

The Secret Side of International Politics

PLSC 29202/39202

Winter 2025

Time: Mondays & Wednesdays, 9:30-10:20am

Room: Harper Memorial Library 130

Professor: Austin Carson, Department of Political Science, acarson@uchicago.edu

TAs: Adam Weiss (aweiss5@uchicago.edu) and Alex Tippet (tippetta@uchicago.edu)

Office Hours:

Carson:

Weeks 2, 3, 5, 8: Tuesdays, 2-3pm, via Zoom. Sign up [here](#).

Weeks 4, 6, 7, 9: Thursdays, 5:30-7:30pm, Ex Libris Café. Drop in, no sign up.

TAs: see Canvas.

Course description

This course introduces students to the secret side of international politics. The class meets twice per week and uses a lecture/lab model. Each week, a lecture day covers a theme regarding secrecy's role in world politics while a "lab" day provides guidance on each stage of the research paper assignment. The course integrates scholarship on secrecy, intelligence, leaks, and related topics from a range of theoretical approaches. We learn about secrecy's role in protecting sensitive diplomatic negotiations, insulating leaders from domestic political scrutiny, and as a vehicle for clandestine information collection and intelligence analysis. We also learn about secrecy's role in covert action and as a tool to safeguard international reputation. We conclude with two weeks on secrecy's impact on individuals within the national security state and the impact of new technology on states' ability to act secretly. Student grades are largely based on an original research paper that draws on declassified primary materials and related checkpoint assignments. Other assignments assess students' ability to think critically about assigned readings. This course is intended for advanced undergraduates (political science majors and non-majors welcome) and M.A. students with the appetite and bandwidth for a very challenging writing project compressed into the rushed quarter system.

Books for purchase

I recommend buying your books from the [Seminary Co-Op Bookstore](#). Note correct editions via the ISBN number. There is only one book to buy:

Gusterson, Hugh. *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*. University of California Press, 1996. ISBN 9780520213739

Requirements

Students are expected to attend every session and complete the required readings. The class grade is based on reading assessments and a final research paper.

Weekly reading reactions (30%). Students must write weekly reactions in Canvas that respond to the assigned readings for lecture days (listed under "Required readings for lecture" in the schedule below). Weekly reactions should follow a simple "one paragraph, one question" format. That is, each student should write a paragraph reflecting on the readings and pose one question. Reactions can focus on a single reading but the best will identify themes or make novel observations about more than one. Reactions should be posted in the Discussion section of the course Canvas site.

They will be graded “incomplete / pass / high pass” and are due by the start of class (9:30am Chicago time) the day of lecture (Mondays besides Week 1).

Research paper (70% in total). Students must write an original research paper that draws in large part on originally classified or otherwise unavailable primary government materials. The goal of this assignment is for students to get hands-on experience doing qualitative-historical research using materials that shed light on the hidden aspects of the secret side of international politics. Papers should feature a clear argument that pushes forward existing scholarly and/or popular understandings of an event, relationship, or program. The focus of the paper need not be secrecy’s political value; it may, instead, use previously unavailable documents to shed light on a well-known event. Canvas features a host of examples of past papers and topics. Consult these often! The overall grade is composed of the following checkpoint assignments:

- Topic proposal and research question (Wk 3) (5%)
- Data description and conventional wisdom summary (Wk 4) (5%)
- One paragraph summary and outline (Wk 5) (5%)
- Five-page draft swap, including feedback to partner (Wk 8) (5%)

The research paper, due during finals week, must be at least 25 pages double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, one-inch margins, and use footnotes (not endnotes). There is no maximum length. The paper is worth 50% of the course grade.

Professionalism and community

We will create our own quarter-long intellectual community. I prioritize each student feeling comfortable developing and scrutinizing their own ideas and those of others. Students must follow basic rules of respectful intellectual exchange. Be professional in your communications with me, the TA(s), and other students. Emails should be thoughtfully composed with normal punctuation and salutations. Comments in class should be respectful of other students. Disagree without being disagreeable. Offer a contrasting view without being confrontational. This kind of open environment for intellectual exploration and exchange requires the absence of discriminatory or abusive behavior. For example, gender-based misconduct, which encompass a range of conduct from harassment to sexual assault, will be treated as violations of the standards of our community and is unacceptable. Other forms of misconduct based on race, religion, or sexual orientation are equally unacceptable. One useful university resource is [here](#). I encourage you to come to me with concerns about anyone’s professionalism, including your own.

