

**Readings in International Political Thought:  
Machiavelli in Text and Social Context**

**Ateş USLU**

**PhD, professor**

Istanbul University Faculty of Political Science  
International Relations, MA Program  
Spring 2025-2026

Venue:	Classroom:	Notes:
Monday 12:00-14:40		30% The Midterm mark (Symposium) 70% The Final mark

### Description

This course interrogates the evolution of International Political Thought (IPT), a field that emerged in the early 21st century to challenge the reductive 'great debates' of traditional IR theory. It challenges the common scholarly practice of constructing anachronistic genealogies, where thinkers are retroactively drafted into modern schools of thought. Instead, this course adopts a rigorous historical methodology that treats texts as active responses to their specific eras. By treating classic texts not as static monuments but as active responses to their own eras, students will master the interpretation of foundational themes: war, diplomacy, and the shifting boundaries of the law of nations.

This semester, we focus exclusively on Machiavelli, treating his work not as a timeless manual for power, but as a response to specific 16th-century social and political conditions. By applying the methods of international political thought to Machiavelli's oeuvre, students will move beyond the 'great debates' of realism vs. liberalism to interrogate the specific historical origins of war, diplomacy, and the law of nations through a 16th-century lens.

The course is structured in two movements. Part I (Weeks 2–7) situates Machiavelli's political thought within the social and intellectual ferment of the Renaissance, providing the necessary context for his departure from tradition. Part II (Weeks 8–14) pivots to the international arena, interrogating how Machiavelli's social observations and internal political logic inform his approach to inter-state relations. By analyzing his primary texts, students will explore how his understanding of civic life and social conflict shapes his theories on military strategy, diplomacy, and the survival of the state in a hostile world.

### The Lecturer

Ateş Uslu is a historian of political thought, professor of political science at Istanbul University. He graduated from the International Relations Department of Galatasaray University. He earned his master's degree in History from Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne University. He completed his doctoral studies through a joint program between the same university and Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest. In addition to his articles in various journals and books on the history of political thought, cultural history, and political history, he is the author of three books in Turkish: *Lukács: The Road to Marx* (2006), *Introduction to the History of Political Thought: Historiography, Core Approaches, and Research Methods* (2017), and *The Social History of Political Thought* (3 volumes, 2021).

**Office:** A-25 **Office hours:** By appointment. Please email [ates.uslu@istanbul.edu.tr](mailto:ates.uslu@istanbul.edu.tr) to schedule a meeting.

## Assessment

### *The Midterm Mark*

Task	Grading
The Symposium is a structured scholarly exchange consisting of a presentation (15 minutes) and a Q&A session (25 minutes):	The Midterm mark is a composite score reflecting your total contribution to the Symposium sessions (Weeks 2–7). It is calculated as follows:
1) Each student will be assigned one core reading and will be required to present its main problem, central arguments, and proposed solutions in a 15-minute presentation. A handout must be distributed to the class at the start of the session.	1) Presentation Quality (50%): Evaluated on the clarity of the argument reconstruction, the quality of the handout, and the ability to defend the text during the Q&A.
2) Following the presentation, every student is required to pose one question to the presenter. Questions should take one of the following forms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarification: Seeking further detail on a specific issue or passage.</li> <li>Synthesis: Linking the presentation to other topics or thinkers covered in the course.</li> <li>Critique: Addressing the limitations or logical tensions within a specific point of the presentation.</li> </ul>	2) Inquiry Quality (50%): Evaluated on the caliber of the questions asked during the weeks you are not presenting.

### *The Final mark*

Task	Grading
For the final mark, students are required to complete the following two tasks:	The Midterm mark is a composite score, calculated as follows:
1) Weekly Flash Tests (Weeks 10–14): At the conclusion of each seminar, students will complete a 15-minute proctored assessment focused on the week's primary readings and close-reading analysis.	1) Flash Tests (50%): 5 tests in total (Weeks 10-14), evaluated on the logical validity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0-20: Inaccuracy</li> <li>20-30: Descriptive only</li> <li>30-40: Mechanical accuracy</li> <li>41-50: Analytical precision</li> </ul>
2) Final exam: During the formal examination period, students will sit for a 60-minute, closed-book exam. This critical synthesis exam covers the entire semester's curriculum. Students must write a single, cohesive essay in response to a thematic prompt that requires the synthesis of multiple course topics.	2) Final exam (50%): Evaluated on the coherence, historical range, and inter-textual analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0-20: Historical and conceptual inaccuracy</li> <li>20-30: Narrative review</li> <li>30-40: Analytical competence, involving clear connections</li> <li>41-50: Sophisticated synthesis, rigorous argumentation</li> </ul>

