

Poli 142P: Crisis Areas in World Politics

Fall 2018

Instructor: Brandon Merrell, bmerrell@ucsd.edu
Lectures: Mondays, 5:00-7:50pm in HSS 1330
Office Hours: Mondays, 3:30–4:30pm (and by appointment) in SSB 448
Online Content: <http://TritonEd.ucsd.edu>

Description and Overview: This course provides advanced undergraduate students with a survey of historic and contemporary crises and conflicts. While examining each crisis, we will consider the development of the organizations that employed or threatened violence, the factors that motivated them to abandon peace negotiations, and the political strategies that governed their use of force. Our focus is on diplomatic interactions and the political, economic, and cultural contexts in which they occur.

To establish a theoretical platform in which to ground our discussion, during the first three weeks of the course I will introduce modern theories of crisis behavior, diplomatic signaling, and war. Most readings during these weeks are optional, albeit strongly encouraged.

Beginning in the fourth week, we will discuss one historical or current crisis topic each week, with two books and one or more short readings assigned on each topic. Students are not required to read or prepare discussion material for all weeks. Instead, they are assigned to specific weeks and readings in the following manner:

- On the first day of class, I will circulate a list of ten crises and associated readings.
- All enrolled students will have an opportunity to rank these topics by order of preference. To rank the topics, follow this link: <https://goo.gl/forms/Q4UyTliqZWMSrpsh1>
- Using these preferences, I will assign each student to two *primary* and two *secondary* topics.
- Students are assigned a book on each primary topic and short articles on secondary topics.
- Finally, students are exempt from readings on the topics to which they are not assigned.

All students should come to class willing and able to participate in class discussions—especially students who are assigned to a topic. Be prepared to ask and answer questions and to discuss the conflicts in detail! The goal of our discussion is to understand whether the events we observe in each crisis match or diverge from the theoretic expectations we developed during the first three weeks of the course. To facilitate this discussion, students will also be responsible for presentations on their *primary* topics.

Prerequisites: Although no previous coursework in international relations is necessary, I encourage students to complete POLI 12 (“Introduction to International Relations”) before enrolling in this course. Ideally, students should have taken my POLI 140C (“International Crisis Diplomacy”) course, which introduce game-theoretic approaches to the study of war. This course is designed to complement 140C by providing students with the historical and empirical grounding that are necessary to apply, interpret, and improve upon existing analytic theories.

Rules and Requirements:

Assignments and Grading Scale:

- Quizzes (15%)
- Participation in discussion (15%)
- Two critical response papers (one on each primary crisis, 25% each)
- Two in-class presentations (one on each primary crisis, 10% each)
- Students have an opportunity to write an additional response paper for bonus credit.

I use the following grading scale: "A-" = [90-93.3̄), "A" = [93.3̄-96.6̄), "A+" = [96.6̄-100], with other letter grades following analogous intervals.

Quizzes: At the beginning of each class, students will answer several short questions on important material from the previous lecture and/or the previous week's discussion. I will drop your lowest quiz score when calculating your overall grade.

Participation: I expect students to arrive in class prepared to discuss the readings. You should take this seriously. At minimum, you should keep notes while you read on each of the following themes:

- Causes of war: why did peace break down?
- Actors and goals: what are the preferences of the main political decision-makers?
- Key events: are there crucial battles, negotiations, or turning points in the narrative?
- Contexts: are there important aspects of culture, society, domestic politics, etc.?
- Theory: what elements were consistent or inconsistent with established theory?

Critical Response Papers: Students are assigned to read one book on each of their assigned "primary" crises. Papers should be uploaded to TurnItIn via TritonEd by midnight before class on the day they are due. Your assignment is to write a short paper (<1000 words or four double-spaced pages) in which you complete the following tasks:

- Summarize in one paragraph the main argument of the book. This may be difficult, especially with non-academic texts where the author's argument is not transparent.
- Provide a critique or discussion of whether the book matches our theoretical expectations regarding military diplomacy, crisis behavior, and conflict. Where do existing theories apply? Where do they seem to fall short or predict results distinct from those we observe? Does the narrative highlight weaknesses or lacunae in existing theory that we ought to address?
- Discuss the author's use of supporting evidence. What are the strongest parts of the author's argument? What additional information would you require in order to become convinced of the author's argument?
- State whether you agree or disagree with the author's argument. Does our knowledge of theory allow us to make a better interpretation of the events?

