

# UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY WARFARE

First Year Seminar, Fall 2016  
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Mondays & Wednesdays, 3:30p – 4:50p  
Scott Hall 107 [The Burdick Room]  
This syllabus is available at [www.willreno.org](http://www.willreno.org)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the politics of recent and ongoing conflicts. Civil wars feature prominently among these conflicts and in this course as well. Many countries have become involved in various fashions in ongoing civil wars in Syria and Iraq, as in most other civil wars. International concerns about the plight of civilians in conflict zones generate calls for armed intervention. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees reports that there were more refugees at the end of 2015 than at any time since the end of the Second World War. Refugee flows have played important roles in developments such as the rise of nationalist sentiments in Europe and debates about immigration elsewhere. Meanwhile, concerns about international terrorism and extremism intersect with these conflicts.

Rather than a course about any particular war, this course will equip students to identify and to understand basic underlying features that are present in most all modern conflicts that involve warfare among the people. This endeavor will provide students with the analytical tools with which to ask questions about the nature of contemporary warfare, the calculations and the aims of actors involved in these wars, and the effectiveness of their tactics and their strategies. In a broad sense, the aim is to get inside the heads of some of these actors to gain insight into how contemporary warfare works.

This course is divided into four sections. The first section introduces students to the vocabulary of an analytical understanding of contemporary warfare. This section focuses on the micro-politics of violence. Students are introduced to how social scientists think about the relationship between the uses of violence and other important features of warfare such as the recruitment of fighters, the organization and behavior of armed groups, the management of information, and the roles of audiences. These analytical tools help students to examine in greater depth how armed groups, whether these are rebel formations, militias, government armies, or police, interact with local populations. Readings in the second section help to explain prominent recent uses of violence. This section helps students to understand why armed groups commit (or refrain from) massacres of noncombatants, the reasoning behind the use of and the impacts of suicide attacks and other notable elements of contemporary warfare.

The third section considers whether the character of contemporary warfare is specific to our time. One view is that the underlying logic of violence and warfare is fairly constant over time. Another view is that technological innovations, new ideas about appropriate behavior i.e., human

rights norms), geo-political shifts and so forth fundamentally change how wars are fought. The fourth section focuses on some distinctive elements of contemporary wars, including Violent Internationalists (armed supporters for wholesale global changes—which includes what some politicians and media call “radical Islamists”) and Hybrid Warfare (the combination of regular and irregular warfare, such as in Ukraine and elsewhere). The final section considers American responses to contemporary warfare. These responses include increased reliance on robots (including drones), contractor war fighters, Special Forces, open-ended commitment of forces & mission creep, and other developments.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING**

Students need to have completed the reading assignments listed under each meeting noted in the course schedule below. Grades will be based on the following criteria:

- **Class attendance and participation** (20%): Every student is expected to attend every class meeting and come prepared to discuss the required reading material. Questions are provided below for each meeting. These may provide a basis for discussion, and students are most welcome to pose other questions and issues.
- **Four essays** (20% 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. Students will receive a memo at least ten days before each assignment is due. These memos will take into account discussions with students about possible essay topics.

## **BOOKS & OTHER READING MATERIAL**

The following books are required reading and are available online at your favorite vendor.

Mary Kaldor. 2012. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), Stanford.

J.B. Walker, 2012. *Nightcap at Dawn in Iraq: American Soldiers' Counterinsurgency in Iraq*. Skyhorse Publishing.

## **GOALS OF THE COURSE**

The primary goal of this course is to lead students to their own understanding of theories and empirical evidence regarding the causes, conduct, and termination of contemporary conflicts. 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 conflicts.

Additional goals include:

- Educate students regarding the different types of conflicts that exist now and in the past.
- Relate the different forms of violence that are currently labelled “terrorism”.
- Examine the various strategies that states use to combat insurgencies
- Understand and debate the relative merits of strategies that use high levels of violence versus those that use minimal violence
- Understand and debate the relative merits of selective versus indiscriminate violence
- Understand the priorities and underlying assumptions of policy responses to conflicts.
- 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:

- Distinguish among different types of political violence in their analysis of any conflict that they encounter.
- Evaluate the relative efficacy of different types of violence used by actors in conflicts and identify the conditions that are associated with this efficacy.
- Understand and explain why actors in some conflicts are more prone to certain kinds of violence against noncombatants.
- Understand and explain the role that violence plays in official policies (i.e., counterinsurgency, counter-terrorism, et al.) that are designed to respond to contemporary conflicts.
- Make informed judgements about the efficacy of policies and the tradeoffs that policy choices entail.
- Critically evaluate how (and whether) social science theories can inform the public and government officials about the nature of violence generally and about specific contemporary conflicts.

