, upland plateau. Still, Iranian governance is difficult, and the ability of central rulers to control the outlying regions has always been hindered by distance and terrain. This presentation examines these topics in Iranian geography while also exploring how the Iranian peoples have learned to adapt to and exploit their rugged landscape.

Length: 1 hour

6. Iran's Cyber Wars

Iran's pursuit of an offensive cyberwar capability can be traced back to 2010, when the Stuxnet virus began disabling thousands of computers linked to the Iranian nuclear program. Since then, the Iranians have developed an increasingly sophisticated array of cyber weapons such as spear phishing, wiper viruses, botnets, and distributed denial of service attacks. This lecture briefly examines the evolution of Iran's offensive cyberwar effort and places it within the broader context of Iran's national security strategy. The lecture examines how and why the U.S. and Iran have been waging cyber-attacks on each other even though neither is technically in a state of war. Each is still probing the other's red lines on when cyber-attacks are "permissible" (i.e. limited retaliation) in peace time and when they are not (triggers for war).

Length: 1 hour



Pakistan

Culture and Regions

1. Pakistan's Cultural Diversity: The Struggle for National Identity

Forged in 1947 on the principle that being Muslim was sufficient to build a nation state, Pakistan has struggled to define itself ever since. Yet, as this course emphasizes, the common thread running throughout Pakistan's tumultuous history has been cultural diversity. Pakistan is home to numerous ethnic groups, speaking different languages, practicing different customs and often cherishing their own conceptions of history. Moreover, while Pakistan was founded as a homeland for the Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent, this course drives home the crucial observation that Pakistani Islam is far from monolithic. Indeed, the very conflicts that are tearing the country apart today stem from different interpretations of religion, state and society. Pakistan is still very much a nation state in the making, struggling to define a new 'supra-national' identity for its vast and diverse population.

Length: this course can be tailored to student time and preference.

2. Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas

Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) first gained some prominence in the United States media following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks and U.S. involvement in neighboring Afghanistan. Tragically for its inhabitants the FATA was not well understood in Pakistan itself let alone the wider world. This course bridges some of these gaps by exploring the FATA in terms of its geography, culture, recent history, as well as the multiple insurgencies tormenting this region today. Students gain a better understanding of why the FATA matters, especially with regard to the long-term viability of the Pakistani state and U.S. national security interests.

Length: up to 8 hours

3. An Introduction to the Culture and History of the Baluch People

The Baluch are one of the least understood peoples in Asia, yet they inhabit a strategically vital region extending from eastern Iran through Afghanistan to Pakistan. This presentation examines the Baluch through the related areas of ethnicity, language, customs, and religion. Students are then introduced to the modern history of the Baluch by examining how the Baluch lands were divided by outside powers and their separate destinies placed under the aegis of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Many Baluch yearn for greater autonomy yet this desire is manifested differently depending on geographical circumstances. For example, Baluch unrest in Pakistan is a distinctly nationalist phenomenon where religious identity is largely subsumed. The opposite is true of Iran where the guiding ideology of Baluch resistance is religion: Salafi insurgents versus a Shi'a-dominated Iranian state.

Length: 1 hour

4. Pakistan's Kashmir Territories: Myths and Realities

The status of Jammu and Kashmir have been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan since their birth in August 1947. More is known about India's larger Kashmir state, since it has been the scene of several wars with Pakistan not to mention an ongoing insurgency and terrorist campaigns. On the other hand, we know very little about Pakistan's 'rump Kashmir' – the two regions it administers pending a 'final resolution' of the Kashmir conflict. This presentation examines the historical, political, and legal foundations of Pakistani rule in two areas of the 'historic Kashmir' run by Islamabad: Azad ('Free') Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. This presentation also explores some of the hypocrisy inherent to Pakistan's position on the Kashmir dispute: although the Pakistani government is officially dedicated to the notion of a free and fair plebiscite that will permit all Kashmiris to join Pakistan (an assumed outcome), it nonetheless denies the peoples of 'its' Kashmir freedom of speech and assembly.

Length: 1 hour

History

1. A Brief History of Pakistan: 1947 to the Present

Pakistan dominated U.S. news headlines for well over a decade, starting with its nuclear tests in 1998 and continuing with the military coup of 1999, the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, and its role in Afghanistan after 9/11. Unfortunately, Pakistan's history is not well-known in the West, despite its increasing importance on the global stage. This course examines Pakistan's political history with a focus on the larger problems of national identity, the country's deadly feuds with neighboring India, and the general failure of Pakistan's political elites to create a stable, viable and prosperous country.

Length: up to 12 hours

National Security

1. Pakistan's Endless Quest for Security

This course examines Pakistan as the epitome of a 'National Security State'. A systematic approach is employed whereby students 'get into the shoes' of Pakistani security officials as they define threats to national security both foreign and domestic. Next, the course examines Pakistan's national security objectives – i.e. what do the country's elites seek? Finally, the course examines the different elements of Pakistan's national security strategy – diplomacy, information, military, economics and covert action. Additional attention is devoted to Pakistan's military and covert strategies in the related realms of nuclear weapons, conventional force modernization and unconventional warfare.

Length: up to 8 hours

2. Insurgency as an Instrument of State Policy: Pakistan

Accomplishing ambitious policy objectives with limited means is a dilemma confronting most states in the world today, especially those surrounded by powerful neighbors. From its birth in the bloody Partition of British India in 1947 the Pakistani state has grappled with myriad security problems posed by its much larger Indian neighbor and adversary. One tool to offset Indian military and economic superiority has been Pakistan's use of insurgency as a tool of state policy. From Pakistan's perspective, unconventional warfare helps negate some of India's manpower advantages by tying it down in costly and time-intensive counter-insurgency warfare in Kashmir and the northeast tribal belts. Pakistan's pursuit of insurgency against India has not been cost free, however. At times it has sparked wars between both countries. Pakistan's use of insurgent surrogates has often boomeranged against it, endangering internal security and undermining an already fragile economy.

Length: 1 hour

3. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence: A Brief History

Over the last 30 years ISI has become one of the most well-known – and notorious – intelligence agencies in the world. This is due mainly to its use of unconventional warfare as a strategy to oust India from Kashmir and the foreign coalition from Afghanistan. As this brief history points out, ISI also is a domestic player with extensive powers to harass, intimidate, incarcerate, and even murder Pakistanis deemed threats to 'national security'. This presentation concludes that ISI's power stems from the Army's dominant position within Pakistan. ISI is not a rogue agency, but rather a loyal handmaiden of the Army-dominated State.

Length: 1 hour

4. How Kashmir's 'Liberation Wars' became Irrelevant

Ideology is an indispensable feature of modern insurgencies. Not only does it provide the justification for armed struggle, but also a promising vision of the future. It is difficult to imagine the Viet Cong insurgency absent Marxism-Leninism and Vietnamese nationalism just as Deobandism was instrumental to the success of the Taliban in 1990s Afghanistan. Starting in the late 1980s and extending well into the first decades of the twenty-first century several insurgent groups fought for the national 'liberation' of Indian-held Kashmir or, the creation of an Islamic State there. This presentation examines how Pakistan hijacked the Kashmir nationalist agenda for its own ends and ultimately mired the prospects for a 'free Kashmir' in a savage terrorist war fought in the main by non-Kashmir jihadi groups like *Lashkar-e Taiba* and *Jaish-e Mohammed*.

Length: 1 hour



Afghanistan

Geography & Geopolitics

1. The Geography of Afghanistan: An Overview

It is often tempting to skip over geography when it comes to foreign area studies yet, as this presentation reminds us, geography is destiny. It shapes a given community's history, trading relationships, culture, language and, above all, identity. Perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than Afghanistan, where mountainous terrain, vast deserts, and harsh climates forge numerous local communities whose mistrust of outsiders is proverbial. This course provides a useful overview of Afghanistan's physical and political geography with a special emphasis on that country's history, economic prospects, and cultural diversity.

Length: 4 hours

Culture and Regions

1. Problems of Afghan Identity

Like many states in Africa and Asia, Afghanistan's leaders struggle to define an all-encompassing national identity for their country's myriad ethnicities, religious sects and tribes. Indeed, in many aspects, the struggle for Afghanistan that extended from 2001 to 2021 was a political struggle in which key identity issues like the role of Islam in society and politics and managing the country's ethnic divide were debated in tribal councils, government offices, law courts, universities and the battlefield. What is Afghanistan? What does being an Afghan mean? Students quickly learn that the answers to these questions are more complex than they first appear.

Length: up to 4 hours

2. The Role of Ethnicity in Afghanistan

This course introduces students to the complex issue of ethnicity in Afghanistan. Ethnicity is first placed in its proper Afghan context as a term referring to language and/or religious sect rather than ‘race’ as it is understood in the United States. Next, students examine some of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan including the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Nuristanis, Baluchis and others. Finally, the course emphasizes that ethnicity has increasingly become an important driver of conflict in Afghanistan in recent decades as a result of foreign invasion, civil wars, and the influx of new ideas about nationalism and the nation state. Ultimately, the idea of being ‘Afghan’ is being challenged by competing ‘sub-nationalities’ intent on either greater autonomy within Afghanistan or outright independence.

Length: Up to 8 hours

3. A Guide to Pashtun Tribes

U.S.-led coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan have learned the fundamental lesson that successful counterinsurgency efforts pivot around understanding tribal structures, legal codes, and histories. The Pashtun people of Afghanistan and Pakistan represent one of the world’s most enduring tribal societies in spite of – or because of – successive invasions and occupations by outsiders. The Pashtun tribal structures are notoriously complex and often contradictory. This course tries to shed some light on Pashtun tribal society by examining the primary elements of tribal structure, the division of tribes and clans, tribal leadership, and the tribal code called *Pashtunwali*. The course concludes by noting the important nexus between tribe and insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Length: 2 hours

4. Afghan Customs and Beliefs

The conventional wisdom is that Afghanistan is a diverse society with irreconcilable ethnic and religious differences. This course suggests otherwise by examining those customs, behaviors, and beliefs that many Afghans hold in common. Among these we find similar attitudes to time, negotiating behavior, honor, fatalism, and the pivotal importance of personal vice institutional relationships. As the U.S.-led international coalition in Afghanistan learned repeatedly, understanding the Afghan perspective and adapting to Afghan methods of doing business were essential to creating a viable, enduring Afghan government.

Length: 8 hours (it can be tailored to customer time requirements)

5. An Introduction to Pashtun Poetry

Literature often aids cultural understanding, since it imparts valuable insights on social mores, group consciousness, identity, gender, religious belief, family life and other concepts. This course introduces the students to Pashtun poetry and the role it has played in defining a unique Pashtun identity. Students read English translations of two prominent Pashtun poets: Khushal Khan Khattak and Rahman Baba; they examine the themes pervading each poet's works such as mysticism and Pashtun disunity. The course also examines the role that poetry plays in the present-day Islamist discourse in Afghanistan by focusing on how the Taliban used poetry to recruit and inspire their fighters.

Length: 1 hour

6. Who are Afghanistan's Kuchis? (And why do they matter?)

Several decades ago, Western anthropologists confidently predicted the demise of nomadism in Afghanistan. Yet nomadism is alive and well in Afghanistan today, and foreign aid workers and soldiers have remarked on the large numbers of Kuchis (Afghan nomads) transiting the country. This lecture examines several aspects of Kuchi culture including their settlement and migration patterns, the role that women play in Kuchi society, the often conflicted relationship between the Afghan state and its Kuchi population, and the attitudes toward Kuchis found among other Afghans.

Length: 2 hours

7. Islam in Afghanistan

This course provides an overview of Islam as it has been practiced in Afghanistan. Students learn how Islam spread in Afghanistan via the outreach of Sufi missionaries and, to a lesser extent, fire and sword. The conversion of Afghanistan to Islam was a lengthy process that did not really culminate until the end of the nineteenth century, with the forced conversion of the Kafiri tribes in the northeast. Students learn how the interpretation of Islam shifted especially in the latter half of the twentieth century with the diffusion of Salafist ideologies. A schism emerged in Afghan Islam that pitted 'traditionalists' of a more syncretic Afghan Islam against those 'modernists' who would 'purge' and 'cleanse' Islam of practices like mysticism, dancing, poetry and music.

Length: up to 10 hours

8. An Introduction to Afghan Sufism

Sufism (or mysticism) is essential to understanding Islam as it is practiced in Afghanistan today. This presentation begins with an overview of Sufism in general and how its practices vary widely from North Africa to Indonesia. Next students are introduced to various aspects of

Afghan Sufism, including the main Sufi orders, the role that Sufism played in converting Afghans to Islam, and the stresses imposed on Afghan Sufis with the rise of Islamic reform movements like Deobandism and Salafism. In addition, the course shows how Sufism has influenced the greatest poets of Pashtun and Tajik cultures.

Length: 1 hour

History

1. A History of Afghanistan

When it comes to Afghanistan invaders come and invaders go. It seems as if each successive invader fails to learn from the failures of its predecessor; such indeed was the fate of the United States and its allies after they ousted Afghanistan's Taliban in 2001. This course examines the warp and weft of Afghanistan's history from the earliest invasions by the Persians and Alexander the Great through the creation of the first Afghan Kingdom in 1747 to the Soviet invasion of 1979 and the US-led intervention after 11 September 2001. The course emphasizes some broad themes that permeate Afghan history, including repeated failures to create a strong central authority, the conflicted relationship between government and tribe, and the struggles to define a common Afghan identity.

Length: up to 16 hours

2. The Life of an Afghan Villager

This unique lecture presents recent Afghan history from the perspective of a '40-something' Afghan villager living in the eastern province of Khost. The role play is intended to expose students to the life story of one Afghan man whose narrative of death, dispossession, exile, struggle, and hope is not that unusual for a country that has endured more than three decades of war.

Length: 1 hour

Foreign Policy

1. The Goals and Strategies of Foreign Powers in Afghanistan

If only Afghanistan was an island, where government institutions and a resilient national economy could be created without the hindrance of outside powers. Of course, the reality is very different: Afghanistan is a veritable cross roads and unfortunate battleground where neighboring powers wage their proxy wars against each other. This lecture briefly examines the goals and policies of the most important regional players on the Afghan scene: Pakistan, Iran, India, Russia and China. Ultimately, since the U.S. and its Western allies withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021,

it is these countries that must share the burden of Afghanistan's myriad political, economic, and social problems even as they resume their proxy wars for mastery over the Afghan scene.

