

Holiday Gifts for IR Professors

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, DEC 8 2014

Writing in the *Washington Post* last week Professor Dan Drezner laid out his holiday gift ideas for political scientists. Wrote Drezner, “With the passing of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, holiday shoppers can now focus on niche gifts, like the important political scientists in their lives.” The Tufts University professor offered up a list of gift ideas including one that had this Australian-born, France-based, technically-Irish citizen shaking his head: a passport. Heck, I’ve got two already and my four year old son has two and qualifies for a third, should I ever get around to doing the paperwork.

But, sadly, while Drezner’s work on political economy is firmly in the international sphere, his gift guide was distinctly US-centric. “Most political scientists in this country are ‘Americanists,’ he writes in recommending *The Good Wife* on DVD, “which means they’re interested in American politics. And despite the proliferation of shows about politics on television, despite the accolades thrown at *House of Cards* and the social media gasping about *Scandal*, the best show about politics in America right now is *The Good Wife*, and it’s not close.”

But what if you are charged with finding a gift for a professor who is not an Americanist, but rather one who works in IR? What sorts of gifts should you be sending their way this holiday season? I cobbled together a few suggestions to get your gift giving juices flowing.

The Gift of Getting Organized: Evernote Premium (€5/month, €45/year)

Evernote is ideal for keeping track of everything that a professor comes across during a day at the office, at home, or at a conference. Think of it as a piece of software that enables you to remember everything forever. Audio notes whispered into a cell phone from the back row of a conference? Easy. Take a photo of a restaurant while walking around an unfamiliar city? Evernote not only stores the photo but the GPS coordinates so you can find it again. Scan a PDF and Evernote’s OCR system makes it searchable later – and these things are just touching the surface of what this software can do. For writing, research, note taking, scheduling, and now with chat and sharing options updated, it’s a great tool made even better. The relatively cheap premium upgrade is a gift the professor in your life will thank you for well into the New Year.

The Gift of a Good Read: *Foreign Policy* (\$60 for print and digital)

It’s not *International Organization* or *International Security*, and it doesn’t have the gravitas of *Foreign Affairs*. But in a world where breaking international political and security news is usually given the 30-second treatment between reality TV show reveals, *Foreign Policy* stands out for its commitment to international political journalism and informed commentary. A subscription to the magazine – I get mine on the iPad but you can persist with a hard copy, too – opens up the otherwise mostly-paywalled website, including some great blogs by David Rothkopf and Stephen Walt. I’ve found it invaluable in providing solid background pieces for students who otherwise might decide that the world is all too complex for them to try and understand. Entertaining and informative, an annual subscription makes for a great gift.

The Gift of a Good Movie: *Lord of War/Syriana* (€7)

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I've been using *Syriana* in my classroom for the last year or so as a way of introducing the complex nature of Middle Eastern resource politics to my students. The movie takes a wide view of the region and introduces themes including energy, development, terrorism, intelligence gathering, corruption, bribery, and race into a smooth-flowing couple of hours of on-screen action. Matt Damon plays well, as does George Clooney, and this edition is teamed with Nicolas Cage's *Lord of War* – itself a great film on international political manoeuvring. Indeed, in a world where the images of the end of the Cold War are usually ecstatic Berliners pulling down a wall, Yuri Orlov's alternative take on things – a crash course in the unbridled capitalism that was the looting of Soviet armouries – is a useful reminder of the dark underbelly of international trade.

The Gift of Binge TV: *Homeland: Three Series Box Set* (\$79.99)

Drezner went for *The Good Wife* but I don't think that you can go past *Homeland* for international political drama. Terrorism, sources and methods, basic fieldcraft, drone strikes, morally questionable foreign policy decisions, cover-ups, double-agents, and all the intrigue that goes with it. *Homeland* started strong in Season 1, continued along the same path in Season 2, and while Season 3 is slower, things are heating back up in Season 4. A box set allows for binge watching of a great Showtime-backed series in that period between the end of the Fall and the start of the Spring, and will have your favourite IR professor bouncing back into the classroom, refreshed and ready to go.

The Gift of Political History: eBay

Good international politics professors usually have an eye for the historical. After all, how is it possible to explain the present if the past is completely or even mostly unknown or ignored? Scouting around on eBay can deliver more than a few recent historical artefacts that, depending on your professor's specialty, might appeal. I found the following to be rather interesting:

- Obama Nobel Peace Prize stamps – in case you want to mail yourself back to 2009 before the drone strikes, Libya, and ISIS.
- Yuri Gagarin: Cosmonaut poster – forget a voyage to Mars, or even the race to the moon. When the space race first got going it was a Soviet cosmonaut who led the way.
- Angela Merkel facemask – if you cannot be the most powerful woman in world politics, you can still look like her.
- Crimea Annexation Commemorative Coin – if your professor is a fan of power politics in the offensive realist style they might appreciate this Vladimir Putin embossed coin commemorating the annexation of Crimea. Of course, like Putin's ruble, the value of the coin isn't guaranteed to hold its value.

In the end, though, the very best gift for an IR professor is probably the same as the best gift for anyone else: a kind thought, a caring gesture, and a bit of time away from the office with family and friends around a holiday feast.

Happy holidays.

About the author:

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