Email policy

In general, I am unable to read and respond to student emails until the day after I receive them. On weekends, I often do not read/respond at all. Please do not expect immediate replies. For emergencies or crises, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will do my best to respond quickly. The [Dean-on-Call Program](#) is another critical resource for anyone in a crisis situation of any kind.

Late policy

Deadlines are strict. Assignments received late will be dropped a full letter grade for each 24-hour period past the deadline. Exceptions include unexpected illness or family emergencies, with instructor approval. Advanced communication is important, to the extent possible.

Academic integrity

For original research papers, plagiarism in any form is especially problematic. I strictly follow the University’s policy on academic integrity: “It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another’s statements or ideas as one’s own work.” Note that “another” can refer to both human-generated text/ideas or that of very smart machines. More details on the policy are [here](#).

AI policy

Artificial intelligence can be a valuable tool for learning. The University’s [PhoenixAI](#) system is one valuable platform for this and may be worth exploring. However, misuse and overuse of AI can drastically

curtail the learning process that is central to this course. *Uses of AI not expressly permitted is a violation of academic integrity (see above) and grounds for grade reductions and other consequences.*

- Guiding principles for AI in this class
 - Many of our learning goals can be achieved only through the process of manually researching and writing a long paper. The finished, polished paper is less the point. Learning how to get there is the point. Use of AI that allows shortcuts in the research and writing process creates shortcuts in learning.
 - AI is good at some tasks. Manually doing those tasks should not be romanticized or reflexively preserved simply because this is how things have been done before.
 - AI is remarkably good at generating “stuff.” Human brains are the only way to convert stuff into useful research material.
 - Writing is an especially sacred skill and one key goal of the course. There is no substitute for original, creative writing. AI can never threaten the integrity of this goal.
- What is expressly forbidden: use of text generated by AI tools in student writing in any assignment under any circumstances is forbidden. Text generated by AI that is trivially modified is strictly forbidden. Information/text generated by an AI tool should never be considered a reliable source and should not be cited.
- What is expressly permitted: use of AI for brainstorming, for suggestions of literatures to consult and relevant research areas, for what might be conventional wisdom, or for sources is permitted. For each of these, subsequent “manual” steps are critical if use of AI is to advance learning goals. Summarization of texts with AI tools as part of the research process for the paper is permitted but risky. Manual summarization is a key skill and there is no substitute for close reading of important source material. Two final warnings: 1) beware of hallucinations and 2) students are responsible for using human brain power to analyze AI output, assess its validity and wisdom, and integrating it into their specific project.
- Other uses of AI may emerge during the quarter. Please ask about them. I will assess and clarify their status. To facilitate learning together about AI, I will ask for volunteers to create an “AI Advisory Group” early in the quarter. Its role will be to collate questions and provide periodic advice about how AI tools may benefit or harm the research/writing process.
- Verification. As a safeguard against prohibited uses of AI, each student will be required to be able to provide proof of “version history” for their final research paper, upon request.

Disability accommodations

If you need any special accommodations, please provide me with a copy of an Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) as soon as possible so that you may discuss with me how your accommodations may be implemented in this course.

Overview of Topics

Contents

Week 1 (Jan 6). Overview	5
Week 2 (Jan 13). Secrecy in Diplomatic Negotiations	6
Week 3 (Jan 20). Secrecy and Domestic Politics	7
Week 4 (Jan 27). Secrecy and Information: Intelligence Collection	8
Week 5 (Feb 3). Secrecy and Understanding: Intelligence Analysis	9
Week 6 (Feb 10). Secret Influence Attempts (Covert Action)	10
Week 7 (Feb 17). Secrecy and International Reputation	11
Week 8 (Feb 21). Secret Societies: Secrecy and the Individual	12
Week 9 (March 3). Secrecy and New Technology	13

Schedule and Readings

Week 1 (Jan 6). Overview

We will review the syllabus and learn about the course's major assignment: the research paper. I will describe the lecture/lab format and answer initial questions. I will conclude with a short lecture defining the scope of the course through a discussion of the meaning of the terms in the course title.

Week 1 (Jan 8). Mini-Lecture & First Lab

This class is split 50/50 between lecture and lab. I will start by describing the most conventional view of secrecy's role in international politics: as a means of securing states against security threats posed by adversaries. I will unpack this logic and connect it to classic International Relations theoretical traditions. The second half will feature more details on the paper assignment, including tips on finding a topic, the two "styles" of paper, and how to plan your quarter to finish in 9 weeks.

