

PSCI 3107A
The Causes of War
Thursday 8:35 a.m. – 11:25 a.m.
Please confirm location on Carleton Central

Instructor: Dr. Brian C. Schmidt
Office Hours: Monday 1-3 p.m., Tuesday 9-11 a.m.
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I. Course Description and Objectives

From its inception to the present day, the study of war has been a major preoccupation of the field of International Relations. One of the primary justifications for establishing a separate field of International Relations was that no other academic discipline made the study of war its central focus. There are several valid reasons for studying war, but perhaps most fundamentally, it is the fact that sovereign states frequently do engage in systematic, large-scale interstate warfare. The twentieth century, for example, has been described as the most murderous in recorded history with an estimated 187 million battle-related deaths. And while the character of war might be changing, the twenty-first century has so far not been a pacific one.

The fundamental objective of this course is to familiarize students with several different theoretical perspectives on the origins of large-scale inter-state war. Throughout the semester, we will attempt to answer the question “why war”? There literally is enough literature about the causes of war to fill a considerable portion of a library. To help sort through the literature, the course will employ Kenneth Waltz’s levels of analysis framework for understanding the causes of war. Our investigation of the causes of war will focus on the role of individuals, domestic politics, and the international system.

In addition to examining theories that focus on the causes of war, we will also examine a few specific case studies such as World War I and the Iraq War. The research paper that you are responsible for will result in you becoming an expert in a specific war of your choosing. We will also review several videos to illustrate some of the major themes of the course and to consider additional case studies.

II. Course Format

This class will be “face to face” meeting on Thursdays from 8:35am to 11:25am. I will be presenting a formal lecture on the assigned material. There will be opportunities for discussion and to ask questions. On the dates when a video has been assigned, we will attempt to end class

early to give you the opportunity to watch and respond to the video. I will be utilizing powerpoint slides, and these will be posted on Brightspace.

III. Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Explain the different theoretical explanations of the causes of war
- Differentiate the competing explanations of war based on Waltz's three-images
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the competing theories of war
- Demonstrate how the different theories can be used to explain a particular war
- Critique and defend the different theories of war
- Recognize historical facts and interpretations of the cause of specific wars.

IV. Course Texts

Course Texts

There are two required texts for the course. The course texts are available for purchase at the Carleton University Bookstore. The required texts as well as the other assigned readings have been placed on reserve in the library. All of the articles and book chapters can be accessed online through the Carleton University library website (<http://catalogue.library.carleton.ca>) and through ARES, which can be found on the Brightspace site for this course.

Students are expected to complete the assigned reading prior to attending class. Your ability to complete the course successfully is dependent on reading and understanding all the assigned material.

1. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (Columbia University Press, 2001). (\$37.24 both used and new copies are acceptable).
2. Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, *Causes of War* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). (\$57.95 both used and new copies are acceptable).

V. Evaluation at a Glance

Your final grade will be determined on the following basis:

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|---|-----|
| • Video reflections (three) | 15% |
| • Research Paper Proposal (October 9) | 15% |
| • Research Paper (November 27) | 35% |
| • Final Exam (TBD during final exam period, December 8 - 20). | 35% |

VI. Evaluation in Detail

Video Reflections: You are responsible for submitting three different video reflections. Each of the videos can be accessed via the links provided on Brightspace. No matter what videos you select to review, they are due within 96 hours of their assigned date. For example, if you chose to review *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* (September 18), the assignment would be due on September 22, 12:00pm. Each reflection should be between 300-500 words. When reflecting on the video, the main objective is to link the video to the course material.

- *What did the movie tell you about TOPIC X [that we just discussed]? How was the movie portrayal the same/different from how it was discussed in class?*
- *What concept/event/person/etc. did the movie clarify for you? What did it raise questions about?*
- *Based on the course material and the video, list and define three relevant terms/concepts.*

Paper proposal: You are required to turn in a 3-4 page paper proposal that clearly indicates the specific war that you have selected to research. You should identify the main combatants and attempt to ascertain the main issues that led to the war – what was this war all about? You should provide some of the background information concerning your war (a brief historical description of the conflict). A provisional bibliography of books and articles that you will be consulting should be included in your proposal.

