

WHY WARS HAPPEN

Rutgers University

PS 395:01
Political Science Seminar

Fall 2011

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States, empires, dynasties, tribes, clans and other groups have fought wars for thousands of years. In its various forms, war is undoubtedly the most destructive form of human behavior. Most of us would like to see an end to war, or, if that is not possible, at least a reduction in the horrible destructiveness of war. Any realistic attempt to reduce the frequency and intensity of war requires, however, that we first understand why wars occur. Despite the enormous intellectual energy that has been devoted to this question by philosophers, historians, and social scientists, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on what causes wars. There are many theories and extensive debates. Our primary aim in this course is to gain a better understanding of the causes of war by examining some of the leading theories of war and by applying those theories to a number of important historical cases through student research projects and oral presentations.

War includes many forms of organized violence between social groups, from “primitive” warfare to the world wars of the twentieth century to contemporary civil wars, insurgencies, and terrorism. In a one-semester course we cannot focus on all types of warfare and cover them in any kind of depth, in part because different types of wars have different causes and thus require different theories to explain them. A theory of great power war (like World War II) will probably not provide a very good explanation for the ongoing insurgency in Iraq or Afghanistan.

In this seminar we focus on war between states. Interstate war has been the most prominent form of war in the last five centuries, and it has shaped the evolution of the modern world system. Although interstate war (and especially great power war) has declined in frequency while civil wars, insurgency, and terrorism have increased in frequency, interstate war is still the most destructive form of war and the one that has the greatest potential for fundamentally reshaping the nature of world politics. In addition, there are enough danger spots in the world – the Middle East, the Indian-Pakistani rivalry, the Korean peninsula, the resurgence of Russia, and the rise of China as a rival to the United States – to warrant a continued concern with interstate war.

One can understand war on a number of different levels. Our objective in this seminar is not to engage the philosophical question of the "essence" or meaning of war, or the biological question of whether human nature is primed for violence. Instead, we focus on the question of why wars occur at some times and not other times, between some states rather than between other states, under some conditions (diplomatic, military, economic, social, political) rather than other conditions, under some leaders rather than other leaders. Although in some respects war is a constant feature of world politics, it makes more sense to think of war as a variable. The task is then to explain variations in war and peace over time and space. Most social science, in fact, takes the form of explaining variation in outcomes. This forces us to go beyond a single historical case and think about theories of war, since it is only through theory that we are able to generalize about the conditions under which war is most likely to occur.

Theorizing about war and peace, however, is only part of our task. Given multiple theories, we need some way to assess which theories provide the best explanations of the most wars, which theories are most consistent with historical reality. This concern with empirical validity leads us to an interest in history. History is important not only because explaining the past is a valuable end in itself, and because history is a fertile source of theoretical ideas, but also because history provides an essential means of testing our theories, adjudicating among competing theories, modifying our theories, and ultimately helping us construct better theories. In addition, one of the best ways to understand theories of war is to try to apply them in actual historical cases.

One can identify countless theories of interstate war, and one way to make sense of these various theories is to categorize them. Many (but not all) scholars have concluded that the best way to organize theories, of war and of international relations in general, is to use the "levels-of-analysis" framework. With that in mind, we begin the course with a discussion of the levels-of-analysis framework, which we apply to the 2003 Iraq War both to illustrate the framework and to identify some of its potential limitations. After a brief discussion of how political scientists and historians differ in their respective approaches to the study of war and peace, we then turn to other broad conceptual issues bearing on the causes of war. One is the meaning (actually, multiple meanings) of the term "cause." Another is the conception of war advanced by Carl von Clausewitz, which suggests that war is a fundamentally political act.

We then go on to examine a number of theories of war and specific causal factors. We include such factors as international anarchy, the security dilemma, the balance of power, power transitions, preventive war, deterrence and the spiral model, economic interests, domestic politics, diversionary motivations, individual psychology, misperceptions, and

bureaucratic politics. We analyze how each of these factors contributes to the onset of international war and how these factors interact with each other to produce complex causal patterns. We illustrate each of the main theoretical arguments with examples from a wide range of historical cases – American and non-American, past and present, Western and non-Western, great power and small power.

The second half of the course will be centered around individual student research projects, which students will begin working on early in the term. Each student will undertake a major research project on the causes of a particular war and present the analysis to the class for discussion. The aim is for each student to come out of the class with a detailed understanding of a particular war along with more generalized knowledge about a larger number of wars. Although the aim of individual research projects is to explain the outcome of a particular historical case, taken together these research projects provide an informal “test” of various theories. If a particular theory appears to “fit” most of our cases, we can gain confidence in its validity. If a theory does not fit many cases, we lose confidence in its general validity. We may also find that some causal factors are extremely important but only in a small number of cases.

