International Security

Sample Course Syllabus – Graduate Level

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Course Description and Rationale

This graduate seminar surveys central theories, debates, and contemporary challenges in international security. We ask why states go to war or make peace, how domestic institutions and leaders influence conflict, whether military alliances deter aggression, and how nuclear weapons and emerging technologies transform security relations. The primary goal is to evaluate theoretical arguments and empirical evidence rather than to study any single country or conflict.

The course is organized around three connected themes: **(I) theoretical approaches to war and international security**; **(II) domestic political institutions, leadership, and security strategies**; and **(III) contemporary security challenges and the consequences of violence**. Students critically assess the research literature and develop their own theoretically informed research designs.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to (1) explain foundational and recent scholarship on international security; (2) evaluate theoretical assumptions, causal mechanisms, and empirical evidence; (3) identify original research questions and derive testable hypotheses; (4) design independent studies of international security; and (5) communicate research findings clearly and assess their implications for policy.

Readings and Access

Required and extra readings appear below. Required readings form the basis of seminar discussion; extra readings support further research. Readings may be made available through the institution's learning platform, library, or publicly accessible sources where available.

Requirements and Assessment

- **Two extension papers (20%):** Write two short papers (up to three pages each) developing an original research question, theory, and at least one testable hypothesis based on assigned readings. Submit in two different teaching weeks.
- **Two presentations (20%):** Lead one discussion of the weekly literature (approximately 15 minutes, 10%) and deliver one research design presentation (approximately 10 minutes, followed by discussion, 10%).
- **Seminar participation (20%):** Prepare the readings and contribute substantively to discussion of arguments, research designs, data, findings, and potential extensions.
- **Research design, initial submission (25%):** Submit a 4,000–5,000-word research design paper presenting a question, literature, theory, hypotheses, and empirical strategy; results are not required.
- **Research design, revision and response memo (15%):** Revise the paper in response to instructor feedback and submit a memo describing revisions.

Research and discussion expectations: Students should consider whether an article asks an important question, identifies plausible mechanisms, uses appropriate data and methods, and draws well-supported conclusions. Seminar discussions should be thoughtful, evidence-based, and respectful.

Submission and grading: Deadlines and submission procedures will be announced for the applicable academic term. Late-work and grade-appeal procedures will be governed by the adopting institution's rules and any additional course policies announced by the instructor.

Accessibility, accommodations, and academic integrity: Students are encouraged to discuss accommodation needs with the instructor and appropriate university offices. Submitted work must be original, transparently attribute sources, and follow institutional academic integrity and generative-AI policies. Classroom discussion should respect differing viewpoints; when a Chatham House-style discussion rule is adopted, remarks may be discussed outside class without identifying their speakers.

Schedule: Weeks are teaching units, not fixed calendar dates. The sequence and reading load may be adjusted to the local academic calendar.

Weekly Topics and Readings

Week 1: Introduction – How to study International Security?

Required Reading:

- Lake, David A. "Why "isms" are evil: Theory, epistemology, and academic sects as impediments to understanding and progress." International Studies Quarterly 55, no. 2 (2011).
- Singer, J. David. "The level-of-analysis problem in international relations." World Politics 14, no. 1 (1961): 77-92.
- Fearon, James D. "Counterfactuals and hypothesis testing in political science." World Politics 43, no. 2 (1991): 169-195.
- Wohlforth, William C. "The Stability of a Unipolar World." International Security 24.1 (1999).

Extra Reading:

- Waltz, Kenneth N. "Structural realism after the Cold War." International Security 25.1 (2000).
- Robert Powell, "Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neo-Realist-Neo-Liberal Debate," International Organization 48.2 (1994).
- Layne, Christopher. "The unipolar illusion: Why new great powers will rise." International Security 17, no. 4 (1993): 5-51.

