

# SYLLABUS

ACADEMIC YEAR 2016

ELECTIVES PROGRAM

Term II

Elective NS2266

STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC THINKING IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE, PA 17013-5050

14 March-29 April 2016

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UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE AND CARLISLE BARRACKS  
CARLISLE, PENNSYLVANIA 17013-5242

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ATTENTION OF

CSWC-SSL-NSS

14 March 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Syllabus, "Strategy and Strategic Thinking in the First World War," Elective,  
Academic Year 2016

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Duckenfield".

Professor Mark Duckenfield  
Chairman, Department of National  
Security and Strategy

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U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013-5050

SYLLABUS  
ELECTIVE

14 March 2016

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# STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC THINKING IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

## SECTION I

### ELECTIVE DESCRIPTION

#### 1. OBJECTIVES.

a. Examine the nature of strategic thinking in the total war environment of 1914-1918.

b. Examine the impact of factors such as culture, history, and geopolitics on the strategic thinking of the great powers.

c. Analyze the strategic thinking of the United States in comparison and contrast with those of the European great powers.

d. Examine the strategic approaches of the great powers to conflict termination and the establishment of a peace treaty.

**2. SCOPE.** Although the United States currently does not envision fighting a total war like the First World War, the conflict of 1914-1918 nevertheless offers numerous strategic lessons. These lessons include the need to adapt strategy to the reality of war when prewar plans fail to meet strategic objectives; the development of global strategy; and the strategic identification of the goals for conflict termination. This course will not be a history of the First World War *per se*; although a working knowledge of the war and its main events will no doubt prove useful, it is not required.

**3. PREREQUISITE.** None.

**4. METHODOLOGY.** The primary methodology is active adult learning in seminar discussions. Students will use instructor provided resources and independent research to enhance seminar discussion. Students will apply their learning in case studies and a written evaluation requirement.

**5. ELECTIVE REQUIREMENTS.** Each student is expected to:

a. Complete the assigned reading and substantially contribute to seminar Discussion.

b. Discussion for each lesson will be guided by a list of study questions. For each lesson one of the questions will be marked with an asterisk (\*) that indicates the question may be selected as a paper topic. Each student will write one analytical essay (3-5 pages) based on one of the study questions for any lesson of the student's

choosing. This paper does not require outside research and will draw on the assigned reading for that lesson

**6. EVALUATION.** Written work, seminar preparation and seminar contributions will be evaluated according to the standards set out in CBks Memorandum 623-1, USAWC STUDENT ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION RESIDENT AND DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

**7. COURSE RELATIONSHIP.** This course reinforces and expands knowledge, skills, and competencies presented to students in TWS, SL, NSPS, and DEM, broadening their perspectives, adding depth to their understanding, and refining their application of skills and competencies through practice. Other elective courses offered by the departments may focus on similar knowledge, specific knowledge, or skills and competencies addressed in this course through different methodologies or subject matter. Because the course examines cultural underpinnings and conditions that contribute to weak and/or failed states, it relates directly to regional studies courses that covers developing countries.

**8. DETAILED PROGRAM.**

a. The planning calendar indicates the schedule of classes and subjects to be covered by class period. Exact dates and times will be provided at the first meeting.

b. Specific instructions and readings are listed in the class description following the planning calendar.

**9. FACULTY ORGANIZATION.** Faculty organization for the conduct of this course follows:

Chairman, Department of National  
Security and Strategy

Prof Mark Duckenfield  
Room C210  
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Department Elective Program  
Director

Dr. Nation  
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Elective Instructor

Dr. Neiberg  
Room C228  
Phone 5-3306

**10. RECOMMENDED BACKGROUND READING.**

The following list of books provides a sample of works on the war for those who wish to increase their knowledge.

Edward Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

David Kennedy, *Over Here: American Society and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Frederick Manning, *Her Privates We* also sometimes published as *Middle Parts of Fortune*, (numerous editions), written by a veteran of the Battle of the Somme, it is one of the best novels of the war.

Michael Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War: A Global History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Dennis Showalter, *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires* reprint edition (Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books, 2004), a study of the first major battle on the eastern front, but the book covers much more.

In addition, you may want to search for books and articles by some of the foremost scholars on the war including John Horne, Hew Strachan, Dennis Showalter, Holger Herwig, and Jennifer Keene. You can, of course, see me for suggestions on specific aspects of the war.

