

POL 15a: Introduction to International Relations

Summer Session II 2026

6 July – 6 August, 2026

Online, Synchronous Course: **ZOOM LINK TBD**

Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 8:30 – 11:00 EST (O Schedule)

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Office Hours: TBD and by appointment

Course Description / Objectives:

This course is an introduction to the art and science of studying international relations. This course is designed to provide the world-political literacy necessary for astute global citizenship or future study in political science. Topics include the fundamentals of statehood / political geography, global history since the French Revolution, basic international relations theory, collective action, and contemporary issues in world politics.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to build the competence necessary for continued study in world politics, a goal which also helps bolster students' ability to be thoughtful citizen of the world. Accordingly, by the end of the course, students should be able to:

- make reasoned arguments about contemporary or past international political issues through use of both evidence and basic international relations theory,
- critically evaluate historic and theoretic arguments about world politics,
- apply theoretic arguments about world politics to contemporary events,
- demonstrate basic competence and awareness about important international relations issues and history, and
- successfully be able to study international relations at an advanced level.

Course Assignments / Grading

- Four Weekly Assignments – 10% each, total of 40%
 - Following each Thursday lecture, students will complete an assignment via written submission, to be uploaded to Moodle before Monday's lecture. There is no assignment for the last week of class.
- Attendance and participation / active learning – 20%
 - Students' attendance and participation is expected throughout the course. Participation in discussions and class activity is both a metric of their work, and an act of responsibility to themselves and their peers.
- Final Exam – 40%
 - The final exam shall consist of two parts and be spread across two days. During classtime on August 4th, students shall complete a written exam. The written exam will likely consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. On August 6th, there will be an oral exam. During classtime, students will join the instructor on zoom

individually, who will examine them on what they wrote on their written exam, as well as other course material.

Required Texts – other readings noted under course schedule are available on Moodle.

Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and David A. Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 10th edition (Pearson, 2017). ISBN-13: 978-0-1355-7143-9 (print); 978-0-1374-7760-9 (eBook). Course Reserves: JZ1305 .N94 2016; [OneSearch link](#).

Robert J. Art, Timothy W. Crawford, and Robert Jervis, *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, 14th edition (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023). ISBN-13: 978-1-5381-6955-1 (print); 978-1-5381-7693-1 (eBook). Course Reserves: JZ1242 .I574 2023; [OneSearch link](#).

Prerequisites

No prerequisites are necessary to take this course.

Notice regarding credit hours

Success in this 4 credit-hour course is based on the expectation that students will invest a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week outside of class.

Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence / Large Learning Model Usage

Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student's own effort. Infringement of academic integrity by a student subjects that student to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University or other sanctions. Please consult [Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work via TurnItIn.com., or similar software to verify originality.

Use of Artificial Intelligence or Large Learning Models is not permitted in this class. This is for educational purposes. AI models, even after years of training, are poor when it comes to issues of politics and history. At best, they are often inaccurate, at worst, propaganda. Most importantly, use of AI tools offloads the work of learning from the student to the computer. Successful completion of this course requires the human behind the computer to demonstrate their competence. For this reason, use of AI in written work, or as a crutch, can be detrimental to learning.

Be advised that any writing submitted in this course that is not your own (e.g., writing obtained or adapted from artificial intelligence or any other text-generating tool) or that does not provide accurate attribution to the source material you used constitutes academic dishonesty and will be addressed accordingly.

A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic integrity as they apply to a specific course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards. Citation and research assistance can be found at [Brandeis Library Guides - Citing Sources](#).

Moodle Courses

[Moodle Courses](#) is the Brandeis learning management system. Login using your UNET ID and password. For LATTE help, contact Library@brandeis.edu.

Library Services

The [Brandeis Library](#) collections and staff offer resources and services to support Brandeis students, faculty and staff. Librarians and Specialists from Research & Instructional Services, Public Services, Archives & Special Collections, Sound & Image Media Studios, MakerLab, AutomationLab, and Digital Scholarship Lab are available to help you through consultations and workshops. Additionally, the Library offers help with research (finding and citing materials, analysis, software support etc.). In the course of your research, I highly suggest using the library's services. [Aimee Slater](#) is the Library's specialist in Government Information and Social Sciences. Other [Subject Liaisons](#) can be found on the Library's webpage.

