

# **POLITICS OF CIVIL WARS**

## **Political Science 376 / African Studies 390**

Fall 2017

Lectures by William Reno

TA: Marco Bocchese

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 15:30 to 16:50

Frances Searle Building 2407

### **Overview**

Scholars of warfare typically divided into those who studied inter-state wars in which national armies battle for supremacy for some sort of geopolitical objective and those interested in internal or “civil” wars in which rebels fight an incumbent government to control the state and rule its people. In contrast, approaches in this course recognize that to varied degrees all wars involve multiple layers of conflict, each centered on a variety of often clashing, agendas. This course will focus on these layers where the locus of conflict is within the state. Commonly termed “civil wars”, these conflicts can be associated with inter-state wars, such as the US-led attacks on the Taliban regime of Afghanistan in 2001 and the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq in 2003. Internal wars can also include wars in places where formal state authority is very weak, such as in Somalia since the collapse of the central government in early 1991 and government failure in Iraq after the 2011 US withdrawal, where autonomous militias under the control of local politicians and strongmen overshadow the national army as they fight in pursuit of their own agendas. In these conflicts, the national army may seem like little more than just another militia, as in Libya after the 2011 NATO intervention that led to the removal of Muammar Qaddafi.

The armed actors in these civil wars reflect many agendas and may include ethnic militias, vigilantes, foreign mercenaries, and criminal gangs. A key proposition in this course is that these multiple agendas and complex dynamics—“wars within wars”—may occupy changing roles in recent and ongoing civil wars. This development stands in contrast to civil wars through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Though these wars also included complex arrays of armed groups and agenda, they tended to feature more clear-cut distinctions between state and rebel combatants. The causes and significance of this shift will constitute one of the themes of this course.

The first segment of this course will consider academic theories about the causes of civil wars. These theories range from the economist’s analysis that an abundance of natural resources and other economic opportunities provide incentives for rebellion to enterprising individuals, to the idea derived from international relations that “security dilemmas” (mutual fears that one’s neighbors pose a threat) cause civil wars, and to the investigation of how changes in the global structure of economies and politics influence civil wars. The second segment of this course will focus on the role of violence in processes of war fighting. Students will find that the explanations of causes of civil wars, while of varying applicability from one case to the next, prove to be quite valuable in terms of generating questions and in turning attention to particular kinds of relationships. This section will focus on processes such as the rise of leaders, the formulation of ideologies and political programs (or their absence), and recruitment of fighters and supporters. In a third section we will consider the special role of violence in influencing the courses of these other processes and relationships.

## Course Requirements

Students are required to complete all required assignments to be eligible for a passing grade in this course. The relative weight of each assignment is as follows:

Participation	10%	(See note below)
A midterm exam	25%	Administered Tuesday, 17 October in class
A final exam	30%	<a href="#">Administered</a> Monday, 4 December, 12:00 to 14:00
A paper about 10 pages	35%	Due Tuesday, 21 November in class

Participation means showing up for class and exhibiting evidence of having read assignments. Failure to show up for class, particularly one that meets in the middle of the workday, will have a negative impact on evaluation. The midterm exam will be an essay format exercise administered in class. Details will be provided before the exam day, Tuesday, 17 October. The final exam will be comprehensive, with a bias toward material from the second half of the course and will be administered during the scheduled final exam period on Monday, 4 December.

The paper is due at the last class on 21 November. This paper should be about 10 pages. The topic of the paper is negotiable and can accommodate specific interests and goals of individual students. More general topics are permitted, such as “My [meaning your] theory of violence in civil wars” or “globalization and civil wars—the real story”. Third year students might want to use this paper to develop an undergraduate research grant proposal. Fourth year students may set sights on bigger fellowships and grants. These and other “synergies” are encouraged, provided that the topic of the paper is in dialogue with issues and analytical considerations associated with this class. There is no “correct answer” that is required for this paper. Evaluation will be based upon the coherence of argument and presentation of supporting evidence against at least one reasonable alternative. Readings from class may be used to provide data and other information to make an argument. Students are welcome to consult work beyond the assigned readings. As length is limited, this assignment should not spiral into a major research project.

## Required Readings

The following three required textbooks are available at various purveyors on the web. These should be available as reasonably priced used copies. Other readings are available at the course Canvas site. The instructor will have handouts from time to time.

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn: American Soldiers' Counterinsurgency in Iraq*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, ISBN: 978-1616086176.

Danny Hoffman (2011) *The War Machine: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, ISBN: 978-0822350774.

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* [3<sup>rd</sup> edition]. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, ISBN: 978-0804785495.