## **AN ADDITIONAL NOTE**

Some materials for this course contain graphic imagery of war, foul language, and political views that some may find quite objectionable. All reasonable efforts will be made to warn students of particular content.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Part I: Political Violence:

Discriminate & indiscriminate violence, collaboration & control, violence & information

**Wednesday, 21 Sept:** Welcome to the course. A discussion of the brief reading for this class meeting will serve as a warmup for what is to follow.

J.B. Walker. 2012. "The Beginning, or the End," and "Encountering the Other: Navigating with a Concussion," in his *Nightcap at Dawn*, 11-40.  
[This reading will be distributed to students prior to the first class meeting.]

**Monday, 26 Sept: Territory and Control:** The nature of the contested battlespace and how the nature of control affects the perceptions of the war fighters and the people. How does an observer of this situation figure out what is really going on and evaluate options?

J.B. Walker. 2012. "Into the Labyrinth: Understanding Insurgency on the Ground," in his *Nightcap at Dawn*, 101-67.

**Wednesday, 28 Sept: The Identification Problem:** The centrality of information and the difficulty of identifying who is a genuine supporter and who may provide information to the enemy. What role does violence play in shaping support and in the collection of information?

J.B. Walker. 2012. "Distant View of a Minaret: Risks and Subversion," in his *Nightcap at Dawn*, 71-100.

**Monday, 3 Oct: Support and Recruitment:** How does the leader of the armed group know that recruits are reliable? How do leaders convince the recruits to fight?

Kilcullen, David. 2009. "The Accidental Guerrilla," in his *Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, Oxford, 1-38.

**Wednesday, 5 Oct: Collaboration and Defection:** What is the relationship between different uses of violence (i.e., discriminate versus indiscriminate violence) and non-combatant behavior? What signals do different uses of violence convey to an audience? What is the audience for the American Civil 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.

## **Part II: Logics of Violence Considered**

**Monday, 10 Oct:** Why do some groups use extreme violence? What do they think they can gain from this violence? Is this discriminate or indiscriminate violence?

Stathis Kalyvas. 1999. "Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria," *Rationality and Society*, 11:3, 243-285.

[*Revisit* J.B. Walker. 2012. "The Harafish: Method behind the Insurgent Madness," and "Midaq Alley under Insurgent Control," in his *Nightcap at Dawn*, 103-53. Think about this now in terms of zones of insurgent v government control.]

*First paper due in class*

**Wednesday, 12 Oct:** What are the aims of the suicide attack? Do suicide attacks achieve their aims?

Robert Pape. 2003. "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review*, 97:3 (Aug), 343-361.

J.B. Walker. 2012. "Idris in His Element: Suicide Fighters and Suicide Bombers—A Distinction," and "Idris's Foibles: Suicide Terrorism and Its World of Allies," in his *Nightcap at Dawn*, 259-79.

## **Part III: Old Wars and New Wars?**

Is there a declining utility in the use of force?

Has identity (i.e., ethnic & sectarian) politics played a changing role in warfare?

**Monday, 17 Oct:** Old ways of warfare: are they gone forever?

Mary Kaldor. 2012. "Introduction" and "Old Wars," in her *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*,

**Wednesday, 19 Oct:** Globalization and its discontents in a pre-Brexit world. We examine the many wars of the former Yugoslavia, the war's actors and their aims. Global warriors, foreign fighters and attacks in the West

Mary Kaldor. 2012. "Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Case Study of a New War," in her *New and Old Wars*, 32-70.

Pieter Van Ostaeyen 2016. "Belgian Radical Networks and the Road to the Brussels Attacks," *CTC Sentinel* (June), 7-12.

**Monday, 24 Oct:** The politics of new wars: neo-tradition, neo-tribes and the ascent of ethnic conflict. Is this new or has this kind of warfare always been with us?

Mary Kaldor. 2012. "The Politics of New Wars," in her *New and Old Wars*, 71-93.

Stathis Kalyvas. 2001. "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?" *World Politics*, 54:1 (Oct), 99-118.

**Wednesday, 26 Oct:** Criminal enterprises, violent gangs and their places in contemporary warfare. What are the boundaries between warfare and criminal violence? How far is Chicago from Iraq?