The paper proposal is due on **October 9, 2025**. Students must have their paper proposal and war accepted before they can turn-in a final paper. If your proposal is not accepted, you will have seven days to re-submit a new proposal. After that time, a penalty of one letter-grade per day will be imposed (e.g. B+ to B).

Research Paper: You are required to write a 12 - 15 page research paper, in which you describe a war of your choice, review contending explanations of this war's origins, and relate these explanations to the theories covered in the course. You must select and utilize two different theories of war and apply them to the war you have chosen to research. **The paper is due on November 27, 2025.** To receive credit for taking the course, you must submit a research paper; if you do not submit a research paper you will automatically fail the course. A more detailed description of the paper assignment is attached to this syllabus.

Final Exam: The final exam will test your knowledge of all the major theories, ideas, concepts, and wars that we have studied throughout the term. The exam is comprehensive and will include all the material covered in the course syllabus. You are responsible for all the material that has been assigned in the course outline, discussed in the lectures, and found in the various movies that we will be viewing. The exam will consist of short-answer, identification questions and essay questions. More information

about the exam will be provided at the end of the semester. The exam will take place during the university-scheduled exam period (December 8-20).

VII. Other Guidelines

- To obtain credit in this course, students must meet all of the course requirements. Failure to complete all the assignments will automatically result in a failing grade for the course.
- Late assignments will be downgraded one letter-grade category per day. For example, a B+ paper, one day late, will receive a B.
- “As our understanding of the uses of AI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, students are required to discuss their use of AI in any circumstance not described here with the course instructor to ensure it supports the learning goals for the course”.

VIII. Course Schedule

Week 1 (September 4)

Course Introduction

Video: Deadly Game of Nations

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=deadly+game+of+nations

Week 2 (September 11)

Explaining and Understanding War

Waltz, Preface, ch. 1.

Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, ch. 1

Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (New York: Penguin, 1986), Book I, chs. 1-3)

Jack Levy, “War and Peace” in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons eds., *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2002).

Week 3 (September 18)

Image I: Individuals as the Cause of War

Waltz, chs. 2 and 3

Daniel Byman and Kenneth Polack “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesmen Back In,” *International Security* (Vol. 25, No. 4, 2001): 107-46.

Video: Inside the Mind of Adolf Hitler

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1OLQW-WXLI>

Week 4 (September 25) Rational and Irrational Decision-making

Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, chs. 5-6.

John G. Stoessinger, *Why Nations Go to War*, 10th ed. (Thomson Wadsworth, 2008) ch. 10.

Jack Levy, "Misperception and the Causes of War: Theoretical Linkages and Analytical Problems," *World Politics* (Vol. 36, No. 1, Oct. 1983), pp. 76-99.

Video: The Fog of War

Week 5 (October 2) Image II: Domestic Politics and War

Waltz, chs. 4-5.

Levy and Thompson, ch. 4.

Week 6 (October 9) Democracy and War/Dyadic Interactions

Levy and Thompson, chs. 3, 4 (104-117)

Bruce Russett, "Why Democratic Peace?" in Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller eds., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 82-115.

Sebastian Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," *American Political Science Review* (Vol. 97, No. 4, Nov. 2003): 585-602.

Week 7 (October 16) Realism and War

Waltz: chs. 6 and 7.

Marc Trachtenberg, "Realism: A Historian's View," *Security Studies* 13, 1 (Autumn 2003): 156-194.

Week 8 (October 23) Fall break – no class

Week 9 (October 30) Structural Realism and War

Levy and Thompson, ch. 2

Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb eds., *The Origins and Prevention of Major Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 39-52. Also available in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 615-628.

John J. Mearsheimer, "War and International Politics," *International Security* 49, 4 (Spring 2025): 7-36.

John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 71-88.

Video: Six Days in June

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyATjG9MJPI>

Week 10 (November 6) Hegemonic Theory, Dynamic Differentials Theory and WW I

Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), chs. 1, 3.
Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb eds., *The Origins and Prevention of Major Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 15-37. Also available in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 591-613.

Video: The First World War 1914-1918

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ypFeoDIsns>

Week 11 (November 13) Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China

Graham Allison, "Thucydides Trap"

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>

David Kang and Xinru Ma, "Power Transitions: Thucydides Didn't Live in East Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 41, 1 (2018): 137-154.

Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler, Douglas Lemke et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century*. New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2000, ch. 1 (pp. 3-43).

