

American University
School of International Service
SIS-653-011

Nuclear Weapons: Politics and Proliferation

Fall 2021

Wednesdays 8:20 PM – 10:50 PM

Sharon K. Weiner

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office hours (via zoom): Mondays 5:00 – 6:30 PM; Fridays 4:00 – 5:30 PM, and other times by appointment (<https://calendly.com/skweiner/office-hours>)

Learning Objectives

The United States is currently poised to invest an estimated \$1.5 trillion in modernizing its nuclear arsenal. Terrorist access to nuclear weapons and materials remains a top national security concern. Russia and China, meanwhile, are modernizing their arsenals and seem increasingly willing to use nuclear threats in support of an aggressive foreign policy agenda. This course will help students understand the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. decisions about national security, including the politics of nuclear weapons decision making in the United States, the role of nuclear weapons more broadly in U.S. strategy, and explanations for why other countries pursue, develop, or forego nuclear weapons. Students will also learn how to write about nuclear weapons issues for both academic and policy audiences. Perhaps most importantly, students will learn to be contrary; that is, to critically analyze, comment on, disagree with, poke holes in, and otherwise engage with policy and media reports about nuclear weapons.

Learning Outcomes

- Develop a critical literacy with respect to theories, ideas, and policies that seek to explain the relationship between nuclear weapons and state action;
- Understand nuclear weapons delivery systems, warheads, key technical parameters of their use, and their effects;
- Be able to critically assess nuclear weapons relevant policy statements, articles, and visual media to better understand underlying assumptions, biases, and misrepresentations; and,
- Improve the quality of your research, analytical writing, and your ability to translate these into policy-relevant and/or politically-motivated writing.

Course Material

All material is posted on Canvas except for the following item:

- Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (W.W. Norton).
 - Please get the 2nd or 3rd edition of this book. Although these editions have slightly different chapters, for the purposes of this class it does not matter which edition you read.

Course Requirements

All written assignments should be emailed directly to skweiner@american.edu in either .doc or .docx or another Word-compatible format. Please do NOT submit assignments through Canvas.

Class participation 10%

This course will be conducted as a seminar and therefore it is essential that you start each class having read the required material. More importantly, you should engage critically with that material both in terms of its content and as applied to your own research interests. I expect you to make regular contributions to class that reflect a knowledge of the readings and also to constructively engage with and provide feedback to peers.

“Fake” News 5% + 5% By Tuesday at 5 PM on various dates throughout the semester

Select a news item of direct relevance to the topic being discussed in a specific week. For that week’s class, you will prepare an analysis of that news item, assessing the degree to which it presents its topic fairly and completely. In other words, if you had to form an opinion on the subject or make a policy choice based upon that article, what additional information would be necessary to understand the topic more fully? Are there any explicit or implicit biases of the author? Your analysis will be submitted in the form of a memo that succinctly summarizes the article and then analyzes it, all in less than 4 pages. All “fake” news articles and analysis will be posted on the course Canvas site as part of the required reading for that week.

- Your first “fake” news assignment will be completed as part of a group. Your group will lead the discussion on the topic in class.
- Your second “fake” news assignment will be a solo effort and consist only of the memo.

One Side of the Debate 20% Due Monday, October 4, before 9 PM

Identify a specific nuclear weapon-relevant policy question, either historical or contemporary, that is either central to your research interests or of personal interest. This will be the topic of your remaining assignments for the semester, which will ask you to analyze and adjudicate the debate over this policy issue.

NOTE: although it is not required, it is in your best interest to submit to me in advance your policy topic in the form of a research question. Although good questions can lead to bad papers it is almost impossible to produce a good paper based on a bad research question.

For this assignment, in 3,000 words or less, summarize and critically analyze one side of the debate on your policy question. This analysis should include:

- 1) the main points of agreement/disagreement on this side of the debate;
- 2) underlying assumptions;
- 3) an analysis of the evidence, actors, and/or institutions that tend to support this side of the debate including any relevant organizational and political biases.

Please note that your analysis needs to be based on the policy debate but also informed by the relevant historical, academic, and policy-relevant literature.

