Summary

Why do wars occur? Over the centuries, hundreds of millions of people have died as a result of military conflict. The human and economic costs of war are well-understood – yet wars continue to recur. Why?

This seminar will review and evaluate theories about the causes of war. Each week, we will consider a different class of theories. We will dissect and evaluate the theoretical logic, and discuss possible approaches to empirical testing. Often, we will use the First World War as a starting point for hypothesis development because the theoretical literature about World War I is unusually rich. However, we will conduct in-depth case studies of several other modern wars as well.

Enrollment in this course is restricted to advanced undergraduates with an extensive course background in international relations.

Objectives

By the end of the course, students should:

1. Attain a deep comprehension of the events precipitating the First World War.

2. Be able to evaluate competing explanations for military conflict using rigorous analytical techniques.

3. Learn to think more clearly and write more persuasively.

General Requirements

1. Complete the Readings. The reading load for this class is considerable. Students unwilling to accept a heavy reading burden should not take this course. It is important to absorb the readings beforehand in order to fully engage with the ideas discussed in class. Common myths about the readings include: (1) believing that it is possible to catch up on the readings by cramming at the end of the semester; (2) focusing on trivial details rather than the big ideas of each reading; and (3) thinking that it is not
worth reading any of the assignments if they cannot all be completed. Be careful not to succumb to these myths.

2. **Contribute to Class Discussion.** Participation is a critical element of this seminar, and all students must attend and actively participate in class each week. Dialogue with your classmates will help you gain a better understanding of the course material, and will also help generate ideas for the final research paper. I will take attendance and evaluate your participation in each class discussion.

3. **Write a Final Paper.** Each student will write a major research paper, due on the day designated for the course’s final exam. The paper assignment is described in the packet attached to the end of this syllabus.

4. **Complete the Assignments.** Throughout the semester, each student will be asked to complete several assignments related to the final paper. These assignments will help students make regular progress on the final paper and provide opportunities to make revisions and correct errors.

5. **Deliver a Final Presentation.** An imminent public presentation can be a surprisingly powerful research motivator. For this reason, toward the end of the semester each student will give a 15-minute talk about the central points of their research paper and answer audience questions. Each student will designate a short background reading for the class to read beforehand. Use of PowerPoint is encouraged.

**Assignments and Evaluation**

There are four main components to the final semester grade.

- Participation: 35%
- Final Presentation: 15%
- Research Paper (and four assignments): 50%

**Professionalism, Ethics, and Other Policies**

1. **In-Class Distractions.** Please do not use your laptops in class. It is essential that seminar participants focus on the discussion and not hide behind a computer screen. Please also turn off your phones before class. Texting during class is distracting for the instructor, those around you, and most importantly, you.

2. **Late Arrivals.** Please be prompt so that class may begin and end on time.

3. **Academic Integrity.** Cheating and plagiarism are taken very seriously in this course. All assignments must be solely the original work of the student. Quoting or paraphrasing another author without attribution on any written assignment is considered plagiarism. Avoid plagiarism by using footnotes (with page numbers) whenever you quote, paraphrase, or otherwise borrow someone else’s ideas. Citing others’ work is a
standard scholarly practice, and there is no punishment for having too many citations. If you are unsure whether you are committing plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask the instructor for guidance (before you submit your work). Violators risk failing the course and being reported to the Honor Committee.

4. Group Collaboration. Colleagues are essential to one’s intellectual growth, and I urge students to collaborate with classmates. Sharing written summaries, reading draft papers, and commenting on others’ practice presentations are all acceptable forms of collaboration. On the other hand, writing portions of a classmate’s paper or copying a paragraph from a book or website without attribution are very serious violations.

5. Late Assignments. Late assignments will not be accepted for any reason. To ensure that illness, computer failures, or other unanticipated events do not cause you to miss an assignment deadline, it is recommended that you begin the assignments well in advance of the deadline. Further, you should back up your work off-site using the University’s Home Directory, Google Drive, Dropbox, or another free cloud backup service.

Books and Readings

There are four required books, all available at the University of Virginia Bookstore. All other readings can be accessed on Collab.


Schedule

1. Introduction: The Puzzle of War
   - No assigned readings.

2. Theory and the Scientific Method

3. Case Study: The First World War
4. The Balance of Power, Polarity, and Realism


5. Power Transition Theory


6. Case Study: The Pacific War


7. Offense-Defense Theory

- Assignment #1 due.

8. Economics, Trade, and Interdependence


9. **Student Research Meeting #1**

10. **Beliefs and Informational Approaches**


11. **Case Study: The Winter War**

   - Assignment #2 due.

12. **Psychology and Misperception**


13. **Student Research Meeting #2**

14. **Nationalism**


15. **Diversionary War Theory**

   - Assignment #3 due.
16. Case Study: The Falklands War


17. Student Research Meeting #3

18. Domestic Politics


19. Democratic Peace

- **Assignment #4 due.**

20. Organization Theory


21. Student Research Meeting #4
22. Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence


23. Case Study: The Kargil War


24. The Future of War


25. Student Research Presentations
Bibliography


