

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

POL 237: MODERN WEAPONS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Spring 2025

Class Meeting: TTH 3:00-4:15
Smith Hall 108

Instructor

Keith Shimko
BRNG 2236
Office Hours: T and TH 11:00-1:00 + by appt
+ by appointment
Email: kshimko@purdue.edu

Teaching Assistants:

See TA Information in Brightspace

Objectives: Whether it was the “smart” weapons used by the United States or the weapons of mass destruction it was looking for, the Iraq wars confirmed again the central importance of weapons technology 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. Though 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, 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.

Many observers believe that we are at a critical turning point with new technologies fundamentally changing the way nations (especially the United States) prepare for and fight wars. These changes could, in turn, have a tremendous impact on American society, its military, and its relations with the rest of the world. We will examine this so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) from a historical and contemporary perspective. We will compare the current RMA to past military revolutions, such as the gunpowder revolution of the 1400s and 1500s as well as the changes in warfare wrought by the

industrial revolution. The bulk of the course, however, will focus on the debates and challenges of the current revolution. Among the questions we will explore: Can air power win wars in places like the Persian Gulf, Kosovo, and Afghanistan without the use of ground forces or extensive American and local civilian casualties? Can and should the proliferation of nuclear weapons be prevented? And, most importantly, what does the American experience in Iraq since 2003 indicate about the role of technology in changing the character of warfare?

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and explain the impact/importance of the critical technologies in the emergence of modern total warfare
2. Explain the elements and requirements of nuclear deterrence (and debates about the requirements)
3. Discuss how contemporary information technologies have (and have not) changed the conduct of warfare

Readings: There are two texts for this class:

Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare and the Course of History* (Gotham, 2006)

Keith Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010)

All other readings will be available on Brightspace

Grading:

There will be three *non-cumulative* exams in this class. To address concerns that a poor grade on one of these “high stakes” elements might be difficult to recover from, your lowest exam will be discounted to 20% of your grade while the others will be 40% each (in the past I have weighted the exams equally). Exams will consist of short answers of varying formats and an essay.

The Grading scale is as follows (a 79.5 would be rounded to an 80/B-):

A:	94 and higher
A-:	90-93
B+:	87-89
B:	83-86
B-:	80-82
C+:	77-79
C:	73-76
C-:	70-72
D+:	67-69
D:	63-66

D-: 60-62
F: 59 and lower

Make-Up Policy: If you are unable to take an exam on the scheduled date, notify me *before* the exam at the email address indicated above (unless, of course, there is a good reason you are unable to). For those who cannot take the exam for a legitimate reason (illness being the most likely), I will work with you to arrange a make up.

NOTE: Do NOT make plans to leave campus before you know the dates of your final exams. That you (or your parents) bought a ticket or made plans before you knew the date of the exam **will not** be considered a reasonable basis for an accommodation.

Classroom Etiquette: This class meets for 75 minutes twice a week. If you come to class, I expect you to remain until it is over. If there is some reason you need to leave early, tell me at the start and sit near a door so you can make an unobtrusive exit. If you feel there is some reason you may not be able to sit through a 75 minute class on a given day, please do not attend. If you think there will be many such days, please drop the class and take another.

Cellphones are to be turned off and put away at the start of class. They are not to be left on your desk or checked at any point during class.

Computers are not to be used in class. Research and my own experience demonstrates that students learn more and do better when they take written notes (which I suggest you do on printouts of the lecture PowerPoints that will always be posted well in advance of class in brightspace).

SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

1/14: Organizational/Thinking About Weapons and Warfare

Scenes from *The Last Samurai*

PART I: MILITARY REVOLUTIONS IN HISTORY

Part I Learning Objectives

1. Identify the key elements of a “military revolution”
2. Explain how early gunpowder weapons contributed to the rise of modern state system in Europe
3. Trace the evolution of firearms/firepower in the 19th century
4. Explain how nationalism and industrialism contributed to the rise of modern total war
5. Differentiate and evaluate the different versions of strategic AirPower theory

1/16: What is a “Military Revolution”?

Boot, Introduction (pp. 7-16)

Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and American Military Revolution*, pp. 3-9

Krepenevich, “From Cavalry to Computer, *The National Interest*, Fall 1994, intro section

1/21: Gunpowder Revolution: The Military Roots of a Social/Political Revolution

Boot, pp. 19-24, 74-76

Geoffrey Parker, “The Gunpowder Revolution, 1300-1500,” in Geoffrey Parker, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 106-117.

1/23 and 28: The Napoleonic Revolution: The Social/Political Roots of a Military Revolution

Boot, 83-92.

John Weltman, *World Politics and the Evolution of Warfare* (Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 35-40.

