

THE AMERICAN WAY OF WAR

First Year Seminar, Fall 2018
Will Reno: reno-at-northwestern-dot-edu
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:00 to 12:20
314 Locy Hall
This syllabus is available at www.willreno.org

OVERVIEW

This course traces the development of American military strategy and uses this history to help inform debates about current and future U.S. defense policy. The course opens with a broad survey of the long sweep of American thought about the relation of warfare and national interest. Attention then turns to the massive military buildup and assault on Iraq in 1991 that began more than a quarter-century of US military operations of varying degrees in that country. The Iraq War of 2003-2011 and US military operations in Afghanistan since 2001 brought to the fore debates about the conduct of counterinsurgency. We will consider these debates in this course, along with the emergence of multi-domain warfare (i.e., political warfare and information warfare alongside kinetic operations) against increasingly capable adversaries.

Our attention then turns to increased reliance on low-profile Special Operations Forces and other strategies that are designed to counter foes and to help friendly governments increase their own military capabilities. Assistance can extend to more complex stability operations, which we also will consider. We will weigh debates about targeted killings (i.e., drones) and private military service companies and the American conduct of warfare. We will explore the larger issue of open-ended operations and the places (including Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Niger, and Libya) where American forces engage in warfare (of varied intensity) in countries with which the US is not at war. Our attention then turns to current challenges of hybrid warfare (i.e., hacking and “fake news” and their roles in conflicts). We will consider what actually counts as “warfare” and as “politics as usual.”

This brings us to the Big Picture: What do potential future American ways of war look like? Are we to do endless counterinsurgency, and is this really just counter-terrorism? What is the difference, and how do we know? What does “winning” look like after 17 years in Afghanistan? Is future war to be a return to the concerns of the Atomic Revolutions, spheres of hegemony and state versus state way of warfare, such as some envision from the situation on the Korean Peninsula?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Students need to complete the reading assignments listed under each meeting before the actual class meeting. Grades will be based on the following criteria:

- **Class attendance and participation (10%):** Every student is expected to attend every class meeting and come prepared to discuss the required reading material. Questions are

provided below for each class meeting to provide a basis for discussion. Students are most welcome to pose other questions and issues.

- **Three essays (30% each):** In accordance with this course's status as a fall quarter first year seminar, students will expect it to focus on writing. These essays should be in the 6-8 page range. Due dates are noted in the course schedule. An assignment memo at the end of the syllabus provides further details related to these essays.

BOOK & OTHER READING MATERIAL

The following book is required reading and is available online at the Norris Center Bookstore.

Russell Weigley. 1973. *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. Indiana University Press (ISBN: 978-0-253-28029-9)

Additional reading material can be acquired either through following links on the electronic syllabus and / or accessing material on the password-protected Canvas site for this course

GOALS OF THE COURSE

The primary goal of this course is to lead students to their own understanding of theories and empirical evidence regarding historical and contemporary debates about US military strategy. This will require reading course material, discussing it in class, and writing essays based on readings, discussions and one's own analysis of core issues related to fighting wars. Additional goals include:

- Educate students regarding the nature and evolution of American warfighting strategies.
- Understand the substance of debates over American warfighting strategies.
- Examine questions that these warfighting strategies present to policy makers and citizens.
- Recognize the priorities and underlying assumptions of policy responses to conflicts.
- Promote critical analysis of the impact of technological innovations on warfighting.
- Gain an understanding of past and current norms concerning the conduct of war.
- Understand varied interpretations and debates about the role of international law in the conduct of warfare.
- Promote student capacities to read social science research, and understand and be prepared to debate its approaches and findings,

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Have the capacity to distinguish among different warfighting strategies in their analysis of any conflict that they encounter.

- Evaluate the relative efficacy of different strategies in armed conflicts, and understand why various actors in conflicts adopt particular strategies.
- Understand and explain why actors in some conflicts are more prone to certain kinds of violence against noncombatants.
- Understand and explain the role that official policies (i.e., counterinsurgency, counter-terrorism, et al.) play in contemporary conflicts.
- Make informed judgements about the efficacy of policies and tradeoffs that policy choices entail.
- Critically evaluate how (and whether) social science theories can inform the public and government officials about the nature of warfighting generally and about specific contemporary conflicts.

