The Transformation of War

October-December 2011
Tuesday 8h45-10h45- Room 2

Pascal Vennesson
pascal.vennesson@eui.eu

Seminar Description:

The seminar, intended both for complete novices in security/strategy/military affairs and for doctoral researchers with some knowledge in the field, examines the changing character of war these last twenty years. Since the end of the Cold War, wars have not disappeared but they are not what they used to be. Their number, aims, character, conduct, scope and consequences have partially changed in a variety of ways and partially remained constant. What did or did not change and why?

We will examine and assess critically the main alternative explanations for change/continuity in warfare and explore new hypotheses, emphasizing notably the links between the transformations of (domestic, transnational, international) politics – including citizens’ political participation -- and the transformations/continuity of war and warfare. We will further discuss these approaches by looking at the logics and characteristics of specific armed conflicts.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the seminar, you should be able to:

- Get a better sense of the characteristics of wars and warfare since 1989 in a comparative historical and regional perspective.
- Understand and critique different conceptions of the changing character of war.
- Identify and assess the different links between domestic politics and the changing character of war as well as their evolution over time.
- Develop an analytical viewpoint at the intersection of politics and strategy.
- In addition, this seminar gives you an opportunity to hone your writing and oral skills.

Requirements:

This is a discussion seminar and I encourage class participation. Participants will present and discuss texts from the syllabus. If their research project is related to the seminar’s themes, participants are welcome to present their own work.

- Seminar attendance: I expect regular attendance and will circulate a signing sheet at each seminar. I authorize one seriously justified absence (medical reason).
- Doctoral researchers are expected to do all the required reading -- on average: about 60 p./session -- for each session prior to class and to write a short
summary, or a personal critique, of the session’s readings (about 500 words). Note that the readings that should only be “skimmed” do not have to be included in the summary.

- An oral presentation of 10 minutes, followed by questions, and the leading of a seminar discussion. Make sure that the class has a detailed outline of your oral presentation as a handout. I will ask for the written note of the presentation.


**SEMINAR OUTLINE**

1. The Changing Character of War, 1989-2011: introduction, definitions, questions
2. Trends in the Characteristics of War, 1989-2011
3. The Transnational Sources of the Changing Character of War
4. Technology and the Changing Character of War
5. The “New Wars” Debate
7. Popular Demobilization and Changing Wars
8. Diminished Democracy and the American Way of War
9. Wars in Africa
10. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

Recommended supplementary readings listed below are designed to provide background and additional information in preparing papers and oral presentations, or suggest further line of inquiry for those who desire it.

1. **The Changing Character of War, 1989-2011: Definitions and Questions** *(Oct. 4)*

   No required reading

   What is war? Concept, operationalization, methods, comparisons. What is, and should be, the focus of the study of war (including what changes and does not change)? Disentangling the dimensions of war and warfare: number of wars, number of soldiers involved, incidence, ends, means, motivation, organization, weapons and equipment, strategy and tactics, geographical scope, causes, conduct, outcome, etc.


**Recommended Supplementary Readings:**


http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/index.htm Since the 1970s, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) collects information on a large number of aspects of armed violence since 1946.


2. Trends in the Characteristics of War, 1989-2011 (Oct 11)

Please note: at 19h we will watch Jean Renoir, *La grande illusion* (1937 – French original version with English subtitles).

1916, Lieutenant Maréchal and Capitaine de Boeldieu, two French combat pilots, are shot down by the Germans. They are taken to a prisoner of war camp where they strike up a friendship with Lieutenant Rosenthal, a wealthy Jew who shares lavish food parcels sent by his family with his fellow prisoners. The three men help with digging a tunnel in a bid to escape from their prison, but they are transferred to another camp before they can finish the task. After numerous further foiled escape attempts, the three men are reunited at a remote German fortress which now serves as a high security prison. The prison is overseen by a German aristocrat, Capitaine von Rauffenstein, who has been invalided out of the war. Von Rauffenstein fraternises with de Boeldieu, since they share a common social background. Although the fortress has a reputation for being escape-proof, Maréchal and Rosenthal are determined to escape. What does war change if the barriers which divide social classes remain intact? Is war simply a game for the idle rich to justify their existence? A masterpiece of cinema’s history.


Recommended Supplementary Readings:


3. The Transnational Sources of the Changing Character of War (Oct. 18)


Recommended Supplementary Readings:


4. Technology and the Changing Character of War (Friday Nov. 4, Room 3—Note the day and the room) (Note: there will be no seminar on Oct 25)

The changing character of war is fundamentally shaped by changes in the kinds of equipment warriors use. War is “(...) completely permeated by technology and governed by it” (Van Creveld, 1). High tech/low tech.


Recommended Supplementary Readings:


5. The “New Wars” Debate(s) (Nov 8)


*Recommended Supplementary Readings:*


6. Political Participation, Mobilization and War: A Clausewitzian Framework (Friday 11 Nov-Room 3 – Note day and room) – No sessions on 15 and 22 Nov

Please note: at 19h we will watch Henry King’s “Twelve O’Clock High” (1949) with Gregory Peck.

In 1943, the "hard-luck" 918th Bomb Group has accumulated the highest loss rate and the worst bombing effectiveness record in all of U.S. Eighth Air Force. Morale is a disaster. General Pritchard, head of Bomber Command, concludes that the problem is the group commander, Col. Keith Davenport, whose leadership style has allowed discipline to erode and whose overidentification with the crews has encouraged them to feel sorry for themselves. General Savage takes command and starts to clamp down on discipline and deals harshly with slackers.


Recommended Supplementary Readings:


7. Popular Demobilization and Changing Wars (Nov 29)

Following Clausewitz’s suggestion, if we want to understand changes in warfare these last 20 years, we should examine politics – especially citizens’ political participation -- carefully. Civic participation and mobilization these last 20-30 years: characteristics and changes. Democracies and non-democracies. Implications for warfare? Is this the “democratic peace” argument?

Theda Skocpol, Rachael V. Cobb, Casey Andrew Klofstad, “Disconnection and Reorganization: The Transformation of Civic Life in Late-Twentieth Century America,” Studies in American Political Development, 19 (Fall 2005), 137-156.


Recommended Supplementary Readings:


8. *Diminished Democracy and the American Way of War (Friday 2 Dec – Room 3 – Note day and room)*

Please note: at 19h we will watch Brent and Craig Renaud’s *Off to War. From Rural Arkansas to Iraq* (2005)
From the farms and fields of Arkansas to the deadly streets of Baghdad, “Off to War” tracks the citizen soldiers of the Arkansas National Guard as they come face to face with the horrors of war.


Recommended Supplementary Readings:


9. Wars in Africa (Dec 6)


**Recommended Supplementary Readings:**


10. **Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan (Friday 9 Dec, room 3– Note day and room)**


**Recommended Supplementary Readings:**


