

ECH 1101-A

WAR AND PEACE: BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Winter 2026

Prof. Roland Paris

Course Information

Class Schedule

In person lectures, Montpetit Hall (MNT), Room 203.
Mondays 4:00-5:20 p.m. and Wednesdays 2:30-3:50 pm.

Instructor

Name: [Roland Paris](#)

Email: rparis@uottawa.ca

Office Hours

In-person: Wednesdays 10 a.m.-12 p.m. in FSS 6005E. No reservation required; just show up.

Online: Various times. Book a 15-minute Teams meeting using this tool: <https://calendly.com/rparis/15-minute-meeting>

The answers to many questions can be found in this document. Please read it carefully before sending your questions to me or the TAs. Please allow **at least two (2) business days** for a reply before sending any further messages on the same topic (note: weekends are not business days).

Official Course Description

Study the root causes of wars, peace efforts, and crises in today's world. Develop a deeper understanding of the issues currently dominating the headlines by analyzing their causes and consequences. Study several contemporary crises, such as armed conflicts, humanitarian disasters, large-scale human rights violations, and diplomatic conflicts, and identify their origins, consequences, and possible solutions.

Additional Course Information

In this course, we will take a deeper look at four major armed conflicts and crises (Afghanistan, Ukraine, Mali, and Israel-Palestine) and two cases of currently rising tensions (in the Taiwan Strait and the Caribbean Sea). Going “behind the headlines” means examining causes, consequences, and potential solutions in detail.

Although this course is designed for the [Conflict and Human Rights](#) (ECH) major, it is fully accessible to students from outside the program who may be new to the subject.

Please **print out and read this syllabus carefully**. It contains the answers to many common questions and outlines the policies and expectations for this course. If you still have questions after reviewing it, you are welcome to come to my office hours or to [book an online appointment](#). If you have a short question, you can email also me. (I aim to respond to student emails within two business days of receiving them; please note that weekends are not considered business days.)

A word of warning: Students who do not complete the required readings will have difficulty getting good grades in this course – and could fail. The midterm and final exams will be based both on the lectures and required readings. You will also learn more from the lectures if you do the readings in advance.

The lectures will be recorded and available later on Brightspace. Although I will not take attendance, I strongly encourage you to attend the lectures. Students who attend in person typically perform better — often *a lot* better — than those who don't. Plus, it's a lot more fun to attend class in person than on your computer!

Grading

Evaluation	Date	Exam covers	Percent of course grade
Midterm exam #1	Feb. 4	Sessions 1-7	25%
Midterm exam #2	Mar. 11	Sessions 9-15	25%
Final exam	Exam period	Entire course	50%

The two midterm exams will be held in the regular classroom during the regular class time.

The final exam will be 3 hours and held during the exam period (the precise date, location, and time will be provided by the Registrar's Office).

Missed Exams

According to [academic regulation A-8.6](#), absence from any examination or test on medical grounds or due to exceptional personal circumstances, must be reported by submitting the online [Declaration of Absence from an Evaluation form](#) **within three (3) working days of the examination date**, except if extenuating circumstances prevent the student from doing so; these circumstances must be documented.

EIN (fail) Grading Policy

Students who do not write either the midterm exam or the final exam will receive a grade of Incomplete (EIN) in this course.

Readings and Lectures

Links to all readings are available on the course Brightspace page. Your knowledge of the main arguments of the required readings, along with the content of the lectures, will be tested in the midterm and final exams. You will not be tested on your knowledge of any optional readings, videos, or maps. I strongly advise you to arrange your schedule so that you can keep up with the required readings in the course.

Artificial Intelligence

If you use AI to summarize the course readings, rather than doing the readings yourself, you risk missing important elements that could be on your midterm or final exams. However, if you are confused or uncertain about any concepts you come across in the readings, you are welcome to use AI as a supplemental "personal tutor" (while recognizing that AI can generate misleading results).

