

Warfare in Contemporary Global Politics

Political Science 395

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Tuesdays & Thursdays, 09:30 to 10:50,
Scott Hall 201—The historic Ripton Room
This syllabus is available at www.willreno.org

OVERVIEW

This course examines the role that warfare plays in contemporary global politics as the balance of power among states shifts from an era of American hegemony to an increasingly competitive environment. This course also examines the global challenges and opportunities confronting the United States and the efforts of US political leaders to craft a grand strategy that adequately addresses them, as well as the perspectives of leaders and policymakers in other countries as they confront this changing environment in their own ways. This course thus is designed to integrate real-world observations, analysis, and theoretical frameworks in international relations, international security, and American foreign policy.

The first part of this course considers the relationship of warfare and structures of global power. What accounts for the relative scarcity of interstate wars after the Second World War, an era that has been largely (though not entirely) free of wars of territorial conquest? What is the relationship between onset, duration and intensity of civil wars and structures of global power? Thus, a question for our age: Will warfare become more common as the old order fades and is replaced with competition between multiple great powers and among regional powers? What steps can be taken to avoid that fate?

The second part of the course considers technological developments that have enabled warfare on a scale not previously imagined. How have these developments influenced efforts of military planners and operators to identify objectives, allocate resources, the select tactics and methods, and how they weigh potential risks and contingencies in the use of armed force?

The third part of this course considers how contemporary US political leaders and policy makers contemplate the uses of armed forces to reach political and strategic objectives in line with the broader national interest. Are states and international organizations inclined to make sustained efforts to create new and build on old security architectures?

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:

Participation	10%	(See note below)
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Two memos	30%	(15% each, due 30 January & 20 February)
Midterm exam	25%	(Take home, 48 hours to 23:59, 6 February)
Policy paper	35%	(10 pages-ish, due 6 March)

Participation = showing up for class and exhibiting evidence of having read assignments. Failure to show up for class will have a negative impact on evaluation. The midterm exam will be an essay format take home exam that will be provided at least 48 hours prior to the Tuesday, 6 February deadline. The two memos require the student to identify and critically engage a key idea in one of the readings encountered in class readings to that point. Memos should be about 4 pages in length.

The paper is due on 6 March, the last moment before the start of WCAS Reading Week. This paper should be about 10 pages. The paper's topic can accommodate interests and goals of individual students. It can be helpful to read each class session's questions and statements in this syllabus. Hyperlinks lead to related materials. Students might use this paper to develop a fundable undergraduate research grant proposal. Other students may set sights on bigger fellowships and grants. These and other combined purposes are welcome, provided that the topic of the paper is relevant to issues and analytical considerations associated with this class. Evaluation will be based upon the coherence of the argument and presentation of supporting evidence against at least one reasonable alternative. Students are welcome to consult work beyond the assigned readings, but the paper should not become a huge project.

BOOK & OTHER READING MATERIAL

- The only required textbook for this course is Jahara Matissek & Buddhika Jayamaha. 2022. *Old & New Battlespaces: Society, Military Power, and War*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, ISBN: 978-1626379961
- Additional readings are available via hyperlinks in the electronic version of this syllabus and at the Canvas site for this course.

Trigger alert: Materials for this course about war may contain graphic imagery of war and political views that some may find objectionable. Reasonable efforts will be made to warn students of such content.

GOALS OF THIS 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 warfare in global politics.
- Develop an analytic framework and historical context for understanding contemporary US foreign policy challenges related to the changing character of warfare.
- 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 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 specific strategies.
- Understand and explain why actors in some conflicts are more prone to certain kinds of violence against noncombatants.
- Understand and explain the role official policies (i.e., counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, et al.) play in contemporary conflicts.
- Make informed judgements about efficacy of policies and tradeoffs policy choices entail.
- Think about and discuss plausible directions in which US military strategy might evolve to address new challenges.
- Critically evaluate how social science theories can inform the public and government officials about the nature of warfighting generally and about specific contemporary conflicts.