Length: 2 hours

2. Iran and Afghanistan: Myths and Realities

Throughout much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries Iraq played a more prominent role in Iranian foreign policy than Afghanistan. Still, Tehran has learned that it cannot ignore its eastern borders. This lecture examines Iran's relationship with Afghanistan from the perspective of geography, history, Iran's national interests and goals, and the broader context of Iran's relations with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, India, and China. The presentation concludes that Iran will continue to pursue core interests in Afghanistan, including the maintenance of an Iran-friendly government in Kabul and economic and political dominance over western Afghanistan.

Length: 1 hour

National Security

1. Afghanistan's Military Culture

This lecture uses the concept of "military culture" as a way of understanding how Afghans fight their wars. Students learn how geography, history, political culture and foreign invaders have shaped an Afghan aptitude for insurgency. Common features of Afghan insurgency are explored in depth and placed in proper context such as the 'shifting alliances' phenomenon, constant negotiation, and the propensity for feuding and constant power struggles.

Length: 1 hour

2. Afghan Intelligence Services: 1978-2025

Confronted by a notoriously fractious society with a long history of revolts, civil wars, and foreign invasions, successive Afghan governments whether royalist, Communist, or Islamist have relied on ruthless security services to stay in power. Indeed, studying the various intelligence services of Afghanistan is a useful introduction to the perils and pitfalls of Afghan politics and foreign relations. This lecture provides a useful overview of the Afghan intelligence and security apparatus. The narrative begins with the early Communist secret police forces and continues through the intelligence apparatus employed by the anti-Soviet guerrillas, the Taliban's notorious security services, and the National Directorate of Security. (NDS). It concludes with a brief assessment of the Taliban's restoration to power in 2021 and the creation of the General Direction of Intelligence.

Length: 2 hours

3. Afghanistan's Logistics Wars

Terrain and climate inevitably shape the nature of the battlefield, and this is certainly true of landlocked, mountainous Afghanistan. Regardless of their resource base, national wealth, conventional military capabilities, and will counter-insurgents in Afghanistan inevitably face the same crucial problem: sustaining a force on the ground and in the air that can neutralize (at best) the insurgent threat while keeping vulnerable lines of communication open to port cities in Pakistan or Russia. Afghanistan's myriad wars against the British, the Soviets, and the U.S.-led coalition represent a superb case study in the formidable challenges of logistics in successful COIN operations.

Length: 1 hour

4. Taliban Information Operations

The Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan is probably best known for his quote: 'the medium is the message'. This is certainly true of the Afghan Taliban and its 'discovery' of the value of information operations. This presentation examines how the Taliban not only evolved its message but the means through which it conveyed that message from its relatively primitive approach of the mid-1990s to the sophisticated 'media blitz' operations of the mid-2000s. The presentation concludes by placing the Taliban's IO campaign within the larger framework of its goals and strategies.

Length: 1 hour

5. Counter-Leadership Targeting in COIN: The Case of the Taliban

The growing literature on COIN illustrates the value of capturing, killing, or otherwise neutralizing the political leadership of a given insurgency group. For example, when Ernesto 'Ché' Guevara tried to foment an insurgency in Bolivia in the late 1960s, his capture and execution by U.S.-led Bolivian Rangers put an effective end to insurgency in that country for decades. This study examines how the Soviets tried – and failed – to target insurgent leadership in Afghanistan during the 1980s.

Length: 1 hour



Central Asia

1. A Century of Nation Building

What is a ‘nation state’? How are nation states built? How do they fall apart? Political scientists have tried to answer these questions with the broad rubric of ‘state formation’. This course examines how the five states of the former Soviet Central Asia were created on the basis of classic imperial ‘divide and conquer’ strategies. Each of the so-called ‘Stans’ was developed around a core ‘national’ group which was vested with all the accoutrements of a modern nation state – ‘ethnicity’, language, customs, common history – except political independence. With the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union these states became more or less politically independent yet each has confronted serious and fundamental challenges linked to weak national identity.

Length: 4 hours

2. Uzbekistan: The Dilemmas of Reform

The largest of the Central Asian republics in terms of population, Uzbekistan also enjoys the rather dubious distinction of being one of only two double-landlocked states in the world (each of its neighbors is landlocked as well). This lecture briefly examines how the Uzbekistan state was created at the hands of Soviet ‘nationalities experts’ in the 1920s. It then explores some of the most notorious aspects of the Islam Karimov era, including a fierce suppression of independent political expression. We then transition to the Uzbekistan of 2025 and assess its future in terms of economic and political development.

Length: 1 hour

3. Kyrgyzstan: The Politics of a Failing State

The republics of the former Soviet Central Asia are notorious for their authoritarian presidents who seem destined to serve for life terms. In this context, Kyrgyzstan is something of an outlier:

it is politically turbulent with three revolutions over fifteen years. Kyrgyzstan does have some vestiges of democracy, such as routine elections, but these are tainted by allegations of bribery and nepotism. This lecture examines some of the challenges confronting Kyrgyzstan's fractious and enfeebled political establishment, including its weak national identity, chronic poverty and indebtedness, clan and regional conflicts, powerful mafias, not to mention two powerful neighbors, Russia and China.

Length: 1 hour

4. Kyrgyzstan: National Security Issues

Kyrgyzstan's threat perceptions are mainly shaped by internal factors, such as a largely dormant Islamist insurgency and restless ethnic minorities. A small developing state in the heart of Asia, Kyrgyzstan can afford only a modest army and air force. It tries to purchase a modicum of security by cultivating close ties with China and especially Russia. Kyrgyzstan is also a minor player in two regional security pacts: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Key questions for Kyrgyz national security decision-makers revolve around the crisis in Afghanistan. For example, how will Bishkek respond to a revived Islamist insurgency that takes its inspiration from the stunning Taliban victory in August 2021?

Length: 1 hour

5. Tajikistan: A Country Overview

The briefing provides a comprehensive overview of Tajikistan, Central Asia's poorest and most fragile state, its geography, natural resources, ethnic composition and demographics, regional security dynamics, and a clan-based power structure. It also provides a detailed description of the restive Pamir region with unique ethnic, religious, and linguistic specifics, that continues to create center-periphery tensions threatening national cohesion. The presentation explores Tajikistan's Soviet-era political system legacy and the role of Russian language. The briefing assesses the country's control of Central Asia's freshwater resources which is both strategic asset and source of regional conflict. The briefing provides detailed analysis of the 1992-1997 civil war and the rise of authoritarianism. Critical attention is given to Russia's military presence, relations with Taliban, and the expansion of BRI and China's growing footprint, including military cooperation.

Length: 1 hour

6. China in Central Asia: From Economic Control to Political Manipulation

The briefing analyzes China's systematic expansion of influence across Central Asia, documenting Beijing's strategic displacement of Russia as the region's dominant external power through mechanisms that extend far beyond economic engagement into sophisticated political

manipulation and social control. The presentation examines how China leverages the "Three Evils" framework to align Central Asian governments with its security priorities. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has engineered economic dependence via strategic trade agreements, extensive resource extraction, and the controversial transfer of polluting and toxic semi-manufacturing operations that Central Asian states accept due to their weak negotiating positions. The briefing explores China's deployment of soft power instruments including cultural programs, media influence, and educational exchanges, complemented by expanding military cooperation that enhances Beijing's security footprint across the region. Particularly concerning is China's export of "Smart City" surveillance technologies that reinforce authoritarian governance structures, creating digital control systems that serve both host governments and Chinese intelligence interests. The analysis highlights the critical disconnect between Central Asian populations—who increasingly view Chinese influence with suspicion and resentment—and their governments, which remain captured by Beijing through elite co-optation strategies involving personal enrichment, political protection, and strategic corruption that ensures leadership compliance with Chinese objectives while undermining regional sovereignty and long-term stability.

Length: 1 hour

7. Fergana Valley: The Hotbed of Ethnic Tensions in Central Asia

The briefing examines Central Asia's most volatile flashpoint, where unique geographic constraints, extreme ethnic fragmentation, and acute resource scarcity converge to create persistent instability threatening regional security. The briefing traces the historic-political origins of ethnic tensions from Tsarist colonization through Soviet nationality policies to post-independence power struggles, while examining how stark economic disparities, youth unemployment, rapid demographic growth, and competition over increasingly scarce freshwater resources fuel intercommunal violence. Particular attention is given to the issues of ethnic enclaves including limited access to water, road connections to their home countries, and economic opportunities lead to periodic eruptions of deadly ethnic violence that have claimed thousands of lives since 1989. The analysis further explores how the Soviet collapse created an ideological vacuum rapidly filled by Islamic fundamentalism, driving the spread of radical Islamist movements and militant groups throughout the Fergana Valley establishing the region as a breeding ground for extremism that threatens stability and security way beyond Central Asia.

Length: 1 hour

8. Persian Triangle: The Prospects of Shia Insurgence and Influence of Iran in Central Asia

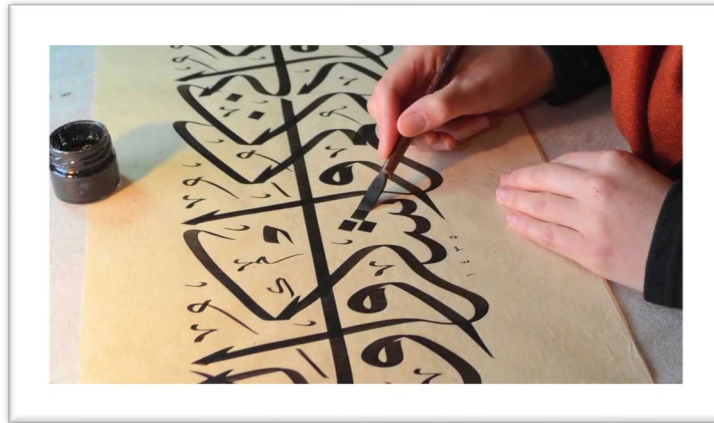
The briefing assesses Iran's potential for expanding sectarian influence across Central Asia by examining the strategic positioning of Shia populations and Tehran's evolving relationships with

regional states, particularly focusing on areas where religious identity intersects with ethnic grievances and geopolitical competition. The presentation maps significant Shia minorities beyond Iran's borders—including communities in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Critical attention is given to the unique situation in Tajikistan's Pamir region, where the Ismaili Shia population has maintained tense relations with Dushanbe since 1992-97 civil war increasing the prospects for Iran's involvement. The analysis traces Iran-Tajikistan relations from post-Soviet optimism through current ambivalence. It also looks at Dushanbe's deep suspicions of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and the paradoxical reality that both Shia communities and the Taliban find common cause against ISIS's Wahhabi extremism, creating strange-bedfellow dynamics where Tehran and the Taliban share tactical counterterrorism interests even as fundamental ideological and strategic tensions—including water rights, refugee flows, and border security—threaten cooperation, ultimately revealing how sectarian identity, ethnic solidarity, and pragmatic economic-political calculations create a complex matrix that could either constrain or enable Iranian influence.

Length: 1 hour

9. Central Asia in Crosshairs of Riyadh and Tehran

The briefing analyzes the intensifying geopolitical competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran for influence across Central Asia, examining how both powers exploit the region's unique post-Soviet vulnerabilities such as identity crises following decades of enforced atheism, economic underdevelopment, and authoritarian governance to advance divergent political and economic objectives that reshape Central Asian society and threaten regional stability. The presentation details Saudi Arabia's initially effective "mosque diplomacy" strategy to establish patronage over Central Asian states. However, the unintended consequences of Wahhabi radicalization, the growth of extremist movements, and domestic terrorist attacks alarmed secular governments and prompted a sharp reversal in attitudes toward Saudis. The briefing examines how Iran has strategically capitalized by pursuing a more pragmatic approach centered on economic ties, trade agreements, infrastructure connectivity, and cultural diplomacy positing Tehran as a more sustainable influence broker. Length: 1 hour



Islamic Studies

1. *An Introduction to Islam*

This course presents an overview of Islam, including the crucial significance of the Prophet Mohammed, the Revelation of the Qur'an, and the struggles of the early Islamic community in pagan Mecca. Students study how Islam fit within the existing framework of other monotheistic faiths in the Arabian Peninsula, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Other prominent issues include Islamic approaches to art and music; the origins of the Sunni-Shi'a divide, the different schools of *Shari'a*, the diffusion of Islam throughout North Africa, the Near East and Central Asia. Finally, students study how Islamic scholars have struggled with the fundamental challenges of European imperialism, social change, technology, secularism, and nationalism.

Length: This course can be tailored from as little as one to a maximum of ten hours.

2. *What is Salafism?*

Salafism or *al-Salafiya* is an intellectual, theological and social movement that influences Islam in many parts of the world today. Meaning 'way of the ancestors' *al-Salafiya* regards the early Muslim community under Prophet Mohammed and his immediate successors as the essential model for the world's estimated 1.6 billion Muslims today. As such, key elements of Salafism include the 'purging' of local variants of Islam such as mysticism, saint worship, elaborate burial practices, dancing, singing, poetry and clothing. This presentation introduces students to the origins of the modern Salafist movements and how they have impacted on many Islamic communities today including Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia.

Length: 1 hour

3. 'Crusaders, Imperialists and Zionists': A Salafist View of History

While most Americans have been exposed to certain aspects of the 'radical Islamist' debate, particularly as it pertains to 'jihadism' and so-called 'Islamic terror,' few understand the perspective that the Salafists – both non-violent and violent alike – have on history. This lecture presents an opportunity to explore at least one perspective on history in an instructor-led role play. The presentation covers salient issues of the Salafist narrative such as the vital importance of early Muslims as a model for later generations, the impact of the Crusades and the Mongol invasions on Islamic civilization, the European domination of much of the Islamic world, the rise and fall of secular nationalism, and the 'rediscovery' of Islam as a source of inspiration, moral guidance, economic justice and political power during the last fifty years.