Privacy

To protect your privacy in any case where this course involves online student work outside of Brandeis password-protected spaces, you may choose to use a pseudonym/alias. You must share the pseudonym/ alias with me and any teaching assistants as needed. Alternatively, with prior consultation, you may submit such work directly to me.

Student Support

Brandeis University is committed to supporting all our students so they can thrive. If a student, faculty, or staff member wants to learn more about support resources, the [Support at Brandeis](#) webpage offers a comprehensive list that includes these staff colleagues you can consult, along with other support resources:

- [The Care Team](#)
- [Academic Services](#) (undergraduate)
- [Graduate Student Affairs](#)
- Directors of Graduate Studies in each department, School of Arts & Sciences
- Program Administrators for the Heller School and International Business School
- [University Ombuds](#)
- [Office of Equal Opportunity](#).

Course Accommodations

Brandeis seeks to create a learning environment that is welcoming and inclusive of all students, and I want to support you in your learning. Live auto transcription is available for all meetings or classes hosted on Zoom and you can turn it on or off to support your learning. Please [check for Zoom updates](#) to take advantage of this new feature. To learn more, visit the [Zoom Live Transcription webpage](#). For questions, contact help@brandeis.edu

If you think you may require disability accommodations, you will need to work with Student Accessibility Support (SAS) (781-736-3470, access@brandeis.edu). You can find helpful student FAQs and other resources on the [SAS website](#), including guidance on how to know whether you might be eligible for support from SAS. If you already have an accommodation letter from SAS, please provide me with a copy as soon as you can so that I can ensure effective implementation of accommodations for this class. In order to coordinate exam accommodations, ideally you should provide the accommodation letter at least 48 hours before an exam.

Course Schedule

Part 1: International Relations Theory

Monday, July 6th, 2026 — Introduction, What is International Relations?, Sovereignty

- **Readings:**
 - o Nye and Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation*, 1-16, 39-55. **Hereafter UGCC.**
 - o Stephen Krasner, 1995, "Compromising Westphalia," *International Security* 20: 115-151
 - o Stephen Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1998, pp. 29-46.
- **Learning Goals**
 - o Become familiar with the structure of the course.
 - o Become acquainted with the core ideas the various schools of thought within International Relations.
 - o Understand how the concepts of sovereignty and anarchy theoretically structure scholarly International Relations thought.
 - o Understand the nuances within the concept of sovereignty, including within the framework of Krasner's tripartite definition of sovereignty.

Tuesday, July 7th, 2026 — Realism: Anarchy, Conflict, and Cooperation (or lack thereof)

- **Readings:**
 - o Nye and Welsh, UGCC, 17-38, 55-67 up to "liberalism".
 - o Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue" within Art, Crawford, and Jervis, *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*. **HEREAFTER "ACJ"**
 - o Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Anarchic Structure of World Politics," *ACJ*
 - o Stephen Walt, "Alliances: Balancing and Bandwagoning" *ACJ*
 - o John J. Mearsheimer, "Anarchy and the Struggle for Power," *ACJ*
 - o Robert Jervis, "Offence, Defense, and the Security Dilemma," *ACJ*
- **Learning Goals**
 - o Understand how anarchy structures International Relations theory
 - o Become aware of anarchy is qualified and how one might argue for against the idea of International Relations as being structured by anarchy.
 - o Understand the positivist-scientific purpose behind Waltz's levels of inquiry.
 - o Learn the basics of Waltzian Neorealism, and the impact of the security dilemma on state behavior
 - o Competently understand polarity in the international system.

Thursday, July 9th, 2026 — Institutionalism and State Level Theories

- **Readings:**
 - o Nye and Welsh, UGCC, "liberalism," pages 67-72.
 - o Kenneth A. Oye, 1985, "Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies." *World Politics* 38 (1): 1-24.
 - o Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Can Interdependence Work?" *ACJ*.