Required readings for lecture

Fearon, James D. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 379–414. [Read sections marked on Canvas in yellow highlights only.]
Cancian, Mark. *Inflicting Surprise: Gaining Competitive Advantage in Great Power Conflicts*. CSIS, January 21, 2021. Chapters 1, 3. [Link here](#).
Parkinson, E. Malcolm. "The Artist at War: Painters, Muralists, Sculptors, Architects Worked to Provide Camouflage for Troops in World War I." *Prologue Magazine*. Spring 2012, Vol. 44, No. 1. [Link here](#).
Listen to "Razzle Dazzle." Episode 65. 99% Invisible. (13 minutes) [Link here](#).

****Don't forget to post your first reading reaction to Canvas by start of class****

Supplemental reading

Carnegie, Allison. "Secrecy in International Relations and Foreign Policy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (2021): 213-233.
Gibbs, David N. "Secrecy and International Relations." *Journal of Peace Research* 32.2 (1995): 213-228.
Bok, Sissela. *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
Green, Brendan Rittenhouse, and Austin Long. "Conceal or Reveal? Managing Clandestine Military Capabilities in Peacetime Competition." *International Security* 44.3 (2019): 48-83.
Slantchev, Branislav L. "Feigning Weakness." *International Organization* 64, no. 3 (2010): 357–88.
Axelrod, Robert. "The Rational Timing of Surprise." *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (January 1979): 228–46.
Betts, Richard K. "Surprise Despite Warning: Why Sudden Attacks Succeed." *Political Science Quarterly* 95, no. 4 (1981): 551–72.
Lindsey, David. "Military Strategy, Private Information, and War." *International Studies Quarterly* 59.4 (2015): 629-640.
Holt, Thaddeus. *The Deceivers: Allied Military Deception in the Second World War*. Scribner, 2004.

Week 2 (Jan 13). Secrecy in Diplomatic Negotiations

This week focuses on the role of secrecy in diplomacy. Diplomats do much of their work behind closed doors. For example, the vast majority of contacts between ambassadors/embassies and host countries are in private settings. Backchannel diplomatic channels are often used to resolve disputes. Diplomatic reporting back to the “home office” is always in secret. Secret, direct negotiations often precede the splashy trade or peace agreements that make headlines. Why is secrecy so useful for diplomacy? We think about this question via two cases: a secret back channel during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the Nixon White House, and the secret negotiations to end Libya’s chemical weapons program.

Required readings for lecture

Colson, Aurélien. “The Ambassador Between Light and Shade: The Emergence of Secrecy as the Norm for International Negotiation.” *International Negotiation* 13, no. 2 (2008): 179–95.

Moss, Richard A. *Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow: Confidential Diplomacy and Détente*. University Press of Kentucky, 2017. Introduction, Chapter 2. Digital version available [via Library](#).

Tucker, Jonathan B. “The Rollback of Libya’s Chemical Weapons Program.” *Nonproliferation Review* 16.3 (2009): 363-384.

****Don’t forget to post a reading reaction to Canvas by start of class****

Week 2 (Jan 15). Lab

In our first full “lab” meeting, we discuss one reading on another case of secret diplomacy: the quiet talks that led to the Abraham Accords between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain. We then spend time discussing how to find sources for the research paper.

Required readings for discussion

Isaac Stanley-Becker. “How Trump Advanced Arab-Israeli Peace but Fueled Palestinian Rage.” *Washington Post*, February 10, 2024. [Link here](#).

Supplemental reading

Bjola, Corneliu, and Stuart Murray, eds. *Secret Diplomacy: Concepts, Contexts and Cases*. Routledge, 2016.

Crall, Dennis A., and Thomas M. Martin. “Cool Hand Nuke: Lessons From the Quiet Diplomacy of the Cienfuegos Non-Crisis.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9.2 (2013): 189-201.

Chambers, Simone. “Behind Closed Doors: Publicity, Secrecy, and the Quality of Deliberation.” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12.4 (2004): 389-410.

Nutt, Cullen G., and Reid BC Pauly. “Caught Red-Handed: How States Wield Proof to Coerce Wrongdoers.” *International Security* 46.2 (2021): 7-50.

Castle, Matthew, and Krzysztof J Pelc. “The Causes and Effects of Leaks in International Negotiations.” *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (December 1, 2019): 1147–62.

Kuo, Raymond. “Secrecy among Friends: Covert Military Alliances and Portfolio Consistency.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 63–89.

Haas, Melinda, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. “To Disclose or Deceive? Sharing Secret Information between Aligned States.” *International Security* 45, no. 3 (January 1, 2021): 122–61.

Myrick, Rachel. “Public Reactions to Secret Negotiations in International Politics.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 68.4 (2024): 703-729.

Yoder, Brandon K., and William Spaniel. “Costly Concealment: Secret Foreign Policymaking, Transparency, and Credible Reassurance.” *International Organization* 76.4 (2022): 868-900.

