

BOWDOIN COLLEGE
Department of Government and Legal Studies

Weapons of the Weak
Government 1031

Professor Barbara Elias
Office: 203 Hubbard Hall
E-mail: belias@bowdoin.edu

Office Hours M 9:30am-11:30am
M W 11:40am-1:05pm
Massachusetts Hall 105

Despite enjoying a preponderance of resources, the rich and mighty don't always win in life, or in war. Why? How do peasants and insurgents impose their will on more "powerful" organizations? How do wealthy armies at times lose wars to impoverished rebels? Whereas money and material can be measured, divided and counted in a spreadsheet, less quantifiable factors of conflict such as ideas, identity, legitimacy, willpower and fortitude are too-often discounted as secondary factors. But these may, in truth, be at the heart of war, and weapons for the weak to bring down the mighty.

Required Books:

1. Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, (Second Edition, Potomac Books, 2005)
2. Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, (Princeton University Press, 2017)
3. Hassan Blasim, *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq*, (Penguin, 2014)
4. Kevin Powers, *The Yellow Birds*, (Little, Brown and Company, 2012)

All other readings will be available on e-reserve through Blackboard, or distributed to students via paper copy or e-mail. Since the topics addressed in this class are in conversation with current and evolving topics, assigned readings and topics may evolve to address new developments. Readings are due for the specified day assigned. Students should arrive prepared for class by completing the reading and taking notes ahead of the date listed.

As this is a first year seminar, we will focus on reading, discussion and writing. There may be limited portions of class dedicated to lecture on insurgency, but the majority of our time together will be spent discussing the readings, digesting the writing process and providing you space to adjust to life as a professional student at the college level.

Graded Assignments

1. 15% Participation & Professionalism

Based on attendance, level of preparation, quality of commentary, respect for peers, and etiquette with phones/laptops. Student participation in this course is a requirement. Each student will prepare *two discussion questions for every class meeting* based on the readings or the news. The professor will ask for volunteers, or call on students at random to present a question to the class. The goal is to have every voice in the room be heard and considered in our collective project to explore complex modern warfare.

2. 5% Reaction Paper (1 page) **September 3**

Choose a phrase from “How to Tell a True War Story.” Explain why that expression is striking to you. What does it mean? What does it say about war? How is it structured? What role does it play in O’Brien’s argument?

3. 10% Critical Response Paper (3 pages) **September 17**

This assignment asks you to complete a number of tasks. First, concisely summarize arguments made by several authors. Second, identify evidence, data, and assumptions within arguments. Third, offer your own argument by critically comparing and contrasting debates or integrating theories proposed by various authors. Fourth, use proper citations.

4. 15% Midterm Paper (3 pages) **October 10**

Synthesize and compare authors and broad concepts developed in class. The development of this paper will assist you in making sophisticated arguments in your final paper. A cover letter reflecting on the writing process for you, and addressing your perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the paper must be attached.

5. 10% War Simulation– Group Participation **October 17**

Using primary source documents, the class will be divided into groups and simulate a critical moment in an insurgency war. Performance will be graded. You will be judged on preparation, the soundness of proposed strategic logic, dedication to the exercise and incorporation of readings and concepts from the class.

6. 7.5% War Simulation – Individual Reports (2 pages) **October 22**
A question will be distributed asking you to use your experience in the simulation to understand concepts in insurgency warfare.
7. 7.5% Policy Memo (1 page) **November 26**
The President needs your assessment and recommendations. This assignment teaches you how to synthesize materials, apply academic theory to real-world scenarios, and to practice structuring a policy memo, as opposed to an academic paper.
8. 5% Critical Response Paper (4 pages - Updated & Resubmitted) **December 3**
Update the first draft of either your critical response paper or midterm with 1) style edits and 2) new relevant evidence/authors covered since first submission.
9. 25% Final Paper (5 pages) **December 14, 4pm.**
A cumulative paper assignment that brings together the analytical and writing skills exercised throughout the semester in the context of the subjects covered.