With a class enrollment approaching 30, we do not have enough time to allow students to select any war they want and have 30 different presentations and discussions. Instead, I am giving you a choice of eight different wars. With several students working on each war, this format will facilitate discussion and debate about alternative interpretations of each war. This format has many advantages, and has worked very well in the past.

Each student will select one of these historical cases for his/her research project. We can have up to five, but no more, students working on a particular case. If only one student selects a particular case, we will probably have to drop that case. I would like to make that decision by the third week of class.

Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE)
 World War I – Europe
 Pacific War (the United States and Japan, 1941)
 Korean War (1950)
 1967 Arab-Israeli War
 1973 Arab-Israeli War
 1990/91 Persian Gulf War
 2003 Iraq War

READINGS

There are three sets of required reading for the seminar:

- 1) Theoretical reading for part I of the course.
- 2) Background reading for each of our historical cases in part II of the course.
- 3) Reading for your specific research project.

I have also included as recommended reading two sample papers from past years.

The theoretical reading, which includes a book and several articles, is designed to survey the leading theories of the causes of war. That is important as an end in itself. It is also essential for your two papers for the class. Without an understanding of the theories of war, you will have a difficult time identifying and summarizing the alternative interpretations of the historical case you are studying. One can identify a very large number of different interpretations. Theory helps identify which are most important and how to categorize them. A theoretical understanding also helps you to organize your research paper on the causes of your war and to interpret the massive amount of historical information on the war.

The background historical reading, which consists of one article-length piece per war, provides a historical description of the causes of each of the wars that we will study in this seminar. The background historical reading serves two purposes. First, if you are not sure which case you want to choose as your research project, a quick reading of some of these essays provides the best way for you to get a sense of each of the wars. (See also the section on “Selecting a Paper Topic,” on p. 10 of this syllabus.) Second, the background reading also allows us to assume, for the purposes of student presentations, that the members of the class have some familiarity with the case, so presenters can present focus on interpretive issues rather than on summarizing the history. You need to do the background reading in order to understand the presentations, ask good questions, and participate in the discussion (which is part of your grade).

I include as recommended reading two sample papers from previous undergraduate seminars for the purpose of giving you a sense of what a good paper looks like, and hopefully to reduce the level of uncertainty and anxiety.

I will provide some guidance on the reading for your particular research project.

Book (available at New Jersey Books, 37 Easton Avenue; 732 253 7666), on the internet, and on reserve at Alexander Library):

Jack S. Levy & William R. Thompson, *Causes of War*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Articles and Book Chapters (available on my Sakai site, www.sakai.rutgers.edu)

Theories of War

John J. Mearsheimer, "Anarchy and the Struggle for Power." In Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis, eds., *International Politics*. 7th ed. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2005. Pp. 50-60.

Geoffrey Blainey, "The Abacus of Power." In Blainey, *The Causes of War*. New York: Free Press, 1988. Pp. 108-124.

Robert Jervis, "Deterrence, the Spiral Model, and the Intentions of the Adversary." In Ralph K. White, *Psychology and the Prevention of Nuclear War*. New York: New York University Press, 1986. Pp. 107-30.

Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications." *World Politics* 24 (Spring 1972): 40-79.

Historical Background for Class Presentations

Note: Pay attention to page numbers; in some cases it is not the entire article.

Donald Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War*. New York: Viking-Penguin, 2003. Part I.

James Joll, *Origins of the First World War*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 1992. Chap 2.

Scott D. Sagan, "The Origins of the Pacific War." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, 4 (Spring 1988): 893-922.

John G. Stoessinger, "The Temptations of Victory: Korea." In Stoessinger, *Why Nations Go to War*. 11th ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2011. Chap. 3, pp. 62-87.

John G. Stoessinger, "The Sixty Years' War in the Holy Land: Israel and the Arabs." In Stoessinger, *Why Nations Go to War*. 11th ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2011. Chap 7, pp. 214-51.

Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, "How Kuwait Was Won: Strategy in the Gulf War." *International Security* 16, 2 (Fall 1991): 5-41.