Week 2: War as a bargaining failure, costly signaling, audience costs

Required Reading:

- Fearon, James D. "Rationalist explanations for war." International Organization 49.3 (1995).
- Fearon, James D. "Signaling foreign policy interests: Tying hands versus sinking costs." Journal of Conflict Resolution 41, no. 1 (1997): 68-90.
- Tomz, Michael. "Domestic audience costs in international relations: An experimental approach." International Organization 61, no. 4 (2007): 821-840.
- Weeks, Jessica L. "Autocratic audience costs: Regime type and signaling resolve." International Organization 62, no. 1 (2008): 35-64.

- Kertzer, Joshua D., and Ryan Brutger. "Decomposing audience costs: Bringing the audience back into audience cost theory." American Journal of Political Science 60, no. 1 (2016): 234-249.

Extra Reading:

- Fearon, James D. "Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes." American Political Science Review 88, no. 3 (1994): 577-592.
- Powell, Robert. "War as a commitment problem." International Organization 60. 1 (2006).
- Filson, Darren, and Suzanne Werner. "A bargaining model of war and peace: Anticipating the onset, duration, and outcome of war." American Journal of Political Science (2002): 819-837.
- Branislav L. Slantchev and Ahmer Tarar, "Mutual Optimism as a Rationalist Explanation for War." American Journal of Political Science 55, 1 (January 2011): 135–148.
- Levendusky, Matthew S., and Michael C. Horowitz. "When backing down is the right decision: Partisanship, new information, and audience costs." The Journal of Politics 74, no. 2 (2012).
- Gartner, Scott Sigmund. "The multiple effects of casualties on public support for war: An experimental approach." American Political Science Review 102, no. 1 (2008): 95-106.
- Harris, Benjamin Norwood, and Erik Lin-Greenberg. "Cheap Tweets? Crisis Signaling in the Age of Twitter." International Studies Quarterly 68, no. 2 (2024): sqae067.

Week 3: Domestic Politics – Democracy, autocracy, public opinion

Required Reading:

- De Mesquita, Bruce Bueno, James Morrow, Randolph Siverson, and Alastair Smith. "An institutional explanation of the democratic peace." American Political Science Review (1999).
- Tomz, Michael R., and Jessica LP Weeks. "Public opinion and the democratic peace." American Political Science Review 107.4 (2013): 849-865.
- Gelpi, Christopher. "Democratic diversions: Governmental structure and the externalization of domestic conflict." Journal of Conflict Resolution 41, no. 2 (1997): 255-282.
- Weeks, Jessica L. "Strongmen and straw men: Authoritarian regimes and the initiation of international conflict." American Political Science Review 106.2 (2012): 326-347.
- Lee, Soyoung. "Domestic distributional roots of national interest." American Political Science Review 118, no. 4 (2024): 1824-1839.

Extra Reading:

- Layne, Christopher. "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace." International Security 19, no. 2 (1994): 5-49.
- Maoz, Zeev, and Bruce Russett. "Normative and structural causes of democratic peace, 1946– 1986." American political science review 87, no. 3 (1993): 624-638.
- Oneal, John R., and Bruce Russett. "The Kantian peace: The pacific benefits of democracy, interdependence, and international organizations, 1885–1992." World Politics 52, no. 1 (1999).
- Palmer, Glenn, Tamar London, and Patrick Regan. "What's stopping you? The sources of political constraints on international conflict behavior in parliamentary democracies." International Interactions 30, no. 1 (2004): 1-24.
- Rathbun, Brian C., Christopher Sebastian Parker, and Caleb Pomeroy. "Separate but Unequal: Ethnocentrism and Racialization Explain the "Democratic" Peace in Public Opinion." American Political Science Review (2024): 1-16.
- Tir, Jaroslav. "Territorial diversion: Diversionary theory of war and territorial conflict." The Journal

of Politics 72, no. 2 (2010): 413-425.

- Peceny, Mark, Caroline C. Beer, and Shannon Sanchez-Terry. "Dictatorial peace?" American Political Science Review 96, no. 1 (2002): 15-26.
- Lai, Brian, and Dan Slater. "Institutions of the offensive: Domestic sources of dispute initiation in authoritarian regimes, 1950–1992." American Journal of Political Science 50.1 (2006).