## Course Schedule - Summary

*The weekly schedule may be subject to change.*

Intro	Week 1	16 February 2026	Introduction Conceptual and Methodological Framework
Part I	Week 2	23 February 2026	Reception of Machiavelli in Political Thought: An Overview
	Week 3	2 March 2026	The Text in Its Social Context - I: Machiavelli Before <i>The Prince</i>
	Week 4	9 March 2026	The Text in Its Social Context - II: <i>The Prince</i>
	Week 5	16 March 2026	The Text in Its Social Context - III: <i>Discourses on Livy</i>
	Week 6	23 March 2026	The Text in Its Social Context - IV: <i>The Art of War</i>
	Week 7	30 March 2026	The Text in Its Social Context - V: <i>Florentine Histories</i>
	Week 8	6 April 2026	Receptions of Machiavelli in 20th-century IR Theory: Realist Readings and Critical Interpretations
Part II	Week 9	13 April 2026	Machiavelli Through the Perspective of History of International Political Thought
	Week 10	20 April 2026	Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 1
	Week 11	27 April 2026	Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 2
	Week 12	4 May 2026	Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 3
	Week 13	11 May 2026	Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 4
	Week 14	18 May 2026	Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 5 Conclusion
	Exam	15 June 2026	Critical Synthesis Exam

## Course Schedule

*The weekly schedule may be subject to change.*

*The schedule includes literature that all seminar participants must read and prepare in advance. Recommended further readings will be provided throughout the semester.*

