

What Do We Know About War? A Seminar

Steven V. Miller

Sample Syllabus

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Course Description

The onset, expansion and consequences of inter-state conflict lie at the heart of international relations scholarship. This class will explore these topics, highlighting what we know and what we do not know. We will start by clarifying our concepts and what we mean when we use terms like “dispute” and “war.” We will then review scholarship on some classic concepts and “correlates” of inter-state conflict, like power, alliances, contiguity, and democracy. We will transition to a discussion of what we know about the consequences of conflict, like rivalry relationships, conflict recurrence, and even transitions to peace. We will conclude with a discussion of the frontier of the field, touching on newer topics like leaders in conflict and the nexus between climate change and conflict. Students that complete this class should have a broad overview of prominent quantitative scholarship on the cause of disputes and war in the international system, situating them in scholarship in the “peace science” field.

Learning Outcomes

1. Define inter-state conflict, militarized interstate disputes, and war.
2. Summarize the basic “correlates” of inter-state conflict.
3. Grasp not just democratic peace theory, but the full implications of the central claim of the peaceful nature of democracies.
4. Understand why states routinely fight each other over the allocation of territory.
5. Read research designs and interpret regression results.

Books for the Semester

Required/Main Book

This is a class very much in the peace science tradition, which is more focused on articles than books. However, an undergraduate version of this class will be taught principally around the book, complemented by a few of

the articles listed in the outline for the class schedule. The graduate version of the class will also recommend the book for students who feel they could use a gentler introduction to the material as well.

Mitchell, Sarah McLaughlin, and John A. Vasquez, eds. 2021. *What Do We Know about War?* 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Recommended Book(s)

These books are recommended either because book chapters appear in the class schedule or because I may use them for other purposes. For example, the Vasquez (2009) book is used for a paper assessment in the undergraduate version of this class.

Gleditsch, Kristan Skrede. 2002. *All International Politics Is Local*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Vasquez, John A. 2009. *The War Puzzle Revisited*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wagner, R. Harrison. 2007. *War and the State: The Theory of International Politics*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Assessment

This class can be taught at either the undergraduate-level or graduate-level. The graduate-level version of this class would be heavier on readings and seminar-level discussion. The (upper-division) undergraduate-level version of this class would be lighter on readings and more focused on a traditional lecture and discussion format. The assessment would vary as well.

Undergraduate: an undergraduate version of this class would have two written exams and a final written exam. The writing assignment for this class would be less about an original research paper and more a term paper that takes inventory of the material and evaluates the decision-making that led to a particular war from an original list of wars compiled by Gibler and Miller (Forthcoming)¹. Here, I like to have students read Vasquez (2009) from the recommended books section and relay the war they study to it. The book is accessible and weaves in multiple sections of the class as well.

Graduate: a graduate version of this class would have a midterm and a final exam, both written. Assuming a smaller class size than a typical undergraduate course, students are expected to participate more in discussion and to critically evaluate these readings. Every week, a student should select one of the readings and do an article summary of it.² Students are expected to put forward an original research paper on the topic of international conflict by the end of the semester. Care will be given through the semester to walk the student through what this should look like, but the goal is the kind of research paper that could be presented at a conference.

¹Gibler, Douglas M., and Steven V. Miller. Forthcoming. "The Militarized Interstate Confrontation (MIC) Dataset, 1816-2010." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

²Instructions for what I expect on this assignment are here: <http://svmiller.com/article-summaries/>

Class Schedule

What follows is a course outline, structured over 15 weeks, for this class. This outline can be extended in any number of ways. For example, a shorter semester can lead to some weeks being omitted (e.g. Week 15). This outline is primarily structured as a graduate-level syllabus, which is why the reading list is long. An undergraduate version of this syllabus would be lighter on readings and lean more on chapters from Mitchell and Vasquez' (2021) *What Do We Know About War (WDWKAW)*. Those chapters are listed in in parentheses with the section headings.

Week 1: Identifying Militarized Confrontations and Wars (WDWKAW, Chp. 16)

I like to implore students to “say what you mean and mean what you say.” This week will make sure we say what we mean and mean what we say when we use terms like “conflict”, “war”, “dispute”, and so on.

Bremer, Stuart A. 1992. “Dangerous Dyads: Conditions Affecting the Likelihood of Interstate War, 1816-1965.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36(2): 309–41.

Diehl, Paul F. 2006. “Just a Phase?: Integrating Conflict Dynamics over Time.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 23(3): 199–210.