MacGregor Knox, “Mass politics and nationalism as military revolution: The French Revolution and after, in Know and Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 57-66.

1/30 and 2/4: The Industrial-Military Revolution: Technology and Early Manifestations

Boot, 116-146, 196-201

2/6: The Industrial-Military Revolution: European Global Dominance

Boot, 77-83, 146-169

2/11 and 13: Total War on the Ground: World War I and the Triumph of Weapons – The Rise and Demise of the Continuous Front

Robert O’Connell, *Of Arms and Men* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 241-246, 251-256, 265-269.

2/18: Air Power in Theory

Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton, 2002), pp. 76-81, 289-293.

2/20: Air Power in Reality: Strategic Bombing and Blitzkreig

Boot, 268-304

Watch Video: *The Road To Total War*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnppCclvk0&t=1061s>

*****2/25: EXAM #1*****

PART II: A NUCLEAR REVOLUTION?

Part II Learning Objectives

1. Explain the reasons for the emergence and demise of “massive retaliation”
2. Explain the elements and logic of “mutual assured destruction”
3. Explain the strategic dilemmas that emerged with the development of ICBMs and how the nuclear TRIAD could resolve these dilemmas
4. Identify the key elements of, and requirements for, nuclear deterrence
5. Explain why we have so few nuclear weapons states.

2/27 and 3/4: Nuclear Strategy in the Cold War: The Emergence of M.A.D.

No Readings

Watch: *Nuclear Strategy for Beginners*

3/6: Was There Really a “Nuclear Revolution”?

John Mearsheimer, “Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War,” *The Atlantic* (November 1990).

John Mueller, “The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons,” from *Retreat from Doomsday*, pp. 110-116.

3/11: Nuclear Proliferation: Why So Many Nuclear Powers? Why so Few?

Shimko, *International Relations*, Ch.11.

***** NO CLASS 3/13 *****

3/25: Nuclear Proliferation – Don’t Worry (or at least not so much)

3/27: Nuclear Proliferation – Worry (maybe a lot)

4/1: Nuclear Proliferation: Why Did/Do we Worry about Iran?

Robert Hunter, “The Iran Case: Why Countries Want Nuclear Weapons,” *Arms Control Today* (December 2004), pp. 22-25

Paul Pillar, “We Can Live with A Nuclear Iran,” *Washington Monthly* (March/April 2012).

Graham Allison, “The Nightmare this Time,” *Boston Globe*, March 12, 2006.

NOTE: I am not going to have time to lecture about chemical and biological weapons, but I will assign a few readings for you to do on your own (the other readings for this section, after all, are a little light), including (more will likely be added as we approach this section):

Mark Perry, “Why the World Banned Chemical Weapons,” *Politico* (April 3, 2017).

***** 4/3: Exam #2*****

PART III: A NEW REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS?

Part III Learning Objectives

1. Explain the strategic context and logic of the “off-set strategy” and how the technologies it involved would allow the United States/NATO to defeat the Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact.
2. Identify the elements of a “reconnaissance-strike complex”
3. Describe the different types of guided munitions and identify their strengths and limitations
4. Explain the logic of “parallel warfare” or “AirLand Battle.”
5. Explain how the U.S. experience in Iraq illustrated the promise and limitations of key military technologies.

4/8: The Origins and Elements of a Contemporary Revolution in Military Affairs

Shimko, Chs. 1 and 2

4/10: The First War Against Iraq (1991): The Promise of the RMA?

Shimko, Ch. 3

4/15: Video: *The Gulf War*, part 2

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x76hx2z>

Though not required, it is a good idea to watch the first hour as well

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x76hx2y>

4/17: The RMA in the 1990s

Shimko, Ch. 4

4/22: The Afghan Prelude

Shimko, Ch. 5

4/24: The Second War Against Iraq (2003): The Promise of the RMA?

Shimko, Ch.5

4/29: Third Iraq War (2003 - ?): The Limits of the RMA?

Shimko, Ch. 6 and pp,

5/1: An RMA (?) and Its Future

Shimko, Conclusion

*******Exam #3: TBA*******

Attendance:

Consistent with Purdue's policy, class attendance is not optional. That said, I do not take attendance and you do not earn/lose any credit based on attendance. I can assure you, however, that coming to class is the best way to do well in this class. Note also that while lecture PowerPoints will be posted on brightspace, the lectures **will not** be recorded and posted. The only way to access the lectures is to attend them.

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Nondiscrimination Statement

Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. More details are available on our course Brightspace table of contents, under University Policies.

Accessibility

Purdue University strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, you are welcome to let me know so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center at: drc@purdue.edu or by phone: 765-494-1247. More details are available on our course Brightspace under Accessibility Information.