Week 4: Leaders – turnover, culpability, experiences, demographic factors

Required Reading:

- Debs, Alexandre, and Hein E. Goemans. "Regime type, the fate of leaders, and war." American Political Science Review 104, no. 3 (2010): 430-445.
- Croco, Sarah E. "The decider's dilemma: Leader culpability, war outcomes, and domestic punishment." American Political Science Review 105, no. 3 (2011): 457-477.
- Horowitz, Michael C., and Allan C. Stam. "How prior military experience influences the future militarized behavior of leaders." International Organization 68, no. 3 (2014): 527-559.
- Mattes, Michaela, and Jessica LP Weeks. "Hawks, doves, and peace: an experimental approach." American Journal of Political Science 63, no. 1 (2019): 53-66.
- Bertoli, Andrew, Allan Dafoe, and Robert Trager. "Leader age and international conflict: A regression discontinuity analysis." Journal of Peace Research 61, no. 4 (2024): 643-658.
- Fuhrmann, Matthew and James D. Kim. "Socialization, Self-Selection, and the Life Experiences of World Leaders: Why Business Experience Influences Defense Spending." The Journal of Politics, Forthcoming.

Extra Reading:

- Chiozza, G., & Goemans, H. E. (2011). Leaders and international conflict. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-2.
- Fuhrmann, Matthew. "When do leaders free-ride? Business experience and contributions to collective defense." American Journal of Political Science 64, no. 2 (2020): 416-431.
- Scott Wolford. "The turnover trap: New leaders, reputation, and international conflict." American Journal of Political Science 51, no. 4 (2007): 772–788.
- Schramm, Madison, and Alexandra Stark. "Peacemakers or iron ladies? A cross-national study of gender and international conflict." Security Studies 29.3 (2020): 515-548.
- Jones, Benjamin F., and Benjamin A. Olken. "Do leaders matter? National leadership and growth since World War II." The Quarterly Journal of Economics 120, no. 3 (2005): 835-864.
- Kim, James D. "Fear or Anger? Leaders' Childhood War Trauma and Interstate Conflict Initiation." International Studies Quarterly 68, no. 2 (2024): sqae069.
- Jost, Tyler, Joshua D. Kertzer, Eric Min, and Robert Schub. "Advisers and Aggregation in Foreign Policy Decision Making." International Organization 78, no. 1 (2024): 1-37.
- Jervis, Robert. "Do leaders matter and how would we know?" Security Studies 22.2 (2013).

Week 5: Nuclear Weapons – proliferation, deterrence, superiority, taboo

Research design presentation workshop.

Required Reading:

- Monteiro, Nuno P., and Alexandre Debs. "The strategic logic of nuclear proliferation." International

Security 39, no. 2 (2014): 7-51.

- Sechser, Todd S., and Matthew Fuhrmann. "Crisis bargaining and nuclear blackmail." International Organization 67, no. 1 (2013): 173-195.
- Bell, Mark S., and Nicholas L. Miller. "Questioning the effect of nuclear weapons on conflict." Journal of Conflict Resolution 59, no. 1 (2015): 74-92.
- Kroenig, Matthew. "Nuclear superiority and the balance of resolve: Explaining nuclear crisis outcomes." International Organization 67, no. 1 (2013): 141-171.
- Tannenwald, Nina. "The nuclear taboo: The United States and the normative basis of nuclear non-use." International Organization 53, no. 3 (1999): 433-468.