Length: 1 hour

4. Shi'ism 101

This lecture offers a basic introduction to Shi'ism. It compares and contrasts Shi'ism with the majority Sunni sect within Islam while exploring the different Shi'a sub-sects. Students learn about key elements in the evolution of Shi'ism over the centuries, such as leadership disputes in the early Islamic era, the rise and fall of powerful dynasties such as the Fatimids and Safavids, the increasing power and influence of the clergy and the religious schools, and the contribution of Ayatollah Khomeini to Shi'a concepts of secular and spiritual leadership. Finally, students will also examine the sectarian aspects of current conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Length: 1 hour

5. The Role and Place of Hanafi School in Islam

The presentation provides a comprehensive analysis of one of the oldest and most widespread schools of Islamic jurisprudence. It traces the school's history and foundational background, exploring its popularization and establishment as a dominant legal tradition during the Golden Age of the Abbasids. The brief delves into the specific methodologies and doctrinal differences that distinguish Hanafi law from other schools, while also addressing the critiques leveled against it. A significant focus is placed on the Ottoman Empire's role in cementing its influence and the school's modern-day relevance, particularly through the lens of the Deobandi and Barelvi sub-schools in South Asia. The analysis extends to the contemporary confrontation between these two movements, their respective paths of radicalization, and their complex alliances with extremist groups like the Taliban and ISIS. Finally, the brief assesses challenges to the traditional Hanafi establishment by the growing doctrinal and political influence of Wahhabism.

Length: 1 hour

Europe & Turkey

U.S. European Command Area of Responsibility



Russia

Geography and Geopolitics

1. Russia's Strategic Geography: A Role Play

This presentation uses a role play format to examine the prospects, challenges and dilemmas of Russia's strategic geography. A notional Russian Army General Staff Colonel presents his country's perspective on Russia's national security problems as well as the country's considerable advantages in natural resources, sheer land mass, and unique presence in both Europe and Asia. The presentation systematically breaks down Russia's strategic geography into four key areas: the Arctic, where Russia anticipates a windfall in revenues from natural gas and oil deposits; the Far East, where Russia is eager to trade on its location as a 'Pacific power' yet equally anxious of a rising China; the South, where Russia has focused on two phobias in recent years: NATO expansion and the spread of what its strategic thinkers call 'Wahhabi extremism'; the West, which is obviously Russia's dominant security concern given its population concentration there, its myriad links to multiple European states, and its abiding determination to thwart any further moves aimed at NATO expansion.

Length: 2 hours

2. The Geopolitics of Great Powers

What makes a great power great? How can we quantify and qualify those ‘ingredients’ that go into making one set of nation states substantially different from others in terms of their relative strength? This presentation series examines those factors which define certain great powers from up-and-comers as well as former great powers. It uses a combination of factors to measure power. Some factors, such as land area, population size, physical terrain, and natural resources, are relatively easy to measure and can be quantified in a measure of a state’s strength. But there is another factor – namely, ‘national will’ or ‘will to power’ that is equally important in measuring great power strengths and weaknesses, yet it is notoriously difficult to quantify in any meaningful manner.

Russia. In terms of land area, natural resources, nuclear weapons, the size of its conventional armed forces, and national will Russia makes a strong case for great power status. Still, its obvious strengths aside, there are factors that undercut Russian power, including its relatively small population, seasonal ice and permafrost, its limited access to the world ocean, and its vast, difficult-to-defend frontiers.

Length: 1 hour

3. Polar Considerations: The Dilemmas of Melting Ice

Climate change is rapidly emerging as the pivotal international security issue of the twenty-first century, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the hitherto neglected regions of the High Arctic. As warmer temperatures melt more ice more countries are examining the possibilities of exploiting the Arctic for maritime transit, natural resource surveys, and natural resource extraction. Some countries, notably Russia, have invested considerable resources in their Arctic presence including new icebreakers and research stations while others like the United States have been relatively passive. This presentation examines the Arctic from three general perspectives: (1) evolving maritime trade patterns; (2) natural resource exploration and extraction; (3) geopolitics. It concludes with a warning: although key players are currently determined to resolve their territorial disputes in the Arctic peacefully this should not be taken for granted over the longer term. Indeed, as new opportunities open up in the melting Arctic for extracting natural gas and oil some countries are backing their sovereign claims with modernized, expanded military forces.

Length: 2 hours

4. Russian Power in the Black Sea

In 2014, Russia invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula, which had been Ukrainian territory since the 1950s. Shortly afterward, the Russian military instigated secessionist unrest in eastern

Ukraine's Russian-language minority. Both of these power moves were part of a larger Russian strategy to dominate the Black Sea region, protect Russia's southern flank, project power into the Middle East, divide NATO, and assert Russia's great power status. This lecture traces the rise and fall of Russian power in the Black Sea during the twentieth century. It details how Russia has restored its power in the region by capturing Crimea and using it as a base for new naval, air, and air defense equipment.

Length: 1 hour

5. Russia in the Baltics: Intimidation, Harassment, Influence

Russia is an ancient player in the Baltic region with a history there that extends over eight hundred years. At the same time, though, Russia influence has waxed and waned, even though Russian leaders believe that control over the Baltics is key to their great power ambitions. In recent years, Russia has dramatically stepped up its game in the region by deploying new military equipment and harassing neighboring states with simulated nuclear strikes, frequent airspace violations, and aggressive intelligence operations. This lecture delves into Russian goals and policies in the Baltics. It also assesses the effectiveness of those policies. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, its position in the Baltic Sea arguably worsened since two hitherto neutral countries – Sweden and Finland – decided to join the NATO alliance.

Length: 1 hour

6. Russia in the Caucasus

Russia has a centuries' old interest in the Caucasus region. Under the Russian Empire and its Soviet successor, Moscow called the shots in both north and south Caucasus. In 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, independence came to the three republics of the South Caucasus. The new Russian Federation still regarded the South Caucasus as lying inside its sphere of influence. At times Moscow has used military pressure to enforce its claims. Still, the region has witnessed the growing involvement of other outside powers including Turkey, China, and the European Union. Together they make it difficult for Russian President Vladimir Putin to restore Russian dominance over the region.

Length: 1 hour

Domestic Policy

1. The Perils of Russian Demography

Under President Putin Russia has reemerged on the world scene with an expansionist foreign policy and the modernization of its conventional military. Still, as this presentation cautions, Russia's strengths should not be over-exaggerated, especially when one examines critical

shortcomings in the Russian economy and its demography. This lecture explores some of the perils and pitfalls of Russia's demographic structure. The country probably will continue to face a declining population and, depending on the scenario, this decline could be either gradual or precipitous. Although Russia has long grappled with the "rich country" problem of declining fertility rates, it also is afflicted by an unusually high mortality rate among working-age males. Combined, these two factors have not only halted the growth in Russian population but, under most scenarios, will contribute to a steep decline in the country's total population. Some estimate a population loss of nearly 80 million between 2020 and 2100.

Length: 1 hour

2. Chechnya: Russia's Achilles Heel

The lecture discusses the conquest of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the resistance of the local population, the policy of Russification, mass deportations and their aftermath during Soviet Union times, the Ossetian-Ingush conflict, the factor of religion, Chechen wars of the 1990s, Kadyrov's clan and its relations with Vladimir Putin, and the current de-facto status of Chechnya within Russian Federation.

Length: 1 hour

3. Russia's Far East: How Close Is Moscow?

This brief describes the history of Russia's Far East as well as its detailed geography and demography of the region, ethnic composition, flora and fauna, natural resources, industrial profile, cosmodrome Vostochny, transportation connections, "Turn to the East" developmental policy, social issues, and political landscape including the rise of opposition and the government's strategy to control it.

Length: 1 hour

4. The Indigenous People of Siberia: The Wealth of Russia

The brief describes the administrative structure of Siberia, the conquest of the region, numerous ethnic groups of Siberia, their history, demography, lifestyle specifics, ethnic origination and specifics, linguistic and cultural characteristics, the effect on russification, the role of these groups in Russian history, and the main religion - shamanism. Special attention is given to the most prominent groups in Siberia such as Yakut/Sakha, Buryat, and Tuva, especially their part in the war in Ukraine.

Length: 1 hour

Foreign Policy

5. Assertive Russia

In 2005 Russian President Vladimir Putin infamously observed that ‘the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster’ of the Twentieth Century. Indeed, with the 1991 collapse of the USSR came a decade of bitter humiliation and weakness at the hands of the West – at least as seen through Putin’s eyes and those of many other Russians. This presentation uses a series of case studies to examine how Russia has attempted to reassert itself in global affairs, including its military operations in Syria, Ukraine, and Georgia as well as strategic forces modernization and stepped-up military exercises. This presentation offers a futures component as well, for it offers several scenarios where Russian adventurism could trigger localized conflict or even global war.

Length: 2 hours

6. China and Russia: Short-Term Allies/Long-Term Rivals?

China’s recent dramatic rise as a global economic and military power has enabled a new multipolar order to emerge. New coalitions are emerging, such as the growing rapprochement between Russia and China, which is clearly aimed at counterbalancing U.S. power and influence. Official Chinese and Russian rhetoric proudly trumpet the emergence of this apparent alliance, however, a closer glance reveals that the Beijing-Moscow relationship is very much a compact of unequals where Russia finds itself in the uncomfortable – and unprecedented – position of junior partner.

Length: 1 hour

7. Russia in Africa: Reviving Old Dreams?

In 1984, the Pentagon’s annual publication *Soviet Military Power* showed Moscow seemingly at the top of its imperial game. Maps and pictures detailed a Soviet military presence in numerous countries around the world from Cuba and Vietnam to Ethiopia and Angola. Yet only seven years later the Soviet Union ceased to exist and its African dreams seems to vanish along with it. As the top successor state with aspirations to take over the old Soviet mantle, Vladimir Putin’s Russian Federation has spent the last six years trying to regain ground lost in Africa since 1991. Unlike its Soviet predecessor, the Russian Federation has little to offer in humanitarian aid and non-military technical assistance. The name of the game today is money, and Russian oligarchs close to Putin are trying to muscle their way into some of the most unlikely countries including Madagascar, the Central African Republic, and Guinea.

Length: 1 hour

8. Russia and the Balkans: Is Russia on Its Way Out?

The brief investigates relations Russia has been nurturing with the Balkan countries, primarily former Yugoslavia, due to political considerations, economic relations, and ethnic and cultural ties. It analyzes the history of Russia's presence in that part of Europe, its involvement in ethnic and political tensions, financial footprint, leverage and an array of tools it uses to influence the region and challenges it encounters in the process.

Length: 1 hour

9. Russia and the Caucasus: Goals and Strategies

The brief describes Russia's conquest of the Caucasus in 18-19th C and instruments it uses to control the region, including military actions, ethnic divisions and deportations, bribes, and other. It discusses the numerous ethnic and territorial conflicts in the region, Russia's role and interest, and their effect on Russia's regional and global political standing. Special attention is given to Chechen wars, invasion of Georgia in 2008, internal Georgian conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh dispute.

Length: 1 hour

10. Russo-Japanese Relations: The Kurile Islands Dispute

Russia and Japan are not only neighbors they also have mutually complementary economies. Japan imports virtually all of its energy while Russia is a top energy exporter. Russia desperately needs foreign investment to recapitalize its Soviet-era infrastructure while Japan is a major source of foreign direct investment around the world. Nonetheless, neither country ranks very high in the other's list of trading partners. As for diplomatic relations, the tone is cordial but rather frosty. So what is the problem? As with many things in this part of the world the Second World War still looms large. At the very end of that conflict the Soviet Union invaded, occupied, and annexed the Kurile Islands chain which border on the Pacific Ocean. Japan has never acknowledged Soviet/Russian sovereignty over four islands in the southern part of the chain. As a consequence, the Kuriles remain a major obstacle to improved Russo-Japanese relations. This lecture examines not only the origins of the Kurile Islands dispute but its consequences for East Asian security as a whole.

Length: 1 hour

11. The Wagner Group: Unleashing Putin's Dogs of War

The Russian state likely sees mercenary groups as a useful way of advancing Russian state interests whether it is backing friendly regimes (Bashar al-Asad, Malian junta), supplanting the West, and, possibly, competing with China. Mercenary force can also be located within the

larger Russian framework of unconventional - or hybrid - warfare where Moscow can use the fig leaf of “plausible deniability” as cover for its use of violence to achieve state objectives without formally committing Russian forces. Finally, the Russian state and its oligarchs are driven by the profit motive. Foreign governments are willing to pay for Russian mercenaries and often that payment comes in the form of natural resources.

Length: 1 hour

12. Transnistria: The State that Isn't

Transnistria is a relatively obscure consequence of the 1991 breakup of the former Soviet Union. In the aftermath of that geopolitical earthquake, the newly independent Russian Federation encouraged “breakaway regions” in several former Soviet states, including Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. In 1992, Transnistria declared its independence from Moldova and it has been backed by Russian money and military assistance ever since. There are three essential reasons that explain Russia’s continued intervention in Transnistria. The most obvious of these is the desire to divide-and-conquer Moldova, an independent state that emerged from the collapse of the USSR. Russia also seeks to thwart Moldova’s membership in NATO and the European Union. Finally, Transnistria gives Moscow leverage over neighboring Ukraine.

Length: 1 hour

13. Russia in Latin America: A Low-Cost, Low-Risk Approach

Over the last century the Soviet/Russian approach to Latin America has been inconsistent. There have been spurts of frenetic activity, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, followed by extended periods of relative inactivity. The Soviet Union made modest inroads primarily through Cuba but also, to a lesser extent, via Nicaragua. The breakup of the USSR resulted in a diminished Russia that spent much of the 1990s trying to grapple with economic collapse and a drastically reduced military position. As a consequence, aid for Cuba all but dried up. Beset as it was by domestic problems and international concerns that had higher priority, Putin’s Russia was slow to return to Latin America in any meaningful fashion. Russian engagement with the region ramped up after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and NATO’s Bucharest Declaration, which promised future membership for Georgia and Ukraine.

Length: 1 hour

National Security

14. Strategic Forces Modernization

China and Russia view nuclear weapons as essential pillars of their drive for great power status. Therefore, it is not surprising that both are spending a great deal of resources and time on

updating their strategic forces to include: mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, hypersonic glide re-entry vehicles, new ballistic missile submarines, supersonic cruise missiles, and stealth bombers. The United States faces a major force modernization of its own having postponed or cancelled many programs during the post-Cold War ‘peace dividend’. Finally, this presentation examines the strategic nuclear capabilities of several other, albeit smaller powers, including the United Kingdom, France, Israel, India, and North Korea. The presentation concludes with an overview of the US National Missile Defense program and the seeming commitment by all of the existing nuclear-armed powers to some form of Mutually Assured Destruction.