Important additional information: The following information is also available on the Faculty of Social Sciences website, on the [Student Hub](#) webpage under «[Ressources, administrative policies and academic Regulations](#)»

- **Intellectual Property Rights of Course Content:** The professor retains copyright to all material created as part of their course, including online courses, unless they have entered into another copyright agreement. Visit the [Copyright Office webpage](#) or consult your professor.
- **Artificial intelligence (AI) and academic integrity:** Consult your professor to obtain the parameters of [using AI](#) to complete your assignments in his or her course.
- **Health and wellness:** There are many [resources available](#) to help you.
- **Institutional Policies and Academic Regulations:** It is very important to know the institutional [policies and academic regulations](#) associated with your academic success. Listed below are some of the key academic regulations you should familiarize yourself with:
 - **Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct:** If you would like clarification regarding academic integrity and misconduct, please consult [Academic Regulation A-4](#) or consult your professor.
 - **Bilingualism at the University of Ottawa:** Per [Academic Regulation A-1](#) : « Except in programs and courses for which language is a requirement, all students have the right to produce their written work and to answer examination questions in the official language of their choice, regardless of the course's language of instruction.»
 - **Academic regulation – deferred mid-term or final exam:** Per [Academic Regulation A-8.6](#), students must submit the online [Declaration of Absence from an exam](#) form within the five (5) working days following the exam in order to differ a mid-term or final exam. An administrative fee of \$60 will be charged to the student's account for each submission.

Indigenous Affirmation

We pay respect to the Algonquin people, who are the traditional guardians of this land. We acknowledge their longstanding relationship with this territory, which remains unceded. We pay respect to all Indigenous people in this region, from all nations across Canada, who call Ottawa home. We acknowledge the traditional knowledge keepers, both young and old. And we honour their courageous leaders: past, present, and future.

Course Schedule

PART I – INTRODUCTION

Jan. 12 – Session 1: Introduction to the Course

In this session:

- I will describe the main themes of the course and its requirements. If you haven't already read this course syllabus carefully, please be sure to do so now.

Required reading:

- Course syllabus (this document)
- Margaret MacMillan, "Humanity, Society and War," in *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* (Penguin, 2020), pp. 1-29.

Questions to consider while you read:

- What drew you to a course about war and peace?
- What are three things that you learned or took away from MacMillan's chapter

Jan. 14 – Session 2 – What is War?

In this session:

- We will explore different perspectives on the meanings of "war" and "peace."

Required reading:

- Cameron D. Lippard, Pavel Osinsky and Lon Strauss, "The Nature of War," in *War: Contemporary Perspectives on Armed Conflicts around the World* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-16.

Questions to consider while you read:

- What associations do you have with the words "war" and "peace"?
- Is there a difference between "war" and other types of conflict? Does this distinction make sense?

Jan. 19 – Session 3 – Why Do Wars Happen?

In this session:

- We will explore different explanations for why wars occur.

Required reading:

- Beatrice Heuser, "Root Causes and Drivers of War," in *War: A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices* (Oxford, 2022), pp. 127-149.

Questions to consider while you read:

- Which of the causes of war described by Heuser seem the most convincing to you?
- Which seem the least convincing? Why?

Jan 21 – Session 4 – How to Study War and Peace

In this session:

- We will consider different ways in which war and peace can be studied. We will also talk about how to examine the case studies of conflict in the remainder of our course.

Two required videos:

- Todd Landman, "An Introduction to Case Studies," Sage Research Methods (2017), watch Part 2, "Selecting a Case Study."
- David Spiegelhalter, "Correlation vs Causation: A Brief Guide to Communicating Research," Winton Centre, University of Cambridge (Nov. 3, 2020).

Required reading:

- None.

Questions to consider while you read:

- What are some research questions about war and peace that you can imagine investigating (or *wanting* to investigate)? What approaches could you take to answer these questions?
- What can researchers learn from case studies of specific wars? And what are the some of the challenges in drawing conclusions from case studies?

