

University of Western Ontario
Department of Political Science

Russia's War Against Ukraine POLISCI 2415B 650

**Syllabus
Winter Semester, 2025**

Course Instructor:
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Format: Asynchronous (Lessons uploaded by/at 3PM on Tuesday)
Office Hours: By appointment over Zoom

The great Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz once famously wrote that war is the continuation of politics by other means, and Russia's current campaign of conquest against Ukraine is no exception. Wars are rarely monocausal, and usually they are the result of a constellation of factors that make violent action attractive for calculating political leaders and aggressive states. While no conflict is truly Manichean, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine constitutes a stark and unilateral escalation of the violence that has throttled the region since the Euromaidan civil revolution of 2013, when pro-Western demonstrators toppled the pro-Russian and highly corrupt government of President Viktor Yanukovich. Since then, Russia has pursued a ceaseless campaign of hybrid warfare against the Ukrainian state, including the use of clandestine troops to covertly seize Crimea, the funding of pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's eastern provinces (oblasts), and the relentless use of cyber-attacks to devastate the country's digital and economic infrastructure. On February 19th, 2022, Russia escalated the conflict even further when President Vladimir Putin commenced a "special military operation" that nominally sought the "demilitarization and denazification" of Ukraine. However, it would soon become apparent that Russia's primary goals in the invasion were expanding its territory and extending its influence in the country at the expense of Ukraine's territorial integrity and political sovereignty. While estimates vary, some sources have suggested as many as a million civilians and combatants have died since February of 2022, and the conflict has proven to be the continent's most deadly since the Second World War.

In this course we will examine the myriad factors that led to the war. We will explore how the war unfolded, and its economic, political, and humanitarian cost for both the Ukrainian and Russian people. We will also analyze the international fallout of the war and discuss how it has and will change geopolitics perhaps irrevocably. There are several key questions that we will tackle in this course, namely (but not limited to): Why did Russia invade Ukraine? Who is Vladimir Putin, and what are his motivations behind this conflict? What is humanitarian cost of the war on the

Russian and Ukrainian populations? What are the geopolitical consequences of this conflict? How can the belligerents move forward and produce a lasting peace to the conflict?

Course Outline:

Lecture videos and lecture slides will be uploaded by/at 3PM on Tuesdays for each week (though certain weeks' lectures and lessons may be uploaded earlier), with the lecture videos being segmented into two or more parts. The total lecture length for each lesson will be roughly 90-105 minutes in total. The number of lecture videos per lesson may vary depending on the size of the lecture, but you should expect 2-3 videos per lesson. One should be able to find them in the contents section of the course site.

Evaluation:

This is a non-essay course, and you will be evaluated and assessed based on various online quizzes and exams. All quizzes are timed, and once started they must be completed, and you do not have the option to go back on the quizzes. I will design the tests so that non-accommodated students will receive on average one minute of time per evaluation to complete an individual question, while students with accommodation will receive on average 90 seconds per question. While I do believe that most students would follow the honour system and refrain from using aids to help them during their tests, I anticipate that a certain contingent of students will always abuse the system, so naturally all these evaluations will be effectively *open book*. ***The quizzes and exams will generally draw material equally from both the lectures and the readings.***

Weekly Quizzes-30%

The first quiz is merely for surveying opinion and general knowledge, and it will not be graded on accuracy, merely completion. Every following quiz will be graded on accuracy.

Every week, a quiz will be posted in the quiz or survey section after the lecture is uploaded. Students will have until 11:59 PM on the Friday of that week to complete it. Quizzes will be timed (11 minutes per quiz to answer 10 questions, 16 minutes for accommodated students), and must be completed once started. No late weekly quizzes will be accepted barring an *a priori* accommodation or extreme extenuating circumstances. There will be no quizzes for reading week, the week of the midterm, or for the final week of the course.

Midterm-30% (Due Friday, February 14th by 11:59 PM)

The exam will consist of multiple-choice and true/false questions. It will be roughly an hour in length (the exact length will be determined). Accommodated students will be given a separate link to a separate exam, where they will be granted additional time and an additional day to complete the exam. Late submission without prior approval from the instructor will not be accepted.

Final Exam-40% (Due Friday, April the 4th by 11:59 PM)

The final exam is cumulative, but a slightly greater emphasis will be loaned to materials presented in the latter half of the course after the midterm. Accommodated students will be given a separate link to a separate exam, where they will be granted additional time and an additional day to complete the exam. Late submissions without prior approval from the course instructor will not be accepted.

Readings:

THERE ARE NO READINGS THAT YOU ARE REQUIRED TO PURCHASE FOR THIS COURSE.

