

## Global Resource Geopolitics Natural Resource Development and Conflict

**Lecturer: Dr. David Lehrer**

1 1/2 hours twice a week ● 3 credits ● Undergraduate

### Course description

Conflict over natural resources is often described as the defining feature of our age. As global demand for energy, consumer goods, and high-tech increases, so our geopolitical contests seem to intensify. Technological development continues to change the definition of resources, the nature of conflicts, and the manner in which resources are valued, extracted, exchanged, and controlled across the globe. Meanwhile, diverse actors and institutions are experimenting with measures to govern the immense, essential, and deeply problematic enterprises responsible for wresting raw materials from the earth and transforming them into the hardware of everyday life. In a time of multiple environmental and political crises, it is especially important to understand how global resource geopolitics shape our lives in ways big and small.

This introductory course equips students with the tools they need to understand the relationship between conflict, natural resources, and the effects of this relationship on development, peace, and security. The course is divided into three parts. Part I familiarizes students with key concepts in global resource geopolitics and examines the historical transformations that led to our present moment of global conflict, climate crisis, and widespread predictions of resource exhaustion. Part II examines the key concepts behind fears of resource scarcity, namely the environment, natural resources, and thresholds. Part III examines key cases and governance approaches to global resource geopolitics, looking in particular at conflict minerals, oil and gas and renewable alternatives. Throughout the course, we examine cases from the Americas, Eurasia, and Africa. Students will complete a semester-long research project that analyzes the geopolitics of a place and resource of their choice.

### Learning Goals:

*By the end of the course, the student should be able to:*

- Differentiate between high value and basic natural resources and describe their impacts on development, peace and security
- Identify “resource curse” situations and analyze their impact on geopolitics regionally and globally
- Present evidence based opinions in writing and verbally on natural resource scarcity, the climate crisis and geopolitical conflict.
- Discuss the role of the oil industry in our current climate crisis and provide evidence based arguments for sustainable energy policies
- Propose creative solutions to turn resource fueled conflicts into resource based cooperation.

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- Engage with guest speakers and fellow students who reflect different perspectives and experiences in an open, prepared, and non-judgmental way placing views expressed in a larger context.

### Grading and Assignments:

- **Semester long research project (40% of final grade)** Students will complete a semester-long research project that analyzes the resource geopolitics of an approved place and resource of their choice. The project consists of the following:
  - **Geopolitical Extraction Profile (40 points of project grade):** This essay focuses on a particular country and resource providing an overview of the history of extraction in the country and how that history impacts the country's current geopolitical, developmental and socioeconomic circumstances. **Your selected country and resource will be the same as for your commodity chain analysis.**
  - **Commodity Chain Analysis (40 points of project grade):** This research essay continues where the previous essay left off and traces the production chain of the commodity extracted from the country profiled in the first essay. To the fullest extent possible, you will describe the journey of the commodity from its point of origin to its final point of consumption and disposal. The essay should include a graphic rendition (map or flow chart) showing the commodity chain.
  - **Final Presentation (20 points of project grade):** The final 2 weeks of classes will be devoted to your presentations. The final presentation must: briefly synthesize your findings from the two essays, discuss the relationship between commodity extraction and regional geopolitics, contain a visual component, and allow time for a brief Q&A.
  - See class schedule for assignments and due dates.
- **Midterm Exam (35% of final grade):** The purpose of the midterm exam is to assess and reinforce your grasp of the key concepts covered in the course. The midterm exam will cover all readings and lectures assigned during Parts I and II.
- **Attendance and punctuality (15% of final grade):** Your attendance and punctuality are important to achieving the greatest possible learning outcomes for you and your peers.
- **Participation (10%)** Participation is evaluated based on your attendance, engagement, preparation, and completion of all in-class assignments and activities.
  - **Participation:** Students are responsible for keeping up with the material covered in all classes. Planned absences must be reported in advance.
  - **Engagement:** Attendance is more than being physically present. You must be mentally present, too.
  - **Preparation:** It is not only acceptable but expected that some readings will challenge you as you proceed through the course. That is, after all, the point. Bring your questions and quandaries to class, present them in a respectful way, and we will work through them together.

