

# PPHA 32740: Order & Violence

The Roots of Wars and the Paths to Peace

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University of Chicago, Harris School of Public Policy

Fall 2025 DRAFT Syllabus

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## Course description

This is a class about violent conflict—why do some groups fight? Most enemies loathe in peace, and so what makes warring groups different? We'll study conflict at every level—nations, political factions, ethnic groups, religions, villages, and gangs—investigating the common logics and roots.

This is also a class about what to do about violence. From the streets of Chicago to the UN Security Council, what can be done to get warring rivals to stop the violence? And what can be done to get societies that are fragile and on the edge of fighting to be more resilient? We'll look at what some prominent people and organizations have to say about violence reduction, and assess whether it makes sense in light of social science.

We'll cover a range of literatures. We will start with game theory—the science of strategy—and introduce economics, history, comparative politics, international relations, psychology, and sociology. We will also study the practical experiences of policymakers, and the organizations and plans they have produced.

**Aims** My goal with this course is to get you to learn to think analytically and clinically about conflict and war. The conflicts we are discussing in class are some of the most intense, longstanding, important, and emotional in the world. A lot of the public discussion is about who is right or wrong, whether an action is just or unjust, and so on. These are important questions but they're not our aim.

We are going to try to look at these issues and actions through the lens of social science—what explains these actions and decisions and strategies? Are they rational or irrational, and in what ways? Whether a side, a policy, or an action is seen as right or wrong, just or unjust, only matters to the extent that it helps us explain how rivals behave and why. Fortunately, there is an immense amount of economics, political science, psychology, sociology, and practical experience of policymakers to guide us. You will learn these theories and evidence, and learn to interpret events and opinions and behaviors through this social science.

In sum: the aim is to think clearly and analytically and write clearly and analytically.

## Course structure

Generally, each week we will:

- Read a collection of articles and book chapters
- Have a mixture of lecture and discussion in class
- Complete one of the following:
  - a game theoretic problem set,
  - a short written assignment, or
  - a presentation and discussion

Most of the readings are articles or books where a PDF version are hyperlinked in the syllabus or available in Canvas. Instructions for VPN access are [here](#). There is also one required book (see below).

**No electronics policy** To support focused discussion and reduce distraction, laptops, smartphones, and full-feature tablets are not permitted during class. Writing-only e-ink tablets (e.g., reMarkable, Supernote, Kindle Scribe) are allowed. Full-feature tablets are permitted if they are used as a writing-only tablet with a stylus. I am happy to accept exceptions for students with a documented Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation.

Why do this? Harris has instituted an electronics policy that allows this as there is now considerable evidence that the use of electronics in classrooms has adverse impacts on learning for both the laptop user and others in the classroom. See, for example, [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Moreover, based on evaluations from the Harris Core, which instituted the policy last year, most students found the classes more engaging. See [here](#) for a similar experience.

For students concerned about note taking, I am open to a system whereby 1–2 students are designated note takers during class and/or we record lectures, then use AI and notetakers to create typed notes or summaries shared to the entire class. We can discuss this in the first class.

**Mental health and disability and learning difference accommodations** My objective is for students to learn the material, and I'm well aware that people have different learning styles and strengths. I have two kids with moderate learning differences and disabilities, and my wife the psychologist is pretty sure I'm undiagnosed ADHD (well... very sure), so I am sympathetic.

If you have a documented Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation (e.g. extra test-taking time, difficulty with handwriting) please have SDS or your dean/advisor contact me. If you feel you have issues but you don't have an official accommodation, please feel free to reach out to me and we can discuss. (I'd also encourage you to seek out SDS since there really is a lot that you can learn that helps.)

Finally, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues are commonplace and I cannot remember a time in the last 20 years when at least one of my students has not had a serious episode during the quarter. Again, I'm happy to work with you on timelines to help you do well. It's better to come to talk to me *early*. If you are missing class or assignments I may also reach out to check in.

**Pre-requisites** This class is designed for Master's students at Harris, but is open to Master's students across the social sciences at UChicago. The Harris core classes are highly recommended, especially the analytical politics sequence. Non-Harris students are expected to be familiar with introductory economics and game theory. If you have no exposure to game theory, you will struggle with some of the assignments, but you can get by if you put in the time and effort.

By the end of the quarter, my goal is that students have learned to:

- Be able to diagnose fragile situations, and the causes of political instability
- Be able to identify and evaluate peacebuilding measures
- Understand the ties between political development and security
- Understand of the special challenges of policy in fragile settings

## Grading

Your grade will have 4 components:

1. 5% for the two problem sets
2. 25% for a midterm
3. 10% for your presentation
4. 10% for your discussion memo
5. 35% for the final exam

6. 15% for in-class participation

- This is not an attendance grade, as attendance is required
- The TAs and I will typically give students an end-of-quarter score of 5 to 12 based on the quality of participation in class (asking and answering questions, high quality of commentary, ability to engage civilly with other students, ability to listen to other views)
- Note that it is not necessary to speak up every class, and that it is especially not good to speak up so frequently that you dominate conversations
- Scores of 13-15 will be very rare and used to distinguish the top 10% of contributors

**Attendance** No one will be penalized for missing up to two lectures, since everyone falls sick, has family circumstances, or religious observances. Please let me know if you have more frequent absences and we can discuss.

