

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Political Science 205
Portland State University | Fall 2026

Syllabus and Course Schedule

Compiled from the Canvas course export on October 5, 2026.

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Instructor and Contact Information

INSTRUCTOR David Kinsella Department of Politics and Global Affairs Hatfield School of Government	CONTACT INFORMATION Phone: 503.725.3035 Email: kinsella@pdx.edu Office: Urban Center Building, 650L Office Hours: Monday 1:30-2:45 and by appointment -- in person or via Zoom
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Course Description

This course is an introductory survey of the political science subfield of international relations, with special emphasis on such topics as war and peace, foreign policy, international law and organization, human rights, global trade and finance, and economic development. We begin by discussing the origins of the modern state system, its key actors, and the most influential theories for understanding how international politics works. We then turn to events and issues drawn from the variety of topics that international politics encompasses – for example: Did nuclear weapons keep the Cold War cold? Do we need a world government? When is war illegal? Does prosperity in the most advanced countries require poverty in others? Is foreign aid an obligation or just charity?

The aim of the course is to familiarize students with contemporary issues in international relations and to provide an analytic foundation for more advanced coursework in the field. The course may count as one of the three lower-division courses required for a major in political science, and one of two for the minor. There are no prerequisites for this course and it may also be taken by students majoring in other disciplines.

Learning Objectives

- Show a familiarity with a wide range of substantive issues in international politics and foreign policy : Students will explore and gain insight into a broad spectrum of critical topics in international relations, including geopolitical conflict, diplomacy, international law, human rights, global trade, and economic development.

- Demonstrate mastery of the main theoretical and analytical approaches to the study of international relations : Students will be equipped with an understanding of the foundational theories and methodologies used in international relations, such as realism and liberalism, and will learn how these theories can frame the analysis of international events and policies.
- Articulate normative positions on key ethical dilemmas arising from interactions among states and nonstate actors in global society : Students will be able to engage with complex ethical questions that surface in international politics, such as sovereignty versus intervention, the ethics of warfare, and the distribution of global resources.

Assignments and Assessment

Reading, Documentaries, Lectures

Course materials have been organized into four thematic modules, one per week. For each, you are assigned three kinds of work: (i) reading, (ii) a documentary video, and (iii) mini-lectures.

Readings . All assigned readings are journal articles available online. If there is no link listed for the assignment, you are to retrieve the article via the PSU Library's website; if there is a link, then it will retrieve the article from this Canvas site or take you to the article on the web. There are two reading assignment per week. In addition to the assigned articles, you should be reading, on a regular basis, some newspaper that provides thorough coverage of world affairs (e.g., the New York Times or the Washington Post). I may occasionally add an article from the news to your assigned reading for the week.

Documentaries . All assigned video documentaries include URLs. You access these either through the PSU library or by following the link to an online streaming service. I have also included unofficial transcripts. These are generated by AI from the closed captions, so they are not necessarily free from errors. If you use them and notice anything that needs correcting, please let me know.

Mini-lectures . These are relatively brief “lectures” of the type I would normally deliver in the on-campus version of this course, but transcribed -- sometimes with screenshots from PowerPoint presentations -- for you to read. There are two or three of these per week. A link will take you to a Word file, which you may then download or read online.

Requirements and Evaluation

Course grades are based on a midterm and final exam, each worth 50% of your grade. Each exam consists of 25 multiple-questions and two essay questions. The midterm covers material from weeks 1 to 5; the final covers weeks 6 to 10. Each exam is timed for 90 minutes and will be available to take anytime during a designated 3.5-day block (Thursday noon to Sunday midnight). You may consult your notes or downloaded course material while you are taking the quiz; you may not consult sources on the web, including AI platforms.

Courtesy, Conduct, and Resources

Academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for being familiar with the PSU Code of Student Conduct and Responsibility, especially the section concerning academic misconduct -- that is, plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty. If you are unsure of the definition or consequences of academic misconduct, please consult with me.

Use of Generative AI tools. Using tools to check and correct your own writing (built-in spelling and grammar checkers or third-party tools like Grammarly) is different from using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to create content or structure in response to your prompts. In your work for this course, use of the first sort of tool is encouraged, while use of the second sort of tool is subject to the following limitations: Using generative AI to complete written assignments, including examinations, is not permitted. However, you may use these tools to study, help conduct research, or brainstorm ideas and arguments. The use generative AI tools outside these parameters qualifies as academic misconduct. If you are uncertain about the allowable use of generative AI in the course, please consult with me in advance.

