

# NTA-489: Current Topics in International Security

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Class Meetings	Contact Information
Tues/Thurs: 12:45 – 2:00PM, Miller Hall 2110	Instructor: Chris Price
Student Hours: 10AM – 3PM, Weds	Office: 2149 Miller Hall
9AM – 11AM, Thurs	Email: <a href="mailto:Price2CG@jmu.edu">Price2CG@jmu.edu</a>

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## Course Description

How do we apply existing theories on international security to new puzzles and questions? In this course, we will look at contemporary issues that affect international security, including relations between great powers, the interplay of international and domestic politics, ecological challenges of disease and climate change, and the effects of the information revolution.

While your previous courses have introduced you to established debates in the discipline, in this course we will focus on how to apply these theories to current problems. We will do this using traditional seminar methods of reading and discussion, with assessments which build a professional portfolio and develop your analytical skills.

The topics are a sampling of modern security challenges, including state and non-state threats to international order, state interests, and human well-being. I encourage you to think about questions and topics not covered by the course readings, and these topics are not the only ones which are important in the study of international security.

This course is a part of the larger curriculum. The design of the course, particularly in the content and assessments, is meant to prepare you to apply your skills after college. At the end of this course, you should be able to find emerging research, specify a research question, identify key alternative explanations, and propose how to effectively evaluate these explanations.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Evaluate contemporary problems in International Politics using existing theories and frameworks.
- Analyze complex cases of conflict and cooperation in the contemporary world.
- Communicate opinions on complex and controversial social problems effectively.

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## Course Organization

**Course Structure:** This course meets twice a week, for 75 minutes.

The first class of the week focuses on a particular theoretical debate, contrasting older and more recent articles, and talking about how it fits with our understanding from previous classes.

The second class of the week will focus on a specific case or cases to help us see how academic works can explain current events, as well as discussing how we conduct research and preparing for assignments.

**Course Materials:** All required readings will be posted on Canvas, and there is no obligation to buy a textbook.

**Summary Course Calendar:** Topics and readings may change throughout the term. While I will update the class of any changes, please stay alert to changes in course materials, assignments, or meetings.

Week	Dates	Topics	Notes
1	8/21	Introductions	
2	8/26, 8/28	Defining International Security	
3	9/2, 9/4	Great Power Competition	
4	9/9, 9/11	International Order	Due: Initial Topic Proposal, 9/12
5	9/16, 9/18	The Utility of Force	
6	9/23, 9/25	Nuclear Deterrence and Proliferation	JMU Family Weekend
7	9/30, 10/2	Changing Military Technology	Due: Reflective Essay 1, 9/29
8	10/7, 10/9	Cyber Conflict	
9	10/14, 10/16	Economic Coercion	Due: Working Bibliography, 10/13 Homecoming Weekend
10	10/21	Two Level Games	Fall Break
11	10/28, 10/30	Civil Wars	Due: Literature Review, 10/27
12	11/4, 11/6	International Terrorism	
13	11/11, 11/13	Illicit Markets	Due: Public Scholarship Assignment, 11/14
14	11/18, 11/20	Environmental Threats	Due: Reflective Essay 2, 11/21
15	11/25, 11/27	Thanksgiving Break – No Class	
16	12/2, 12/4	Concluding Thoughts and Final Presentations	Due: In-Class Presentation
Finals Period	12/9		Due: Professional Scholarship Assignment, 12/9 Reflection, 12/11

A more detailed version of the Course Schedule starts on [Page 5](#).

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## Assessments and Grades

**Methods of Assessment:** Your final grade will be assigned based on your achievement on the full set of assessments listed below. For each of these, I will provide you with a rubric laying out my expectations for that assignment, which I will provide to you in advance. For written assignments, I will provide you with feedback to help you improve as you go through the course. I do not use a curve in grading, as I believe curving grades can create perverse incentives for students and undermine the learning process.

### Summary Course Assignments:

Assignment	% of Final Grade	Due
Participation	24 (24 x 1%)	Earned throughout the semester
Reaction E-mails	6 (3 x 2%)	3 times during semester; No more than once per week.
Reflective Essays	10 (2 x 5%)	Essay 1 due Monday, 10AM, September 29 Essay 2 due Friday, 4PM, November 21
Initial Proposal	5	Due 5PM, Friday, September 12
Working Bibliography	10	Due 10AM, Monday, October 13
Literature Review	5	Due 10AM, Monday, October 27
Public Scholarship	15	Due 4PM, Friday, November 14
Class Presentation	5	Presented in last class session, December 4th
Professional Scholarship	15	Due 5PM, Tuesday, December 9
Final Reflection	5	Due 9AM, Thursday, December 11

More details on these assignments are available in Canvas.