PART II – CASE STUDIES

Jan. 26 – Session 5 – AFGHANISTAN Before 9/11

In this session:

- We will explore conditions in Afghanistan from the end of the Soviet occupation until September 11, 2001.

Optional introductory video:

- "The Complex History of Afghanistan," Nobel Peace Prize Forum (2022).

Required reading:

- Excerpt from Michael Rubin, "Who Is Responsible for the Taliban?" American Enterprise Institute (March 1, 2002).

Questions to consider while you read:

- What happened in Afghanistan after the Soviet Union withdrew its forces from that country in 1989?
- How did the Taliban gain power in the 1990s?
- What were Pakistan's interests and involvement in Afghanistan during that period?

Jan. 28 – Session 6 – AFGHANISTAN: US Invasion and Aftermath

In this session:

- We will examine the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and steps taken to stabilize the country after the apparent defeat of the Taliban regime.

Optional video:

- "How to Lose a War in 20 Years," Imperial War Museums (2021).

Required reading:

- Andrew Cottey, "Afghanistan and the New Dynamics of Intervention: Counter-Terrorism and Nation Building," *SIPRI Yearbook 2003* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2003), pp. 167-194.

Questions to consider while you read:

- On what basis did the U.S. justify its military action in Afghanistan?
- What was the U.S. military strategy?
- What arrangements were put into place after the Taliban's apparent defeat?

Optional reading (primary document):

- U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's handwritten comments on "U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan" document, October 16, 2001.

Feb. 2 – Session 7 – AFGHANISTAN: Insurgency, Escalation, and Failure

In this session:

- We will examine the resurgence of violence in the years after the 2001 invasion, how the U.S. and its allies responded, and what lessons can be drawn from the 20-year international effort.

Required reading:

- Astri Suhrke, "A Contradictory Mission? NATO from Stabilization to Combat in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 15 no. 2, (April 2008), pp. 214-236.

Questions to consider as you read:

- What explains why the international mission in Afghanistan ran into difficulties?
- Was there a "contradiction" at the heart of this mission, as Suhrke argues? What does she mean – and do you agree with her?
- How is "counterinsurgency" strategy supposed to work?
- What, in your opinion, are the three most important lessons of the Afghanistan war?

Optional reading:

- Roland Paris, "Afghanistan: What Went Wrong?" *Perspectives on Politics* 11:2 (June 2013), pp. 538-548.

Feb. 4 – Session 8 – MIDTERM EXAM #1 (Held in our regular classroom at the regular time. This midterm covers the lecture materials and the required readings for Sessions 1-7.)

Feb. 9 – Session 9 – UKRAINE: Background to the War

In this session:

- We will examine the context leading up to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Required reading:

- Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States* (Polity, 2023), pp. 1-15.

Questions to consider as you read:

- What were Russia's and Ukraine's respective goals?
- What methods short of war did Russia use to try to achieve its goals?
- What were NATO's options faced with Russia's increasing aggressiveness towards Ukraine?
- Was the escalation towards the 2022 full-scale invasion "inevitable"?

Feb. 11 – Session 10 – UKRAINE: Russia's Full-Scale Invasion

In this session:

- We will discuss Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion and how the war has unfolded since then.

Required reading:

- "War in Ukraine," Council on Foreign Relations (regularly updated webpage).
- Excerpt from Jean-Marc Rickli and Federico Mantellassi, "The War in Ukraine," Geneva Centre for Security Policy (April 2024), pp. 8-14.

Questions to consider as you read:

- What do you think Russia's strategy was in February 2022, and why did it apparently fail to work out as planned?
- What are Russia and Ukraine's strategic goals in this war?
- How has the war itself changed since 2022?

Feb. 15-21 – Reading week (no class meetings)

Feb. 23 – Session 11 – UKRAINE: How It Might End

In this session:

- We will consider the question of how wars end in general, and how the Ukraine war in particular might end.

Required reading:

- Max Bergmann and Maria Snegovaya, "Russia's War in Ukraine: The Next Chapter," Center for Strategic and International Studies (September 2025).