Week 3 (Jan 20). Secrecy and Domestic Politics

[MLK Day: NO IN-PERSON CLASS. Recorded lecture.]

This week focuses on the role of secrecy in coping with domestic politics. Leaders often face conflicting priorities: what is useful in foreign policy may be damaging at home. Robert Putnam (1988) famously termed the result “two-level games.” Moreover, both states in a cooperative situation are playing such two-level games. One appeal of secrecy is its ability to sever such links. The lecture will flesh out the kinds of domestic political challenges secrecy can address and how it addresses them with illustrations from the Cuban Missile Crisis and post-9/11 drone program.

Required readings for lecture

- Sagan, Scott D., and Jeremi Suri. "The Madman Nuclear Alert: Secrecy, Signaling, and Safety in October 1969." *International Security* 27.4 (2003): 150-183.
- Brown, Jonathan N., and Anthony S. Marcum. "Avoiding Audience Costs: Domestic Political Accountability and Concessions in Crisis Diplomacy." *Security Studies* 20 (April 2011): 141–70. [Skip the section “A Theory of Domestic Political Accountability...”]
- Miller, Greg and Bob Woodward. "Secret Memos Reveal Explicit Nature of U.S., Pakistan Agreement on Drones." *Washington Post*, October 24, 2013. [Link here](#).
- Mazzetti, Mark. "A Secret Deal on Drones, Sealed in Blood." *New York Times*, April 6, 2013. [Link here](#).

Week 3 (Jan 22). Lab

If secrecy is used to avoid domestic scrutiny, this lab session asks whether it is incompatible with democratic oversight. We will then review advice for settling on a paper topic, the ways of posing different research questions, and do a deep dive into several paper exemplars on Canvas.

Required readings for discussion

- Thompson, Dennis F. "Democratic Secrecy." *Political Science Quarterly* 114.2 (1999): 181-193.

Supplemental reading

- Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 427-460.
- Myrick, Rachel. "Why So Secretive? Unpacking Public Attitudes toward Secrecy and Success in US Foreign Policy." *The Journal of Politics* 82.3 (2020): 828-843.
- Gibbs, David N. "Secrecy and International Relations." *Journal of Peace Research* 32.2 (1995): 213-228.
- Stasavage, David. "Open-Door or Closed-Door? Transparency in Domestic and International Bargaining." *International Organization* 58, no. 04 (2004): 667–703.
- Kurizaki, Shuhei. "Efficient Secrecy: Public Versus Private Threats in Crisis Diplomacy." *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 03 (2007): 543–58.
- Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Zachary C. Steinert-Threlkeld, and David G. Victor. "Predictability versus Flexibility: Secrecy in International Investment Arbitration." *World Politics* 68, no. 3 (June 23, 2016): 413–53.
- Saunders, Elizabeth N. "War and the Inner Circle: Democratic Elites and the Politics of Using Force." *Security Studies* 24, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 466–501.
- Spaniel, William, and Michael Poznansky. "Credible Commitment in Covert Affairs." *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 3 (2018): 668–681.
- Yarhi-Milo, Keren. "Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance." *Security Studies* 22, no. 3 (2013): 405–35.
- Smith, Gregory L. "Secret but Constrained: The Impact of Elite Opposition on Covert Operations." *International Organization* 73.3 (2019): 685-707.
- Colaresi, Michael P. *Democracy Declassified: The Secrecy Dilemma in National Security*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2014.

****Topic proposal and research question due by Friday, Jan 24 by midnight****

****Email TAS****

Week 4 (Jan 27). Secrecy and Information: Intelligence Collection

Secrecy is also used as a tool for understanding. Gathering information through clandestine methods is the essence of intelligence collection (next week shifts the focus to analyzing that information). Lecture will cover the history of espionage and the variety of secret methods modern states use to gather information in secret. We will learn about the importance of technology in modern secrecy-based information collection, as illustrated by the famous U-2 spy plane. I will then outline the subject of my current book project, “intelligence infrastructure,” on the importance of a network of physical facilities, often far from a state’s own capital, for gathering intelligence.

Required readings for lecture

- Clark, Robert M. "Perspectives on Intelligence Collection." *Journal of US Intelligence Collection* 20 (2013): 47-52. [Link here](#).
- Brugioni, Dino. *Eyes in the Sky: Eisenhower, the CIA and Cold War Aerial Espionage*. Naval Institute Press, 2010. Chapter 5 (incl photos at end of chapter). Digital version available [via Library](#).
- Carson, Austin. “Intelligence Infrastructure and International Politics: An Excerpt.” Working Manuscript, University of Chicago, 2025. [On Canvas.]