Week 1	16 February 2026	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p><b>Conceptual and Methodological Framework</b></p> <p><b>Reading suggestions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Armitage, David. <i>Foundations of Modern International Thought</i>, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. pp. 17-56.</li> <li>• Armitage, David. "The International Turn in Intellectual History". In <i>Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History</i>, eds. Darrin M McMahon &amp; Samuel Moyn, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 232-252.</li> <li>• Bell, Duncan. "International Relations and International History". In <i>The Oxford Handbook of History and International Relations</i>, edited by Mlada Bukovansky, Edward Keene, Christian Reus-Smit, and Maja Spanu, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023, 94-110.</li> <li>• Brown, Chris. "Political Thought, International Relations Theory and International Political Theory: An Interpretation". <i>International Relations</i>, 2017, 31(3): 227-240, DOI: 10.1177/0047117817723062</li> </ul> <p><b>Selections from critical approaches to mainstream IR theory</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ashworth, Lucian M. "Did the realist-idealists great debate really happen? A revisionist history of international relations". <i>International Relations</i>, 16(1), 2002, 33-51.</li> <li>• Ashworth, Lucian M., <i>Creating International Studies: Angell, Mitrany and the Liberal Tradition</i>, Routledge, 2017.</li> <li>• Buzan, Barry &amp; George Lawson, "Rethinking benchmark dates in international relations". <i>European Journal of international relations</i>, 2014, 20(2): 437-462.</li> </ul>
Week 2	23 February 2026	<p><b>Reception of Machiavelli in Political Thought: An Overview</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Del Lucchese, Filippo. <i>The Political Philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli</i>. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015. pp. 117-170.</li> <li>• Walsh, Mary. "Historical Reception of Machiavelli", <i>Seeking Real Truths Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Machiavelli</i>. Edited by Patricia Vilches and Gerald Seaman. Leiden: Brill, 2007. pp. 273-301.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bogiaris, Guillaume. "Machiavelli". In <i>Research Handbook on the History of Political Thought</i>. Edited by Cary J. Nederman &amp; Guillaume Bogiaris. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024. pp. 348-358.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>The Reception of Machiavelli - A Selection of Key Texts:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strauss, Leo. <i>Thoughts on Machiavelli</i>. University of Chicago Press, [1958] 2014.</li> <li>Lefort, Claude. <i>Machiavelli in the Making</i>. Northwestern University Press, 2012.</li> <li>Pocock, J.G.A. <i>The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition</i>. Princeton University Press, 2016.</li> </ul>
Week 3	2 March 2026	<p><b>The Text in Its Social Context - I: Machiavelli Before <i>The Prince</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Readings:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skinner, Quentin. <i>Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. pp. 1-23.</li> <li>Wood, Ellen Meiksins. <i>Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment</i>. London: Verso, 2012. pp. 33-44.</li> </ul>
Week 4	9 March 2026	<p><b>The Text in Its Social Context - II: <i>The Prince</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Readings:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heller, Agnes. <i>Renaissance Man</i>, translated by Richard E. Allen. London: Routledge &amp; Kegan Paul, [1967] 1978. pp. 329-362.</li> <li>Gramsci, Antonio. <i>The Modern Prince and Other Writings</i>. New York: International Publishers, 1968. pp. 135-142, 163-164.</li> </ul>
Week 5	16 March 2026	<p><b>The Text in Its Social Context - III: Discourses on Livy</b></p> <p><b><i>Readings:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Najemy, John M. "Society, class, and state in Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy", <i>The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli</i>. Edited by John M. Najemy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. pp. 96-111</li> <li>Althusser, Louis. <i>Machiavelli and Us</i>. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2000. [Chapter I]</li> </ul>
Week 6	23 March 2026	<p><b>The Text in Its Social Context - IV: The Art of War</b></p> <p><b><i>Readings:</i></b></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wood, Neal, "Introduction", N. Machiavelli, <i>The Art of War</i>, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965. [Chapter 4 et seq.]</li> <li>• Winter, Yves. "The Prince and His Art of War: Machiavelli's Military Populism." <i>Social Research: An International Quarterly</i> 81, no. 1 (2014): 165-191. <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sor.2014.0003">https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sor.2014.0003</a>.</li> </ul>
Week 7	30 March 2026	<p><b>The Text in Its Social Context - V: Florentine Histories</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winter, Yves. Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 167-191.</li> </ul>
Week 8	6 April 2026	<p><b>Receptions of Machiavelli in 20th-century IR Theory</b></p> <p><b>Readings on Realist Interpretations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guilhot, Nicole. "The First Modern Realist: Felix Gilbert's Machiavelli and the Realist Tradition in International Thought". <i>Modern Intellectual History</i>, 13(3), 2016, pp. 681-711, doi:10.1017/S1479244314000870.</li> <li>• Jackson, Michael, &amp; Thomas Moore. "Machiavelli's Walls: The legacy of realism in international relations theory", <i>International Politics</i>, 53, 2016, 447-465.</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings on Critical Interpretations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carta, Caterina. "Gramsci and The Prince: Taking Machiavelli outside the realist courtyard?", <i>Review of International Studies</i>, 43/2, 345–366, doi:10.1017/S0260210516000280</li> <li>• Hutchings, Kimberly. "Negotiating the lines between war and politics: Machiavelli's gendering of war and peace", <i>International Politics</i>, 53, 2016, 519–533.</li> </ul>
Week 9	13 April 2026	<p><b>Machiavelli Through the Perspective of Intellectual History</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keene, Edward. <i>International Political Thought: An Historical Introduction</i>, Polity, 2005, 98-127.</li> <li>• Roth-Isigkeit, David. "Niccolò Machiavelli's International Legal Thought: Culture, Contingency, and Construction", (ed.) Kadelbach, Stefan &amp; Kleinlein, Thomas &amp; Roth-Isigkeit, David, <i>System, Order, and International Law: The Early History of International Legal Thought from Machiavelli to Hegel</i>, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 19-37.</li> </ul>
Week 10	20 April 2026	<b>Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 1</b>

		<p><b>Source readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Machiavelli, Niccolò, <i>Machiavelli on International Relations</i>. Edited by Marco Cesa. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 33-53.</li> </ul>
Week 11	27 April 2026	<p><b>Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 2</b></p> <p><b>Source readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Machiavelli, Niccolò, <i>Machiavelli on International Relations</i>. Edited by Marco Cesa. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 55-83.</li> </ul>
Week 12	4 May 2026	<p><b>Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 3</b></p> <p><b>Source readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Machiavelli, Niccolò, <i>Machiavelli on International Relations</i>. Edited by Marco Cesa. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 87-109.</li> </ul>
Week 13	11 May 2026	<p><b>Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 4</b></p> <p><b>Source readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Machiavelli, Niccolò, <i>Machiavelli on International Relations</i>. Edited by Marco Cesa. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 109-127.</li> </ul>
Week 14	18 May 2026	<p><b>Machiavelli on International Relations: Source Readings - 5</b></p> <p><b>Source readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Machiavelli, Niccolò. <i>Machiavelli on International Relations</i>. Edited by Marco Cesa. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 127-135.</li> </ul> <p><b>Conclusion</b></p>
Week 15	15 June 2026 (13:00-14:00)	Final Exam
	29 June 2026 (13:00-14:00)	Make-up Exam