POL 237: Modern Weapons and International Relations
Online, Spring 2016 (March 7—April 30)

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Course Description

Whether it was the "smart" weapons used by the United States or the weapons of mass destruction it was looking for, America's recent conflicts have confirmed again the central importance of weapons technologies and capabilities in international relations. During the past century, the pace of change in military technology has accelerated greatly. It is easy to forget that a mere one hundred years ago many of the weapons that we take for granted today did not even exist. There were, for example, no tanks, bombers or missiles, not to mention nuclear weapons or laser-guided munitions. In the centuries before the industrial revolution military technology changed slowly whereas today it seems that revolutionary new weapons appear every few years. While the impact of changing military technology is most obvious in terms of the conduct of warfare, the effects do not stop there. Somewhat less obvious but by no means less important are the profound social and political consequences that often accompany changing military technology. In this course we will examine evolving military technology and Revolutions in Military Affairs (RMA), both in terms of the immediate impact on the conduct and nature of war as well as the broader social and political implications of military change. Among others, we will attempt to answer questions such as: can air power win wars without the use of extensive ground force or extensive friendly casualties? Can and should the proliferation of nuclear weapons be prevented? How can we tell if change is truly revolutionary and will result in broader social change and when it is merely novel and interesting? What does the rapid march of technology say about the future political changes, domestically and internationally?

Required Texts

There are two required texts for this class. Beyond these, I will provide links to online readings that are also required but are free of charge. The texts are as follows:


Boot, Max. 2007. War Made New: Technology Warfare and the Course of History, 1500 to Today. Gotham Books. [Click here for Amazon link for more information.]

Course Expectations:

This course will be conducted entirely online. No component of the course will require your physical presence at Purdue. Everything you do that will be graded will be done 100% online. As such, you should expect to have internet access throughout the eight week run of the course or at the very least be able to access blackboard and your email several times a week. You are also expected to remain informed of weekly requirements and developments in the course by accessing blackboard and checking the announcements. Because this course is online, it will require you to be a self-starter. I am not around to help answer questions in person, encourage you to complete work and answer questions immediately. Success in this course will require you working ahead of time, asking questions far enough in advance that you have 24+ hours to wait for a response and be proactive as to stave off the invariable emergence of two very real terrors: laptop death and internet interruptions.
Furthermore, because the lecture component is incredibly small, you will be filling course hours with reading and writing, perhaps more than of it than you are normally accustomed. I expect this can be rewarding for certain types of students; for others, it will be less so. It reading and writing is challenging to you, this class will be challenging (but hopefully still rewarding). Most of all, I do not associate the terms “online” with “easy.”

Keep in mind that this course is an eight week course that is scheduled to run from March 7 to April 30. This means the amount of work you will do across a semester in a normal course will be handled in this section of POL 237 in eight weeks. As a result, you might feel like the pace of the class, or workload expectations, are higher than normal. Keep this in mind as you plan on how you will approach your courses this semester. If you have work you can get done in advance in other classes, I advise you to take advantage of that situation so that you will free up time for this accelerated course.

Purdue’s IT staff does a good job making sure blackboard continuously functions and I have never had a critical error where students have permanently lost work or grades. However, I have also not had a semester yet where students have not been able to access the system from time to time. In order to be proactive as possible, try not to wait until the last minute to try to post homework. Additionally, I cannot recommend strongly enough that when you post your work to blackboard keep a copy on hand as a word document and email me that document as soon as possible. If you feel like blackboard malfunctioned, we will then have timestamps proving you tried to handle the situation proactively in advance of the deadline for the work. I want to give every student the benefit of the doubt when it comes to technological difficulties but ultimately if there is no work for me to grade I cannot assign a grade regardless of the circumstances surrounding the malfunction.

Method of Communication

Please do not hesitate to contact me at any point in the semester. I have created an email address specifically for my online political science courses and can be reached at poldistancemwp@gmail.com When you send correspondence, please start with the course number in the subject line. For example, 237 Lecture Question, 237 Homework Clarification. I will do my best to check the course email once a day. Students are expected to keep up with checking their emails as well.

Course Assignments and Grading

Your grade will be derived from two sources: responses to weekly homework questions and a series of three short/long answer essay question examinations. Obviously all of this will be open book, given there is no way for me to monitor you. As such, both the homework and exam questions will require a considerable level of detail and effort. This can be most easily demonstrated through citing reading materials and elaborating on your thoughts about each question (beyond merely answering it). I do not expect you to be experts in the material, but given this course is an elective I do expect you will care enough to spend a few hours a week to exert some effort.

