POSC 342 International Conflict and War

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Political Science 342 reviews insights into large-scale conflict and war gained from the studies of peace researchers, conflict resolution theorists, and international relations specialists. A persistent "cause" of war has been the readiness of societies to resort to force in order to reduce a perceived threat to their security or to their political, religious, ideological, economic, or sociocultural value systems. Political scientists call attention to the fact that, so far as historical evidence goes, the initiation of war is a matter of conscious, deliberate choice, not of decision-less outbreak. Scientific research on war is based on the critical assumption that there are patterns and regularities in conflict behavior that can be identified systematically.

In this course, we will examine a number of state- and system-level analyses war, including mutual misperception, nationalism, power asymmetries, degree of polarity, alliance configurations, and periodicity (i.e., long cycles). Both traditional and quantitative methods of inquiry (including Correlates of War data) will be evaluated.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

In Political Science 342 students will be expected to evaluate critically theoretical and empirical research on the causes of international war; the various disciplinary approaches and levels of analysis used in the study of war; and the findings of major projects on international conflict behavior. The objectives of the course are to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature on selected topics, and to identify potentially promising avenues for future research.

This is a research-oriented seminar intended primarily for juniors and seniors in the International Relations Program of the Department of Political Science. It is also open to other students who have taken the prerequisite of courses needed for a seminar course.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grades will be based on seminar participation (20%), three abstracts of data-based journal articles on war research (12%), a seven-to-nine-page take-home exam (15%), a short paper on an ongoing or threatened militarized dispute (18%) and the seminar paper (35%). There will be no final exam.

Abstracts are short, one to one-and-a-half page papers analyzing data-based journal articles. In the abstracts, students are to list: 1) the query, or the question to be tested and explained; 2) the explanatory and outcome variables and the putative relationship between the two; 3) the indicators used in measuring the variables and the strength of relationship between them; 4) data sources that the author used; 5) any data manipulation used (e.g., regression, analysis of variance); and 6) the findings.

The disputes paper should be about 12-15 pages in length and should be a detailed analysis of an threatened militarized dispute or an enduring rivalry. The publication, Border and Territorial Disputes, 3rd ed. (1992), by Gale Research Inc., which I will place on reserve, has a listing of disputes. The format for writing the paper should follow that outlined in Dunnigan and Bay, A Quick and Dirty Guide to War: Briefings on Present and Potential Wars (1991), which is on reserve. Students should also be familiar with the Internet and other sources for up-to-date information.

All students will be required to complete a seminar paper. This paper should have a text of about 20-25 pages (double spaced) in length, exclusive of footnotes, tables, figures, and references. The general topic will be either
(1) a case study analysis of a war or militarized dispute, utilizing the various approaches learned during the course, or (2) a study of one of the theoretical approaches to the study of war. The paper is to be handed in no later than November 22, 1999.

All the assigned readings should be completed by students prior to the seminar. Students should come to the seminar prepared to discuss and debate vigorously the assigned readings. The grade for seminar participation will be based in part on the demonstrated familiarity with the readings and contributions to the seminar discussions.

A "volunteer" will provide an overview of issues in the day's readings, and to raise critical questions for class discussion. The presentations should be about five minutes in length and include the preparation and distribution of an outline and a list of discussion questions based on the readings. The discussion grades will be based on the oral presentation as well as the quality of the discussion questions prepared.

**READINGS**

Five books are used for the course, in addition to journal articles. All are on Library closed reserve. The books are:

- Maoz, *Paradoxes of War* (1990) - ON RESERVE

Journal articles and chapters from other books will be provided by the instructor and put on library reserve.

Some useful journals include:

- *International Security*
- *Journal of Conflict Resolution*
- *International Interactions*
- *International Studies Quarterly*
- *Journal of Peace Research*
- *SIPRI Yearbook*
- *World Politics*

**COURSE OUTLINE**

I. INTRODUCTION: ON THE STUDY OF WAR


**H. DECISION-MAKER LEVEL EXPLANATIONS OF WAR**


**III. DOMESTIC-LEVEL EXPLANATIONS OF WAR**


**IV. DYADIC-LEVEL EXPLANATIONS OF WAR**


V. SYSTEMIC-LEVEL EXPLANATIONS OF WAR