Week 4 (Jan 29). Lab

This lab session will feature a discussion of one important intelligence collection system, satellites, and its impact on diplomacy. We therefore join this week’s focus on secrecy in information with the diplomacy theme from earlier. We then discuss what “conventional wisdom” means, how to identify it, and how to craft an argument that contrasts with it.

Required readings for discussion

- Gordon, Michael. “Six Chinese Ships Covertly Aided North Korea. The U.S. Was Watching.” *Wall Street Journal*. [On Canvas or [here](#)]
- Bateman, Aaron. "Trust but Verify: Satellite Reconnaissance, Secrecy and Arms Control During the Cold War." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 46.5 (2023): 1037-1061.

Supplemental reading

- Long, Austin, and Brendan Rittenhouse Green. “Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1–2 (January 2, 2015): 38–73.
- Early, Bryan R., and Erik Gartzke. “Spying from Space: Reconnaissance Satellites and Interstate Disputes.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 9 (October 1, 2021): 1551–75.
- Bolsinger, Diana. "Not at Any Price: LBJ, Pakistan, and Bargaining in an Asymmetric Intelligence Relationship." *Texas National Security Review* (Winter 2021/2022).
- Bolsinger, Diana I. "Deception and Manipulation in an Intelligence Liaison Relationship: US–Pakistani Negotiations and the 1980s Afghan Program." *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 37.1 (2024): 49-70.
- Nutt, Cullen G. "'Vital and Irreplaceable Facilities': Explaining Leverage When States Host Great Powers' Spying Operations." *Intelligence and National Security* 39.5 (2024): 841-863.
- Bateman, Aaron. "The Weakest Link: The Vulnerability of US and Allied Global Information Networks in the Nuclear Age." *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2024): 1-30.
- Bateman, Aaron. "Hunting the Red Bear: Satellite Reconnaissance and the 'Second Offset Strategy' in the Late Cold War." *The International History Review* (2024): 1-17.

****Data and conventional wisdom summary due by Friday, Jan 31 by midnight****

****Email TAs****

Week 5 (Feb 3). Secrecy and Understanding: Intelligence Analysis

Raw data is useless. Secretly obtained information must be processed, synthesized, and analyzed carefully to reach politically useful insights. Today, that process is done in large intelligence bureaucracies under the heading of “intelligence analysis.” We learn about intelligence analysis and how it can go wrong, building on the large literature on intelligence failures.

Required readings for lecture

Zegart, Amy B. *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*. Princeton University Press, 2009. Chapter 1, 4. Digital version available [via Library](#).

Rovner, Joshua. *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence*. Cornell University Press, 2011. Chapters 2, 3, 7. Digital version available [via Library](#).

Bergman, Ronen, Mark Mazzetti, and Maria Abi-Habib. "How Years of Israeli Failures on Hamas Led to a Devastating Attack." *New York Times*, October 29, 2023. [Available here](#).

Week 5 (Feb 5). Lab

This lab session will feature discussion of a provocative (and depressing?) thesis from Richard Betts: intelligence failures are inevitable. I will then provide a primer on how to analyze primary documents and organize one's notes.

Required readings for discussion

Betts, Richard K. "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable." *World Politics* 31, no. 1 (1978): 61–89.

Wirtz, James J. "Are Intelligence Failures Still Inevitable?." *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 37.1 (2024): 307-330. [Focus on Midway vs. Pearl Harbor.]

Supplemental reading

Johnson, Loch K., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence*. Oxford Univ Press, 2010.

Wohlstetter, Roberta. *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962.

Thomas, Martin. *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914*. University of California Press, 2008. Chapter 1. [On Canvas]

Jervis, Robert. *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell University Press, 2011. Chapters 1, 3 and 4.

Bar-Joseph, Uri, and Rose McDermott. *Intelligence Success and Failure: The Human Factor*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Yarhi-Milo, Keren. *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations*. Princeton University Press, 2014.

Yarhi-Milo, Keren. "In the Eye of the Beholder: How Leaders and Intelligence Communities Assess the Intentions of Adversaries." *International Security* 38.1 (2013): 7-51.

Bar-Joseph, Uri. "The politicization of intelligence: A comparative study." *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 26.2 (2013): 347-369.

Karam, Jeffrey G. "Missing Revolution: The American Intelligence Failure in Iraq, 1958." *Intelligence and National Security* 32.6 (2017): 693-709.

Davies, Philip HJ. "Intelligence culture and intelligence failure in Britain and the United States." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17.3 (2004): 495-520.