AN ADDITIONAL NOTE: Materials for this course may contain graphic imagery of war and political views that some may find distressing. At various stages of the course videos will be shown. Students will be warned of content prior to viewing.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Part I: Attrition or Annihilation?

Thursday, 27 September: Waging war with limited resources and pursuit of a strategy of attrition. Winning by surviving was possible through the avoidance of enemy concentrations. Nathaniel Greene: The guerrilla warfare strategy that forced the dispersal of superior British forces. How to make a strong army weak as it fights the weak

Weigley. 1973. *American Way of War*, 3-58

Tuesday, 2 October: The rise of a naval strategy oriented toward defense and the impact of steam powered warships. Winfield Scott and his strategy of attrition, applied in Mexico. Dennis Hart Mahan and Napoleon's strategy of annihilation The Civil War: A strategy of attrition or annihilation? The Confederacy's defensive strategy of winning through surviving, transformed under R.E. Lee to an offensive-defensive strategy to take battles to the North. Sherman's and Grant's use of indirect means, coupled with a strategy of mass and concentration to wage war against an economy and a political system. Debates about the strategy of terror against civilians

Weigley. 1973. *American Way of War*, 59-163.

Thursday, 4 October: Combatants and civilians in the Civil War. The identification problem: Who is a combatant and who is a non-combatant? What is the relationship between different uses of violence (discriminate versus indiscriminate violence) and non-combatant behavior? What is the role of international humanitarian law in the conduct of war?

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.

Stephen Ash. 1995. "Rebels and Conquerors," in his *When the Yankees Came: Chaos and Violence in the Occupied South*, (University of North Carolina), 38-75.

Tuesday, 9 October: Strategy of sea power and Empire. Stephen B Luce and Alfred Thayer Mahan define why the US needs a strong navy. The Great War leads to the argument for mechanized forces to break the defensive deadlock. Billy Mitchell's argument for air power and a role for an air force in a Pacific Ocean strategy. ORANGE and the development of development of a strategy for a Pacific Ocean war

Weigley. 1973. *American Way of War*, 167-265

Thursday, 11 October: The strategic logic of A.T. Mahan. The argument for a focus on maritime dominance and the destruction of Japan's battle fleet The UK-US debate in the European war over an enveloping strategy versus a concentration and mass strategy. Applying concentration and mass to destroy the German army. Strategic bombardment and debate over the appropriate target—German civilians (Douhet doctrine) or Germany's economy (daylight precision bombing)

Weigley. 1973. *American Way of War*, 269-359.

Tuesday, 16 October: Transformational technologies: Why were atomic weapons at the heart of a strategic revolution? What is the impact of the strategy of deterrence on plans for warfighting? Can combats be included in a viable nuclear strategy? Is discipline and restraint compatible with the maintenance of a military that is geared toward winning wars through the destruction of the enemy's armed forces?

Weigley. 1973. *American Way of War*, 363-440

First Paper Draft Due

Thursday, 18 October: Vietnam and the tension between a strategy of annihilation and a policy of limited objectives. Do wars of annihilation work in “struggles of national liberation?” Are counterinsurgency and nation-building antidotes to this dilemma? The Powell Doctrine and the return to the strategy of annihilation of the enemy’s forces, and the start of US military’s quarter-century-plus engagement in Iraq–Gulf War I. Is there a place for annihilation (or combats of other sorts) in US strategy?

Weigley. 1973. *American Way of War*, 441-477.

Joint Chiefs of Staff. 1992. [*National Military Strategy of the United States*](#). [The Powell Doctrine]

MAJ Frank Hoffman. 1994. [*Decisive Force: The New American Way of War?*](#) Naval War College, 156-193.

Part II: Recent & Contemporary Ways of War The Challenge of Fighting Wars of Attrition

Tuesday, 23 October: Fighting wars of attrition in the pursuit of order. The challenges of using a military designed to fight a war of annihilation to fight wars of attrition. How does counterinsurgency (COIN) define victory? Hearts and minds versus combats as a COIN strategy. Is COIN a strategy or simply a collection of tactics? Are lessons from the past integrated in the development of COIN, and are these lessons meaningful in the contemporary context of warfare?