Questions to consider as you read:

- What factors make a negotiated ceasefire so difficult, and what does this reveal about the limits of diplomacy in wartime?
- Under what conditions do you believe a negotiated peace would become most likely?
- Can you imagine any alternative ways the Ukraine war might end, beyond those discussed by the authors?

Feb. 25 – Session 12 – EXTRA: A Glimpse of Future War?

In this session:

- We will use the Ukraine war as a window into the evolving technology of warfare.

Required reading:

- Aosheng Pusztaszeri and Emily Harding, "Technological Evolution on the Battlefield," Center for Strategic and International Studies (September 2025).

Questions to consider as you read:

- How are new technologies changing war?
- What are the ethical and strategic implications of widespread drone and autonomous-weapon use?
- How might new technologies be used to promote peace?

Mar. 2 – Session 13 – MALI: Background to the War

In this session:

- We will discuss the conflict context leading up to the deployment of a major United Nations peace operation in Mali in 2013.

Optional introductory video:

- "Origins of Mali's Tuareg Conflict," Caspian Report (April 2013).

Required reading:

- Steven Zyck and Robert Muggah, "Conflicts Colliding in Mali and the Sahel," *Stability*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2013), pp. 1-6.
- William Lloyd George, "Mali's irrevocable crisis," Al Jazeera, April 16, 2012, pp. 1-3.

Questions to consider while you read:

- How was the 2012 crisis different from previous political crises in Mali?
- What were the primary causes and motivations behind the conflict?
- What external factors contributed to the conflict in Mali?

Mar. 4 – Session 14 – MALI: International Intervention

In this session:

- We will discuss the international intervention in Mali (which aimed to stabilize the country and to help implement a peace agreement, while also combating terrorism) and we will examine how the United Nations mission performed in these roles.

Optional video:

- United Nations, "MINUSMA: Securing Peace In Mali," February 2, 2017.

Required reading:

- Brief overview of the purposes (or "mandate") of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).
- Bruno Charbonneau, "Intervention in Mali: Building Peace between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2017), pp. 415–31.

Questions to consider as you read:

- What are the main principles of "peacekeeping" and of "counter-terrorism," according to the Charbonneau?
- How did the tension between these two concepts play out in Mali?

Mar. 9 – Session 15 – MALI: End of the UN Mission and the Future of Peacekeeping

In this session:

- We will take stock of the MINUSMA mission in Mali, explore why the Malian government asked the UN mission to depart, and discuss the implications for security in Mali and the surrounding region (which is called "the Sahel").

Optional video:

- "MINUSMA: Why Did the UN Mission in Mali fail?" BBC Africa (Nov. 2024).

Required reading:

- El-Ghassim Wane, "MINUSMA's withdrawal from Mali: Brief overview of the mission's performance and challenges, and lessons for peacekeeping in Africa," ACCORD Conflict and Resilience Monitor, May 28, 2024.

- Richard Gowan and Daniel Forti, "What Future for UN Peacekeeping in Africa after Mali Shuttters Its Mission?" International Crisis Group (July 2023).

Questions to consider while you read:

- In what ways did the UN mission succeed, and in what ways did it fail?
- Did the end of the mission indicate anything about the possible future of UN peace operations?
- What are some of the challenges of attempting to resolve civil wars?

Mar. 11 – Session 16 – MIDTERM EXAM #2 (Regular time and place, covering Sessions 9-15.)

Mar. 16 – Session 17 – Israel-Palestine: Background to the War in Gaza

In this session:

- We will explore the historical context prior to the October 7 attacks and subsequent war in Gaza.

Required reading:

- Jeremy Pressman, "A Brief History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict" (University of Connecticut, 2005).

Questions to consider while you read:

- How should we define the different phases of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and what have been the main characteristics of each phase?
- What have been the principal obstacles to peace on both sides of the conflict?
- How important have historical narratives and collective memory (e.g., Nakba, Holocaust, 1967 victory, intifadas) been in shaping public attitudes about peace?