### Grading Standards:

Above or Equal To	Below	Letter Grade
93	100	A
90	93	A-
87	90	B+
83	87	B
80	83	B-
77	80	C+
73	77	C
70	73	C-
65	70	D+
55	65	D
50	55	D-
0	50	F

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## Course Policies

A detailed description of course policies is available on the Course Canvas page, and I will describe key ones in our first meeting. Please take the time to read the detailed policies, as they are likely to answer questions which you may have during the course. The points below are ones that I want to reiterate, as they may be different from course to course, not the only policies for this class.

**Instructor Availability:** The easiest way to reach me is through email, [price2cg@jmu.edu](mailto:price2cg@jmu.edu). Don't worry about sending emails outside of normal working hours – part of why it is my preferred medium is that you can send your thoughts or questions when you have them, rather than waiting. I have scheduled student hours Wednesday and Thursday morning and am happy to find alternative ways to meet if you are booked at those times.

**Respect:** We are going to talk about emotionally charged topics, which include discussions on violence, religion, identity, and money. Many of the readings are critical and may challenge widely held views or beliefs. As such, it is important that we do our best to treat others as we would want to be treated, to choose our words with thought, and to give each other grace when (it's a when, not an if) someone says something that we may disagree with.

**Attendance and Participation:** Attendance is part of your grade, with an expectation you will be present and on time at least 24 out of the 28 scheduled class sessions. I don't need a doctor's note or picture of a car accident if you're absent – like most professional workplaces, I'm taking you at your word in explaining why you missed something. If you have a condition or outside situation means you will miss more than four classes for good reasons, please talk with me in person so we can find accommodation.

**Late Assignments:** Please do your best to turn in assignments by their assigned due date. In cases of emergency – family, medical, or for scheduled university events – I will grant extensions. In the absence of a written request for extension, or if a request does not meet these criteria, I will apply a late penalty, specified in the instructions for each assignment.

**Support:** The University wants you to do well, and has programs dedicated to support you in cases of emergency. While I do not want to pry in your affairs, if you are facing problems which are beyond your abilities to manage, please talk with me so I can refer you to university programs which are there to support you.

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## Detailed Course Schedule

### Week 1 - Introduction

#### Guiding Questions:

Are the expectations and assignments of this class clear to you? What are some of the topics you want to know more about by the end of class? Is there anything your instructor should know to help you succeed? Are there portions of the syllabus and class plan that can be productively changed?

#### Thursday, August 21st

- Syllabus, Canvas Site

### Week 2 – Defining International Security

#### Guiding Questions

How do we define security? What topics are included in International Security? Who decides what is (or isn't) a security issue? How do these claims affect what we study, and how we study it? How do we effectively read academic works on security?

#### Tuesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>

We will think about what goes into a definition of security, and trade-offs for different definitions.

- Tickner, J. Ann. 2018. Peace and Security From a Feminist Perspective. Pages 15-25 in *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*. Sara E. Davies and Jaqui True, eds. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Drezner, Daniel W. 2024. How Everything Became National Security (And National Security Became Everything). *Foreign Affairs* 103(5): 122-135.

#### Thursday, August 28<sup>th</sup>

We will discuss how to effectively read academic works.

We will also have a visit from the University Career Center.

- Hoover Green, Amelia. 2013. How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps. Manuscript.

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## Week 3 – Great Power Competition

### Guiding Questions

How has the distribution of power changed since the turn of the century? What implications does a changing distribution of power have for peace and stability?

### Tuesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>

We will talk about realist theories, emphasizing the importance of polarity, and how polarity has and hasn't changed since the turn of the century.

- Brooks, Stephen G. and William C. Wohlforth. 2016. The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position. *International Security* 40(3): 7–53.

### Thursday, September 4<sup>th</sup>

We will think about alternative predictions for how the rise of China will affect prospects for international peace and stability.

- Allison, Graham. 2020. The New Spheres of Influence: Sharing the Globe with Other Great Powers. *Foreign Affairs* 99(2): 30-40.
- Chatterjee Miller, Manjari. 2024. The Most Dangerous Game: Do Power Transitions Always Lead to War? *Foreign Affairs* 103(4): 128-135.
- Mitter, Rana. 2025. The Once and Future China. *Foreign Affairs* 104(3): 53-65.

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## Week 4 – International Institutions and Order

### Guiding Questions

Can institutions effectively manage great power competition? How have institutions and the global order changed over the past two decades? Do you have any questions about the Major Assessment exam?

