Aims
Introduce students to the main facts about conflict. Apply theoretical and empirical economic tools to the study of conflict. Give students an appreciation of the main questions at the research frontier in the economic analysis of conflict. Draw some policy conclusions on how the international community should deal with conflict. Study data issues that arise when analysing conflict.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of this course students should:

- Have substantial knowledge of the facts about conflict.
- Be able to apply theoretical and empirical economic analysis to the study of conflict
- Be conversant with the research frontier in conflict economics
- Have developed well-articulated views on policy toward conflicts
- Understand key data issues that arise in studying conflict

Course Delivery
The course will be delivered through twenty two-hour lectures and eighteen one-hour seminars. I will present the more difficult conceptual issues in lectures.

The seminars will be structured discussions run by a PhD teaching fellow. IT IS CRUCIAL FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE COURSE THAT STUDENTS PREPARE FOR EACH SEMINAR BEFORE THE ACTUAL SEMINAR. Seminar preparation will normally be a short reading or video clip plus a worksheet. The questions on the exams (midterms and finals) will resemble the worksheet questions.

I will be available for consultation (either by you individually, or in small groups) during office hours. Office hours are Tuesday, 10:30 - 11:30, Thursday 10:30 - 11:30. If you cannot make the office hours feel free to just knock on my door at any time. I will also be very available by email at all times (m.spagat@rhul.ac.uk). There will be a course blog on which I will post emailed questions and my answers (after removing the identity of the emailing student). The blog has been a big success over the last two years so you definitely will want to make use of it. I’m always happy to meet students in person but there are definite advantages to having a written record of your questions and my answers.
Assessment
- There will be two sit-down exams, each worth 10% of the final mark. These will be given on November 11 and March 3.
- There will be two short essays, each worth 10% of the final mark. These will be due on January 20 and March 23. There will be a maximum of 1,200 words on each essay.
- There will be 3-hour unseen examination worth 60% of the final mark. This will be taken during the summer term. The exam will consist of three mandatory multi-part questions.

Reading
I give links to all of the articles in the reading list below. I have tested all the links on my office computer and they all worked for me as of mid-August. It is possible, however, that some of these links require you to be working through RHUL subscriptions to get through. So you may need to go through the library system to obtain a few of the readings. Please let me know if you have problems with a particular reading. I will also post a few things on the Moodle web site to smooth access.

Weekly Timetable

AUTUMN TERM

Week 1. Induction Week, no class

Week 2. Overview of the course, Iraq Body Count (IBC), the concept of “central tendency”

Reading


Optional Background

VOX (2014), Iraq Explained -- ISIS, Syria and War

VOX (2014), A Brief History of ISIS and the conflict in Iraq
Week 3. The costs counter-terrorism, war finance, value of a statistical life, dispersion, estimating an average from a sample, statistical bias, confidence intervals, Ricardian equivalence.

Reading


Seminar – Insurgent compensation, compensating differentials, counting deaths versus documenting deaths, interpreting the table in “The Weapons that Kill…”, central tendencies.


Dardagan, Hamit (2014), “Towards an Active Memorial of War: Hamit Dardagan at TEDxEastEnd”

Worksheet

Week 4. Counting, documenting and estimating war deaths, excess deaths, sample surveys, non-sampling errors

Reading


Seminar – Costs of counter terrorism, summary statistics, calculating means and confidence intervals from random samples.

Mueller, John (2015), Are we spending too much fighting terrorism?

Mathews, Dylan (2016), The TSA is a waste of money that doesn’t save lives and may actually cost them, Vox
Worksheet

Week 5. To rebel or not to rebel, linear regression, statistical significance, causation, opportunity cost

Reading


Seminar – Bias, estimating violent and excess deaths, confidence intervals

BBC “*Counting the Dead in Iraq*, More or Less

Worksheet

Week 6. The Rwandan genocide and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; A cycle of violence?, logistic regression

Reading


Optional Background – Beauchamp, Zack "Rwanda's Genocide — what Happened, why it Happened, and how it Still Matters," VOX.

Optional Background – “Everything you need to Know about Israel-Palestine,” VOX.

