

# The Secret Side of International Politics

PLSC 29202/39202

Winter 2026

**Time:** Tues & Thurs, 2:00-3:20pm

**Room:** Rosenwald Hall 015

**Professor:** Austin Carson, Department of Political Science, [acarson@uchicago.edu](mailto:acarson@uchicago.edu)

**TAs:** Megan Maxwell ([maxwellm@uchicago.edu](mailto:maxwellm@uchicago.edu)) and Bangchen Ruan ([bangchenruan@uchicago.edu](mailto:bangchenruan@uchicago.edu))

## Office Hours:

Prof. Carson: days/times vary; sign up [here](#). I will also hold drop-in office hours 1-2 times per quarter.

TAs: days/times posted on Canvas.

## Course description

This course introduces students to the secret side of international politics and leads them through a quarter-long research paper writing process. The class meets twice per week and uses a lecture/lab model. Each week, the first session is a lecture on a theme regarding secrecy's role in world politics and the second session a "lab" that provides practical guidance on each stage of a large 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 politics, as a part of intelligence collection and analysis, and in covert action. We contrast these state-centric views with a week on secrecy's impact on individuals and the role of technology in enabling and constraining states' ability to act secretly. Students must write 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 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; other assigned readings from books are posted on Canvas.

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% total).** Students will write weekly reactions in Canvas that respond to required readings on lecture days. These reaction posts 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." *Reading reactions are due by the start of class (9:30am Chicago time) the day of lecture (Tuesdays).*

**Research paper (70% in total).** Students will 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. In terms of topic, papers may focus on secrecy itself (secrecy's political value; a secret event; covert action) or use previously secret documents to shed light on a publicly known event, person, or program. I will post on Canvas detailed guidance including several examples of papers from past classes. *Read and learn from these examples!* Along with the final paper, students will complete these 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 final research paper is worth 50% of the course grade. It should be 25 pages or more, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, one-inch margins, and use footnotes (not endnotes or internal citations). There is no maximum length. It is **due Weds, March 11, during finals week.**

### **Professionalism and community**

We will create our own quarter-long intellectual community. 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. My goal is for each student to feel comfortable developing their own ideas and assessing those of others. An environment of intellectual exploration and exchange requires the absence of discriminatory or abusive behavior. For example, gender-based misconduct, which encompasses harassment and sexual assault, will be treated as a violation 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.

### **Mental and other health**

There are many resources on campus for supporting students with their mental and physical well-being. I encourage proactive care and strong communication with me. The Student Wellness webpage, including its mental health resources, is [a good starting point](#). The university's [Dean-on-Call Program](#) is a 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**

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. However, misuse and overuse of AI can drastically curtail the learning process that is central to this course. *Uses of AI that are not expressly permitted by the*

professor are a violation of academic integrity (see above) and grounds for grade reductions and other consequences.

- Some guiding principles for AI in this class:
  - AI must advance the learning goals of a course. These require experience with many manual aspects of the researching and writing process. Uses of AI that allow shortcuts in the research and writing process are therefore shortcuts in the learning process.
  - We should not romanticize or reflexively preserve old methods simply because that was how things were done before. AI is good at some tasks; it may enhance the planning and some preliminary aspects of the research for a paper.
  - Writing is sacred. It is a key skill developed in this course and a skill for life. There is no substitute for learning how to do original, creative writing. *AI may not be used to generate written content or revise manually written material.*
- Some specific uses and their status in this class:
  - Expressly forbidden: using text generated by AI tools as a form of writing for any assignment, under any circumstances. Text generated by AI that is simply modified is also strictly forbidden.
  - Permitted uses: brainstorming; for suggestions of relevant literatures for a research area; for suggestions on what might be conventional wisdom for a topic/idea/event. For each of these uses, *subsequent manual steps are critical* otherwise use of AI endangers learning goals. Hallucinations are common; poor-quality ideas are common. Students are responsible for vetting and improving any AI output, including assessing its validity and wisdom.
  - *Required: as a safeguard against prohibited uses of AI, each student will be required to be able to provide “version history” to TAs and the professor for their final research paper, upon request. I will explain this in more detail in class.*
- I am open to other uses of AI. Students may propose them. I will assess and, if approved, share the details with the class.
- The University’s [PhoenixAI](#) system is one valuable platform for this and may be worth exploring. I have also found Anthropic’s Claude AI to be useful.