**CLASS SCHEDULE (15 weeks)**

Week	Class Content	Reading
<b>Part I: Geopolitics: The Basics</b>		
<p><b>Goal:</b> Familiarizes students with key concepts in global resource geopolitics and examines the historical transformations that led to our present moment of global conflict, climate crisis, and widespread predictions of resource exhaustion.</p> <p><b>Lecture and Discussion Themes:</b> Classical Geopolitics; Critical Geopolitics; Environmental Geopolitics</p>		
1	Introduction to Resource Geopolitics. Struggle to save the Samar sand dunes of the southern Israel – a personal story. <i>What do I hope to get out of this course?</i>	
2	Classical Geopolitics: The geographical pivot of Eurasia – the world is a closed system.	Mackinder (1904)
	Critical Geopolitics: Feminist Geopolitics, examining politics at scales other than the Nation-State	Hyndman (2001)
3	Environmental Geopolitics: The Age of the Anthropocene	Dalby (2012)
	Discourse, Practice, and Representation: The West and the Rest	Hall Requested
4	The Three Ages of Geopolitics; Civilizational Geopolitics, Natuarlized Geopolitics, Ideological Geopolitics	Agnew (2003) Reidy (2011)
<b>Part II: The Environment, Natural Resources, and Society</b>		
<p><b>Goal:</b> Examines the key concepts behind fears of resource scarcity, namely the environment, natural resources, and thresholds.</p> <p><b>Lecture and Discussion Themes:</b> Geopolitical and Geo-economic organization: Society vs Nature, Core and Periphery, Town and Hinterland, The Greater Good and Sacrifice Zones</p>		
5	‘The Greater Good’, Sacrifice Zones and the “Resource Curse”	Valdivia (2015)
	<i>Topic for Geopolitical Extraction Profile due</i>	Pruett (2016) Sachs & Warner (2001) Manberger & Johansson (2019)
6	Tragedy of the Commons: Understanding the consequences of unhindered resource extraction.	Hardin (1968) Gardiner (2001)
	<i>Numerical example</i>	
	Population Growth: The carrying capacity of the planet.	Tal & Kerrit (2020)
	<i>Guest Lecture: MK, Dr. Alon Tal</i>	
7	Environmental Conflict Resolution: The environment as a cause and a victim of conflict	UNEP (2009)

<i>Mid-term Exam – on Parts I and II of course</i>		
Week	Class Content	Reading
<b>Part III: Key Issues and Case Studies</b>		
<p><b>Goal:</b> To examine key cases and governance approaches to global resource geopolitics, looking in particular at conflict minerals, oil and gas.</p> <p><b>Lecture and Discussion Themes:</b> The history, politics and economics of conflict minerals and oil extraction</p>		
8	<p>Case study: Cobalt &amp; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, how mineral extraction improves and destroys communities in the Congo, the role of the government and the role of international corporations.</p> <p><i>Geopolitical Extraction Profile due</i></p>	<p>Eichstadt (2013) Prologue Ch. 11-12 Requested Sovacool (2019)</p>
9	<p>History of Oil and its impact on the shape of the world we live in.</p> <p>Climate Change, the Middle East, and the Promise of a Post-Oil Era</p> <p><i>Guest Lecture: Professor Dan Rabinowitz, Tel Aviv University</i></p>	<p>Shah (2004) Rabinowitz (2020)</p>
10	<p>Tar Sands, Pipelines and Fracking</p> <p><i>From the headlines – examples for of oil resource conflicts from around the world</i></p> <p>International Governance: Challenges and solutions to responsible resource management in a global economy.</p>	<p>Adkin (2015) Willow &amp; Wylie (2014) Denchak &amp; Lindwall (2021) OECD (2016) Whitney (2015) Raghaven (2014)</p>
11	<p>Keys to a Clean Energy Future: History, Applications, and Production</p> <p><i>Guest Lecture: Dr. Michael Roth, Harvard University</i></p> <p>Harvesting the Dead Sea – The dilemma of the commons</p>	<p>Gounon (2021)</p>
12	<p><i>Work on draft Commodity Chain Analysis</i></p> <p>Student presentations</p>	
13	<p>Student presentations and Summary</p> <p><i>Commodity Chain Analysis Due</i></p>	

Please note that all guest speakers are tentatively scheduled and will be confirmed closer to the date of the class.