Seminar – Getting ready for writing your essays
Read and discuss student essays from last year

Week 7. Reading Week, no class

Week 8. Civilian targeting index, PRIO and Uppsala data, decline of war, more on linear and logistic regression

Reading


Human Security Report 2013, "Overview".


Seminar – To rebel or not to rebel, Rwanda, Israel-Palestine, linear and logistic regression


Worksheet

**AUTUMN Exam – FRIDAY NOVEMBER 11, 16:30 start.** It covers lectures 1-5 and seminars for weeks 3 – 8.

Week 9. The Dirty War Index (DWI), the costs and benefits of peace in Northern Ireland, rare events, confidence intervals through simulation

Reading


Optional Background – “Colombia FARC: Celebrations after Ceasefire ends Five Decades of War,” BBC.


Seminar- First midterm

Feedback on the midterm using the answer key


Reading

Human Security Report 2009, “The Shrinking Costs of War, chapter 7, The Death Toll in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” (Only chapters 7 and 8 are assigned here. The link includes other chapters.)


Optional Background – “Ivory Coast Profile,” BBC.

Optional Background – “Biafra: Thirty Years On,” BBC.

Optional Background – “Q & A: DR Congo Conflict,” BBC.

Seminar – Decline of war, CTI, DWI, missing data, peace dividend in Northern Ireland

Vox (2014), “Three Big Reasons War is Going Away.”

Worksheet

Week 11. Economic development, asset markets

Readings


Optional Background – “Angola Profile,” BBC.


Seminar – Rare events, confidence interval simulations, excess deaths, differences in difference

McKee, Doug (2015), “An Intuitive Introduction to Differences in Differences.”

Worksheet

Week 12. Coups and Assassinations, probit

Reading


Seminar – Financial markets, event studies, war and economics history, more essay preparation

Final tune up for essays.


Worksheet
SPRING TERM

Week 1. Causes of conflict (correlations), sensitivity analysis, p hacking, psychology of conflict

Reading


No seminar for week 1.

Week 2. Prediction, economic shocks and conflict, instrumental variables

Reading


Seminar - Coups, assassinations, spurious correlations, cross country regressions

Have a look at the Spurious Correlations web site

Smeets, Ionica, (2012), "The Danger of Mixing up Causality and Correlation," TEDxDelft


Worksheet

AUTUMN ESSAY DUE WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20. (Use turnitin only)

Week 3. Commodity price shocks
Reading


Seminar – Ciconne versus Miguel, predictions, psychology of conflict

Superforecasting: How to Predict the Future – Philip Tetlock – Animated Book Review.

Duck Soup (1933), “This Means War!”

Worksheet

Week 4. Economic aid and conflict, rape and conflict

Reading


Seminar – Commodity price shocks, differences-in-differences, psychology of conflict

Lincoln, Abraham (1863), “The Gettysburg Address”.

Worksheet

Week 5. Conflict and climate change 1

Reading


Seminar – Aid and conflict, rape and conflict

Chishti, Malihi (2016), “Foreign Aid: Are we really helping others or just ourselves?, TEDxUTSC.

Worksheet

Week 6. Reading Week, no class

Week 7. Conflict and climate change 2, panel data

Reading


Seminar – Essay preparation, climate and conflict

*Climate Change and the Syrian Civil War (ECC Factbook Conflict Analysis)*

Worksheet

Week 8. Conflict and climate change 3, Syrian war

Reading


Seminar – Conflict and climate, revision for exam

Can Climate Change Cause War?

Worksheet

SPRING Exam, FRIDAY MARCH 3, start time 4:30. It covers lectures 11 – 16 and seminars for week 2 (but not the questions on coups and assassinations) through week 7.

Week 9. Costs of terrorism

Reading


Seminar- Second exam

Feedback on the exam using the answer key

Week 10. Causes of terrorism, media and terrorism

Reading


Seminar – Profiling terrorists, costs of terrorism, panel data

Tourism in Europe Bears the Brunt of Terrorism

Worksheet
Week 11. Terrorism and poverty

Reading


Seminar - Economics of terrorism

San Diego Professor Discusses Radicalization

Worksheet

THURSDAY, March 23, SPRING ESSAY DUE (Use Turnitin only)