Foundations of Military Theory

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Foundations of Military Theory

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Foundations of Military Theory
SAASS 600

“There are those who sneer at military theory and talk contemptuously of 'chairborne officers,' but the history of the last twenty years has demonstrated the vital importance of clear thinking and farsighted planning. Naturally the theorist must be closely allied to practical realities—Guderian is a brilliant example—but without his preliminary work all practical development will ultimately fail.”

F.W. von Mellenthin
Panzer Battles

“[S]trategy cannot be a single defined doctrine; it is a method of thought, the object of which is to codify events, set them in order of priority and then choose the most effective course of action. There will be a special strategy to fit each situation; any given strategy may be the best possible in certain situation and the worst conceivable in others. That is the basic truth.”

André Beaufre
An Introduction to Strategy

Course Overview and Description

Unsatisfying outcomes in conflict and uncertainties about future war often lead to reinvigorated study of war, including its theories and works on strategy. Some critics will put the blame for failure, real or perceived, at the foot of homo strategicus, the “strategic man” often personified by specific political or military leaders. Theorists and their works too receive their share of critical scrutiny. The uncertain consequences of decades of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, combined with seemingly endless ebb and flow of violent extremism and the potential stakes related to future war with Russia and the People’s Republic of China, are just some of the factors driving renewed interest in military theory and the conduct of strategy.

This course is indeed a foundational one for the future strategist as it asks and allows you to think through the answers to the following questions:

- What is war? What purpose can and should it serve? What is war’s nature and what, if anything, causes that nature to change? Is war an art, a science, or both?
- Can theory be timeless or is it merely a product of its context? What drives the creation of theory? What makes good theory?
- What is strategy? Is strategy best conceptualized as a theory of victory, a plan to accomplish a goal, or both? What separates effective from ineffective strategies? Why is strategy easy to comprehend in concept but difficult to do in execution?
The course consists of fifteen seminars divided into three conceptual groupings: general theory, specific theory, and strategy. The first group of seminars looks at the question of war and theorizes about its nature, character, characteristics, and conduct. Although you have previously been introduced to the ideas of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, in this course you will read them in depth, in their entirety, and consider their importance. The second section of the course builds on this foundation and explores theories that reflect a specific focus. In this group of seminars we will look specifically at theories developed for individual operating domains, or environments that reflect changing social, political, economic, and technological contexts. The third and last group of seminars connects theory to the strategy, or theory in practice. In particular, this group of readings looks at both theory and strategy from the more contemporary perspective, including the theory, history, logic, and purpose of strategy.

Grading

Course paper (55 percent of your grade). On the last Friday of the course, 20 August, you will hand in your paper prior to the start of class. This written requirement forces you to confront a central issue of the course with a coherent, sustained argument in a 2,500-word essay. Your paper should draw upon and demonstrate comprehension of the ideas, concepts, and theories contained in the readings and discussed in seminar and will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Issue awareness – How well the student incorporates factual data and coherent evidence in support of the argument.
- Originality and Creativity – How well the student draws from the readings and other sources to provide an argument that is more than glorified summation.
- Theory – How well the student incorporates a theoretical framework; that is, a logical argument and sound reasoning.
- Application – The “so what” of the paper. Is it relevant? Is it realistic? If it criticizes, does it offer a solution?
- Grammar – Technical quality of the writing. Includes writing style; writing should be succinct, readable, and organized.

The remainder of the course grade involves your seminar participation and includes your personal theory of war, which you will present in class on the last day of the course. Both the quality and quantity is evaluated and counts for 45 percent of your overall grade.

Course Administration.

In normal circumstances, this course is split into two sessions per day, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The morning sessions would normally convene in Grey and Blue seminars and meet from 0900-1100. The afternoon session would be split into Grey and Silver seminars and meet from 1200-1400. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, may continue to influence safe and responsible course delivery. If conditions warrant, social distancing requirements will likely force us to alter seminar compositions, times, and locations. The 600 teaching team asks for your patience and understanding as we continue to wrestle with how best
to deliver the SAASS seminar experience, while looking out for your health and welfare as our primary consideration.

In addition, class times may be altered for guest speakers, student events, and other SAASS-related activities. Anticipated absences from class should be cleared with the instructor, course director, Dean of Students, and/or the commandant in advance. If you are feeling unwell, do not risk coming to class—simply call or text one of us to let us know.

