WAR AND SOCIETY
PLSC 380N
Spring 2025

Instructor: Benjamin O. Fordham
E-mail: bfordham@binghamton.edu
Office hours: Wednesdays 1-3, in LNG-58, and by appointment

Course Purpose

This course will examine the interaction between domestic institutions and practices and international war. It is a companion to another class I teach regularly, the Political Economy of Security and Conflict (PLSC380U). That course stresses the interaction between war and the domestic and international economy, while this one emphasizes mainly non-economic considerations. The two courses cover many overlapping topics but approach them differently. This course deals with three major topics. First, we will first consider the way that different states and societies have defined their vital interests and used military force to pursue them. Next, we will examine some of the ways that war has affected modern social and political life. Finally, we will examine the role of military force in liberal, democratic societies.

This course is a 4-credit course, which means that students are expected to do at least 12.5 hours of course-related work or activity each week during the semester. This includes scheduled class lecture/discussion meeting times as well as time spent completing assigned readings, preparing written assignments, and other course-related tasks.

This course counts toward the social science general education requirement (category N). It counts for several purposes within the political science major:

- Helps fulfill the requirement for 10 PLSC courses for political science majors.
- Fulfills the requirement of at least 1 course in international relations
- Helps fulfill the requirement for 6 upper-level courses (300- or 400-level)
- Fulfills the N (Social Science) general education requirement

Learning Objectives

In this course, students will learn about the relationship between war and domestic society in a range of historical settings. They will also use and develop their writing and critical thinking skills.

Course Materials

The assigned reading is a vital part of this class. We will sometimes spend all or part of a class period discussing a specific book or other reading. In addition to the three books listed below, which we will read in their entirely, there are a range of other articles and book chapters listed below. There are links to these materials in the Brightspace page for this class.

The following three books are available at the University Bookstore, as well as from other sources:

Karp, Matthew. 2016. *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coyne, Christopher J., and Abigail R. Hall. 2018. *Tyranny Comes Home: The Domestic Fate of U.S. Militarism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Edstrom, Erik. 2020. *Un-American: A Soldier's Reckoning of Our Longest War*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Course Requirements and Grading

Class Discussion. Over the course of the semester, there are 11 scheduled discussions of assigned readings. The dates and topics of these discussions are noted in bold print in the course schedule below. Three are linked to books we are reading. Eight are tied to articles or sets of articles. Each will begin with a question posted in the online discussion board in Brightspace, setting the stage for an in-person class discussion. Tentative versions of the discussion questions are included in this syllabus but are subject to change as the semester goes along. The discussion board will present the final version of each question. You should post an answer by 5:00 on the day before each scheduled class discussion. Late answers will not receive credit. I may ask you to summarize or elaborate on your answer in class, so you must be present to receive credit. After you post your answer, you will be able to see other students' posts and respond to them online if you like, though you are not required to do so. Each student is also permitted to miss two class discussions during the semester without penalty. The remaining discussion posts will count for 45% of your grade for the course.

Midterm Exam. There will be a midterm exam on March 19th that will cover all the course material we have examined though that date. The exam will consist of short-answer questions. To give you a better idea of what these questions will be like, I will distribute a sample version of the exam before the midterm. The midterm exam will count for 20% of your grade for the course.

Final Exam. The final exam be given on the date determined by the university during the final exam period. We should know this date soon, but it is set after classes have begun. The final exam will follow the same format as the midterm exam, and I will distribute a second set of study questions covering the second half of the class. The final exam will count for 35% of your grade for the course.

Grading Scale. Your semester grade will be computed on a 100-point scale as follows: 94-100 = A; 91-93 = A-; 88-90 = B+; 84-87 = B; 81-83 = B-; 78-80 = C+; 74-77 = C; 71-73 = C-; 65-70 = D; 0-64 = F.

Course Policies

Office Hours. I will be available from 1:00-3:00 on Wednesdays in my office, LNG-58. You do not need to make an appointment to see me during this time. If you need to meet at another time, either in person or via Zoom, contact me by e-mail and we will set it up.

Technology. We will use Brightspace, the university's learning management system, for some purposes, including the distribution of course materials, the submission of discussion posts, and

reporting grades. If you encounter technical problems with the system, I encourage you to turn to the technical support it provides: https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport.

E-mail. I will use your university e-mail address for course announcements and other official purposes. Check this account at least once a day. I recommend setting your university e-mail account to forward messages to whatever e-mail address you use most often. I will respond to student messages in a timely manner but do not count on receiving an answer in less than 24 hours.

