Political Science (POL S) 407
International Conflict
Winter 2026
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30am-12:50pm
SMI 205

Instructor:

Gabriella Levy (glevy2@uw.edu)
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-4:00pm, Gowen 37

Teaching Assistants:

Name	**Email**	**Office Hours**
Ryan Reynolds	deadpool@uw.edu	Thursdays 9-11am, Smith 31

Course Overview:

Why do countries go to war? Is it inevitable because of the structure of the international system, or are some countries and some leaders more likely to initiate conflicts? What tactics can help countries win these wars, and which tactics are counterproductive? This course will focus on conflicts between two states as well as conflicts in which states fight armed actors based outside of their borders. There will be two midterms, each consisting of a series of IDs and long-answer questions, and a final research paper which considers which theory we've read about best explains the outbreak or ending of a conflict of your choice. It is recommended that you take POL S 203 Introduction to International Relations prior to enrolling in this class.

Readings:

All readings are to be read before the day they are assigned. They are all available on Canvas. While many of the readings are quantitative in nature, a previous background in statistics is not required for the course. I expect you to consider the argument made, the kinds of data used, and the conclusions of each piece.

Each Friday a series of guided reading questions for the next week's readings will be posted to Canvas. Many quiz sections will focus on these questions.

Assignments:

Assignment	*Percentage*	*How it will be assessed*	*Date*
Class Participation	20	Participation in weekly quiz sections	Throughout the semester
Midterm 1, In-Class	20	IDs + long answer	February 10th
Final Research Paper Proposal	10	Case selection + 2 theories you are testing + initial list of 6 sources	February 24th

Midterm 2, In-Class	20	IDs + long answer	March 12th
Final Research Paper	30	10-12 pages	March 18th

Policies:

PowerPoints be posted online. Unless otherwise stated, lectures and quiz sections will not be recorded. Personal recordings will not be allowed except as relevant for DRS accommodations. Lectures and quiz sections will take place in person.

Teaching assistants will assign you a participation grade for each week's quiz section, and your lowest such grade will be dropped. There is no makeup work which can replace participation in quiz sections.

Missed examinations due to university events may be accommodated with two weeks' notice. Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Religious Accommodations Policy. Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form. Only after written confirmation from the professor or TA should the student consider a make-up exam or extension to an at-home assignment granted. Late at-home assignments for which no extension has been granted will result in a 5% reduction in the assignment grade for each day the assignment is late.

If you would like to appeal a grade, please wait 24 hours from the time you receive the grade. After reviewing your answers and the comments, provide a typed statement to the TA explaining why you believe the grade you received should be altered (why exactly more points should be given for a particular answer). This typed statement must be about the substance of the work, not the effort you put into it or the class. Bring the work and your written concerns to the TA's office hours within one week of receiving the graded assignment for a discussion; submission of your statement beyond one week will not be considered. The TA will reread the work, reevaluate it if appropriate, and return it to the student within 2 days. The TA has the right to leave the grade as is, raise the grade, or lower the grade. If you are still dissatisfied, the above procedures will be repeated directly with the professor within 2 days of the receipt of the decision from the first regrade. The professor has the right to leave the grade as is, raise the grade, or lower the grade. If you would like to appeal the above regrades, then a similar procedure must be followed. You must provide a typed statement to the Associate Chair of the Political Science department explaining why you believe the grade (and regrades) you received you should be altered. Bring your work and your written statement to the Associate Chair within 10 days of receiving the regrade decision from the course professor. The Associate Chair will confer with relevant department faculty, reevaluate the assignment, and return it to the student within 1 week. The departmental grade appeal decision from the Associate Chair is final.

I expect you to comply with the University of Washington's policies regarding student misconduct, which can be found here: https://www.washington.edu/cssc/for-students/student-code-of-conduct/. Any use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, when working on

assignments is forbidden; use of generative AI will be considered academic misconduct and subject to investigation. All work submitted for this course must be your own. This policy exists because the assignments in this class have been designed to challenge you to develop creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills; using AI technology will limit your capacity to develop these skills and to meet the learning goals of this course. If the Community Standards & Student Conduct (CSSC) office finds you responsible for any form of academic misconduct, you will receive a 0 on the relevant assignment.

