Theme of the Course and Objectives

For centuries, warfare has been a central theme in international relations. Whether they contribute to the rise and decline of nation-states or affect the emergence of long-term rivalries, wars transform state relations and help define world politics. How has international conflict changed throughout the years? Why are interstate wars on decline at the moment? What explains the onset of violent conflict among states? Finally, are the United States and North Korea destined to fight?

By investigating the causes of war, the course will allow students not only to understand the onset of previous conflicts but will equip them with tools to predict future fighting. We begin to explore international war by focusing on patterns of warfare from past centuries until the present. We then approach the study of war through systematic analysis of conflict at the individual, domestic, and international level. The course will thus explore the role of human psychology and personality in decisions to fight. It will also examine the difference between authoritarian regimes and democracies in managing conflict by studying how institutional accountability and transparency shape relations among states. Lastly, we will focus on the role of international factors in the onset of war. For example, what is power, and how do shifts in the distribution of power in the international system affect propensity to fight? Are some cultures more likely to clash than others?

We will critically examine several wars among states using the above level-of-analysis approach. As we make sense of human decisions to fight, we will be able to understand why state negotiations break and war follows. In doing so, students will be in a position not only to evaluate conflict initiation but also to recognize conditions that make peaceful resolution possible.
Required Readings


3) Additional readings will be posted on E-reserve (* indicates that article/book chapter can be found on E-reserve) or you can access them from the library's online resources (**) indicates available in online resources). Absence of * or ** indicates that the reading is from one of the two required books or you can access it directly from the link given on the syllabus. On rare occasions, you will access the reading from Angel; A next to the reading indicates Angel.


(access directly from the link on the syllabus)

(access directly from the link on the syllabus).


Gwertzman, Bernard (2004). “Betts: Don’t Expect Perfection from Intelligence Agencies,” Interview,
(access directly from the link on the syllabus)


(access directly from the link on the syllabus)


Preble, Christopher (2004). “Intelligence Failures Now and Then,” CATO Institute, (access directly from the link on the syllabus)


Seliktar, Ofira (2005). “Turning Water Into Fire: The Jordan River As the Hidden Factor in The Six Day War,” The Middle East Review of International Affairs, 9,2. (access directly from the link on the syllabus)


Students are also encouraged to purchase a semester subscription to a major newspaper such as The New York Times, the Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, etc. and follow the news regularly.

Course Requirements

Students will be responsible for reading the assigned material before each class and discussing some of the readings during the lecture. We will have two exams consisting of multiple-choice, definition, short-answer, and essay questions. You will write two papers designed to improve your analytical and creative skills.

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<td>Assignment # 1: Conflict Prediction</td>
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<td>Assignment # 2: Simulation Activity</td>
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Exams: Multiple-choice, definition, short answer, and essay

Assignments: In the first paper (~8-10 pages), you will make a prediction about the possibility of war by relying on the approaches we studied in class. In addition, you will participate in simulation activity where you will assume a specific role and will have to manage crisis situation in a way to avoid an outbreak of war. You will write a short reaction paper (~3-4 pages) describing your strategies and analyzing the effectiveness of your approach. Our simulation activity will be conducted online, and there is a small fee ($12) to purchase the role for each participant. Precise directions will be given later in the semester.

Attendance and Participation: You should come to class and actively participate in our discussions. Please read the assigned material before each class so that we can have a lively exchange of ideas. In addition to regular participation, you will also work with others in small groups to explain the onset of major wars using the approaches we study in class.

Extra Credit: Interested students may earn up to 2 points of extra credit that will be added to the final average. You may watch a film about any topic related to war and write a two-page critical analysis of the film through the lens of the issues/problems we covered in class. The film analysis should include only brief summary of the movie, the rest should concentrate on critical analysis: What is the deeper meaning of the film? How does it help us understand the
onset of war? What does it accomplish and fail to deliver? Etc. *Extra credit must be completed before the start of the reading week, no extra credit will be accepted after this time. You are allowed to do one extra credit only.*

**Grade Assignment:**

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**Class Rules:**

1) Exams must be taken on the assigned dates. The papers must be turned in on the scheduled dates. No make ups will be allowed unless an emergency occurs and is properly documented (for example, a doctor’s note is provided). Attendance and participation during book discussion, group discussions, and simulation are REQUIRED.

2) Please act respectfully towards the instructor and other students. Talking and sleeping in class distracts everyone from learning. I trust that you will show respect to all around you. Students who are disrespectful towards the professor and other students will be asked to leave the classroom and their name will be forwarded to the dean’s office.