**Faculty**

Professor James D. Kiras, Course Director and Grey Seminar leader

Office: ---
Office Phone: ---
Office Email: ---

Professor Wayne E. Lee, Silver Seminar leader

Office: ---
Office Phone: ---
Office Email: ---

Professor Robert Hutchinson, Blue Seminar leader

Office: Room ---
Office Phone: ---
Office Email: ---

Should you need to contact the course director after office hours, please call --- or via email at --.

**Books**

Below is the complete list of books that you will require for the course. Review the stack of books you receive prior to the class, and if you are missing any, please do not hesitate to bring it to my attention. The last reading of the course, for Day 15, will be issued to you either in electronic form or in a printed reader. All other required reading material, including reproduced articles and book chapters, is provided to you either in the bound volume or posted online. If posted online, the Course Director will send out information on where and how to access prior to the start of the course:

Reading Guide

COURSE 600, FOUNDATIONS OF MILITARY THEORY

Course Director’s Note

This guide is provided to help you critically assess a work of military theory and creatively incorporate it into your own thought. Its use will seem burdensome at first but with practice and discipline it will become a natural component of your intellectual life. The mental effort involved in working your way through it will also pay huge dividends by enhancing your ability to evaluate other ideas about war and strategy and, most importantly, to develop your own!

All great commanders have acted on instinct, and the fact that their instinct was always sound is partly the measure of their innate greatness and genius. So far as action is concerned this will always be the case and nothing more is needed. Yet when it is not a question of acting oneself but of persuading others in discussion, the need is for clear ideas and the ability to show their connection with each other. So few people have yet acquired the necessary skill at this that most discussions are a futile bandying of words; either they leave each man sticking to his own ideas or they end with everyone agreeing, for the sake of agreement, on a compromise with nothing to be said for it.

Clear ideas on these matters do, therefore, have some practical value.

-Clausewitz, Note of 10 July 1827

1. **Data.** Standard Bibliographic Entry.

2. **Author.** Information concerning the author that influenced his ability to theorize about a war or a particular aspect thereof.

3. **Context.** Information about the author's environment that influenced the development of his theory.

4. **Scope.** What is the theory about? How broad or narrow is it?

5. **Evidence.** What is the basis of evidence for the theorist's work?

6. **Central Proposition.** What is the fundamental proposition put forward by the theorist, i.e., the one upon which the remainder of the theory rests?

7. **Other Major Propositions.** What additional propositions does the theorist advance? Think of the relationship between these propositions and the central proposition as being roughly analogous to the relationship of corollaries to a theorem in geometry.

8. **Critique.** Theories are evaluated on the basis of internal consistency and comprehensiveness as well as external validity and utility. Some specifics:
a. Internal Consistency and Comprehensiveness.

(1) How is the subject under investigation defined? Does this definition conflict with other definitions contained in the theory?

(2) How does the theorist categorize the subject under investigation? Does the totality of the categories equal the totality of the field? Are the categories distinct?

(3) How does the theorist explain relationships among various parts of the subject? Are these explanations internally consistent, or do some contradict others?

(4) How well does the theorist connect the subject under investigation to other related subjects?

(5) Is the theory complete? Does it comprehend all relevant topics and components?

b. External Validity and Utility.

(1) How well do the theoretical propositions correspond with the evidence of historical analysis?

(2) How well do the theoretical propositions correspond with the evidence of contemporary reality?

(3) Of what use is the theory in helping the strategist deal effectively with a contemporary problem?

(4) How well do the theoretical propositions help the strategist anticipate future developments?

9. Comparison and Synthesis. How does this work of theory compare and contrast with other theoretical works in the same general field? What synthesis, if any, is possible among these theories?

10. Importance. To what extent has this work influenced the theory and practice of war? How influential should it be in the present and the future?

