PS 391: Current Crises and Events in International Relations  
Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30-10:45 a.m.  
Curtain Hall 124  
Spring 2020

Instructor: Dr. Kristin Trenholm  
Office: Bolton Hall, Room 630  
Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-3:00 p.m., and by appointment  
E-mail: trenholm@uwm.edu

Course Description  
This course examines several current crises or challenging international events—which are defined as unstable, pressing international situations in which significant change, with the possibility of undesirable outcomes, appears imminent. In the first part of the course, we examine a number of international relations theories, and consider factors that might mitigate or exacerbate conflict. We then consider several current international crises and challenging events. The learning objective is to enhance our critical thinking about the theoretical and topical arguments assigned, and to consider what evidence the authors offer in support of their theories.

The readings for this course are varied. We begin by reading several contemporary-classic works on international relations theory (including works by Morgenthau, Waltz, Doyle, Wendt, Nye, and Snyder). We then consider the following crisis topics: the Syrian civil war; the rise of ISIS and the migration of foreign fighters; Europe’s migration/refugee crisis; Brexit and strain within the European Union; the rise of populism in Europe; the Russian annexation of the Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine; tension within NATO regarding its response to Russian aggression; China’s assertiveness in the South and East China Seas and the associated regional tension; nuclear proliferation (i.e., the Iran nuclear deal and North Korea’s nuclear program); the internationalization of disease (i.e., the Ebola and Zika viruses); internationalization of crime (especially the Mexican Drug cartels); and cybersecurity.

Having completed this course, students should be able to theorize about relations among states, and factors that seem to mitigate or exacerbate current crises. Furthermore, students should enhance their critical and analytical skills in the process and apply such skills to current topics in international relations. In short, students should take from this class the critical thinking skills that will enhance their discriminating consumption of professional research and journalistic arguments in the field.

Course Requirements  
Regular attendance and participation: Students are expected you to come to class each session and to come prepared. Students are expected to: 1) finish the assigned readings before the class for which they are assigned, 2) attend class regularly, 3) show up to class on time, and 4) participate in class discussion.

For this three-credit course, students are expected to devote approximately 144.5 hours of time on this class. This class meets twice a week for 75 minutes, for a total of 37.5 hours of required lecture and discussion time. Students should expect to spend approximately 60 hours reading the course material. There are also three essay quizzes, a student presentation, and
discussion notes that will require approximately 12 hours. Students should reserve at least 15 hours to study for the midterm and approximately 20 hours studying for the final exam.

**Preparation:** Students should be able to identify and assess the various authors’ arguments by applying the three-part critical thinking process presented below. Students should come to class prepared to answer the following questions:

- **Part I. Identify the author and the context:** 1) What is the context of the authors’ arguments? 2) From what theoretical perspective does the author consider the crisis topic that is discussed? 3) With whom are the authors engaged in debate? 4) With respect to the more theoretical contributions, what kind of research design is employed?
- **Part II. Understand the argument:** 1) What does the author seek to explain, and what factors are central to the explanation? 2) What evidence does the author offer in support of the argument? 3) What are the key concepts?
- **Part III. Overall assessment of the argument:** 1) Are there counter-arguments that can be made? 2) What is the significance or relevance of the author’s argument? 3) What do you make of the author’s argument overall?

**Grades**
Grades will be based on the best two of three short essay quizzes (worth 8.33% each), attendance and participation (8.34%), one midterm exam (worth 35%), and one final exam (worth 40%). Interested students may write an optional research paper, in which case the final exam will be worth 20% and the final research paper worth 20%. The research paper is due **Monday, May 4, 2020, at 9:30 a.m. at the start of class**. I do not accept late papers unless there is a documented emergency or university-accepted excuse. The final exam is **Wednesday, May 13, 2020, 7:30-9:30 a.m.**

**Optional Final Research Paper**
Students may write a seven-to-ten-page research paper analyzing the causes of one of following crises or pressing international events considered in the course. Please note that this is a shortened list of topics covered in the course. You must choose one of these topics.

