Political Science 417 - Fall 2020
Theories of War
Wednesday web meetings, 3:55-5:10 PM

Contact Information

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About the Course

This course introduces students to the major theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of armed conflict. The course will consist of a combination of recorded lectures and synchronous weekly discussions. Our primary aim is to understand causes of conflict among states (international conflict), within states (civil conflict), and between a state and non-state actors (e.g., terrorism). Our early material will emphasize big-picture approaches and the methods by which social scientists study conflict systematically. In later weeks, we will apply this material to understand a variety of substantive topics.

Learning outcomes of the course include the following:

- Students will distinguish between narrative and scientific approaches to the study of armed conflict
- Students will synthesize the findings of recent studies in armed conflict
- Students will analyze and report on an ongoing conflict hot-spot

Expectations

Lectures and discussions

The weekend before each meeting, I will post a series of 5-10 minute videos, typically summing to no more than 75 minutes of lecture. Students should watch the videos before our synchronous web meeting each Wednesday, where students can pose questions and discuss themes from the lecture and readings.

Technology

Students will need access to a computer with broadband internet access and a web browser capable of displaying course content, completing quizzes and exams in Blackboard, and joining synchronous web meetings via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. For more information about Blackboard, see the IT website here. You can also contact University Technology Services helpdesk at helpdesk@sc.edu or 803.777.1800.

Readings

Readings are intended to supplement lecture. Many readings consist of peer-reviewed, scholarly articles, some of which use sophisticated methods. Students can largely skim over technical information while focusing on the substance—the research question, argument, and findings—of each academic reading. I also assign recent blog posts and journalistic articles relevant to the curriculum, which tend to be written for a wider audience.
All readings are available as PDF documents that will be posted to Blackboard or web sources linked in this syllabus. Students do not need to purchase any readings for this course.

Projects

I will randomly assign students to groups responsible for a project that will be due in stages throughout the semester. Students who wish to pursue a solo project may contact me no later than August 31. Each group will be responsible for presenting an analysis of a current armed conflict hot-spot. Group presentations will include a brief historical summary of the case and then apply course concepts to make predictions about future trajectories. Presentations may be submitted as videos or recorded live during a synchronous meeting.

Further, each individual student will responsible for posting Blackboard discussion responses to every project (other than their own) highlighting similarities and differences between cases. Detailed project criteria will be posted to Blackboard early in the semester.

Quizzes

There will be a short quiz via Blackboard each of the first ten weeks of class (including after our first meeting). Quizzes will be available to take from Wednesday evening through Friday afternoon. The quizzes are open-“book,” and open-notes, but are strictly time-limited. I write quiz questions that require a thorough understanding of course material such that students can apply course concepts to hypothetical situations. As a result, it will not be easy to search for answers via the internet.

Class behavior

This course will, at times, involve the discussion of controversial and sensitive ideas. Students should treat everyone with respect. Try to extend the benefit of the doubt to those who hold opinions contrary to your own. The instructor is expected to facilitate learning, to answer questions appropriately, to be fair and objective in grading, to provide timely and useful feedback on assignments, to maintain adequate office hours, and to treat students as he would like to be treated in their place.

On the same theme of respectfulness, please avoid talking or otherwise engaging in distracting behavior during class. It is generally good best to keep microphones on mute except when speaking to the class. Please turn off or silence cellphones and other distracting devices.

Finally, given the unusual circumstances of our current pandemic, I ask that everyone be understanding if some students face occasional interruptions from, e.g., children or pets. I have done my best to design a course that will minimize time pressures and maximize flexibility. Please let me know if you face any difficulties participating.

Grading

Quizzes - 35%

Each of 10 quizzes will consist of five multiple choice questions. Each quiz is equally-weighted at 3.5%. Students who are happy with their quiz grades can skip the final and count the quizzes for 70% of their final grade.

Course projects - 30%

Group presentations: 20%; Individual Blackboard posts: 10%. A detailed grading rubric will be posted to Blackboard.
Final exam - 35%

The final exam will be offered remotely via Blackboard. It will consist of 50 multiple choice questions, some of which will be “remixed” quiz questions.

Final grade calculation

Final letter grades are recorded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90% or above</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 to 89.99</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>80 to 84.99</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 79.99</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 to 74.99</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 69.99</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64.99</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 60</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There will be no individual extra credit, although I might offer the entire class extra credit opportunities. If I am impressed with attendance and participation, I might reduce grade thresholds by rounding decimals of ≥ .5 up. I do not raise grades due to job or scholarship requirements, or simply because a student was close to receiving a higher grade. Typically, I will not respond to emails asking for this type of preferential treatment. Of course, I am always willing to double-check for errors in grade calculations.