The Other Side of the Debate 25% Due Monday, November 8, before 9 PM

Same instructions as above, but for the other side of the debate.

Who Wins? 10% Due Monday, December 6, before 9 PM

In 1,000 words or less, explain how you will determine which side of the debate is most persuasive or “wins”. You may not simply agree with one side of the debate or offer your personal opinion. Instead,

in this paper you will outline the criteria or standards you will apply to your debate and in support of the policy recommendation(s) made in your last assignment (a policy memo).

Policy Memo 25% Due Wednesday, December 15, before 10:50 PM

In two pages or less, produce a policy memo that:

- 1) Is addressed to a specific policy maker, summarizes the debate, and explains why it is important for the policy maker to take a side in that debate or adopt a specific recommendation to resolve it;
- 2) makes an argument about which side of the debate is more persuasive and is explicit about the criteria used in making that judgement; and,
- 3) explains the likely pros and cons of selecting the recommended course of action.

Syllabus

September 1 Syllabus, Assignments, Plan for the Semester

Please read the course syllabus and assignments and be prepared to discuss any questions, concerns, or uncertainties.

We will also be discussing the effects of nuclear weapons and how they work. Please read/watch:

- Lynn Eden, "City on Fire," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 60:1 (January /February 2004), 32-37, 40-43.
- The "attack scene" from *The Day After*, Edward Hume (writer) and Nicholas Meyer (director) (1983) on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I5xznESLc>
- For some ideas about nuclear policy, plus a bit of fun, please watch: John Oliver, "Nuclear Weapons: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver," July 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Y1ya-yF35g>

September 8 Two Nuclear Posture Reviews

In this class we will dissect two Nuclear Posture Reviews (NPRs). Please read the following and be prepared to discuss how they are similar and different:

- Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April 2010.
- Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, February 2018.
- Hans M. Kristensen & Matt Korda, "United States nuclear forces, 2021," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, (2021), Vol. 77, No. 1, 43-63.

September 15 Doing Research on Nuclear Questions

How do you do research and discover information about a topic that is technical and often highly classified with few open publications? Please read the following materials and be prepared to discuss the similarities, differences, and biases in each:

- Section 2.52, W76-1 Modification Program, Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan, July 2019.
- Amy F. Woolf, A Low-Yield, Submarine-Launched Nuclear Warhead: Overview of the Expert Debate, Congressional Research Service, January 5, 2021.

- Vipin Narang, The Discrimination Problem: Why Putting Low-Yield Nuclear Weapons on Submarines is so Dangerous, *War on the Rocks*, February 8, 2018.
- Adam Lowther, Why We Need the W76-2 Low Yield Nuke, *Breaking Defense*, March 2, 2020.

September 22 Why do states get the bomb?

There is no agreement on the answer to this question! Please read the following and be prepared to discuss the different answers:

- Scott D. Sagan, "Why do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security*, (Winter 1996-1997), 21:3, 54-86.
- Etel Solingen, "The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint," *International Security*, (1994), 19:2, 126-169.

Please also watch this short video in which nuclear experts from 4 different countries apply Sagan to their areas of research.:

- Security From Inside the State – Why States Get Nuclear Weapons

September 29 Is proliferation good or bad?

For two different views, please read and be prepared to discuss:

- Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.), 2nd or 3rd editions only. If you have the 2nd edition, read chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 and skim the rest; if you have the 3rd edition, read chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and skim the rest.

REMINDER: One Side of the Debate (20%) is due Monday, October 4, before 9 PM.

October 6 Deterrence

How do you turn deterrence into nuclear strategy? What does it mean to "deter"? Please read and be prepared to discuss:

- Bernard Brodie, "The Anatomy of Deterrence," *World Politics*, 11:2 (January 1959), 173-191.
- Henry A. Kissinger, "Force and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age," *Foreign Affairs*, 34:3 (April 1956), 249-366.
- John Mueller, "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons," *International Security*, 13:2, (Fall 1988), 55-79.