**Problem sets** The Week 2 and 3 assignments are a game theoretic problem sets. We designed them to be straightforward for Harris students who have done the analytical politics core classes. Non-Harris students who do not have this background: do not freak out or drop the class. The goal is not to give non-mathematical class-takers a zero. It's to walk you through the ideas step by step, so you get a sense of what it is all about. Your classmates and your TAs will be resources for you.

Also, they are worth 5 percent for a few reasons:

- ChatGPT can do them in about 2 minutes (though I do not recommend that)
- The main purpose is to have you work through the logic of the basic model/concepts underlying the class so that, when we invoke the model in class examples, it is straightforward and intuitive
- The true test of your mastery of the problem sets will come from midterm and final exam performance, which will each usually include one problem set-like question (so ChatGPT does not pay, except as a tutor)

**Discussion memo** You will have one discussion memo, which are:

- Roughly 3–4 pages long
- Should cite specific arguments (with page number references) from the relevant readings
- Submitted in Word or a PDF
- Double-spaced, 12-point font, with 1 inch margins (so that it is easy for your TAs to write notes and comments)

- Based on your own critical reflections on the readings and application to the week's conflict
- *Not* summaries of the readings or general reflections
- Critical analysis and application of the ideas in the course and the readings
- May be informed by AI as a research tool, but may not be written by AI (note that AI does not do a great job applying specific readings to the specific course concepts, and so you should be skeptical of what AI gives you on this subject)

**Presentations** You will work with a small group to research one conflict and present on its origins and/or continuation and potential solutions. See each week below for topic suggestions.

You will be asked to rank your preferences in Week 1.

Each week from weeks 6-9 your group will present for about 20 minutes at the beginning of class. Two groups will present on that conflict that day. The remaining 40 minutes I will lead a discussion of the conflict.

Your assignment is to analyze the conflict through the lens of the social science in the class.

Some tips:

- Do not feel your presentation has to cover all aspects of a conflict (beginning, persistence, end) as that is too ambitious
- Focus. Try to develop a smaller number of arguments in depth.
- Read widely. Your group should divide up reading and share insights with one another, even if you each pursue a different theme or topic.
- Discuss your proposed presentation and structure and approach with your TA and instructor at least a week in advance. Sign up for office hours early.
- Everyone in a group typically gets the same grade
- You may all take turns presenting but it is not necessary to do so. It is fine to have 1–2 designated presenters.
- Show critical thinking, creative arguments, use of the theory in the course, and thoughtful applications of the material to what you read

**Midterm and final exam** I used to do more discussion memos and a final essay, but given the new capabilities of AI, I have decided to return to having hand-written exams. You can expect:

- A short question or two similar to what you see on the problem sets

- Some short answer questions about some of the required readings
- Some longer questions probing theoretical concepts and applying them to cases

If you do the assignments and readings and pay attention in class, you will be well-prepared.

**How to get a good grade** First of all, for most of you, no one will ever look at your grades again for as long as you live, so don't worry about the grade. I am happy to have you switch to Pass/Fail if you need to.

There is a simple way to get a high grade in this course:

- **Read the readings.** All of the grading is designed to incentivize you to read and understand the material. The reason I do this is that I think reading and writing are the main way we all change how we understand the world and influence others. Virtually every reading in this course is one that deeply influenced my own perspective.
- **Think critically about what you read.** Every paper is wrong in some way. Usually it has major flaws or oversights. Your job is to figure out what the problems are and the limits of the argument. For the rest of your career, approach every paper or book with the idea that your job is partly to figure out why it is wrong.
- **Make notes and think about your essay answers along the way.** The syllabus includes all discussion memo topics for the quarter. When reading the readings and taking class notes, write down your ideas and thoughts in real time.
- **Use AI as an enabler not as a substitute.** AI can be a useful learning tool. But it does not have a very deep understanding of the conflict theory taught in this class, and its answers tend to be mediocre. I've checked. It will be useful as a tool, but you will still have to read and think. When we grade short essays and presentations, we will reward more specific and deeper discussion of the ideas taught in class, evidence of reading the readings closely, and more thoughtful applications to the cases at hand. To be honest, if you were clever about it and probed AI well enough, you could probably get B+ level answers or better. If that's how you want to spend your tuition money and time, there's only so much we can do to control that, and you may or may not get caught. It doesn't really seem worth it.
- **Hand in all assignments.** Failing to hand in anything substantial can really impact your grade. Please speak to me if you need an extension. Late policies will apply but this is better than nothing.