**PLANNING CALENDAR**  
**NS2266– STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC THINKING IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR**  
**ACADEMIC YEAR 2016 (TERM II)**

16 MAR 2016, 1300-1600	21 MAR 2016, 1300-1600	29 MAR 2016, 0830-1130
NS2266-01 Prewar Strategic Thinking – the Allies Root Hall	NS2266-02 Prewar Strategic Thinking – the Central Powers AHEC	NS2266-03 War Planning AHEC
1 APR 2016, 0830-1130	4 APR 2016, 1300-1600	12 APR 2016, 0830-1130
NS2266-04 Reacting to Strategic Crises, 1914 AHEC	NS2266-05 Global Strategies Root Hall	NS2266-06 Strategies for Total War, 1915-1916 Root Hall
14 APR 2016, 0830-1130	18 APR 2016, 0830-1130	20 APR 2016, 1300-1600
NS2266-07 Strategies for Total War, 1917-1918 Root Hall	NS2266-08 U.S. Strategic Thinking AHEC	NS2266-09 Strategy and Conflict Termination AHEC
25 APR 2016, 1300-1600		
NS2266-10 Peacemaking and the Postwar Strategic Environment AHEC		

## SECTION II

### CLASS DESCRIPTIONS

Introduction. The First World War struck unexpectedly. Virtually all observers in that fateful the summer of 1914 thought that the international situation was better than it had been for many years. Colonial issues and long-standing continental controversies like Alsace-Lorraine had cooled considerably. Yet when the war began it struck with an astonishing ferocity due to the nature of war planning, especially in Germany. War plans reflected the strategic assumptions and requirements of the great powers as they understood them in 1914. When those plans failed to achieve strategic success, planners had to rethink their strategic assumptions. Scholars continue to debate how well they did so. This course will allow us to examine how strategy and strategic thinking was shaped by the experience of war and the assumptions of the leaders of the great powers. We will also examine how strategy, both political and military, affected the process of conflict termination and peacemaking.

NSS2266-01: Prewar Strategic Thinking – The Allies. This session will introduce the major themes of the course and outline its requirements. It will then use a comparative methodology to examine the prewar strategic thinking of three of the great powers: Great Britain, Russia, and France. We will also examine the strategic relationship between the three as embodied in the Triple Entente. We will examine the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts within which strategists in these three states set their policies. At the end of the class we will address the historical debate about the extent to which prewar strategic thinking made the First World War inevitable, or at the very least more likely.

#### Required Readings.

a. Roy A. Prete, "French and British Prewar Defense Policies," and "Entente Strategic Planning after 1911," in *Strategy and Command: The Anglo-French Coalition on the Western Front 1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009), 3-43.

**[Blackboard]**

b. Robert A. Doughty, "The Transformation of the French Army," in *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 17-36.

**[Course Reserve]**

NS2266-02: Prewar Strategic Thinking – The Central Powers. This session is an extension of the previous one, although it turns its analytic eye toward the Central Powers. We will take the same general methodological model from lesson one and use it to study Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. We will then determine the similarities and differences between the strategic environments of the two alliance

systems. We will end by assessing the argument of some historians that the strategic decisions of the Central Powers led directly to war in 1914.

Required Readings.

a. Dennis Showalter, "The Circus Rider of Europe," in *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires: Corner Stones Of Military History* (1993; repr., Dulles: Potomac Books, 2004): 13-35. **[Blackboard]**

b. Hew Strachan, "Turkey's Decision to Join the Central Powers," in *The First World War, To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 651-679. **[Course Reserve]**

c. Robert Foley, "The (re)birth of Ermattungsstrategie," *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 38-55. **[Course Reserve]**

NS2266-3: War Planning. This lesson analyzes the controversial topic of war planning. We will continue using our comparative methodology, looking at how the strategic problems of the great powers and alliances conditioned their assumptions about war planning. We will finish by examining the argument made by some scholars that war planning (or "war by timetable") turned a relatively minor diplomatic crisis into a situation that could only be resolved by war. This lesson will therefore also deal with topics like civil-military relations, the role of military advisers, and the responsibilities of civilian defense specialists.

Required Readings.

a. Robert Doughty, "French Strategy in 1914: Joffre's Own," *Journal of Military History* 67, no. 2 (April, 2003): 427-454, in [ProQuest](#) (accessed 15 January 2016). **[Database]**

b. Robert Foley, "The Short-War Belief," in *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56-81. **[Course Reserve]**

c. Hew Strachan, "War Plans," in *First World War: Volume I: To Arm* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 163-207. **[Course Reserve]**

NSS2266-04: Reacting to Strategic Crises, 1914. This lesson will analyze the failures of the prewar plans and the reactions of strategists to the need to formulate new ideas. The role of technology, the failure of prewar tactics, and a rapidly widening global environment of war posed tremendous challenges to strategists, military and civilian alike. Most of the key strategists of 1914 had lost their jobs by 1916. We will examine where they failed and why while also examining the lack of alternatives and options they perceived. We will also look at the new generation of strategic leaders to see how their ideas differed.

