

THE POLITICS OF WAR IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Political Science 101, Freshman Seminar
Fall 2009, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30am to 10:50am
Program of African Studies seminar room, 620 Library Place

Will Reno
620 Library Place, 847-491-5794
reno@northwestern.edu, www.willreno.org

Course Overview: A primary purpose of this course is to acquaint students with important political debates about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These debates focus on reasons behind US decisions to engage in these wars, the evolution of US military strategies in both conflicts, the potential for unintended and unanticipated outcomes, and the domestic political consequences of US engagement. The operative assumption in this course is that one need not have any prior knowledge whatsoever about this subject. A positive interest in learning, however, is preferred.

A second purpose of this course is to use this topic as a vehicle for freshman seminar students to interpret and analyze policies and their outcomes. This involves gaining an appreciation for alternative perspectives and an awareness of the tradeoffs among political, economic military, ethical, and legal goals. As in all freshman seminar courses, students will express their ideas in periodic written assignments. Students also will have an opportunity to participate in a blog that will be linked to the class.

A third purpose of this course is to reflect on an important collective national experience. While public debate about these wars has been intense and contentious at various periods, at other times there is not a great deal of discussion about these wars, their impacts on America's military and its relations with wider society (and its Commander-in-Chief), and on America's role in the world. Moreover, most of the country's university campuses seem to be as coolly removed from this experience as it is possible to be. This course is meant to challenge that condition and to encourage students to think for themselves about some of these broader issues and their impacts on the nature of democratic society and as they touch on their everyday lives and experiences.

Requirements: Course grades will be based upon the following components of this seminar:

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| Class discussion and participation (including class blog) | 10% |
| Three papers (of about six pages) | 60% (20% each) |
| Final paper (of about 10 pages) | 30% |

Class discussion and blog: Students are encouraged to speak up in the classroom. Students also will have an opportunity to participate in a public forum blog. Students will choose secret code user names. The professor will moderate discussion and will accept suggestions from the class members for topics. This blog will be readable by the wider public, and thus expose students to the possibility that outsiders will be attracted to the discussion. Who knows? Perhaps policy makers, Iraqi or Afghan citizens, or US soldiers may participate. [Blog details to follow.]

The three shorter papers: Students will compose three response essays to debates from class discussion and readings. Each essay should be on the order of six pages or so. Each essay will have two due dates; the first for a draft and the second for a final version.

The final paper: Students will compose a longer (10 page or so) analytical essay that grapples with a “bigger issue” question about US policy. These questions will be decided in consultation with individual students. They can include (but are not restricted to) matters concerning the appropriateness or effectiveness of military strategy, moral and ethical considerations that are (or should be) associated with policies, the longer-term impact of policies on American political debates, and so forth.

More details about this and the other essay assignment will follow as students become familiar with some of the topics covered in this course.

Required Books:

Bing West (2008) *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq*. Random House.

Seth Jones (2009) *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. W.W. Norton, 2009.

US Strategy Immediately after the 11 September Attacks on New York and Washington, DC

September 22 & 24: – Doctrines of Just War, Preemptive War. Did the US have the resources and political will to carry out the 2002 National Security Strategy? Note the differences in al Qaeda’s and the *National Security Strategy’s* analysis of the causes of terrorist attacks.

George W Bush (2002) [*National Security Strategy of the United States*](#) (2002), (Washington, DC: The White House).

Christopher Blanchard, (2007) "[Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology](#)," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, RL32759, 9 July).

Michael Vlahos (2005) "[America as a Revolutionary Force](#)" *Globalist*, (8 March)

The War in Iraq

September 29: The Invasion (2003): Why did the US go to war in Iraq? What accounts for the diversity of official, quasi-official and other explanations?

Joseph J Collins (2008) "[Choosing War](#): The Decision to Invade Iraq and Its Aftermath," (National Defense University, Occasional Paper #5).

Bing West (2008) *Strongest Tribe*, from "How to Create a Mess" through "War", 3-63.

October 1: The Sunni Arab insurgency gains strength (2003-04): Why were initial goals kept so modest? (Keep this debate in mind as we encounter later debates about expansive versus limited goals in warfare.)

Bing West (2008) *Strongest Tribe*, from "Inadequate Means" through "Widescale Fighting," 64-105.