All readings will be provided to you in the readings sub-link on the Brightspace site or will be made accessible through Western Library. With the exception of the introductory week, there will be only two readings required for each given lesson. I will also provide supplemental optional readings which may enhance and broaden your understanding of the subject materials but will not necessarily be required to pass this course with a stellar grade. While it is generally best practice to do the readings prior to the lecture, it is not necessary, but the lectures will make frequent reference to these readings while providing novel information and analysis. ***The quizzes will generally draw material equally from the lectures and the readings.*** The lectures will also provide clarity as to what is relevant for you to extract from the readings, so please watch the lecture videos before raising substantial questions about the content of the readings.

Accommodation:

Accommodated students will receive extra time when it comes to completing the timed exams and quizzes, and they will receive an extra day to complete the midterm and exam. If you require accommodation, make sure you go through the proper channels at Accessible Education at Academic Support.

Course outline

Part 1: Historical Background and Prelude to War

Week 1: Introduction (January 7th, 2025)

- No readings, but please review the syllabus.
- Surveying quiz (*graded not on accuracy, but on completion* so I can assess the general knowledge of this cohort, so I actively encourage you for this quiz only not to study beforehand. EVERY QUIZ FOLLOWING THIS ONE WILL BE GRADED ON ACCURACY HOWEVER)

Mandatory Readings

- Syllabus

Optional Readings

- <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/a-historical-timeline-of-post-independence-ukraine>

(I recommend you read this AFTER doing the quiz, for I am trying to gauge everyone's general knowledge with the first quiz).

Week 2: Ukraine and Russia Pre-1991(January 14th)

Ukraine was a nation before it was a state, and under tsarist rule Russia was an empire before it was nation. We will explore how the origins and trajectory of these respective nation-building projects helped to shape nationalism and geopolitical developments in the world today.

Mandatory:

- Dyczok, Marta. 2024. *Ukraine Not "the" Ukraine*. Cambridge, United Kingdom; Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 3: The Nation Builders, pgs. 20-34).
- Shlapentokh, Dmitry. 1992. "The End of the Russian Idea." *Studies in Soviet Thought* 43 (3): 199–217. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00818763>.

Optional:

- Hechter, Michael. 2021. "Internal Colonialism, Alien Rule, and Famine in Ireland and Ukraine." *East, West (Edmonton)* 8 (1): 145–57. <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus642>.

Key terms: Nationalism, Pan-Slavism, Soviet Union, Leonid Kravchuk, Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin

Week 3: From Soviet Disunion to the Orange Revolution; Russia and Ukraine prior to Euromaidan (January 21st)

In this week we will examine more recent historical factors that account for the creation of the modern geopolitical landscape in Central and Eastern Europe. We will also examine how political developments within these countries and other relevant cases helped to shape the modern conflict today.

Mandatory:

- Pifer, Steven. "To Understand Putin, We Need to Look at 1990s Russian Democratization." *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/04/12/understand-putin-we-need-look-1990s-russian-democratization/>.
- Dyczok, Marta. "Breaking Through the Information Blockade: Election and Revolution in Ukraine 2004." *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 47, no. 3–4, 2005, pp. 241–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2005.11092387>.

Optional:

- Aslund, Anders. 2003. *Left Behind: Ukraine's Uncertain Transformation*. *The National Interest*. Vol. 73. Washington: The National Interest, Inc.

- I recommend the documentary series TraumaZone (produced by Adam Curtis) from the BBC, which you can find in its entirety on YouTube, in particular episodes 3 and 4 (warning; it contains often graphic depictions of violence and sexuality). It mainly depicts the events leading up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the turbulent years that characterized the initial post-communist years of Russia.

Key terms: Orange Revolution, NATO expansion, oligarch, Vladimir Putin, Leonid Kuchma

Week 4: The Revolution of Dignity and its Ramifications (January 28th)

We will be exploring the specific course of events that led to the Russian incursion into Ukraine in the first place. Namely, we will be discussing the civil revolution known as the revolution of dignity or “Euromaidan” that upended the pro-Russian Yanukovich government, thus kickstarting Russia’s decade-long cannibalization of the Ukrainian state. Questions we will be raising in this lesson include: Why did the revolution happen? Why did Russia seize Crimea? How did the major powers initially respond to Russian aggression in 2014? What were the Minsk Accords and why did they fail?

Mandatory:

- Diuk, Nadia. 2014. “EUROMAIDAN: Ukraine’s Self-Organizing Revolution.” *World Affairs (Washington)* 176 (6): 9–16.
- Åtland, Kristian. 2024. “War, Diplomacy, and More War: Why Did the Minsk Agreements Fail?” *International Politics (Hague, Netherlands)*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00637-x>.

Optional:

- CBC News. "Ukraine: A Timeline of Key Events in the Euromaidan Protests." *CBC News*, February 21, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/ukraine-2014-euromaidan-1.6756384>.

