



**POLITICAL SCIENCE 370K**

**ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:  
ARMED GROUP GOVERNANCE**

**SPRING 2024**

**Class meeting time and location:** Tue/Thu, 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM, LIFE-2302

**Instructor:**

Dr. Sally Sharif  
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**Teaching Assistants:**

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Note: Students should email the TAs for any course-related questions, request for extension, or accommodation letters.

**Course Description**

In some conflict contexts, armed groups occupy a grey area in relation to the state—they may provide security, practice diplomacy, and implement public policy, yet remain adjacent to the state in ways that allow them to evade international legal frameworks. The Wagner group in Russia and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Iran are two prominent examples. In this class, we identify the emergence and role of these groups domestically and internationally and then explore their governance strategies when they transition to becoming state actors in cases of rebel victory or successful coup d'états.

This course will provide students with the theoretical and analytical tools to understand and explain the politics of state-supported armed groups within their unique historical, institutional, conflictual frameworks. We will examine different theories of state formation, armed group governance, and the ability of different theoretical approaches to explain the violent repertoire of armed groups. The focus of the course is on states undergoing civil conflict or engaging in internationalized civil wars. Our fundamental aim will be to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how, why, and with what consequences state-supported armed groups engage in violence.

**Course Learning Objectives**

This course has 5 core learning objectives. Students will be able to:

1. Describe when, how, and why states create armed groups

2. Differentiate and critically evaluate the relative strengths and limitations of leading approaches to understanding armed group activity
3. Investigate critical issues in armed group governance
4. Develop a research question and paper on a state-supported armed group
5. Present an executive summary of the research paper and take questions from a critical audience

### **Course Format**

The format of the course will be two class sessions a week in person. Audio/video recording of lectures is not permitted.

### **Required Course Texts**

None. All course readings will be available for download from the UBC Canvas system. There are on average about 45-60 pages of scholarly readings per week, plus usually a couple of short popular sources (op-eds, podcasts, or videos).

### **Course Assignments, Due Dates and Grading**

Students are responsible for material covered in class discussions as well as in the assigned readings. Regular attendance in class is expected. Grades will be determined on the basis of the following:

#### Weekly tests (40%)

This course tests knowledge of the readings and attention to the lecture through weekly multiple-choice tests during the lecture via Canvas. Students should have access to a computer or phone during class to do the test.

#### Midterm exam (30%)

The midterm exam is a closed-book exam based on class lectures, readings, and the audio-visual material on the syllabus. I post discussion questions for every class on Canvas. The questions on the midterm exam will be from these questions. Student answers should reflect their understanding of the material on the syllabus (not answers provided by Google or ChatGPT).

#### Final exam (30%)

The final exam is a closed-book exam based on class lectures, readings, and the audio-visual material on the syllabus covered after the midterm exam. The questions on the final exam will be from discussion questions posted on Canvas. Student answers should reflect their understanding of the material on the syllabus.

### **Regrading Policy**

Regrading of marked work by the teaching assistant will only take place if accompanied by a one-page memo indicating in detail the grounds for regrading; students should note that a regrading of a paper or exam may result in the lowering of grade upon further review. If this procedure does not resolve the matter, it may be appealed to the professor, who, again, may raise or lower the grade upon further review.

## Lecture Outline and Readings

### Week 1 State Formation and Violence

January 9

Introduction to the syllabus: no reading required

January 11

- Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." In Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds. *Bringing the State Back In*. [pages 169-191].
- Watch "The Thirty Years War 1618-1648 & the Treaty of Westphalia." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZZTfk-f5ps>. (17 mins)

### Week 2 State-Perpetrated Violence

January 16

- Michael Mann. 2005. *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. New York: Cambridge University Press. [pages 1-34]
- Watch "Why Armed Militia Groups are Surging Across the Nation." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zsr61e1sSeY>. (10 mins)

January 18

- Ariel Ahram. 2011. *Proxy Warriors: The Rise and Fall of State Sponsored Militias*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. [Chapter 1]
- Ahram, Ariel. "Are Militias a Menace?" *The Washington Post*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkeycage/wp/2015/01/05/are-militias-a-menace/>.
- Watch "Inside the Forgotten War in Darfur, Where the Killing Never Stopped." [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_NlgaXrMTc4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NlgaXrMTc4). (14 mins)

### Week 3 What are State-Sponsored Armed Groups?

January 23

- Staniland, Paul. 2015. "Militias, Ideology, and the State." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(5): 770-93.
- Watch "Inside Prigozhin's Wagner, Russia's Secret War Company." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMXnJMCoFYI>.

