GOVERNMENT 3867:

THE CAUSES OF WAR

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“Happy he, who could understand the causes of things”
- Virgil, Georgics, Book 2, line 490

Course Description: Government 386 examines problems of war and peace in theoretical and historical perspective. More specifically, we will examine the causes of interstate war—that is, large scale organized violence between the armed forces of states. We will seek to discover what kinds of conditions make war between states more or less likely. Topics covered include: 1) historical patterns in warfare; 2) theoretical explanations for war; 3) evaluation of the evidence for the various explanations; 4) the impact of nuclear weapons on international politics; 5) the uses and limitations of air power; 6) ethics and warfare. Topics 2 and 3 are the core of the class and will take up roughly three-fourths of the semester.

Causes of war may be found at several “levels of analysis.” Our survey will focus on theories of war at three levels of analysis: the individual and small groups, the nation-state, and the international system. At each level different theories aim to identify causes of war and discover variables that make war more or less likely. At the individual level, for example, various psychological theories of decision-making and small group dynamics offer explanations for war. At the state level, the central claim is that something about the nature of particular types of states causes them to be more aggressive or war-prone than other types of states (for example, democracies vs. authoritarian states, trading vs. autarchic states, unstable vs. secure governments). Finally, explanations at the international system level focus on balance of power politics, cycles of hegemonic rise and decline, arms races, deterrence failure, and alliance patterns as possible causes of war. After surveying explanations for war at these three levels, we will end the course by discussing three special topics: 1) the role of nuclear weapons; 2) the uses of air power in the contemporary era; 3) ethics and warfare.
Throughout the class, we will pay special attention to evaluating the empirical evidence for different theories of war: what kind of evidence counts for or against a perspective? How well does the historical record support a theory’s key implications? Does statistical evidence, which looks at the conditions surrounding the outbreak of dozens or hundreds of wars, support or impugn hypotheses? Is this evidence consistent with the careful casework of historians who look at particular wars in great detail? Upon completing the course, students will not only be acquainted with the main types of explanations offered for interstate war, but they will also be able to evaluate the evidence supporting the various explanations of the causes of war. In turn, this knowledge and skill should help students evaluate different proposals for fostering peace and reducing conflict in the future, and for crafting national security strategies.

More generally, students will acquire skills to help them weigh the soundness of logic and quality of evidence supporting competing claims in order to arrive at their own estimates of the value of various theoretical perspectives – a skill with much greater general value than simply the application to security studies. These skills will be valuable for a range of future activities: law school and the legal profession, work in government agencies and think tanks, and consulting – employers of all types tend to value these inferential and critical thinking skills highly.

Requirements and Grading: Requirements are two preliminary exams, a final examination, active participation in i>clicker polls during lecture, and participation in a discussion section. There is no research paper. The two prelims will each combine an in-class and a take-home section. The in-class section will consist of several “explain and describe” questions and a short essay question. A short paper (5 pages) makes up the take-home section of each prelim exam. On the take-home paper, students will be asked to apply and synthesize course material by crafting policy responses to fictitious foreign policy scenarios. The two prelims each count for 25% of your final grade, whereas the final exam (which is in class and comprehensive, although the long essay questions will be handed out in advance of the exam) accounts for 40%. Discussion section attendance and participation makes up the remaining 10%. i>clicker participation is mandatory and offers the opportunity for extra credit points (see next section).

• Final Examination Date and Time: Monday, May 14, 9:00 – 11:30 AM

• Please make sure that you can take the final examination at the designated date and time; no early exam or alternate exam time will be considered. If you cannot take the final exam at the assigned time, do not take this class.

i>clicker Policies. i>clickers will be used in every lecture session. This is useful for learning because it promotes active thinking and engagement with lecture material. Research shows that the use of i>clickers can have a significant effect on student learning. They are very easy to use and set up. The clickers will be used to assess students’ beliefs about matters of fact (and contrast these beliefs with facts), to compare pre-coverage/post-coverage beliefs and knowledge about course material, to collect data for classroom demonstrations, and to allow us to explore the effects of discussion among students on
believes. I will not be using them for quizzes. I will not grade or evaluate your answers to any i>clicker questions; I just want you to participate.

You will need to bring your clicker to class every day. You can purchase an i>clicker at the Cornell Campus Store. In order to receive credit for participation, you’ll need to register your i>clicker (you need to do this every semester). To register your i>clicker, follow these steps:

2. Click on the link "Click here if you wish to submit a request for <your name>"
3. Type in the clicker ID # and click Submit (ID number found on the back of clicker).
4. You have successfully registered your i>clicker with the Cornell i>clicker system.

**Important:** Please do not register i>clickers at the iclicker.com site!

You may have noticed that the totals under grading above summed to 100%. So what then is the role for i>clicker in course grades? It is two-fold. First, participation is a course requirement: you must participate with i>clicker at least some of the time to get credit for the course. Second, this is the only way to earn extra credit in the class. i>clicker participation can be used to “earn back” points lost in exams. In the final grade calculation, exams make up 90% -- or 90 out of 100 points on the scale I use to calculate course grades. With i>clicker participation, you can earn back up to 5 “lost points” out of that 90, increasing your exam score up to a maximum of 90. Thus, good i>clicker participation can to some extent compensate for lapses on exams. However, perfection (90 out of 90) is the maximum; if you totally ace the exams, i>clicker does nothing (you cannot be better than perfect!).