In addition, College Seminars are designed to enable students to:

- Set and evaluate academic goals
- Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing
- Study effectively
- Think critically
- Understand and meet Northwestern's standards of academic integrity
- Know when and how to ask for help

AN ADDITIONAL NOTE: Some materials for this course contain graphic imagery of war and references to such that some may find distressing. At various stages of the course videos will be shown. Students will be warned of content and provided with an accommodation, should they wish to refrain from exposure to such material.

ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

<p><i>Northwestern University is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers</i></p>
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in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university's established accommodation process (e: accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; p: 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit: <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html>

PROHIBITION OF RECORDING OF CLASS SESSIONS BY STUDENTS

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited. Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

SUPPORT FOR WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Northwestern University is committed to supporting the wellness of our students. Student Affairs has multiple resources to support student wellness and mental health. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed, please reach out for help. Students can access confidential resources through the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Religious and Spiritual Life (RSL) and the Center for Awareness, Response and Education (CARE). Additional information on all of the resources mentioned above can be found here:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/care/>

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE STATEMENT

Northwestern is committed to fostering an academic community respectful and welcoming of persons from all backgrounds. To that end, the [policy on academic accommodations](#) for religious holidays stipulates that students will not be penalized for class absences to observe religious holidays. If you will observe a religious holiday during a class meeting, scheduled exam, or assignment deadline, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two week of class. If exams or assignment deadlines on the syllabus fall on religious holidays you observe, please reach out so that we can discuss that coursework.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Part I: The Value of Theory – Frameworks for Analysis

Thursday, 4 January: Is there less warfare nowadays?

John Mueller. 2013. “The Decline of War” in his *Remnants of War*. Cornell University Press, 161-181.

Tuesday, 9 January: The international system as a framework for understanding war. Is warfare an enduring element of global politics? If that is true, what explains islands and islands and interludes of peace? How can one explain simultaneously the spread of war and peace?

Bear Braumoeller. 2019. “Introduction” and “Reasons for Skepticism” in his *Only the Dead: The Persistence of War in the Modern Age*. Oxford University Press, 3-46.

Thursday, 11 January: The battlespace as a framework for understanding the relationship between the nature of warfare and the changing character of warfare.

Jahara Matisek & Buddhika Jayamaha. 2022. “Imagining War” and “How Battlespaces Change Through Time” in their *Old & New Battlespaces*, 1-43.

White House. 2022. *The [National Security Strategy](#) of the United States of America*. Washington, DC.

Tuesday, 16 January: Atomic weapons and the advent of a strategic revolution. What is the utility of force in a nuclear-armed world? Does Cold War experience provide insights into the future of proxy warfare? The character of indirect warfare in the 2020s.

Jahara Matisek & Buddhika Jayamaha. 2022. “Warfare in the Nuclear Age” in their *Old & New Battlespaces*, 45-61.

Candice Rondeaux & David Sterman. 2022. “[Twenty-first Century Proxy Warfare](#)” in their *Understanding the New Proxy Wars*. Oxford University Press, 12-46.

Thursday, 18 January: Theories of deterrence and the nuanced shaping of perceptions so that an adversary sees alternatives to aggression as more attractive than war. How can one measure deterrence when potential aggressor motivations are varied and complex? Denial versus punishment, direct versus extended deterrence. Is there a durable post-1945 [anti-nuclear instinct](#)?

Bernard Brodie, ed. 1946. "[War in the Atomic Age](#)" in *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*. Yale Institute of International Studies, 14-56.

Thomas Schelling. 1966. "[The Diplomacy of Violence](#)" in his *Arms and Influence*. Yale University Press, 1-34.

Tuesday, 23 January: The "[Unipolar moment](#)" amidst an expanding battlespace. Is the infrastructure of a rules-based global order and intensified global commerce a function of US global power or is it an autonomous driver of geopolitical structures?

Jahara Matissek & Buddhika Jayamaha. 2022. "The Complexity of Emerging Battlespaces" in their *Old & New Battlespaces*, 63-96.

Joseph Nye, Jr. 1990. "[Soft Power](#)" *Foreign Policy* 80 (Autumn), 153-171.