11. Personal significance. How has this work contributed to my own theory of war?

Note: The last question is obviously the most significant. It is therefore useful to keep a running account of the evolution of your thinking about war as you read each work. It is also true, however, that the last question cannot be adequately answered until you have mentally worked through all of the preceding issues. The mental discipline of recording your responses to these questions will pay tremendous dividends in stimulating your intellectual development, not only for SAASS, but also for the rest of your life.
SEMINAR ONE

The Nature of Military Theory: Clausewitz & Sun Tzu

In this first seminar we explore the subject of theory from a variety of perspectives. First, you will read and discuss reflections of the purpose of military theory by SAASS Professor Emeritus and founder of this course, Professor Harold Winton. In particular, Winton identifies the criteria to assess theory we will use for the remainder of this course. From this introduction we will explore the nature of military theory from vastly different contexts: 19th century Prussia and 5th century BC China. In this first of four seminar discussions of the capstone work of Carl von Clausewitz, we will examine the study of theory in general and military theory in particular. Pay particular attention to Clausewitz’s explanations of what theory should and should not be expected to do for the student of war. In addition, note how Clausewitz distinguishes the relationships and differences between theory, historical analysis, and military criticism.

We will spend the second half of the seminar discussing the oldest work of theory, Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*. Both the author and his work remain the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Some suggest “Master Sun” was the greatest living strategist of ancient China’s “Spring and Autumn” and “Warring States” period. Others suggest the man and his work are a composite at best, or the product of a fanciful imagination at worst. Regardless of the debate it is certain the conduct of war was an important issue for rulers to consider. Those who could offer what we would call today effective strategic advice were considered to be of great value to the kingdom. To this extent, nothing has changed. As you read *The Art of War*, ask how it was shaped by the culture from which it sprang and what counsel it offers to contemporary strategists.

REQUIRED READINGS:

**BOOKS**


Sun Tzu, *The Illustrated Art of War*, pp. 6-239.
  Note: Read Liddell Hart’s Foreword with an eye toward our consideration of his theory in Seminar 10; read Griffith’s preface and introduction for insight into the context in which Sun Tzu wrote.

**Article**

Winton. “An Imperfect Jewel.”

**Guide to Further Study:**

Clausewitz


Brodie, Bernard, "A Guide to the Reading of On War" in Clausewitz, *On War*. An extended commentary by one of the 20th century’s great strategic thinkers on the continuing relevance of Clausewitz's work. READ ONLY AFTER reading the relevant passages of Clausewitz for yourself. Brodie’s analysis is useful but not a substitute for your own thought!

The [Clausewitz home page](#) provides a good deal of useful information including two indexes to the Paret/Howard translation of *On War*, a helpful bibliography, and a selection of recent articles on the relevance of Clausewitz’s work to contemporary strategic issues.


**Sun Tzu**


SEMINAR TWO

The Essence of War: Clausewitz

What is war? What are its characteristics? What are its constituent elements? What are the relationships among its characteristics and among its elements? Given the significance of war in the human experience, questions such as these have occupied reflective men for centuries; and while the answers to some of them have remained relatively stable, the answers to others have changed rather frequently. This seminar allows you to examine the thoughts of Carl von Clausewitz on these issues. Clausewitz was a Prussian soldier who closely observed the dynamic interaction of war and politics in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe. This vantage point gave him the opportunity to study two remarkable and very distinct eras of modern warfare – the state wars of the Fredrican era and the national wars of the Napoleonic period. As you read Clausewitz’s foundational book, reflect on the influence of his environment and experiences on his ideas, identify the central propositions of the mostly highly regarded portion of his work, and critically evaluate his argument.

REQUIRED READINGS:

BOOKS


Introductory essays to On War by Peter Paret, Michael Howard, and Bernard Brodie, Clausewitz, On War, pp. 3-58 (read quickly for Clausewitz’s context, influence, and contemporary relevance).

Clausewitz, On War, Book I, pp. 75-123; Book II, Chapter 1, pp. 127-132.

Guide to Further Study:


Having established the essence of war and a method for analyzing war, Clausewitz's next step was to consider the elements of strategy, which he defined as the use of engagements for the purpose of the war. He does this in Book III and again in his summary in Book VIII. Clausewitz's notion of strategy thus straddles what we in contemporary parlance refer to as military strategy—the use or the threat of the use of force to further political interests—and operational art: the design, organization, conduct, and support of major operations and campaigns to achieve strategic objectives. As you read this portion of *On War*, be sensitive to Clausewitz's shifts in perspective in his use of the word "strategy" from the national level to the theater level. Also be alive to the fact that his discussion of the term “center(s) of gravity” [a valid translation, but not the only valid translation, of the German term(s) *Schwerpunkt(en)*] in Book VIII treats the concept in both a singular and plural fashion.