3) Students who wish to use a laptop in class to take notes may do so only for that purpose. You are not allowed to browse the internet, check e-mail, and chat during class. At the beginning of the semester, every student planning to use a laptop will write and sign a statement that he/she promises to use the computer only for class-related purposes. If you violate your promise, you will no longer be allowed to use the laptop and five points will be deducted from your final participation grade.

4) Students must be aware of university rules concerning cheating and plagiarism. Please see university website if you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism.

5) Failure to turn in the papers or take any of the exams will constitute grounds for a failing grade for the course.

6) The papers should be turned in at the beginning of class. Late papers will be penalized in the following manner: ten points will be deducted per day for any paper that is not turned in at the beginning of class. Please do not email your papers or drop them in the office (unless previously consulted with me or unless I give specific instructions to do so) but bring them to class instead. Thank you.

7) Students dissatisfied with their grade shall not discuss their exam/paper grades with the professor immediately after the exams/papers are returned. If you wish to speak with me regarding your grade, you must wait 48 hours and then make an
appointment to see me during office hours. Pressuring the professor to increase your grade constitutes a form of unprofessional behavior and will not be accepted. I reserve the right to dismiss any student from the course permanently if a student threatens, pressures, or tries to bully the professor.

8) Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, (646) 685-0118, during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, contact me to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Wed. August 26

I. Introduction: Course Outline & Overview

Week 2

Mon. August 31

II. Origins and Trends in Conflict: Is War in the Past?

a) Genes and war: is aggression inevitable? Can humans exist without warfare?
b) Historical patterns and the decline in interstate conflict
c) “Wars of the third kind”


Wed. September 2

III. The Changing Nature of Warfare

a) From stones and spears to nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons
b) New technology and cyberwars
c) Video clip, Cyber War!
d) How does technological innovation in warfare affect decisions about war? Does the existence of nuclear weapons mean that wars are less likely to occur?
e) Who fights whom: is state vs. non-state-actor warfare the future?

Langewiesche, 80-98**; Hinde & Rotblat, 30-38*; Kimmage & Ridolfo, 88-90**; Osipovich 93**

Week 3

Wed. September 9
IV. Levels of Analysis: Systemic and Dyadic (Anarchy and Power)

a) Studying causes of war using levels of analysis
b) Anarchy and its impact on conflict
c) Distribution of power and the offense/defense balance
d) Balancing and alliances: does it stop the onset of war?

Levy (1996) 3-24*; Blainey, 108-124A; Waltz, 615-628**

Week 4

Mon. September 14

No class—professor at a conference

Wed. September 16

V. Levels of Analysis: Systemic and Dyadic (Power Transition)

a) How does rapid change in power affect the chance of war?
b) Are China and U.S. headed for war in the near future?
c) Power transition and the link to preventive wars
d) Case study: the preventive war that never happened—the rise of Germany in the 1930s

Kugler & Organski, 13-28*; Ripsman and Levy, 32-67**

Week 5

Wed. September 23

VI. Levels of Analysis: Systemic and Dyadic (Arms Races and Deterrence)

a) How do arms races originate? To what extent are they the main cause of war or merely a symptom of strained interstate relations?
b) When is deterrence successful?
c) The role of nuclear weapons: do they serve as an effective deterrent?

Ganguly, 45-70**; Kapur, 71-94**

Week 6

Wed. October 14

VII. Case Study: World War I
a) Origins and causes through the lens of systemic approaches

Kagan, 81-205

Week 7

Mon. October 19

VIII. The Breakdown of Negotiations and War

a) If war is a costly venture, why do rational leaders nevertheless choose to fight rather than settle on an alternative outcome?

b) Understanding the role of bluffing and commitment problems in pre-war negotiations

c) The importance of costly signaling

Fearon, 1-32


Wed. October 21

IX. Level of Analysis: Systemic and Dyadic (Culture)

a) To what extent are wars caused by cultural incompatibilities? Is there really such as thing as ‘clash of civilizations’ or the battle between Americans and Muslims?

b) Analyzing the evidence and the argument’s logic

Huntington, (available online:

http://history.club.fatih.edu.tr/103\%20Huntington\%20Clash\%20of\%20Civilizations\%20ful\n1\%20text.htm)

Week 8

Mon. October 26

X. Case Study: World War II

a) Origins and causes through the lens of systemic approaches

b) Examining the role of bluffing, commitment problem, and signaling

Kagan, 281-388

Wed. October 28

XI. Level of Analysis: State (Geography and Resources)
a) What is the relationship between territory and war? Why is territory considered the most war-prone issue?
b) Renewable and non-renewable resources: understanding the role of each in the path to conflict
c) Case Study: global warming and its impact on resource scarcity and war