Max Boot. 2003. [*“The New American Way of War,”*](#) *Foreign Affairs*, 82: 4, (July / Aug), 41-58.

Eliot Cohen, Conrad Crane, Jr., John Horvath & John Nagl. 2006. “Principles, Imperatives, and Paradoxes of [*Counterinsurgency*](#),” *Military Review*, (March-April), 49-53.

Gian P. Gentile, [*“A Strategy of Tactics: Population-centric COIN and the Army,”*](#) *Parameters: Journal of the Army War College* (Autumn 2009), 5-17.

Steven Metz. 2017. [*“A Wake for Counterinsurgency? Abandoning Counterinsurgency: Revising Antiterrorism Strategy,”*](#) *Parameters*, 13-23.

(Not required but it is there for you some day! Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication 12-15. 1940. [*Small Wars Manual*](#), Department of the Navy.)

First Paper (Revised Version) Due

Thursday, 25 October: Fighting wars in states in which partner governments lack the political will and / or capacity to fight. Learning the hard way about dealing with insurgents, or is it just lather, rinse, and repeat? The importance of ground-level information: how much information is enough information? What does counterinsurgency tell about whether past experience defines what we will, can, or must do in the future? When we repeat mistakes, is it because we are forced to because of bad habits, or have we failed to embrace the challenges of wars of attrition?

Karl Eikenberry. 2013. “The [Limits of Counterinsurgency](#) Doctrine in Afghanistan: The Other Side of the COIN,” *Foreign Affairs*, 59 (Sept/Oct), 59-74.

Mike Martin. 2014. “From the US Re-engagement: ‘Counterinsurgency’, 2009-12,” in his *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict*. Hurst & Co., 195-231.

Tuesday, 30 October: Light Footprints – the utility of applying military force in countries with which America is not at war. The ascendancy of [Special Forces](#) and of foreign military training operations: Does training a government’s security forces work when that government lacks the political will or capabilities to take advantage of that effort?

Andrew Feikert. 2018. [US Special Operations Forces \(SOF\): Background and Issues for Congress](#). Congressional Research Service. (13pp.)

US Special Operations Command. 2018. [USASOC 2035](#).

Daniel Byman & Ian Merritt. 2018. “The [New American Way of War](#): Special Operations Forces in the War on Terrorism,” *Washington Quarterly*, 41:2, 79-93.

Thursday, 1 November: Stabilization Operations – “Whole-of-government” approaches to overseas operations. Is this just another name for state-building? Can we identify a case of a successful stabilization operation? Are stabilization operations really new? What place, if any, is there for an emphasis on democratic governance? Is stabilization in Afghanistan the same as “winning” in Afghanistan?

Department of Defense. 2005 [Directive 3000.05: Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction \(SSTR\) Operations](#), 28 Nov. (These few pages save all but those with lots of time on their hands from the 250 page [Joint Publication 3-07, Stability](#).)

Jennifer Taw. 2012. “Explaining the Military Mission Revolution,” in her *Mission Revolution: The U.S. Military and Stability Operations*, Columbia University Press, 109-140.

Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. 2018. "Introduction," "Measuring the Effectiveness of Stabilization," "Findings," and "Lessons" in [*Stabilization: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*](#). Arlington, VA; SIGAR, 1-8, 125-141 & 179-189.

Tuesday, 6 November: Private military service companies; i.e., "contractors." Under what conditions might private sector security be effective? Does the use of private security services affect the place of the military in US society? How does the use of private security companies affect elected and other officials' decisions about the use of force? A case study of one firm.

Deborah Avant & Renée de Nevers. 2011. "Military Contractors & the American Way of War," *Daedalus* 140: 3 (Summer), 88-99.

Christopher Spearin. 2014. "Special Operations Forces & [Private Security Companies](#)," *Parameters*, 44:2 (Summer), 61-73.

Case study: Josh Rogin. 2017. "Inside Erik Prince's Proposal to [Outsource the War](#) in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, (9 Aug); Marc Fisher, Ian Shapira and Emily Rauhala. 2018. "[Inside Erik Prince's China Venture](#)," *Washington Post*, 4 May; BBC. 2018. [Interview](#) of former Blackwater CEO Erik Prince, *HARDtalk*, 18 Sept. (23 min.)