October 13 North Korea and Iran

How serious is the threat from North Korea? How can we convince North Korea to denuclearize? Should the United States return to the JCPOA, attempt to negotiate a new agreement, or accept that Iran will develop nuclear weapons? Please read the following and come to class prepared to take a side in these debates:

North Korea

- Hans M. Kristensen & Matt Korda, "North Korean nuclear weapons, 2021," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 77:4 (2021), 222-236.
- Kelsey Davenport, "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy," Fact Sheets & Briefs, Arms Control Association, July 2020.
- Missile Defense Project, "Missiles of North Korea," *Missile Threat*, CSIS, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/dprk/>

- Hugh Gusterson, Paranoid, “Potbellied Stalinist Gets Nuclear Weapons: How the U.S. Print Media Cover North Korea,” *The Nonproliferation Review*, 15:1 (2008), 21-42.

Iran

- Kelsey Davenport, “The Joint Comprehensive Plan of action (JCPOA) at a Glance,” Fact Sheets & Briefs, Arms Control Association, May 2018.
- Read the 5 witness statements in U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, “Assessing the Iran Deal,” Serial No. 115-23, April 5, 2017. Please note that for each witness there is a Statement for the Record, as well as testimony given that day. These usually duplicate each other so no need to read both.

October 20 Russia and China

Should the United States extend the New START Treaty with Russia? Should we be worried about Russia’s “escalate to de-escalate” nuclear doctrine? Is China on the brink of changing its nuclear doctrine? And what about those hypersonic weapons? Please read the following and come to class prepared to take a side in these debates:

Russia

- *Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, April 8, 2010.
- Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, “Russian nuclear weapons, 2021,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, (2021), 77:2, 99-108.
- Olga Oliker, “Russia’s Nuclear Doctrine,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2016.
- Mark B. Schneider, “Escalate to De-escalate,” *Proceedings* (February 2017), 143:2.

China

- Hans M. Kristensen & Matt Korda, “Chinese nuclear forces, 2020” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, (2020), 76:6, 443-457.
- Li Bin and Tong Zhao, editors, “Introduction” and “Chapter 1” in *Understanding Chinese Nuclear Thinking*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016.
- Michael R. Pompeo and Marshall S. Billingslea, China’s Nuclear Madness, U.S. Department of State, January 4, 2021.

October 27 No First Use and Launch on Warning

Should the United States adopt a no first use policy? For this week, you are responsible for doing research and deciding before class which side you are on. Come to class prepared to craft a memo with your colleagues that persuasively argues your position.

November 3 Arms Control vs the Ban Treaty

Among people who favor a reduction in reliance on nuclear weapons, some argue that the best path forward is arms control. Others contend this isn’t sufficient and have grown weary of unfilled promises by the nuclear weapons states to disarm. This week’s discussion will be led by Zia Mian, Senior Research Scholar and Co-Director, Program in Science and Global Security, Princeton University

- Joint Statement By China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom And United States [P5 declaration] – United Nations General Assembly 73, New York, October 22, 2018.
- Mark Schapiro, “Non-Aligneds Versus The Bomb: Mutiny on the Nuclear Bounty,” *The Nation*, December 27, 1993.
- Rebecca Davis Gibbons, “The humanitarian turn in nuclear disarmament and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,” *The Nonproliferation Review*, 25:1-2, (2018), 11-36.
- Steven E. Miller, “The Rise and Decline of Global Nuclear Order?” in “Meeting the Challenges of the New Nuclear Age: Nuclear Weapons in a Changing Global Order”, *American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 2019.

REMINDER: *The Other Side of the Debate (25%) due Monday, November 8, before 9 PM.*

November 10 Ethics and the Bomb

How are we to judge the ethics of nuclear weapons and nuclear possession? Please read these selections and come to class prepared to discuss why they disagree:

- C. Todd Lopez, 4 Things to Know About the U.S. Nuclear Deterrence Strategy, U.S. Department of Defense, April 1, 2019.
- Arundhati Roy, “The end of imagination,” *Frontline*, July 27, 1998.
- The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, May 3, 1983. (skim for the main arguments)
- Kingston Reif, Debating U.S. Nuclear Spending in the Age of the Coronavirus, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, June 10, 2020.
- Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12:4 (1987), 687-718.
- Lee Butler, “The False God of Nuclear Deterrence,” *Global Dialogue*, 1:2 (Autumn 1999), 74-81.