Vasquez, 133-152*; Seliktar; http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2005/issue2/jv9no2a4.html
Easterbrook, 52-64**

Week 9

Mon. November 2

XII. Levels of Analysis: State (Economic Explanations)

a) The relationship between economic interdependence and war
b) Economic growth/decline and conflict
c) Case Study: world economic expansion and security in pre-WWI Europe

Blainey, 18-32 & 87-96A; Rowe, 195-231**

Wed. November 4

XIII. Levels of Analysis: State (Regime Type)

a) Are democracies more peaceful than other states in general or under specific conditions?
b) What explains the ‘democratic peace theory’? And to what extent will democratization help bring an end to wars and interstate armed conflicts?

Owen, 137-158*; Mansfield and Snyder, **

Week 10

Mon. November 9

Midterm

Wed. November 11

XIV. Levels of Analysis: State (Diversionary Theory of War)

a) Domestic instability and foreign wars
b) Evidence for the scapegoat hypothesis
c) Case study: Honduras, El Salvador and the Soccer War

Levy (1988) 653-673∗∗; Kapuscinski,

Week 11

Mon. November 16

XV. Levels of Analysis: Groups (Bureaucratic Politics)

a) How does inter-group rivalry among governmental bureaucracies affect decisions about war?
b) The problem with standard operating procedures
c) What is the role of intelligence in decision-making? Why and how do intelligence failures occur? What role did intelligence failure play in the decisions leading up to the war in Iraq?

Gwertzman,

Wed. November 18

XVI. Documentary Film: The Enemy Within

Week 12

Mon. November 23

No class—professor at a conference

Wed. November 25

XVI. Levels of Analysis: Individual (Human Psychology)

a) What role do cognitive limitations, misperception, and personality play in decisions about war? How do we ‘identify’ war-prone personalities?
b) Insights from prospect theory
c) How important are explanations at the individual level in relation to the other explanations we studied when it comes to understanding causes of war? How do we know that personality was a factor and not power politics?
d) Case study: The Kaiser and the Fuhrer

Waite, 143-162∗
Week 13

Mon. November 30

XVII. Case Study: Cuban Missile Crisis

a) Analyzing the onset and peaceful resolution of the crisis using levels of analysis
b) Understanding the role of groups and individuals in crisis decision-making

Kagan, 437-548

Wed. December 2

XVIII. Present and Future Threats: Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare

a) What is the root cause of terrorism?
b) To what extent will future conflicts be waged against non-state vs. state actors? What kind of developments might drive such a phenomenon?
c) What is unconventional warfare? How can it be won?
d) Why do we see asymmetric conflicts?


Week 14 & Week 15

Mon. December 7

XIX. Book Discussion: America’s Wars in Afghanistan & Iraq—The Forever War

Wed. December 9, Mon. December 14 & Wed. December 16

XX. Simulation Activity: Crisis in North Korea

PAPER 1 DUE ON DECEMBER 14

FINAL EXAM: GOOD LUCK! (DECEMBER 30)
Causes of War
Assignment: Analytical Paper

Your task in this paper is to predict whether the crisis situation you will study will result in war. You should identify whether you think war will occur, whether stalemate will be the outcome, or the crisis will be peacefully resolved. To address this issue, you should rely on three levels of analysis we studied in class (international (including rationalist explanations for war), domestic, and individual) to justify your prediction. You must demonstrate why some explanations are stronger than others in building your argument. To complete this assignment, you should do a very basic research about your crisis to make your prediction credible. The paper should be approximately five to seven pages in length.

Due: December 14th

Grading requirement:

- Did the student make a specific prediction?
- Did the student address ALL levels of analysis in building his/her argument, and explain why some explanations are more suitable than others in contributing to our understanding of the future war/peace/stalemate in the crisis situation?
- Did the students demonstrate basic knowledge about the case necessary to make the argument coherent?
- Did the student express his/her argument coherently and logically?
- Did the student proofread the paper for grammar and style?

Sample Cases:

Israel-Syria
Israel-Iran
U.S.-Iran
China-Japan
Venezuela-Colombia
Venezuela-U.S.
Ukraine-Russia
Ethiopia-Eritrea
Serbia-Kosovo
Greece-Turkey
Afghanistan-Pakistan
Armenia-Turkey
Myanmar-Thailand
Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan
Armenia-Azerbaijan