Discrimination. PSU's policies require faculty members to report any instance of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about these experiences with an employee who does not have these reporting responsibilities and can keep the information confidential, please contact a confidential advocate (503.725.5672 or online) or another confidential employee listed on the sexual misconduct resource webpage.

Disabilities. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The PSU CARES Team, hosted by the Dean of Student Life, is available to consult with you regarding any issues of students in distress, including sexual misconduct.

Course Calendar

The topics covered each week are as follows:

Week 1	Global Society
Week 2	Worldviews
Week 3	Why Wars Happen
Week 4	Changing Character of War
Week 5	U.S. Foreign Policy
Oct 29 - Nov 1	Midterm exam
Week 6	Global Political Economy
Week 7	International Organization
Week 8	International Law
Week 9	International Ethics
Week 10	Global Environmental Politics and Law
Dec 3-6	Final exam

Detailed Weekly Course Schedule

The following schedule reproduces the substantive weekly module information from Canvas in a compact, printable format. Links and LMS navigation controls are omitted.

Week 1 - Global Society

What we cover. International politics takes place within a "society" of states and nonstate actors. Aside from the actors themselves, what are the other characteristics of this global society? Are there rules and norms as there are in American society or Malaysian society? It turns out that there are, the most important of which is the sovereignty of the nation-state. We will examine the origins of state sovereignty as the foundation upon which global society is built.

Readings

- David Kinsella, Bruce Russett, and Harvey Starr, *World Politics: The Menu for Choice* (Cengage, 2013), chap. 3. (Canvas)
- Tanisha M. Fazal, "The Power of Principles: What Norms Are Still Good For," *Foreign Affairs* 103, no. 4 (July/August 2024): 148–154.

Film/documentary. *The World is My Country*. PBS, 27 March 2021. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 1a: Modern State System
- Topic 1b: State- ish -hood

Week 2 - Worldviews

What we cover. Our understanding of international politics is partly shaped by our worldviews, and these are often the product of the concepts and theories that scholars have developed over the course of decades to explain the way states and non state actors interact in global society. We will examine two theoretical perspectives, realism and liberalism, which tend to offer competing accounts of international politics. They can also be detected in the way policymakers perceive the international environment.

Readings

- Randall L. Schweller, "The Balance of Power in World Politics." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2016).
- Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12 (Summer 1983): 205-232.

Film/documentary. *China, the U.S. & the Rise of Xi Jinping*. Frontline, 2024. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 2a: Competing Worldviews in International Relations
- Topic 2b: Balance of Power
- Topic 2c: Realist and Liberal Games

Week 3 - Why Wars Happen

What we cover. Warfare is costly and destructive, which makes its outbreak one of the central puzzles of international politics. Why do states resort to force when negotiated outcomes might leave them better off? This week we consider how misperception, incomplete information, risk, deterrence, and strategic interaction can lead states toward war—or help them avoid it. We also examine how nuclear weapons complicate these calculations by making both escalation and restraint potentially catastrophic.

Readings

- Kori Schake, "What Causes War?" *Orbis* 61 (2017): 449-462.
- Ulrich Kühn, "The Fall Crisis of 2022: Why Did Russia Not Use Nuclear Arms?" *Defense & Security Analysis* 41 (2025): 280-300.

Film/documentary. The Bomb . PBS, 2015. Requires access via PSU Library login. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 3a: War: Misperception and Miscalculation
- Topic 3b: War and Rationality

Week 4 - Changing Character of War

What we cover. War does not remain fixed in form. States and armed groups adapt to new technologies, political conditions, and opportunities, combining conventional force with insurgency, terrorism, cyber operations, information warfare, and increasingly sophisticated drones. This week we consider how the post-9/11 wars reshaped the use of force and how the war in Ukraine has combined many of these newer tools with the return of large-scale, high-intensity interstate warfare.

Readings

- Patrick Porter, "Out of the Shadows: Ukraine and the Shock of Non-Hybrid War." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 8, no. 3 (2023).
- James Wesley Hutto and James Patton Rogers, "The Drone Revolution: Towards a Synthesis in the Drone Debate." *European Journal of International Security* 11 (2026): 145–165.

Film/documentary. 2000 Meters to Andriivka . Fontline, 2025. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 4a: Global War on Terrorism
- Topic 4b: The Changing Character of War

Week 5 - U.S. Foreign Policy

What we cover. Foreign policy is the government's strategy and practice of managing its interactions with other states and nonstate actors in pursuit of the national interests. As the United States emerged as a great power and then a superpower, its foreign policy -- and its foreign policy bureaucracy -- became more complex and encompassing to accommodate the multifaceted nature of the country's global interests. Different models of foreign policy help us grasp this complexity and the potential for disastrous outcomes.