Steve A. Yetiv, "The Iraq War of 2003." In Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States in the Persian Gulf, 1972-2005*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. Pp. 118-44.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There is one set of formal requirements for the course, centered around your research project on the causes of a particular war and coming in three parts:

- 1) a 2-3 page paper (single space) that summarizes alternative interpretations of your historical case and that includes a preliminary bibliography of sources used;
- 2) an oral presentation to the class on your provisional analysis of the causes of your war, followed by discussion;
- 3) a research paper on the causes of the war.

There is no mid-term or final examination.

Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

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|----------------------------------|-----|
| first paper | 20% |
| oral presentation and discussion | 20% |
| research paper | 60% |

In addition, my judgment of your contribution (quantity and quality) to class discussion, both during our survey of theoretical approaches and in the discussions of presentations of other members of the seminar, will be important in the evaluation of all borderline cases. This gives you a strong incentive to complete all required readings prior to class meetings. Also, I expect you to attend every meeting of the seminar. Grades in borderline cases (which will be many) can be affected by poor attendance. I get particularly annoyed when students are absent during other students' presentations.

Students should submit their papers as an attachment under the "Assignments" tab on Sakai. Papers should be in a Word document format. A pdf format is also acceptable. For those who prefer other processing programs, please convert your papers to a Word (.doc or .docx) or PDF format before submitting. Please do not submit your papers in an .odt or other format. Your paper will be automatically be run through the "Turnitin" program, which identifies long passages in a paper that match passages in the "Turnitin" data base, which includes the internet.

Paper #1: Alternative interpretations (2-3 pages single space [with extra space between paragraphs]; includes bibliography, due October 25 to the "Assignments" tab on my Sakai site)

Historians often vary in their interpretations of particular historical events or episodes, and wars are no exception. One thing that motivates professional historians is the ambition to demonstrate than an existing interpretation is wrong or at least incomplete, to

suggest a new interpretation, and to support it with evidence from documents or from other sources. If one accepts the conventional wisdom about a particular episode, then there is not much point to doing yet another study. This norm is if anything more pronounced in political science. Political scientists who want to test their own theory against the historical evidence identify several alternative theories and then try to demonstrate, based on the evidence, that their preferred theory is superior to the alternatives.

Sometimes it is fairly easy to identify alternative interpretations of a particular war. Take the U.S. decision for war against Iraq in 2003 as an example. Some argue that it was “all about oil,” while others emphasize the ideological aim of overthrowing an evil dictator and bringing democracy to Iraq and to the region, or the fear (however misplaced) of Iraq’s nuclear weapons program, the role of neoconservatives in the U.S. decision-making process, or the world view and personality of U.S. President George W. Bush. Sometimes alternative interpretations are evident in the title of books and articles. The subtitle of Herbert Bass’s book on *American Entry into World War I* (1964) is *Submarines, Sentiment, or Security*, suggesting that American motivations were either the German submarine threat to U.S. commerce or to the principle of freedom of the seas, the ideological commitment to liberal democracies in Europe, or the aim to maintain the balance of power. To take another example, in a study of the Crimean War that I wrote with a student who took this seminar fifteen years ago, my coauthor and I used the title “Crisis Mismanagement or Conflict of Interests? A Case Study of the Crimean War.”

Admittedly, things can get complicated quickly, since it is usually possible to identify one or two variations of each alternative interpretation. You have to use your own judgment as to whether a given variation is important enough to qualify as a separate alternative interpretation. The more you read about theories about war and about historical cases, the easier it is to make these judgments. I am generally looking for three to six alternative interpretations for a particular war.

If alternative explanations do not “emerge” from debates among historians, you can suggest some yourself based on your understanding of theories of war. One easy approach would be to adopt an approach based on the levels of analysis framework. This might lead to the identification of an international system level (or realist) interpretation, a domestic political interpretation, and an individual level interpretation. Some might want to add a bureaucratic politics interpretation. Others might want to suggest two domestic interpretations (for example, one based on the diversionary theory of war, and another based on the pressure from powerful domestic economic interests).

One of my aims in assigning this first paper is to help you write a better research paper. One thing that separates many excellent research papers from good papers is that an excellent paper often includes a discussion of why a given interpretation is better than the leading alternative explanations. Your shorter paper, or ideally a revised version of it, can and should be incorporated into your final research paper for the course. More generally, because all social science is about devising better explanations for a historical case or a better theory to explain variations in outcomes across cases, my aim is to encourage you to think in more social scientific terms.

Paper # 2: Research Paper (11-13 pages, single space, due Monday, December 16, noon, at the “Assignments” tab on my Sakai site).