Fursenko, Aleksandr, and Timothy Naftali. "Soviet Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *Intelligence and National Security* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 1998): 64–87.

Trachtenberg, Marc. "Assessing Soviet Economic Performance During the Cold War: A Failure of Intelligence?" *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 2 (2018).

Horowitz, Michael C, and Erik Lin-Greenberg. "Algorithms and Influence Artificial Intelligence and Crisis Decision-Making." *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (December 1, 2022): sqac069.

****One paragraph summary and outline due by Friday, Feb 7 by midnight****

****Email TAs****

Week 6 (Feb 10). Secret Influence Attempts (Covert Action)

Secrecy is also central to covert action, or concealed influence attempts by states in a foreign country. This can include changes to domestic political leadership (i.e. regime change), covert involvement in war, economic or other forms of sabotage, or other measures. We learn about the various reasons leaders find covert action so appealing.

Required readings for lecture

- Carson, Austin. "The Unique Challenges of Covert Missions: How Leaders Assess the "Quiet Option." In *Inside the Situation Room*, edited by Keren Yarhi-Milo and Hillary Clinton, Oxford University Press, 2025. [On Canvas]
- O'Rourke, Lindsey A. *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War*. Cornell University Press, 2018. Chapters 3, 4, 7. Digital version available [via Library](#).
- Carson, Austin. *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics*. Princeton University Press. 2018. Chapter 1. [On Canvas]

Week 6 (Feb 12). Lab

This lab session focuses on the question: does covert action need to stay secret to be useful? We then discuss a set of common mistakes student make in writing the research paper: failing to discuss the stakes of their analysis; failing to keep a narrow and consistent focus; failing to leverage secondary sources.

Required readings for discussion

- Cormac, Rory, and Richard J. Aldrich. "Grey is the New Black: Covert Action and Implausible Deniability." *International Affairs* 94.3 (2018): 477-494.

Supplemental reading

- Bloch, Chase, and Roseanne W. McManus. "Denying the Obvious: Why Do Nominally Covert Actions Avoid Escalation?." *International Organization* (2024): 1-25.
- Poznansky, Michael. "Stasis or Decay? Reconciling Covert War and the Democratic Peace." *International Studies Quarterly* 59.4 (2015): 815-826.
- Johnson, Loch K. "Covert Action and Accountability: Decision-Making for America's Secret Foreign Policy." *International Studies Quarterly* 33.1 (1989): 81-109.
- Carson, Austin. "Facing Off and Saving Face: Covert Intervention and Escalation Management in the Korean War." *International Organization* 70.1 (2016): 103-131.
- Forsythe, David P. "Democracy, War, and Covert Action." *Journal of Peace Research* 29.4 (1992): 385-395.
- Daugherty, William J. *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency*. Univ Press of Kentucky, 2006.
- Poznansky, Michael. "Revisiting Plausible Deniability." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 45.4 (2022): 511-533.
- Stempel, John D. "Covert Action and Diplomacy." *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 20.1 (2007): 122-135.
- Otto, Jacob, and William Spaniel. "Doubling Down: The Danger of Disclosing Secret Action." *International Studies Quarterly* 65.2 (2021): 500-511.
- Joseph, Michael F., and Michael Poznansky. "Media Technology, Covert Action, and the Politics of Exposure." *Journal of Peace Research* 55.3 (2018): 320-335.
- Poznansky, Michael. "Feigning Compliance: Covert Action and International Law." *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2019): 72-84.
- Spaniel, William, and Michael Poznansky. "Credible Commitment in Covert Affairs." *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 3 (2018): 668-681.
- Paliwal, Avinash, and Paul Staniland. "Strategy, Secrecy, and External Support for Insurgent Groups." *International Studies Quarterly* 67.1 (2023).
- Carnegie, Allison, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. "Democratic peace and covert military force: An experimental test." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 67.2-3 (2023): 235-265.
- Egloff, Florian J., and Max Smeets. "Publicly Attributing Cyber Attacks: A Framework." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 46, no. 3 (April 16, 2023): 502-33.
- Williamson, Scott. "Do Proxies Provide Plausible Deniability? Evidence From Experiments on Three Surveys." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 68, no. 2-3 (March 1, 2024): 322-47.

Week 7 (Feb 17). Secrecy and International Reputation

In this week, we focus on how concerns about international reputation may motivate states to use secrecy. Secrecy can avoid “bad optics” in the international arena. It may be valuable for hiding a violation of international norms or international law or to hide ties/cooperation with a “bad actor” such as a pariah state, terrorist organization, or organized crime. Secrecy can specifically avoid a state appearing hypocritical by hiding actions it has criticized in the past. The unifying feature in this week is a desire to reduce damage to a country’s international image, reputation, or status.

