

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfare: Afghanistan and Iraq

**INTA 4803-MS/8803-MS**

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### Course Description

One may think it presumptuous at the beginning of only the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to offer a course exploring the elements of contemporary warfare and strategy unique to our century. Indeed, we may be in a situation equivalent to the 1920s attempting to predict the revolution in military affairs (RMA) that gave the Second World War its character. Many of the weapons that comprised that character had made their appearance during the Great War that ended in 1918. However, in the inter-war period only one military organization, the German Army, truly grasped the significance of the military technical revolution possible in land warfare and crafted the fabled Blitzkrieg. Strategists in other nations grasped the significance of submersibles (again Germany), the aircraft carrier (Japan and a growing group of naval officers in the US), strategic bombing (England), etc.. Few military thinkers and even fewer national leaders realized an appreciation of the extent to which emerging technologies and new military organizations would change the nature of warfare.

One might think that precision strike weapons whether GPS or laser guided, computer viruses (Stuxnet), drone warfare (Predator, Global Hawk) and other products of the information technology and micro-electronics revolution have already revolutionized warfare in this century.

As the online defense magazine [Defense Update](#) notes:

“Over the past decade, modern air forces are transforming their operational concepts from platform and weapons dependent to effects oriented planning. In other words, shifting from focusing on the number of airplanes it takes to destroy a single target, to the number of targets which can be destroyed with a single aircraft and the aggregated effect such attacks could yield. Investment in precision guided munitions following the lessons from the Kosovo campaign was fully vindicated during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Around 66% of US munitions and up to 85% of RAF munitions used during OIF were precision guided, either by [Global Positioning Systems \(GPS\)](#) or by [laser](#) or both. This demonstrates a huge leap forward in capability since the 1991 conflict, when the proportion of precision guided munitions was around 30% of US and 18% of RAF weapons

The US Forces flew 37,000 missions during OIF, dropping 23,000 precision guided weapons (over 66% of the total ordnance dropped) and launching 750 cruise missiles. During OIF, new tactics were developed to find, fix, track, engage, and assess fleeting targets, enabling the coalition to effectively process 156 time sensitive targets, and more than 680 highly mobile dynamic

targets. Coalition forces command and control structures at the Combined Air Operations Center were also modified to far better integrate space operations into operational planning and mission control.” <http://defense-update.com/features/du-4-04/feature-pgm.htm>

Given these extraordinary advances in military technology, military systems evolution, operational innovation, and organizational adaptation, the hallmarks of an RMA, it is surprising to note that the two significant wars that have been fought by the United States military in this Century were counterinsurgencies, asymmetrical conflicts that have their roots in wars fought for the last two millennia among unequal combatants using asymmetrical strategies. Save for several weeks at its inception (Operation Iraqi Freedom), the Iraq War immediately degenerated into an 8 year long brutal counterinsurgency operation. The Afghan War, a classic counterinsurgency, has lasted for almost 11 years. It had no conventional military phase. Its objectives remain ill defined.

So to understand 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfare we must accept what Shakespeare has told us, “What’s past is prologue”. In the summer of 2003, the Directorate for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict at [The Pentagon](#), with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s blessing, offered a screening of the film “The Battle of Algiers” on August 27, regarding it as a useful illustration of the problems faced in Iraq,<sup>[18]</sup> a mere five months after major combat operations against Iraq had commenced. A flyer for the screening read:

"How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. Children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar? The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film."<sup>[19]</sup>

According to the [Defense Department](#) official (Directorate for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict) in charge of the screening, "Showing the film offers historical insight into the conduct of French operations in Algeria, and was intended to prompt informative discussion of the challenges faced by the French."<sup>[19]</sup>  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Battle\\_of\\_Algers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Battle_of_Algers))

*“The Battle of Algiers* reconstructs the events that occurred in the capital city of [French Algeria](#) between November 1954 and December 1957, during the [Algerian War of Independence](#). The narrative begins with the organization of revolutionary cells in the [Casbah](#). Then civil war between native [Algerians](#) and European settlers ( *pied-noirs* ) in which the sides exchange acts of increasing violence, leading to the introduction of French army paratroopers to hunt the [National Liberation Front](#) (FLN). The paratroopers are depicted as winning the battle by neutralizing the whole of the FLN leadership either through assassination or through capture. However, the film begins with a [coda](#) depicting demonstrations and rioting for independence by native Algerians, suggesting that although France won the Battle of Algiers, it lost the Algerian War.”  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Battle\\_of\\_Algers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Battle_of_Algers))

Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme choses!

We will begin the course with a screening of “The Battle of Algiers” Then we will pursue along two tracks – counterinsurgency and conventional military operations.

We will review the lessons of the Vietnam War, as well as those of Operation Desert Storm (1991), and attempt to understand how those lessons were seemingly lost during US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. We will conclude by addressing the question asked by Marshal Ferdinand Foch, French hero of the Great War, when he attempted to interpret, amid the carnage that characterized that conflict, Clausewitz's dictum that: "War is a continuation of politics by other means". To Foch, the central question was: "De quoi s'agit-il?" What's it all about? According to the famed strategist Bernard Brodie, this is the single most important question in all strategy. Obviously, this is not simply a military question, but involves politics, policy, and economics as well and is directed at an understanding of how vital national interests are served or threatened sufficiently to take up arms. We need to know why we invaded Iraq in 2003, and why we did not consolidate our nascent and brilliant victory in Afghanistan in 2002 by sealing off the mountain passes out of Tora Bora, killing Osama Bin Laden and leaving, "Mission Accomplished." Why did we do what we subsequently did? Why were we for 8 years at war in Iraq and 11 years at war in Afghanistan? De quoi s'agit-il?

### **Requirements**

This course should be in seminar format, but alas it is not. Nonetheless, we are going to conduct it as a seminar, just spread out in time. You are expected to attend all classes, and roll will frequently be taken with consequences for repeated absences. Actually, you get three before you get into hot water! We are going to be informal. You are expected to do the readings that will be assigned subsequently in class. You are expected to volunteer comments and to answer questions based on the readings or films in class.

You will work in project teams. Each team will produce a final analytical product based on the readings and other research materials. The teams may select their own topics for the final project. The final product will be a 15 page annotated PowerPoint briefing delivered in class. That effort will be your grade, informed by your attendance and the quality of your participation in class and within your group as judged by your teammates.

*If you cannot work well with others, if you think film is a waste of valuable class time, or if you are unable to share your ideas in class, you may want to take another course.*

### **Texts:**

Order from Engineer's Bookstore or online. We will read short articles and have some film for the first several weeks of class until a reasonable number of books can be secured. We will read a lot of stuff. The books were all mass market books (except for Kilcullen) and although they have a casual aura about them, they are written by serious participants or observers on the ground. The definitive and most likely boring academic treatises on these wars have yet to be written, so you should enjoy this reading.

James Fallows, Blind into Baghdad. Prize winning writer for the Atlantic Monthly. We will read all of this first.

Dexter Filkins, The Forever War. Veteran war correspondent. We will read all of this.

Thomas E. Ricks, Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq. Senior writer for the Washington Post. We will read selected parts of this.

David Kilcullen, The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One. Expert on guerilla war, senior advisor to General Petraeus in Iraq. We will read selected parts of this.

Gary C. Schroen, First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan. Led the first CIA teams into Afghanistan. We will read selected parts of this.

Michael Hastings, The Operators: The wild and terrifying inside story of America's war in Afghanistan. Hasting was on assignment from Rolling Stone when he wrote this. His article in that magazine got General McCrystal fired. We will read all of this.