Mar. 18 – Session 18 – ISRAEL-PALESTINE: October 7 and Aftermath

In this session:

- We will examine the events of October 7 and the subsequent war in Gaza.

Required reading:

- "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," Council on Foreign Relations (regularly updated).
- Steven A. Cook, "Two Years After Oct. 7, a Trail of What-Ifs," *Foreign Policy* (October 6, 2025).

Questions to consider while you read:

- Did Israel have a right to respond militarily to the October 7 attacks?
- How would you evaluate its response, and the impact of this response on the prospects for long-term peace?
- How has the conflict affected tensions in other parts of the Middle East?
- Has the response of other countries (around the world) been helpful or harmful?

Optional reading:

- [On the rules of war:] Canadian Armed Forces, *The Soldier's Handbook on the Law of Armed Conflict Applicable to Land Warfare*, (Office of the Judge Advocate General, September 2025).

Mar. 23 – Session 19 – ISRAEL-PALESTINE: What Comes Next?

In this session:

- We will explore consider possible futures of the Israel-Palestine conflict, including the long-discussed "two-state solution" and the difficult question of who will govern Gaza.

Required reading:

- Mohammed R. Mhawish, "Gaza's Broken Politics," *The New Yorker* (October 14, 2025).
- Mariel Ferragamo and Diana Roy, "The Quest for Palestinian Statehood: What to Know," Council on Foreign Relations (September 23, 2025).

Questions to consider while you read:

- What happened to the "two-state solution"? Is it a dead idea? Can it be revived? Are there better alternatives?
- In what ways are Palestinian politics "broken" and how does this make a lasting peace harder to achieve?
- What are the continuing impediments on the Israeli side to achieving a lasting peace?

Mar. 25 – Session 20 – TAIWAN STRAIT: Why are Tensions Rising?

In this session:

- We will learn about the historical origins of recent tensions in the Taiwan Strait (i.e., the waterway between Taiwan and mainland China).

Required reading:

- Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang, "The Taiwan Strait Conflict," Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective, Ohio State University (April 2024).

Questions to consider as you read:

- How do the leaders of the People's Republic of China (i.e., mainland China) view Taiwan?
- Why did the United States pursue a policy of "strategic ambiguity" towards Taiwan?
- What does "self-determination" really mean in a context like Taiwan's, where identity, history, and geopolitics are deeply entangled?

Mar. 30 – Session 21 – TAIWAN STRAIT: Avoiding War

In this session:

- We will examine the current situation in the Taiwan Strait and consider possible future scenarios.

Required reading:

- "Confrontation Over Taiwan," Council on Foreign Relations (regularly updated webpage).
- "The Taiwan Scenarios 1: Subversion, Quarantine, Blockade, Invasion," The Strategist, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, July 21, 2025.

Questions to consider while you read:

- In what ways could "shadow war" methods (cyber, disinformation, economic pressure) be more destabilizing than conventional ones?
- What might trigger a shift to open conflict?
- Should external powers act as deterrents, mediators, or stay out entirely?

Apr. 1 – Session 22 – CARIBBEAN SEA: US Military Strikes

In this session:

- We will examine recent developments in the Caribbean Sea.

Required reading:

- To be provided.

Apr. 6 – Holiday (no class meeting)

Apr. 8 – Session 23 – CARIBBEAN SEA: What Counts as "War"?

In this session:

- We will explore the complicated question of what counts as “war” in this context, including legal issues.

Required reading:

- To be provided.

PART III - CONCLUSION

Apr. 13 – Session 24 – REFLECTING ON THE COURSE: Understanding War and Peace

In this session:

- We will take stock of what we have learned about "war and peace" in the conflicts we examined and more generally. We will also talk about preparing for the final exam.

Required reading:

- None

Question to consider:

- What are five significant things you learned in this course?
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FINAL EXAM

- 3 hours.
- During the exam period.
- Registrar's Office will announce the precise date, time, and location.