

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

Political Science 446, Winter 2026
Portland State University

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 11:00-noon, in person or via [Zoom](#), and by appointment

Description

The foremost function of the state is to provide for the security and well-being of its people. The pursuit of security involves governments in a wide range of both domestic and international activities -- political, economic, and military. How do governments promote national security? What challenges do they face, and what tools have they developed to meet those challenges? How secure can states expect to be in the modern world, and at what cost?

The course explores these and other questions related to national and international security policy in contemporary world politics. We examine the role of national power, strategy, and the use of military force; the workings of the American national security establishment, including the intelligence community; the tradeoffs between homeland security and civil liberties; and domestic sources of insecurity. On all these topics, the course will emphasize both theoretical and practical issues. We also spend a fair amount of time on national security law.

Learning Objectives

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

- Analyze and critique various national and international security issues by engaging with contemporary case studies and theoretical frameworks. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of key concepts, such as deterrence, power dynamics, and the impact of globalization on security.
- Understand the structure and functions of the American national security establishment, including key actors like the Department of Defense and various agencies within the intelligence community. Analyze their roles in promoting national security, decision-making processes, and the interplay between different branches of government in shaping security policy.
- Efficiently locate, assess, and apply relevant online resources and information pertaining to security policies. Develop research and analytical skills through assignments that require critical evaluation of sources, synthesis of diverse perspectives, and the application of theoretical knowledge to practical security issues.
- Evaluate legal and ethical dilemmas related to national security by examining real-world scenarios and historical precedents. Articulate well-reasoned normative positions that consider the balance between security needs and civil liberties, while addressing the moral implications of actions taken by state actors.

Requirements and Evaluation

Undergraduate course grades are based on a [midterm exam](#) (40%) and either a [final exam](#) or a term paper (60%). The exams consist of multiple-choice questions and longer essays. The [term paper](#) requires a significant research effort and a 15-20 page analysis. Graduate course grades are based in a midterm exam and a term paper of 25-30 pages. During the last week of the term, graduate students will give oral presentations summarizing the preliminary findings and argument of their research. All term paper topics must be approved in advance; a prospectus is due in week 3. For all students, attendance is required and participation in class discussion is expected.

I hold on to students' written work for one academic term after the end of the course, so if you want to keep your final exam or paper, please get it from me no later than the end of spring term 2026.

Readings

All assigned readings are available online; there are no books to purchase for the course. Unless the reading includes a link, it is available online from the PSU library. You must retrieve these readings (all journal articles) by logging into the [PSU library website](#) and locating and downloading the article from one of the library's full-content subscription services. If you haven't done this before, or are rusty, there are instructions [here](#) – or you can contact me and I will walk you through it. Where a link is provided, it will take you to the reading on the web.

At the end of the list of readings, you will also find, at week's end, updated copies of any slides I have used during lectures that week. (Until they are updated, the slides linked in the syllabus are those used when I last taught the course on campus.)

In addition to the assigned readings, you should be reading, on a regular basis, the [New York Times](#), the [Washington Post](#), or some other newspaper with thorough international coverage. Your performance in the course will reflect your familiarity with current national security issues, and not just an understanding of lecture material and course readings.

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 (like ChatGPT). 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 argument. 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.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE and ASSIGNMENTS

6, 8 Jan **Security and Strategy**

What is national security and national security policy? What is strategy? We start with some basic national security concepts, and then take up topics in grand strategy, including the recently released National Security Strategy, and military strategy, including nuclear strategy.

Readings

- John Allen Williams, Stephen J. Cimbala, and Sam C. Sarkesian, *U.S. National Security: Policymakers, Processes, and Politics*, sixth ed. (Rienner, 2022), chap. 1. ([online](#))
- Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford University Press, 2013). Chapters 7 (“Clausewitz”) and 16 (“The Revolution in Military Affairs”)
- Eliot Cohen, “Trump’s Security Strategy is Incoherent Babble.” *The Atlantic*, December 5, 2025 ([online](#))
- [slides](#)

13, 15 Jan **Military Power**

Military power is fundamental to national security. It is also rapidly changing. Here we consider the implication of changing military technology and doctrine, and different views about the post-cold war position of the United States and the future of American military power and global influence.

Readings

- Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Yale University Press, 1966), Chapters 1 (“The Diplomacy of Violence”) and 2 (“The Manipulation of Risk”)
- Raphael S. Cohen et al., “Peering into the Crystal Ball: Holistically Assessing the Future of Warfare.” RAND Corporation Research Brief 10073, 2020. ([online](#))
- Sean McFate, “America’s Addiction to Mercenaries.” *The Atlantic*, 12 August 2016. ([online](#))
- [slides](#)

20, 22 Jan **National Security Establishment**

In the United States, who makes national security policy? What branches of government are involved

and how are policymaking and war-making powers distributed between them? These have been subjects of continuous debate throughout the nation's history.

Readings

- Charles A. Stevenson, "The Story Behind the National Security Act of 1947." *Military Review* (May-June 2008): 13-20.
- Louis Fisher, "Basic Principles of the War Power." *Journal of National Security Law and Policy* 5 (2012): 319-337.
- Risa Brooks, "Paradoxes of Professionalism: Re-thinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States." *International Security* 44 (spring 2020): 7-44.
- W. J. Hennigan, with An-My Lê, "Sole Authority." *New York Times*, 7 March 2024. ([online](#))
- [slides](#)

27, 29 Jan **NATO and Transatlantic Security**

Throughout the cold war, transatlantic security was closely intertwined with U.S. national security, but after the cold war ended, the unity and utility of the transatlantic alliance began to be questioned in some quarters. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has upended this debate. Is NATO resurgent?