Grade Appeals. All grade appeals must be made in writing, not in person. If you believe a grade I assigned you is incorrect, you should write a brief email message explaining your concerns. I will review your message and respond to you in writing.

Cheating and Plagiarism. All writing submitted as part of this course, including comments posted on discussion boards, must be your own work, not something produced by other people or an AI system. You may introduce and use outside material that you think is relevant but you should credit the original authors when you do so. You need not do so through a formal citation system in a discussion board post, but you should say where you originally discovered the ideas you are using. On exams, you may not use notes or receive external assistance of any kind. All electronic devices must be completely turned off and put away unless you have received special permission to use them. Violations of these rules will result in a failing grade for the course and will be submitted to the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee for further disciplinary action.

Decorum. I encourage you to express your views on the course material both in class and on the discussion boards. You are free to disagree with me or with your fellow students, just as others are free to disagree with you. In doing so, however, please refrain from personal insults or inflammatory rhetoric. Be respectful of one another and always remember that there is a real person on the other end of your comments.

Tentative Course Schedule and Assigned Materials

(All dates are subject to change during the semester)

Dates:	**Topic and Reading Assignment:**
January 22	Introduction and Overview

Part I. The Influence of Social Structure on National Interests and War-Fighting

January 27	How Can Social Structure Influence National Interests and War?
January 29	Ancient Mediterranean City-States: Bryant, Joseph M. 1990. "Military Technology and Socio-Cultural Change in the Ancient Greek City." *The Sociological Review* 38(3): 484-516.

Dates:	**Topic and Reading Assignment:**
February 3 and 5	The Roman Republic and the Roman Empire: Mattern, Susan P. 1999. *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 1. Kagan, Kimberley. 2006. "Redefining Roman Grand Strategy." *Journal of Military History* 70(2): 333-62. **Discussion for February 3**: Does the fact that the Romans did not engage in policy planning as we currently understand it make foreign policy fundamentally different for them?
February 10 and 12	The Transition from Feudalism to the Absolutist State in Europe: White, Lynn. 1962. Medieval Technology and Social Change. New York: Oxford University Press. 1-38. **Discussion for February 10:** Lynn White's article, like Joseph Bryant's piece we read earlier, stress that military technology can shape social organization. Can things work the other way around, with social organization shaping the available military technology?
February 17, 19, and 24	War and National Interests in Modern States: Karp, Matthew. 2016. *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. **Discussion for February 24**: 1. Karp shows that slaveholders were greatly concerned about the fate of slavery in other parts of the Western Hemisphere. Was emancipation in these other societies really as much of a threat to their interests as they feared? 2. In chapters 6 and 7, Karp shows that slaveholders were quite confident about the future of slavery as an institution even into the 1850s when most countries had abolished it. Was there any realistic basis for this confidence, or were they merely delusional? 3. Suppose the South had successfully seceded from the United States. Considering the policies its leaders had advocated when they were still in the union, what is one major foreign policy initiative you think they would have undertaken once they became independent?

Dates:	**Topic and Reading Assignment:**

Part II. The Impact of War on Modern Societies

February 26, March 3 and 5

Nations and Nationalism:

Snyder, Jack, and Karen Ballentine. 1996. "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas." *International Security* 21(2): 5-40.

Discussion for March 5:

1. Should freedom of the press be limited in new democracies to prevent the exploitation of nationalism by unscrupulous politicians, as Snyder and Ballentine suggest?

2. The Snyder and Ballentine article was written roughly 30 years ago. Do they make claims or assumptions that no longer appear valid today?

March 10 and 12

No class meeting (Spring break)

March 17

Review session for midterm exam

March 19

Midterm Exam

March 24 and 26

Race and Empire

Korstad, Robert, and Nelson Lichtenstein. 1988. Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement. *Journal of American History* 75 (3): 786-811.

Skrentny, John David. 1998. The effect of the Cold War on African-American civil rights: America and the world audience, 1945-1968. *Theory and Society* 27: 237-285.

Discussion for March 26: On balance, was the Cold War helpful or harmful to the civil rights movement in the United States?

March 31

Gender

Campbell, D'Ann. 1993. "Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union." *Journal of Military History* 57(2): 301-23.