Syrian civil war and international involvement
International terrorism: ISIS and the rise of foreign fighters
Migration/refugee crisis in Europe
Brexit and strain within the European Union
Russian intervention in Ukraine
China’s assertiveness in the South and East China Seas and associated regional tension
Nuclear proliferation: the Iran nuclear deal or the North Korean nuclear program
Internationalization of disease (the Ebola or Zika virus)
Internationalization of crime (the Mexican drug cartels)

By the third week of class, your choice of crisis must be approved. Students will identify three or four independent variables (i.e. causes or explanations) for their selected case and analyze the relative impact of the identified variables as causes of the crises. These causes will be drawn from the explanations and theories considered in the course material. For example, students might consider causes such as: a state leader’s ideology (e.g., the desire to spread their
ideal system of government, political power and/or economic influence); structural causes (e.g.,
the balance of power); foreign influences, pressures, or threats; domestic political pressure; a
territorial/border dispute; and/or a state’s socially constructed cultural identity.

The paper will consist of two parts. In the first section of the research paper (3-5 pages),
students will identify the theoretical causes of the current crises or event considered. In the
theory section of the paper, students are expected to present a theoretical argument about how
each cause (or “independent variable”) contributed to the outbreak of the crisis. For each factor
chosen, (a) explain the theoretical logic of why that factor is thought to be a cause of crisis
events in general, and (b) hypothesize about how each variable is expected to apply to your
particular case. Work through the general logic of the causes of crisis and make specific
references to your case, to show how each part of the logic applies to the specific case. Consider
how the independent variables might interact. Is one cause or explanation expected to be
relatively more influential as an explanation for your topic? Why or why not? All of your
reasoning in this section should apply logically to several potential crises. Avoid formulating
theories based on your knowledge of the specific crisis, unless the reasoning can be generalized
to many other potential crises or emergency situations.

In the final section of the paper, students will consider the evidence for their causes.
Students are expected to analyze and explain how the crisis’ historical record supports (or fails to
support) each of the theoretical causal explanations specified in the previous section. Does the
evidence support each theory in a way that was predicted? Why or why not? Use specific
information from your chosen crisis to explain and support your argument. Keep in mind that no
real-world example is perfectly explained by three or four causes. We hope for our theories to
explain as much as possible, but we have to be careful to look for evidence of what they don’t
explain.

Research papers must include references to books and/or refereed academic journal
articles. Students may cite readings assigned in the course but must also include references to at
least five other additional books or refereed academic journal articles. Regarding academic
journal articles, I recommend searching the UWM libraries website. (Go to “search and find” on
the upper left side of the main library page. Click on Databases A-Z and search JSTOR and
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts. Try searching by using the name of the crisis, a term like
“causes,” names of political actors, and other terms related to the explanations or causes. Also,
try searching coverage of the selected crisis in current news and in journals of current
international affairs.)

Students must include a summary of their theoretical argument and evidence (or
research findings) in the introduction to their research paper. This section is usually easiest to
write after the rest of the paper is finished.

The research paper is to be double-spaced, and the ten-page limit does not include
materials such as the title page, bibliography, and/or any additional charts, maps, or data
included. The ten-page maximum requirement is based upon standard fonts and margins. Be
sure to use the spelling and grammar review, number your pages, and use a standard reference
guide when citing your references, such the Chicago Manual of Style Online. The Chicago-Style
Quick Guide can be found at: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html>. It
provides many useful sample citation references. (Many political science journals use the
“author-date” method, which is probably the most common way to cite references in the field.)

Students are responsible for citing all references and for submitting their own work. It is
very important that you submit your own work; use quotations when incorporating the work of
others; cite references when paraphrasing; and cite all references carefully. UWM takes the issue of academic integrity seriously. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing other’s work (which may include “cutting and pasting” from the work of others, paraphrasing without citing the source, use of quotations without citing the source, and inadequate citation of references) will receive an “F.” Be aware that cases of academic misconduct reported to the University may result in severe penalties after a review process.