Length: 2 hours

15. Russia’s Hybrid Warfare Strategy

Russia’s post-Cold War transformation from cooperative neighbor of the West to increasing belligerence roughly coincides with the rise of an apparently new Russian way of war. As this presentation explains, the so-called ‘hybrid warfare’ strategy is largely a Western label applied to various examples of covert statecraft that Russia has utilized in various forms for centuries. The big change vector, however, has been information technology which has enabled Russia to distort, disfigure, and misinform in ways it could only dream about during the Cold War. Several case studies are used to examine ‘hybrid warfare’ in its various manifestations including the cyberattack on Estonia in 2007, the 2014 crises in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, Russia’s intervention in the Syrian Civil War, and, most recently, Russia’s effort to influence the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections. The presentation concludes with a concise examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘hybrid warfare’ approach.

Length: 2 hours

16. Russia’s Cyberwar: The Expanding Frontline

The brief describes strategy and tactics Russia uses to expand its presence in the cyberspace and the posed threats. It accesses the role of Vulcan group as well as other government-funded or government-connected enterprises and research centers in developing specific tools for cyberattacks, assesses the importance of cybersecurity through specific examples, discusses the involvement and role of GRU/Main Intelligence Directorate and its connections to most notorious hacker groups inside and outside of Russia, and describes the evolution of hacker strategies and methods.

Length: 1 hour

17. Overview of Russia’s “Near Abroad” Military Bases

The brief provides a detailed overview of all Russian military bases in former Soviet republics, including bases equipment and defense potential, analyzes their importance for Russian state

security, and assesses their prospects from political, economic, and strategic point of view. The brief investigates Army, Air Force, and NAVY bases in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Armenia, Transnistria, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and military cooperation with Kazakhstan.

Length: 1 hour

18. Chechens in the Global Jihad

The people of the tiny Russian republic of Chechnya have a formidable reputation in the worldwide jihad movement today. Indeed, Chechens have allegedly fought in a number of conflicts including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, Pakistan, in addition to a terrorist campaign against Russia. This presentation attempts to answer two important questions: (1) what is the true extent of Chechen involvement in foreign jihads? (2) what motivates Chechens to fight in countries far from home? By understanding the role of Chechen fighters in several conflicts, students gain a better understanding of the foreign fighter phenomenon in general.

Length: 2 hours

19. Russian Nuclear Doctrine: Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons

Russian military theorists and defense officials envision a role for non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) in conflict de-escalation and war termination scenarios. They have created NSNW scenarios in their war games. They have also developed a range of NSNW dual-use delivery vehicles from artillery shells and short-range ballistic missiles to nuclear torpedoes and cruise missiles. In 2018, the United States began to address deficiencies in its existing NSNW stockpile by developing a low-yield nuclear warhead for the Trident II sea-launched ballistic missile and a new sea-launched cruise missile. Ultimately, what is at stake is two different perspectives on the utility of nuclear weapons. Whereas the West has tended to regard them as “doomsday weapons” with very high thresholds governing their use, the Russians are more ambiguous and flexible.

Length: 1 hour

20. Russia: Conventional Military Modernization

The Russian armed forces are slowly recovering from a series of geopolitical debacles that began with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and culminated with poor performances in Chechnya and Georgia. Since 2008, the Russian government has poured new resources into its conventional military capabilities while also carrying out a major overhaul of its military structure and doctrine. This lecture traces the collapse and especially the revival of the Russian armed forces. It assesses how increased procurement spending between 2001 and 2019 have translated into new weapons systems while, at the same time, modernizing some legacy weapons as well. The lecture concludes on a cautionary note: Russia’s economy is

about 5.5% of the combined size of the U.S. and European Union economies. Moscow will be hard-pressed to maintain let alone modernize a military establishment that consumes an enormous amount of scarce financial resources. Leaner years lie ahead for the Russian armed forces.

Length: 1 hour

21. Russia's Great Power Ambitions: The Ukraine Crisis

Russia's goals for Ukraine include the following: (1) preponderant influence in Kyiv's decision-making, especially regarding foreign policy and national security; (2) limited Ukrainian sovereignty – particularly with regard to foreign policy and national security; (3) no further NATO expansion to include Ukraine and Republic of Georgia; (4) limited Russian liabilities for Ukraine in terms of the economy, finance, and politics; (5) creation of a Ukrainian satrap that has the outward façade of being independent but accepts Moscow's diktat in critical areas like foreign and defense policy. Ukraine occupies important ground in the Russian worldview in general and that of Vladimir Putin in particular. Putin appears to see the status of Ukraine as a barometer of Russia's great power strength and a test of Russian resolve. He views Ukraine as a zero-sum game where Russia can only gain if Ukraine loses sovereignty. For Putin, "losing" Ukraine means a Ukraine that is independent in its domestic and foreign policy. An independent Ukraine would probably be attached to the West politically, militarily and economically. This would represent a strategic nightmare for Russia of the first magnitude.

Length: 1 hour

7. Kaliningrad: Russia's Baltic Bastion

Kaliningrad is an accident of history. As "Stalin's unwanted child" it is a remnant of Soviet power in the Baltic region that survived the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kaliningrad is an exclave: it is geographically separated from Russia by two NATO states (Lithuania and Poland) as well as Belarus. Kaliningrad is a strategic and operational liability for Russia. It is vulnerable and exposed. Its small size does not permit any operational defense-in-depth options for its garrison. Russian thinkers speculate that if NATO were to capture Kaliningrad during hostilities it could be used as a bargaining chip for gains elsewhere in the war-termination phase. Because of this Russia has steadily built up its military capabilities in the exclave so that Kaliningrad is now one of the most heavily militarized regions in Europe.

Length: 1 hour

8. Russia: Intelligence and Security Services - History

Russia has a long tradition of secret service that includes both a political police and intelligence gathering agencies. The rationale for Russia's maintenance of a secret police and intelligence

apparatus can be found in the country's geographical challenges and its long list of domestic and foreign enemies. Finally, as would-be reformers of the early 1990s discovered, it is much easier to create an intelligence agency than to actually get rid of one. While they succeeded in breaking the KGB up into its internal security and foreign intelligence components, Russian President Vladimir Putin has empowered the FSB and allowed it to expand into the foreign intelligence arena.

Length: 1 hour

9. Russia's Security and Intelligence Services

The brief provides a detailed overview of Russia's main security and intelligence agencies such as FSB, SVR, GRU, MVD, FSIN, ROSGVARDBIA, and other. It describes their history, structure, objectives, strategies, and specifics. The brief, also, offers a closer look at the various Spetsnaz/Special Forces units in Russia, their intended purpose and application, preparation process, and distinct features. The brief analyzes the extent of coordination among the agencies and operational challenges.

Length: 1 hour

10. Russian Space Power and Doctrine

As one of the pioneers of space travel and exploration Russia embraces space power in most of its facets. Russia was one of the first countries to experiment with offensive space capabilities, especially in the area of anti-satellite weapons. Russia has the benefit of experience, a very large infrastructure that supports space exploration, a will to excel in space, and, as mentioned, certain offensive capabilities. But Russian weaknesses in space are just as significant as its strengths. Russian military and space power are eternally constrained by the realities of Russian economic weakness. Russia still relies heavily on an infrastructure that was built during the distant Soviet era, and the sheer costs of maintaining this infrastructure must be enormous. Russia lacks the allies that are increasingly becoming critical factors in any accurate measurement of space power. Moreover, there is virtually no role for true private enterprise, and this fact hinders innovation, competitive drive, and creativity. Russian space doctrine appears to emphasize deterrence, retaliation and denial. Russia views space as an arena to deter attacks against Russian space assets as well as attacks against Russian conventional and strategic deterrent forces. Russia wants to possess the means of retaliation if deterrence fails. In the event of general war Russia will probably try to deny space to the US and/or NATO via kinetic, cyber, and electronic warfare attacks on adversary space assets.

Length: 1 hour

Culture

1. The Role of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Russia

The brief reviews the history and traditions of paganism some of which still present in today's Russia, the history and specifics of Russian Orthodox Church, the factor of Mongol conquest and its effect of the church, the schism of the 17th C, the sect of Old Believers, the relations with the state from 18th C until today, the persecution of church during Soviet times, the relations with Russian Orthodox Church abroad, the conflict with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in modern days, internal issues and conflicts, and the extent of religious freedoms in Russia.

Length: 1 hour

2. Slavic Ethnic Groups: Belarussians, Russians, Ukrainians

The brief describes the three Eastern Slavic groups, their history, common ethnic and cultural ties, and various factors that contributed to the formation of primary differences over time. The brief discusses the origination of Eastern Slavs, their early statehood and nation building, the effect of Mongol invasion, the emergence of Cossacks social group and their role in the political development of the three nations, the role of Orthodoxy, the establishment of Russian World/Mir ideology, and linguistic and cultural differences and similarities of Belarussians, Russians, and Ukrainians.

Length: 1 hour

Ukraine and Belarus

1. Ukraine: The Formation of National Identity

The central importance of Ukraine for the future of European security was highlighted by Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and subsequent moves to destabilize the Donbas Basin of eastern Ukraine. Beneath the headlines, though, is a far more subtle struggle for the heart and soul of Ukraine itself: Russian officials have revived century-old theories that Ukraine, Ukrainians and the Ukrainian language simply 'don't exist' but are local manifestations of a more powerful and enduring Russian reality. This presentation examines Ukraine from the perspective of state and national formation. It briefly examines those elements which make up the Ukrainian national narrative today including language, history, symbols, religion, and the decisive role played by the Ukrainian intelligentsia. Ukraine defied the odds in the Twentieth Century by surviving a succession of horrors including the rise of the Soviet Union, the terror famine of the mid-1930s, the Soviet annexation of eastern Galicia, the Nazi invasion and occupation, and the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Ultimately, Ukraine's rise as an

independent nation state 1991 was not only a result of providence but also a stubborn and enduring national ethos.

Length: 2 hours

2. Ukraine War: Preconditions and Expectations

The brief discusses the root of the conflict in Ukraine through historical perspective and current geostrategic objectives. It describes political, social, and economic conditions and ties that contributed to the escalation of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine. The brief investigates how the value of Ukraine, its demography, ethnic composition and related linguistic and cultural issues, internal political struggle in Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, separatism in Donbass, and Russia's increasing tensions with NATO contributed to the start of the war in Ukraine.

Length: 1 hour

3. Belarus: Identity, Dictatorship, and Russia

Belarus is better known in the West for dictatorship and pro-Russian policies than it is for culture, history, and domestic politics; however, as this presentation argues, Belarus has a geopolitical significance that often passes notice. More than many countries in Europe Belarus has been a victim of geography – its flat terrain lies in the path of the traditional invasion route to Russia – and suffers from a weak national identity. Moreover, Belarus has little control over its own destiny, for Russia is the commanding power in this part of the world, and Russian influence extends to virtually all sectors of the Belarusian government, economy, and society. This presentation also examines why Belarus is important from a Russian national security perspective given its proximity to three NATO states and its commanding position astride key Russian gas and oil pipelines to Europe.

Length: 2 hours

The Caucasus

22. The Republic of Georgia: Looking for a Protector

Georgia is an old nation state whose origins date back more than 1,500 years. Throughout its turbulent history, Georgia was repeatedly invaded and occupied by the Turks, Mongols, Persians, and Russians. In 1991, Georgia declared its independence from the disintegrating Soviet Union; however, its first decade as a sovereign power was marked by civil war, secessionist regions, incompetent governance, and widespread poverty. The 2003 Rose Revolution ushered in a period of exceptional change in Georgia as corruption was reduced, the economy liberalized, and

one breakaway region (Abkhazia) reincorporated into the state. A crushing defeat in 2008 at the hands of the Russian army left Georgians once again questioning the future of their country. Will they be a standard bearer for the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the Caucasus? Or will Georgia once again serve as a Russian surrogate, bound to Moscow's fiat? This lecture tries to address these and other questions about a fascinating, if little known, country that hovers on the edge of the West's consciousness.

Length: 2 hours

23. Georgia: A Rumble in the Caucasus

A detailed overview of Georgia's history, geography, demography, the country's relation with Russia from protectorate to the Soviet republic, independence, Georgia's modern leaders and their role in the country's political and economic development, Georgian Dream political party and escalation with the European Union, the role of Christianity, and lasting economic dependency on Russia.

Length: 1 hour

24. Armenia's Bitter Fate

The brief includes an overview of Armenia's history and origination, geography and strategic location as well as their role in the country's numerous invasions and territorial conflicts, demography, the role of Christianity in Armenia's national identity, the energy sector profile, economy, the genocide of 19-20th C and relations with its historical rival Turkey, the issue of Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh, current relations with Russia, and the role of Russian military base in Gyumri.

Length: 1 hour

25. Chechnya: Russia's Achilles Heel

The lecture discusses the conquest of Caucasus by Russian Empire in 18-19th C, the resistance of the local population, the policy of Russification, mass deportations and their aftermath during Soviet Union times, Ossetian-Ingush conflict, the factor of religion, Chechen wars of the 1990s, Kadyrov's clan and its relations with Vladimir Putin, and the current de-facto status of Chechnya within Russian Federation.

Length: 1 hour

Other European States

1. Poland: “Shield” of the West

Like human beings every society – to include nation states – is a distillation of its experiences. An old country located in the heart of Europe, Poland has experienced more than its share of invasion and occupation over the course of a millennia. This lecture explains the essence of Polish history by examining several themes. A flat, fertile country, Poland has been repeatedly subjected to invasion and occupation; however, it has resisted its occupiers in seemingly quixotic rebellions that seem to defy the odds. The maps of Poland have repeatedly changed along with Polish identity. Polish political culture has an authoritarian element that longs for a strongman who will battle the country’s internal divisions and stand up to its aggressive neighbors. Poland has often vested its hopes in distant foreign powers like Britain and America who, all too often, fail to deliver on those hopes. Perhaps as an explanation or justification for their tragic history, some Poles have nurtured the view that their country serves as the West’s “shield” against threats as diverse as the Mongol horde, Soviet Communism, and German fascism.