Required reading

- Dafoe, Allan, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth. "Reputation and Status as Motives for War." *Annual Review of Political Science* 17.1 (2014): 371-393. [Only pp. 371-376.]
- Poznansky, Michael. “Feigning Compliance: Covert Action and International Law.” *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2019): 72–84.
- Polakow-Suransky, Sasha. *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa*. Pantheon, 2010. Prologue, Chapter 5. [On Canvas]
- Farrell, Henry, and Martha Finnemore. "The End of Hypocrisy: American Foreign Policy in the Age of Leaks." *Foreign Affairs* 92.6 (2013): 22-26.

Week 7 (Feb 19). Lab

This lab will start with a discussion of the role of the “Pearl Harbor in Reverse” problem in the Cuban Missile Crisis, a classic case of hypocrisy concerns affecting decision-making. We then shift to a discussion of writing technique, including the importance of structure in writing and the ideas of balance and proportion in research papers.

Required readings for discussion

- Tierney, Dominic. ““Pearl Harbor in Reverse” Moral Analogies in the Cuban Missile Crisis.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9.3 (2007): 49-77.

Supplemental reading

- May, Ernest R., and Philip Zelikow. *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002. See especially: October 18, 19, 20 (pp. 73-137).
- Krcmaric, Daniel. “Information, Secrecy, and Civilian Targeting.” *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 322–33.
- Poznansky, Michael. *In the Shadow of International Law: Secrecy and Regime Change in the Postwar World*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2020.
- Hurd, Ian. “The Strategic Use of Liberal Internationalism: Libya and the UN Sanctions, 1992–2003.” *International Organization* 59, no. 03 (2005): 495–526.
- Mercer, Jonathan. *Reputation and International Politics*. Cornell UP, 1996.
- Lupton, Danielle L. *Reputation for Resolve: How Leaders Signal Determination in International Politics*. Cornell University Press, 2020.
- Gillies, Alexandra. “Reputational Concerns and the Emergence of Oil Sector Transparency as an International Norm.” *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2010): 103–26.
- McManus, Roseanne W., and Keren Yarhi-Milo. “The Logic of ‘Offstage’ Signaling: Domestic Politics, Regime Type, and Major Power-Protégé Relations.” *International Organization* 71, no. 4 (2017): 701–33.
- Finnemore, Martha. "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity: Why Being a Unipole Isn't All it's Cracked Up to Be." *World Politics* 61.1 (2009): 58-85.
- Long, Magda. "Shadows of Power Beneath the Threshold: Where Covert Action, Organized Crime and Irregular Warfare Converge." *Intelligence and National Security* (2024): 1-27.

Week 8 (Feb 24). Secret Societies: Secrecy and the Individual

We make an abrupt pivot this week, moving away from the impersonal “state” level of analysis to the very personal side of secrecy in international politics. Drawing on sociology-inspired approaches to secrecy, we think about how the practice of state secrecy affects individuals and groups. We explore the value of thinking about secrecy in international politics as a product of so many “secret societies.” Working in secret can create unique cultures and shape individuals’ identities and values. We analyze this in national security institutions and learn through scholars’ use of unique methods like ethnography.

Required readings for lecture

Grey, Christopher, and Jana Costas. *Secrecy at Work: The Hidden Architecture of Organizational Life*. Stanford University Press, 2016. Introduction, Chapters 3, 5. Digital version available [via Library](#).

Gusterson, Hugh. *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*. University of California Press, 1996. Chapters 1, 3, 4, 6.

Week 8 (Feb 26). Lab

This lab session starts with a small-group discussion of a classic study of the culture of (secret) national security groups. It focuses on the language used by “national security professionals.” We then return to writing technique, focusing on nitty-gritty details like integrating primary quotes, how to format citations for different sources, paragraph length, and more.

Required readings for discussion

Cohn, Carol. “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals.” *Signs* 12, no. 4 (Summer 1987): 687–718.

Supplemental reading

Erickson, Bonnie H. “Secret Societies and Social Structure.” *Social Forces* 60, no. 1 (September 1, 1981): 188–210.

Gibson, David R. “Enduring Illusions: The Social Organization of Secrecy and Deception.” *Sociological Theory* 32.4 (2014): 283–306.

Costas, Jana, and Christopher Grey. “Bringing Secrecy into the Open: Towards a Theorization of the Social Processes of Organizational Secrecy.” *Organization Studies* 35, no. 10 (October 1, 2014): 1423–47.