Key terms: Euromaidan, Yanukovich, Crimea, Minsk Agreement.

Part 2: The Invasion of 2022 and its consequences

Week 5: The Invasion as it happened; the first year. (February 4th, 2025)

This part of the course we will examine what actually transpired during the initial escalation of the conflict in 2022. Key questions we will raise include: What happened during the initial escalation of the conflict? Why during the initial invasion did the Russians under-perform expectations so dramatically? What were the Russian forces initially trying to achieve?

Mandatory:

- Dalsjö, Robert, et al. “A Brutal Examination: Russian Military Capability in Light of the Ukraine War.” *Survival (London)*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2022, pp. 7–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2078044>.

- Trofimov, Yaroslav. 2024. *Our Enemies Will Vanish: The Russian Invasion and Ukraine's War of Independence*. 1st ed. New York: Penguin Publishing Group. Chapters 4-12 (these are very short chapters so don't be daunted, its roughly 50 short pages in length).

Optional:

- <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-ill-fated-invasion-ukraine-lessons-modern-warfare>
- "Full Text: Putin's Declaration of War on Ukraine." *The Spectator*, February 24, 2022. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-putin-s-declaration-of-war-on-ukraine/>.

Key terms: Special military operation, Vladimir Zelensky, Kyiv, Donbass, Luhansk, Kherson.

Week 6: The Propaganda War and the Conventional War (February 11th)

The war is not only fought on the ground but is also fought in the digital and information space. This section of the course will be focused on examining the various elements of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine, including both its conventional and disinformation tactics. This lesson will examine the different tactics Russia uses to pursue its war of aggression, and we will be gaging how effective its hybrid stratagem has been in realizing its territorial and political ambitions.

Mandatory:

- Oleinik, Anton. 2024. "War Propaganda Effectiveness: A Comparative Content-Analysis of Media Coverage of the Two First Months of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine." *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 32 (4): 526–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2023.2187801>.
- Fedorchak, Viktoriya. 2024. *The Russia-Ukraine War: Towards Resilient Fighting Power*. First edition. Abingdon, England: Routledge, Chapters Four & Five.
- No Quiz, but the midterm will be posted.

Optional:

- Perez, Christian and Anjana Nair. "The Information War in Russia's War in Ukraine." *Foreign Policy*, August 22, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/22/information-warfare-in-russias-war-in-ukraine/>.

Key terms: Hybrid warfare, disinformation, attrition, logistics.

Week 7: Reading Week (February 18th)

No quiz. No Lesson. No readings.

Week 8: War crimes and atrocities; Civilian life in the Ukraine and its occupied territories (February 25th)

We will be examining how the war has affected civilian life in Ukraine and Russia, with specific focus on the populations of the Russian occupied regions of Ukraine. We will examine the alleged

atrocities and war crimes committed by both sides of the conflict and investigate how appropriate it is to call the Russian invasion an effective genocide against the Ukrainian people and nation.

Mandatory:

- Harding, Luke. 2022. *Invasion: The Inside Story of Russia's Bloody War and Ukraine's Fight for Survival*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 79-94.
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Ukraine: High Commissioner Updates Human Rights Council." July 4, 2022.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/07/ukraine-high-commissioner-updates-human-rights-council>.

Optional:

- <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/ukraine-russian-forces-must-face-justice-for-war-crimes-in-kyiv-oblast--new-investigation/>
- https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coiukraine/A_79_4632_AUV.pdf

Key terms: Genocide, war crime, occupation, ICC.

Week 9: Theoretical and Ideological Explanations for the Conflict; Vladimir Putin and his ideology (March 4th)

This lesson will examine the specific theoretical explanations used to explain the conflict's onset. Key questions that will be examined include: why did Russia invade in the first place? How did Russia justify their bellicose actions? What are Russia and the West's geopolitical interests in the region? What domestic factors may have motivated Russia to attack?

Mandatory:

- Mearsheimer, John J. 2014. Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin. *Foreign Affairs* (New York, N.Y.). Vol. 93. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.
- Kuzio, Taras. 2024. "Ukrainian versus Pan-Russian Identities: The Roots of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 24 (3): 234–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12422>.

Optional:

- Kuzniar, Roman. 2014. "Mearsheimer and the Poverty of His Realism." *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 23 (4): 141–52.

Key terms: Neorealism, liberal internationalism, constructivism.

Part 3: The Fallout of the Conflict

Week 10: The Domestic Impact on Russia; the International Reaction (March 11th)

We will examine how this conflict has impacted political and economic development in Russia, and how it has exacerbated the “*authoritarization*” of Russia and other members and its Eurasian allies. This week will also focus on how the conflict effected the international community, the political divide within the community regarding the conflict, and how the war has changed international geopolitical alignments.