Extra Reading:

- Fuhrmann, Matthew. "Taking a walk on the supply side: The determinants of civilian nuclear cooperation." Journal of Conflict Resolution 53, no. 2 (2009): 181-208.
- Nicholas Miller, 2014. "The Secret Success of Nonproliferation Sanctions," International Organization 68(4): 913-944.
- Narang, Vipin. "Strategies of nuclear proliferation: How states pursue the bomb." International Security 41, no. 3 (2016): 110-150.
- Fuhrmann, Matthew, and Todd S. Sechser. "Signaling alliance commitments: Hand-tying and sunk costs in extended nuclear deterrence." American Journal of Political Science 58.4 (2014).
- Lee, Kyung Suk, James D. Kim, Hwalmin Jin, and Matthew Fuhrmann. "Nuclear weapons and low-level military conflict." International Studies Quarterly 66, no. 4 (2022): sqac067.

Week 6: Military Alliances – formation, extended deterrence, credibility, reassurance

Research design presentation workshop.

Required Reading:

- James Morrow. "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances." American Journal of Political Science 35 no. 4 (1991): 904-933.
- Crescenzi, Mark JC, Jacob D. Kathman, Katja B. Kleinberg, and Reed M. Wood. "Reliability, reputation, and alliance formation." International Studies Quarterly 56, no. 2 (2012): 259-274.
- Leeds, Brett Ashley. "Do alliances deter aggression? The influence of military alliances on the initiation of militarized interstate disputes." American Journal of Political Science 47.3 (2003).
- McManus, Roseanne W. "Making it personal: The role of leader-specific signals in extended deterrence." The Journal of Politics 80, no. 3 (2018): 982-995.
- Lee, Soyoung. "The strong, the weak, and the honored: examining the decline in honored alliances post-1945." International Interactions 49, no. 1 (2023): 114-131.

Extra Reading:

- Kenwick, Michael R., John A. Vasquez, and Matthew A. Powers. "Do alliances really deter?" The Journal of Politics 77, no. 4 (2015): 943-954.
- Blankenship, Brian. "Promises under pressure: Statements of reassurance in US alliances." International Studies Quarterly 64, no. 4 (2020): 1017-1030.
- Gibler, Douglas M. "The costs of reneging: Reputation and alliance formation." Journal of Conflict Resolution 52, no. 3 (2008): 426-454.

Week 7: Economic, human, border, climate security, emerging technology

Research design presentation workshop.

Required Reading:

- Li, Quan, and Rafael Reuveny. 2011. "Does trade prevent or promote interstate conflict initiation?" Journal of Peace Research 48 (4):437–453.
- Humphreys, Macartan. "Natural resources, conflict, and conflict resolution: Uncovering the mechanisms." Journal of Conflict Resolution 49, no. 4 (2005): 508-537.
- Simmons, Beth A., and Michael R. Kenwick. "Border orientation in a globalizing world." American Journal of Political Science 66, no. 4 (2022): 853-870.
- Strezhnev, Anton, Judith G. Kelley, and Beth A. Simmons. "Testing for Negative Spillovers: Is Promoting Human Rights Really Part of the "Problem"?" International Organization 75.1 (2021).
- Arias, Sabrina B., and Christopher W. Blair. "In the eye of the storm: Hurricanes, climate migration, and climate attitudes." American Political Science Review 118, no. 4 (2024).
- Schwartz, Joshua A., Matthew Fuhrmann, and Michael C. Horowitz. "Do armed drones counter terrorism, or are they counterproductive? Evidence from eighteen countries." International Studies Quarterly 66, no. 3 (2022): sqac047.

Extra Reading:

- Early, Bryan R. "Alliances and trade with sanctioned states: A study of US economic sanctions, 1950–2000." Journal of Conflict Resolution 56, no. 3 (2012): 547-572.
- Adamson, Fiona B. "Crossing borders: International migration and national security." International Security 31, no. 1 (2006): 165-199.
- Simmons, Beth A., and Robert Shaffer. "Border anxiety in international discourse." American Journal of Political Science 68, no. 2 (2024): 661-677.
- DeMeritt, Jacqueline HR. "International organizations and government killing: Does naming and shaming save lives?" International Interactions 38, no. 5 (2012): 597-621.
- Kenwick, Michael R., and Beth A. Simmons. "Pandemic response as border politics." International Organization 74, no. S1 (2020): E36-E58.
- Lee, Soyoung. "Resources and Territorial Claims: Domestic Opposition to Resource-Rich Territory." International Organization 78, no. 3 (2024): 361-396.