See the grade scale for this course on Canvas and below at the end of this document.

Resources and Support:

1) My goal is to create a learning environment that supports a diverse range of perspectives, experiences, and identities.
   - The topics that we're covering in this class are often difficult, not just intellectually but also emotionally. While I expect there will be rigorous discussion and even disagreement during our class discussions, I ask that you engage in each class meeting with care and empathy for the other members in the classroom. I will not tolerate insults; gender or racial slurs; or any other form of bullying, intimidation, or hate speech. I expect all members of this class to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of this class.
   - Please inform me early in the term if you require accommodations or modification of any of course procedures. Accommodations must be established and documented with Disability Resources for Students (DRS).

2) Resources, Questions, and Communication:
   - You do not need to sign up for office hours and are welcome to drop by to talk about assignments, readings, or other course content; careers; etc.
   - If you have an administrative or logistical question, please consult the syllabus first, and then email your TA if you remain uncertain. If you still do not have an adequate answer, please email the professor. Please allow 24 hours for email replies during the week, and 72 hours on the weekends.
   - Students are encouraged to take full advantage of the Odegaard Writing and Research Center.
   - UW Seattle Health Services is available to assist students dealing with a range of health-related issues and concerns. Health care on campus is provided through the Hall Center and the Counseling Center.
   - For tips on how to read academic articles, I recommend resources from Amelia Hoover Green and Leanne C Powner.

Schedule

Section 1: Intro

1. January 6th; Introduction: What is interstate conflict and how do we measure it?
    - Pettersson, Therese. 2025. "UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook v 25.1." UCDP. https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/ucdpprio/ucdp-prio-acd-251.pdf.
    - Davies, Shawn, Garoun Engström, Therése Pettersson, and Magnus Öberg. 2025. "Organized Violence 1989–2024, and the challenge of identifying civilian victims." *Journal of Peace Research* 62(4): 1223-1240.
    - ACLED. 2025. "ACLED Codebook." Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. https://acleddata.com/methodology/acled-codebook.
    - ACLED. 2025. "Ukraine Conflict Monitor." https://acleddata.com/ukraine-conflict-monitor/#update.

Section 2: Causes of War

2. January 8th; The System: Balance of Power & Power Transitions
    - Waltz, Kenneth N. 1988. "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18(4): 615–28.
    - Allison, Graham. 2015. "The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?" *The Atlantic.*
    - Kang, David C. 2003. "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks." *International Security* 27(4): 57–85.

3. January 13th; The System: Security Dilemma & Deterrence
    - Herz, John H. 1950. "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 1950 2(2): 157-180.
    - Schelling, Thomas C. 1966. *Arms and Influence.* Yale University Press. → Ch. 2
    - Jervis, Robert. 1976. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics.* Princeton University Press. → Ch. 3

4. January 15th; The System: Bargaining Theory of War
    - Fearon, James D. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49(3): 379–414.
    - Goddard, Stacie E. 2006. "Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy." *International Organization* 60(1): 35–68.
    - Lake, David A. 2010. "Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War." *International Security* 35(3): 7–52.

5. January 20th; The State & the Nation: Nationalism & Territory
    - Tir, Jaroslav. 2010. "Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict." *The Journal of Politics* 72(2): 413–25.

- Hensel, Paul R., Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, Thomas E. Sowers, and Clayton L. Thyne. 2008. "Bones of Contention: Comparing Territorial, Maritime, and River Issues." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52(1): 117–43.
- De Juan, Alexander, Felix Haass, Carlo Koos, Sascha Riaz, and Thomas Tichelbaecker. 2024. "War and Nationalism: How WW1 Battle Deaths Fueled Civilians' Support for the Nazi Party." *American Political Science Review* 118(1): 144-162.