Mandatory:

- Gould-Davies, Nigel. 2023. “How the War Has Changed Russia.” *Survival (London)* 65 (2): 23–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2193093>.
- Coker, Christopher. 2023. “The War in Ukraine and the Return of History.” *LSE Public Policy Review* 3 (1). <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.81>.

Key terms: Totalitarian, sanctions, United Nations.

Week 11: The Geopolitical Ramifications of the Conflict (March 18th)

The conflict has had a dramatic impact on global geopolitics outside of Russia and Ukraine, often for the worse. Building upon the themes of the prior week, this week will examine how the conflict has directly changed Russian foreign policy in other theatres and affected global political realignments. Most notably, we will be looking at internal political developments in the Caucasuses, Belarus, and the Levant that have manifested because of the War.

Mandatory:

- Baunov, Alexander. “Putin Chose Ukraine Over Syria.” *Foreign Affairs*, December 26th, 2024. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russia/putin-chose-ukraine-over-syria>
- Ishaan Tharoor. “How the War in Ukraine helped stoke an Armenian tragedy.” *The Washington Post*. September 28th, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/28/armenia-azerbaijan-russia-ukraine-war-nagorno-karabakh/>

Optional:

- <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/03/15/blog-how-war-in-ukraine-is-reverberating-across-worlds-regions-031522>

Week 12: Conclusion (March 25th)

We will conclude the course with two readings discussing the possibility of a future peace and the economic costs and political necessities of a future postbellum reconstruction for Ukraine. We will summarize the main themes, ideas, and topics of the course, and I will provide a small review of the course materials that are relevant for the final exam.

Mandatory:

- Erik Berglöf and Vladyslav Rashkovan (2023). Reconstructing and Reforming Ukraine. In *Ukraine: Russia's War and the Future of the Global Order*, edited by Michael Cox, 403-429, London: LSE Press, 2023.
- Lesia Ogryzko. "Rebuilding Ukraine: How a Prevention-First Approach Can Avert Destruction and Save Costs." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, July 29, 2023. <https://ecfr.eu/article/rebuilding-ukraine-how-a-prevention-first-approach-can-avert-destruction-and-save-costs/>.

No Quiz

The final exam will be made available on the following Tuesday at noon and will be due by Friday before 11:59 PM (April 4th).

APPENDIX TO UNDERGRADUATE COURSE OUTLINES DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Prerequisite checking - the student's responsibility

"Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites."

Security and Confidentiality of Student Work (refer to current *Western Academic Calendar* (<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/>))

"Submitting or Returning Student Assignments, Tests and Exams - All student assignments, tests and exams will be handled in a secure and confidential manner. Particularly in this respect, leaving student work unattended in public areas for pickup is not permitted."

Grade adjustments

In order to ensure that comparable standards are applied in political science courses, the Department may require instructors to adjust final marks to conform to Departmental guidelines.

Academic Offences

"Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Submission of Course Requirements

ESSAYS, ASSIGNMENTS, TAKE-HOME EXAMS MUST BE SUBMITTED ACCORDING TO PROCEDURES SPECIFIED BY YOUR INSTRUCTOR (I.E., IN

CLASS, DURING OFFICE HOURS, TA'S OFFICE HOURS) OR UNDER THE INSTRUCTOR'S OFFICE DOOR.

THE MAIN OFFICE DOES NOT DATE-STAMP OR ACCEPT ANY OF THE ABOVE.

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

EXAMINATIONS/ATTENDANCE (Sen. Min. Feb.4/49, May 23/58, S.94, S.3538, S.3632, S.04-097) A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations: 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year. 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Medical Policy, Late Assignments, etc.

Students registered in Social Science should refer to http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/having_problems/index.html for information on Medical Policy, Term Tests, Final Examinations, Late Assignments, Short Absences, Extended Absences, Documentation and other Academic Concerns. Non-Social Science students should refer to their home faculty's academic counselling office.

University Policy on Cheating and Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence." (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)."

Multiple-choice tests/exams: "Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating."

Note: Information excerpted and quoted above are Senate regulations from the Handbook of Scholarship and

Academic Policy. http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/index.html

PLAGIARISM*

In writing scholarly papers, you must keep firmly in mind the need to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged borrowing of another writer's words or ideas. Different forms of writing require different types of acknowledgement. The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers.

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of publication, and page number.

Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writers' ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source, these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently. Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject.

In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks is necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction your instructor very likely will do so for you, and they will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases in their suspension from the University.

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Adopted by the council of the Faculty of Social Science, October, 1970; approved by the Dept. of History August 13, 1991

Accessibility at Western: Please contact poliscie@uwo.ca if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you.

SUPPORT SERVICES

The Registrar's office can be accessed for Student Support Services at <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services (including the services provided by the USC listed here) can be reached at:

<http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Services can be reached at: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