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

**BOOKS**


**Guide to Further Study:**


SEMINAR FOUR
Attack and Defense: Clausewitz

One would think that Clausewitz's experience of Napoleonic war would lead him to concentrate on the offense rather than the defense. In fact, he treats the latter in considerably greater depth. In Book VI he begins to tie time, a frequently neglected aspect of military theory, into his analysis with the proposition that time left unused accumulates to the advantage of the defender. In Book VII, Clausewitz examines the offense, which he calls the weaker form of war with the positive object. Here he explores in more detail the reciprocal and interactive nature of the relationship between attack and defense and again interjects time into operational calculations with his discussions of the culminating point of the attack. Frequently and incorrectly thought of as a purely material consideration, offensive culmination in the Clausewitzian sense has mental and, more importantly, moral considerations inextricably woven into it. As you come to grips with Clausewitz's ideas, see what historical examples you can cite that either support or refute his propositions concerning the relation between the attack and defense, the diminishing power of the offense, the influence of terrain and fortifications on the attack, and political considerations influencing the calculation of offensive culminating points. Also be aware that the term “center of gravity” is used in Book VII. Compare and contrast its use here with that found in Book VIII and in other places you may have discovered it in On War.

REQUIRED READINGS:

BOOKS


Guide to Further Study:


Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini was a Swiss officer who served on the staff of Marshal Ney and as a military adviser to Tsar Alexander I. A prolific writer on military affairs, he became one of the interpreters of Napoleonic warfare to the American army of the nineteenth century. The influence of pragmatic Jominian thought is evident in our planning and doctrine today. An appreciation of the Jominian approach to theory is thus useful to the strategist. As you study his interpretation of strategy and campaigns, compare and contrast it with that of Clausewitz. You will find this task easier by referring to the West Point Atlas for the Wars of Napoleon, available online. Also be alive to the fact that Jomini outlived Clausewitz. Thus, his writings are both a foil against which Clausewitz argued and a response to what Clausewitz wrote. He also lived to see developments in war that Clausewitz missed. Ask yourself how these developments influenced his writings.

REQUIRED READINGS:

BOOKS


Jomini, Art of War, read prefatory material and Chapters I-III, pp. 5-162 and Conclusion, pp. 293-97.

Guide to Further Study:


SEMINAR SIX
The Theory of Naval Warfare: Mahan

The most prominent name in the annals of naval theory is Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan, who is also the first American to become regarded as a serious strategic thinker, was the son of Dennis Hart Mahan, longtime professor of military art and engineering at the United States Military Academy. The younger Mahan graduated from Annapolis and late in his career achieved fame as the president and chief lecturer at the newly formed Naval War College in 1886. The book you are reading for today’s class, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, won him world-wide acclaim and launched a prolific literary career. During the course of his life, Mahan produced 20 books, 22 contributions to other books, 161 journal articles, 109 known newspaper articles, 27 translated articles, and 13 pamphlets. Though an indifferent seaman, Mahan was a consummate publicist whose forceful articulation of “command of the sea” captured the imagination of sailors the world over and established the paradigm for Giulio Douhet’s *Command of the Air*. As you read Mahan’s first and most significant work, analyze it at two levels: 1) the role of sea power in the life of a nation; and 2), the dynamics of war at sea. Pay particular attention to Mahan’s discussions of the different types of naval strategies a nation can employ.

**REQUIRED READING:**

**BOOK**


**SUGGESTED READING:**


**Guide to Further Study:**


**SEMINAR SEVEN**

The Theory of Maritime Warfare: Corbett

Sir Julian Corbett was the son of a well-to-do British architect. Like Mahan, Corbett was in his mid-forties before he began to study naval warfare seriously. He came to it, however, much differently. After taking a law degree at Cambridge, he spent a number of years as a gentleman of leisure engaging in extensive world travel. He next turned to fictional writing and then to historical biography. His book *Drake and the Tudor Navy* brought him to the attention of the Royal Navy, and several years after its appearance he found himself lecturing senior naval officers at Portsmouth. Also like Mahan, he became directly involved in naval policy, working as one of the instruments in Lord Fisher’s program to reform the Royal Navy before the Great War and serving as the its chief historian during and after the war. Corbett’s influence on the Royal Navy was marked by controversy surrounding his part in the drafting of instructions that contributed to Jellicoe’s decision not to pursue the German High Seas Fleet at Jutland and his disdain for convoys as a response to the German submarine threat. Nevertheless, his main theoretical work, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, remains one of the classics of seapower literature. Although Corbett's work builds on Mahan's, its approach to war at sea is much different. As you examine his central ideas, compare and contrast them with Mahan's and test them against the general theory of war you have developed thus far in the course.