January 25

- Carey, Sabine C., Neil J. Mitchell, and Will Lowe. 2013. "States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence: A New Database on Pro-Government Militias." *Journal of Peace Research* 50(2): 249-258.
- Carey, Sabine C., Neil J. Mitchell, and Katrin Paula. 2022. "The Life, Death and Diversity of Pro-Government Militias: The Fully Revised Pro-Government Militias Database, Version 2.0." *Research & Politics* 9(1).
- Watch "The Iranian Revolutionary Guard." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJeOT6VcAqA>.

## Week 4 Functions of Armed Groups in the State

January 30

- Mitchell, Neil J., Sabine C. Carey, and Christopher K. Butler. 2014. "The Impact of Pro-government Militias on Human Rights Violations." *International Interactions* 40(5): 812–36.
- Watch "A New Generation of Paramilitary Groups is Killing Social Activists in Colombia." [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sg6PehYX4\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sg6PehYX4_Y).

February 1 No class in person – Watch video lecture and do the test at home

- Cohen, Dara Kay, and Ragnhild Nordås. 2015. "Do States Delegate Shameful Violence to Militias? Patterns of Sexual Violence in Recent Armed Conflicts." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(5): 877–98.

## Week 5 Case Study I – Russia

February 6

- Marten, Kimberley. 2019. "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35(3): 181-204.
- Mussa, Marco, and Matvej Dubianskij. "'Black Cat in a Dark Room': Examining the Impact of Russia's Wagner Group in The Central African Republic and Mali." *Journal of International Affairs* 75, no. 2 (2023): 209–32.

February 8

- Reynolds, Nathaniel. 2019. "Putin's Not-So-Secret Mercenaries: Patronage, Geopolitics, and the Wagner Group." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Mehra, Tanya, and Abigail Thorley. 2022. "Foreign Fighters, Foreign Volunteers and Mercenaries in the Ukrainian Armed Conflict." International Center for Counter-Terrorism (11 July). <https://www.icct.nl/publication/foreign-fighters-foreign-volunteers-and-mercenaries-ukrainian-armed-conflict>.

## Week 6 Case Study II – The Middle East

February 13

- Salehyan, Idean. 2020. "Militias and the Iraqi State: Shifting Modes of Indirect Governance." In Kenneth W. Abbott, Bernhard Zangl, Duncan Snidal, and Philipp Genschel. Eds. *The Governor's Dilemma: Indirect Governance Beyond Principals and Agents*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 100-118.
- Leenders, Reinoud, and Antonio Giustozzi. 2019. "Outsourcing State Violence: The National Defence Force, 'Stateness' and Regime Resilience in the Syrian War." *Mediterranean Politics* 24(2): 157-180.

February 15

- Costantini, Irene, and Federico Donelli. 2022. "Sponsor-Proxy Dynamics Between Decentered Multipolarity and Non-State Actors: Evidence from the MENA Region." *Small Wars & Insurgencies*.
- Watch "The Middle East's Cold War, Explained." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veMFCFyOwFI&t=10s>.

**Week 7** **No class: Midterm break**  
 February 20 & 22

**Week 8** **Case Study II – The Middle East (Cont.)**  
 February 27

- Midterm exam

February 29

- Forozan, Hesam, and Afshin Shahi. 2017. “The Military and the State in Iran: The Economic Rise of the Revolutionary Guards.” *Middle East Journal* 71(1): 67–86.
- Leenders, Reinoud, and Antonio Giustozzi. 2022. “Foreign Sponsorship of Pro-Government Militias Fighting Syria’s Insurgency: Whither Proxy Wars?” *Mediterranean Politics* 27(5): 614-643.

**Week 9** **State Consolidation in the Face of Armed Groups**  
 March 5

- Carey, Sabine C., Michael P. Colaresi, and Neil J. Mitchell. 2015. “Governments, Informal Links to Militias, and Accountability.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(5): 850–76.
- Al-Dawsari, Nadwa, and Thanassis Cambanis. 2022. “How Much Control Do International Sponsors Have Over Militias?” The Century Foundation (3 May). <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/much-control-international-sponsors-militias/>.

March 7

- Stanton, Jessica A. 2015. “Regulating Militias: Governments, Militias, and Civilian Targeting in Civil War.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(5): 899–923.
- Watch “Iran's Power Over Iraq.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTPKJtPWNrQ>.

**Week 10** **Fragmentation from the State**  
 March 12

- Thomson, Andrew, and Dale Pankhurst. 2022. “From Control to Conflict: A Spectrum and Framework for Understanding Government-Militia Relationships.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (September).
- Levy, Rachael. 2020. “What are Militias and Are They Legal?” *The Wall Street Journal* (10 October). <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-are-militias-and-are-they-legal-11602370719>.