Gibler, Douglas M., and Steven V. Miller. Forthcoming. “The Militarized Interstate Confrontation (MIC) Dataset, 1816-2010.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

Gibler, Douglas M., Steven V. Miller, and Erin K. Little. 2016. “An Analysis of the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) Dataset, 1816-2001.” *International Studies Quarterly* 60(4): 719–30.

———. 2020. “The Importance of Correct Measurement.” *International Studies Quarterly* 64(2): 476–79.

Palmer, Glenn, Vito D’Orazio, Michael R. Kenwick, and Roseanne W. McManus. Forthcoming. “Updating the Militarized Interstate Dispute Data: A Response to Gibler, Miller, and Little.” *International Studies Quarterly*.

Palmer, Glenn, Vito D’Orazio, Michael Kenwick, and Matthew Lane. 2015. “The Mid4 Dataset, 2002–2010: Procedures, Coding Rules and Description.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 32(2): 222–42.

Sarkees, Meredith Reid, Frank Whelon Wayman, and J. David Singer. 2003. “Inter-State, Intra-State, and Extra-State Wars: A Comprehensive Look at Their Distribution over Time.” *International Studies Quarterly* 47(1): 49–70.

Week 2: Systemic Theorizing and Power (WDWKAW, Chp. 2)

This week will serve two purposes. First, it will introduce students to the topic of “power”, the most ubiquitous concept in the study of international conflict. Second, it will serve as a discussion for why we eschew systemic theorizing on this point. Wagner (2007) features prominently here, mostly for his critiques of systemic theories in the first few chapters.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce. 1988. “The Contribution of Expected Utility Theory to the Study of International Conflict.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18(4): 629–52.

Forsberg, Tuomas. 2011. “Power in International Relations: An Interdisciplinary Perspective.” In *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Pami Aalto, Vilho Harle, and Sami Moisio. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sample, Susan G. 2018. "Power, Wealth, and Satisfaction: When Do Power Transitions Lead to Conflict?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62(2): 1905–31.

Singer, David J. 1987. "Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset on Material Capabilities of States, 1816-1985." *International Interactions* 14(1): 115–32.

Vasquez, John A. 1998. *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wagner, R. Harrison. 2007. *War and the State: The Theory of International Politics*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

———. 2010a. "War and the State: A Synopsis." *International Theory* 2(2): 283–87.

———. 2010b. "War and the State: Reply to Comments." *International Theory* 2(2): 343–50.

Week 3: Contiguity and Territory (WDWKAW, Chp. 1)

We start with the strongest correlate of conflict: contiguity. Previously thought to be a condition of opportunity or increased interactions, we know now neighbors fight because they are more likely to contest the allocation of territory between them.

Braithwaite, Alex, and Douglas Lemke. 2011. "Unpacking Escalation." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28(2).

Diehl, Paul F. 1991. "Geography and War: A Review and Assessment of the Empirical Literature." *International Interactions* 17(1): 11–27.

———. 1992. "What Are They Fighting for? The Importance of Issues in International Conflict Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 29(3): 333–44.

Miller, Steven V., Jaroslav Tir, and John A. Vasquez. 2020. "Geography, Territory, and Conflict." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, Oxford University Press.

Senese, Paul D. 1996. "Geographic Proximity and Issue Salience: Their Effects on the Escalation of Militarized Interstate Conflict." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15(1): 133–61.

Senese, Paul D., and John A. Vasquez. 2003. "A Unified Explanation of Territorial Conflict: Testing the Impact of Sampling Bias, 1919-1992." *International Studies Quarterly* 47(2): 275–98.

Vasquez, John A. 1995. "Why Do Neighbors Fight? Proximity, Interaction or Territoriality?" *Journal of Peace Research* 32(3): 277–93.

Week 4: Democracies and International Conflict (WDWKAW, Chp. 8)

The "closest thing to an empirical law in all of political science", the democratic peace research program points to the peculiar way in which democracies behave in the study of international conflict. Not everyone is convinced of this research program (see Mousseau's chapter in WDWKAW), but the evidence here is convincing.

Altman, David, Federico Rojas-de-Galarreta, and Francisco Urdinez. 2021. "An Interactive Model of Democratic Peace." *Journal of Peace Research* 58(3): 384–98.

- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alastair Smith. 1999. "An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace." *American Political Science Review* 93(4): 791–807.
- Choi, Seung-Whan. 2011. "Re-Evaluating Capitalist and Democratic Peace Models." *International Studies Quarterly* 55(3): 759–69.
- Dafoe, Allan. 2011. "Statistical Critiques of the Democratic Peace: Caveat Emptor." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(2): 247–62.
- Dafoe, Allan, John R. Oneal, and Bruce Russett. 2013. "The Democratic Peace: Weighing the Evidence and Cautious Inference." *International Studies Quarterly* 57(1): 201–14.
- Imai, Kosuke, and James Lo. 2021. "Robustness of Empirical Evidence for the Democratic Peace: A Nonparametric Sensitivity Analysis." *International Organization* 75(3): 901–19.
- Maoz, Zeev, and Bruce Russett. 1993. "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986." *American Political Science Review* 87(3): 624–38.
- Ray, James Lee, and Allan Dafoe. 2018. "Democratic Peace Versus Contractualism." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35(2): 193–203.

Week 5: Alliances and Deterrence (WDWKAW, Chp. 3)

Do alliances cause war or peace? States sign them for security assurances, to alter the (ex ante) balance of power should war occur, and to prepare themselves for war (if it were to happen). Whether this achieves a peaceful balance of power is a matter of debate.

- Johnson, Jesse C., and Brett Ashley Leeds. 2011. "Defense Pacts: A Prescription for Peace?" *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7(1): 45–65.
- Kenwick, Michael R., and John A. Vasquez. 2017. "Defense Pacts and Deterrence: Caveat Emptor." *Journal of Politics* 79(1): 329–34.
- Kenwick, Michael R., John A. Vasquez, and Matthew A. Powers. 2015. "Do Alliances Really Deter?" *Journal of Politics* 77(4): 943–54.
- Lai, Brian, and Dan Reiter. 2000. "Democracy, Political Similarity, and International Alliances, 1816-1992." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44(2): 203–27.
- Leeds, Brett Ashley. 2003. "Alliance Reliability in Times of War: Explaining State Decisions to Violate Treaties." *International Organization* 57(4): 801–27.
- Leeds, Brett Ashley, and Jesse C. Johnson. 2017. "Theory, Data, and Deterrence: A Response to Kenwick, Vasquez, and Powers." *Journal of Politics* 79(1): 335–40.
- Morgan, T. Clifton, and Glenn Palmer. 2003. "To Protect and to Serve: Alliances and Foreign Policy Portfolios." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47(2): 180–203.
- Morrow, James D. 2000. "Alliances: Why Write Them Down?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 3: 63–84.
- . 2017. "When Do Defensive Alliances Provoke Rather Than Deter?" *Journal of Politics* 79(1): 341–45.
- Smith, Alastair. 1995. "Alliance Formation and War." *International Studies Quarterly* 39(4): 405–25.

Week 6: Arms Races (WDWKAW, Chp. 4)

“If you want peace, prepare for war” is a famous aphorism in the profession and the debate about whether arms races lead to peace or war was one of the biggest empirical debates in IR in the 1980s. We review these findings and their implications this week.

Bolks, Sean, and Richard J. Stoll. 2000. “The Arms Acquisition Process: The Effect of Internal and External Constraints on Arms Race Dynamics.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44(5): 580–603.

Diehl, Paul F. 1983. “Arms Races and Escalation: A Closer Look.” *Journal of Peace Research* 20(3): 205–12.

Gibler, Douglas M., Toby J. Rider, and Marc L. Hutchison. 2005. “Taking Arms Against a Sea of Troubles: Conventional Arms Races During Periods of Rivalry.” *Journal of Peace Research* 42(2): 131–47.

Rider, Toby J. 2009. “Understanding Arms Race Onset: Rivalry, Threat, and Territorial Competition.” *Journal of Politics* 71(2): 693–703.

Sample, Susan G. 1997. “Arms Races and Dispute Escalation: Resolving the Debate.” *Journal of Peace Research* 34(1): 7–22.

Wallace, Michael D. 1982. “Armaments and Escalation: Two Competing Hypotheses.” *International Studies Quarterly* 26(1): 37–56.

Week 7: Managing Conflict and Contentious Issues (WDWKAW, Chp. 11)

States have numerous means to manage contentious issues that come between them. The week’s focus here is primarily about territory, but the methods reviewed are generalizable to conflictual relationships over other contentious issues.

Gibler, Douglas M., and John A. Vasquez. 1998. “Uncovering the Dangerous Alliances, 1495–1980.” *International Studies Quarterly* 42(4): 785–807.

James, Patrick, Johann Park, and Seung-Whan Choi. 2006. “Democracy and Conflict Management: Territorial Claims in the Western Hemisphere.” *International Studies Quarterly* 50(4): 803–17.

Owsiak, Andrew P. 2012. “Signing up for Peace: International Boundary Agreements, Democracy, and Militarized Interstate Conflict.” *International Studies Quarterly* 56(1): 51–66.