- Oona Hathaway, 2007, “Why do states commit to Human Rights Treaties?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51 (4): 588-621.
- Michael W. Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” *ACJ*
- G. John Ikenberry, “The Next Liberal Order,” *ACJ*
- Bruce Russett, 2010, “Peace in the Twenty-First Century,” *Current History* 109: 11-16.
- **Learning Goals:**
 - Become familiar with the prisoner’s dilemma and collective action problems, in and outside the context of international relations.
 - Understand how “neoliberal institutionalist” theory diverges from realist thought.
 - Begin investigation of how factors at the domestic level impact how states interact at the international level
 - Disentangle common understandings of “liberalism” from the package of hypotheses and assumptions made within what is sometimes called liberal theory.
 - Become adept with “historical-institutionalist” arguments about institutions, and the potential of institutions to endure despite change in power.

Monday, July 13th, 2026 — Constructivism and Ideas in IR

- **Readings:**
 - Nye and Welsh, UGCC, “Constructivism,” 72-75.
 - Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, “Transnational Activist Networks” *AJC*.
 - Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, 1998, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52 (4): 887-917.
 - Nina Tannenwald, 2020, “The Legacy of the Nuclear Taboo in the Twenty-First Century,” in *The Age of Hiroshima*, ed. Michael D. Gordon and G. John Ikenberry (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 276-293.
 - Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, “International Law and its Transformation Through the Outlawry of War,” *International Affairs* 95: 45-62.
 - Philip Y. Lipsy, Jiajia Zhou, 2026, “Institutional Racism in International Relations,” *International Organization* 80 (1): 111-151.
- **Learning Goals:**
 - Become familiar with the sociological view of international relations.
 - Be able to know what Alexander Wendt means when he says, “anarchy is what states make of it.”
 - Understand how organized networks of individuals can influence global politics.
 - Contextualize oneself within the world of global politics.
 - Explain the impact and importance of social dimensions of world politics.
 - Understand the constructivist argument in favor of international law’s relevance.

Part 2: International Relations History

Tuesday, July 14th, 2026 — Modernity, The Concert of Europe

- **Readings:**
 - Nye and Welsh, UGCC, 81-98.
 - Branch, Jordan. 2011. “Mapping the Sovereign State: Technology, Authority, and Systemic Change.” *International Organization* 65 (1): 1-36.

- Kalevi Holsti, 2016, “Governance without Government: Polyarchy in Nineteenth Century European International Politics,” *Major Texts on War, the State, Peace, and International Order* (Springer), 149-171.
- Jeffrey Frankel, “Globalization and the Economy,” *ACJ*
- **Learning Goals**
 - Become familiar with global history from Napoleon to WWI.
 - Debate the instability of multipolarity.
 - Become competent with ideas of global economics and global trade.

Thursday, July 16th, 2026 — World War One, Its Causes, and Its Aftermath

- **Readings:**
 - Nye and Welsh, UGCC, 98-116.
 - James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *ACJ*
 - Stephen van Evera, 2015, “European Militaries and the origins of WWI,” *The Roots of World War I and the Risk of US-China Conflict*, eds. Richard N. Rosecrance and Stephen E. Miller, (MIT Press), 149-172.
 - Tanisha Fazal, “The Versailles Treaty was signed June 28, 1918. So why don’t countries formalize peace today?” *Washington Post*, 28 June 2019.
 - Carsten-Andres Schulz and Tom Long, 2026, “Bound by History: How Antecedents Shaped the Institutional Design of the League of Nations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 70: 1-13.
- **Content:**
 - Become adept with making arguments about the cause and termination of wars from a variety of standpoints.
 - Understand how communication and psychology influence decision-making in crisis.
 - Understand how perceptions of military power and doctrine have political consequences.