October 6: The rise of the Madhi Army (2004-05): Was this just the ethnic cleansing of Baghdad or a force for stability?

International Crisis Group (2006) [Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?](#) (Brussels: ICG, 11 July).

+++ **Some class time will be devoted to preparing drafts of Essay One** +++

October 8: The Situation deteriorates and the "Revolt of the Generals" (2006)

Bing West (2008) *Strongest Tribe*, from "Contradictory Goals" through "Flawed Assessment," 106-65.

October 13: Fighting in Anbar and the Awakening (Fall 2006): Who pulls the strings? Which is the co-opted party in this relationship? Is this improvisation or a blueprint for the (Afghan) future? Who are the enemies of the Mahdi Army?

Capt. Travis Patriquin's "How to Win the War in Al Anbar" (Powerpoint file, Blackboard site) and LTC David Kilcullen [Australian Army] (2006) "[Twenty Eight Articles](#): Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency" *Small Wars Journal*.

LTC Jim Crider (2009), "[Inside the Surge](#): One Commander's Lessons in Counterinsurgency," (Center for a New American Security).

Bing West (2008) *Strongest Tribe*, from 'Al Qaeda: Murder and Intimidation' through Civil War," 167-96.

+++ **Essay One due in class** +++

October 15: The adoption of the surge strategy in Washington and in Baghdad (Fall – Winter 2006-07). Consider the logic of military and civilian personnel working together on "stability operations" in conflict zones.

George W Bush (2005) [National Security Presidential Directive 44](#) (Washington, DC: The White House, 7 Dec.)

Donald Rumsfeld (2005) [Department of Defense Directive 3000.05](#), (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 28 Nov.).

Bing West (2008) *Strongest Tribe*, from "Bush Weighs His Options" through Washington Turns," 197-223.

October 20: Washington, electoral politics and consolidation in Iraq (2007-08). Was the surge responsible for changes, or was something else responsible?

Bing West (2008) *Strongest Tribe*, from "Sunnis Change Sides" through Baghdad: Surge Takes Hold" 224-316.

October 22: Democracy and Shiite rule in Iraq: What would be the basic elements of a sustainable peace in Iraq? Is the military part of the war "over" as Bing West supposes?

Bing West (2008) *Strongest Tribe*, from "Washington Assesses the Surge" through "Strongest Tribe," 317-76.

The War in Afghanistan

October 27: Cold War struggles, the collapse of an effective central government, and the rise of the Taliban

Seth Jones (2009) *Graveyard of Empires*, from “Descent into Violence through “Uncivil War,” 3-51.

+++ **Drafts of Essay Two to be discussed in class** +++

October 29: The American-led campaign after 9-11 – Doctrines of Just War

Seth Jones (2009) *Graveyard of Empires*, from “Rise of the Taliban” through “Operation Enduring Freedom,” 52-108.

November 3: Washington’s shift to a focus on Iraq (2002)

Seth Jones (2009) *Graveyard of Empires*, from “Light Footprint” through “Logic of Insurgency,” 109-162.

+++ **Essay Two due in class** +++

November 5: Resurgence of the Taliban (2005-07): What happened to Afghan government forces?

Seth Jones (2009) *Graveyard of Empires*, from “Collapse of Law and Order” through “A Growing Cancer,” 163-202.

November 10: Afghanistan moves back into the spotlight in Washington (late 2007-2008), and trying to learn from the experience in Iraq

Gian Gentile (2009) “The [Selective Use of History](#) in the Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine,” *Army History*, 72 (Summer), 21-33.

Seth Jones (2009) *Graveyard of Empires*, from “Perfect Storm” through “National Caveats,” 203-255.

November 12: Strategic and tactical reassessments, intensifying the cooperation between civilian and military agencies. Should the US military “serve the people of Afghanistan” or serve US taxpayers and US strategic goals? Are these compatible goals?

Gordon England (2008) [Department of Defense Directive 3000.07](#) (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1 Dec.), [on Irregular Warfare]

Seth Jones (2009) *Graveyard of Empires*, from “Water Must Boil” through “Al Qaida: a Force Multiplier,” 256-295.

+++ **Drafts of Essay Three discussed in class** +++

November 17: Assessing the effectiveness of the new strategy (2008-09): How has this strategy been modified or changed prior political aims?