**REQUIRED READING:**

**BOOKS**


- *Skim* Editor's Introduction and Part I, Chapters 1-3, pp. xi-xlvi and 3-51 for Corbett’s context and to see how he introduced sailors to Clausewitz’s ideas;
- *Read* Part I, Chapters 4-6; Parts II & III; and Appendix, The “Green Pamphlet,” pp. 52-345.

**Guide to Further Study:**


SEMERNAR EIGHT

The Theory of Independent Air War: Douhet

One of the prominent lines of demarcation within both the theory and practice of air warfare is the distinction between the employment of the air weapon as an independent instrument of national security and its use as a complementary tool in conjunction with the efforts of other military forces. The Italian Giulio Douhet is the first, and arguably the most widely known, theorist of the former. Douhet was an Italian soldier who was court-martialed in 1916 for criticizing the Italian war effort for, among other things, paying insufficient attention to the demands of war in the air. He was exonerated in 1918 and made chief of Italy's Central Aeronautical Bureau. He was promoted to general in 1921, the same year he published the original edition of Command of the Air. He retired shortly thereafter and spent much of the remainder of his life thinking and writing about aeronautical issues. As you delve into his most famous work, note the resonance of its central proposition with Mahan’s concept of command of the sea and think critically about the relationships among evidence, concepts, and vision in the development of military theory.

REQUIRED READING:

BOOK

Douhet, The Command of the Air.
- *Skim* Book Three, pp. 209-292;
- *Read* the Editors’ Introduction; Douhet’s Preface; and Books One, Two, and Four, pp. 1-207 and 293-394.

SUGGESTED READING:


Guide to Further Study:


SEMINAR NINE

The Theory of Complementary Air War: Slessor

John Slessor was a British Airman who served in the Great War and went on to become an air marshal during WW II. A protégé of Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard, the dominant figure of the inter-war RAF, Slessor was hand-picked by Trenchard to serve as the service’s chief instructor at the British [Army] Staff College in Camberley from 1931 to 1934. It was a shrewd selection. Slessor combined a knack for seeing problems from a wide perspective with an uncanny ability to balance the realities of the past and present with the potentialities of the future. These qualities enabled him to conceive of and articulate a clear vision for how air forces should profitably interact with ground formations in fighting and winning a land campaign. His awareness of the realities of both air and ground combat also made him a credible interlocutor with his army audience. As you confront Slessor’s argument, be sensitive to its resonance with Corbett’s and ask yourself how well its major propositions have stood the test of time.

REQUIRED READINGS:

BOOK

Slessor, Air Power and Armies.

- Skim the appendices, pp. 216-26;

Guide to Further Study:


SEMINAR TEN

The Theory of Indirect Approach: Liddell Hart

Basil Henry Liddell Hart (note for the wary: Liddell Hart is a non-hyphenated, double last name; referring to him as “Hart” and rendering the name as “Liddell-Hart” are both reflections of either ignorance or inattentiveness) was a British captain who was gassed on the Western Front in the Great War. After the war, he took to the impassioned study of military history and advocacy of mechanization and armored warfare in the British army. Between the wars he was noted biographer, defense correspondent, and trusted advisor to Secretary of State for War, Leslie Hore-Belisha. Liddell Hart popularized the idea of “grand strategy” and both coined the term and advocated the concept of indirect approach. Over the course of four decades, his *Decisive Wars of History* grew into successive editions of *Strategy*, which he periodically updated to address new developments in the strategic environment. As you examine Liddell Hart’s ideas, consider the reasons they developed as they did, their strengths and weaknesses, and their contemporary relevance and utility.