Owsiak, Andrew P., and Derrick V. Frazier. 2014. “The Conflict Management Efforts of Allies in Interstate Disputes.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10(3): 243–64.

Owsiak, Andrew P., and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell. 2019. “Conflict Management in Land, River, and Maritime Claims.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 7(1): 43–61.

Powell, Emilia Justyna, and Krista E. Wiegand. 2010. “Legal Systems and Peaceful Attempts to Resolve Territorial Disputes.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 27(2): 129–51.

Week 8: War Outcomes and War Consequences (WDWKAW, Chp. 7)

What are the consequences of fighting? Conceptually, fighting is a costly lottery that imposes costs on participants that cannot be recouped ex post, but even here there is some disagreement about what exactly this looks like.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Randolph M. Siverson, and Gary Woller. 1992. "War and the Fate of Regimes: A Comparative Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 86(3): 638–46.

Fazal, Tanish M. 2014. "Dead Wrong?: Battle Deaths, Military Medicine, and Exaggerated Reports of War's Demise." *International Security* 39(1): 95–125.

Koubi, Vally. 2005. "War and Economic Performance." *Journal of Peace Research* 42(1): 67–82.

Organski, A. F. K., and Jacek Kugler. 1977. "The Costs of Major Wars: The Phoenix Factor." *American Political Science Review* 71(4): 1347–66.

Rasler, Karen A., and William R. Thompson. 1985. "War Making and State Making: Governmental Expenditures, Tax Revenues, and Global Wars." *American Political Science Review* 79(2): 491–507.

Thompson, William R. 1993. "The Consequences of War." *International Interactions* 19(1-2): 125–47.

Week 9: Rivalries and Conflict Recurrence (WDWKAW, Chp. 5)

Students will learn that conflict is not independent and identically distributed. Rivalry relationships emerge around conflict that make conflict more likely to recur.

Goertz, Gary, and Paul F. Diehl. 1993. "Enduring Rivalries: Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Patterns." *International Studies Quarterly* 37(2): 147–71.

Klein, James P., Gary Goertz, and Paul F. Diehl. 2006. "The New Rivalry Dataset: Procedures and Patterns." *Journal of Peace Research* 43(3): 331–48.

Quackenbush, Stephen L. 2010. "Territorial Issues and Recurrent Conflict." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 27(3): 239–52.

Quackenbush, Stephen L., and Jerome F. Venteicher. 2008. "Settlements, Outcomes, and the Recurrence of Conflict." *Journal of Peace Research* 45(6): 723–42.

Thompson, William R. 2001. "Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics." *International Studies Quarterly* 45(4): 557–86.

Week 10: Transitioning to Peace (WDWKAW, Chps. 9-10)

No matter rivalry relationships, conflict recurrence, and the difficulty managing contentious issues, peace is a potential outcome of war. This week will explore how states transition to peaceful relationships.

Gibler, Douglas M., and Andrew P. Owsiak. 2018. "Democracy and the Settlement of International Borders, 1919-2001." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62(9): 1847–75.

Gleditsch, Kristan Skrede. 2002a. "A Regional Approach to Conflict, Integration, and Democratization." In *All International Politics Is Local*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 31–63.

———. 2002b. "Zones of Peace, Conflict, and Democracy." In *All International Politics Is Local*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1–29.

Owsiak, Andrew P., Paul F. Diehl, and Gary Goertz. 2017. "Border Settlement and the Movement Toward and from Negative Peace." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34(2): 176–93.

Owsiak, Andrew P., and Toby J. Rider. 2013. "Clearing the Hurdle: Border Settlement and Rivalry Termination." *Journal of Politics* 75(3): 757–72.

Week 11: Leaders and Conflict (WDWKAW, Chp. 14)

This week starts a pivot toward newer topics in the study of international conflict, beginning with a discussion of leaders. Increasingly, scholars are paying attention to the attributes of leaders because leaders, not "states," make decisions that initiate or escalate disputes.

Bak, Daehee, and Glenn Palmer. 2010. "Testing the Biden Hypothesis: Leader Tenure, Age and International Conflict." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6(3): 257–73.

Chiozza, Giacomo, and H. E. Goemans. 2004. "International Conflict and the Tenure of Leaders: Is War Still "Ex Post" Inefficient?" *American Journal of Political Science* 48(3): 604–19.

Ellis, Cali Mortenson, Michael C. Horowitz, and Allan C. Stam. 2015. "Introducing the LEAD Data Set." *International Interactions* 41(4): 718–41.

Goemans, Henk E., Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Giacomo Chiozza. 2009. "Introducing Archigos: A Dataset on Political Leaders." *Journal of Peace Research* 46(2): 269–83.