November 17 Nuclear Terrorism

What’s the difference between a nuclear weapon and a radiological device? Can terrorists be deterred? This week we explore a variety of issues related to concerns about nuclear terrorism.

- Jonathan Medalia, “Dirty Bombs”: Technical Background, Attack Prevention and Response, Issues for Congress, Congressional Research Service, June 24, 2011.
- Please watch this discussion about domestic nuclear terrorism: <https://www.stimson.org/event/protecting-against-insider-threats/>
- “Nuclear Explosion”, ready.gov/nuclear-explosion (This website offers the U.S. government’s advice for what to do in the event of a nuclear explosion. Come to class prepared to discuss how useful you find this advice, plus other cultural or social “cues” that you think are being promoted.)

December 1 Nuclear Weapons and Power

The nuclear weapons states usually justify their weapons as critical for national security while claiming that the nuclear weapons of others constitute dangerous proliferation. This week we examine the relationship between states, nuclear weapons, and power.

- Hugh Gusterson, “Nuclear Weapons and the Other in the Western Imagination,” *Cultural Anthropology*, (Feb 1999), Vol. 14, No. 1, 111-143.
- Anne Harrington de Santana, “Nuclear Weapons as a Currency of Power: Deconstructing the Fetishism of Force,” *The Nonproliferation Review*, (November 2009), Vol. 16, No. 3, 325-345.

- Sam Marullo, "The Ideological Nature of Nuclear Deterrence: Some Causes and Consequences," *The Sociological Quarterly*, (Autumn 1985), Vol. 26, No. 3, 311-330.
- Benoit Pelopidas, "The unbearable lightness of luck: Three sources of overconfidence in the manageability of nuclear crises," *European Journal of International Security*, (July 2017), Vol. 2, part 2, 240-262.

REMINDER: *Who Wins? (15%) is due Monday, December 6, before 9 PM.*

December 8 TBD

This space is TBD in order to leave room for nuclear weapons issues or controversies that arise during the semester.

REMINDER: *Policy Memo (25%) is due Wednesday, December 15, before 10:50 PM.S*

University-Wide Policies

Academic Integrity

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the university's [Academic Integrity Code](#). By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Academic Integrity Code and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly and disciplinary action will be taken should violations occur. This includes cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism.

Recording of Classes

You are not permitted to make visual or audio recordings of classroom lectures or any class related content, using any type of recording devices (e.g., smart phone, computer, digital recorder, etc.) unless prior permission from the instructor is obtained, and there are no objections from any of the students in the class.

If permission is granted, personal use and sharing of recordings and any electronic copies of course materials (e.g., PowerPoints, formulas, lecture notes and any classroom discussions online or otherwise) is limited to your own personal and for educational purposes only, even after the end of the course. Exceptions will be made for students who present a signed Letter of Accommodation from the [Academic Support and Access Center](#).

To supplement the classroom experience, lectures may be audio or video recorded by faculty and made available to students registered for this class. Faculty may record classroom lectures or discussions for pedagogical use, future student reference, or to meet the accommodation needs of students with a documented disability. These recordings are limited to personal use and may not be distributed (fileshare), sold, or posted on social media outlets without the written permission of faculty.

Unauthorized downloading, file sharing, distribution of any part of a recorded lecture or course materials. or using information for purposes other than your own learning may be deemed a violation of [American University's Student Code of Conduct](#) and subject to disciplinary action (see Student Conduct Code VI. Prohibited Conduct).

Student Code of Conduct

The central commitment of American University is the development of thoughtful, responsible human beings in the context of a challenging yet supportive academic community. The [Student Code of Conduct](#) is designed to benefit the American University community and to assist in forming the highest standards of ethics and morals among its members. By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Student Code of Conduct and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code.

Discrimination and Harassment

American University expressly prohibits any form of discrimination and discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. AU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information, or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities.