### **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

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## 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. 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.

### Week 1 (Jan 8). Secrecy's Definition and Conventional Security Role

I will conclude start defining the scope of the course through a discussion of the meaning of secrecy in everyday life and in international politics. I then lecture on the most common role for secrecy in international politics: to generate information advantages vis-à-vis adversaries and thereby provide security to insecure states in an anarchic system.

#### **Required readings for lecture**

Lindsay, Jon R. *Age of Deception: Cybersecurity as Secret Statecraft*. Cornell University Press, 2025, pp. 30-46. [Book available via [Open Access here](#)]

Cancian, Mark. *Inflicting Surprise: Gaining Competitive Advantage in Great Power Conflicts*. CSIS, January 21, 2021. Chapters 1, 3. [Link here](#).

Listen to "Razzle Dazzle." Episode 65. 99% Invisible. (13 minutes) [Link here](#).

Fearon, James D. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 379-414. [On Canvas. Read sections marked in yellow highlights.]

**\*\*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 most of their work behind closed doors. Most conversations between ambassadors and host countries are in private settings. Backchannel negotiations are a common tool to end wars and resolve disputes. Why is it so useful in 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**

We start by discussing 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 in Foreign Policy**

This week focuses on the value of secrecy for leaders managing domestic political constraints. Leaders often face conflicting priorities in foreign policy. What is useful in foreign policy may be damaging at home. Robert Putnam (1988) influentially dubbed the resulting dilemmas “two-level games.” Complicating things further, smart leaders must consider the domestic constraints of other states, such as their cooperative partners. Secrecy can address these constraints. By manipulating information, leaders may be able to have their cake and eat it too.

#### **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.
- Saunders, Elizabeth N. *The Insiders' Game: How Elites Make War and Peace*. Princeton University Press, 2024. Chapter 5 (“The Vietnam War as an Insiders’ Game”). Digital version available [via Library](#).
- 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**

Building on the domestic political value of secrecy, we start this lab session by addressing the phenomenon of leaks and their domestic political consequences. 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**

- Farrell, Henry, and Martha Finnemore. "The End of Hypocrisy: American Foreign Policy in the Age of Leaks." *Foreign Affairs* 92.6 (2013): 22-26.

#### **Supplemental reading**

- Putnam, Robert D. “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games.” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 427-460.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

**\*\*Topic proposal and research question due by Friday, Jan 23 by midnight\*\***

**\*\*Email to TAs\*\***

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

One vast area of government activity that relies on secrecy is intelligence. 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 collect intelligence. This includes the importance of technology in modern intelligence collection activities, as illustrated by the famous U-2 spy plane. We will also discuss one important intelligence collection system – satellites – and its impact on diplomacy.

#### **Required readings for lecture**

Clark, Robert M. *Intelligence Collection*. CQ Press, 2013. Preface and Introduction. [On Canvas]  
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](#).

Johnson, Thomas R. *American Cryptology during the Cold War, 1945-1989*, Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency, 1995. Book IV, Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel version (declassified 2024). Read pp. 320-334 (KAL 007 incident) at [this link](#) [and on Canvas].

Gordon, Michael. "Six Chinese Ships Covertly Aided North Korea. The U.S. Was Watching." *Wall Street Journal*. [On Canvas or [here](#)]

#### **Week 4 (Jan 29). Lab**

This lab session will feature a short lecture about my current book project on "intelligence infrastructure." The second half will focus on what "conventional wisdom" means, how to identify it, and how to craft an argument that contrasts with it.

#### **Required readings for discussion**

Carson, Austin. *To Spy on the World: Geopolitics and the Infrastructure of Intelligence*. Working book manuscript. Chapter 1: Introduction. [Posted in Modules in Canvas]

#### **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 30 by midnight\*\***

**\*\*Email to TAs\*\***

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

Raw data is useless. This week focuses on the second main element of intelligence: making sense of many streams of raw information in analytic products. This process is also done in secret. We learn about intelligence analysis and the large scholarly literature on how analysis can contribute to 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**

We will spend the full lab session on tips for how to organize primary documents, analyze them, and take notes that best set students up for effective writing.