Length: 1 hour

2. What is behind Poland’s Complicated Relations with Neighbors?

The brief discusses the history of Poland, statehood, the roots of democracy through their relations with Germanic city-states, the role of Teutons and Mongols in separation of Slavic tribes, the rise of Rzeczpospolita – The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, its clashes with Moscow duchy, decline and submission to Russian Empire, the role of Szlachta and Uniates, the Cossacks rebellions and early grievances with proto-Ukrainian state, the partitions of Poland, Volhynia Massacre and Ukrainian nationalists, Katyn Massacre and relation with Russia, and the complexities of modern Poland-Ukraine relations.

Length: 1 hour

3. The Eastern Mediterranean: Islands, Gas Deposits, and Seabed Pipelines

The Eastern Mediterranean Sea has long been the crossroads of multiple civilizations. From the dawn of recorded history different empires have clashed over the waters linking its islands, peninsulas, and adjacent continents. In August 2020, two countries which claim to be heirs to this history nearly came to blows over waters east of Crete. Immediately at stake in this feud are potential natural resources such as natural gas. In addition, though, Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus are also disputing the Eastern Mediterranean itself – its waters, its airspace, and the right to extract its riches. This lecture probes the origins and dimensions of the dispute. It assesses those factors which have made the Eastern Mediterranean border conflict particularly difficult to resolve.

Length: 1 hour

4. North Macedonia: Surviving in a Dangerous Neighborhood

North Macedonia is a small, landlocked country located in the heart of the Balkans Peninsula. Its population of two million is one of the smallest in the region. Moreover, it is shrinking fast because of North Macedonia's anemic birth rate. North Macedonia has a Slavo-Macedonian majority and a substantial (25%-30%) Albanian minority. Macedonian history is quite depressing. The country was repeatedly contested by its neighbors in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. Indeed, disputes over Macedonia were the fuel for several Balkans wars. For decades Communist Yugoslavia effectively shielded Macedonia from rapacious neighbors but then Yugoslavia disintegrated, and Macedonia embarked on an awkward existence as an independent entity. Macedonian national identity is still very much a work in progress, and even its name and language are hotly contested by two neighbors: Greece and Bulgaria.

Length: 1 hour

5. Moldova: The Cost of Independence

The brief provides a detailed profile on Moldova's political development, reunification attempt with Romania, the role of political and ethnic differences in civil conflicts and separatism in Transnistria and Gagauzia and the level of Russia's involvement, the effect of demographic crisis on internal politics, the challenges of economic development, energy security and disputes with Russia, the factor of corruption in the country, and Moldova's EU integration process.

Length: 1 hour

6. Albania: Europe's Unknown Country

Albania is a relatively small state (by land area and population) located in the southeast corner of the Balkans Peninsula. Unlike several other neighboring states, Albania has a large Albanian majority; however, many Albanians currently reside outside the state in neighboring Kosovo and North Macedonia as well as Italy and the United States. Albania is the only Muslim majority state in Europe, although few Albanians are fervent practitioners of either Islam or Christianity. Although it took centuries to emerge there is a powerful Albanian nationalism based on a common language, customs, and history. Moreover, there are also occasional dreams of a greater Albania that would include ethnic Albanian populations in neighboring countries. These dreams aside the demographic realities confronting the country are its greatest test: as a consequence of emigration and low birth rates Albania is most likely going to lose anywhere up to half of its population through natural causes by the end of this century.

Length: 1 hour

7. Bulgaria: The Nation that Lived

Bulgaria is one of the oldest Slavic cultures. Not only was the Cyrillic alphabet born in Bulgaria, but Bulgarians also developed a literary language before many of their neighbors. Starting in the Fourteenth Century Bulgarians endured some five centuries of Ottoman occupation, yet they managed to preserve their language, religion, and culture. A new Bulgaria was born in 1878 after a Russian victory over the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, that Bulgaria was a revanchist state determined to expand its borders into neighboring areas. Indeed, Bulgaria fought and mostly lost several wars to change those borders. Communism was imposed in 1944, and Bulgaria enjoyed the status of being Moscow's "most loyal satellite" until 1989, when dramatic change inside the Soviet Union swept away the old Communist establishment. A new Bulgaria was born, one that was democratic and leaned to the West but was tragically also aging fast.

Length: 1 hour

8. Romania: National Identity and State Formation

The brief reviews Romania's origination, national identity, and uniqueness compared to its neighbors. It investigates the country's ancient and modern history and the way it affected Romania's relations, alliances, and political development, including the era of totalitarianism under Ceausescu. The brief describes geography, economy, industrial capacity, natural resources, demography, and linguistic specifics of the country, as well as the role of religion in society.

Length: 1 hour

9. Prospects for NATO Expansion: The Case for Sweden & Finland

One of the great ironies of Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is that although it was intended to halt NATO expansion, it will most likely hasten it. That expansion probably will not include beleaguered Ukraine, but both Sweden and Finland are most likely to become members. Sweden and Finland currently are nonaligned countries; that is, they are not members of any military alliance although they have close defense ties with each other and with many NATO countries. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, popular opinion in both Sweden and Finland has now shifted in favor of NATO membership. If one or both of these states does apply for NATO membership, there will be a dangerous period between formal application and final approval by each NATO partner country. Russia might be tempted to use this interregnum for intimidation and harassment via cyberattacks, air space violations, and disinformation.

10. Finland, Russia, and NATO: A Scandinavian Gambit

The brief discusses the history of Finland as part of Russian Empire including the Era of Bureaucracy as a way to coexist with Russia, Finland's independence and its complex relation

with the Soviet Union, the nonalignment and Finlandization, economic ties with Russia, the change of stance on NATO after the war in Ukraine, Turkey's roadblock and the issue with Kurds, and deterioration of Russia-NATO relations.

Length: 1 hour

11. The Sami People of Scandinavia

The Sami are an indigenous people of northern Europe whose estimated population is between 70,000 and 100,000. Sami identity is defined in large part by languages, cultures, and, to a lesser extent, common history. The largest Sami communities are found in Norway and Sweden; there are much smaller Sami settlements in Finland and Russia. Traditional Sami were ideally adapted to the environmental conditions of northern Scandinavia: they lived off the land and inflicted very little lasting damage on it. Like small minority communities everywhere, the Sami today face major challenges. Paramount is the preservation of their languages and cultures but there is also the extinction threat posed by assimilation into majority communities that surround them.

Length: 1 hour

12. Estonia: Protecting National Identity

The brief focuses on Estonia's complex relation with its neighbor Russia particularly after the collapse of Soviet Union and the passage of the contested Estonian Citizenship Law and the rise and role of Non-Citizens group, primarily ethnic Russians, as a result of that. It also reviews the factor of nationalism and Estonian and other Finno-Urgic ethnicities in the growing tensions. The brief, also, describes current clashes with Russia over honoring of the Estonian SS battalion and the revision of history.

Length: 1 hour

13. The Dutch Impact on History

The Netherlands is a relatively small country in terms of land area and population, but its impact on world history is disproportionately large. Not only was the Netherlands a seventeenth century superpower, it was also an early innovator in capitalism, a pioneer in maritime navigation and cartography, and the de facto founder of modern Indonesia. This lecture examines the Netherlands' influence on the world by focusing on exploration, trade, culture, and technology. It also spotlights the country's contribution to international law and the visual arts.

Length: 1 hour

Turkey

1. Turkey: Erdogan Challenges History

The coup attempt of July 2016 by military units against the elected Turkish government spotlighted that country's disturbing shift toward authoritarianism. Amid much discussion on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his efforts to Islamize and dominate Turkey, few are examining Erdogan from a broader context – namely that of the history of the Turkish Republic. This presentation attempts to 'fill in the gaps' on Erdogan's Turkey in two ways: first it explores Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the modern secular Turkish state; then it delves into Erdogan's efforts to reshape Turkey in Islamic terms. The army has long been the self-appointed Guardian of Ataturk's legacy, yet the failed coup of summer 2016 marks a crucial turning point in that institution's ability to dominate Turkish politics. This presentation concludes by examining likely outcomes for Turkey's future and the variables that could impact on those outcomes.

Length: 2 hours

2. Turkey in the Middle East

Throughout the Cold War, the Turkish Republic defined its domestic and foreign policies in terms of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Starting in 2003, with the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, Turkey has shifted its foreign policy away from Europe to the Islamic world in general and the Middle East in particular. Over the last ten years we have witnessed this new Turkish foreign policy in action in Syria, Libya, the Persian Gulf, Azerbaijan, and Somalia. Now President, Erdogan has so far demonstrated considerable skill and dexterity as he tries to advance Turkish national goals in the face of opposition from some of his NATO allies not to mention regional heavyweights like Saudi Arabia and Egypt. This lecture examines the Erdogan revolution in Turkish foreign affairs, which has led to military interventions in Libya, Syria, and Azerbaijan while projecting Turkish power in the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa.

Length: 1 hour

3. Turkey and NATO: Is a Divorce Inevitable?

Recent years have witnessed a growing rift between Turkey and its NATO allies in multiple arenas, including weapons acquisition, Iraq, Syria, Libya, the eastern Mediterranean, relations with Russia and China, not to mention Turkey's human rights practices. Some Western analysts have even speculated that either Turkey will withdraw from NATO or the alliance will void Turkish membership. This lecture argues that Turkey will probably remain within NATO if only because this best serves Ankara's national security interests as well as those of the Alliance.

Length: 1 hour

4. Turkey: NATO's Weakest Link?

The briefing examines Turkey's increasingly problematic position within NATO by tracing its trajectory from the post-Ottoman era as one of the earliest members to its modern-day status as an unpredictable partner whose actions often contradict Western objectives and values. The presentation analyzes how decades of frustration over stalled European Union membership has fueled nationalist resentment and strategic reorientation under Erdoğan's leadership, manifesting in escalating tensions with NATO. The briefing addresses persistent irritants including Armenian genocide, growing authoritarianism that contradicts NATO's democratic values, and fundamental disagreements over Kurdish forces. Turkey's playbook in Syria and purchase of Russia's S-400 air defense system represents a watershed moment demonstrating Ankara's willingness to defy alliance consensus and compromise NATO's integrated defense architecture. The analysis explores Turkey-Russia relations, examining how contemporary economic interdependences create leverage Moscow exploits to pull Turkey away from Western orbit. The briefing concludes by assessing whether Turkey's civilizational identity crisis, authoritarian drift, neo-Ottoman ambitions, and pragmatic pivot toward Russia and other non-Western powers indicate an irreversible strategic realignment making it the alliance's most vulnerable pressure point that Russia and China can manipulate to fracture Western unity during future crises.

Length: 1 hour

Africa

U.S. African Command Area of Responsibility



Continent

1. Africa: Strategic Overview

The 2007 creation of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) was the most tangible sign yet of Washington's new appreciation for Africa's strategic location, its natural resources, and its international security challenges. This brief focuses on Africa's land area, growing population, abundant natural resources, links between state instability and transnational terrorism as well as China's involvement in African affairs. Case studies are examined to illustrate course themes.

Length: 1 hour

2. State-Building and Collapse in Africa

Most African states have grappled with coups, revolutions, insurgencies, and civil wars since gaining independence in the 1960s and 1970s. This presentation examines African state instability through the prism of colonial-era boundary demarcations, the circumstances surrounding independence, and the difficulties in maintaining post-independence unity. Several examples of state failure are explored and explained including Liberia and Somalia. The presentation concludes with some general observations on African unity, state sovereignty, and the prospects for further state breakup.

Length: 1 hour

3. Africa, Water and Conflict

This presentation examines the issue of fresh water scarcity in Africa by focusing on several case studies, including Nile River disputes, North Africa water scarcity issues, the problems posed by a vanishing Lake Chad, and growing stress on the Niger River basin. The presentation concludes that there are no easy solutions to water access problems, although there are some promising advances in technology and regional politics. Ignorance is not an option here: failure to address African water scarcity will no doubt generate more human conflict and spur human migrations to Europe and the Middle East.

Length: 1 hour

4. China in Africa: ‘Win-win’ or ‘Win-lose’?

China has made considerable inroads in Africa in recent years, dominating the continent’s foreign trade and foreign direct investment. At the same time, China’s diplomatic influence and military presence on the continent have been growing as well. This presentation locates China’s African policy in recent diplomatic history and Beijing’s national goals and strategies. China sees Africa as a crucial source of natural resources for its industrialization; Africa is almost equally viewed as a top priority market for Chinese goods and a source of labor for Chinese companies. The presentation concludes with a brief analysis of how China’s growing African role is perceived by many Africans.

Length: 1 hour

5. China in Africa Part II: Promoting Xi Jinping Thought

China seems to be ratcheting up its effort to export Xi Jinping Thought as an “alternative development model” to Western liberal capitalism. At the same time, Beijing seems to be second-guessing certain aspects of its financial strategy in Africa. When Covid-19 struck the global economy, China’s leaders began to focus more on investing locally rather than continue with the expansive vision of the Belt and Road Initiative. There appears to be a greater wariness on the part of Beijing lending institutions to grant new loans to high-risk African borrowers.

Length: 1 hour

6. Russia in Africa: Reviving Old Dreams?

Vladimir Putin’s Russian Federation has spent the last decade trying to regain ground lost in Africa since the 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union. Unlike its Soviet predecessor, the Russian Federation has little to offer in humanitarian aid and non-military technical assistance. The name of the game today is money and mercenaries, and Russian oligarchs close to Putin are muscling their way into several countries, such as Madagascar, the Central African Republic, and Mali.

Length: 1 hour

7. Salafi-Jihadists in Africa: An Overview

The African continent might be described as a cauldron of competing Islamic visions. On the one hand are the so-called “Traditionalists,” Believers who practice Islam in accordance with the dictates and practices handed down to them by their forefathers and local religious leaders. Another school of thought is the Salafist which seeks to recreate an ideal Islamic state that supposedly existed at the time of Prophet Mohammed and his first four successors. Then there is the Salafi-Jihadist school which seeks to overthrow the existing system (Muslim rulers, etc) through the use of supposedly religiously-sanctioned violence. In broad terms, we are talking about a clash within a civilization, in this case the Islamic one.

Length: 1 hour

8. Africa’s Bush Wars and their Legacy

By the early 1970s the majority of states in Sub-Saharan Africa had achieved their independence. The only holdouts were the Portuguese colonies, the Apartheid regime in South Africa, the break-away, white republic of Rhodesia, and French Somalia. Independence eventually came to each of these countries, although in the case of Rhodesia and the Portuguese colonies in particular it was achieved through bush wars pitting white counterinsurgents against black nationalists. This lecture traces the origins and evolution of Africa’s bush wars in the 1970s and 1980s. It also discusses their legacies, which include authoritarian, one-party states in Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau.