In-Class Presentations: Each week, we will hold six student presentations. Three groups will present on each of the two books that are assigned for that week. The first presentation will introduce the background of the crisis, including the actors, their interests, the geographical context, key events, and a timeline of the crisis. The second presentation will introduce how our theories of war and crisis behavior apply to these particular events, with the goal of attributing the cause of the crisis to one particular mechanism. The final group will address possible alternatives and attempt to identify weaknesses in or challenges to our current theories. Presentations should range between 10 and 15 minutes. 75% of each presentation grade is based on the prepared materials; the remaining 25% is based on actual in-class presentation. Presentation slides should be emailed to me by midnight before class on the day of the presentation.

Academic Dishonesty: All work must be completed by the individual to whom it is assigned. Students are not permitted to use unauthorized assistance of any kind. Any student who is caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office for administrative sanction.

Late Assignments and Missed Exams: Make-up assignments are only offered under valid and documented circumstances. If you know you will miss an assignment for a legitimate reason, notify me at least a week in advance. Email is perfectly acceptable. If you cannot contact me in advance, you must do so as soon as possible. I will work with you to resolve reasonable problems, but it is your responsibility to arrange with me to take a makeup exam. All make-up work must be submitted by June 17th.

Grades and Appeals: You will be graded solely on your academic performance. This includes clarity of thought, knowledge of the material, composition, spelling, and grammar. Students can appeal grades that they believe are incorrect. Appeals will consist of one typed page that identifies the problem and presents a reasoned argument that revision is appropriate. Appeals must be submitted within one week of the return of an assignment.

Disability: Students who will request accommodations should register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (University Center 202; 858.534.4382) and provide me with documentation outlining appropriate accommodations. I am happy to meet with you individually to discuss your needs.

Readings and Course Schedule:

Part I: Theories of Crisis Bargaining

Week #1: Introduction and Overview (October 1st)

Topics:

- Introduction to the course.
- The political science research process.
- Why do we need theories?
- Assumptions regarding rationality, actors, and interests.

Week #2: Signaling and Unitary Causes of War (October 8th)

Topics:

- Anarchy in the international system.
- How and why do actors send credible signals?
- Discussion of the causes of war.
- Non-rational theories of war.
- Mutual optimism, commitment problems, and issue indivisibility.
- Power shifts and preventive war.
- Reading scientific books and case studies.

Optional Readings:

- James D. Fearon, 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 379-414.
- Brandon Merrell and Alexei Abrahams. "The Secrecy Gambit: Clandestine Power Shifts and Preventive Conflict."

Week #3: New Theories of War and Conflict (October 15th)

Topics:

- Gambling, diversionary war, and rallying effects.
- Domestic constraints and audience costs.
- Principal-agent relationships in international conflict.
- Civil insurgency and domestic bargaining.
- Writing a critical review or research memo.
- Example crisis presentation.

Optional Readings:

- Brandon Merrell. "Vetoing the Peace: The Agency Dilemma in Crisis Decision-Making."
- Eli Berman and David Lake, eds., 2019. *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Transnational Threats through Local Agents*, Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press. Introduction.
- Alexei Abrahams and Brandon Merrell. "Monopolies of Violence? Civil Insurgency and the Accountability Paradox."

Part II: Student Presentations and Discussion of Specific Crises

Week #4: Israel & Palestine (October 22nd)

Books:

- **Group 1A:** James L. Gelvin. *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years Of War* [Amazon Link](#)
- **Group 1B:** Nathan Thrall. *The Only Language They Understand: Forcing Compromise in Israel and Palestine.* [Amazon Link](#)

Short Readings:

- Robert Danin, "A Third Way to Palestine: Fayyadism and Its Discontents." *Foreign Affairs*, January 1, 2011.
- Grant Rumley and Amir Tibon, "The Death and Life of the Two-State solution: How the Palestinians May Eventually Get Their State." *Foreign Affairs*, June 16, 2015.
- Michael J. Koplow, "Language Lessons: Force Alone Wont Fix Israel and Palestine." *Foreign Affairs*, May 31, 2017.

Week #5: Myanmar & The Rohingya (October 29th)

Books:

- **Group 2A:** Azeem Ibrahim. *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide.* [Amazon Link](#)
- **Group 2B:** Francis Wade. *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim 'Other.'* [Amazon Link](#)

Short Readings:

- Zoltan Barany, "Myanmar's Shaky Transition: A Treacherous Path to Democracy." *Foreign Affairs*, March 30, 2016.
- Lynn Kuok, "While the World Sleeps, Myanmar Burns: The Latest Rohingya Crisis." *Foreign Affairs*, September 28, 2017.
- Jonah Blank and Shelly Culbertson, "How the U.S. Can Help Resolve the Rohingya Crisis: A Twofold Approach for Washington and Its Partners." *Foreign Affairs*, January 4, 2018.
- Zoltan Barany, "Where Myanmar Went Wrong: From Democratic Awakening to Ethnic Cleansing." *Foreign Affairs*, April 16, 2018.

