Description

What would happen if a nuclear weapon exploded in Los Angeles? How hard would it be for terrorists to build a nuclear weapon, and what can be done to prevent that?

Was it moral for the US to use nuclear weapons against Japan? Why did the Iraq War happen? Why was the US intelligence on Iraq’s WMD so screwed up? What would Saddam Hussein have done with nuclear weapons, if he’d been allowed to get them? Will the US attack Iran over its nuclear program? Should it? Why can’t the US or the international community prevent countries like North Korea from getting WMD?

Are all the worries about WMD just over-hyped nonsense? What difference do WMD make in international politics? What if the spread of WMD actually makes the world better off?

When Robert Oppenheimer, the theoretical physicist in charge of the secret US program to develop nuclear weapons, saw the first-ever atomic detonation, in a test in the New Mexico desert in 1945, he thought to himself: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” Since that fateful day, conflict among the world’s nations has posed the risk that humanity itself could be annihilated. The United States and Soviet Union soon set off an arms race that would last almost half a century, consume so many resources that it eventually brought the Soviet Union to collapse, and led to the production of enough nuclear weapons to kill every human being on Earth many times over. And
yet, almost from that same day, governments set about trying to understand the implications of these new weapons, and to prevent their use and their spread to others.

In this class, we will study the difference weapons of mass destruction have made to the course of human civilization. We will learn how such weapons are made, what effects they have, and how and why they have spread. We will read about the history of their use, from ancient times (did you know the Greeks used chemical weapons?) to the present (or that terrorists used nerve gas to attack the Tokyo subway?). We will study the evolution in US nuclear strategy, from massive retaliation (“making the rubble bounce”) to restraint, and the debates over how to stop these weapons from spreading further, and what to do if these efforts fail.

Along the way, you will gain and refine a number of skills that will be useful in later classes, and in your eventual career. You will learn how to analyze controversial issues, dispelling the hype and vitriol that often surrounds these in public commentary. You will practice communicating your assessments and judgments with calm, concision, and clarity. You will see how modern research in political science is done, and how it is applied to real-world problems. Finally, you will learn how to read and digest academic research, even when it uses mathematical or other techniques you don’t understand.

Contacting Me: You can email me at any time, and I will try to respond within a day, though exceptions will happen. I will also try to respond more quickly as exams or assignment deadlines approach. You may also set up a time to come by my office and talk, using my online calendar.

Students with Disabilities: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible.

Academic Integrity: Don’t lie, cheat, or steal. Plagiarism is all three (think about it). Also, don’t abet the bad behavior of others. If you catch a classmate breaking exam rules or copying another’s work and don’t report it, you’re abetting it. Get caught doing any of these and the penalty is an F in the course, at minimum. For more detail, see the Trojan Integrity Guide and the related guide to avoiding plagiarism.

Books

Please acquire the books listed below. Don’t be alarmed by the long list. Those with a star (*) are available in electronic format for free from the USC Libraries. If you buy a copy of all the others from Amazon, the total cost should be around $70.


**Requirements**

**Preparation and Participation (10%):** Careful, thorough reading of the assigned papers before class and participating thoughtfully in class are essential to the value of this course. Though most meetings will be devoted to lecture, there will be ample opportunity for you to raise questions and engage in discussion with your classmates.

**Short Assignments (30%):** At several points during the semester, I will give you a short assignment to help you think through the readings.

**Midterm (25%) and Final (35%) Exams:** The exams will be closed-book and closed-notes. The midterm will be administered in class; the final on Thursday, December 8, from 11am to 1pm. They will include multiple choice and short answer questions, and will also ask you to define some key terms from the readings.

**Late Policy:** If you need to, you may submit one short assignment up to a week late, with no questions asked as long as you email me before the deadline to let me know you’ll be taking the extension. However, everyone must take the midterm and final at the specified date and time. Exceptions to this policy for personal emergencies will be granted at my discretion.

**Schedule and Readings**

Readings are to be completed by the beginning of class on the date listed. Some of the readings build in a sequence: it will be easier to understand them if you read them in the order listed. The journal articles and working papers listed below will be available on the class website.

**NOTE:** Many of the papers listed below contain appendices that describe the mathematical details behind the paper’s results. I will not test you on the material in these appendices, but I encourage you to read them if you are curious about the details.
The Basics

What problems do weapons of mass destruction create? When did these problems arise, and why do they still concern us? What exactly are weapons of mass destruction, and how are they created?

Tuesday, August 23: Overview of the class, no assigned readings

Thursday, August 25: [72 pages]


Tuesday, August 30: [57 pages]


[NO CLASS] Thursday, September 1: [78 pages]


How WMD Are (or Could Be) Used

How might WMD be used, and how have they actually been used? What are the consequences of their use? How might their use be deterred?

Tuesday, September 6: [110 pages]


Thursday, September 8: [86 pages]


Tuesday, September 13: [76 pages]


Thursday, September 15: [76 pages]


Tuesday, September 20: [79 pages]

The Spread of WMD

Why do states try to get these weapons, and when they do, are we better or worse off?

Thursday, September 29: [60 pages]


Tuesday, October 4: [79 pages]


Thursday, October 6: [75 pages]


Tuesday, October 11: [38 pages]


Using Diplomacy to Halt Proliferation

How can states be peacefully stopped from seeking WMD? How can the dangers inherent in states’ WMD arsenals be reduced?

Thursday, October 13: [? + 27 pages]


Tuesday, October 18: [59 pages]

**Thursday, October 20:** Midterm Exam (in class)

Tuesday, October 25: [157 pages]


**Using Coercion to Halt Proliferation**

*How can we tell when a state is pursuing WMD? How can force or threats be used to stop it? Why go to war when sanctions might suffice?*

Thursday, October 27: [47 pages]


Tuesday, November 1: [70 pages]


Thursday, November 3: [51 pages]


Tuesday, November 8: [54 pages]


Thursday, November 10: [70 pages]


Tuesday, November 15: [70 pages]


Thursday, November 17: [43 pages]

New Problems with WMD

*Can the United States achieve nuclear supremacy? Could terrorists get WMD, and could they be stopped from using it? Will North Korea or other actors sell nuclear weapons?*

**Tuesday, November 22: [51 pages]**

[**NO CLASS**] **Thursday, November 24: [75 pages]**

**Tuesday, November 29: [84 pages]**

**Thursday, December 1: [70 pages]**