**Late policy** The late penalty is typically one grade level per day (e.g. from an A- to a B+). I can waive the penalty if you have a timely, legitimate, and documented excuse.

- If you are missing classes or have a late assignment because of sickness or religious observance, we can accommodate you. If predictable, please alert the TA by email *in advance*. Please make specific arrangements for extensions of any assignments.
- Do not wait until weeks after a missed assignment to talk to us. I especially advise against waiting to contact us until the last week of classes or after final grades have been submitted. It is easier to accommodate timely requests.

**Re-grading policies** Feel free to discuss your grades with your TAs to get clarification. If, following such a conversation, you feel that an error was made, *please submit a re-grade request in writing to your TA, by email, within two weeks of the assignment being handed back*. Please include an explanation or justification for the re-grade request.

A poor way to ask for a re-grade is to simply lobby non-specifically for a better grade, or to explain there is some reason you need to maintain a certain grade level. A good way to ask for a regrading is to substantively discuss why you thought you answered the question well, ask for clarification, and if a mistake was made we can correct it. Or, if you have a legitimate medical or related excuse, please follow the instructions above.

## What to do if you're having problems

I'm committed to helping everyone pass the class, in a way that you still learn the materials and gets the work done. If you find yourself unable to join a class or complete an assignment for physical health, mental health, or other personal reasons, just let me know. Here is what I suggest if a problem comes up:

- As soon as possible, email me and *copy your student services advisor*, with a note about the missed work and an explanation. *I hold everything in the strictest confidence*. But if you would like to explain the situation to your advisor only and have them contact me directly without the personal details, that is fine too.
- I don't really care when you put in the effort, so long as you find the time to read and reflect on the material in the course. In general, I will identify a way for you to make up an assignment. This will often be an extension of the deadline. If we discuss answers in depth the following class, it may be that I ask you to submit an essay on a different question.
- In extreme cases, students have sometimes taken time over the break or subsequent quarter to finalize the assignments and the class.
- Try not to tell me last minute. Advance notice is always a good policy.

# Harris Policies

## Free Expression, Civil Discourse, and Inclusion

We are going to cover some of the most intractable and difficult conflicts in this class. Your fellow students may be from one of the affected countries, fought there, or had friends or relatives suffer there. They may hold passionate opinions, especially active conflicts like the recent and ongoing violence in the Middle East.

Rather than shy away from issues like the attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7, Israel's invasion of Gaza, or the complex politics and players in the region, we are going to tackle it head on.

Previous years have made me optimistic about Harris and UChicago students' ability to tackle these issues in a thoughtful way. Previous classes of students have shown maturity and an ability to bring an open mind and professionalism to the classroom, and most of all to think like social scientists. There will be missteps and misstatements along the way. The best way to deal with these is with generosity and patience. We are all learning.

As a reminder, here is a statement of the [Harris School's commitment and guiding principles](#) when it comes to diversity, inclusion, free expression, civil discourse, and discrimination, which we will seek to embody:

The Harris School of Public Policy welcomes and respects students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives as part of our commitment to building an inclusive community.

As a leading public policy school, Harris holds diversity as a core value. That includes not only diversity of opinion, but diversity along a broad spectrum of factors, including race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, religion, socio-economic background, and social or political belief. Recognizing the value of diversity and inclusion is essential to combating discrimination, addressing disparities, and cultivating ethical and clear-eyed policy leadership.

Harris enlists all members of the school's community to maintain a welcoming environment for scholarship and learning that helps students develop the understanding and tools to drive better policy in their communities and around the world. As a school, we empower our community to advance policy based on evidence, not ideology.

Consistent with the University of Chicago's commitment to free expression, we believe that open discourse is vital to our mission as a policy school. Harris encourages its leadership, faculty, student body, and administrative staff to respect and engage with others of differing backgrounds or perspectives, even when the ideas or insights shared may be viewed as unpopular or controversial. Recognizing that diverse views, as well as political, cultural,



religious, and social differences, can sometimes create tensions, Harris aims to foster thought-provoking discourse by encouraging community members to speak freely about all issues. We are a place where difficult questions are discussed with mutual respect and open minds.

## Academic Integrity

All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that students shall not represent another's work as their own, use un-allowed materials during exams, or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage.

The University's policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty are described [here](#). It is worth explicitly stating the University's approach here: "It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another's statements or ideas as one's own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University's disciplinary system. Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual character of the University, we take them very seriously."

The Harris School's policies are available in the Harris Student Handbook Canvas site.

- The Academic Honesty and Plagiarism section expresses the main principles.
- Detailed guidelines for more specialized student work (e.g., problem sets including computer code) are offered in the section titled Harris Integrity Policy for Problem Sets Involving Code.
- Harris's specific procedures for handling suspected violations of these policies are available in the section Harris Procedures for Allegations of Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Dishonesty and are also re-produced as an Appendix to this document.
- All students suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Harris Dean of Students for investigation and adjudication. The disciplinary process can result in sanctions up to and including suspension or expulsion from the University.
- In addition to disciplinary sanctions, I will impose a grade penalty for students who have committed academic dishonesty.
- Other penalties for violations could be imposed instead, alone or in combination, including a zero grade on the assignment or a failing grade in the course.