6. January 22nd; The State & the Nation: Institutions
    - Evera, Stephen Van. 1984. "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War." *International Security* 9(1): 58-107.
    - Howell, William G., and Jon C. Pevehouse. 2005. "Presidents, Congress, and the Use of Force." *International Organization* 59(1): 209–32.
    - National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. 2004. "The 9/11 Commission Report." National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. → Chapters 11 & 13

7. January 27th; The State & the Nation: Regime Type
    - Oneal, John R., and Bruce M. Russett. 1997. "The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950-1985." *International Studies Quarterly* 41(2): 267–93.
    - Rosato, Sebastian. 2003. "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory." *American Political Science Review* 97(04): 585–602.
    - Weeks, Jessica L. 2012. "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict." *The American Political Science Review* 106(2): 326–47.

8. January 29th; The State & the Nation: Interdependence
    - Colgan, Jeff D. 2013. "Fueling the Fire: Pathways from Oil to War." *International Security* 38(2): 147–80.
    - Leeds, Brett Ashley. 2003. "Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes." *American Journal of Political Science* 47(3): 427–39.
    - Sagan, Scott D. 1986. "1914 Revisited: Allies, Offense, and Instability." *International Security* 11(2): 151-175.

9. February 3rd; Leaders' Perceptions
    - Saunders, Elizabeth N. 2009. "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy." *International Security* 34(2): 119–61.
    - Yarhi-Milo, Keren. 2018. *Who Fights for Reputation? The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict.* Princeton University Press. → Introduction
    - Harris, Shane, Karen DeYoung, Isabelle Khurshudyan, Ashley Parker, and Liz Sly. 2022. "Road to War: US Struggled to Convince Allies, and Zelensky, of Risk of Invasion." *Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2022/ukraine-road-to-war/.

10. February 5th; Other Differences Among Leaders
    - Koch, Michael T., and Sarah A. Fulton. 2011. "In the Defense of Women: Gender, Office Holding, and National Security Policy in Established Democracies." *The Journal of Politics* 73(1): 1–16.
    - Horowitz, Michael C., and Allan C. Stam. 2014. "How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders." *International Organization* 68(3): 527–59.
    - Yarhi-Milo, Keren, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Jonathan Renshon. 2018. "Tying Hands, Sinking Costs, and Leader Attributes." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62(10): 2150–79.

11. February 10th; Midterm 1 (content from January 6th through February 5th)

Section 3: Once War Has Begun

12. February 12th; Strategy
    - Brands, Hal and Peter Feaver. 2021. "Getting Grand Strategy Right." In *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy.* Oxford University Press.
    - Betts, Richard K. 2021. "Is Grand Strategy an Illusion? Or, the Grandiosity of Grand Strategy" In *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy.* Oxford University Press.
    - Goldberg, Jeffrey. 2016. "The Obama Doctrine." *The Atlantic.* https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/.
    - The [Biden] White House. 2022. "National Security Strategy." The White House. https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/articles/2022%20National%20Security%20Strategy%2020221012.pdf?ver=FGtjjh6vAvqCi7iRow97rg%3d%3d.

13. February 17th; Civilians & Violence
    - Kocher, Mathew Adam, Thomas B. Pepinsky, and Stathis Kalyvas. 2011. "Aerial Bombing and Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(2): 201–18.
    - Lyall, Jason, Graeme Blair, and Kosuke Imai. 2013. "Explaining Support for Combatants during Wartime: A Survey Experiment in Afghanistan." *American Political Science Review* 107(4): 679–705.
    - Valentino, Benjamin, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay. 2004. "'Draining the Sea:' Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare." *International Organization* 58(2): 375–407.

14. February 19th; Civilians, War, & Stuff Besides Violence
    - Sexton, Renard, and Christoph Zürcher. 2023. "Aid, Attitudes, and Insurgency: Evidence from Development Projects in Northern Afghanistan." *American Journal of Political Science* 117(4):1308-1326.

- Martinez, Luis R., Jonas Jessen, and Guo Xu. 2023. "A Glimpse of Freedom: Allied Occupation and Political Resistance in East Germany." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 15(1): 68–106.
- Charnysh, Volha and Evgeny Finkel. 2017. "The Death Camp Eldorado: Political and Economic Effects of Mass Violence." *American Political Science Review* 111(4): 801-818.