Manjari Chatterjee Miller, "The Most Dangerous Game: Do Power Transitions Always Lead to War?" *Foreign Affairs* 103, 4 (July/August 2024): 128-135.

Video: John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully" April 16, 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ4xZuaisxA&t=1565s>

Week 12 (November 20) The Iraq War: Preventive or Pre-emptive?

Stoessinger, ch. 9.

Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly* (Vol. 118, No. 3, 2003).

John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "An Unnecessary War," *Foreign Policy* (January/February 2003).

Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "What to do about Iraq," *The Weekly Standard* (January 21, 2002).

Jack S. Levy, "Preventive War and the Bush Doctrine," in Stanley A. Renshon and Peter Suedfeld eds., *Understanding the Bush Doctrine: Psychology and Strategy in an Age of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2007): 175-200.

Video: The World According to Bush

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JN63GTs0ZYM>

Week 13 (November 27) Conclusion – Why War?

Waltz, ch. 8.

Levy and Thompson, ch. 8.

John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, 5 (September/October 2014): 1-12.

Timothy Garton Ash, “Postimperial Empire,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, 3 (May/June 2023): 64-75.

Week 14 (December 4) Final Exam review

VIII. Research Paper Assignment

The writing assignment asks you to choose and study a war that you find interesting. Since the course focuses on theories of inter-state war, you are strongly encouraged to select an international war rather than an intra-state war. If you are unsure of which war to study, please come and see me early in the semester. After you have selected a war, your paper should do the following three things:

- Describe the essential facts of the case that you have selected. Who fought whom? When? Where? Over what? What were the main circumstances that led to the outbreak of the war you have selected? What were the immediate conditions? What were the underlying causes? If you select a protracted war, you should focus on a specific phase of the war; the origins of the conflict.
- Select, discuss, and elaborate two different theories of the cause of war. What do these theories focus on to explain the outbreak of war? What variable does the theory isolate? What is the theoretical argument being made to explain war? You must identify the authors of the theories that you are using. Who are the authors associated with each theoretical interpretation? Be sure that you identify at least two distinct theoretical interpretations of the war’s origins, and the chief author(s) associated with each of them. You need to select two contrasting theories of war and apply them to your specific case.
- Apply the two theories to the war that you have selected to research. How well do the theories that you have selected help to explain your war? This part of the assignment requires you to be familiar with some of the historical literature on your war. You need to review the historical literature on the origins of your chosen war. What are the major contending interpretations of the outbreak of the war? Who are the authors associated with each interpretation? Consider to what extent the interpretations identified in the literature that you have been reading correspond to the different theoretical perspectives covered in the course. Does your war confirm, or disconfirm, or otherwise speak to claims, hypotheses,

propositions, theories or accounts of the causes of war that you have encountered during the semester? How do the theories that you have selected help to explain your war? Is one theory more relevant or superior to the other? You need to apply the theories that you have selected to your specific case and assess how well the historical details of the war can be explained by each of the two different theories. In your evaluation, please be sure that you reference specific authors.

Examples of some of the theories that you may select:

Misperception
Prospect Theory
Diversionary War Theory
Power Transition Theory
Defensive Realism
Offensive Realism
Democratic Peace Theory
Just War Theory
Nationalism and War
Marxist theories of imperialism
Enduring rivalries
Feminist theories of war
Preventive War, Pre-emptive War
Alliances and war
Security dilemma, spiral model
Rationalist theories of war
Offense-Defence Theory
Balance of Power Theory

Further instructions and details:

While I will be looking to see that you have covered each of the three things listed above, there is a great deal of freedom in how you write the paper. But be sure to avoid the tendency of turning the paper into simply a historical narrative of the events of your chosen war. History is never neutral, and you should strive to identify the theoretical and analytical framework of the books and articles that you have selected. You might want to provide contrasting factual accounts of the war that correspond to the different theoretical perspectives that you are utilizing. You will likely have to be creative in this exercise and determine how the theories that we have discussed in class relate to the war you have selected. How do you appraise one theoretical account as being superior to another? As you work on this assignment, please keep in mind that it is both a historical and theoretical enterprise. And once again, I am looking for two contrasting theoretical explanations of the war that you have chosen to study.