Your i>clicker score will be calculated using the percentage of days you participated in class with your i>clicker, beginning with the 3rd class meeting (Jan 27). To count as participating, you need to respond to all or all but one of the questions on a given day. 36 lectures will be using i>clicker, and we are skipping the first to allow for people to add the class: this means 35 lectures will be used to calculate your i>clicker participation. Points will be awarded according to this schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90% of sessions (&gt;31 meetings)</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% of sessions (&gt;27 and &lt;32)</td>
<td>4 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>70% of sessions (&gt;24 and &lt;28)</td>
<td>3 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>60% of sessions (&gt;20 and &lt;25)</td>
<td>2 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>50% of sessions (&gt;17 and &lt;21)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
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<tr>
<td>30% of sessions (&gt;10)</td>
<td>0 points but requirement fulfilled</td>
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Please note that i>clicker participation can only help you; it is a “bonus.” In addition, you can miss quite a few sessions and still get bonus points. Thus there is ample room for misses due to illness, personal reasons, athletics, etc.

**Texts:** Three books are available for purchase at the Cornell Campus Store. In addition, you’ll need an i>clicker. One can be purchased at the Cornell Campus Store. There is also a
reading packet, but I have dispensed with hard copies. Everything that would normally be in the reading packet will be on the Blackboard course website.

The reading load averages only 92 pages per week. This is less than in many (most?) Government department classes. Yet be forewarned: some of the heaviest weeks of reading come near the end of the semester. In addition, some of the reading is heavy on concepts and short on narrative, which always makes for slower going, and I expect you to be on top of all it for the exams. Try to read ahead or at least keep up, or when dead week rolls around the week won’t be the only thing that is dead ....

The following items are required:

- An i>clicker.

*Course Web Page:* for information on how to enroll, go to the Blackboard FAQ sheet:

http://www.it.cornell.edu/services/blackboard/faq.cfm#students

**Cornell University Policies and Regulations:** Participation in this class commits students and instructors to abide by Cornell’s expectations and policies regarding equal opportunity and academic integrity. Further, taking this course implies permission from students to submit their written work to services that check for plagiarism, such as Turnitin.com.

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with university policies regarding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity. In particular, please make yourself familiar with the definition of plagiarism, and be aware that you may not turn in the same piece of work (or part thereof) for credit in multiple classes, either in the same semester or while at Cornell in general. Violations of the University Code of Academic Integrity will be firmly dealt with in this class. The Code can be found on the web at (a link to the Code can also be found on the Government 3867 web page):

http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html

A helpful Cornell tutorial called “Recognizing and Avoiding Plagiarism” can be found at:

http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm

Please make yourself familiar with the contents of these documents.

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1 All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.
In addition, this instructor observes all university policies addressing racial, ethnic, gender, sexual preference, or religious discrimination and all forms of harassment; I conduct class in conformance with provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with pertinent policies and to bring any concerns related to them to the attention of Professor Way.

Course Schedule and Outline:

❖ **Topic 1:** Introductory Overview and Historical Patterns in Warfare
(3 lectures, Jan 23 – 27)

Readings:


❖ **Topic 2:** Individual and Small-Group Explanations
(9 lectures, Jan 30 – Feb 17)

*Individual Level Explanations*

(personal psychology, cognitive psychology)

Readings:

Small Group Level Explanations
(groupthink, bureaucratic politics)

Readings:


Topic 3: State Level Explanations
(9 lectures, Feb 20 – March 14)

The Diversionary Theory of War

Readings:


Preliminary Examination #1:
Wednesday, February 29 in class. Take-home essay handed out in class and due at the beginning of class on Monday, March 5.
Military Organizations and War

Readings:


Democracy and War

Readings:


Economic Interdependence and War

Readings:


Topic 4: International System Level Theory
(9 lectures, March 16 – April 16)

The Security Dilemma and Its Consequences: Arms Races, Offense-Defense Balance, and Deterrence

Readings:

Distribution of Power and Alliance Patterns as Causes of War

Readings:

Power Transition and Hegemonic Rise and Decline

Readings:
1. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*. Parts of Chapter 1 (pp. 9 – 18), chapter 3 (pp. 106-110, pp. 146-155), and all of chapters 4-5 (pp. 156 – 210).

**Revisionist and Status Quo States**

Readings:


**Putting it All Together: Combining Multiple Levels of Analysis**

Readings:


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**Preliminary Examination #2:**

Friday, April 13 in class. Take-home essay handed out in class and due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, April 18.

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**Topic 5:** Nuclear Weapons

(3 lectures, April 18 – April 23)

**Who Wants Them, Who Gets Them, and What Difference Do They Make?**

Readings:

Topic 6: Ethics of War and the Conduct of War
(2 lectures, April 25 – April 27)

Just War Theory

Reading:

1. Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 3rd Edition. Chapters 4-5 (pp. 51 – 85), 8-9 (pp. 127 – 159), 11 (pp. 176-196), and 14-16 (pp. 225 – 268).

Topic 7: Air Power
(3 lectures, April 30 – May 4)

The Uses and Limitations of Air Power

Readings:


Study Period: May 7 - 8
Final Exam Period: May 9 –18
Our Final Exam: Monday, May 14, 9:00 – 11:30 AM.
Location: TBA