15. February 24th; Ethics **(note: final paper proposal due on Canvas by start of class)**
    - Walzer, Michael. 2015. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books. → Ch. 3, Ch. 8-9
    - McMahan, Jeff. 2004. "The Ethics of Killing in War." *Ethics* 114 (4): 693–733.
    - Dill, Janina, and Livia I Schubiger. 2021. "Attitudes toward the Use of Force: Instrumental Imperatives, Moral Principles, and International Law." *American Journal of Political Science* 65(3): 612–33.

16. February 26th: Third Party Intervention
    - Salehyan, Idean, David Siroky, and Reed M. Wood. 2014. "External Rebel Sponsorship and Civilian Abuse: A Principal-Agent Analysis of Wartime Atrocities." *International Organization* 68(3): 633–61.
    - Meier, Vanessa, Niklas Karlén, Therése Pettersson, and Mihai Croicu. 2023. "External Support in Armed Conflicts: Introducing the UCDP External Support Dataset (ESD), 1975–2017." *Journal of Peace Research* 60(3): 545–54.
    - Entous, Adam. 2025. "The Secret History of the War in Ukraine." *New York Times.*

17. March 3rd; Military Victory
    - Biddle, Stephen. 2004. *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle.* → Chapters 2-3
    - Lyall, Jason. 2020. *Divided Armies: Inequality and Battlefield Performance in Modern War*. Princeton University Press. → Chapter 1
    - Beckley, Michael. 2018. "The Power of Nations: Measuring What Matters." *International Security* 43(2)" 7-44.

18. March 5th; Negotiations and Agreements
    - Ghosn, Faten. 2010. "Getting to the Table and Getting to Yes: An Analysis of International Negotiations." *International Studies Quarterly* 54(4): 1055–72.
    - Fortna, Virginia Page. 2003. "Scraps of Paper? Agreements and the Durability of Peace." *International Organization* 57(02): 337-372.
    - Matanock, Aila, and Adam Lichtenheld. 2022. "How Does International Intervention Work to Secure Peace Settlements After Civil Conflicts?" *British Journal of Political Science* 52: 1810-1830.

19. March 10th; Modern Technology
    - Mitts, Tamar, Gregoire Phillips, and Barbara F. Walter. 2022. "Studying the Impact of ISIS Propaganda Campaigns." *The Journal of Politics* 84(2): 1220–25.

- Silverman, Daniel, Karl Kaltenthaler, and Munqith Dagher. 2021. "Seeing Is Disbelieving: The Depths and Limits of Factual Misinformation in War." *International Studies Quarterly* 65(3): 798–810.
- Abraham, Yuval. "'Lavender:' The AI machine directing Israel's bombing spree in Gaza." *+972 Magazine*. https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/.

20. March 12th; Midterm 2 (content from February 12th to March 10th)

Research paper due on Canvas on March 18th at 4:30pm PST

Appendix A: Grade Scale

Grade	Percent	Letter
4.0	95-100	A
3.9	93-94	A
3.8	91-92	A-
3.7	90	A-
3.6	89	A-
3.5	88	A-
3.4	87	B+
3.3	86	B+
3.2	85	B+
3.1	84	B
3.0	83	B
2.9	82	B
2.8	81	B-
2.7	80	B-
2.6	79	B-
2.5	78	B-
2.4	77	C+
2.3	76	C+
2.2	75	C+
2.1	74	C
2.0	73	C
1.9	72	C
1.8	71	C-
1.7	70	C-
1.6	69	C-
1.5	68	C-
1.4	67	D+
1.3	66	D+
1.2	65	D+
1.1	64	D
1.0	63	D
.9	62	D
.8	61	D-
.7	60	D-
0.0	<60	E

Appendix B: Instructions for Final Paper Proposal

Your paper proposal should consist of the following three things:

1. *Case selection:* You should specify, first, which interstate war you are focusing on and, second, whether you are seeking to explain the outbreak or the ending of the conflict. Please phrase your case in the form of a question. For example, you may ask, "What caused the Six Day War?" Please speak to your TA if you would like to focus on an internationalized intrastate conflict instead of an interstate one.
2. *Theories:* Please list *two* theories from the class which could help answer your question and explain using a maximum of four sentences why the two theories are relevant.
3. *References:* Provide an initial list of 6 sources which you will be using to determine which theory best explains the outbreak or ending of the conflict you are focusing on; these should be primarily peer-reviewed sources, though they need not be from Political Science journals. Acceptable references may also include primary source documents, such as from relevant governments, international organizations, or respected civil society organizations. Please format references in Chicago style. If you don't know where to begin, the following Research Guides from UW libraries may be helpful: Foreign policy, Government Publications, International Inter-Governmental & Non-Governmental Organizations, Military Studies.
4. *Grading:*
    1. Case selection: 20%
    2. Two theories: 20%
    3. References: 60%

Here is a non-exhaustive list of possible interstate wars. War of 1812; Franco-Spanish (1823); First Russo-Turkish (1828); Mexican-American (1846); First Schleswig-Holstein (1848); Platine (1851); Crimean (1853); Ecuadorian-Columbia (1863) Second Schleswig-Holstein (1864); Franco-Prussian (1870); Sino-French War (1885); First Sino-Japanese (1894-95); Greco-Turkish (1897); Spanish-American (1898); Russo-Japanese (1904-05), Italo-Turkish (1911-12); Second Greco-Turkish (1919); Second Sino-Japanese (1937); Russo-Finnish (1939); Soviet-Japanese border conflict (1938-1939); Korean (1950-53), Sino-Indian (1962), Konfrontasi (1963-66), Indo-Pakistani (1965); Vietnam (1965); Six Day (1967); Sino-Soviet border conflict (1969); Indo-Pakistani (1971); Yom Kippur (1973), Turco-Cypriot (1974); Sino-Vietnamese (1979); Iran-Iraq (1980), Falklands/Malvinas (1982); Chad-Libya (1987), Iraq-Kuwait (1990), Armenia-Azerbaijan (1992, 2020, and/or 2023), Eritrea-Ethiopia (1998); Kargil War (1999); Russian-Georgia (2008); Russo-Ukrainian (2014-present); China–India skirmishes (2020-21); Russo-Ukrainian escalation (2022-present).

Appendix C: Requirements for a Strong Final Research Paper

1. Format:
    a. 10-12 pages not including bibliography
    b. Times New Roman
    c. 12-point font
    d. double spaced
    e. 1-inch margins
2. *At least* 15 sources
    a. References should be primarily peer-reviewed sources, though they need not be from Political Science journals. Acceptable references may also include primary source documents, such as from relevant governments, international organizations, or respected civil society organizations.
    b. If you don't know where to begin, the following Research Guides from UW libraries may be helpful: Foreign policy, Government Publications, International Inter-Governmental & Non-Governmental Organizations, Military Studies.
    c. Please format references in Chicago style.
3. Structure:
    a. Introduction (one paragraph):
        i. What war are you focusing on?
        ii. Are you examining the cause or the end of the war?
        iii. Which two theories/explanations are you testing?
        iv. What is your overall conclusion/thesis?
    b. Brief description of the case (one paragraph):
        i. What are the relevant facts of the war?
    c. Applying the theories to the case:
        i. What are the theories' causal arguments about the causes of war or peace?
        ii. What would we expect to see if each theory was correct in your case? What evidence supports and challenges each theory?
        iii. Given part b, which theory provides a stronger explanation?
    d. Conclusion (one paragraph)
        i. Your conclusion should go beyond what you've already said
4. Grading:
    a. Clarity of writing: 10%
    b. Accurate and appropriate use of sources: 20%
        i. Sources are about the topic
        ii. Page numbers and citations are accurate
        iii. All claims about sources include page numbers
        iv. 15+ sources
    c. Clear thesis and introduction: 10%
    d. Description of case: 10%
    e. Application of theory 1: 15%
    f. Application of theory 2: 15%
    g. Discussion of which theory provides a stronger explanation: 15%
    h. Conclusion: 5%