Writing is a very important skill, and you should strive to write the best paper that you can. The paper should adhere to all of the rules and requirements of written composition. Paragraph development, grammar, punctuation, spelling, citations, title page, overall appearance are all

important and will be considered when I grade your paper. Edit and proofread your paper before submitting it. Do not let yourself lose crucial points because of spelling and punctuation errors.

It is extremely important to cite properly the sources you draw upon for facts and/or interpretation. You need to document all quotations and scholarly borrowing from other authors by careful footnoting. To avoid plagiarism, do not paraphrase or cite passages from other published sources without giving full credit to them. When you quote from an author be sure that you use quotation marks and cite the work and page number where the quotation can be located (beware, I do check). This should not be a mystery. A good writing manual will explain all the procedures for documenting a research paper. Take a careful look at the exemplary endnote format used in Copeland's *Origins of Major War*.

While web sources might be helpful to you, be sure that you are clear about the source of the material. If you do use a web source, be sure that you document it properly. This is an academic exercise and you should be consulting scholarly books and journal articles. When you do refer to a particular source, you should strive to identify the author(s) (e.g. According to A.J.P. Taylor, "international anarchy was an underlying reason for the outbreak of WW II."). In addition to identifying the relevant theories to understand the war you have selected, you will need to support your theories with the facts of your case. How does theory help us to understand the specific historical details of your chosen case? Identifying and utilizing the best sources for understanding your war is crucial to a successful paper. This is often a time-consuming process, and you should begin it early.

Political Science Course Outline Appendix

REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Student Mental Health

As a university student, you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus):

<https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

Carleton Resources:

Mental Health and Wellbeing:

<https://carleton.ca/wellness/>

Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>

Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>

Academic Advising Centre (AAC):

<https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>

Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS):

<https://carleton.ca/csas/>

Equity & Inclusivity Communities:

<https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>

Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>

Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389,

<https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>

ood2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>

The Walk-In Counselling Clinic:

<https://walkincounselling.com>

Academic consideration for medical or other

extenuating circumstances: Students must contact the instructor(s) of their absence or inability to complete the academic deliverable within the predetermined timeframe due to medical or other extenuating circumstances. For a range of medical or other extenuating circumstances, students may use the online self-declaration form and where appropriate, the use of medical documentation. This policy regards the accommodation of extenuating circumstances for both short-term and long-term periods and extends to all students enrolled at Carleton University.

Students should also consult the [Course Outline Information on Academic Accommodations](#) for more

information. Detailed information about the procedure for requesting academic consideration can be found [here](#).

Pregnancy: Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, please contact Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC) at equity@carleton.ca or by calling (613) 520-5622 to speak to an Equity Advisor.

Religious obligation: Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with

Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, please request your accommodations for this course through the [Ventus Student Portal](#) at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). Requests made within two weeks will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. For final exams, the deadlines to request accommodations are published in the [University Academic Calendars](#). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally scheduled exam (*if applicable*).

Survivors of Sexual Violence: As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>.

Accommodation for Student Activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the

individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

PETITIONS TO DEFER

Students unable to write a final examination because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control may apply within **three working days** to the Registrar's Office for permission to write a deferred examination. The request must be fully supported by the appropriate documentation. Only deferral petitions submitted to the Registrar's Office will be considered. [See Undergraduate Calendar, Article 4.3](#)

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s). Permissibility of submitting substantially the same piece of work more than once for academic credit. If group or collaborative work is expected or allowed, provide a clear and specific description of how and to what extent you consider collaboration to be acceptable or appropriate, especially in the completion of written assignments.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's official withdrawal dates

OFFICIAL FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's Official Exam Period (may include evenings & Saturdays or Sundays)

For more information on the important dates and deadlines of the academic year, consult the [Carleton Calendar](#).

GRADING SYSTEM

The grading system is described in the Undergraduate Calendar section [5.4](#). Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is an essential element of a productive and successful career as a student. Students are required

to familiarize themselves with the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*" This can include:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*"

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

RESOURCES (613-520-2600, phone ext.)

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| Department of Political Science (2777) | B640 |
| Loeb | |
| Registrar's Office (3500) | 300 Tory |
| Centre for Student Academic Success (3822) | 4 th floor |
| Library | |
| Academic Advising Centre (7850) | 302 Tory |
| Paul Menton Centre (6608) | 501 |
| Nideyinàn | |
| Career Services (6611) | 401 Tory |