REQUIRED READINGS:

BOOK


SUGGESTED READING:


Guide to Further Study:


_____.* “The Hidden Sources of Liddell Hart’s Strategic Ideas.”* *War in History*. 3 (July 1996): 293-308.
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SEMINAR ELEVEN

The Theory of the Science of War: Fuller

In Clausewitz's day, when technological development took place almost glacially, it was not necessary to consider in detail the influence of new weapons on the conduct of war. The weapons of Napoleon and Wellington were essentially the same as the weapons of Frederick and Marlborough. Even more significantly, so were the means by which they provisioned their forces. The Industrial Revolution changed all that. Mass production techniques and the railroad fundamentally transformed the amount of materiel that could be brought to the battlefield. The pace of scientific and engineering breakthroughs seemed to put war into a permanent state of flux. The first military thinker to synthesize the impact of the Industrial Revolution on war with a Clausewitzian approach to its moral and intellectual elements was an iconoclastic British soldier, John Frederick Charles Fuller. Based on his personal study of eastern mysticism and military theory and history and on his experience as the senior staff officer of the tank corps in the Great War, Fuller developed a theory of war that attempted to integrate the experience of technological advancements with classic military thought. In the process, he also codified the “Principles of War” in a manner that still influences many military institutions. As you plumb Fuller's thoughts on war, make sure you understand the method by which he arrived at his conclusions and assess the utility of his ideas for contemporary students of military affairs.

NOTE: Bring to class a schematic representation of your understanding of the relations among Fuller's object of war, spheres of war, elements of war, principles of war, groups of principles, and the law of economy of force. The schematic can take the form of a PowerPoint slide, mindmap, sketch, drawing, or the like. The complexity of Fuller’s argument and the opaqueness of his style make this a difficult assignment. Diagramming Fuller’s argument greatly assists in facilitating and enhancing your comprehension of his work.

REQUIRED READINGS:

BOOKS

Howard, *War in European History*, Chapter 6, pp. 94-115. This brief survey of the era between the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 and the end of World War I in 1918 should give you a flavor for the major changes that had affected the nature of war between the time in which Clausewitz and Jomini wrote and the time in which Fuller wrote.

Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War*. Note: when the word “moral” appears in Fuller’s text in italics, it has the same meaning and pronunciation as the American word morale, as in “the unit had high morale.” When you see “moral” non-italicized, its English and American meanings are synonymous, as in “he exerted a strong moral force over his followers.” Awareness of this distinction will save you some grief when you get into the intricacies of Fuller’s argument.
Guide to Further Study:


SEMINAR TWELVE

The Theory of Strategy: Dolman

Works on strategy are derived from a number of sources: experience, reading, discussion, among others. The inspiration for the following work came from teaching the course in which you find yourself today. Everett Carl Dolman is a former SAASS instructor who taught in this course more than a decade ago. His interaction with students over various years, combined with his eclectic background and intellectual interests, led him to write *Pure Strategy*. Like many authors in this course, Dolman combines insights from his experience as a practitioner (as a former analyst in the National Security Agency) with deep reading and an intellectual curiosity to find answers to the largest questions of strategy. Make no mistake: Dolman’s ideas about strategy and war will force you to reevaluate your own understanding of the subjects. As evidence, consider how he begins the second chapter of today’s book: “The first notion the military strategist must discard is victory, for strategy is not about winning.” (p. 5) For our discussion today, consider the question whether “pure” strategy can exist and why the United States seems to have great difficulty in the current century maintaining is competitive advantage.

REQUIRED READINGS:

BOOK


Guide to Further Study:


SEMERN AR THIRSEEN

The Purpose of Strategy: Gray

No other contemporary author on the subject of strategy is as prolific as Colin S. Gray. He has published twenty-three books and more than a hundred articles on subjects ranging from nuclear strategy to strategic culture. Now retired and serving as Professor Emeritus at the University of Reading, Gray has worked in the United States and the United Kingdom in government (during the Reagan Administration in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency), in think tanks (the Hudson Institute and the National Institute for Public Policy), as well as in academia. Gray’s ideas have been controversial as well as popular. For example, one of his co-authored articles in 1980 created a firestorm in the disarmament and strategic studies communities by suggesting nuclear war could be fought and was winnable. Gray remains popular for several reasons, including his pragmatic view of strategy, steadfast advocacy for the value of the ideas of Clausewitz, as well as his ability to separate lucidly the intellectual wheat from chaff in terms of theory and concepts. The book you will read today is the first in his “strategy trilogy” and presents the author’s self-proclaimed “general theory of strategy.” Be prepared for today’s seminar to evaluate this general theory.