Length: 1 hour

North Africa

1. Egypt after the Arab Spring

In early 2011 mass civil disobedience shook the Arab world, leading many observers to conclude that much anticipated political change had come at last to the region. In Egypt, localized protests in Cairo’s Tahrir Square soon expanded into a nation-wide demand for change. Thirty years of the Mubarak dictatorship ended, elections were held, and then things began going backward. This lecture examines the events immediately leading up to and following Egypt’s spring. It studies the causes of the revolt and traces political developments that brought about a Muslim Brother President followed by a military dictator. The lecture assesses Egypt’s future, fusing demographic, economic data and broader regional developments.

Length: 1 hour

2. Libya 101

Libya has been immersed in internal conflicts since February 2011. While its mercurial - and often bizarre – dictator, Mu’ammarr al-Qadhafi, is long gone, the future of the Libyan state is still in a state of flux. This presentation examines Libya from a broad perspective. It is meant to be a basic, ‘nuts and bolts’ overview of the country, including its geography, geopolitics, peoples, and history. The lecture concludes by examining several future scenarios ranging from state breakup and federalization to ongoing civil war.

Length: 1 hour

3. Algeria: Identities in Conflict

Algeria is both the largest Arab state and largest African country. It is endowed with extensive oil reserves and is one of the largest natural gas producers in the world. This presentation examines Algeria’s importance for U.S. national security policy. It demonstrates how Algeria’s civil war in the 1990s can be explained by an ongoing quest for cultural and national identity: *What is an Algerian? What is the optimal system for Algeria? Should it be a secular nation state or an Islamic one?* Such an identity crisis is not unique to Algeria; few, however, have suffered the terrible consequences as Algeria has: from 1992 to 2004 over 100,000 Algerians died in a civil war that was brutal by anyone’s standards.

Length: 1 hour

4. Morocco: Berm Strategy in Western Sahara Conflict

It is axiomatic that guerrillas who enjoy safe havens are nearly impossible to defeat. When Morocco confronted an insurgent group called the POLISARIO in the Western Sahara in the 1970s it too faced an opponent with a convenient safe haven in a neighboring state, Algeria. To negate POLISARIO’s maneuverability and limit its access to the population, Morocco built a sophisticated series of sand berms, reinforced concrete bastions, and support roads that ran the length of the Western Sahara’s borders with Algeria and Mauritania. Although the effort proved very costly, it deprived the POLISARIO ‘fish’ the essential access it needed to the ‘waters’ of the native population on the other side of the wall.

Length: 1 hour

The Sahel

1. The Sahel: An Overview

The most impoverished region in the world, Africa's vast Sahel region buffers Sub-Saharan Africa from the Sahara Desert. This presentation introduces the students to the geography, climate, terrain, and natural resources of the Sahel, while highlighting the region's growing problems with soil erosion, aridity, and desertification. The Sahel region is then examined from the perspectives of ethnicity, tribe, religion and constructing "nation states". The importance of the Sahel for the world economy and global security are highlighted throughout.

Length: 1 hour

2. Africa's Sahel and Regional Geopolitics

The Sahel region is a climatic and geopolitical buffer zone between North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Increasingly arid due to climate change, the Sahel is also the poorest region on the planet. This lecture shows how a lethal brew of desertification, spiraling population growth, very low literacy rates, and weak national identities combined to make the Sahel ripe for persistent human conflict.

Length: 1 hour

3. Turmoil in Mali

Like its other Sahel neighbors, Mali has fallen on truly hard times. Its attempts at establishing a democratic legacy have been stymied by army coups, entrenched corruption, and persistent insurgencies. This lecture examines the key factors contributing to Mali's near collapse. It also details the impact Malian state failure has had on U.S. policy goals such as limiting the spread of regional insecurity, preventing the rise of terrorist sanctuaries, and stemming the erosion of human rights standards. While Mali will never be a tier one U.S. national security concern, its myriad problems will require continued attention by Washington and its European allies in coming years.

Length: 1 hour

4. Instability in the Sahel: An Update

The Sahel region has long been cursed by poverty, drought, and persistent insurgencies. In recent years, fragile governments have been overthrown by military dictators whose supposed intent is to "win" the war against their respective insurgencies and overturn the regional order. This lecture traces the systematic overthrow of regional governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger followed by the ouster of European peacekeeping forces, and the introduction of Russian

mercenaries. Unfortunately, as always, the biggest losers in these wars are the civilian population.

Length: 1 hour

The Horn of Africa

1. Eritrea: “The Insistent State”

The European refugee crises of 2014-2015 spotlighted the horrors of the Syrian civil war, Islamic State atrocities, and sectarian violence in Iraq. Still, according to U.N. and European Union data, Eritreans comprised one of the largest nationalities among refugees seeking safe haven in Europe. This lecture provides background context for Eritrea’s human flight problem, including Eritrea’s conflicts with Ethiopia and the foibles of its endemically suspicious leadership.

Length: 1 hour

2. Sudan After Omar al-Bashir

In April 2019 the Sudanese army ended the thirty-year dictatorship of President Omar al-Bashir in a *coup d’état*. A former army officer, al-Bashir presided over the most disastrous period in Sudan’s already wretched history including government atrocities and mass famines that killed millions of people. This lecture locates al-Bashir’s fall in the broader context of Sudan’s recent history. It also analyzes Sudan’s ‘springtime revolt’ and the impact it will have on neighboring states as well as the United States and China.

Length: 1 hour

3. The “Other War”: Sudan’s Forgotten Civil War

The 2019 overthrow of dictator Omar al-Bashir foreshadowed a turbulent new era in Sudan. Civilian rule has been consistently blocked by the military while the top generals have clashed on the streets of Khartoum and other cities. The Sudanese civil war pits General Abd al-Fattah al-Burhan against Lieutenant General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, and their power struggle has now expanded to include broad swathes of the country. As Sudan’s violence spirals, some are contemplating possible state failure: a Sudan that follows the Somalia model of competing warlords, mass famines, and constant violence.

Length: 1 hour

4. Ethiopia: Prospects for a Failing State

Ethiopia is the second-most populous African country and home to over eighty ethnic groups. In 2018, a new leader named Abiy Ahmed emerged after a coup within the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front. At first Ahmed took promising steps to alleviate some of his country's most pressing problems, including a peace treaty with Eritrea, emptying his political prisons, easing censorship, and negotiating with armed secessionist groups. Then, in November 2020, Abiy Ahmed decided that a course correction was in order by sending his army into the northern state of Tigray and thereby ignited a civil war that was still raging a year later. This lecture examines the background to the Tigrayan crisis. It also addresses concerns regarding Ethiopia's possible disintegration and the prospects for new state creation in the Horn of Africa.

Length: 1 hour

5. War in Tigray: Prospects of Long-Term Peace

The rise of Abiy Ahmed and his faction inside Ethiopia's ruling party sidelined a generation of Tigrayan political leaders who had led the revolt against the Ethiopian Marxists and then formed the first post-war governments. Tensions between Abiy and his predecessors eventually boiled over into a secessionist rebellion in Ethiopia's northern Tigray province in 2020. The resultant war between the central government and Tigrayan guerrillas was noteworthy for its brutality against the civilian population. The federal forces eventually suppressed the rebellions; however, the long-term outlook for peace in Tigray is doubtful given Addis Ababa's lack of a post-war strategy for addressing the social and economic causes of the war.

Length: 1 hour

6. The Nile River and Conflict in Northeast Africa

The importance of the Nile River for Sudan and Egypt in particular cannot be emphasized enough. In the case of Egypt, the Nile accounts for over 95% of that country's fresh water supplies. The recent completion of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia over the Blue Nile has generated renewed fears of "water wars" between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. Egypt regards its supply of fresh water from the Nile as an existential issue; the creation of the GERD is widely perceived as a threat to Egypt especially since there is no agreement between the three states on how to share the waters of the Nile.

Length: 1 hour

West Africa

1. Boko Haram: The Threat to Nigerian Stability

In 2014 jihadists called ‘*Boko Haram*’ achieved global infamy when they abducted hundreds of teenage girls from a primarily Christian village in northern Nigeria. Although this group had already declared war on Nigeria’s government, it was the ‘Chibok girls’ which elevated its notoriety. This presentation examines *Boko Haram* by answering the following questions: (1) What is *Boko Haram*? (2) Why did it emerge? (3) What are *Boko Haram*’s links to the global jihadi movement? (4) How did the Nigerian government respond to the threat? (5) Has *Boko Haram* been defeated? (6) What is the outlook for the group?

Length: 1 hour

2. The Federal Republic of Nigeria: Africa’s Fragile Giant

Nigeria is Africa’s largest state by population and economy. It is also an ambitious experiment in nation-building: how to weld together several large ethno-linguistic and religious areas into a single, coherent state. Due to its diversity, Nigeria tends to be inward-looking. Nigeria has weathered multiple crises throughout its six decades, including Biafra’s secession attempt during the late 1960s, military coups, and the emergence of jihadist groups in recent years. Although many experts are cautiously optimistic about Nigeria’s prospects, evidence points to an inept governance that is nudging it towards “failing state” status.

Length: 1 hour

3. The Outlook for Nigeria

Nigeria is home to Africa’s largest population and national economy; however, the country’s prospects have long been marred by corruption and mismanagement by the central government. The 2022 Human Development Report by the United Nations ranked Nigeria 163 out of 191 countries; this is obviously not an impressive standard to be maintained by a country that aspires to African leadership. Another major challenge is Nigeria’s population growth: according to U.N. statistics it will be the third largest country in the world in 2050 after India and China. This population will be difficult to sustain on the country’s existing natural resources and human capital bases.

Length: 1 hour

Southern Africa

1. Angola: Turning the Page?

Angola is a paradox from a development perspective. On the one hand it is blessed with natural resources including oil, diamonds, arable land, and plenty of accessible fresh water supplies. On the other, Angola has some of the most shocking income disparities in the world, a bitter irony for a country led by a political party that was once fanatical in its commitment to Marxism-Leninism. Angola's curse is corruption: its former President, Jose Eduardo dos Santos was infamous for making his daughter the wealthiest woman in Africa and put his son in charge of Angola's \$5 billion sovereign wealth fund. The 2017 'selection' of a new president for Angola was supposed to be a harbinger of a brighter future; but in many respects Joao Lourenco's regime is a carbon copy of its predecessor.

Length: 1 hour

2. South Africa: The Reform Imperative

South Africa has the most advanced economy on the continent with a tremendous bounty of natural resources not to mention sophisticated financial markets and a sound industrial base. Yet the country is beleaguered by socioeconomic deficits that threaten to overwhelm its democracy. Corruption has made the country a notorious byword in international business circles, while the economy itself is hampered by high income inequalities, a staggering unemployment rate, and enormous budget deficits that have reduced its credit rating to 'junk' status.

Length: 1 hour

3. What Makes a Great Power Great? The Case for South Africa

The Republic of South Africa enjoys attributes of a great power, including immense mineral wealth, Africa's most industrialized economy, and a favorable geopolitical location. Yet the country's relatively small population and land area as well as its chronically under-performing economy significantly debilitate its great power prospects. South Africa fields a decent military by regional standards; however, its power projection capabilities have significantly eroded over time. Decades after Apartheid, South Africa still has one of the greatest disparities of income and education in the world.

Length: 1 hour

4. ISIS in Mozambique

Mozambique is one of the poorest states in Sub-Saharan Africa. In recent years an Islamic State affiliate has waged an insurgent campaign in northern Mozambique aimed at destabilizing the

government and preventing the exploitation of a large natural gas deposit recently discovered offshore. This lecture examines the origins and development of the ISIS campaign in Mozambique. It discusses the brief involvement of Russian mercenaries and the more sustained involvement of Rwandan soldiers who have been deployed to the area as employees of a French oil company.

Length: 1 hour

5. Zimbabwe: From Despair to Desperation

Ever since it achieved its independence in 1980, the Republic of Zimbabwe has been an economic basket case ruled by a single party and a dictator named Robert Mugabe. Mugabe cemented his rule by relying on army units to suppress his tribal opposition and then systematically divided and conquered the rest of his population by playing them against the land-owning white settler population. When Mugabe was overthrown by a coup inside his own party in 2017 there were hopes that Zimbabwe might be able to break the chain of nepotism, corruption, poverty, and violence. Unfortunately, as this lecture details, Mugabe's heir, Emmerson Mnangagwa is ruling the country in much the way that his predecessor did with tragic consequences for Zimbabwe's development.

Length: 1 hour

Central Africa

1. War & Peace in Africa's Great Lakes

The Great Lakes of Central Africa is probably the most conflict-prone region in Africa. Since the mid-1990s it has been the scene of some of the most savage conflict in recent memory, including a genocide and a series of civil wars that killed over five million people and displaced many more. This lecture examines the curiously interlinked destinies of Zaire-Congo and Rwanda, the largest and smallest states in the region. It traces how abundant natural resources, predatory regional powers and state failure have combined to make the Great Lakes a byword for instability and human misery.

Length: 1 hour

2. Central African Republic: The Phantom State

The humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) is an outgrowth of poor governance, endemic corruption, rampant poverty, and corrosive religious identity politics. This

lecture examines some of these dimensions of the persistent conflicts in CAR, including the recent involvement of Russian mercenaries.

Length: 1 hour

3. Eastern Congo: Humanitarian Crisis & Regional Wars

The eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DROC) have been wracked by a civil war that can be traced back to the Rwandan genocide of the mid-1990s. Today, those genocidal features persist, although the Rwandan government has used them to justify the creation of a Congolese proxy called M23 and the systematic pillaging of eastern Congo's natural resources, including diamonds. This lecture traces the origins and development of the regional wars in eastern Congo. It emphasizes the central roles played by Rwanda and Uganda in fueling those wars, which are motivated in large part by a desire to exploit the region's wealth of natural resources.

