Draft syllabus: readings marked TBA still to be finalized

War in the Modern World II
(1945 to Present)
History 241
(CRN 36995)

Spring 2015
Tues/Thurs: 12-1:20
123 PAC

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Graduate Teaching Fellows:

Aims

This course is an introduction to the history of war since 1945. The main focus of the course is changes in the nature and conduct of war in the context of social, economic, political and technological change. The course thus continues the main themes developed in HIST 240 (War in the Modern World, I), though HIST 240 is not required to take HIST 241.

Much more than in HIST 240, a focus on recent trends in the nature and conduct war leads to the point where history and strategic studies converge. A central premise of this class is that the development of a coherent strategic policy requires an understanding and recognition of recent trends in war. In other words, answers to the security issues facing the U.S. and the world are intimately bound up with the question of what war is in the contemporary world: its nature, its objects, and its main characteristics. The only way to obtain an understanding of what war is is by looking at the wars of the last several decades, which is to say, by studying the history of recent wars.

We will start the term in the aftermath of World War II and several of the regional conflicts that were left unresolved with the defeat of Germany and Japan in 1945. We will continue with an examination, on the one hand, of the Cold War between the U.S. and U.S.R.R. and, on the other hand, the era of the wars of decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s. After a look at the civil conflicts of the later Cold War, we will turn in the last
third of the course to "war in the very modern world": military developments and war since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1990. We will conclude with an examination of terrorism as a form of war and some thoughts on what the future of war might hold.

Learning objectives: what I expect you to get out of this class

1. An understanding of both the main trends in the conduct and nature of war from the end of World War II to the present and the different ways that we can account for those changes. War has been changing over the last half century. What are the nature of those changes and how might we account for them?

2. A sense of some of the major concepts, problems and themes common to military history and strategic studies as these are practiced today. This course will introduce you to some of the conceptual language specific to military history and strategic thought; it will also expose you to several of the exemplary issues that that strategists and military history historians are grappling with today.

3. Practice and familiarity with several of the basic methodological moves that historians commonly employ. In particular, we will be comparing different interpretive explanatory frameworks that historians have used, either to explain specific events (such as the outcome of the Chinese Civil War: why did the Communists win?), or to explain general trends. Especially toward the end of the term we will be looking at why these interpretative frameworks matter and what their strategic implications might be.

Grades and assignments

Grades for this course are calculated on the basis of 100 points for the term. The points are distributed as follows:

Two on-line quizzes: 15 points each
Midterm exam: 25 points
One paper: 20 points
Final exam: 25 points

The due dates are as follows:

First quiz: April 10 (on-line submission)
Midterm: April 28 – bring blue-green book
Second quiz: May 13
Paper: June 5 (on-line submission)
Final: June 8 (Monday), 8:00 am – bring blue-green book

The materials for the paper and places to submit papers and quizzes will be found on the course Canvas site in the “Papers and quizzes” content area. The quizzes and paper will be submitted on-line.

The quizzes will focus on material recently covered in class. The midterm and final will cover material not covered in the quizzes as well as test your ability to synthesize the materials into a larger understanding of the broader trends in war. The paper will be a short research paper on a topic of your choosing drawn from the themes and subjects in Jeremy Black, War in the Modern World, 1990-2014. I will be talking about this more extensively later in the term but it is important to emphasize here that selecting an appropriate research paper topic is a central part of writing a research paper.

All of the assignments require written work. I encourage collaboration but you may not plagiarize others' work (plagiarism: "the act of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own" - for the purposes of this class, greater emphasis is placed on "work" (as in "written work"), than ideas but you should credit ideas as well). For tips on avoiding plagiarism, see http://library.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/index.html

Written work will be evaluated according to the general grading standards posted at http://gradeculture.uoregon.edu/ under the link for History.

Readings


All other readings can be found on Canvas under “Course Readings.”

Schedule of topics and readings (readings are listed for the day on which they will be discussed in class. Anything listed below after “Read” is required; anything listed after “Suggested” or “Also” is optional)

Pt. I: Aftermath wars of WWII and the early Cold War

March 31: Introduction: the "problem" of war since WWII and setting the context for Pt. I of this class: the legacy of WWII
Read: General Rupert Smith (Ret.), The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World (2005), 1-8 (first part of the "Introduction")

April 2: Guerrilla warfare according to Mao


April 7: Chinese Civil War

Read: Bruce Elleman, Modern Chinese Warfare, 1975-1989, 217-232 (ch. 13, “China’s Nationalist-Communist Civil War”); and Civil War section of the “China” article from the New Encyclopedia Britannica. You can also find maps on the Blackboard site.

We'll also watch the first part of “The Assembly,” which takes place in the north. If you wish to watch it in its entirety, the movie provides a bridge to the Korean War (the hero ends up in Korea on Friday) – Niu Jun’s piece (below) explains the connection.

April 9: Victory of the Chinese Communists


April 10: first quiz due (on-line submission)

April 14: Limited war: the Korean War


April 16: Nuclear strategy, military power and the Cold War

April 21: Korea in the context of nuclear weapons


Also: NSC 68 (I’ve posted a pdf copy. For an analysis you can get Ernst R. May, ed., American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68; but you’ll have to get this on your own)

April 23: France in Indo-China


April 28: In-class midterm – please bring something to write in (blue/green book, purchased in bookstore)

Pt. II: War in the era of decolonization and the later Cold War: two examples

April 30: The U.S. in Vietnam


May 5: Explaining U.S. failure in Vietnam

May 7: Wars of independence in Africa: the example of Mozambique


May 12: Rebellions, coups and the Cold War: the example of Mozambique


May 13: second quiz due (on-line submission)

Pt. III: War since 1990

May 14: War in our world (post-1990): setting up the problem

Read: Black, chs. 1 and 2

May 19: A conventional account and the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991)


May 21: Signs of difference and the example of Somalia

May 26: The War on Terror

Read: Black, ch. 5, "The War on Terror"; TBA

May 28: A proliferation of war?

Read: Black, ch. 6, "A multitude of conflicts"; TBA

June 2: Into the future: great power

Read: Black, ch. 7, "Into the future: rivalry of the major powers"; TBA

June 4: Into the future: weak states and "small wars"

Read: Black, chs. 8 and 9, "Into the future: weak states and 'small wars'?" and "Conclusions"; TBA

FINAL EXAM: Monday, June 8, 8:00 am – in our classroom, bring blue-green book