#### **Required readings for discussion**

None.

#### **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 6 by midnight\*\***

**\*\*Email to TAs\*\***

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

Secrecy also plays an important role via covert action. Covert action differs from intelligence collection and analysis in that the goal is not to observe but to change. Covert action uses secret and deniable methods to influence politics, military affairs, or economics within foreign countries. Covert action can try to change political leadership (i.e. regime change), alter the course of a war, or damage an economy. 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](#).
- Cormac, Rory, and Richard J. Aldrich. "Grey is the New Black: Covert Action and Implausible Deniability." *International Affairs* 94.3 (2018): 477-494.

## **Week 6 (Feb 12). Lab**

An initial discussion will focus on how covert action addresses escalation dynamics. We then discuss a set of common mistakes students make when 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**

- Carson, Austin. *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics*. Princeton University Press. 2018. Chapter 1. [On Canvas]

### **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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Van Veen, Elspeth. "Secrecy's subjects: Special operators in the US shadow war." *European Journal of International Security* 4.3 (2019): 386-414.
- 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 the Individual**

This week pivots to analyzing how secrecy shapes the everyday experience of working in foreign policy and international politics. Drawing on sociology-inspired approaches to secrecy, we consider how it affects individuals and groups. We explore the value of thinking about “secret societies” and the social life of working in a secret environment. This 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**

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

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.

## **Week 7 (Feb 19). Lab**

We continue the discussion of how operating in covert or secret modes shapes the social aspects and individuals in national security. 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**

Van Veen, Elspeth. "Secrecy's Subjects: Special Operators in the US Shadow War." *European Journal of International Security* 4.3 (2019): 386-414.

### **Supplemental reading**

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

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

Grey, Christopher, and Jana Costas. *Secrecy at Work: The Hidden Architecture of Organizational Life*. Stanford University Press, 2016.

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

Lundborg, Tom. "Secrecy and subjectivity: Double agents and the dark underside of the international system." *International Political Sociology* 15.4 (2021): 443-459.

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.

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.

## **Week 8 (Feb 24). Secrecy and Technology**

This week pivots away from individuals and states to technology. New technology can give states new ways of acting secretly (think cyber espionage) or it can reduce their ability to act in secret (think commercial satellite imagery). How has the state of technology generally shaped how secrecy functions in international politics? Using a technological lens allows us to assess how new commercial and military technologies – satellites, drones, cyber, AI – may be changing its use and its success.

### **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](#).
- 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]

## **Week 8 (Feb 26). Lab**

This lab session will focus on technology and open source information, including the kinds of insights available to states and non-state actors via citizen-generated content, public data, and commercial sources. We then return to writing technique, focusing on nitty-gritty details like integrating primary quotes, how to format citations, paragraph length, and more.

### **Required readings for discussion**

- Zegart, Amy. "Open Secrets: Ukraine and the Next Intelligence Revolution." *Foreign Affairs* 102 (2023): 54.

### **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.

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

**\*\*Email to TAs\*\***

### **Week 9 (March 3). Secrecy and Democracy**

We end with a week on the tension between democratic principles and the secret side of international politics. Can democratic governance coexist in light of the many roles and appeals of secrecy we have covered this quarter? If so, how?

#### **Required readings for lecture**

Thompson, Dennis F. "Democratic Secrecy." *Political Science Quarterly* 114.2 (1999): 181-193.  
Colaresi, Michael P. *Democracy Declassified: The Secrecy Dilemma in National Security*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2014. Chapter 6.  
Pozen, David E. "The Leaky Leviathan: Why the Government Condemns and Condone Unlawful Disclosures of Information." *Harvard Law Review* 127 (2013): 512.

#### **Supplemental reading**

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.  
Smith, Gregory L. "Secret but Constrained: The Impact of Elite Opposition on Covert Operations." *International Organization* 73.3 (2019): 685-707.  
Johnson, Loch K. "Covert Action and Accountability: Decision-Making for America's Secret Foreign Policy." *International Studies Quarterly* 33.1 (1989): 81-109.

### **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 11 by 5 pm\*\***  
Send to TAs and [acarson@uchicago.edu](mailto:acarson@uchicago.edu)