**Big trigger warning:** Materials for this course may contain graphic imagery of war and political views that some may find objectionable. All reasonable efforts will be made to warn students of particular content.

## Class Schedule

### Part I: Considering the Concept of Civil War in History and Efforts to Identify the Basic Causes of Civil Wars

**September 19:** Introduction to the general concept and approaches to the study of civil wars. What is a civil war and how many of them are currently underway? Are civil wars increasing or decreasing in frequency? How do we know?

Stathis Kalyvas (2007) "Civil Wars" in Carles Boix & Susan Stokes, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 416-34. This short essay should be read prior to the first class meeting and is available [here](#).

**September 21:** Consider how the nature of civil wars changed (or not changed) over time. Is the distinction between new and old wars valid? Does it matter for Kaldor's argument if wars of old have elements of the new embedded within them?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars* [textbook], chapters "Introduction" and "Old Wars", 1-31.

Stathis Kalyvas (2001), "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?" *World Politics*, 54 (Oct), 99-118, available [here](#).

**September 26:** A "new war" explained? An examination of the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina from the 1990s. How broadly applicable is the "new war" category? Is Mexico experiencing a "new war" type of civil war or is this a really bad crime wave or something else?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, chapters "Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Case Study of a New War" and "The Politics of New Wars," 32-93.

Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk (2017) *Drug Violence in Mexico*, San Diego: Justice in Mexico Project, available [here](#).

**September 28:** Economic explanations of civil war onset and continuation: Is greed and / or relatively easy opportunities to rebel responsible for civil war onset? Are civil wars of this sort a more recent phenomenon?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, "The Globalized War Economy," 94-118.

Paul Collier (2000) "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 44 (Dec), 839-53.

Mark Shaw (2015) "Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: the Evolution of an Elite Protection Network," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53: 3 (Sept), 339-364.

**October 3:** Ethnic mobilization and the role of reciprocal fears of attack responsible for the onset and continuation of civil wars? Can one attribute most civil wars to the manipulations of enterprising political actors or is there need to be an underlying societal narrative of grievance or aggression?

Charles King (2004) "The Micropolitics of Social Violence," *World Politics*, 56:3 (April, 431-55, available [here](#).

Jack Snyder & Robert Jervis (1999) "Civil War and the Security Dilemma," in Barbara Walter & Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insurgency, and Intervention*, Columbia, 15-37.

**October 5:** State weakness as a cause of civil wars. Are civil wars following state breakdown a new phenomenon? How does a rationalist explanation for state weakness as a cause of civil wars differ from Hoffman's culturally contextualized explanation? Are "civil wars of state weakness" an African phenomenon or are they more widely observable? Is Afghanistan a candidate for this kind of civil war?

Danny Hoffman (2011) *War Machines* [textbook], 1-87.

James Fearon & David Laitin (2003) "Ethnicity, Insurgency & Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, 97:1 (Feb), 75-90, available [here](#).

**October 10:** Continued Discussion of Hoffman's book: What is the relationship of state weakness to the ground-level processes during the Sierra Leone—Liberia conflict? Is this an example of the weakness of state capacity or alternative to state capacity? Note in particular the role of patronage politics and its influence in the organization of West African rebel groups. What is a "war machine" and how would you apply it in other cases that we've studied?

Danny Hoffman (2011) *War Machines*, 88-161.

**October 12:** Socio-economic pressures as a distinct cause of civil wars. Think more about the proposition that civil wars in Africa constitute a distinct category. To what extent do cultural factors enhance or mitigate the probability that a civil war will occur and to what extent does culture shape the nature of conflict when it does occur? Also consider the role of international intervention in shaping civil wars.

Danny Hoffman (2011). *War Machines*, 162-260

**October 17:**

**Midterm Exam—in class**

## **Part II: Micro-dynamics of Violence and the Social Environment of Warfare—and a Focus of Civil War Violence and Counterinsurgency in Iraq**

**October 19:** The critical recurring elements of violence in civil wars. Note the roles of interactions between actors at central and local levels, and between combatants and non-combatants, and the logic of selective versus indiscriminate violence. The logic of asymmetric information, the local dynamics of violent contention, and the problem of accurate identification

Stathis Kalyvas (2006) “A Theory of Irregular War I” and “A Theory of Irregular War II,” in his *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 87-110.

Clay Mountcastle. 2009. “Proving Ground for Punishment: Pope, Halleck and Schofield in Missouri,” in his *Punitive War: Confederate Guerrillas and Union Reprisals*, (University of Kansas), 21-55.

**October 24:** Examine the relationships that exist between insurgents, counterinsurgents and the people. Revisiting the identification problem: How do insurgents use people in tactical ways? What is the relationship between narrative / ideology and the reasons why people support insurgents?