Week 8: Civil War

Research design presentation workshop.

Required Reading:

- De Bruin, Erica, Gabriella Levy, Livia I. Schubiger, and Michael Weintraub. "Out-Competing Rivals: Armed Group Governance and Civilian Attitudes in Colombia." American Political Science Review (2024): 1-14.
- Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler. "Greed and grievance in civil war." Oxford economic papers 56, no. 4 (2004): 563-595.
- Salehyan, Idean, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch. "Refugees and the spread of civil war." International Organization 60, no. 2 (2006): 335-366.
- Walter, Barbara F. "The critical barrier to civil war settlement." International Organization 51, no. 3 (1997): 335-364.

- Prorok, Alyssa K. "Leader incentives and civil war outcomes." American Journal of Political Science 60, no. 1 (2016): 70-84.
- Grasse, Donald. "State terror and long-run development: The persistence of the Khmer Rouge." American Political Science Review 118, no. 1 (2024): 195-212.

Extra Reading:

- Cunningham, Kathleen Gallagher, Kristin M. Bakke, and Lee JM Seymour. "Shirts today, skins tomorrow: Dual contests and the effects of fragmentation in self-determination disputes." Journal of Conflict Resolution 56, no. 1 (2012): 67-93.
- Sambanis, Nicholas. "Do ethnic and nonethnic civil wars have the same causes?" Journal of Conflict Resolution 45, no. 3 (2001): 259-282.
- Cunningham, David E. "Blocking resolution: How external states can prolong civil wars." Journal of Peace Research 47, no. 2 (2010): 115-127.
- Hartzell, Caroline, and Matthew Hoddie. "Institutionalizing peace: power sharing and post-civil war conflict management." American Journal of Political Science 47, no. 2 (2003): 318-332.
- Kydd, Andrew, and Barbara F. Walter. "Sabotaging the peace: The politics of extremist violence." International Organization 56, no. 2 (2002): 263-296.
- Humphreys, Macartan, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "Handling and manhandling civilians in civil war." American Political Science Review 100, no. 3 (2006): 429-447.

Week 9: Independent Reading and Research Workshop

Week 10: Psychology and legacies of violence

Required Reading:

- Kertzer, Joshua, Brian Rathbun, and Nina Srinivasan Rathbun. "The price of peace: Motivated reasoning and costly signaling in international relations." International Organization 74.1(2020).
- Schnakenberg, Keith E., and Carly N. Wayne. "Anger and political conflict dynamics." American Political Science Review 118, no. 3 (2024): 1158-1173.
- Landau-Wells, Marika. "Building from the brain: Advancing the study of threat perception in International Relations." International Organization 78, no. 4 (2024): 627-667
- Lupu, Noam, and Leonid Peisakhin. "The legacy of political violence across generations." American Journal of Political Science 61, no. 4 (2017): 836-851.
- Kim, James D. "The long-run impact of childhood wartime violence on preferences for nuclear proliferation." Journal of Conflict Resolution 68, no. 1 (2024): 108-137.

Extra Reading:

- Jervis, Robert. 1976. Perception and Misperception in International Politics. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-4.
- Mercer, Jonathan. "Emotional beliefs." International Organization 64, no. 1 (2010): 1-31.
- Pomeroy, Caleb. "Hawks Become Us: The Sense of Power and Militant Foreign Policy Attitudes." Security Studies 33, no. 1 (2024): 88-114.
- Gurr, Ted. "Psychological factors in civil violence." World Politics 20, no. 2 (1968): 245-278.
- Charnysh, Volha, and Evgeny Finkel. "The death camp Eldorado: Political and economic effects of mass violence." American Political Science Review 111, no. 4 (2017): 801-818.

This syllabus is a sample and may be revised to reflect institutional requirements and the academic calendar.