### Tuesday, September 9<sup>th</sup>

- G. John Ikenberry. 2018. The End of Liberal International Order? *International Affairs* 94(1): 7–23.
- Kendall-Taylor, Andrea and Richard Fontaine. 2024. The Axis of Upheaval. *Foreign Affairs*: 103(3): 50-63.

### Thursday, September 11<sup>th</sup>

No class! As of this week, the Major Assessment will now only be given to Spring Seminar participants.

Please use this time to work on your initial topic proposal.

### Due:

Initial Proposal, Friday, 9/12, in Canvas, by 5PM

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## Week 5 – The Utility of Force

### Guiding Questions

How does the use of military force translate to political objectives? Why have powerful countries, despite using overwhelming military force, failed to achieve their political goals? Is military force becoming obsolete?

### Tuesday, September 16<sup>th</sup>

- Meuller, John. 2021. *The Stupidity of War*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Prologue: Pages 1- 24.

### Thursday, September 18<sup>th</sup>

We will think about how military force does or doesn't lead to political goals, based on the on-going war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

- Pape, Robert. 2025, August 7. The Unparalleled Devastation of Gaza: Why Punishing Civilians Has Not Yielded Strategic Success. *Foreign Affairs*: [Online Edition](#)
- Ayalon, Ami. 2025, August 5. Israel Is Fighting a War It Cannot Win. *Foreign Affairs*: [Online Edition](#).
- Dassa Kaye, Dalia. 2025, July 30. Israel's Squandered Victory. *Foreign Affairs*: [Online Edition](#).

### Posted:

Instructions, Resources, Rubric for First Review Essay

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## Week 6 – Nuclear Deterrence and Proliferation

### Guiding Questions:

How have nuclear weapons changed theories of international security? Do nuclear weapons make conventional war obsolete? Which nuclear policies make the world safer, and which more dangerous? How dangerous is nuclear proliferation? Why have we seen a slowing in nuclear proliferation?

### Tuesday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>

- Lieber, Keir A., and Daryl Grayson Press. 2020. *The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution: Power Politics in the Atomic Age*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Chapter 1, Pages 10-30.
- Tannenwald, Nina. 1999. The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use. *International Organization* 53(3): 433-468.

We will look at the arguments brought up in the readings to think about the nuclear modernization programs of existing nuclear powers.

### Thursday, September 25<sup>th</sup>

- Waltz, Kenneth N. 2013 (1995). Excerpts: Chapter 1, Pages 1-9. In *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)*, Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, eds. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.
- Hymans, Jacques E C. 2012. Botching the Bomb: Why Nuclear Weapons Programs Often Fail on Their Own – and Why Iran’s Might, too. *Foreign Affairs* 91(3): 44-53.
- Minchin Allison, David. 2025, July 14. Why Force Fails to Stop Nuclear Proliferation. *Foreign Affairs*, [available online](#).

We will look at these readings thinking about the case of the Iranian Nuclear Program.

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## Week 7 – Technology and Armed Conflict

### Guiding Questions

How does technological change affect the conduct of warfare? How do political and organizational factors affect the importance of technological changes? Do recent technological changes make war more or less likely? How do existing findings apply to explaining current trends in the war between Russia and Ukraine?

### Tuesday, September 30<sup>th</sup>

- Cohen, Eliot. 1996. A Revolution in Warfare. *Foreign Affairs* 75(2): 37-54.
- Talmadge, Caitlin. 2015. *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Excerpts, Chapter 1, Pages 12-33.

We will discuss how changes in technology and society affect the lethality and effectiveness of military forces.

We will have a visitor from Madison Center for Civic Engagement.

### Thursday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>

- Biddle, Stephen. 2023. Back in the Trenches: Why New Technology Hasn't Revolutionized War in Ukraine. *Foreign Affairs* 102(5): 153-167.
- Horowitz, Michael C., Lauren A. Kahn, and Joshua A. Schwartz. 2025, July 4. What Drones Can—and Cannot—Do on the Battlefield. *Foreign Affairs*, available [online](#).

We will think about how claims of a 'new' kind of war fit with evidence from Ukraine.

### Due:

Initial Review Essay, 10AM, Monday, September 29

### Posted:

Instructions, Rubric, Resources for Working Bibliography Assignment.

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## Week 8 – “Cyber” Conflict

### Guiding Questions

Does conflict in the virtual realm differ from conflict in the physical realm? Do these tools upend existing balances of power? What are the potential impacts of ‘cyber’ attacks on day-to-day life? What methods exist to lessen the potential harms?