Length: 1 hour

Central & South America

U.S. Southern Command Area of Responsibility



Continent

1. Russia in Latin America: A Low-Cost, Low-Risk Approach

Over the last century the Soviet/Russian approach to Latin America has been inconsistent. There have been spurts of frenetic activity, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, followed by extended periods of relative inactivity. The Soviet Union made modest inroads, primarily through Cuba but also, to a lesser extent, via Nicaragua. The breakup of the USSR resulted in a diminished Russia that spent much of the 1990s trying to grapple with economic collapse and a drastically reduced military position. As a consequence, aid for Cuba all but dried up. Beset as it is by domestic problems and international concerns that had higher priority, Putin's Russia has been slow to return to Latin America in any meaningful fashion.

Length: 1 hour

2. China in Latin America

The People's Republic of China stresses economic ties in its Latin America strategy. China seeks access to the abundant natural resources of Latin America and new markets for Chinese products. Over time China has become the top trading partner of several heavyweights, including Brazil, Chile, and Peru. Latin America also plays a role in a broader Chinese strategy to set new international technology standards and increasingly dominate high technology markets. China also tries to curry favor with Latin American governments to build support for Chinese positions on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and the South China Sea.

Length: 1 hour

3. Los Conquistadores and Their Impact on History

In the sixteenth century, two Spaniards, Hernan Cortez and Francisco Pizarro, essentially wiped out two civilizations: the Aztecs of Mexico and the Inca of Peru. Their brutal conquests of the Americas, accomplished through deception, chicanery, and raw greed ushered in a Spanish imperium which lasted until the first decades of the nineteenth century. Within a century of the Spanish conquest, most of the indigenous inhabitants of Central and South America had been wiped out, by Old World diseases. At the same time, the extraction of the continents' abundant natural resources boosted Spain and Portugal to the first rank of global powers. The age of the Conquistadores ushered in a new age of knowledge in Europe yet, at the same time, it also marked the birth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Finally, the Spanish Conquest marks the beginning of the modern world.

Length: 1 hour

Central America

1. Nicaragua Simmers: Can Ortega Hold?

In the 1990s the trends for democratic development in Latin America had never seemed more promising. Castro's Cuba aside, much of the region had transitioned from dictatorship to democracy. In 2025, the situation in some countries looked distinctly less promising: Venezuela was mired in economic chaos and internal violence while Nicaragua was swept by a wave of protests that briefly threatened President Daniel Ortega's hold on power. The demonstrations in Nicaragua were fueled primarily by socioeconomic concerns – at least in the beginning. However, amidst a government crackdown on protesters, people began demanding fundamental political change in their country starting with the resignation of their authoritarian president and his increasingly powerful spouse.

Length: 1 hour

2. Central America: Social, Political and Economic Trends

Although Central America's seven countries are close U.S. neighbors, they rarely enter the U.S. news cycle except when natural disasters, immigration or criminal gangs form the narrative. This lecture examines several important trends in the region that help us assess where Central America is headed in coming years. We examine population growth, development criteria, economic performance, and political systems to help explain not only the region's surprising diversity but why it will remain relevant to U.S. national security for the foreseeable future.

Length: 1 hour

3. El Salvador: The Outlook for Nayib Bukele

El Salvador's Nayib Bukele is the embodiment of Latin America's *caudillo* figure in modern form. The son of Palestinian immigrants, Bukele's dramatic rise to the presidency in El Salvador was followed by a much-publicized battle against the country's historically high murder and crime rates, the mass incarceration of many young males, and the violation of democratic norms. Bukele baffles American liberals: his populist quasi-dictatorship still enjoys the support of 90% of Salvadorans who are apparently willing to sacrifice their hard-won democracy for a hard-line solution to the country's crime problems.

Length: 1 hour

4. The Legacy of the United States' Involvement in Central America

The United States legacy in Central America is a strange mixture of neglect and obsession. At times, the isthmus has attracted considerable – often unwanted American attention – such as Theodore Roosevelt's determination to hack a canal out of the Panamanian jungle or the deployment of Marines to Nicaragua in the 1930s. Currently, Central America exists in the American consciousness largely as a source of unwanted refugees and migrants. This lecture examines the U.S. role in Central America since the creation of the Panama Canal. It traces the waxing and waning of Washington's interest in the region, and concludes that the rise of China as a dominant trading power will trigger renewed US interest in the region.

Length: 1 hour

South America

1. The Venezuela Crisis: Implications for U.S. Security

As of 2019 Venezuela possessed the world's largest oil reserves yet was producing less crude oil than it did in 1940. Moreover, a combination of unrestrained government spending, oil 'gifts' to friendly states like Cuba, and staggering levels of hyperinflation forced more than four million people to flee the country. How did Venezuela arrive at this point? What are the implications of its collapse for regional and U.S. security? This presentation tries to answer these and other questions as it explores the dimensions of one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters.

Length: 1 hour

2. What Makes a Great Power Great? The Case for Brazil

As the world enters a new multi-power phase, rising powers such as Brazil demand greater political clout on the international stage. Brazil has tangible factors in its favor, including land area, population size, abundant natural resources, a national language, and the absence of a

neighboring peer rival. Still, this perspective must be balanced by Brazil's uneven economic performance and a political system frequently paralyzed by political corruption, bloated bureaucracy, and populist leaders who defy the traditional power centers.

Length: 1 hour

3. Political Turmoil in South America: 'Episodic' or Long-Term Trend?

In the two decades following the end of the Cold War South America seemed to have put much of its negative past behind it. Gone were the dictatorships of Videla and Pinochet. South America had finally turned a corner and entered what Francis Fukuyama once famously called 'The End of History'. Yet in recent years, this seemingly placid surface has been wracked by demonstrations in unlikely countries, the ouster of incumbent governments in key states, a constitutional crisis in Peru, and the rise of a rightwing populist government in Brazil. Recent political turbulence is linked to broader trends, including a near-universal disgust with corruption, income inequality, economic stagnation, declining faith in democracy as an answer to society's woes, and a widespread fear of reversion to the poverty of its recent past.

Length: 1 hour

4. Venezuela Update: Maduro Survives, Opposition Fractures, People Suffer

Venezuela enters its 6 December 2020 National Assembly elections with an apparently unified dictatorship intent on holding on to power and an increasingly divided and demoralized opposition. The government's obvious Achilles' Heel is its catastrophic economic performance and yet, so far, President Nicolas Maduro has survived assassinations, coups, and even abduction. One of the essential factors contributing to Maduro's survivability is his internal security apparatus. Surveillance of the armed forces in particular has been intensive, since they have been the primary impetus for coups in Venezuela's recent history.

Length: 1 hour

5. The Prospects for Peace in Colombia

In November 2016, the Colombian government concluded a landmark peace deal with the largest insurgent faction in the country, the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (aka "FARC"). Four years later, the peace treaty has survived a presidential election (won by a treaty skeptic), recidivism on the part of some former FARC commanders, and escalating violence in rural areas vacated by the FARC. On the other hand, over 13,000 ex-FARC guerrillas have laid down their weapons and reintegrated into society. The lecture spells out these and other stressors on the treaty while also explaining why peace in Colombia is in the interests of U.S. strategy.

Length: 1 hour

6. Bolivia: the Rise and Fall of Evo Morales

Politics is Bolivia's abiding curse. In the nearly two hundred years since the country gained its independence from Spain in 1825 it has witnessed no fewer than 190 revolutions and coups. This lecture examines Bolivia through the career of its controversial former (and possibly future) President, Evo Morales. In some respects, Morales marked a distinct change in his country's politics: not only was he Bolivia's first indigenous President, he implemented a socialist program that raised many of his people out of poverty. In other respects, though, Morales was a continuation of Bolivia's lethal authoritarian politics where anger, grievance and revenge are the currencies of power.

Length: 1 hour

7. Turbulence in the Andes

The last year (2021) saw the rise of leftwing populist presidents in two Andes countries: Chile and Peru. Propelling their election victories were Covid 19, high unemployment, little economic growth, growing income disparities, a general disgust with corruption, high crime rates, and an articulated protest against the "excesses of neoliberalism". There are several consequences for U.S. policy stemming from the leftward trend in the Andes countries. One is less governmental support for Washington's efforts to isolate Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. There is potentially more regional support for China. There probably will be a growing tide of anti-U.S. sentiments expressed by regional leaderships, although they will be focused on addressing internal economic needs first.

Length: 1 hour

8. Argentina: A Nation of Immigrants

Like the U.S., Argentina is a nation of immigrants. The indigenous peoples were all but completely wiped out as a result of "extermination" policies waged by nineteenth century dictators. The original immigrant population was overwhelmingly from Spain but, over time, successive waves came from Italy, Germany, Ireland, and Eastern Europe. In the twenty-first century the largest element within the immigrant population is from other Latin American countries. Currently, population growth is below replenishment rates. This means the population is starting to age with fewer young people entering the work place. What makes Argentina so baffling to outsiders is that while it is well-positioned for sustained prosperity (developed economy, universal literacy, unilingual society) it is nevertheless cursed by disastrous fiscal policies and chronic insolvency.

Length: 1 hour

9. South America's El Dorado: Oil, Gas and Fragile Economies

South America has been a relatively minor player in global oil and gas production. The continent's single biggest variable is Venezuela. Indeed, when it comes to oil and gas, there is Venezuela – with the largest proved oil reserves in the world – and everybody else. Recent historic lows in Venezuela's oil production are due to gross mismanagement, corruption, and a lack of capital investment. Increased oil production has enabled Brazil to become the region's leading oil producer and an oil exporter. Recent discoveries of large oil and gas fields in Guyana and Suriname indicate that both will be major oil exporters within the next ten years.

Length: 1 hour

10. Venezuela, the ELN, and Narcotics

In recent years the ability of the Nicolás Maduro's regime to exercise law and order in remote parts of Venezuela has decreased significantly. Filling the power vacuum have been militias, gangs, and erstwhile Colombian Marxist-Leninist insurgent groups like the FARC and the ELN. The Venezuelan government cooperates openly with the ELN to provide law, order and justice in western Venezuela. They also split the proceeds from the enormous volume of cocaine that crosses the Colombia-Venezuela border each day before being loaded onto planes for onward transport to Honduras. This lecture examines some of the numerous links that bind Caracas and the ELN together. It concludes that the ELN would have ceased to exist years ago were it not for the steady support of the Chávez and Maduro regimes. In return for such assistance, the ELN aids the Venezuela government in taxing the cross-border illegal traffic between Colombia and Venezuela, including narcotics, people, guns, and natural resources.

Length: 1 hour

11. The Venezuela-Guyana Border Dispute

A simmering border dispute between Venezuela and Guyana is one the many legacies of British colonialism in the New World. This one began shortly after the birth of Venezuela in the nineteenth century, and it has continued off and on since then. Most recently, the discovery of large amounts of oil in the continental shelf off Guyana has prompted Venezuela's dictator, Nicolas Maduro, to reassert old claims to two-thirds of Guyana, an area called Esequibo or Esequiba. This lecture examines the origins of the dispute, traces the impact of geography on history, and outlines how the recent discovery of substantial amounts of oil transform this territorial dispute into a matter of international concern.

Length: 1 hour

12. The Demographics of Chile

Chile's demographic history is marked by the presence of indigenous peoples, such as the Mapuches, the original Spanish conquistadores, and, later, the massive influx of immigrants from primarily European countries. This lecture examines the history of the settlement of Chile in demographic terms. It then examines Chile's current demographic dilemmas, including an aging population and the difficulties of assimilating primarily Venezuelan migrants. The lecture also explores how Chile's future economic prosperity will depend in large part on how it grapples with the demographic challenges of today.

Length: 1 hour

13. Venezuela: Maduro's Survival Strategy

Venezuelan Dictator Nicolas Maduro's ability to remain in power despite multiple coup and assassination attempts as well as a defunct economy is still something of a mystery. As this lecture details, part of Maduro's knack for survival is a combination of simple, dumb luck, a Cuban-trained internal security force, and an opposition that is often divided against itself. Maduro is clever enough to understand that the Venezuela army constitutes the most vital pillar of his regime. Consequently, he has spent a great deal of his scarce resources on ensuring that the generals are tranquil and the soldiers remain in their barracks. Barring a major revival of Venezuela's economy – a very unlikely prospect - Maduro or his successor will be ousted from power. It's a question of when not if.

Length: 1 hour

14. Peru's Political Culture

Although there are entire textbooks dedicated to political culture, perhaps the best definition is that it represents a nation's "political personality". In Peru, a combination of geography and history have produced a political culture that blends authoritarianism with community politics, the privileged few versus the marginalized many, frequent revolts, crises of political legitimacy, and a search for savior figures and utopias. This lecture briefly introduces to concept of political culture before elaborating on it in the context of Peru's complicated geography and treacherous history.

Length: 1 hour

15. Colombian Mercenaries: At War in Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, and Mexico

Mercenaries have long played an important role in inter-state warfare. In recent years, state sponsors like Ukraine, narcotics cartels, and wealthy Arab oil powers have recruited thousands of ex-Colombian soldiers to fight their wars in different parts of the globe. Colombians are

valued for their battlefield experience, familiarity with U.S. weapons, training, and relatively low cost. This lecture examines how Colombian mercenaries have been employed in Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, Mexico, and Haiti.

Length: 1 hour

16. Narco Submersibles: Getting Cocaine to Market

Narco wars are a never-ending struggle between cartels and states that seeks to prevent the export of illicit drugs to their shores. Over the decades, narco syndicates have employed an imaginative array of methods to get drugs to markets, including human traffickers, shipping containers, fruit and vegetable shipments, as well as aircraft. Recent years have witnessed a surge in the use of artisanal semi-submersibles and even fully submersible vehicles. As this lecture explains, these platforms are much harder to detect and intercept. They are optimized for one-way missions across vast expanses of water at minimal costs to the carters that manufacture them.

Length: 1 hour

The Caribbean

1. The Havana Syndrome: Who, What, and Why?

Starting in November 2016, U.S. intelligence officers and diplomats in Havana, Cuba, began reporting an unusual range of ailments from severe headaches, nausea, and hearing painful sounds to loss of memory and even damage to motor skills. Later, some Canadian diplomats, also serving in Havana, reported similar conditions. Still later, U.S. diplomats assigned to the American Consulate in Guangzhou, China, reported hearing loss, inexplicable sounds, migraines, and nausea. When U.S. and Canadian experts tried to identify the likely cause of these “events” their hypotheses ranged widely from sonic guns, microwave emitters calibrate to damage hearing and induce memory loss, pesticides, and even mass hysteria. As to who did it and why, the consensus seems to point a Russia working in league with Cuban hardliners; however, no definite proof has been offered.