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

Financial Action Task Force. 2015. "Sources of Finding" and "Movement and Use of Funds and Other Assets," in [\*Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL\)\*](#), FATF, 12-31.

[Drug Lord: The Legend of Shorty](#)

*Second Paper Due in Class*

**Monday, 31 Oct:** The connection between state failure and contemporary wars. Iraq's insurgents who are inside the state at the same time that they fight the state

Mary Kaldor. 2012. "New Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," and "Governance, Legitimacy and Security," in her *New and Old Wars*, 151-201.

J.B. Walker. 2012. "The Self-perpetuating Sob Story: The Political and Military Strategy of Jaish al-Mahdi," and Fighting JAM: Politics, Strategy, Tactics," in his *Nightcap at Dawn*, 333-96.

**Wednesday, 2 Nov:** Disruptive technologies and new audiences? Information and limits of modern warfare

Rupert Smith. 2007. "Trends: Our Modern Operations," in his *Utility of Force. The Art of War in the Modern World*, Knopf, 269-307.

Emile Simpson. 2013. "The Language of War," in his *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-first Century Combat as Politics*, Hurst & Co., 15-39.

#### **Part IV: Recent & Ongoing Civil Wars, Violent Internationalism & Hybrid Warfare**

**Monday, 7 Nov:** How many wars have we got and how many have we gotten into? What counts as a contemporary war?

Paul Williams. 2016. "Counting Africa's Conflicts," in his *War & Conflict in Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Polity, 15-41.

**Wednesday, 9 Nov:** Hybrid warfare, cyber war, information warfare and the force of politics (rather than the politics of force)

Michael Kofman & Matthew Rojansky. 2015. "[A Closer Look at Russia's 'Hybrid War'](#)", Wilson Center – Kennan Institute.

Andrew Weisburd, Clint Watts & Jim Berger. 2016. "Trolling for Trump: How Russia is Trying to Destroy Our Democracy," [War on the Rocks](#), 6 Nov.

Liz Spayd. 2016. "A Muted Alarm Bell over Russian Election Hacking," *New York Times*, [5 Nov.](#)

**Monday, 14 Nov:** Al-Qaeda in Iraq and ISIS. Strategic uses of extreme violence and the effort to control information and choices

J.B. Walker. 2012. "Children of Gebelawi: Inside the Sunni and Kurdish Insurgencies", in his *Nightcap at Dawn*, 171-257.

PBS, *Frontline*, [The Secret History of ISIS](#) (55 min.)

## **Part V: American Ways of Warfare:**

COIN, Light footprint, contractors, robots

**Wednesday, 16 Nov:** New commitments, new tasks, and a [global architecture](#) of bases. Complex operations and “whole of government” approaches: Is contemporary warfighting separable from state-building?

Department of Defense. 2009. “Instruction 3000.05: [Stability Operations](#)”

US Army & Marine Corps. 2007. “Unity of Effort: Integrating Civilian and Military Activities,” in *Counterinsurgency Filed Manual* (FM3-24), University of Chicago Press, 33-77.

*Third Paper Due at 5pm, Friday, 18 Nov*

**Monday, 21 Nov:** Warfare and development assistance, the impact of Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) and other programs.

US Army Combined Arms Center. 2011. “[Concept](#)” in *Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team Handbook*, US Army CIC, 5-12.

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.

**Monday, 28 Nov:** Standoff and light footprints, the pursuit of terrorism suspects via US Federal Courts.

Patrick Johnston & Anoop Sarbahi. 2014. “The [Impact of U.S. Drone Strikes](#) on Terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Working paper.

International Security Program, [Drone Wars Pakistan: Analysis](#) [website]

Paul Cruickshank. 2015. “A View from the CT Foxhole: An Interview with Zainab N. Ahmad, Asst. U.S. Attorney,” *CTC Sentinel* (Nov/Dec), 9-12.

**Wednesday, 30 Nov:** War without end?

J.B. Walker. 2012. “Karnack Café: Perceptions in Counterinsurgency,” in his *Nightcap at Dawn*, 519-39.



### *Fourth Paper Due in Class*

These are a few on-line sources that might be of interest:

Empirical Studies of Conflict (Princeton University), at <https://esoc.princeton.edu/>, collects conflict data, papers and articles on civil wars and insurgencies, and other useful information for policy makers, students, and the informed public as well as to academic researchers.

Political Violence @ a Glance, <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/>, provides accessible posts by analysts who tackle topical issues and pose questions about political violence.

[H-War](#) is a member of H-Net Humanities & Social Sciences Online.