

PL SC 378: International Conflict

Rand Blimes

136 TMCB, MWF 11–11:50

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Office hours: Mon 9:30–11; Wed 12–1; and by appointment

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About the Course

This course is a study of war and peace. During the course of the semester we will discuss the following questions. What causes people to systematically kill each other in the phenomenon known as war? Why do wars occur? Are there conditions that make war systematically more likely to occur? Is war preventable? Once a war has begun, what makes it more likely to end? What kind of policy should the US adopt to prevent wars from occurring? Can we protect allies from conflict as well as ourselves?

The course has two broad goals. The first is to better understand war in a systematic, “scientific” way. We will spend most of our time understanding why wars occur, but we will also ask why wars last as long as they do, and what makes them more likely to end. Second, we will discuss how what we learn about war applies to the US. If we understand what causes war, is it possible to prevent both the US and its allies from experiencing wars? Are there situations in which it is necessary to go to war?

Materials

There are three required books for this course along with several articles or book chapters (which I will make available to you in electronic format). The required texts are:

- Copeland, *The Origins of Major Power War*
- Gellar and Singer, *Nations at War*
- Midlarsky, ed., *The Handbook of War Studies II*
- Van Evera, *Causes of War*

These books are all available in the bookstore (or on Amazon).

In addition, I expect you to read the international section of the New York Times daily (or some other reputable news source). You can access this online at <http://www.nytimes.com/>. You will need to sign up, but this is free.

Requirements

While this class will utilize historical examples to illustrate ideas, this is not a history class. We will focus on how scholars have used the scientific method to try to understand wars in general (rather than understanding a specific war). This approach may be new to some of you, and a quick glance through the assigned readings will reveal that there is a large amount of scientific research you will be required to be familiar with. While scientific research often (but certainly not always) uses statistics to investigate the validity of its theoretical propositions, I do not assume any background in statistics on your part. Everything you are required to know can be understood if you are able to tell the difference between a positive number and a negative one,

and if you can tell, for example, whether .7 is greater than or less than .05. I hope that even the most math-phobic of you will not be deterred by this aspect of the course.

You will be expected to critically evaluate the theoretical and empirical work that you read for class. You are not expected to believe everything you read (and I will try to give both sides of all the major arguments we will cover). I do expect you to be familiar with, and be able to explain, all the approaches to understanding conflict which we will cover, but you must decide whether they are valid for yourself.

Grading

Your grade for the class will be based on the following.

- 2 exams, a mid-term and a final, each worth 25% of your grade. The final will be given on the day scheduled by the university. Each test will be a combination of short answer and essay questions. You will need to bring a blue book to each.
- You will write a research paper on an international conflict not studied as one of the case studies in class. This paper should be about 15 pages in length, double-spaced with normal margins. You will choose to analyze EITHER the cause of the conflict or the termination. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate your ability to 1) link theoretic concepts to historical events, 2) use evidence to properly support an argument, and 3) communicate effectively through writing. More information will be given to you later on in the semester. The paper will be due the last scheduled day of class (Dec. 10)
- The final 10% of your grade will come through class participation. To earn all 10 points you must come to class prepared and participate in class discussion (using the assigned readings to inform your contributions to the discussion).

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty in fulfilling any assignment will be grounds for failing the course. Thus, for instance, you must not represent someone else's work as your own in carrying out your paper assignment. And, when presenting another person's ideas or data, you must provide explicit citation to acknowledge your intellectual debt. Quotation marks must be used when you are quoting someone. Minor changes that try to paraphrase someone else's ideas do not relieve you of the responsibility of acknowledging your intellectual debt. When in doubt, you should err on the conservative side (that is, by citing your sources) or you should at least consult with me. You are responsible to learn about the Honor Code adopted by the University. You can find relevant information at the following website:

http://www.byu.edu/honorcode/honor_code.htm#HONESTY

Special Considerations

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. BYU's policy regarding sexual harassment extends to students as well as faculty. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 378-2847.

If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (378-2767).