# Weekly schedule and readings

This is a reading- and writing-intensive course. Please take that into account when deciding if this is the course for you.

- Each class I assign 1–2 required book chapters or papers. Lectures, class questions, and occasional quizzes will assume you will have read these before class.
- There is one required book, “[Why We Fight: The Roots of War and the Paths to Peace](#)”. Paperback and e-book versions are available online and are typically about \$15 (much cheaper than the prices offered through the UChicago bookstore). The book grew out of years of teaching courses similar to this one, and so it is akin to a form of lecture notes, and allow me to go into more depth in class.
- Other than the required books, all readings are linked and downloadable here, and the majority are in Canvas under “Files”.
- If you want to download, in most cases you will need to be on campus or (from home) log in through UChicago’s [VPN](#)
- If a link is broken or not available through the [VPN](#), *please let the instructor and TA know* as soon as possible

## Weeks 1-5: Theory

### 1 Introduction

**Week 1 Assignment:** Sign up for (1) a group presentation topic and (2) a discussion memo on one of the contemporary conflict/peacebuilding options *before end of day Friday*. Your TA will assign you to a group.

#### 1.1 Introduction (Sept 29)

- Blattman, Christopher. 2022. “Why We Fight” Introduction and Chapter 1. [Available in Canvas under “Files”]

This will be a discussion-based class. Before coming to class, please pick *one* of the case studies below, sit down for 15 minutes, and write down some of the explanations you have heard for (1) what the two sides are competing over, (2) why they fought (if there was violence), and (3) why they avoided violence or settled (especially if the rivals did not go to war).

1. Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022
2. China/Taiwan today

## 1.2 The incentives for peace (Oct 1)

- Kastner, Scott L. “Is the Taiwan strait still a flash point? Rethinking the prospects for armed conflict between China and Taiwan.” *International Security* 40, no. 3 (2015): 54-92.
- Chen Weiss, Jessica. 2023. “Don’t Panic About Taiwan.” *Foreign Affairs*. [See Canvas to download]

## 2 Rationalist war I

Week 2 assignment: Problem set 1, due end of day Friday

**Also: Start reading about your case and thinking about your presentation. Suggested readings are in the respective lectures below, but you may read beyond this.**

### 2.1 Agency problems (Oct 6)

- Blattman, Christopher. 2022. “Why We Fight” Chapter 2.
- Required: Read one of the following (required):
  - Mastro, Oriana S. 2021. “The Taiwan temptation: Why Beijing might resort to force.” *Foreign Affairs*, 100. [See Canvas to download]
  - Roland, Gerard. 2021. “China’s rise and its implications for International Relations and Northeast Asia.” *Asia and the Global Economy*.
  - Pearlman, Wendy. 2009. *Spoiling inside and out: Internal political contestation and the Middle East peace process*. *International Security* 33(3): 79-109.
- Optional supplementary materials:
  - Pearlman, Wendy. 2011. Chapter 1 of “Violence, nonviolence, and the Palestinian national movement”. Cambridge University Press. [see Canvas]
  - Jackson, Matthew O., and Massimo Morelli. 2007. “Political bias and war,” *American Economic Review* 97(4): 1353-1373.
  - Davis, Jason S., 2023. “War as a redistributive problem,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(1), pp.170-184.

## 2.2 Uncertainty (Oct 8)

- Blattman, Christopher. 2022. “Why We Fight” Chapter 4.
- Required: Read at least one of the following:
  - Chang-Liao, N.C. and Fang, C., 2021. “The case for maintaining strategic ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait.” *The Washington Quarterly*, 44(2), pp.45-60.
  - Wu, C.C.H., 2021. “The end of Washington’s strategic ambiguity? The debate over US policy toward Taiwan.” *China Review*, 21(2), pp.177-202.
  - Haass, Richard and David Sacks. 2021. “The Growing Danger of U.S. Ambiguity on Taiwan.” *Foreign Affairs*. [see Canvas]
  - Glaser, Bonnie S., Jessica Chen Weiss, and Thomas J. Christensen. 2024. “Taiwan and the True Sources of Deterrence.” *Foreign Affairs*. [see Canvas]
- Optional supplementary materials:
  - Fearon, James. 1995. “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49(3): 379-414.

## 3 Rationalist War II

Week 3 assignment: Problem set 2, due end of day Friday

Also: Keep reading about your case and meet with your group.

### 3.1 Commitment problems (Oct 13)

- Blattman, Christopher. 2022. “Why We Fight” Chapter 5.
- Frieden, Jeffrey A. 2015. The root causes of enduring conflict: Can Israel and Palestine co-exist?. In *Israel and Palestine: Alternative Perspectives on Statehood*, p.63-75.
- Optional supplementary materials:
  - Powell, Robert. 2006. “War as a commitment problem.” *International Organization* 60(1): 169-203.