## READINGS

- Adkin, Laurie E. (2015) Ecology and Governance in a First World Petro-State. Chapter 1 in *First World Petro-Politics: The Political Ecology and Governance of Alberta*. Pp. 3 – 50.
- Agnew, John (2003) The Three Ages of Geopolitics. Chapter 6 in *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics*. Second Edition. Pp. 85 – 114.
- Dalby, Simon (2012). Environmental Geopolitics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Paper for Presentation to the Sussex Conference “Rethinking Climate Change, Conflict, and Security.”* October 18 – 19, 2012.
- Denchak, Melissa & Courtney Lindwall (2021) What Is the Keystone XL Pipeline? <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-keystone-pipeline>
- Eichstadt, Peter (2013). Prologue: The Gates of Hell in *Consuming the Congo: War and Conflict Minerals in the World’s Deadliest Place*. Chicago Review Press.
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- Flink, James J. (1988) The Automobile Age. London and Cambridge: MIT Press. Pp. 358 - 376
- Gardiner, Stephen Mark (2001). The Real Tragedy of the Commons. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Pp. 387 – 416.
- Gounon, Claire (2021). Sinkholes on receding Dead Sea shore mark 'nature's revenge' (2021, October 27) retrieved 18 February 2022 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-10-sinkholes-receding-dead-sea-shore.html>
- Hall, Stuart “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” pp. 276 – 318
- Hardin, Gareth (1968). The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science*. 162(3859): 1243 - 1248
- Hyndman, Jennifer. (2001) Towards a feminist geopolitics. *The Canadian Geographer*. Pp. 210 – 222
- Kaplan, Robert D. (1994) The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Fabric of Our Planet. *The Atlantic Monthly*.
- Le Billion, Philippe. (2004) The Geopolitical Economy of ‘Resource Wars’ *Geopolitics*. Pp. 1 – 28
- Mackinder, Halford J. (1904) The Geographical Pivot of History. *Geographical Journal*. Pp. 421 – 437.
- Månberger, Andre and Bengt Johansson (2019) The geopolitics of metals and metalloids used for the renewable energy transition. *Energy Strategy Reviews*, Pp 1-10.
- McGuire, Thomas and Diane Austin (2016) Beyond the Horizon: Oil and Gas Along the Gulf of Mexico. Chapter 16 in Strauss, Sarah, Stephanie Rupp, and Thomas Love (eds) *Cultures of Energy: Power, Practices, Technologies*. Pp. 298 – 311. Available as an ebook:

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- <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/lib/bostonuniv/reader.action?docID=10643046&ppg=200> BU Library ID Login Required
- OECD (2016), OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas: Third Edition, *OECD Publishing, Paris*.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264252479-en>
- Pruett, Dave. (2016). We're all in the Sacrifice Zone Now. *The Huffington Post Blog*. Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-pruett/were-all-in-the-sacrifice-zone-now\\_b\\_9823482.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-pruett/were-all-in-the-sacrifice-zone-now_b_9823482.html)
- Raghaven, S. (2014, November 30). "How a well-intentioned U.S. law left Congolese miners jobless." *The Washington Post*. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/how-a-well-intentioned-us-law-left-congolese-miners-jobless/2014/11/30/14b5924e-69d3-11e4-9fb4-a622dae742a2\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/how-a-well-intentioned-us-law-left-congolese-miners-jobless/2014/11/30/14b5924e-69d3-11e4-9fb4-a622dae742a2_story.html)
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- Sovacool, B.K., (2019) The precarious political economy of cobalt: Balancing prosperity, poverty, and brutality in artisanal and industrial mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, Volume 6, Issue 3, Pages 915-939.
- Tal, Alon, Dorit Kerret. (2020). Positive psychology as a strategy for promoting sustainable population policies. *Heliyon* 6 e03696
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- Valdivia, Gabriela. (2015) The Sacrificial Zones of "Progressive" Extraction in Andean Latin America. *Latin American Research Review* 50(3) Pp. 245-253.
- Whitney, T. (2015). Conflict Minerals, Black Markets, and Transparency: The Legislative Background of Dodd-Frank Section 1502 and Its Historical Lessons. *Journal of Human Rights*, 14(2), 183-200.
- Willow, Anna J. and Sara Wylie (2014). Politics, ecology, and the new anthropology of energy: exploring the emerging frontiers of hydraulic fracking. *Journal of Political Ecology* 21(12): 222 – 236.

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קיבוץ קטורה ד.ג. אילות 88840 ישראל קיבוטס קיטورا ד.נ. אילות 88840 إسرائيل  
Tel. 972-8-6356618 Fax. 972-8-6356634 <mailto:info@arava.org>