The paper should focus on the causes of the particular war that you select for investigation. I will circulate additional guidelines about the paper later, and we will talk more about it on and off throughout the course. In addition, we should have plenty of extra time to talk about the papers at our November 1 and 8 meetings, after the presentations those days. Let me briefly describe the paper here, however, because it is a major project that requires a major commitment on your part, and you should take this seminar only if the paper is something that you would enjoy doing.

Your basic task in the paper is to select an interstate war and to analyze its causes. The paper must be more than a historical chronology of the origins of your war. It must be analytically focused and guided by some of the theoretical concepts that we develop in the class. Your task is to explain the case, not test a theory, but you use theoretical ideas to help explain the case. The paper must include an evaluation of the relative importance of different causal factors at different levels of analysis in the processes leading to the outbreak and escalation of the war. I do not want a laundry list of ten or twenty causes of the war. You need to prioritize among the many causes, and identify primary and secondary causes of the war. If you find any necessary or sufficient causes of the war, be sure to identify them and to justify your argument.

I also want to emphasize that this is not just an interpretive essay. It is a piece of historical research that must be well grounded in and supported by the available historical evidence. This requires extensive research and extensive footnoting. In your short paper you should include a list of sources that you have consulted. If something critical is missing I will let you know. If I recommend additional sources that you have omitted, you would be wise to follow up on most of my suggestions.

The Oral Presentation

You will have 5-6 minutes each for your oral presentation, as part of a group panel on each case. This is not a whole lot of time, and it will go by very quickly. You can assume everyone in the class has some familiarity with your case, based on the background reading for the class, but a very brief overview would be useful. The main emphasis, however, should be on summarizing your interpretation of the causes of the war – identifying the primary and secondary factors involved and the causal mechanisms through which they led to the war. You will have more opportunity in the lengthy discussion period to elaborate on the evidence that supports your view.

You will be part of a group for the presentation, but each student does his/her own research paper. Some coordination would be useful in the presentations to avoid overlap (for example, in the Pacific War, one person can focus on the U.S. and another could focus on Japan), but in the end I am interested in your individual interpretations. One way to do this is to spend half of your 5-6 minutes on your part of the history, and the other half on your overall theoretical interpretation of the causes of the war.

In the question and answer session, people will raise questions of interpretation, the theoretical coherence of your argument, the strength and validity of your supporting evidence, and other topics. You should think about these issues when you write your final paper. With this in mind, I strongly recommend that after your presentation you take the time to write down all the useful ideas and any responses that come to mind while things are still fresh.

I do not want your written paper at the time of your presentation. You should think of the presentation as a rough draft of your final research paper and as a means of getting feedback (from other students and from myself) to help you improve the paper. The more focused and coherent your presentation on the causes of your war, the more useful feedback will be. This means that you need to complete a substantial amount of your research prior to your presentation, and to organize it into a coherent interpretation.

Among the various theoretical questions we will attempt to answer in our historical cases are the following: What is the relative importance of causal factors from different levels of analysis on each state's behavior? Or, to ask the same question in a slightly different way, what is the relative importance of strategic, ideological, economic, and domestic political motivations in political leaders' decisions for war? Do states go to war primarily to increase their power and security, to promote certain principles of justice or forms of socio-political organization, to increase their wealth, or to consolidate the domestic positions of key elites? How important are conflicts of interests over tangible issues, like

territorial disputes, as opposed to concerns over power, reputation, and internal politics? Do individual decision-makers make a difference, or would policy choices have been similar if someone else was in power? To what extent are decisions for war made through careful cost-benefit calculations based on state interests and on international and domestic constraints, and to what extent are they driven by flawed information processing and other departures from a rational decision-making calculus?

Selecting a Paper Topic

It is important that you move as quickly as possible to select a war (from the list mentioned above) to serve as the topic of your research paper for the class. The deadline for selecting a topic is September 27. After that, a topic will be assigned to you. Selecting a topic early is important so you can get the topic you want while it is still available. It is also important so that you can begin collecting research materials. Key materials might not be available in Rutgers libraries, and you might have to go through EZ Borrow or Interlibrary Loan (ask a librarian for details). This is an efficient system, but one that does not work overnight, so please do not put off your collection of research materials until the last minute. Remember that your short paper on alternative interpretations of your case is due October 25. Adequate sources for that are almost certainly available in the Rutgers collections.

Some of you might already be familiar with some of these cases and know what war you want to study. Most of you are probably less familiar with these cases, so let me suggest a reasonably quick way of gaining enough familiarity with them to help you make an informed decision.

