Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU) International Summer Semester (ISS) 2026

Understanding Global Conflict

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SHORT COURSE DESCRIPTION

The study of history is, in a sense, the study of war. Examining the past, students will come learn about important peoples and events; the rise and falls of dynasties, empires, kingdoms, and governments; and of the all too frequent occurrence of war. However, in a world where war continues to be waged despite our advances as a civilization, the question arises: Under what conditions are states more or less likely to engage in violent conflict?

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the study of interstate war and conflict. The class will examine different levels of analysis, survey various theoretical frameworks for understanding the conditions necessary and/or sufficient for the onset war, and discuss empirical work that outlines what is currently known about war.

The course deals with many questions. How do we create notions of identity, nationality, and territoriality? How do we process and filter information? How do we react in times of duress? How do we communicate (or miscommunicate) among and across groups? Why do we escalate tensions, and how can we deescalate crises? How do wars change who we are? How do we deal with unresolved issues to prevent further conflict? How can we build, re-build, and foster sustainable relationships and avoid falling into a vicious cycle of violence?

While students interested in international relations and security studies will find the course engaging, no prior knowledge of either is required.

READING MATERIALS

There are no required reading assignments; however, I will provide you with the following suggested reading materials.

- Levy, Jack S, and William R Thompson. *Causes of War*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Vasquez, John A., editor. *What Do We Know about War?* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012.
- Stoessinger, John George. *Why Nations Go to War. Wadsworth*, Cengage Learning, 2011.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

You will be assessed on the following:

- participation
- group presentations
- final exam

To pass, student must:

- achieve a grade of 60 or above out of a 100-point scale
- attend at least 80% of all classes (That means not sleeping, too.)
- complete all assignments

COURSE SCHEDULE

– WEEK I –

Monday (June 29)
Empirical Theory and the Causes of War

Tuesday (June 30)
The Individual Level of Analysis, Part I: Human Aggression
Is human nature really to blame for war?

Wednesday (July 1)
The Individual Level of Analysis, Part II: Psychological Explanations for War
To what extent do individuals and their decisions affect the onset of war?

Thursday (July 2)
The Sub-State Level of Analysis: Decision-Making
How and when do groups affect decisions to go to war?

– WEEK II –

Monday (July 6)
Group Presentation Workshop: Utilizing resources you have gathered over the weekend, you will work with your group to create and prepare for your first presentation.

Tuesday (July 7)
1st Group Presentation: Using the Individual and Sub-State Levels of Analyses to Explain World War I, the Korean War, and the U.S. War in Afghanistan

Wednesday (July 8)
The State Level of Analysis, Part I: Political, Economic, and Demographic Factors
What role do states and society play in the onset of war?

Thursday (July 9)
The State Level of Analysis, Part II: Internal Conflicts, Nationalism, and War Weariness
What role do states and society play in the onset of war?

– WEEK III –

Monday (July 13)
The Dyadic Level of Analysis, Part I: The Nature of Dyads
What role do territorial disputes, shared ethnicity, and rivalries play in decisions to go to war?

Tuesday (July 14)
The Dyadic Level of Analysis, Part II: Game Theory, Bargaining, and Deterrence Theory
Do more or less weapons make for a more peaceful world?

Wednesday (July 15)
The International System Level of Analysis, Part I: Realism, Anarchy, and the Balance of Power
What are system level theories, and how can they help us understand when states are likely to go to war?

Thursday (July 16)

The International System Level of Analysis, Part II: Power Dynamics, Cyclical Theories, and Historical-Structural Theories of War
What are system level theories, and how can they help us understand when states are likely to go to war?

– WEEK IV–

Monday (July 20)
2nd Group Presentation: Using the State & International System Levels of Analyses to Explain World War I, the Korean War, and the U.S. War in Afghanistan

Tuesday (July 21)
Movie: TBA

Wednesday (July 22)
In-class final exam