### 3.2 Advanced rationalist topics (Oct 15)

- Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan, Sandeep Baliga and Alexander Wolitzky. 2019. *"The Case for a Cyber Deterrence Plan that Works."* The National Interest.
- Hassner, Ron E. 2003. *"To halve and to hold: Conflicts over sacred space and the problem of indivisibility."* Security Studies 12(4): 1-33.
- Optional supplementary materials:
  - Maass, Richard W. 2021. *"Salami Tactics: Faits Accomplis and International Expansion in the Shadow of Major War."* Texas National Security Review 5(1): 33-54.
  - Dafoe, A., Renshon, J. and Huth, P., 2014. *"Reputation and status as motives for war."* Annual Review of Political Science, 17(1), pp.371-393.

## 4 Psychological explanations

**Week 4 Assignment:** Initial presentation plan, one per group, due by *end of day Sunday*. Outline the main events, readings, and arguments you plan to employ. This should be a 2 to 4 page outline, double-spaced (for ease of commenting). Bulleted forms is fine, rather than prose.

Note that I encourage all teams to sign up to my office hours *together* at least 1–2 weeks before their presentations to discuss your plan. I will hold extra office hours Oct 27 from 3-6 partly for this purpose.

### 4.1 Intangible incentives (Oct 20)

- Blattman, Christopher. 2022. "Why We Fight" Chapter 3.
- Varshney, Ashutosh. 2003. *"Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and rationality."* Perspectives on Politics 1(1): 85-99.
- Hassner reading from class 3.2

### 4.2 Misperceptions (Oct 22)

- Blattman, Christopher. 2022. "Why We Fight" Chapter 6.
- Pearlman, Wendy. *Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings.* Perspectives on Politics 11.2 (2013): 387-409.

- *Recommended:* Joel Wuthnow. 2025. “The Greatest Danger in the Taiwan Strait Even If China Avoids a War of Choice, a Miscalculation Could Spark a War of Chance.” Foreign Affairs [See Canvas]

## 5 Special event & Midterm

I will hold extra office hours on Oct 27 from 3-6pm mainly for groups who want to discuss their presentations with me, but also for midterm discussions.

### 5.1 Special lunchtime event: PeaceWorks Dialogue on Israel & Palestine (Oct 27)

**Special time and location** The event will run 12pm-1:20pm in a location TBD

**What this is** A moderated dialogue with Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders focused on practical peacebuilding, civic engagement, and constructive discourse across divides. The event is designed as an applied complement to course themes on conflict, negotiation, and institution-building. Attendance will count toward course participation; students from both of my classes are strongly encouraged to attend.

#### Speakers

- **Leehe Bronstein** — Field Manager at Darkenu, Israel’s largest nonpartisan civil society movement promoting democracy, equality, and social justice. She also participates in cross-border events with the Geneva Initiative to advance two-state solutions. Former manager of the Israel Scouts delegation to the United States.
- **Ezzeldeen (Ezz) Masri** — Chief Field Officer, PeaceWorks Foundation. Former First Secretary in the Palestinian Diplomatic Corps (2005–2006). Founding Executive Director of OneVoice Palestine–Gaza (2006); later Director of Development for OneVoice Palestine in Ramallah; returned to Gaza in 2011 as Director of OneVoice–Gaza. Featured in the *New York Times* (2014) for peacebuilding work in Gaza.

**Program leads** PeaceWorks on Campus staff will join us for Q&A, including:

- **Sarah Décarpentrie** (Harris MPP ’15), Chief of Staff / Director of Philanthropic Initiatives, Lubetzky Family Foundation.
- **Elle Garfinkle** (PeaceWorks on Campus program lead).

**Format** Brief opening remarks, facilitated conversation with the speakers, and audience Q&A. The session will emphasize respectful engagement, evidence-informed discussion, and practical lessons for policy and program design.

### Logistics and expectations

- Seating will prioritize enrolled students if capacity is reached.
- Attendance counts toward participation for this course. If you have a course conflict, please communicate to your TA *at least 2 weeks in advance* and we will excuse the absence. If there are enough planned absences, we may hold a class and discussion at the regular class time.