Although internet sources like Wikipedia generally focus more on the history of particular wars and what led up to them than on causal explanations for the war, and hence are of limited value for your research paper, such sources are probably more useful for getting a basic sense of the war. So reading about a few wars on Wikipedia would be one useful place to start. One thing to keep in mind, however, is that this class focuses on the causes of the war, not how it is fought. I suggest that – for the purposes of this class, at least – that you stop reading when the fighting starts.

In addition, on my Sakai site I have posted some additional material for each war. In section two of my Sakai site I post the essay that I have assigned for each historical case as common background reading. If you want a little more information about a case, I have posted a few more readings on each case in sections 4-11 of my Sakai site. Reading through the required background reading and an additional essay or two would be an efficient way of getting a sense of the various wars – much more efficient than randomly selecting a book on “The Origins of xxx War” from the library shelves.

A final word on case selection is in order. Please do not hesitate to pick one of the early cases just because you would be in the first or second presentation groups. For one thing, my expectations are lower for the first few presentations, given both the more restricted time to do your background research and also the lesser familiarity with how things will work. In addition, one advantage to presenting early is that you receive early feedback and have more time to do more research and fine-tune the final research paper.

One final note: You will not be the only person working on your particular case. Although articles and book chapters available on my Sakai site or on the internet can be used by all, there may be limited copies of some important books. Everyone will be better off if you share those materials. Please coordinate with others working on the same case. If a book has been checked out, check with others working on the same case before you recall the book.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Number indicates the week of the term, beginning Sept. 6; letters represent multiple topics each week.

Part I: Theories of War

- 1a. **Course Introduction** (September 6)
focus, aims, organization, requirements
preliminary discussion of research project
- 1b. **The Levels of Analysis Framework**
Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, chap. 1

2. **Analytic Issues** (September 13)
Theory and History
Nature of Causal Explanation
Clausewitz and the Definition of War
Realist, Liberal, Marxist-Leninist, and Constructivist Frameworks
John Mearsheimer, "Anarchy and the Struggle for Power"

3. **System-Level Theories of War:** (September 20)

Balance of Power Theory, Power Transition, and Preventive War
Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, chap. 2

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4. **Dyadic-Level Theories** (September 27)
Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, chap. 3
- 4a. **The Bargaining Theory of War**
Geoffrey Blainey, “The Abacus of Power”
- 4b. **Deterrence and the Spiral Model**
Robert Jervis, “Deterrence, the Spiral Model, and the Intentions of the Adversary”
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5. **Economic Theories of War** (October 4)
Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, pp. 83-93, 70-77.
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6. **Societal-Level Theories** (October 11)
Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, chap. 4, pp. 93-127.
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7. **Decision-Making Theories** (October 18)
- 7a. **Psychology of Decision-making**
Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, chap. 5
- 7b. **Bureaucratic Politics and Organizational Processes**
Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, chap. 6
Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics”
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8. **Individual consultations on papers** (October 25)
** Paper #1 due (“Assignments tab” on Sakai)

Part II: Student Presentations

(and required background reading)

Dates are tentative and depend on student selections of cases.

9. November 1 **Peloponnesian War**
Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War*, part I.
10. November 8 **World War I (1914-18)**
Joll, *Origins of the First World War*, Chap 1-2.
11. November 15 **Pacific War (U.S.-Japan, 1941-45)**
Sagan, "The Origins of the Pacific War"

Korean War (1950-53)
Stoessinger, "The Temptations of Victory: Korea"
12. November 29 **Arab-Israeli War of 1967**
Stoessinger, "The Sixty Years' War in the Holy Land," pp. 214-41.

Arab-Israeli War of 1973
Stoessinger, "The Sixty Years' War in the Holy Land," pp. 241-51.
13. December 6 **1990/91 Persian Gulf War**
Freedman & Karsh, "How Kuwait Was Won: Strategy in the Gulf War."

2003 U.S. - Iraq War
Yetiv, "The Iraq War of 2003"
14. December 13 **Theoretical Comparisons of Historical Cases**

LIST OF DEADLINES

October 25, 4pm paper #1 (submit to Sakai site, "Assignments" tab)
December 19, noon research paper (submit to Sakai site, "Assignments" tab)

NOTE #1: Please turn off your cell phones before entering the classroom. If you need to have your cell phone on for medical or other reasons, please get a note from your dean.

NOTE #2: ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. The University, the Political Science Department, and I each take academic integrity very seriously. The University imposes heavy penalties for plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. If the meanings of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty are not clear, please see the Rutgers website on academic integrity: <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html>

NOTE #3: ABSENCES. Attendance is required at all sessions. Students should report any absence to <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>