Thursday, 8 November: Drones and the continuing quest for more information, speed, and precision. Are drones precise? Controversies over targeting: how do "collateral damage" (the killing of civilians, unintentional targets) matter? Do new technologies of this sort obviate the limitations of strategies? Do tactics drive "strategy"?

Daniel Byman. 2013. "Why Drones Work: The Case for Washington's Weapon of Choice," *Foreign Affairs*, 92:4 (July/Aug), 32-43.

Audrey Kurth Cronin. 2013. "Why Drones Fail: When Tactics Drive Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, 92:4 (July/Aug), 44-54.

Michael Walzer. 2016. "Just & Unjust Targeted Killing & [Drone Warfare](#)," *Daedalus*, 145:4 (Fall), 12-22.

Second Paper Due

**Part III: Present and Future Ways of War:
What is War? What is the Contemporary Utility of Force?**

Tuesday, 13 November: Hybrid Warfare I: Is the “hybrid warfare” concept meaningful? Is hybrid warfare just old-fashioned political warfare with new tools? How does one know if one is at war? The dilemma of distinguishing acceptable political activities from subversion A consideration of non-American views on hybrid warfare.

George Kennan. “Policy Planning [Memorandum](#),” 4 May 1948, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 273, Records of the National Security Council, NSC 10/2.

Jahara Matisek. 2017. “[Shades of Gray Deterrence](#),” *Journal of Strategy Security*, 10: 3, 1-26.

United States Special Operations Command. 2015. [The Gray Zone](#). 9 Sept. (10 pages)

Non-US Perspectives:

General Valery Gerasimov. 2013. “[The Value of Science in Prediction](#),” originally published in *Military-Industrial Kurier*, 27 February.

Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, 1999. [Unrestricted Warfare](#), PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, especially 124-148.

Thursday, 15 November: Hybrid Warfare at Present -- information warfare: Is the role of cyber activities in warfare a transformation? What is the role of information operations in an offensive strategy? Is the offense—defense distinction relevant in the cyber realm? Does (or should) law play a special role in the conduct of information operations, when compared to other kinds of warfare?

Thomas Zeitzoff. 2017. “How Social Media is Changing Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61: 9, 1970-1991.

Rand Waltzman, 2017. *The [Weaponization](#) of Information*, RAND, 27 April.

Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 2017. [Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections](#). (Update and analysis in Scott Shane & Mark Mazzetti. 2018. “[The Plot to Subvert and Election](#): Unraveling the Russia Story So Far,” *New York Times*, 20 Sept.

Clinton Watts. 2017. [Statement](#) Prepared for the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence hearing, “Disinformation: A Primer In Russian Active Measures And Influence Campaigns,” 30 March.

(Not required, but relevant: Department of Defense. 2015. [Cyber Strategy](#); also of interest is Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-12 (R), [Cyberspace Operations](#).)

Tuesday, 20 November: Cyber futures? How do strategists think about the roles and impacts on the American way of war of nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, human brain–machine interface and other technological innovations? [Force 2025 and Beyond](#), [Army Rapid Capabilities Office](#) &c. Should we fear an AI arms race?

Travis Sharp. 2017. “Theorizing Cyber Coercion: The 2014 North Korean Operation against Sony,” *Journal of Security Studies*, 1-29.

M L Cummings. 2017. [Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Warfare](#), Chatham House research paper.

Andrew Lohn, Andrew Parasiliti, William Welser IV. 2016. “Should We Fear an [AI Arms Race](#)?” *Defense One*, Feb 8.

Michael Horowitz. 2018. “[Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power](#),” *Texas National Security Review*, 1:3 (May), 36-57.

Tuesday, 27 November: Hybrid War futures? Is this something different, or just a new dimension of classic coercive strategies? What are the challenges of hybrid warfare planning? The politics of multi-dimensional preparation for war.

Antulio Echevarria. 2016. [Operating in the Gray Zone: An Alternative Paradigm for the U.S. Military Strategy](#), United States Army War College.