Monday, July 20th, 2026 — The Interwar Period, World War Two, and Its Aftermath

- **Readings:**
 - Nye and Welsh, UGCC, Chapter 4 (166-145) and “Counterfactuals and ‘Virtual History’” (75-77).
 - Dale Copeland, “Economic Interdependence and War” *ACJ*
 - Alan Alexandroff and Richard Rosecrance, 1977, “Deterrence in 1939,” *World Politics*
 - Yuen Foong Khong, 1996, “Confronting Hitler and its Consequences,” in *Counterfactual Thought Experiments and in World Politics*, eds. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 95-118.
 - Ward Wilson, 2007, “The Winning Weapon? Rethinking Nuclear Weapons in Light of Hiroshima,” *International Security* 31: 162-179.
 - Paul Fussell, “Thank God for the Atom Bomb,” and “Exchange of Views” in *Thank God for the Atom Bomb and Other Essays* (Summit Books, 1988): 14-44.
- **Learning Goals:**
 - Become familiar with the causes, history, and consequences of the Second World War
 - Consider nuanced theories about state economic policy.
 - Consider the concept of appeasement and debate its prudence.

- Become adept with counterfactual thought experiments about world-political events.
- Debate the strategic and ethical dimensions of deciding to use atomic weaponry against Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- Understand American strategy and the development of postwar international institutions.

Tuesday, July 21st, 2026 — The Cold War

– Readings:

- Nye and Welsh, Chapter 5: “The Cold War”, pages 146-200.
- Robert Jervis, 2001, “Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3: 36-60.
- George F. Kennan writing as “X”, 1947, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Policy*
- Thomas J. Christensen, 2005, “Worse than a Monolith: Disorganization and Rivalry within Asian Communist Alliances and U.S. Commitment Challenges,” *Asian Security* 1: 80-127
- William C. Wohlforth, 2011, “No One Loves a Realist Explanation,” *International Politics* 48: 441-459.
- Max Boot, 2024, “Reagan Didn’t Win the Cold War: How a Myth About the Collapse of the Soviet Union Leads Republicans Astray on China,” *Foreign Affairs*.
- David Holloway, 1988, “Gorbachev’s New Thinking,” *Foreign Affairs*.
- Mikhail Gorbachev, 1987, Speech Given at Murmansk.
- George H. W. Bush, 1990, “Address to the United Nations General Assembly,” a.k.a. the “New World Order” speech.

– Learning Goals:

- Consider arguments about causation and responsibility for the Cold War
- Understand George Kennan’s prescription for US Cold War policy, and the history of US foreign policy during the Cold War
- Consider the various implications of bipolarity.
- Investigate state agency under bipolar, with specific reference to the nonaligned movement and the “third world.”
- Entertain and debate varied arguments about the end of the Cold War.
- Hypothesize the implications of US hegemony after 1989.

Part 3: Contemporary Issues and Forces in World Politics

Thursday, July 23rd, 2026 — The United Nations, Interventionism, Peacekeeping, and Human Rights

– Readings:

- Nye and Welsh, UGCC, Chapter 6, “Conflict and Cooperation in the Post-Cold War World”, 200-230.
- Ian Johnstone, 2003, “Security Council Deliberations: The Power of the Better Argument,” *European Journal of International Law* 14 (3): 437-480
- Adam Roberts and Dominik Zaum, “The UN Security Council,” *ACJ*

- Caroline A. Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, “Crafting Peace through Power Sharing,” *ACJ*
 - Barbara F. Walter, Lisa Morjé Howard, and V. Page Fortna, “The Astonishing Success of Peacekeeping,” *AJC*
 - Alexander B. Downes, “To the shores of Tripoli? Regime Change and its Consequences,” *AJC*
 - David Lake, chapter 3 “Legitimacy and Loyalty,” in *The Statebuilder’s Dilemma: on the Limits of Foreign Intervention*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), sections.
- **Learning Goals:**
- Become adeptly aware of the basics of international law under the UN Charter.
 - Understand how and when use of force is made legal or illegal under the UN Charter.
 - Consider various arguments about the efficacy, creation, and purpose of international law.
 - Become aware of what UN Peacekeeping entails.
 - Consider the legal and moral implications of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.
 - Begin investigating the strategic dimensions of humanitarian interventions.

