

Nuclear Politics Fall 2025

Instructor: Dr. Naomi Egel (negel@uga.edu)

Course Date/Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:35-10:50am

Course Location: Park Hall Room 144

Office Hours Date/Time: Tuesdays 11:30am-1:30pm

Office Hours Location: 202 Herty Drive (International Affairs Building) Room 327

I. Course Overview

This course is an undergraduate seminar on the politics of nuclear weapons. It is intended to provide students with an understanding of the theoretical issues surrounding nuclear weapons, their historical development, the impact they have on world politics and policy, and nuclear arms control and disarmament initiatives. This is a course on nuclear weapons, not nuclear energy.

The course is divided into three sections. The first covers key concepts in nuclear politics, including deterrence, crises, proliferation, nonproliferation, and arms control. The second section applies these concepts to understanding the nuclear histories and policies of individual nuclear weapon states. The third section examines how nuclear politics are shaped by other issues in international relations.

By the end of this semester, you should be able to:

- Understand factors that affect the pursuit, threat, and control of nuclear weapons
- Understand the nuclear weapons policies of different nuclear weapon states
- Analyze how nuclear weapons intersect with other issues in international relations
- Evaluate contemporary policy debates related to the role of nuclear weapons in foreign policy, deterrence, nonproliferation, and arms control.

Course Materials

Most readings for this course are open access or are available online through the UGA Library (tip: when searching the UGA Library website for a book, the ebook version is often the second result). Readings marked with a * are uploaded onto eLC. Students are not required to purchase any materials for this course. Reading must be completed before each class. If you encounter difficulties accessing any of the readings, please contact me. Students are responsible for all assigned readings, even if the material is not discussed in class.

Assignments

All assignments should be submitted through eLC. If you encounter difficulties with eLC, you may email your assignments directly to me.

1. In-class midterm (25% of grade)

The midterm on September 30 will consist of short responses and an essay. You will need to purchase a bluebook or greenbook from the student store for the midterm.

2. Final paper (25% of grade)

The final paper for this class is a policy analysis of between 2,500-3,500 words (approximately 10-15 double-spaced pages), regarding a topic or issue related to this class. For example, a paper might analyze how to address risks of nuclear proliferation from US allies or how to strengthen norms against using nuclear weapons. The analysis should provide 1) an overview of the policy issue, 2) the pros and cons of 2-3 different courses of action, and 3) a recommendation for what course(s) of action to take. The policy analysis should include citations in the form of footnotes (not included in the total word count). The policy analysis cannot be focused on the NPT Review Conference, given that this is the topic of the in-class simulation. You are encouraged to discuss your topic with me in office hours. The final paper is due on December 5 at 11:59pm.

3. Simulation preparation, participation, and reflection (5% + 10% + 5% = 20% of grade)

- a. We will conduct a simulation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference over 3 days (October 28, 30, and November 4). Students will work together in teams of 2 to represent a country at the Review Conference. Additional background and instructions will be given in advance of the simulation.
- b. Simulation preparation: Each team will submit a preparation document of approximately 3 pages (double-spaced) on your country's position and goals going into the NPT review conference. What will you advocate for? What will you oppose? What countries are your likely partners? This should be based on background research regarding your country's involvement in past NPT review conferences. Each team will receive one grade for this assignment.
- c. Simulation participation: Each person will be graded on their individual participation in each of the three days of the simulation.
- d. Simulation reflection: Each team will submit a reflection of approximately 3 pages (double-spaced) on the extent to which your country succeeded in achieving its goals in the simulation and why or why not. Finally, develop 2-3 recommendations for your country to pursue at the next NPT review conference. Each team will receive one grade for this assignment.

4. Nuclear event writeup (5% of grade)

Outside of class, choose one nuclear-related government, think tank, or academic event to attend and write a reflection of 2 pages (double-spaced). The reflection should briefly summarize the event (less than 1 page of summary) and should provide your own analysis of the discussion. This should include what you agreed or disagreed with (and why), connections between the speakers' discussion and discussions in our classroom, and additional implications of speakers' comments. The event can be in-person or virtual. I will share various events in class; however, it is up to you to find and attend an event for this assignment. If you have questions about whether an event falls within the scope of this assignment, ask me. This assignment must be completed (and submitted) by December 1, 2025 at 11:59pm.