Dates:	**Topic and Reading Assignment:**
April 2	Wartime Methods in Domestic Life: Coyne, Christopher J., and Abigail R. Hall. 2018. *Tyranny Comes Home: The Domestic Fate of U.S. Militarism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Bonenberger, Adrian, and Adam Weinstein. 2019. "The Sum of All Beards." *The New Republic*, 4 June 2019, https://newrepublic.com/article/154033/american-beards-military-culture

Discussion for April 2:

1. Coyne and Hall discuss three mechanisms that produce the "boomerang effect," bringing technologies of social control used overseas back into American domestic life, one involving human capital, another related to organizational dynamics, and a third concerning physical capital. Which of these do you think is the most important?

2. Coyne and Hall discuss several overseas practices that have reappeared in American domestic life. Would these practices have been invented for domestic use even if they had not been used internationally first?

3. What might give American political leaders an incentive to curtail the use of the technologies of social control that Coyne and Hall discuss?

4. Bonenberger and Weinstein discuss a more trivial example of a cultural practice that originated in war and made its way into American domestic life. Are there other examples of cultural practices in American life that originated in war?

Part III. Liberal Societies and War

April 7 and 9	Liberal Societies and War: Sagan, Scott D., and Benjamin A. Valentino. 2017. "Revisiting Hiroshima in Iran: What Americans Really Think about Using Nuclear Weapons and Killing Noncombatants." *International Security* 42(1): 41-79.

Discussion for April 9: Have norms about violence, such as the "nuclear taboo" that Sagan and Valentino discuss, changed in ways that limit war in the contemporary world?

April 14	No class meeting (Passover break)

Dates:	**Topic and Reading Assignment:**
April 16 and 22	Liberal Empire and Liberal International Order: Deudney, Daniel, and G. John Ikenberry. 2021. "Misplaced Restraint: The Quincy Coalition Versus Liberal Internationalism." *Survival* 63(4): 7-32. Lieven, Anatol. 2021. "Vindicating Realist Internationalism." *Survival* 63(5): 7-34. **Discussion for April 22**: 1. Deudney and Ikenberry implicitly offer an olive branch to the "left revisionist" part of the Quincy coalition, arguing that their ideals would be well served by being less negative about the potential of American power to advance human freedom. Are left revisionists and "modern liberals" like Deudney and Ikenberry potential allies? 2. Paraphrasing Frank Sinatra, Lieven says that you can't have liberal internationalism of the sort Deudney and Ikenberry favor without American military hegemony (p. 13). Is this true? 3. This debate was conducted in the fall of 2021. Do you think events since then, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, or the outbreak of war in the Middle East, have strengthened or weakened the arguments of either side?
April 21	No class meeting (Easter break)
April 23	The Politics of Remembering Past Wars: Nolan, Alan T. 2000. "The Anatomy of the Myth." In Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 11-34. Smith, Clint. 2021. "The War on Nostalgia." *The Atlantic* 327(5): 52-61. **Discussion for April 23:** 1. Is "Lost Cause" mythology an important determinant of some people's political positions, or is it mainly a rationalization for positions they would have taken anyway? 2. Are there other wars that are remembered in distorted ways that serve present-day political agendas, as the "Lost Cause" version of the Civil War does?

Dates:	**Topic and Reading Assignment:**
April 28	War in Popular Culture: Alonge, Giaime. 2019. "Playing the Nazis: Political Implications in Analog Wargames." https://analoggamestudies.org/2019/09/playing-the-nazis-political-implications-in-analog-wargames/ **Discussion for April 28**: Alonge argues that analog board games focused on World War II encouraged an unsavory obsession with the Nazis. Think about a cultural product you have enjoyed that deals directly or indirectly with war. These could include books, movies, television shows, music, video games, and the like. Did its treatment of war support a political agenda of any kind?
April 30	Counterinsurgency Warfare: Hazleton, Jacqueline. 2021. "The Hearts-and-Minds Myth: How America Gets Counterinsurgency Wrong." *Foreign Affairs*, 15 July 2021.
May 5	The United States and Recent Wars: Edstrom, Erik. 2020. *Un-American: A Soldier's Reckoning of Our Longest War*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing. **Discussion for May 5**: 1. Edstrom argues that recruiting high school students into the military is immoral because they are too young to understand the commitment they are making. What do you think? 2. Edstrom's description of West Point, and of the training his unit received before deploying to Afghanistan, isn't very flattering. Was there any detail in this part of the book that you found especially surprising or important? 3. Edstrom draws some broader, highly critical conclusions about the military and American society in the final part of the book. Is there anything he wrote that you felt went too far?
May 7	Review session for final exam