



Leadership and Strategic Challenges

Academic Year 2025/2026

Prof. Doutora Raquel Vaz Pinto

2nd Semester 18 hours

6 ECTS

Programme: MA in Governance, Leadership and Democracy Studies

Brief Description

«Everyone needs a strategy. Leaders of armies, major corporations, and political parties have long been expected to have strategies, but now no serious organization could imagine being without one. Despite the problems of finding ways through the uncertainty and confusion of human affairs, a strategic approach is still considered to be preferable to one that is merely tactical, let alone random. Having a strategy suggests an ability to look up from the short term and the trivial to view the long term and the essential, to address causes rather than symptoms, to see woods rather than trees.»

Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy, a History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. ix.

How do we identify a good leader and what are the criteria? How do we identify and assess challenges and develop a sustainable and successful strategy to deal with them? To help us answer these questions we will look at five historical case-studies that are relevant for the challenges of the present. By doing so we will be able to learn from their successes and failures and, therefore, we will be better equipped to deal with the current challenging times.

How does this course work?

Students are required to attend and participate in the classes and are expected to do the core readings assigned for each class. Each session starts with a critical analysis and discussion of the readings.

Moreover, we will begin with an introduction to the concepts and the criteria of leadership, strategy, geopolitics, geostrategy, amongst others. The goal is to have a broad understanding of the operative concepts and a solid theoretical framework. Then, we will proceed with five historical case-studies. Each one encompasses two sessions in which we will study the individuals, the historical and political contexts, the strategies adopted regarding the challenges they faced and, lastly, their successes and failures. In the last session we will apply all these lessons in the analyses of the possibilities and the hindrances regarding the USA and China strategies in 2026.

Evaluation?

- Participation and insightful discussion of readings in classes: 25%
- A written exam at the end of the course (mid-May): 50%
- An oral exam at the end of May: 25%.



Classes are always on Mondays from 14h to 15h30m.

Session I: 2nd February

What is leadership and its criteria? What is strategy? What are strategic challenges?

William Deresiewicz, “Solitude and Leadership,” *The American Scholar* (Spring 2010):
<http://theamericanscholar.org/solitude-and-leadership/>

Waller R. Newell, *The Soul of a Leader* (New York: Harper, 2009), pp. 3-35.

Jakub Grygiel, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2006, chapter 1: «The Premature Death of Geography».

Victor Davis Hanson, *The Savior Generals*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2013, pp. 8-48.

Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past, Reflections on the Uses of History*, Penguin Books, London, 2009.

Session II and III: 9th and 16th February

China: Sun Tzu, Ming and Deng Xiaoping

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (translation by Samuel B. Griffith), Watkins Publishing, London, 2005, chapters II, VI e VIII.

Arthur Waldron, «Chinese strategy from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries», in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, Alvin Bernstein (eds.), *The Making of Strategy. Rulers, States and War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 85-114.

Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2011, chapters 1, 13 e 24.

Alexander V. Pantsov e Steven I. Levine, *Deng Xiaoping, A Revolutionary Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2015.

Session IV and V: 23rd February and 2nd March

Germany: Martin Luther, Bismarck and Konrad Adenauer

Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther, the Man who rediscovered God and changed the world*, Penguin Books, London, 2018.

Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck. A Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, chapters 2, 8 and conclusion.



Marcus Jones, «Strategy as character: Bismarck and the Prussian-German question, 1862-1878», in Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich e James Lacey (eds), *The Shaping of Grand Strategy. Policy, Diplomacy, and War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 79-110.

Holger H. Herwig, «Strategic uncertainties of a nation-state: Prussia-Germany, 1871-1918», in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, Alvin Bernstein (eds.), *The Making of Strategy. Rulers, States and War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 242-277.

Ian Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster, Europe 1950-2017*, Allen Lane, London, 2018.

Session VI: 9th and 16th March

India: Babur, Gandhi, Nehru and Indira

Babur Nama, *Journal of Emperor Babur* (Ed. Dilip Hiro), Penguin Classics, India, 2006, Introduction and part III.

Barbara D. Metcalf e Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 1-28 (Chapter I: «Sultans, Mughals, and pre-colonial Indian society»).

Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi, the History of the World's largest Democracy*, Pan Books, Basingstoke e Oxford, 2008, chapters 8 «Home and the World» and 15 «The Experience of Defeat».

Stephen Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, Brookings Institution, New York, 2002, Chapter 7: «India and Pakistan»

C. Raja Mohan, «The return of the Raj», in *The American Interest*, Summer 2010, pp. 4-11.

Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi before India*, Penguin Random House, India, 2013.

Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi, the Years that changed the World 1915-1948*, Penguin Random House, India, 2018.

Session VIII and IX: 23rd March and 13th April

USA: Founders, Abraham Lincoln and FDR

Gordon S. Wood, *Power and Liberty, Constitutionalism in the American Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2021.

Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals, the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, Penguin, London, 2009.



Victor Davis Hanson, «Atlanta is Ours and Fairly Won», in *The Savior Generals*, Bloomsbury Press, New York and London, pp. 96-139.

Patrick O. Cohrs, *The New Atlantic Order, the Transformation of International Politics 1860-1933*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2022.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *Great Speeches*, ed. John Grafton, Dover Publications, New York, 1999.

Michael J. Green, *By More than Providence, Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific since 1783*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2017.

George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower, US Foreign Relations since 1776*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2008.

Session X and XI: 20th April and 27th April

Turkey: Constantinople, Ottomans and Kemal Atatürk

Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2009.

Marc David Baer, *The Ottomans, Khans, Caesars and Caliphs*, Basic Books, London, 2021.

Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*, John Murray, London, 2004.

Session XII: 4th May

Conclusion: Lessons for 2026?

China: «China's Global Security Initiative Concept Paper» 2023 + «China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis» 2023

<https://english.news.cn/20230221/75375646823e4060832c760e00a1ec19/c.html>

https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367485.html

EUA: «Indo-Pacific Strategy» 2022 and «US National Security Strategy 2025»

<https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>