Horowitz, Michael C., and Allan C. Stam. 2014. "How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders." *International Organization* 68(3): 527–59.

Wolford, Scott. 2007. "The Turnover Trap: New Leaders, Reputation, and International Conflict." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4): 772–88.

———. 2012. "Incumbents, Successors, and Crisis Bargaining: Leadership Turnover as a Commitment Problem." *Journal of Peace Research* 49(4): 517–30.

Week 12: Financing Conflict (WDWKAW, Chp. 15)

War costs money and only recently have scholars invested considerable energy into understanding how states finance conflict. We discuss these findings here.

Cappella Zielinski, Rosella, Benjamin O. Fordham, and Kaija E. Schilde. 2017. "What Goes up, Must Come down? The Asymmetric Effects of Economic Growth and International Threat on Military Spending." *Journal of Peace Research* 54(6): 791–805.

DiGiuseppe, Matthew. 2015a. "Guns, Butter and Debt: Sovereign Creditworthiness and Military Expenditure, 1981-2007." *Journal of Peace Research* 52(5): 680–93.

———. 2015b. "The Fiscal Autonomy of Deciders: Creditworthiness and Conflict Initiation." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 11(3): 317–38.

Norrlof, Carla, and William C. Wohlforth. 2019. "Is US Grand Strategy Self-Defeating? Deep Engagement, Military Spending, and Sovereign Debt." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 36(3): 227–47.

Poast, Paul. 2015. "Central Banks at War." *International Organization* 69(1): 63–95.

Schultz, Kenneth A., and Barry R. Weingast. 2003. "The Democratic Advantage: Institutional Foundations of Financial Power in International Competition." *International Organization* 57(1): 3–42.

Week 13: Cyber Conflict (WDWKAW, Chp. 12)

Changing technology has brought on changing frontiers of conflict. We review these implications here, cautioning that “cyber conflict” fears are often overblown but nevertheless perceptions of these new frontiers can alter leader behavior.

Farwell, James P., and Rafal Rohozinski. 2011. “Stuxnet and the Future of Cyber War.” *Survival* 53(1): 23–40.

Gartzke, Erik. 2013. “The Myth of Cyberwar: Bringing War in Cyberspace Back down to Earth.” *International Security* 38(2): 41–73.

Valeriano, Brandon, and Ryan C. Maness. 2012. “The Fog of Cyberwar: Why the Threat Doesn’t Live up to the Hype.” *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2012-11-21/fog-cyberwar>.

———. 2014. “The Dynamics of Cyber Conflict Between Rival Antagonists, 2001–11.” *Journal of Peace Research* 51(3): 347–60.

Zeitoff, Thomas. 2017. “How Social Media Is Changing Conflict.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(9): 1970–91.

Week 14: The Environment and a Changing Climate for Conflict (WDWKAW, Chp. 13)

Environmental factors move slowly over time, but climate change is amounting to a slow-moving disaster accelerating in our lifetime. The implications for conflict here are major and important, even if there is not a whole lot to say definitively about this connection yet.

Buhaug, Halvard. 2016. “Climate Change and Conflict: Taking Stock.” *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 22(4): 331–38.

Cranmer, Skyler J., and Randolph M. Siverson. 2008. “Demography, Democracy and Disputes: The Search for the Elusive Relationship Between Population Growth and International Conflict.” *Journal of Politics* 70(3): 794–806.

Gartzke, Erik. 2012. “Could Climate Change Precipitate Peace?” *Journal of Peace Research* 49(1): 177–92.

Mirimanova, Natalia, Camilla Born, Pernilla Nordqvist, and Karolina Eklöv. 2018. “Central Asia: Climate-Related Security Risk Assessment.”

Nord, Ragnhild, and Nils Petter Gleditsch. 2007. “Climate Change and Conflict.” *Political Geography* 26(4): 627–38.

Salehyan, Idean. 2008. “From Climate Change to Conflict? No Consensus Yet.” *Journal of Peace Research* 45(3): 315–26.

———. 2014. “Climate Change and Conflict: Making Sense of Disparate Findings.” *Political Geography* 43(1): 1–5.

Tir, Jaroslav, and Paul F. Diehl. 1998. “Demographic Pressure and Interstate Conflict: Linking Population Growth and Density to Militarized Disputes and Wars, 1930–89.” *Journal of Peace Research* 35(3): 319–39.

Week 15: What Do We Know About War? (WDWKAW, Chps. 17-19)

This week will take inventory of what we learned over the semester, including what we know with strong certainty, what we once knew but think might be changing, and what are the new frontiers of study. A graduate version of this class may have student seminar presentations this week as well.