## 5.2 Midterm (Oct 29)

In-class, written midterm, covering:

- Versions of the simple bargaining model from the problem set and in-class illustrations
- Short answer questions applying concepts to contemporary issues
- Reading and interpreting short passages or news articles through the lens of theory
- Critical reflections or discussions of main concepts from required readings and lectures

# Weeks 6-9: Contemporary applications

**Weekly Assignment:** In addition to your assigned group presentation, recall that everyone is responsible for one discussion memo in weeks 6 through 9. Guidelines:

- Follow the discussion memo guidelines above under “Grading”
- Your memo should reflect your analysis of that day’s case, and *it must be submitted before the beginning of class when our analysis and discussion begins*
- You should apply the theoretical frameworks and social science we have learned in the class to the case
- Some common approaches include:
  - Choose authors from the syllabus and analyze their diagnosis or solution
  - Integrate several readings or observations into an analysis of the causes of the conflict

- Discuss solutions to the conflict and how they are linked to the causes or persistence of tensions or conflict using the class’s theoretical framework

## 6 Contemporary conflicts I

### 6.1 Israel–Palestine: The Past (Nov 3)

Groups 1 and 2 present, followed by a discussion. To minimize repetition, I suggest that the two groups coordinate to choose different historical periods and episodes. One possible split:

- Group 1 (1987–2001): First intifada through failure of the Oslo Accords and outbreak of the Second Intifada, focusing on why a peace deal could not be reached.
- Group 2 (2001–2010 or 2015) Second Intifada through First Gaza War in 2008-09 (optionally including subsequent Gaza Wars in 2012 and 2014), focusing on sources of brief or sustained violence.

For some basic historical background, here are a few different sources and summaries from major news sources and magazines of various political persuasions. So that the class is familiar with events before attending the discussion and group presentations, everyone should examine at least two sources and contrast their description of events:

- Vox.com “A timeline of Israel and Palestine’s complicated history” [PDF in Canvas]
- [Council on Foreign Relations](#) timeline
- [Aljazeera](#) maps and charts
- [American Jewish Community](#) timeline

I welcome additional suggestions. It is useful to see a variety of viewpoints, in part because we are interested in understand how different viewpoints are constructed, and especially because we are interested in how different narratives shape the capacity to reach bargained solutions.

**Readings for this class** We have already seen several readings on this conflict in weeks 1–3. Groups should use these. Before class, I would ask students to explore 1-2 writings from this list or another analytical source. Some options include, but are by no means limited to:

- Ahmad, A., 2023. “[Land for peace? Game theory and the strategic impediments to a resolution in Israel-Palestine.](#)” *Defence and Peace Economics*, 34(4), pp.385-409.



- Here is [a list of writings](#) by UChicago anthropologist Darryl Li, with a short description of each. You can look for topics of most interest or relevance.
- Feldman, Noah. 2024. [The new antisemitism](#). Time.
- Popular books of different political persuasions and viewpoints:
  - Khalidi, R., 2020. The hundred years' war on Palestine: A history of settler colonialism and resistance, 1917–2017. Metropolitan Books.
  - Shlaim, A., 2020. Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, revisions, refutations. Verso Books.
  - Ari Shavit. 2013. My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel. Random House.

## 6.2 Israel–Palestine: The Present (Nov 5)

Groups 3 and 4 present, followed by a discussion. To minimize repetition, I suggest that the two groups coordinate to choose different aspects of the recent conflict. One possible split:

- Group 3: Outbreak of the 2023 war—why did Hamas instigate this attack, and why did Israel conduct such a sustained invasion of Gaza (in contrast to the previous Gaza Wars 2008–21)?
- Group 4: Alternative peace deals and agreements, why these have failed to take hold, and the best prospects for a peace agreement in the coming year(s).

Remember: You do not have to agree with the views of the authors you discuss, and in fact it is possibly more interesting if you disagree with some of the articles you cover. Rather, the presentation should break down existing arguments and analyze them from a social scientific perspective.

Some reading options include, but are by no means limited to:

- The *Unapologetic Podcast* [[Apple](#)] [[Spotify](#)], by two Palestinian Israelis, is very interesting, especially in terms of trying to provide complex perspectives from different sides, as well as to humanize the people in the conflict. *Episode 23*, with Israeli settler and peace activist Yisrael Piekraish is a good example both of their style, but also an unconventional and creative peace plan [[Apple](#)] [[Spotify](#)].
- A couple of interesting podcasts on Israel and Hezbollah and the strategic logic of each side in the current conflict:
  - Interview with author and journalist Matti Friedman [[Apple](#)] [[Spotify](#)]
  - [Interview with terrorism expert Colin P. Clarke](#) at West Point's Modern War institute