### Readings for Tuesday, October 7<sup>th</sup>

- Gartzke, Erik. 2013. The Myth of Cyberwar: Bringing War in Cyberspace Back Down to Earth. *International Security* 38(2): 41–73.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2017. Deterrence and Dissuasion in Cyberspace. *International Security* 41(3): 44–71.

We will evaluate theoretical arguments on the differences between cyber and physical conflict.

### Readings for Thursday, October 9<sup>th</sup>

- Benjamin Jensen, Brandon Valeriano & Ryan Maness. 2019. Fancy Bears and Digital Trolls: Cyber Strategy With a Russian Twist. *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42(2): 212-234.
- Farwell, James P. and Rafal Rohozinski. 2011. Stuxnet and the Future of Cyber War. *Survival* 53(1): 23-40.

We will apply the theories we talked about on Tuesday to countries’ behavior in cyber-space.

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## Week 9 – Economic Coercion and Human Rights

### Guiding Questions

How different are military and economic coercive threats? Under what conditions are coercive threats likely to succeed, and under what conditions do they fail? What challenges exist in evaluating the effectiveness of coercive threats? What alternative methods exist to get nations to comply with universal goals, such as human rights?

### Tuesday, October 14<sup>th</sup>

- Drezner, Daniel. 2003. The Hidden Hand of Economic Coercion. *International Organization* 57(3): 643-659.
- Farrell, Henry and Abraham Newman. 2025. The Weaponized World Economy. *Foreign Affairs* 104(5): 8-23. Available in [Online Edition](#).

We will discuss the effectiveness of economic coercion, and the challenges in identifying when coercion succeeds and fails.

### Thursday, October 16<sup>th</sup>

- Hafner-Burton, Emilie M. 2008. Sticks and Stones: Naming and Shaming the Human Rights Enforcement Problem. *International Organization* 62(4): 689-716
- Rodriguez, Francisco. 2024, November 28. The Case for Engagement With Venezuela. *Foreign Affairs*. [Online Edition](#).

We will talk about how states can (and can't) use social pressures to improve human rights.

### Due:

Working Bibliography, 10AM, Monday, October 13<sup>th</sup>.

### Posted:

Instructions, Rubric, Resources for Literature Review Assignment

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## Week 10 – Two-Level Games: International Actors and Domestic Politics

### Guiding Questions

When do states interfere in the domestic politics of others? What means do governments use to influence the domestic politics of other nations? Under what conditions are these efforts likely to be successful? How do these efforts influence the possibility of international conflict and cooperation?

#### Tuesday, October 21<sup>st</sup>:

- Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink. 1999. Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics. *International Social Science Journal* 51(159): 89-101.
- McQuinn, Brian, Marcus Kolga, Cody Buntain, and Laura Courchesne. 2024. Russia Weaponization of Canada's Far Right and Far Left to Undermine Support for Ukraine. *International Journal* 79(2): 297-311.

#### Thursday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>:

Fall break – enjoy well deserved time off!

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## Week 11 – International Dimensions of Civil Wars

### Guiding Questions:

When and why do civil wars cause conflict in neighboring states? When and why do outside actors intervene in domestic conflict? How important are external actors in civil wars? What effect do international organizations and civil society have in resolving civil wars? How do we best combine insights from comparative politics and international relations to analyze civil wars?

### Tuesday, October 28<sup>th</sup>

We will discuss trends in the number and type of Civil Wars, and how this is affected by the International System.

- Kalyvas, Stathis and Laia Balcells. 2010. International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict. *American Political Science Review* 104(3): 415-429.

### Thursday, October 30<sup>th</sup>

We will discuss the theory and practice of peace-keeping.. **Everyone should read the Walter, Howard, and Fortna reading, and then only the case you are assigned to read.**

- Walter, Barbara F., Lise Morje Howard, and V. Page Fortna. 2021. The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace. *British Journal of Political Science* 51(4): 1705–1722.
- **Group A:** Howard, Lise Morjé. 2015. United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL). In Joachim A. Koops, Thierry Tardy, Norrie MacQueen, and Paul D. Williams. 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 351-362.
- **Group B:** Tardy, Thierry. 2015. United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP-Macedonia). In Joachim A. Koops, Thierry Tardy, Norrie MacQueen, and Paul D. Williams. 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 500-510.
- **Group C:** Koops, Joachim A. 2015. United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UN-MOT). In Joachim A. Koops, Thierry Tardy, Norrie MacQueen, and Paul D. Williams. 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 443-453.
- **Group D:** Guyot, Caroline, and Alex Vines. 2015. United Nations Angola Verification Missions II and III (UNAVEM II and III). In Joachim A. Koops, Thierry Tardy, Norrie

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MacQueen, and Paul D. Williams. 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 338-350.