As a faculty member, I am required to report discriminatory or harassing conduct to the university if I witness it or become aware of it – regardless of the location of the incident. There are four confidential resource on campus if you wish to speak to someone who is not required to report: Counseling Center, victim advocates in OASIS, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center. If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with [University Police](#) (202-885-2527), the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) (dos@american.edu or 202-885-3300), or the [Title IX Office](#) (202-885-3373 or TitleIX@american.edu). For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact [OASIS](#) (oasis@american.edu or 202-885-7070) or check out the [Support Guide on the Title IX webpage](#).

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the University be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or the use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU email and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any emergency-related absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU email regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the [AU website](#), and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college specific information.

Religious Observances

Students will be provided the opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Please send this notification through email to the professor. For additional information, see American University's [religious observances policy](#).

Academic Support Services

[Academic Success Coaching](#) is a free one-on-one meeting between a student and a professional academic coach to build or enhance time management, organizational, reading, notetaking, test taking and study skills. Students can work with an academic coach to develop an academic action plan, better understand how to break down large assignments, and discuss overcoming procrastination. Coaching services are open to all students. (Location in Clark Hall Rooms 106/113 – Schedule appointments on the [Academic Coaching You Can Book Me](#) – academiccoaching@american.edu)

[International Student & Scholar Services](#) has resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners, response to questions about visas, immigration status and employment and intercultural programs, clubs and other campus resources. (202-885-3350, Butler Pavilion 410).

[Writing Center](#) offers free, individual coaching sessions to all AU students. In your 45-minute session, a student writing consultant can help you address your assignments, understand the conventions of academic writing, and learn how to revise and edit your own work. (Bender Library – 1st Floor Commons – [Schedule tutoring appointments on WC Online](#) – 202-885-2991)

Student Support Services

Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI)

[CDI](#) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, multicultural, first-generation, and women’s experiences on campus and to advancing AU’s commitment to respecting and valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy. It is located on the 2nd floor of Mary Graydon Center (202-885-3651, MGC 201 & 202).

Counseling Center

The Counseling Center offers a variety of psychological services, online resources, and referrals to off-campus mental health care. Please visit the Center's website for more information: www.american.edu/counseling.

Dean of Students Office

The Office of the Dean of Students offers individual meetings to discuss issues that impact the student experience including academic, social, and personal matters. Staff work with students and make referrals to appropriate campus resources for resolution.

Additionally, while academic regulations state that medical absences are to be excused, medical documentation should be submitted to the Office of the Dean of Students ("DOS"). The DOS staff will review the documentation and verify the medical excuse. Faculty have the discretion to approve absences and do not need permission from the Office of the Dean of Students to excuse absences.

Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence

As stated in the [American University Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Policy](#):

"American University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy or parenting, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information or any other bases under applicable federal and local laws and regulations (collectively "Protected Bases") in its programs and activities. The University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and stalking."

The above website includes further details, including how to report instances of discrimination and your responsibilities as a member of the campus community in relation to the policy; you are strongly encouraged to familiarize yourself further with this policy.

Class rosters and University data systems are provided to faculty with the student's legal name and legal gender marker. As a student, you are able to change how your name shows up through email and on your AU ID Card. This option is helpful for various student populations, including but not limited to: students who abbreviate their first name; students who use their middle name; international students; and transgender students. As a faculty member, I am committed to using your name and pronouns. We will take time during our first class together to do introductions, at which point you can share with all members of our learning community what name and pronouns you use, as you are comfortable. Additionally, if these change at any point during the semester, please let me know and we can develop a plan to share this information with others in a way that is safe for you. Should you want to update your name, you can do so by looking at the [guidelines and frequently](#) asked questions from the Center for Diversity and Inclusion.

Students with Disabilities

If you wish to receive accommodations for a disability, please notify me with a memo from the Academic Support and Access Center. As accommodations are not retroactive, timely notification at the beginning of the semester, if possible, is strongly recommended. To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the Academic Support and Access Center at 202-

885-3360 or asac@american.edu. For more information, visit AU's [Disability Accommodations web page](#).