### Required Readings.

- a. Robert Foley, "The Rise of Stellungskrieg," in *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 82-108. **[Course Reserve]**
- b. Hew Strachan, "Problems, and Some Solutions," in *First World War: Volume I: To Arm* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 224-242. **[Course Reserve]**
- c. Robert A. Doughty, "Siege Warfare, 1914-1915," in *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Harvard University Press, 2005): 105-114 and 124-135. **[Course Reserve]**

NS2266-05: Global Strategies. One of the reasons that the war lasted so much longer than most strategists assumed was its global character. Almost from the start of the war, all of the great powers developed global, not just continental, strategies. From Britain's Gallipoli debacle to German attempts to undermine India to French plans to expand their African empire all of the great powers thought in terms of global strategies. Did the strategic ambitions of the great powers exceed their resources? What were the consequences? Did the development of global strategies favor one side?

### Required Reading.

- a. Hew Strachan, "Holy War," in *First World War: Volume I: To Arm* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 694-712. **[Course Reserve]**
- b. Robert A. Doughty, "The Search for Strategic Alternatives, 1915-1916," in *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Harvard University Press, 2005): 203-222. **[Course Reserve]**
- c. Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, "Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery," in the *Middle East, 1789-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 247-269. **[Blackboard]**

NS2266-06: Strategies for Total War, 1915-1916. In 1914 few strategists envisioned what we would now call "total war." By 1916 all of the great powers knew they were fighting one, but few knew exactly what the term meant. They soon came to realize that a total war strategy involved civilian realms like food control, industrial production, and diplomacy. This lesson will ask whether one side's strategists did a better job of adapting to the new environment and, if so, how they made the critical adjustment in their thinking. We will test the thesis that the Allies, not the Germans, made the correct strategic decisions in these years.

### Required Readings.

- a. David French, "The Meaning of Attrition, 1914-1916," *European Historical Review* 103 (1988): 385-405, in [JSTOR](#) (accessed 14 January 2016). **[Database]**

b. William Philpott, "Why the British Were Really On the Somme," *War in History* 9, no. 4 (2002): 446-471, [ProQuest](#) (accessed 14 January 2016). **[Database]**

c. Robert Foley, "Competing Strategic Visions," in *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 109-126. **[Course Reserve]**

NS2266-07: Strategies for Total War, 1917-1918. Most scholars see 1917 as the decisive year of the war. The revolution in Russia and the entry of the United States radically altered the war's strategic environment. This lesson will examine how the events of 1917 both opened new strategic options and constrained others. The strategic decisions made in 1917 set the stage for victory and defeat the following year.

Required Readings.

a. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, "War in the West, 1917-1918" in John Horne, ed., *A Companion to World War I* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 127-138. **[Blackboard]**

b. Robert A. Doughty, "A Strategy of "Healing" and Defense, Spring 1918," in *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 355-404. **[Course Reserve]**

NS2266-08: U.S. Strategic Thinking. The United States entered The Great War with a very different set of strategic objectives from those of its alliance partners. President Wilson underscored these differences by refusing to formally join the alliance, preferring instead to call the United States an "associated power." This lesson will look at how the combination of American values and interests differed from those of Britain and France, as well as those of other alliance partners like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. We will then ask how these differences set the stage for American strategic decision making, reinforcing a common theme of this elective, the nature of strategy within an alliance.

Required Readings.

a. Alan Millett and Trevor Wilson, "Over Where? The AEF and the American Strategy for Victory" in Kenneth J. Hagan and William Roberts, eds. *Against All Enemies: Interpretations of American Military History* (Westport: Greenwood, 1986), 235-256. **[Blackboard]**

b. M. Cooper, "The United States", in *The Origins of World War I*, ed. Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 415-442. **[Blackboard]**

c. David F. Trask, "The Emergency of 1918," in *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, 1917-1918* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 29-42. **[Blackboard]**



NS2266-09: Strategy and Conflict Termination. The differing strategic goals of the USA, Britain, and France came to a head as the three powers considered their goals and aims. As military victory over Germany became increasingly likely, the powers disagreed over the shape of postwar Europe. The rise of the Soviet Union, a possible Bolshevik revolution in Germany, and the financial and physical exhaustion of Britain and France produced a dangerous and unstable strategic environment in 1918. We will spend this lesson examining the strategic choices each power made in this new and surprising environment.

Required Reading.

- a. Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19–31. **[Blackboard]**
- b. David Fromkin, “By the Shores of Troy,” in *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), 363-379. **[Course Reserve]**
- c. Robert A. Doughty, “A Strategy of Opportunism,” in *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 487-507. **[Course Reserve]**

NS2266-10: Peacemaking and the Postwar Strategic Environment. This final lesson follows naturally from the previous one. The Paris Peace Conference dealt with problems across the globe and produced one of the most controversial diplomatic documents in history, the Treaty of Versailles. We will look at that treaty from the perspectives of the strategic needs and interests of the great powers who wrote it. We will finish by comparing the strategic environment of 1919 to that of 1914 and asking whether the peace process truly led to conflict termination or merely sowed the seeds for another round of war a generation later.

Required Readings:

- a. David Fromkin, “Part IX The Tide Goes Out,” in *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), 383-411. **[Course Reserve]**
- b. Carole Fink, ed., “The Peace Settlement, 1919–39,” in *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 543-557. **[Blackboard]**