- There are a large number of opinion pieces on different peace plan options, international strategy, and Israeli strategy from the international community and scholars. Some examples include:
  - Axworthy, Lloyd, Michael W. Manulak, and Allan Rock. 2024. “A UN Trusteeship for Palestine.” Foreign Affairs. [see Canvas]
  - Yglesias, Matthew. 2024. “[The two-state solution is still best.](#)” Slow Boring.
  - Barnett, Michael, Nathan Brown, Marc Lynch, and Shibley Telhami. 2023. “Israel’s One-State Reality: It’s Time to Give Up on the Two-State Solution.” Foreign Affairs [see Canvas].
  - Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan. 2023. “[American Geopolitical Strategy and the Israel-Hamas War.](#)” Irregular Warfare Initiative.
  - Orion, Assaf. 2024. “Israel and the Coming Long War.” Foreign Affairs [see Canvas].
  - Spencer, John. 2024. “Israel Is Winning” Foreign Affairs. [See Canvas]
  - Dajani, Omar and :Limor Yehuda. 2024. “A Two-State Solution That Can Work: The Case for an Israeli-Palestinian Confederation” Foreign Affairs. [See Canvas]
  - Haass, Richard. 2025. “A Palestinian State Would Be Good for Israel” Foreign Affairs. [See Canvas]
  - Lynch, Marc and Shibley Telhami. 2025. “The Promise and Peril of Recognizing Palestine: Can a Two-State Solution Still Emerge From a One-State Reality?” Foreign Affairs. [See Canvas]
- There are various analyses of Hamas and its various factions. Some perspectives include:
  - [Council of Foreign Relations explainer](#)
  - Alshaikh, Hanna. 2024. “[Demystifying how the Hamas leadership works.](#)” Mondoweiss.
  - Omar, Abdaljawad. 2024. “[The question of Hamas and the Left.](#)” Mondoweiss.

Other suggestions are welcomed.

## 7 Contemporary conflicts II

### 7.1 US–Afghanistan (Nov 10)

Groups 5 and 6 present, followed by a discussion. To minimize repetition, I suggest that the two groups coordinate to choose different aspects of the recent conflict. One possible split:

- Group 5: Why did the U.S. invade? Shouldn't the Taliban and U.S. have been able to find a compromise and avoid the invasion? How do standard accounts of the decision to invade fit into our theoretical framework?
- Group 6: Why did the war go on two decades? Were there opportunities for earlier resolutions? Why weren't they taken?

Everyone should read at least one of the following:

- Malkasian, Carter. 2021. *The American War in Afghanistan: A History*. Oxford University Press. [\[Amazon link\]](#)
- Rashid, Ahmed. 2010. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press. [\[Amazon link\]](#)
- Tierney, Dominic. 2013. *Fighting While Negotiating in Afghanistan*. *Orbis* 57(1): 171–186.
- Dobbins, James, and Carter Malkasian. 2015. *Time to Negotiate in Afghanistan*. *Foreign Affairs* 94.
- Semple, Michael, Theo G. Farrell, Anatol Lieven, and Rudra Chaudhuri. 2012. *Taliban perspectives on reconciliation*.
- Grossman, Marc. 2014. *Talking to the Taliban 2011–2012*. *Prism* 4(4): 21-37.
- Sheikh, Mona Kanwal, and Maja Touzari Janesdatter Greenwood. 2013. *Taliban talks: Past present and prospects for the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan*. No. 2013: 06. DIIS Report.
- Coll, S. (2019). *Directorate S: the CIA and America's secret wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Penguin.

## 7.2 Russia–Ukraine (Nov 12)

Groups 7 and 8 present, followed by a discussion. To minimize repetition, I suggest that the two groups coordinate to choose different aspects of the recent conflict. One possible split:

- Group 7: Why did Russia invade? Shouldn't Russia, Ukraine, and Ukraine's allies have been able to find a compromise and avoid the invasion? How do different accounts of the decision to invade fit into our theoretical framework?
- Group 8: Why has the war lasted years? Were there opportunities for earlier resolutions? Why weren't they taken? What are the prospects for a peaceful settlement?

Everyone should read at least one of the following:

- Arel, D. and Driscoll, J., 2023. "Ukraine's unnamed war: Before the Russian invasion of 2022." Cambridge University Press.
- Ashford, Emma. 2024. "[Testing Assumptions About the War in Ukraine](#)." Stimson Center.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 2023. "[NATO Membership for Ukraine](#)." American Purpose.
- Mearsheimer, J.J., 2014. "[Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin](#)." Foreign Affairs, 93, p.77.
- Mearsheimer, J.J. 2024. "[Ukraine, Taiwan and The True Cause of War](#)." Podcast/Video.
- Egorov, G. and Sonin, K., 2023. "[Why did Putin invade Ukraine? A theory of degenerate autocracy](#)." NBER Working paper 31187. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Popova, M. and Shevel, O., 2023. Russia and Ukraine: Entangled histories, diverging states. John Wiley Sons.
- Frye, Timothy. 2022. Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia. Princeton University Press.

## 8 Contemporary conflicts III & Paths to Peace I

### 8.1 Gang violence in US cities (Nov 17)

Groups 9 and 10 present, followed by a discussion. I suggest groups 9 and 10 coordinate to avoid too much overlap (though here they may want to divide themes and authors rather than time periods). Some possible topics to address (using the social science and framework covered in the previous readings):

- How do the accounts of different authors fit into our framework, if at all?
- Many policymakers and scholars argue in favor of deep structural roots and the need for comprehensive solutions. How does this fit into our framework (or not), and what are the alternatives?
- Are there different types, intensities, or lengths of gang violence? How do the causes depend on this, if at all?
- What are some of the most common causes of conflict listed in the popular press? Do they fit into our framework? Are they causes of conflict?