UGA's Benson-Bertsch [Center for International Trade and Security](#) (CITS) hosts events during the semester. A non-exhaustive list of think tanks and research institutions that often have nuclear-related events that can be joined virtually includes:

[Belfer Center](#) (Harvard University)
[Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)
[Center for International Security and Cooperation](#) (Stanford University)
[MIT Security Studies Program](#)
[Nuclear Threat Initiative](#)
[Project on Nuclear Issues](#) (Center for Strategic and International Studies)

5. Movie reflection (5% of grade)

Instead of attending class in-person on Tuesday, November 25, watch *Dr. Strangelove*, a classic movie about nuclear risks. Write a short essay of 1,200-1,500 words (approximately 5-6 double-spaced pages) analyzing the movie, including how it relates to class content and its relevance today. This assignment can be completed before November 25 but is due no later than November 25 at 11:59pm.

The movie can be accessed for free [here](#). You should read this corresponding [article](#) *only after you have watched the movie*.

6. Class participation (20% of grade)

As this is a seminar-style class, class participation is an important component of the course and of your grade. You will need to come to class having done the reading, ready to engage with the material, and prepared to share your thoughts. All students are expected to complete all the assigned readings before the class meetings, attend class, and participate constructively in each class. Attendance is a prerequisite for participation and unexcused absences will negatively affect your participation grade.

Key Dates

Midterm: September 30, 2025

Simulation preparation due: October 21, 2025

NPT simulation: October 28, 30 and November 4, 2025

Simulation reflection due: November 11, 2025

Dr. Strangelove assignment due (no in-person class): November 25, 2025

Event reflection due: December 1, 2025

Final paper due: December 5, 2025

Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours on Tuesdays from 11:30am-1:30pm. You do not need to make an appointment for office hours. Please come to discuss class material, questions about assignments, or other topics related to this class. If my regular office hours do not work with your schedule, you can email me to set up a different time to meet.

II. Classroom Policies

These policies are borrowed and adapted from the Center for Teaching and Learning

Academic Integrity and Honesty

The UGA Student Honor Code states: "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." A Culture of Honesty, the University's

policies and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at <https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/>. Plagiarism refers to the use of others' ideas and/or material without citing the source of the ideas and/or material, *whether intentional or unintentional*. The use of Chat GPT or other generative AI tools in your written assignments is considered plagiarism. Any student who is cheating or plagiarizing will be referred to Judicial Affairs.

Electronics Policy

Laptops are permitted in class for notetaking purposes only. Students may not audio or video record class sessions unless they have received written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center. If students have such an authorization, they:

- Understand that they may use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course.
- Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures, and they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
- Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
- Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.

Accommodations

Students with disabilities that require accommodation should register with UGA's Disability Resource Center at drc.uga.edu, as well as notify me about those accommodations in the beginning of the semester. Students who need accommodation for religious or cultural reasons should notify me as soon as possible.

Inclusion

This class strives to promote a sense of community and a welcoming space for a diversity of ideas, perspectives, and experiences. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, and nationality. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. If your preferred name or gender pronoun differs from that listed in Athena, please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Absences

While in-person student participation is expected for the course, it is possible that health issues may affect your attendance. *Do not come to class if you are feeling sick*. Excused student absence from in-person participation include illness or a health emergency, death of a family member, and documented disabilities. If you are requesting one of these exceptions, notify me of

the reason for the absence and provide accompanying documentation where relevant. When possible, students should notify me in advance of class.