March 14

- Ash, Konstantin. 2016. “Threats to Leaders’ Political Survival and Pro-Government Militia Formation.” *International Interactions* 42(5): 703-728.
- Ahram, Ariel. 2011. “Origins and Persistence of State-Sponsored Militias: Path Dependent Processes in Third World Military Development.” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 34(4).

**Week 11**                                      **Case Study III – Africa***March 19*

- Raleigh, Clionadh. 2016. “Pragmatic and Promiscuous: Explaining the Rise of Competitive Political Militias across Africa.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60(2): 283–310.
- Tubiana, Jérôme. 2019. “The Man Who Terrorized Darfur Is Leading Sudan’s Supposed Transition.” *Foreign Policy* (14 May). <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/14/man-who-terrorized-darfur-is-leading-sudans-supposed-transition-hemeti-rsf-janjaweed-bashir-khartoum/>.

*March 21*

- Magid, Yehuda, and Justin Schon. 2018. “Introducing the African Relational Pro-Government Militia Dataset (RPGMD).” *International Interactions* 44(4): 801-832.
- Flint, Julie. 2009. “Sudan: Beyond ‘Janjaweed’ - Understanding the Militias of Darfur - Sudan” Small Arms Survey (16 June). <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-beyond-janjaweed-understanding-militias-darfur>. [pages 16-30]

**Week 12**                                      **Looking Forward: State Stability***March 26*

- Steinert, Christoph V, Janina I Steinert, and Sabine C Carey. 2019. “Spoilers of Peace: Pro-Government Militias as Risk Factors for Conflict Recurrence.” *Journal of Peace Research* 56(2): 249–63.
- Aliyev, Huseyn. 2019. “When and How Do Militias Disband? Global Patterns of Pro-Government Militia Demobilization in Civil Wars.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42(8): 715-734.

*March 28*

- No class – Instructor attending the WPSA conference

**Week 13**                                      **When Militias Win***April 2*

- Bolte, Brandon, Minnie M. Joo, and Bumba Mukherjee. 2021. “Security Consolidation in the Aftermath of Civil War: Explaining the Fates of Victorious Militias.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65(9): 1459-1488.

*April 4*

- Wrap up – no readings required

**Week 14**                                      **Final exam**

## **Acknowledgement**

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on in their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

## **General Academic Policies**

Regular attendance in class meetings is expected. All assignments must be completed and handed in.

Read the university calendar so that you are aware of no-penalty drop dates, requirements for medical authorization (to defer an exam, for example) and other procedures that may affect you.

Students who wish to appeal grades assigned to their academic work may do so. The initial appeal should be made to the course instructor. If the student remains unsatisfied with this process, he/she may proceed to the head of the department or further to a formal committee established in accordance with University policies.

Religious holidays – UBC permits students who are scheduled to attend classes or write examinations on holy days of their religions to notify their instructor in advance of these days and their wish to observe them by absenting themselves from class or examination. Instructors provide opportunity for students to make up work or examinations missed without penalty. (Policy # 65.)

UBC is committed to the academic success of students with disabilities. UBC's policy on Academic Accommodations for students with disabilities aims to remove barriers and provide equal access to University services, ensure fair and consistent treatment of all students, and to create a welcoming environment. Students with a disability should first meet with an Access and Diversity advisor to determine what accommodations/services you are eligible for.

## **Academic Integrity and Responsibility**

As a member of this class, you are responsible for contributing to the course objectives through your participation in class activities and your work on essays and other projects. In the process of coming into your own as an independent, responsible participant in the academic community, you are encouraged to seek advice, clarification, and guidance in your learning from your instructor. If you decide to seek help beyond the resources of this course, you are responsible for ensuring that this help does not lead you to submit others' work as your own. If an outside tutor or other person helps you, show this policy to your tutor or helper: make sure you both understand the limits of this person's permissible contribution. If you are uncertain, consult your instructor.

Academic communities depend on their members' honesty and integrity in representing the sources of reasoning, claims, and wordings that appear in their work. Like any other member of the academic community, you will be held responsible for the accurate representation of your sources: the means by which you produced the work you are submitting. If you are found to have misrepresented your sources and to have submitted others' work as your own, penalties may follow. Your case may be forwarded to the Head of the department, who may decide that you should receive zero for the assignment. The Head will report your case to the Dean's Office, where the report will remain on file. The Head may decide, in consultation with your instructor, that a greater penalty is called for, and will forward your case to the Dean's Office. After an interview in the Dean's Office, your case may be forwarded to the President's Advisory Committee on Academic Misconduct. Following a hearing in which you will be asked to account for your actions, the President may apply penalties including zero for the assignment; zero for the course; suspension from the university for a period ranging from 4 to 24 months; a notation on your permanent record. The penalty may be a combination of these.