Thursday, 29 November: The prospect of battles for hegemonic dominance? The Atomic Revolution and the Korean Peninsula: Is the nuclear past relevant for thinking about the nuclear future?

Stephen Biddle & Ivan Oelrich. 2016. “Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia,” *International Security*, 41:1 (Summer), 7-48.

Kathleen McInnis, et al. 2017. *The North Korean Nuclear Challenge: [Military Options and Issues for Congress](#)*. Congressional Research Service, (6 Nov).

Third Paper Due

And then... WCAS reading period begins on Monday, 3 December

And then... No final exam!

Additional Resources

[War on the Rocks](#) provides what they call “experience-based commentary and analysis on national security affairs.” The site features commentary and analysis that brings together debates about policy and operations. It’s generally regarded among experts as among the more credible fact-based online venues of this sort. It attracts contributions from leading figures in the field.

[Small Wars Journal](#) “facilitates the exchange of information among practitioners, thought leaders, and students of Small Wars, in order to advance knowledge and capabilities in the field.” It is run by a private foundation, and its editor-in-chief is a retired USMCR Intelligence and Counterintelligence / HUMINT officer. Contributions tend to be from diverse perspectives and are sourced to varying degrees of reliability.

[Lawfare](#) publishes essays at the intersection of law, legal institutions, and national security topics, which include (among many others), topics such as cybersecurity, targeted killing, and secrecy & leaks, etc. The site is generally regarded as having a moderate-liberal bias, is reliably sourced, and usually has more academic contributors than most other sites. Contributors include scholars, and military and civilian experts. The editor-in-chief is a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute.

The [Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs](#) is a think-tank affiliated with Harvard University, a big school out East. I suspect that the more seasoned among you may already know it. This center’s mission includes advancing policy-relevant information about threats to U.S. national interests and international security threats. It is widely regarded as superior in terms of unbiased and well sourced factual reporting.

The [Center for a New American Security](#) is a Washington, D.C.-based think tank which specializes in U.S. national security issues. It strives to produce research that will inform bipartisan policy debate. The co-founders include a former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and a former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

[Defense One](#) is an online news site that reports primarily on matters relating to national defense and security and is owned by Atlantic Media. It reports on recent developments and provides analysis for a policy. It is regarded as reliably well-sourced and accurate among “security professionals” that include government officials, members of the military, and industry.

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

Each of these essays will contribute 30 percent of your final course grade. Class participation will contribute the remaining 10 percent. All assignments are to be submitted electronically. The preferred submission method is to send attached files to reno-at-northwestern-dot-edu.

The First Essay draft is due by the start of class on Tuesday, 16 October. This draft will be ungraded, as you will have the opportunity to respond to the instructor's comments that you will receive in quick order. A revised version of the paper is due by the start of class on Tuesday, 23 October. Here is the prompt for this essay:

Russell Weigley presents an argument that US military strategy has evolved from a focus on attrition to annihilation of enemy forces. At the same time, our readings indicate that this transition has been incomplete and is often contested. In light of this ambiguity, how do you evaluate the relationship of attrition and annihilation in US military strategy?

The Second Essay is due at the start of class on Thursday, 8 November. While there is no requirement to submit a draft before that date, your instructor would be glad to consult about the writing process prior to that deadline. Here is the prompt for the second essay:

The US is engaged in a more or less permanent deployment of military forces in the Greater Middle East and in Afghanistan. Russell Weigley wrote back in 1973 that "at no point on the spectrum of violence does the use of combat offer much promise for the United States today" (p. 477). Evaluate Weigley's statement in light of subsequent developments.

The Third Essay is due at the start of your final class meeting on Thursday, 29 November. As with the second essay, you are welcome to consult prior to handing in this assignment. Here is the prompt for the third essay:

Some of the readings later in this course address what the authors, including some from within the military, see as a crisis of strategy. This crisis is related to open-ended engagements in a growing number of places, and the tendency for American politicians to assign more tasks to the US military. Some find a tendency to see threats everywhere, with a corresponding inclination to label everything as "war." Is this a crisis of strategy, and if so, what would be the most sensible (and viable) measures to address it? If this is not a crisis, explain why it isn't in a way that engages with these writers.