Ali Jalali (2009) “[Winning in Afghanistan](#),” *Parameters*, 39:1, (Spring), 5-21.

Gilles Dorransoro (2009) [The Taliban’s Winning Strategy in Afghanistan](#), (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June).

Seth Jones (2009) *Graveyard of Empires*, from “Into the Eye of the Storm” through “Back to the Future,” 296-326.

+++ **Essay Three due in class** +++

November 19: Washington’s new command (Spring 2009). Is this strategy about counterterrorism or counterinsurgency? What is the definition of mission success and how does one know when one has achieved success? Does Afghanistan have the resources / capacity / political will to take over this strategy?

CNAS (2009) “The [Next 12 Months](#) in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” CNAS, 11 June, with LTGEN David W Barno, Andrew Exum, Nathaniel Fick, Andrew Bacevich, COL Christopher Cavoli. [Note especially the contrast between the arguments of Exum / Fick and those of Bacevich]

November 24: Crisis in Pakistan: Fighting wars in countries with which we are not at war. What are the implications for Pakistan of instability in Afghanistan? What is the effect of targeted killings [predator drone strikes] in border areas?

David Kilcullen (2009) “[Testimony](#) before the House Armed services Committee Hearing on HR 1886, the *Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation (PEACE) Act 2009*, 23 April.

Peter Berger & Katherine Tiedemann (2009) “[The Drone War](#),” *The New Republic*, 3 June.

WCAS reading period begins on Monday, 29 November and ends on Friday, 4 December. Exams begin on Monday, 7 December (Pearl Harbor Day).

Final Essays are due on Monday, 7 December by 17:00. They are to be submitted as attachments to e-mail messages to Will Reno

Resources

National Interest: www.nationalinterest.org. *National Interest* is published by the Nixon Center, Dimitri K. Simes publisher. It reflects a “realist” position in international affairs.

Center for a New American Security www.cnas.org is a Washington think tank founded by Kurt Campbell and Michelle Flournoy in 2007. Some of its associates (including Campbell) have found positions in the Obama Administration. Noted counterinsurgency expert John Nagl serves as CNAS’s president.

The founders of *Small Wars Journal* www.smallwarsjournal.com come from the US Marine Corps. While the journal is not formally associated with the USMC, it is widely read within the military community and by others who are interested in this topic. The site evolved out of the Military Operations on Urban terrain site

The US Army maintains the Battle Command Knowledge System at Ft. Leavenworth, <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC/functions/battlecommandsystem.asp>, to provide training and information on “small wars” and counterinsurgency warfare to deployed units and to link doctrine development with training. The US Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative site is at <http://www.usgcoin.org/>. This site has links to materials such as the US Army’s Field Manual 3-24 (<http://www.usgcoin.org/library/doctrine/COIN-FM3-24.pdf>).

The Commonwealth Institute produces critical analyses of Administration policies in Iraq and Afghanistan, (<http://www.comw.org/warreport/>). Their site also brings together important official reports and reports from think tanks and policy watchdog groups. They also support the Project on Defense Alternatives (<http://www.comw.org/pda/>).

The International Crisis Group (www.crisisgroup.org) produces well-researched reports on political developments in Iraq and Afghanistan. ICG describes itself as “generally recognised as the world’s leading independent, non-partisan, source of analysis and advice to governments, and intergovernmental bodies like the United Nations, European Union and World Bank, on the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict.”

The Afghan Analyst (<http://afghanistan-analyst.org/default.aspx>) gathers together a wide array of useful information and links for further investigation.

For good coverage of current events and feature stories from a regional perspective, try [The National](#) [Dubai] and [Daily Star](#) [Beirut]. [Al-Hayat](#) is a regional newspaper that is good enough to get banned at various times in different countries.

Blogs:

Abu Muqawama: <http://www.cnas.org/blogs/abumuqawama>. Andrew Exum posts under the pseudonym Abu Muqawama. Prior to joining CNAS, he led a platoon of light infantry and then an Army Ranger platoon in Afghanistan at the rank of Captain.

[Ghosts of Alexander](#) on the Afghan campaign and politics & society in Afghanistan.

[Arabic Media Shack](#) analyses security and other political issues of the Middle East from the perspective of Middle Eastern media sources.

[Stupidest Man on Earth](#) provides commentary and links to news and opinion from the perspective of a journalist based in Finland.