Week #6: North Korea (November 5th)

Books:

- **Group 3A:** Mike Chinoy. *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis*. [Amazon Link](#)
- **Group 3B:** Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland. *Hard Target: Sanctions, Inducements, and the Case of North Korea*. [Amazon Link](#)

Short Readings:

- Scott Sagan, "The Korean Missile Crisis: Why Deterrence Is Still the Best Option." *Foreign Affairs*, September 10, 2017.
- Victor Cha and Katrin Fraser Katz, "The Right Way to Coerce North Korea: Ending the Threat Without Going to War." *Foreign Affairs*, April 1, 2018.
- Robert Jervis and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "Perception and Misperception on the Korean Peninsula: How Unwanted Wars Begin." *Foreign Affairs*, April 5, 2018.
- Joshua Shiffrin, "Learning to Love Kim's Bomb: The Upside of a Nuclear-Armed North Korea." *Foreign Affairs*, October 3, 2018.

Week #7: No Class (November 12th, Veteran's Day)

Week #8: Colombia (November 19th)

Books:

- **Group 4A:** Abbey Steele. *Democracy and Displacement in Colombia's Civil War*. [Amazon Link](#)
- **Group 4B:** Winifred Tate. *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats: U.S. Policymaking in Colombia*. [Amazon Link](#)

Short Readings:

- **Optional:** Julia E. Sweig, "What Kind of War for Colombia?" *Foreign Affairs*, September 1, 2002.
- Carlo Jose Vicente Caro, "The Wrong Way to Pressure Colombia: How an American Warning Unsettled Bilateral Ties." *Foreign Affairs*, October 3, 2017.
- Ivan Brisco, "Colombia's Coca Boom: Behind the Failure to Eradicate the Crop." *Foreign Affairs*, November 6, 2017.
- Michael Shifter, "Will Colombia Make Peace With Its Peace Deal: The Compromises That Continue to Divide the Country." *Foreign Affairs*, May 23, 2018.

Week #9: ISIS (November 26th)

Books:

- **Group 5A:** Brian H. Fishman. *The Master Plan: ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory*. [Amazon Link](#)
- **Group 5B:** Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. [Amazon Link](#)

Short Readings:

- Camille Pecastaing, "The Absurdity of ISIS: How Brussels Can Fight Back." *Foreign Affairs*, March 24, 2016.
- Ryan B. Greer and Amir Bagherpour, "To Defeat ISIS, Cooperation Is Key: The Benefits of Multilateralism." *Foreign Affairs*, April 10, 2017.
- Vera Mironova, "The Bloody Split Within ISIS: Inside the Group's Crackdown on Ultra-Extremists." *Foreign Affairs*, December 8, 2017.
- Michael P. Dempsey, "How ISIS' Strategy Is Evolving: What the U.S. Can Do to Counter the Group's Shifting Tactics." *Foreign Affairs*, January 18, 2018.

Week #10: The Democratic Republic of the Congo (December 3rd)

Books:

- **Group 6A:** Gerard Prunier. *Africa's World War: Congo, The Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. [Amazon Link](#)
- **Group 6B:** Jason Stearns. *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*. [Amazon Link](#)

Short Readings:

- **Optional:** Séverine Autesserre, "The Trouble With Congo: How Local Disputes Fuel Regional Conflict." *Foreign Affairs*, May 3, 2008.
- **Optional:** Jason Stearns, "Helping Congo Help Itself: What It Will Take to End Africa's Worst War." *Foreign Affairs*, September 1, 2013.
- John Prendergast and Sasha Lezhnev, "A Worsening Crisis in Congo: And the Threat It Poses to U.S. National Security." *Foreign Affairs*, October 13, 2017.
- Stuart A Reid, "Congo's Slide Into Chaos: How a State Fails." *Foreign Affairs*, December 12, 2017.
- Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, "Waiting for Democracy in Congo: Why Kabila's Retirement Announcement Offers Little Grounds for Optimism." *Foreign Affairs*, August 17, 2018.

Finals Week: No Exam (Optional Response Essay Due December 10th)