Readings

- Graham Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *American Political Science Review* 63 (September 1969): 689-718.
- Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press, "Strategies of Prioritization: American Foreign Policy After Primacy," *Foreign Affairs* 104 (2025): 94-107.

Film/documentary. The War Cabinet . Frontline, 2026. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 5a: Rational Decision Making
- Topic 5b: Governmental Decision Making
- Topic 5c: Small Group Decisions

Midterm Exam, Oct 29 to Nov 1

Week 6 - Global Political Economy

What we cover. International politics also plays out in the area of global trade and finance. In these areas we find some of the most developed sets of rules and regulations, as well as international institutions designed by states to help them identify areas of mutual interests and set up procedures for resolving conflicts when those interests don't align. International political economy includes some of the best illustrations of "governance without government."

Readings

- Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Globalization: What's New? What's Not? (And So What?)" *Foreign Policy* 118 (Spring 2000): 104-119.

- Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, “Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion.” *International Security* 44 (2019): 42-79.

Film/documentary. Chip War, the Race for Semiconductor Supremacy . TaiwanPlus, 2023. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 6a: Collective Action in Global Society
- Topic 6b: Free Trade Regime

Week 7 - International Organization

What we cover. International organizations have become important actors in global society. They are created by states to promote cooperation, manage crises, and foster economic and social development, among other functions. The United Nations, of course, is the premier IO in contemporary world politics, so we will focus on its role in the maintenance of international peace and security. The UN's primary responsibility in this realm falls to the Security Council.

Readings

- Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (Vintage, 2007), chap. 1. (Canvas)
- Maria J. Debre and Hylke Dijkstra, “Are International Organisations in Decline? An Absolute and Relative Perspective on Institutional Change.” *Global Policy* 14 (2023): 16–30.

Film/documentary. The Peacekeepers . NFB, 2005. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 7a: United Nations
- Topic 7b: Collective Security

Week 8 - International Law

What we cover. Until the twentieth century, international law was largely the law of nations, but today it also encompasses rights and duties of international and transnational organizations, and even individuals. Compared to most domestic legal systems, the international legal system is primitive; there is a close interplay between law and politics in international society. We therefore confront a host of normative and legal ambiguities—frustrating perhaps, but this is what makes the subject so interesting.

Readings

- Oona A. Hathaway and Stewart Patrick, "Is the Prohibition on the Use of Force Collapsing?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 26 August 2025. (Web)
- International Court of Justice, *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*, Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures. Order of 24 May 2024 , paragraphs 20-34, 44-57.

Film/documentary. The Trial of Ratko Mladić . Frontline, 2019. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 8a: Sources and Subjects of International Law
- Topic 8b: Human Rights Law

Week 9 - International Ethics

What we cover. International law and international ethics often mirror each other quite closely, but not always. When they do not, it is usually the case that international ethics are more progressive and the law is more conservative. The laws of war, for example, as enshrined in the Hague and Geneva Conventions, codified ethical restraints that evolved over centuries. Today, especially in the area human rights, principles and aspirations are still out in front of legal commitment and enforcement.

Readings

- Amartya Sen, "Elements of a Theory of Human Rights." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 32 (2004): 315-356.
- Eglantine Staunton and Cecilia Jacob, "A Responsibility to Support Civilian Resistance Movements? Broadening the Scope of Nonviolent Atrocity Prevention." *Ethics & International Affairs* 38 (2024): 75-102.

Film/documentary. For Sama . Frontline, 2019. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 9a: Just War Theory
- Topic 9b: Ethics of Intervention
- Topic 9c: International Distributive Justice

Week 10 - Global Environmental Politics and Law

What we cover. Many environmental issues confront us today at the global, regional, and local levels. While there is still some debate within various scientific communities regarding the magnitude of various environmental threats, there is also a widespread feeling that humanity ought not wait for a definitive resolution of these scientific debates before taking action to curb our self-destructive patterns of consumption and waste. Both uncertainty and urgency are manifest in global environmental politics and law.

Readings

- Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics." *International Affairs* 92 (2016): 1107-1125.
- Patricia Villarrubia-Gómez, Ellen Palm, Bethanie Carney Almroth, and Sarah E. Cornell, "The Plastics Game of Thrones: What Is the Plastics Pollution Problem Represented to Be in the Plastics Treaty Negotiations?" *Environmental Science & Policy* 180 (2026). (Web).

Film/documentary. Plastic Wars . Frontline, 2020. Transcript

Mini-lectures

- Topic 10a: Tragedy of the Commons
- Topic 10b: Population Growth
- Topic 10c: Global Environmental Justice

Final Exam, Dec 3-6