Appeals

If you strongly feel that your grade on an assignment does not reflect the quality of your work, you may appeal by writing a 1-2 page memo that explains, in as much detail as possible, why you think you should have received a different grade. Give the memo to me, along with your graded assignment and a letter in which you formally request a re-grade. I will re-evaluate your work and assign a grade, which may be higher, lower, or the same as the original grade.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources:

If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu/>. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services. UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (<https://well-being.uga.edu/communityresources/>) or crisis support (<https://healthcenter.uga.edu/emergencies/>). If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (<https://caps.uga.edu/well-being-prevention-programs-mental-health/>) for a list of free workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center. Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

III. Detailed Course Schedule

* indicates reading on eLC

8/14 Session 1: Introduction

Hennigan, W.J. 2024. "Preventing Nuclear War." *The New York Times*. March 7.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/03/07/opinion/nuclear-war-prevention.html>

8/19 Session 2: Early Nuclear History

What was the legacy of World War II for subsequent nuclear strategy?

*Sherwin, Martin. 1987. *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and the Origins of the Arms Race*. Introduction (pp. 3-9) and Chapter 9 (pp. 220-238).

Alperovitz, Gar. 1995. "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess." *Foreign Policy* 99: 15–34.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1149003>.

8/21 Session 3: Deterrence

What is the logic of deterrence? How does it work?

Schelling, Thomas. 1966. *Arms and Influence*. New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 35-91

Watch: Center for Strategic and International Studies. 2021. Deterrence 101 Module (29 minutes). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1th_3vILd4

8/26 Session 4: Nuclear Crises

What role do nuclear weapons play in international crises?

Sechser, Todd and Matthew Fuhrmann. 2013. "Crisis Bargaining and Nuclear Blackmail." *International Organization* 67(1): 173-195. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43282156>

8/28 Session 5: The Nuclear Revolution

How have nuclear weapons changed international relations?

*Jervis, Robert. 1989. *The meaning of the nuclear revolution: Statecraft and the prospect of Armageddon*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapter 1 (pp. 1-45).

9/2 Session 6: Nuclear Accidents

How can nuclear accidents be avoided? Are nuclear accidents avoidable?

*Sagan, Scott 1993. *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction (pp. 3-10) and Chapter 6 (pp. 250-280)

9/4 Session 7: Proliferation Part 1

Why and how do states pursue nuclear weapons?

Debs, Alexandre and Nuno Monteiro. 2017. "Conflict and Cooperation on Nuclear Nonproliferation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 331–349. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051215-022839>

Sagan, Scott. 1996-1997. "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21(3): 54-86. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539273>

9/9 Session 8: Proliferation Part II

Narang, Vipin. 2016. "Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation." *International Security* 41(3): 110-150. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26777792>

9/11 No class: Dr. Egel at conference

9/16 Session 9: Nonproliferation

How can countries prevent proliferation?

Gibbons, Rebecca. 2022. *The Hegemon's Toolkit: US Leadership and the Politics of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp.1-35). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv1xn0v9d>

Roehrlich, Elisabeth. 2022. *Inspectors for Peace: A History of the International Atomic Energy Agency*. Chapter 9 (pp. 203-232).

9/18 Sessions 10: Arms Control

Why and how have countries attempted to limit or prohibit nuclear weapons?

*Schelling, Thomas and Morton Halperin. 1961. *Strategy and Arms Control*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund. Chapter 1.

Maurer, John. 2018. "The Purposes of Arms Control." *Texas National Security Review* 2(1): 8-27. <https://tnsr.org/2018/11/the-purposes-of-arms-control/>

9/23 Session 11: Disarmament

Müller, Harald and Carmen Wunderlich. 2020. "Nuclear Disarmament without the Nuclear-Weapon States: The Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty." *Daedalus* 149(2): 171–189. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01796

9/25: Session 12: Nuclear Norms

What are the existing norms regarding nuclear weapons?

Tannenwald, Nina. 1999. "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use." *International Organization* 53(3): 433–468. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2601286>

Dill, Janina, Scott Sagan, and Benjamin Valentino. 2022. "Kettles of Hawks: Public Opinion on the Nuclear Taboo and Noncombatant Immunity in the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Israel." *Security Studies* 31(1): 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2022.2038663>

9/30: Midterm

10/2: No class

10/7: Session 13: United States

What is distinctive about individual nuclear weapon states? What do they share in common?