Tefft, Stanton K, ed. *Secrecy, a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. New York, N.Y.: Human Sciences Press, 1980.

Walters, William. “Everyday secrecy: Oral history and the social life of a top-secret weapons research establishment during the Cold War.” *Security Dialogue* 51.1 (2020): 60–76.

De Goede, Marieke, and Mara Wesseling. “Secrecy and security in transatlantic terrorism finance tracking.” *Journal of European Integration* 39.3 (2017): 253–269.

Masco, Joseph. *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*. Princeton University Press, 2006.

Wright, Hannah. “Critical Ethnography in National Security Institutions: Methodological and Ethical Reflections.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 56.1 (2023): 94–98.

Kinsella, Helen M. “Sex as the secret: counterinsurgency in Afghanistan.” *International Theory* 11.1 (2019): 26–47.

Hurlburt, Heather, Elizabeth Weingarten, Alexandra Stark, and Elena Souris. “The ‘Consensual Straitjacket’: Four Decades of Women in Nuclear Security.” *New America*, March 2019. [Read Part II]

Braat, Eleni. “Self-reinforcing secrecy: Cultures of secrecy within intelligence agencies.” *Transparency and Secrecy in European Democracies*. Routledge, 2020. 118–134.

****Swap five pages of drafting with your partner due by Friday, Feb 28 by midnight****

****Email TAs****

Week 9 (March 3). Secrecy and New Technology

How has secrecy changed? What does secrecy look like today? This week adopts a technological lens to assess how new commercial and military technologies – satellites, drones, cyber, AI – have changed how secrecy functions in international politics.

Required readings for lecture

- Lin-Greenberg, Erik, and Theo Milonopoulos. "Private Eyes in the Sky: Emerging Technology and the Political Consequences of Eroding Government Secrecy." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65.6 (2021): 1067-1097.
- Buchanan, Ben. *The Hacker and the State: Cyber Attacks and the New Normal of Geopolitics*. Harvard University Press, 2020. Intro, Chapter 6. Digital version available [via Library](#).
- Zegart, Amy. "Open Secrets: Ukraine and the Next Intelligence Revolution." *Foreign Affairs* 102 (2023): 54.
- Moran, Christopher R., Joe Burton, and George Christou. "The US Intelligence Community, Global Security, and AI: From Secret Intelligence to Smart Spying." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 8.2 (2023). [start at "From Bletchley Park to Silicon Valley" p. 7 → to end]

Supplemental reading

- Larkin, Sean P. "The Age of Transparency: International Relations without Secrets." *Foreign Affairs* 95 (2016): 136-146.
- Perkins, Chris, and Martin Dodge. "Satellite Imagery and the Spectacle of Secret Spaces." *Geoforum* 40, no. 4 (July 2009): 546-60.
- Sanger, David E. *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power*. Crown, 2012.
- Shane, Scott. "Yemen Sets Terms of a War on Al Qaeda." *New York Times*, December 3, 2010.
- Livingston, Steven, and W. Lucas Robinson. "Mapping Fears: The Use of Commercial High-Resolution Satellite Imagery in International Affairs." *Astropolitics* 1.2 (2003): 3-25.
- Witjes, Nina, and Philipp Olbrich. "A Fragile Transparency: Satellite Imagery Analysis, Non-State Actors, and Visual Representations of Security." *Science and Public Policy* 44, no. 4 (August 1, 2017): 524-34.
- Herscher, Andrew. "Surveillant witnessing: Satellite imagery and the visual politics of human rights." *Public Culture* 26.3 (74) (2014): 469-500.
- Maschmeyer, Lennart. "A New and Better Quiet Option? Strategies of Subversion and Cyber Conflict." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 46.3 (2023): 570-594.
- Baram, Gil. "Public Secrets: The Dynamics of Publicity and Secrecy in Offensive Cyber Operations." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 8.3 (2023): ogad013.
- Dylan, Huw, and Thomas J. Maguire. "Secret Intelligence and Public Diplomacy in the Ukraine War." *Survival: August-September 2022*. Routledge, 2023. 33-74.
- Vlad, Ruxandra Oana. "The Perils of Presidential Openness: Strikes, Secrecy and Performative Opacity." *Intelligence and National Security* 38.6 (2023): 956-977.

Week 9 (March 5). Lab

Our last lab session will focus on how to revise, a last set of tips regarding the research papers, and a discussion about grad school with an "Ask Austin Anything about Grad School" format.

Required readings for discussion

None! Work on your papers.

****Final paper due Weds, March 12 by 5 pm****
Send to TAs and acarson@uchicago.edu