Length: 1 hour

2. Cuba: To Reform or Not to Reform

The outbreak of simultaneous protests across Cuba in July 2021 focused international attention on this island and its authoritarian regime. This lecture examines some of the key factors fueling Cuban unrest such as an unreformed economy, widespread goods shortages, frequent electricity

blackouts, and an inept official response to the spread of Covid-19. For years the conventional wisdom on Cuba was that its formidable security services (trained by the Soviet KGB and the East German Stasi) deterred widespread public discontent on the island. The most recent protests seem to indicate that the ability of the services to deter may be breaking down. Are we on the verge of seeing real meaningful change in Cuba?

Length: 1 hour

3. Cuba's Economic Crisis: Is Regime Change Imminent?

Cuba's economy has been in dire straits for decades due to a combination of U.S. embargoes, government mismanagement, and an ideological aversion to private enterprise. Lately, though, things have gotten much worse. The recent U.S. intervention in Venezuela followed by a near-total oil blockade has aggravated existing conditions of mass emigration and periodic unrest. The Cuban tourism industry, once an important source of hard currency, has all but completely collapsed. Other symptoms of Cuba's acute crisis include widespread power blackouts which contribute to a lack of water pressure, furloughed civil servants, spike in inflation, and food shortages. Still, despite all of the above, other critical conditions for regime change are still absent such as signs of a fracturing leadership, defections in the armed forces, and an opposition coalescing around common themes and leaders.

Length: 1 hour

Mexico

U.S. Northern Command Area of Responsibility

1. The Surprising Demographics of Mexico

With a population of nearly 130 million people, Mexico is easily the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. The median age in 2018 was thirty; however, Mexico is getting old fast, and this trend is not likely to change much in the future. The biggest driver of demographical change has been a sharp drop in fertility rates, spurred by a highly successful family planning program, female literacy, and urbanization. The number of Mexican immigrants to the United States has leveled off recently after decades of spectacular growth late in the Twentieth Century. As Mexico enters middle age, anticipate a new government emphasis on pensions, universal health care, and gerontology.

Length: 1 hour

2. The Tropical Messiah: Mexico Under Andrés Manuel López Obrador

Andrés Manuel López Obrador aka AMLO is a leftwing populist politician from the southern Mexican state of Tabasco who won the Presidency in 2018 on a platform that focused on: (1) reducing Mexico's poverty; (2) eliminating corruption; (3) lowering Mexico's shocking crime rates which had been climbing for years; (4) raising the economic growth rate. AMLO's policies are a bundle of contradictions – much like the man himself. He strongly favors expanding some social programs like pensions but is equally (if not more) wary of government debt. He gives voice to leftwing populist messages but promotes a major military role in society. He vows to “end” corruption but undercuts anti-corruption institutions. AMLO's popularity persists despite economic recession, an escalating poverty rate, unsustainable “megaprojects” like the Maya Train, disastrous responses to COVID, high crime rates, ineffective anti-corruption measures, and his attacks on civil society. Still, there is some cause for optimism. One is that AMLO is term-limited. The other is that Mexico's democracy, as imperfect as it is, has endured over decades of strife and stress.

Lecture length: 1 hour

Transnational National Security Issues

1. Geopolitics of the World's Maritime Straits

Living on a continent-sized superpower with uninhibited access to the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans most Americans generally do not focus on those straits and canals that link the global economy today. Perhaps the only exception to this is the Panama Canal, yet even here it can be argued that US attention is slipping since the Canal is now firmly under Panamanian control. This briefing outlines both the importance of maritime trade and those critical straits and canals that facilitate it. Each of these possesses geopolitical importance in its own right; a few have global significance given the extensive traffic that flows through them. Any disruption to commerce could have a significant – and negative – impact on the global economy. A maritime power confronted by geographical and political constraints, China is acutely aware of its vulnerabilities when it comes to the straits and canals covered here. Not surprisingly, then, China is also the most active power seeking land-based alternatives to maritime trade.

Length: 2 hours

2. Lessons in Counterinsurgency

This course uses historical case studies to examine several lessons learned in counterinsurgency. Case studies include: Iran's Proxy Strategy and the Dilemmas it Poses for the Counterinsurgent; Afghanistan's Insurgent Logistics Wars; Leadership Targeting: The Taliban Example; Counterinsurgent Intelligence: Egypt in Yemen; Morocco's Berm Strategy against the POLISARIO; Ethnic Cleansing as COIN: The Polish Example. Each of these cases can be presented separately or as part of a broader examination of COIN strategy.

Length: 1 hour

3. Strategic Forces Modernization

China and Russia view nuclear weapons as essential pillars of their drive for great power status. Therefore, it is not surprising that both are spending a great deal of resources and time on updating their strategic forces to include: mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, hypersonic glide re-entry vehicles, new ballistic missile submarines, supersonic cruise missiles, and stealth bombers. The United States faces a major force modernization of its own having postponed or cancelled many programs during the post-Cold War 'peace dividend'. Finally, this presentation examines the strategic nuclear capabilities of several other, albeit smaller powers, including the United Kingdom, France, Israel, India, and North Korea. The presentation concludes with an overview of the US National Missile Defense program and the seeming commitment by all of the existing nuclear-armed powers to some form of Mutually Assured Destruction.

Length: 2 hours

4. Polar Considerations: The Dilemmas of Melting Ice

Climate change is rapidly emerging as the pivotal international security issue of the Twenty-First Century and nowhere is this more apparent than in the hitherto neglected regions of the High Arctic. As warmer temperatures melt more ice more countries are examining the possibilities of exploiting the Arctic for maritime transit, natural resource surveys, and natural resource extraction. Some countries, notably Russia, have invested considerable resources in their Arctic presence including new icebreakers and research stations while others like the United States have been relatively passive. This presentation examines the Arctic from three general perspectives: (1) evolving maritime trade patterns; (2) natural resource exploration and extraction; (3) geopolitics. It concludes with a warning: although key players are currently determined to resolve their territorial disputes in the Arctic peacefully this should not be taken for granted over the longer term. Indeed, as new opportunities open up in the melting Arctic for extracting natural gas and oil some countries are backing their sovereign claims with modernized, expanded military forces.

Length: 2 hours

5. Russia, China and Polar Dreams

Climate change is having a noticeable and accelerating impact on the Arctic and Antarctic regions in the forms of receding glaciers, melting ice, and melting permafrost. Russian and Chinese leaders see opportunity in the rapidly shifting polar landscapes and are investing resources in new infrastructure and resource extraction. This lecture examines how the Russian and Chinese governments are taking aggressive steps to increase their presence in the polar regions by investigating new maritime trade routes in areas of receding ice and surveying and accessing valuable commodities like, oil, natural gas, nickel, and marine organisms.

Length: 1 hour

6. The Geopolitics of Great Powers

What makes a great power great? How can we quantify and qualify those ‘ingredients’ that go into making one set of nation states substantially different from others in terms of their relative strength? This presentation series examines those factors which define certain great powers from up-and-comers as well as former great powers. It uses a combination of factors to measure power. Some factors, such as land area, population size, physical terrain, and natural resources, are relatively easy to measure and can be quantified in a measure of a state’s strength. But there is another factor – namely, ‘national will’ or ‘will to power’ that is equally important in

measuring great power strengths and weaknesses, yet it is notoriously difficult to quantify in any meaningful manner.

- a. **Russia.** In terms of land area, natural resources, nuclear weapons, the size of its conventional armed forces, and national will Russia makes a strong case for great power status. Still, its obvious strengths aside, there are factors that undercut Russian power, including its relatively small population, seasonal ice and permafrost, its limited access to the world ocean, and its vast, difficult-to-defend frontiers.

Length: 2 hours

- a. **China.** China's dramatic rise from the ashes of its 1970s-era Cultural Revolution to the second largest economy in the world is the most significant geopolitical development since the end of the Cold War. This presentation traces those sources of Chinese power, including population, land area, natural resources, agricultural productivity and overland neighbors as well as its economic dynamism and rapidly modernizing military. Some argue that China's lack of uninhibited access to the world's oceans represents a significant weakness; however, it must be acknowledged that Beijing is making up for this by building a modern, power expansion navy and accelerating the development of overland communications with its fourteen neighbors.

Length: 2 hours

- b. **India.** While China's rise over the last quarter century attracts a great deal of attention another Asian giant has also taken significant – if rather hesitant – steps toward global influence. As this presentation demonstrates, India has many of the core attributes of a great power, including a favorable climate for agriculture, large land area, population size, growing economic clout, and a powerful sense of what can best be described as 'civilizational confidence'. At the same time, though, India must grapple with the reality that it has been all but encircled by two of its greatest rivals – Pakistan and China – who also happen to be allied with each other.

Length: 2 hours

- c. **Brazil.** As the world enters a new multi-power phase several rising powers such as Brazil have been clamoring for greater political clout and recognition on the international stage. Indeed, Brazil does have many tangible factor in its favor, including land area, population size, abundant natural resources, a national language, and the absence of a neighboring peer rival. Still, this rosy perspective must be balanced by the fact that Brazil's economic performance over the last four decades has been mediocre at best while its political system has been paralyzed by political

corruption, a bloated bureaucracy, and a populist president who has defied the traditional power centers. Brazil has been described as a ‘vegetarian dinosaur’ since it shows little inclination to assert itself in its own region let alone internationally.

Length: 2 hours

- d. **South Africa.** The Republic of South Africa has some of the attributes of a great power, including immense mineral wealth, Africa’s most developed and industrialized economy, and a favorable geopolitical location. On the other hand, the country’s relatively small population and land area as well as its chronically under-performing economy significantly debilitate its great power prospects. South Africa fields a decent military by regional standards; however, its power projection capabilities have significantly eroded over time. Successive, democratically elected governments have earmarked scarce national resources for more pressing domestic needs such as socio-economic development. Decades after the end of Apartheid, South Africa still has one of the greatest disparities of income and education in the world.

Length: 2 hours

4. Electromagnetic Pulse: An Existential Threat to US National Security?

The concept of electromagnetic pulse and the damage it could inflict on U.S. national security has waxed and waned in the American public consciousness over the decades since the phenomenon was first detected during early 1960s atmospheric nuclear weapons tests. As far as the Pentagon was concerned, EMP was an effect to be mitigated through ‘hardening’ of sensitive electronics in ‘mission critical’ networks like nuclear weapons’ command, control and communications. At the end of the Cold War, however, much of the urgency surrounding the EMP debate seemed to dissipate, at least until the rise of new nuclear weapons-armed states in North Korea, Pakistan and India. In 2001, the Congress authorized an EMP Commission to investigate how a high-altitude nuclear weapons detonation could debilitate, degrade or ultimately destroy critical features of the US civilian economy, including the electricity grid, telecommunications, financial systems, transportation and logistics nodes, and emergency response. This presentation provides a brief explanation of EMP and the potential impact it could have on the US economy.

Length: 1 hour

5. Hypersonic Vehicles: The Threat to National Security

For those who keep a close eye on developments in military aviation there has been a recent spate of news stories on maturing hypersonic (Mach 5+) technologies including hypersonic

gliders and cruise missiles. The Russians in particular have been keen to advertise the fact that they now allegedly possess a hypersonic glider called Avangard that is capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to target by evading existing defenses. For its part the People's Republic of China recently unveiled the DF-17, which is purported to be a hypersonic weapon that can evade existing theater defenses like the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), the SM-3, and the Patriot PAC-3. This presentation offers an introduction to the latest developments in hypersonic technologies. It also fits these developments in the broader perspectives of the strategic nuclear arms race and future conventional warfare.

Length: 1 hour

6. Anti-satellite Weapons

Anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons have been around almost as long as satellites themselves. During the Cold War, the Soviets made considerable progress in researching, developing, and deploying co-orbital, direct-ascent, and directed energy ASATs. Demonstrations of American precision-guided weapons during Operations DESERT STORM, ALLIED FORCE, ENDURING FREEDOM, and IRAQI FREEDOM revealed that the new American revolution in military affairs was heavily dependent (indeed enabled by) satellite infrastructure. This convinced Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea that attacking U.S. satellites could seriously degrade U.S. military capabilities during a crisis. Consequently, a new generation of ASATs has been developed, and the U.S. has been challenged to respond.

Length: 1 hour

7. The ASCM Revolution in Naval Warfare

Over the course of the last five hundred years there have been several “revolutions in naval affairs” such as gunpowder, the steam engine, submersibles, the advent of aviation, and the development of sea-based nuclear weapons. This lecture is focused on one of the more recent revolutions: the anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM). First introduced during World War II, the ASCM has proliferated widely and even some non-state actors like Hezbollah and the Yemeni Houthis have used them in battle. Recent advances in jet propulsion, air frame materials and artificial intelligence are making ASCMs even harder to detect and neutralize for the defender. One thing is certain: ASCMs will feature prominently in future naval combat although they will be nearly indistinguishable from unmanned aerial vehicles.

Length: 1 hour

8. The Geopolitics of Energy

This lecture provides a basic overview of global energy production and consumption. It highlights the fact that fossil fuels (oil, gas, and coal) still account for more than 80% of world energy consumption in 2019. The movement toward renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and biofuels is being driven by technology enablers and a growing understanding of how fossil fuel is directly influencing global climate change. Even so, change in the energy business comes slowly: transforming economies away from fossil fuels to renewables requires a potent combination of capital investment and political will. For the big fossil fuel producers there is another salient lesson: while they possess a valuable commodity it is not only perishable but of slowly declining utility as well.

Length: 1 hour

9. The “Quartet of Instability” and the Threat to U.S. National Security

With the advent of the new U.S. Administration in 2025, there have been significant changes in the international security landscape. Old Western alliances are being weakened, and a new transactional approach to diplomacy is guiding U.S. foreign policy. Meanwhile, four determined U.S. adversaries have quietly formed their own, informal, quasi-alliance bonded by two fundamental objectives: (1) Weakening the United States; (2) undermining the current international order. This lecture examines the so-called “Quartet of Instability”. It explores how the “alliance” has cooperated on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Iran’s proxy wars in the Middle East. It examines both the strengths and weaknesses of the individual allies. It also explores how the “alliance” may gain new members and the occasional support of certain middle-ranking powers like India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Brazil.

Length: 1 hour