Readings

- Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness." *Policy Review* 113 (June/July 2002): 3-28. ([online](#))
- Hugo Meijer and Stephen G. Brooks, "Illusions of Autonomy: Why Europe Cannot Provide for Its Security If the United States Pulls Back." *International Security* 45 (Spring 2021): 7-43. ([online](#))
- Alexandra Ghesciu and Stéfanie von Hlatky, "Irreconcilable Differences? NATO's Response to Russian Aggression Against Ukraine." *International Journal* 79 (June 2024): 275-296.
- [slides](#)

3, 5 Feb **Intelligence and Counterintelligence**

National security requires knowledge about actual and potential threats. We cover the intelligence and counter-intelligence functions of the national security establishment, and some of the controversies surrounding these activities. But intelligence is about more than "spies and lies."

Readings

- Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community, *Preparing for the 21st Century: An Appraisal of U.S. Intelligence* (March 1996), Appendix A: "The Evolution of the U.S. Intelligence Community – An Historical Overview." ([online](#))
- Amy B. Zegart, *Spies, Lies, and Algorithms: The History and Future of American Intelligence* (Princeton University Press, 2022). Chapters 4 ("Intelligence Basics") and 8 ("Congressional Oversight").
- [slides](#)

10 Feb **Midterm Exam**

12 Feb

National Security and Civil Liberties

Especially during times of crisis, both national security policymakers and the public must confront the trade-off between security and liberty, and there is almost never a consensus on the proper balance. We examine this issue, with special emphasis on surveillance and the right of privacy.

Readings

- Mary-Rose Papandrea, "Protecting the Role of the Press During Times of Crisis," *William and Mary Law Review* 61 (2019-2020): 1159-1186. ([online](#))
- Ed Pilkington, "'Panic Made Us Vulnerable': How 9/11 Made the US Surveillance State – and the Americans Who Fought Back." *The Guardian*, 4 September 2021. ([online](#))
- [slides](#)

17, 19 Feb

Homeland Security during Crisis

Continuing our examination of the theme of security vs. liberty, here we examine some of the emergency measures undertaken by the state during wartime. The Guantanamo detentions in the period following the 9/11 attacks demonstrated what our government was willing to do when the homeland was threatened. But such treatment was not unprecedented in American history.

Readings

- Louis Fisher, "Military Tribunals: A Sorry History." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 33 (September 2003): 484-508.
- Congressional Research Service, "National Emergency Powers." Report 98-105, November 19, 2021. ([online](#))
- Joseph Gunn, "Martial Law in the United States: Its Meaning, Its History, and Why the President Can't Declare It." Brennan Center for Justice, 2 August 2020. ([online](#))
- [slides](#)

24, 26 Feb

Counterterrorism: Law and Ethics

Are we still engaged in a war on terrorism? We consider two alternative paradigms for counter-terrorism, law enforcement and warfare, and the legal and ethical implications of embracing the latter approach. It is striking that the Congressional authorization to use force in response to the 9/11 attacks remains in place 25 years after its passage.

Readings

- Lisa Hajjar, "The Counterterrorism War Paradigm versus International Humanitarian Law: The Legal Contradictions and Global Consequences of the U.S. 'War on Terror'." *Law and Social Inquiry* 44 (November 2019): 922-956.
- Adam Henschke and Timothy Legrand, "Counterterrorism Policy in Liberal-Democratic Societies: Locating the Ethical Limits of National Security." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71 (2017): 544-561.
- Andrew Cohen, "The Torture Memos, 10 Years Later." *The Atlantic*, 6 February 2012. ([online](#))
- [slides](#)

3, 5 Mar

Domestic Extremism and National Security

What defines extremism and how does it impact domestic security? We examine the rise of extremist groups in the United States, exploring their ideologies, tactics, and the threats they pose to national stability. We will analyze the legal and ethical challenges in addressing these groups, considering the balance between civil liberties and security measures.

Readings

- Randall Blazak, "Revisiting the White Boys From Portland to Ukraine: Anomie and Right-Wing Extremism." *American Behavioral Scientist* 68 (2024): 216-240.
- Kathleen Belew, "There Are No Lone Wolves: The White Power Movement at War." In Kathleen Belew and Ramón A. Gutiérrez (eds.), *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* (University of California Press, 2021).
- Sean Fleming, "Searching for Ecoterrorism: The Crucial Case of the Unabomber." *American Political Science Review*. 118 (2024): 1986-1999.
- [slides](#)

10, 12 Mar

New Insecurities: How Vulnerable are We?

Until recently, pandemics, climate change, computer hackers, and social media trolls were not top of mind for U.S. national security analysts. If they don't top the list now, they certainly are taken a lot more seriously now as potential security threats. How vulnerable are nations to such threats? How much more difficult is it for democracies?

Readings

- Jelena Vićić and Erik Gartzke, "Cyber-enabled Influence Operations as a 'Center of Gravity' in Cyberconflict: The Example of Russian Foreign Interference in the 2016 US Federal Election." *Journal of Peace Research* 61 (January 2024): 10-27.
- Cynthia M. Ho, "Addressing IP and Technology Challenges to Pandemic Protection: A Need for Global Coordination to Promote National Security." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 2024 (2025): 115-160. ([online](#))
- Andrea H. Cameron and Sharon E. Burke, "Wargaming Climate Change: Who Plays for the Red Team?", War on the Rocks, November 8, 2022. ([online](#))
- [slides](#)

17 Mar

Final Exam, 9:00-10:50

Papers due, 5:00

This syllabus is available online at web.pdx.edu/~kinsella/ps446w26.pdf. Last updated on 4 January 2026.