**Due:**

Literature Review, 10AM, Monday, October 27.

**Posted:**

Prompts, Rubric, and Resources for Second Review Essay.

Instructions, Rubric, and Resources for Public and Private Scholarship Assignments.

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## Week 12 – International Terrorism

### Guiding Questions:

How has the level of terrorism changed since 2001? How important are changing technological means in explaining terrorism? How should states address international terrorism? What are the connections of terrorism to other types of violence in the international system? Should we even be worried about Terrorism?

### Tuesday, November 4th

We will look at a theoretical work discussing the limits of coercive terrorism, and examining the rise and fall of terrorist organizations.

- Kurth Cronin, Audrey. 2009. *How Terrorism Ends*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 7: How Al-Qaeda Ends, Pages 167-195.

### Thursday, November 6<sup>th</sup>

We will look at a theoretical work discussing online radicalization, and a brief work examining ties between white-supremacist terrorists as an example.

- Amarasingam, Amaranth. 2023. Belonging Is Just a Click Away: Extremism, Radicalisation, and the Role of Online Communities. Chapter 13, Pages 196-212, In *The Routledge Handbook on Radicalisation and Countering Radicalisation*. Joel Busher, Leena Malkki, and Sarah Marsden, eds. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Stevenson, Jonathon. 2019. Right-wing Extremism and the Terrorist Threat. *Survival* 61(1): 233-244.

### Posted:

Instructions, Rubric, and Resources for Final Week Presentation

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## Week 13 – Illicit Markets and Transnational Crime

### Guiding Questions:

Why are there transnational criminal groups? How have these changed in the past two decades? Why do states sometimes tolerate these groups, yet sometimes crack down? What approaches should be taken to combat international criminal networks? Are illicit market actors best understood as a security or economic problem?

### Tuesday, November 11<sup>th</sup>

- Andreas, Peter. 2011. Illicit Globalization: Myths, Misconceptions, and Historical Lessons. *Political Science Quarterly* 126(3): 403–25.
- Felbab-Brown, Vanda. 2017. *The Extinction Market: Wildlife Trafficking and How to Counter it*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Chapter 5, pp. 87-103.

### Thursday, November 13<sup>th</sup>

We will look at readings comparing contemporary licit and illicit markets in Small Arms.

- Farah, Douglas and Stephen Braun. 2007. *Merchant of Death*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons. Chapter 1, Pages 13-28.
- Marsh, Nicholas and Lauren Pinson. 2022. Arms Trafficking, in *The Routledge Handbook of Smuggling*, 1st ed., Routledge, 2022, pp. 213–227.

### Due:

Public Scholarship Assignment, 4PM, Friday, November 14<sup>th</sup>

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## Week 14 – Environmental and Ecological Threats

### Guiding Questions:

How do nations deal with environmental threats? Are these dynamics the same as their response to threats posed by states or human organizations? Are these threats evenly distributed, or are some nations at greater risk than others? How do disasters affect other security threats?

### Tuesday, November 18<sup>th</sup>

We will discuss the effects of natural disasters, including climate change, on security and violence within and across countries.

- Gleditsch Nils Petter. 2012. Whither the Weather? Climate Change and Conflict. *Journal of Peace Research* 49(1): 3-9.
- Busby, Joshua W. 2022. *States and Nature: The Effects of Climate Change on Security*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. Introduction, Pages 1-19.

### Thursday, November 20<sup>th</sup>

We will look at how pandemics affect security, looking at the case of Avian Influenza.

- Drezner, Daniel. 2020. The Song Remains the Same: International Relations After COVID-19. *International Organization* 74(S): E18-E35.
- Ferragamo, Mariel. 2024, May 7. What is Avian Flu? *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from <<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-avian-flu>> as of 2-October-2025.
- Rivers, Caitlin. 2023, March 14. How to Handle the Bird Flu. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1130066>> as of 2-October-2025.

### Due:

Second Review Essay, 4PM, Friday, November 21<sup>st</sup>.

# INTA-489: Current Topics in International Security

## Week 15 – Thanksgiving Break – No Class

Enjoy a Well-Earned Break!

## Week 16 – Presentations and Concluding Thoughts

### Tuesday, December 2

Concluding thoughts on the course.

### Thursday, December 4

No assigned readings – students briefly present their research to the class.

### Posted:

Instructions, Rubric, and Resources for Final Reflection

## Finals Week

Professor will be available for questions or issues throughout the week.

### Due:

- Professional Scholarship Assignment, 5PM, Tuesday, December 9
- Final Reflection, 9AM, Thursday, December 11