REQUIRED READINGS:

BOOK

Gray, The Strategy Bridge.
- *Skim* Introduction and Appendices, 1-14; 262-283
- *Read* Chapters 1-7, Parts I-III, 15-257.

Guide to Further Study:


SEMINARY FOURTEEN

The Science of Strategy I: Russian Views

One of the themes of this course and the school more broadly is continuity and change in war, warfare, and strategy. An element in the military realm that rarely changes is inferring threat and intentions from capabilities and actions. Consider recent discussions on Russia and China, and the capabilities they are acquiring and actions they have taken (Ukraine, South China Sea, etc.) in the broader conversation about great power competition. Some defense analysts will invariably paint vivid scenarios of doom and gloom about these threats based on inferences they draw of capabilities and actions. They talk of adversaries and competitors observing our patterns of action and reading our doctrine and self-assessments. But what of their own writings? While foreign language skill is a barrier, few take the time or make the effort to find and read how our adversaries conceptualize the problems of war, strategy, and warfighting despite available translations.

Our first of two explorations into foreign military thought focuses on Russia. Perhaps no other nation has engaged in as systematic a study of war than the Soviet Union, and later Russia, yet we focus on the emerging or “new” threat of China safe in the assumption we “know” our former superpower opponent. You will learn today this assumption is a dangerous one, as vigorous debate has occurred in the wide range of Russian professional journals, such as *Voennaia Mysl’* and *Red Star*, on engaging in and winning future conflict. A former analyst of the US Army’s Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), Dr. Timothy Thomas, wrote a contracted study examining contemporary Russian thought, its major themes, and points of continuity with and change from Soviet Red Army concepts. For today’s discussion, be ready to discuss each author’s characterization of drivers of change in military affairs, the relationship between political and technological factors, the impact of new domains, creativity and control, and influencing adversary decision making prior to and during the Initial Period of War (IPW).

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

**BOOK**

- Boyd, *Discourse on Winning and Losing.*
  - *Skim* slide deck to understand Boyd’s development of the OODA Loop.
- Thomas, *Russian Military Thought: Concepts and Elements*
  - *Read* 1-1 to 12-8; *Skim* Appendices.

**Guide to Further Study:**


Contemporary Chinese military writing is voluminous; its series on postgraduate instruction, for example, stretches across some 65 volumes on subjects as varied as special operations and space. Unlike documents some analysts have put forward as “official” Chinese military thought on war, such as the 1999 co-authored student thesis “Unrestricted War,” the work you are reading is. *The Science of Strategy* is the product of a group collaboration at Beijing’s National Defense University and a revision of earlier edition published in 1999. The document’s collaborators spent five years discussing and revising the previous edition, in light of what its authors call “new historical conditions.” The basis for our discussion today should be how those authors characterize those new conditions and their impact on the science of strategy. Be prepared to discuss convergent and divergent assessments (compare and contrast) of this work with others from the course, as well as other comparable documents with which you may be familiar (Joint Publication 1-0, *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States*, for example).

**REQUIRED READING:**

**READER**


**Guide to Further Study:**


SEMINAR SIXTEEN

Course Synthesis: Personal Theory of War

Note: The course essay is due at the start of class on 20 August 2021.

This lesson allows you to synthesize the thinking about war you have done in the course to date. To that end, you are required to bring to class a one-page (one side only, font no smaller than 12-pitch) statement of your personal theory of war. This articulation can take any form – ranging from a talking paper, to a dialogue, to a poem, to a short story; or, you may skip narration altogether and render it in visual form. It must, however, fit legibly on a single page. Make copies for each classmate in your seminar and your seminar leader. During class, you will be asked to give a five-minute presentation on the sources of and rationale for your theory and respond to questions from your classmates.

SUGGESTED REVIEW:

- Review notes taken while reading and in seminar.
- Review key passages of works that you felt contributed most to your learning as well as those passages about which you have not yet been able to develop firm conclusions.
- Ask yourself the following types of questions:
  - What is my personal theory of war? (Review notes from lesson 600/1 and the Reading Guide as necessary for the elements of a theory and standards of validity)
  - What evidence do I have to support that theory?
  - What are the issues about which I am most certain, fairly certain, and least certain?
  - What would be the main points I would cover in a three-to-five paragraph essay related to each of the course objectives?
  - Where will I look for answers to my unanswered questions in the remainder of the SAASS course?

REQUIRED READINGS:

NONE