Part II: Considering Patterns of Contemporary Warfare

Thursday, 25 January: Everything all at once: the [strategic boundaries expand](#).

Jahara Matissek & Buddhika Jayamaha. 2022. "Compressed, Converged, and Expanded Battlespaces" in their *Old & New Battlespaces*, 97-115.

Qiao Liang & Wang Xiangsui. 1999. "[Ten Thousand Methods](#) Combined as One: Combinations that Transcend Boundaries" in their *Unrestricted Warfare* Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 179-203.

Class interaction with Lt Col Jesse Humpal, USAF Office of the Secretary of Defense, OUSD POLICY

Tuesday, 30 January: The advent of defensive dominance. [Lessons from Ukraine](#) and the complications facing offensive maneuver. What are the implications of defensive dominance for US [defense strategy](#) and weapons acquisition decisions? Investing in the [wrong side of the competition](#) is a rich nation's game that the United States may no longer be able to afford.

Keir Lieber. 2000. "Grasping the Technological Peace: The Offense-Defense Balance and International Security." *International Security* 25:1 (Summer), 71-104.

Harry Halem. 2024. "[Ukraine's Lessons for Future Combat](#): Unmanned Aerial Systems and Deep Strike." *Parameters* 53:4 (Winter), 21-33.

- **First Memo Due, 23:59 deadline to submit via Canvas.**

Thursday, 1 February: Economic interdependence and war. [Supply chain interdiction](#) as a competitive weapon. [Operationalizing](#) supply chains in US national and ([beyond](#)) conventional military strategy. Sanctions as coercive measures.

Ling Chen & Miles Evers. 2023. “[‘Wars without Gun Smoke’](#): Global Supply Chains, Power Transitions, and Economic Statecraft.” *International Security* 48:2, 164-204.

Congressional Research Service. 2023. [Sanctions Primer: How the United States Uses Restrictive Mechanisms to Advance Foreign Policy or National Security Objectives](#). Report R47829, 6 Nov.

Class interaction with a civil servant, Office of Foreign Assets Control, US Department of the Treasury.

Tuesday, 6 February: [Urban warfare](#). [Ukraine](#) as insight into what contemporary peer-to-peer urban battles entail. Do non-state armed groups have an advantage in urban environments? A look at US–Iran proxy warfare inside and outside cities

Readings to be assigned based on developments in the Middle East

John Spencer, Jayson Geroux & Liam Collins. 2023. “Case Study #7 – [Fallujah II](#),” Modern Warfare Institute (West Point) – Urban Warfare Project

Class interaction with elements of the EU’s **Multinational Special Training-Command (MN ST-C)**—training Ukrainian armed forces in Germany.

- Take home midterms due, 23:59, submit via Canvas.

Thursday, 8 February: Nuclear deterrence, arms races, and escalation in a multipolar global distribution of power. The problem of managing escalation when adversaries are incentivized to misrepresent their actual redlines. The challenge of fighting conventional wars in the shadow of nuclear weapons.

Keir Lieber & Daryl Press. 2023. “The [Return of Nuclear Escalation](#),” *Foreign Affairs* 102: 6 (Nov/Dec),

Caitlin Talmadge. 2022. “Multipolar Deterrence in the Emerging Nuclear Era,” 13-38, and Vipin Narang & Scott Sagan, “The Dangerous Nuclear Future,” 230-250, both in Vipin Narang & Scott Sagan, eds. [The Fragile Balance of Terror: Deterrence in the New Nuclear Age](#). Cornell University Press. [open access book]

Tuesday, 13 February: New communications technologies & the changing character of war—the information realm. The Big Data ecosystem and influence operations, defining “foreign malign

influence” in an interconnected global society. Can propaganda produced by foreign adversaries [influence public opinion](#) in democracies?

Jahara Matissek & Buddhika Jayamaha. 2022. “Civil Society and the Contemporary Battlespace” and “New Battlespaces and Strategic Realities” in their *Old & New Battlespaces*, 117-157.

Department of Defense. 2023. [Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment](#), July [18 pgs.]