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, 11-100.

Mary Kaldor (2012) “New Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,” *New and Old Wars*, 151-84.

**October 26:** This section also examines relationships between insurgents and civilian populations. How do people choose whom to support and to what intensity? What is “subversion”? Note the relationships between armed groups; how some piggyback on others. How do the jihadist insurgents build their organizations? Note how control over flows of information about acts of violence—what information is propagated and what information is hidden—shapes the battlespace.

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, 103-210.

**October 31:** What are the limits of violence and the limits of control through fear? Atrocities and the metrics of control: Do some violent extremists miscalculate in their enterprise? Note the distinctions between suicide fighters and suicide bombers and the different tactical and strategic uses of violence. How does it matter when warfighters lack access to the tools of violence that may be assessable to the insurgents?

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, 211-96.

Robert Pape (2003) “The [Strategic Logic](#) of Suicide Terrorism,” *American Political Science Review*, 97: 3 (August), 1-19.

Review 18 USC § 2441 ([War Crimes Act](#))

**November 2:** Inside the Shia insurgency: How was this insurgency different from the war in Sunni provinces? How does conflict in urban settings differ from conflict in rural settings? Does contemporary urban warfare confirm / not confirm the 'new wars' thesis from earlier in this course? How do rules of engagement affect the character of warfare? Think about asymmetrical warfare and the paradox of the strong becoming weaker as a consequence of fighting the weak.

J.B Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, 299-396.

**November 7:** General lessons: What is the nature of subversion when elements of the rebel forces are embedded in government institutions, versus subversion as a practice among political outsiders? How do the people figure into these different categories of conflict? How do warfighters behave when they are uncertain about the loyalties of others around them? Where do true loyalties lie?

J.B. Walker (2012) *Nightcap at Dawn*, the rest of the book.

Paul Staniland (2012) "Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia," *International Security*, 37:1 (Summer), 142-77.

### **Part III: Organization of Armed Groups and the Logic of Violence—Toward Symmetrical Irregular Warfare in Multiple Dimensions?**

**November 9:** Narratives and mobilization: The fragmentation of the strategic narrative and the enhanced capacity of new and old actors to communicate their narratives to global audiences. Who controls the narrative and what does this mean for states that intervene in civil wars? Has the intensification of global connections changed how insurgents craft mobilizing narratives, and if so, how does that process reflect on Kaldor's argument about 'new wars'?

Emile Simpson (2012) "Strategic Narrative," and "Ethos, Vision and Confidence," *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-first Century Combat as Politics*, London: Hurst & Co., 179-226.

David Kilcullen (2009) "The Accidental Guerrilla," in his *Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1-38.

**November 14:** The logic of wartime violence in the contemporary social context. Has the logic of violence changed as the context of violence (social impacts of state collapse, global insurgent connections, urbanization) changes? What elements of the logic of violence are consistent across time?

Nicholas Krohley (2015) "The Sanctions Era: Shifts in Civil Society and the Rise of the Sadrist Movement," in his *Death of the Mehdi Army: The Rise, Fall, and the Revival of Iraq's Most Powerful Militia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 35-57.

VHosham Dawod (forthcoming) "Iraqi Tribes in the Land of Jihad," in Virginie Collombier & Olivier Roy, eds., *Tribes and Global Jihadism*, London: Hurst & Co, forthcoming.

**November 16:** Contemporary rebel governance: Under what conditions do insurgents provide a viable alternative to state authority? Is the contemporary insurgent "liberated zone" like your grandparent's "liberated zone"? What is the significance of rebel governance for the states that fight rebels?

Ana Arjona (2014) "Wartime Institutions: A Research Agenda," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 58: 8, 1360-1389.

Florian Weigand (2017) "Afghanistan's Taliban – Legitimate Jihadists or Coercive Extremists?" *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:3, 1-23.

**November 21:** Linking policy to academic frameworks to (try to) understand contemporary civil wars: Kaldor's response to the critics and her parting words. Words from the White House set alongside the complexities of contemporary civil wars. What would you do in a policy context?

Mary Kaldor (2012) *New and Old Wars*, "Cosmopolitan Approach" & "Afterwar," 119-50 & 202-21.

White House (2017) "[Presidential Memorandum](#) Plan to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," 28 Jan; White House (2017) "[Remarks](#) by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia," 21 August.

### **Final Papers due in class**

**Final Exam**, Monday, 4 December, 12:00 to 14:00 (in Searle 2407—your classroom): The final exam schedule is [here](#), so check it as the exam draws near to be sure.