Student Presentations, Participation, and Attendance
Regarding participation and attendance, each student must present on three class discussion questions and provide written commentary on one other. When assigned the role of providing written commentary (i.e. sitting in the “hot seat”) students are expected to participate in the discussion and will be called upon, if they do not volunteer. Students presenting (or providing commentary) in a given week should talk to me after class on Wednesday the week before, in order to agree on what will be debated or discussed. Each student will prepare their own talking points, and presentation notes are due after class on the day that presentations are made. Students providing commentary will also submit their notes after class discussion. Students that miss four class periods will receive a zero for the 8.34% of their participation and attendance grade.

There will be no make-up essay-quizzes, although one essay may be dropped. No make-up midterm exams will be given without a university-accepted excuse. Students must produce the appropriate documentation stating why they were not able to be in class at the exact time of the exam. If you have a problem or miss the midterm exam, please contact me immediately. For additional information about UWM University policies see <http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf>. This web site contains a list of University policies regarding such issues as incompletes, grade appeal procedures, and University policy governing academic misconduct, among other things.

Students with special needs are responsible for making their needs known in the first two weeks of the semester, especially if accommodations are needed in order to meet any of the requirements of this course.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments
There is no assigned textbook for this class. All of the assigned readings are available on our class website on Canvas under “content.” The following schedule is subject to modification. Try to finish each day’s reading before class.

I. Introduction and Theory

Week 1 (Wednesday, 1/22): Overview of the Course

Week 2 (Monday, 1/27): International Relations Theory: Realism

(Wednesday, 1/29): Liberalism

Week 3 (Monday, 2/3): Constructivism

(Wednesday, 2/5): Soft Power

II. Current Crises and Events in International Relations
Week 4 (Monday, 2/10): The Syrian Civil War and International Involvement

(Wednesday, 2/12): The Syrian Civil War Continued


Week 5 (Monday, 2/17): Quiz #1 International Terrorism: ISIS and the Rise of Foreign Fighters


(Wednesday, 2/19): International Terrorism: ISIS and the Rise of Foreign Fighters Continued


9. Stanford University’s Mapping Militants Project web link: 
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/maps/view/islamic-state> 
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/maps/view/syria>

Week 6 (Monday, 2/24): The Migration/Refugee Crisis in Europe


(Wednesday, 2/26)


Week 7 (Monday, 3/2): Brexit and Strain within the European Union


(Wednesday, 3/4)


**Week 8 (Monday, 3/9): The Rise of Populism in Europe**


(Wednesday, 3/11): Midterm Exam

**UWM Spring Break March 15-22, 2020**

**Week 9 (Monday, 3/23): Russian Intervention is Ukraine (the Annexation of Crimea and Intervention in Eastern Ukraine)**


(Wednesday, 3/25)


**Week 10 (Monday, 3/30): Current Tension within NATO about How to Respond to Russia**


Week 10 (Wednesday, 4/1): China’s Assertiveness in the South and East China Seas

Week 11 (Monday, 4/6): China’s Assertiveness Continued

(Wednesday, 4/8): China’s Future

Week 12 (Monday, 4/13): Nuclear Proliferation: The Iran Nuclear Deal

(Wednesday, 4/15): Quiz #2 The Iran Nuclear Deal Continued


**Week 13 (Monday, 4/20): The Internationalization of Disease (Ebola and Zika)**


(Wednesday, 4/22)


**Week 14 (Monday, 4/27): Quiz #3 The Internationalization of Crime (The Mexican Drug Cartels)**


(Wednesday, 4/29): Cybersecurity

Week 15 (Monday, 5/4 and Wednesday, 5/6): North Korea’s Nuclear Program and Stability

The final exam is due *Wednesday, May 13, 2020, 7:30-9:30 a.m.*