Thursday, 15 February: New technologies & changing character of war—the AI revolution. The intersection of commercial innovation and its impacts on “network-centric warfare”. [Innovation strategies](#): How do (slow) government bureaucracies work with non-traditional companies, start-ups, as well as industries, trade associations and academic research institutions? US government [policy](#) on military uses of AI

David Gompert & Martin Libicki. 2023. “[Detect and Engage](#): A New American Way of War” *Survival* 65: 5, 65-74.

Jon Lindsay. 2024. “[War is from Mars, AI Is from Venus](#): Rediscovering the Institutional Context of Military Automation. *Texas National Security Review*, 7: 1 (Winter)

Tuesday, 20 February: [LAWS](#) (lethal autonomous weapons systems). Accountability and autonomous weapons systems under international humanitarian law. Is software that is faster, cheaper and at a greater scale than human decision-making a threat to escalation management and deterrence?

Steven Sacks. 2023. “A [Framework for Lethal Autonomous Weapons](#) Systems Deterrence.” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 110, 16-25.

A current reading to be assigned, based on ongoing developments.

- **Second Memo due, 23:59 deadline to submit via Canvas.**

III: US Responses to the Changing Balance of Global Power

Thursday, 22 February: A US grand strategy addresses competition. A history of racial issues while devising and executing strategy.

Barry Posen & Andrew L Ross. 1996. “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy.” *International Security* 21:3, 5–53.

Robbie Shilliam. 2023. “[International Security and Black Politics](#): A Bibliographical Note Toward an Institutional critique” *Security Studies* 32: 4-5, 879-891.

General CQ Brown. 2020. “[What Am I Thinking](#).” (4:47)

Tuesday, 27 February: Responding to nuclear challenges. Is deterrence durable? The Russo-Ukrainian War and lessons about escalation.

U.S. Department of Defense. 2022 *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, DC (READ the [Nuclear Posture Review](#), 1-25).

Lawrence Freedman. 2023. “[The Russo-Ukrainian War](#) and the Durability of Deterrence” *Survival* 65: 6, 7-36.

In class interaction with personnel at NATO headquarters (Brussels) on strategic and operational matters related to Ukraine

Thursday, 29 February: Proxy civilian and military mobilization for irregular warfare.

Daniel Egal & Alexander Noyes. 2023. “[Winning the Irregular World War](#).” RAND, 6 Nov.

Lt Col Jahara Matisek & William Reno. 2023. “[Ukraine Can Point](#) the Pentagon Toward a New Way of War,” *Wall Street Journal*, 3 May.

LTC Jesse Humpal & Will Reno. 2024. “The World Is Not about US: Information and Power in the Current Strategic Environment” *Joint Forces Quarterly* [forthcoming]

Tuesday, 5 March: Strategic futures.

Jahara Matisek & Buddhika Jayamaha. 2022. “The Future of Grand Strategy” in their *Old & New Battlespaces*, 159-171.

Final Paper due, Wednesday, 6 March, 23:59 deadline to submit via Canvas

WCAS Reading Period Begins, Thursday, 7 March

RESOURCES

[Modern War Institute](#) (West Point), commentary and analysis for and among military professionals, and their noted [Urban Warfare Project](#).

[War on the Rocks](#), with regular posts on US military and defense issues, Russo-Ukraine War, Middle East, etc.

[Lawfare](#): analysis of tough legal and policy issues ranging from national security law, threats to democracy, cybersecurity, executive powers, content moderation, domestic extremism, and foreign policy, and others.

[CTC Sentinel](#) (West Point), feature articles on proxy warfare, non-state armed groups

United States Army Training and Doctrine Command ([TRADOC](#)) 525 publications (military operations) explore US Army approaches to potential future operational challenges. Center for Army Lessons Learned ([CALL](#)) publishes material on US Army priorities in the wake of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The *New York Times* maintains a site, “[Maps: Tracking the Russian Invasion of Ukraine](#)” that provides a good summary of a defense in depth stalemate. [Live Map Ukraine](#) provides an interactive up-to-date map and news feed. Deep State also provides Канал ґрунтової аналітики – [interactive map](#).