Incompletes

An incomplete grade is an exception and I will assign such a grade only if two criteria are simultaneously met: (1) the student is unable to complete the course due to a serious personal illness or tragedy, which is adequately documented; (2) the student has completed 50% of the course requirements.

Accommodating disabilities

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to participate fully in this class, contact the Office of Student Disability Services: 803.777.6142, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Student Disability Services.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be treated as such. USC has severe penalties for cases of plagiarism. Should I determine that plagiarism has occurred, I will determine whether the seriousness of the situation warrants (1) a penalty to the assignment, up to assigning a score of 0 for the work, (2) a penalty to the course, up to assigning an ‘F,’ or (3) a more severe penalty in accordance with the approved university procedure.

Copyright

All lectures, quizzes, and exams are copyrighted by the instructor. Most readings are subject to copyright by the authors and/or publishers. Students are encouraged to take notes and utilize course materials for their own educational purpose. However, students may not reproduce or distribute any content without the instructor’s written permission. Students may not share course materials with online social study sites like Course Hero and other services. Students who publicly reproduce, distribute or modify course content may be in violation of the UofSC Honor Code. For an explanation of the UofSC intellectual property policy, see: ACAF 1.33: Intellectual Property Policy.
Schedule

Part 1: Introduction

Week 1 (August 26): Course introduction
Readings This syllabus!
Also check out informative online media such as Political Violence at a Glance, The Monkey Cage, War on the Rocks, Foreign Policy

Week 2 (September 2): Defining the scope of the course: political violence, armed conflict, and war
Topics Inter- vs. intra- vs. extra-state conflict; positive vs. negative peace; MIDs; crises; events; terrorism; state violence; trends over time
Readings Pettersson and Öberg 2020 JPR article
Web article: “Is the World Getting Safer?”

Part 2: The study of conflict

Week 3 (September 9): Origins, “grand” theories, and systemic causes of war and peace
Topics The security dilemma; Woodrow Wilson and the origins of modern IR in WWI; collective security; balance of power theory; power transition theory; hegemonic stability theory
Readings Levy and Thompson 2010 ch 2
Web article: “Why Race Matters in International Relations”
Web article: “Oh God, Not the Peloponnesian War Again”

Week 4 (September 16): The scientific approach
Topics Science vs. narrative; science vs. critical approaches; science vs. conspiracy theories; rationalism vs. constructivism; logic and inquiry; deduction vs. induction; (avoiding) bias; levels of analysis; the Correlates of War project; dangerous dyads; territory disputes
Readings Diehl (ed.) 2004 ch 9
Web article: “I’m a data scientist who is skeptical about data”

Week 5 (September 23): Bargaining and information
Topics The bargaining model of war; asymmetric information; commitment problems; international organizations; terrorist strategy
Readings Fearon 1995 IO article

Week 6 (September 30): The conflict process
Topics Deterrence; alliances; rivalry; recurrent conflict; reputation; faits accompli; battles and information updating; peacekeeping; third-party intervention; selection effects in conflict research
Readings Leeds 2003 AJPS article
Web article: “The Fait Accompli and Persistent Engagement in Cyberspace”
Part 3: Substantive issues

Week 7 (October 7): Regime type
Topics Democratic norms vs. institutions, information vs. constraint; audience costs; democratization and war; battlefield performance; systemic democracy; regime type and terrorism; partisan polarization
Readings Tomz and Weeks 2013 APSR article

Week 8 (October 14): Economics and interconnectedness
Topics The liberal/capitalist/commercial peace; opportunity costs vs. costly signals; dependence and coercion; networks; the resource curse; globalization; climate change; migration; pandemics
Readings Web article: “The Exaggerated Threat of Oil Wars”
Web article: “COVID-19, Food Access, and Social Upheaval”

Week 9 (October 21): Identity and culture
Topics The clash of civilizations (and critiques); colonialism; ethnic violence; genocide; issue indivisibility
Readings Web article: “Are Muslim countries more violent?”
Web article: “The Dutch Are Uncomfortable With Being History’s Villains, Not Victims”

Week 10 (October 28): Leader (un)popularity, citizen grievance, and the police state
Topics Diversionary theory of war; “old” vs. “new” civil wars; civil unrest and accommodation vs. repression; police militarization; state failure
Readings Mitchell and Prins 2004 JCR article
Web article: “Meltdown in Minsk”
Web article: “Is 2020 the New 1968?”

Part 4: Projects
Week 11 (November 4): Project discussions
Week 12 (November 11): Project discussions
Week 13 (November 18): Project discussions, review
Week 14 (November 25): Thanksgiving break—no class

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 9 at 4:00 PM