Everyone should read at least one of the following:

- Abt, Thomas. 2019. *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence—And a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets*. Basic Books.
- Aspholm, Roberto. *Views from the streets: The transformation of gangs and violence on Chicago's south side*. Columbia University Press, 2020.
- Sharkey, Patrick. *Uneasy peace: The great crime decline, the renewal of city life, and the next war on violence*. WW Norton Company, 2018.
- Ludwig, Jend. 2025. *Unforgiving Places: The Unexpected Origins of American Gun Violence*. University of Chicago Press.
- Vargas, Robert. *Wounded city: Violent turf wars in a Chicago barrio*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Leovy, Jill. *Ghettoside: A true story of murder in America*. One World, 2015.
- *The great debate on gun violence*. by Jens Ludwig, CNN.com 2021.
- Kapustin, Max, Terrence Neumann, and Jens Ludwig. *Policing and management*. No. w29851. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2022.
- Braga, Anthony A., and Philip J. Cook. *Policing gun violence: Strategic reforms for controlling our most pressing crime problem*. Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Daniel W. Webster. *Public Health Approaches to Reducing Community Gun Violence*. Daedalus 2022; 151 (1): 38–48.
- Anderson, Elijah. 2000. *The code of the streets. Anomie, Strain and Subcultural Theories of Crime*; Anderson, E., Ed, pp.303-312.

## 8.2 Peacebuilding in fragile states (Nov 19)

Groups 11 and 12 present, followed by a discussion. I want both groups and the class to engage with this joint UN and World Bank report:

- United Nations and World Bank Group. 2018. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*.

The presenters will want to engage with the full report, but everyone else is free to read the shorter Main Messages document.

Presenters are also encouraged to draw on Chapters 6 to 9 of *Why We Fight*. All are encouraged to read Chapters 6 and 7 before class. (Chapters 8 and 9 are required for next week.)

The presentations and discussion will be focused on:

- What kind of conflicts are they focused on?

- What is their theory of conflict? How does it compare to conflict in our class framework? What's present or missing?
- What are their solutions or approach? Do we learn anything about their theory of conflict from the solutions they propose?

## Optional event — How Wars End — Nov 19 6:30pm

I will be leading a conversation at Harris with [John Haltiwanger](#), a staff writer at *Foreign Policy* who covers US National Security, the Middle East and Ukraine. Location and exact time TBD.

**Event description** While traditionally most wars were short, since the 1980s, wars, especially civil wars, have become harder to resolve, with the average ranging from 13 to 20 years. Why is this the case, and what can diplomats and policy makers do to resolve seemingly intractable conflicts in places such as Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan? In this conversation, Chris Blattman and John Haltiwanger will explore these questions in light of various diplomatic efforts to end these and other long-standing conflicts.

## 9 The Paths To Peace II

### 9.1 The future of external intervention (Dec 1)

Groups 13 and 14 will present, followed by a discussion. To minimize overlap, one possible split is for group 13 to focus on peacekeeping and for group 14 to focus on trusteeships. The goal of the lecture will be to discuss the future of outside interventions and the role of outside powers in the context of ending some of the more intractable conflicts. Groups should try to understand the strengths and weaknesses of peacekeeping and trusteeships in the past, and what promise they have for one or more of these contemporary conflicts: Sudan, South Sudan, Gaza, and Eastern Ukraine.

- Blattman, Christopher. 2022. "Why We Fight" Chapters 8 and 9.
- [Introduction](#) to Stewart, Rory, and Gerald Knaus. 2011. "Can Intervention Work?" W.W. Norton & Company. ([The whole book](#) is highly recommended)
- "[The World Must Act Now on Syria: An Open Letter](#)" The New York Review of Books, February 27, 2018.
- This debate on intervention in Sudan:
  - Mamdani, Mahmood. "[Can the African Union Save South Sudan from Genocide?](#)" New York Times, January 8, 2017.

- Gettleman, Jeffrey. “**Quandary in South Sudan: Should It Lose Its Hard-Won Independence?**” New York Times, January 23, 2017.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. “**Responsibility to protect or right to punish?**” Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding 4.1 (2010): 53-67
- Easterly, William. 2008. “**Foreign Aid Goes Military!**” New York Review of Books.
- Shringarpure, Bhakti. 2013. “**In Conversation with Mahmood Mamdani.**” Warscapes, July 15.
- \***Chapter 1 and 7** of Fortna, Virginia Page. 2008. “Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices after Civil War.” Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Weinstein, Jeremy M. 2005. “**Autonomous Recovery and International Intervention in Comparative Perspective.**” Center for Global Development Working Paper 57.
- Fearon, James D, and David D Laitin. 2004. “**Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States.**” International Security 28 (4): 5–43.

## 9.2 Closing lecture and discussion (Dec 3)

- Blattman, Christopher. 2022. “Why We Fight” Conclusion (“The Peacemeal Engineer”).

## 10 Final exam (exam week)

Time and place TBD