Academic Honesty and Late Policy

There is **positively no** dishonesty or plagiarism tolerated. In this class we will review what plagiarism is and how and why it should always be avoided. If you are having trouble, or if emergencies arise that affect your work please contact me. Please review the honor code of the college:

www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/student-handbook/college-policies/

My late policy is to deduct 1/2 a letter grade from the assignment for each 24 hour period the assignment is late. For example, if you hand a paper 23 hours late and the paper is a B+, it will be recorded as a B. If that paper is handed in 47 hours late, the grade will be a B- and so on. Furthermore, to ensure the classroom remains conducive to learning, **no laptops**, tablets or phones are allowed. Please turn the sound off, and store these items in your bag throughout the class period.

Assignment Calendar

August 29 Introduction

(Read together) Tim O'Brien, "How to Tell a True War Story"

September 3: WWII, Economies and Resources - **Reaction Paper Due**

- R.A.C. Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History*, Chapter 9 (pp. 131 – 150) "Economies at War"

September 5: Strategic Bombing – Effectiveness & Normative Questions

- R.A.C. Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History*, Chapters 10 – 11 (pp. 151 – 176) "Strategic Bombing," and "Morale."
- Kurt Vonnegut, "Wailing Shall Be in All Streets" from *Armageddon in Retrospect and Other New and Unpublished Writings on War and Peace*, 2008, (pp. 33 – 45)

September 10: Strategic Bombing – Effectiveness Against the Taliban

- Jason Lyall, "Airpower and Coercion in Counterinsurgency Wars: Evidence from Afghanistan," October 29, 2013. (pp. 1 – 37)
[Critical Response Paper Distributed]

September 12: Library Introduction – Research, Resources and Citations

- O'Neill – Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1 – 38)

September 17: Workshop - **Critical Response Paper Due**

No Readings Due

September 19: Insurgency

O'Neill – Chapters 3 & 4 (pp. 45 – 89)

September 24: Insurgency

- O'Neill – Chapters 5 & 6 (pp. 93 – 138)

September 26: Insurgency

- O'Neill – Chapter 7 (pp. 139 – 154)

October 1: Everyday Forms of Resistance

- James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, Chapter 2, "Normal Exploitation, Normal Resistance," (pp. 28 – 47)

October 3: Counterinsurgency [Midterm Paper Prompt Distributed]

- O'Neill – Chapters 8 & Conclusion (pp. 155 – 203)

October 8: *Fall Break - No Readings Due*

October 10: David and Goliath - **Midterm Paper Due**

- Neil Sheehan, "David and Goliath in Vietnam," *The New York Times*, May 26, 2017

October 15: Iraq Briefing and Simulation Assignments

- Gerges – Introduction (pp. 1 – 22)

October 17: **War Simulation** – Insurgents vs. Counterinsurgents
Readings Distributed

October 22: Workshop and Debrief – **War Simulation Report Due**
No Readings Due

October 24: The World According to ISIS

- Gerges - Chapter 1 (pp. 23 – 49)
- Blasim (pp. 3 – 23)

October 29: Where ISIS Came From

- Gerges - Chapter 2 (pp. 50 – 97)
- Blasim (pp. 27 – 77)

October 31: Iraqi Politics & Insurgency

- Gerges - Chapters 3 & 4 (pp. 98 – 143)
- Blasim (pp. 81 – 101)

November 5: Iraq and Syria

- Gerges - Chapters 5 & 6 (pp. 144 – 201)
- Blasim (pp. 105 – 135)

November 7: How Insurgents Evolve

- Gerges - Chapter 7 (pp. 202 – 221)
- Blasim (pp. 139 – 153)

November 12: No Class

- *Professor at an Academic Conference*

November 14: Museum

- Blasim (pp. 157 – 196)

November 19: - ISIS vs. AQ

- Gerges - Chapter 8 (pp. 222 – 259)
[Policy Memo Assignment Distributed]

November 21: *Happy Thanksgiving - No Readings Due*

November 26: The Future of ISIS - **Policy Memo Due**

- Gerges - Conclusion (pp. 260 – 293)

November 28: Iraq & Workshop

- Powers (pp. 3 – 48)

December 3: Iraq - **Revised Midterm or Critical Response Paper Due**

- Powers (pp. 51 – 72)
- Callimachi, Rukmini, “The Case of the Purloined Poultry: How ISIS Prosecuted Petty Crime,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 2018

December 5: Counterinsurgency in Iraq

- Powers (pp. 75 – 112)

Final Paper Due, Friday December 14, 4pm