

HIST 1571/6571 GOVT 1571:
**American Defense Policy & Military History from the World
Wars to the Global War on Terror**
Professor David Silbey, silbey@cornell.edu

Description: America has fought two wars in the 21st century, in Iraq and Afghanistan. They have been the longest wars in American history and have ended badly, amid much ambivalence about the defense policies that created them. Those wars and policies are part of the long history of the war that America has fought as a global power and the policies that shaped those wars and shaped that global power. This course will look at US defense policies and military experience over the long 20th century, from the earth-spanning conflicts of World War I and II, to the nuclear tension of Cold War conflicts, and finally to the global war on terror. Though this course is primarily about the United States, it draws in the critical global events and actors as well so as to understand the entire history — as much as possible.

Learning Goals: By the end of the semester, students should (1) have a strong grasp of American military history & defense policy of the 20th & 21st centuries, (2) have an understanding of how historical narratives are constructed, remembered, and memorialized, especially by working with primary sources.

Themes: War is both a global effort of nations and the ground-level experience of individuals. In this course, we will focus on a number of **themes**, including the **experience** of ordinary people caught up in war, both soldiers and civilians, and especially ones whose voices have been forgotten; the **policies** and **doctrines** that guided and informed nations as they went to war, the **moments of decision**, when someone's choice materially changed the progress of a war, the **memorials** people created to wars, and the **actions** and **reactions** that changed how war is waged.

Structure: The course meets from 1:00 pm to 4:20 pm. Attendance is mandatory. For class, you should bring your laptop and be ready to use it. Laptops may be open and in use for note-taking during lectures. For discussion periods, they should be put away. Assignment extensions are possible but must be cleared with me ahead of time. Late assignments will be penalized one grade increment (ie, an A to an A-) per day. I reserve the right to change this syllabus but will make reasonable attempts to warn you if I have to do so. My office hours are **Wednesdays 4 - 5:30 pm** via Zoom, and **Fridays 4:00 - 5:00 pm** in my office. I'm also happy to do an appointment at another time, if those times aren't convenient. The two official channels of communication for the course are via email or on Canvas, so be sure to monitor both of those.

Integrity: Remember your academic integrity. Abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Your submitted work should be your own. All required papers may be subject to software review for the detection of plagiarism or the use of AI.

Your access to the course is important to me. Please request your accommodation letter early in the semester, or as soon as you become registered with SDS, so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations.

- Once SDS approves your accommodation letter, it will be emailed to both you and me. Please follow up with me to discuss the necessary logistics of your accommodations.

- If you are approved for exam accommodations, please consult with me at least two weeks before the scheduled exam date to confirm the testing arrangements.
- If you experience any access barriers in this course, such as with printed content, graphics, online materials, or any communication barriers; reach out to me or your SDS counselor right away.

If you need an immediate accommodation, please speak with me after class or send an email message to me and SDS at sds_cu@cornell.edu.

If you have, or think you may have a disability, please contact Student Disability Services for a confidential discussion: sds_cu@cornell.edu, 607-254-4545, sds.cornell.edu.

Assignments	Grade %	Due Date	Hand In
Prelim & Final	20 each = 40 total	Prelim due March 10 Final due May 11	Canvas
Decision Analysis	20%	May 15	Class
Telling a Soldier's Story Presentation	20%	Scheduled in class	Canvas
Participation	20%	Weekly	In class

Class Schedule:

1. January 26: Introduction, Starting at the End: the Road to Afghanistan, Ukraine, and the Middle East. Syllabus. *The evacuation of Afghanistan, 2021; Beginning the Road: The legacy of the Civil War, building a modern fighting force, conquering an empire, a segregated military, Mahan and naval power, industrial mass war.*

Policies: Manifest Destiny; TR's Big Stick

Readings: None.