Monday, July 27th, 2026 — Terrorism and Counterinsurgency

- **Readings:**
- Nye and Welsh, UGCC, 352-356.
 - Bruce Hoffman, “What is Terrorism,” *AJC*
 - Barbara F. Walter, “The New ‘New’ Civil Wars,” *AJC*
 - Jacqueline L. Hazelton, “The ‘Hearts and Minds’ Fallacy: Violence, Coercion, and Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare,” *International Security* 42, no. 1 (2017): 80-93 only.
 - Carter Malkasian, “How the Good War Went Bad: America’s Slow-Motion Failure in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2020)
 - Monica Duffy Toft, “Ending Civil Wars: A Case for Rebel Victory?” *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 7–36.
- **Learning Goals**
- Understand the theoretic difficulty of labeling and studying terrorism.
 - Consider causes and consequences of civil conflict, especially in the post-Cold War context
 - Become familiar with the history and theoretic lessons of the American war in Afghanistan.
 - Consider the strategic and moral implications of different policy choices when dealing with toppled governments.

Tuesday, July 28th, 2026 — Nuclear Nonproliferation / Climate Change in IR

- **Readings:**
- Robert Jervis, “Losing Control in Crises,” in *ACJ*
 - Nina Tannenwald, 1999, “The Nuclear Taboo: the United States and the Normative basis for Nuclear Nonuse” *International Organization* 433-468.
 - William C. Porter, 2010, “The NPT and the Sources of Nuclear Restraint,” *Deadelus* 139: 68-81.

- Scott Sagan, 2018, “Armed and Dangerous: When Dictators get the Bomb” *Foreign Affairs*
- Garrett Hardin, 1968, “The Tragedy of the Commons,”
- Michelle Nijuis, 2021, “The Miracle of the Commons,” *Aeon*
- Stephen M. Walt, “The Realist Guide to Solving Climate Change,” *AJC*
- William Nordhaus, 2021, “Why Climate Policy has Failed, and how Governments can do Better,” *Foreign Affairs*
- **Learning Goals:**
 - Become competent with the vocabulary and concepts around nuclear weapons and their usage.
 - Become adept with various arguments which explain “nuclear restraint.”
 - Consider the role of nuclear potency on contemporary conflict and regional stability.
 - Understand the theoretic arguments which act as foundation for explaining environmental policy.
 - Survey the history of global environmental politics, specifically concerning institutional developments, successes, and failures.

Thursday, July 30th, 2026 — Contemporary Conflict: Enduring Rivalries and Hybrid Warfare

- **Readings:**
 - T.V. Paul, 2006, “Why has the India-Pakistan Rivalry Been so Enduring? Power Asymmetry and Intractable Conflict” *Security Studies* 15 (4): 600-630.
 - Ivan Arreguín-Toft, 2001, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26 (1): 93-128.
 - Edward Fishman, 2026, “How to Fight an Economic War: Field Manual for a Ruptured World,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2026).
 - Ben Buchanan, “The Cybersecurity Dilemma,” *AJC*.
 - Feng Jin, 2019, “The Gray Zone Issue: Implications for US-China Relations,” *The Pacific Forum* 19, working paper 14.
 - Donald Trump, 2025, National Security Strategy of the United States of America
- **Learning Goals:**
 - Consider why certain dyads of states are more conflict-prone than others.
 - Become familiar with contemporary military doctrine.
 - Understand the concepts of “hybrid warfare” and “grey zone conflict” and their implications on conflict and cooperation.
 - Understand the dimensions of “economic conflict” and statecraft, and demonstrate knowledge of the tools states use when making economic foreign policy.

Monday, August 3rd, 2026 — World Order and Course Wrap-Up

- **Readings:**
 - Alexander Stubb, 2026, “The West’s Last Chance: How to Build a New Global Order Before it is Too Late,” *Foreign Affairs*
 - Amitav Acharya, 2026, “Pharaohs, Maharajas, and the Making of a Multipolar World: Examples from non-Western history offer more promising precedents for the end of U.S. hegemony.” *Foreign Policy*

- Graham Allison, 2015, “The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Heading for War?” *The Atlantic*.
- Mark Carney, 2026, “Davos 2026 Special Address by Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada.”
- **Learning Goals:**
 - Consider arguments about the future of world order.
 - Review materials in preparation of our course exam.

Tuesday, August 4th, 2026 — In Class Written Exam

Thursday, August 6th, 2026 — Oral Exam