Academic communities also depend on their members' living up to the commitments they make. By enrolling in this course, you make commitments to an academic community: you are responsible for meeting deadlines, and attending class and engaging in class activities. If you find that you cannot meet a deadline or cannot participate in a course activity, discuss your situation with your instructor before the deadline or before your absence.

Like any academic author submitting work for review and evaluation, you are guaranteeing that the work you submit for this course has not already been submitted for credit in another course. Your submitting work from another course, without your instructor's prior agreement, may result in penalties such as those applied to the misrepresentation of sources.

## **COVID-19 Safety**

**If you are sick, it is important that you stay home.** Complete a self-assessment for COVID-19 symptoms here: <https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en>. In this class, the marking scheme is intended to provide flexibility so that you can prioritize your health and still succeed.

**If you miss class because of illness:** You will be provided the opportunity to earn participation points for that week by scheduling a zoom meeting with me to discuss the week's readings and themes at a later date.

**If I (the instructor) am feeling ill:** If I am unwell, I will not come to class. I will make every reasonable attempt to communicate plans for the class as soon as possible by email. If I am well enough to teach, but am taking precautions to avoid infecting others, we may hold the class online. If this happens, you will receive an email informing you how to join the class.

## **Reach out and ask for help if you need it**



University students often encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. If you run into difficulties and need assistance, I encourage you to contact me by email. I will do my best to support your success during the term. This includes identifying concerns I may have about your academic progress or wellbeing through Early Alert. With Early Alert, faculty members can connect you with advisors who offer student's support and assistance getting back on track to success. Only specialized UBC advisors are able to access any concerns I may identify, and Early Alert does not affect your academic record.

For more information: <https://facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/systems-tools/early-alert>

For information about addressing mental or physical health concerns, including seeing a UBC counselor or doctor, visit: <https://students.ubc.ca/health-wellness>

## **Respectful University Environment**

UBC recognizes that “the best possible environment for working, learning and living is one in which respect, civility, diversity, opportunity and inclusion are valued.” The full *UBC Statement on Respectful Environment for Students, Faculty and Staff* can be found at <http://www.hr.ubc.ca/respectful-environment/files/UBC-Statement-on-Respectful-Environment-2014.pdf>. Students should read this statement carefully and take note of both the protections and the responsibilities that it outlines for all members of the UBC community. Students should also review the Student Code of Conduct, at: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,750,0>

This course values frank discussion, healthy debate, and the free and respectful exchange of ideas. Students are welcome to voice and defend their views, which may differ from those of other students or of the instructor. However, disrespectful behavior, including bullying and harassment, will not be tolerated. The instructor will be professional and respectful in all their exchanges with students, and students will exercise similar professionalism and respect in their interactions with each other and with the instructor.

I expect us all to respect the preferred personal pronouns of all students. Using the right pronoun, like using someone's correct name, is a way to show respect. Please advise me of your pronoun preference early in the semester so I can respond as appropriate.

If you have any concerns about the class environment, please raise them with the instructor. You also have the options of contacting the Head of the Political Science Department, UBC's Equity and Inclusion Office (<http://equity.ubc.ca>), or the UBC Ombudsperson for Students: <https://ombudsoffice.ubc.ca>

## **Equity and Harassment**

UBC is committed to equity (including but not limited to gender equity) and fostering a safe learning environment for everyone. All peoples should be able to study, work, and learn in a supportive environment that is free from sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination. UBC's Policy #3 on Discrimination and Harassment defines harassment as:

“unwanted and unwelcome attention from a person who knows, or ought to know, that the behaviour is unwelcome. Harassment can range from written or spoken comments to unwanted jokes, gifts, and physical assault, and may be accompanied by threats or promises regarding work or study opportunities and conditions. Harassment can be either a single incident or a series of related incidents.” Such behavior is not acceptable and will not be tolerated at UBC. If you or someone you know has encountered sexual violence or harassment, you can find confidential support and resources at the AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre, (SASC), and the Equity and Inclusion Office. The SASC is an all-genders service that serves the UBC-Vancouver campus community and is committed to creating a safer campus community, free from sexualized violence. Their work is informed by feminism, anti-oppression and recognition of intersectionality. The Equity and Inclusion Office is committed to fostering a community in which human rights are respected and equity and diversity are integral to university life.

Resources are available at:

Sexual Assault Support Centre, (SASC)  
249M, Student Union Building, UBC  
604-827-5180  
sasc@ams.ubc.ca  
<http://amssasc.ca>

Equity and Inclusion Office  
2306 – 1874 East Mall (Brock Hall)  
604.822.6353  
equity@equity.ubc.ca  
<http://equity.ubc.ca>