2. February 2: Going to War, Striving for Peace: World War I, 1916-1919.

Topics: Getting ready for war, submarine warfare and the decision to enter the conflict, the Western Front, winning the war, losing the peace, demobilization and coming home. Policies: Collective Security & the 14 Points.

Readings: In Canvas

3. February 9: The 20 Year Peace Fails and the Last European War, 1919-1941. *Topics: Trying to open the battlefield, tanks and airplanes, naval limitations, banning war, the rise of the dictators, Japan, China, and power in the East, remembering the Great War, veterans come home; Rearmament, deterring Japan, the fall of Europe. Policy: Isolationism & Arms Limitation*
Readings: In Canvas

4. February 16: Total War, Europe 1941-43. *Topics: Operation Barbarossa, Mobilization, the Eastern Front, North Africa, the Battle of the Atlantic, the Air War, Strategic Bombing; Mobilization and Industrialization. Policy: Germany First; Arsenal of Democracy.*

Readings: In Canvas

5. February 23: A Long Distance War: The Pacific, 1941-43. Topics: Pearl Harbor, Midway, Guadalcanal and onward; the Southwest Pacific; Aircraft carriers; Building a fleet; Submarine warfare. Policy: Island-Hopping.

Readings: In Canvas

6. March 1: Victory in Europe, 1943-45. Retaking Europe, D-Day, Breakout, the Battle of the Bulge, Germany surrenders, refugees and POWs, Europe asunder. Policy: The Second Front.

Readings: In Canvas

7. March 8: Victory in the Pacific, 1944-45. Topics: Iwo Jima and Okinawa, Invading the Home Islands, Incinerating Japan, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Policy: Unconditional Surrender

Readings: In Canvas

PRELIM DUE ONLINE

8. March 15: Figuring Out the Peace, and a Cold War, 1943-65. Topics: Coming home, the GI Bill, The United Nations, NATO and the division of Europe, the end of empires, a peacetime military; Cold War, Nuclear war-fighting, Mutual Assured Destruction, Flexible Response, Korea, desegregating the military, deterrence & détente, Strategic Air Command, Intercontinental ballistic missiles. Policies: Decolonization, Anti-Communism, Containment.

Readings: In Canvas

9. March 22: Another Way of War: National (and international)

Insurgencies, 1960-1980. Vietnam, Algeria, Ireland, Terrorism; Peaceful resistance; Insurgent models: Mao, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, China, Malaysia, Algeria, Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, the Hollow Force. Policies: Counterinsurgency, the Domino Effect

Readings: In Canvas.

10. March 29: MEMORIALIZATION. Monument tour of the Vietnam Veterans Monument, the Korean War Monument, the World War II Monument and the World War I Monument. Wear comfy shoes.

Readings: In Canvas.

APRIL 5: NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

11. April 12: Winning the Cold War and the Rise of Global Terrorism, 1979-2003 Topics: Abandoning COIN, AirLand Battle, the Reagan Buildup, Afghanistan and the mujahideen, Glasnost & Perestroika, the fall of the wall, end of the Cold War, the First Gulf War, A Unipolar World; North Korea, Iran, Bin Laden, 9/11, Anthrax, Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance, Overthrowing the Taliban, Missing Bin Laden. Policy: Rollback, Imperial Power and the Reality-Based Community

Readings: In Canvas.

12. April 19: Counterinsurgencies: Winning Iraq, 2003-2009 Topics: Nation-Building, Strategic Drift, the Surge (Iraq), Ethnic Realignment, Small unit war, Withdrawing from Iraq. Policy: Nation-building.

Readings: In Canvas.

13. April 26: Losing Afghanistan, 2009-2022. *The surge in Afghanistan; Popular resistance; stasis and the Blob. Evacuation*
Readings: In Canvas

14. May 3: The World at War, 2024: Watching Ukraine and the Middle East,.
Topics: The return of big war in Ukraine. Protracted War in Israel. Policy: Fighting at a distance.
Readings: In Canvas.

Final Due TBD.

Decision Analysis Due TBD