Kristensen, Hans, Matt Korda, Eliana Johns, and Mackenzie Knight. 2025. "United States nuclear weapons, 2025." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 81(1): 53–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2024.2441624>

10/9 Session 14: Russia

Kristensen, Hans, Matt Korda, Eliana Johns, and Mackenzie Knight. 2025. "Russian Nuclear Weapons, 2025." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 81(3): 208–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2025.2494386>

*Adamsky, Dmitry. 2023. "Russia's New Nuclear Normal." *Foreign Affairs*

10/14 Session 15: China

Kristensen, Hans, Matt Korda, Eliana Johns, and Mackenzie Knight. 2025. "Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2025." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 81(2): 135-160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2025.2467011>

10/16: Session 16: India and Pakistan

Sethi, Manpreet. 2022. "Understanding the Nuclear Landscape in Southern Asia: Complexities and Possibilities." *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5(2): 224-242. <http://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2022.2156253>

Clary, Christopher. 2023. "Twenty-Five Years of Overt Nuclear India." *Arms Control Today*. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-10/features/twenty-five-years-overt-nuclear-india>

10/21: Session 17: North Korea and Iran Simulation preparation due

Hecker, Sigfried. 2023. *Hinge Points: An Insider Look at North Korea's Nuclear Program*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. Chapters 1, 3, and 21.

*Brewer, Eric. 2024. "Iran's New Nuclear Threat: How Tehran Has Weaponized Its Threshold Status." *Foreign Affairs*

10/23: Session 18: Past and Potential Nuclear Aspirants

Braut-Hegghammer, Målfrid. 2016. *Unclear Physics: Why Iraq and Libya Failed to Build Nuclear Weapons*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Conclusion (pp. 218-230).

Panda, Ankit and Tristan Volpe. 2024. "Limited Leverage: Nuclear Latency in South Korea's Alliance Bargaining." *The Washington Quarterly* 47(1): 147-166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2024.2326727>

10/28, 10/30, and 11/4 Sessions 19, 20, and 21: NPT Simulation

NPT background readings (to be assigned)

11/6 Session 22: Nuclear Terrorism *How big a threat is nuclear terrorism?*

Lieber, Kier and Daryl Press. 2013. "Why States Won't Give Nuclear Weapons to Terrorists," *International Security* 38(1): 80-104. https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/IS3801_pp080-104.pdf

11/11 Session 23: Intersections With Other Issues, Part I

How do issues not traditionally associated with nuclear weapons affect nuclear weapons policies?

Simulation reflection due

Adamsky, Dmitry. 2019. *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy: Religion, Politics, and Strategy*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. Chapter 11 and Epilogue (pp. 233-255).

Kwong, Jamie. 2023. "How Climate Change Challenges the U.S. Nuclear Deterrent." Report. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/07/10/how-climate-change-challenges-u.s.-nuclear-deterrent-pub-90130>

11/13 Session 24: Intersections With Other Issues, Part II

Cohn, Carol. 1987. "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals." *Signs* 12(4): 687–718. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174209>.

Hennigan, W.J. 2024. "The Toll." *New York Times*. June 20. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/06/20/opinion/nuclear-weapons-testing.html?unlocked_article_code=1.1E0.GrBo.qDRgTlDSsFNS&smid=url-share

11/18 Session 25: Nuclear Weapons and Emerging Technologies

To what extent do emerging technologies create new nuclear dangers?

Fetter, Steve and Jaganath Sankaran. 2024. "Emerging technologies and challenges to nuclear stability." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 48(2): 252–296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2024.2433766>

11/20 Session 26: The Future of Nuclear Weapons

Narang, Vipin and Scott Sagan. 2022. *The Fragile Balance of Terror: Deterrence in the New Nuclear Age*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Introduction and Conclusion (pp. 1-10; 230-250). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv310vm0j>

11/25: Session 27: Dr. Strangelove (no in-person class)

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.