Homework: Your weekly homework assignment will be given to you on Monday morning by 9AM and will be due at noon the following Saturday. Your response should be no shorter than 600 words, (I will likely check), roughly two pages. More is acceptable, less is not. The homework will ask you questions about the reading and lecture in order to make sure you are understanding the material. In order to succeed (read: score well) on the homework I expect that you will engage with the week’s assigned materials. This will be evidenced by referencing/citing specific and broader points directly. Even if you
know parts of the answer without doing the reading you should still augment your answer by including citations. There will be 8 worth 20 points each for a total of 160 points.

Examinations: Your tests for this class will be due at the same time as your homework, noon on Saturday. They will ask bigger picture questions about the past weeks' readings and themes. There is an expectation that these should also be interactions with the course readings and lectures. I will endeavor to not have them overlap with homework subjects so that you are not rehashing work you have done already on exams. There will be 3 worth 50 points each for a total of 150 points.

As such, the total point value for the course is: 310 points.

A word to the wise: save everything you do for this class, in a word document or otherwise, because blackboard can and will, maliciously, consume assignments. If you think it did not accept your homework, the safest thing to do is email it to me. Timestamps will prove you did the work on time. Furthermore, even if there is proof the internet ate your test answers, do you really want to spend time writing them again?

Grades will be assigned on a +/- scale as follows: A+ 100-97, A 96-93, A- 92-90, B+ 89-87, B 86-83, B- 82-80, C+ 79-77, C 76-73, C- 72-70, D+ 69-67, D 66-63, D- 62-60, F 59 and below.

Academic Honesty Statement:

Plagiarism, cheating, etc: absolutely no form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated. If I find evidence of cheating, it will be reported to proper university authorities. Despite the fact that you will not be in class during examinations, there is an expectation that all the work you turn in is done by you alone. If you are unsure about plagiarism, please see me. Be aware that even if you do not feel any personal need to behave in an ethical manner, the university takes such violations very seriously. Nothing in this course will be so difficult to complete that it will be worth risking one's eventual degree.

Please see the links below for Purdue's position on academic honesty.

http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academicintegritybrochure.php

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/

Adaptive Programs:

The Adaptive Programs division of the Office of the Dean of Students arranges academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, and services for students with permanent or temporary disabilities. An Adaptive Programs Specialist works individually with a student to determine the most appropriate accommodations based on the student's medical documentation and specific needs. Academic accommodations, auxiliary aids, and services are designed to assist students in obtaining equal access to course activities, materials, and evaluations. (More info can be found at http://www.purdue.edu/ODOS/adpro/about.htm) Students who need to use these services should notify the instructor immediately to ensure appropriate accommodations.

Schedule:

Week 1, March 7-March 12: What is a "Military Revolution"?

• Boot Prologue and Introduction
• Murray Williamson (link below)
http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA354177

• Michael Thompson (link below)

Week 2, March 14- March 19: The Gunpowder and Napoleonic Revolutions
• Boot, pp. 19-24, 50-52, 57-67, 72-76, 83-95, 99-104

Week 3, March 21-March 26: Total War and the Industrial Revolution
• Boot, pp. 77-83, 116-201

Week 4, March 28-April 2: A Revolution in the Air
• Boot, pp. 268-294

Your first exam is due this week.

Week 5, April 4-April 9: Nuclear Weapons: Debates I
• Christopher Layne on deterrence (link below)
http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/iran-the-logic-of-deterrence/

• Sagan and Waltz: Chp. 1: More May Be Better and Chp. 2: More May Be Worse

Week 6, April 11-16: Nuclear Weapons: Debates II
• John Mearsheimer on deterrence (link below)
http://johnmearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0020.pdf

• Sagan and Waltz: Chp. 3: Waltz Responds to Sagan and Chp. 4: Sagan Responds to Waltz

Your second exam will be this week.

Week 7, April 18-23: Nuclear Weapons: Did They Matter?
• John Mearsheimer (link below)

- John Mueller (link below)

http://sobek.colorado.edu/~blimes/mueller-20-%20The%20Essential%20Irrelevance%20of%20Nuclear%20Weapons.pdf

Week 8, April 25-30: The Information Age: a Modern Revolution?

- Boot Chps. 10 and 11

**Your final exam is due this week.**

**NOTE:** This syllabus and the information contained within it are subject to change at the instructor’s discretion as the need may arise. Any substantive changes during the semester will be communicated via an announcement within Blackboard.