University of Cambridge  
Faculty of Human, Social and Political Sciences  
HSPS Tripos, Part IIB, Soc 8  

REVOLUTION, WAR & MILITARISM

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Aims and objectives:

- To introduce concepts in the study of revolution, war and militarism.
- To illustrate through historical cases how these theories can be applied.
- To cultivate critical analytical thinking in relation to complex social phenomena.

Course Description:

Revolutions are often accompanied by war, and cast a long shadow over a country’s civil-military relations. This paper adopts a holistic approach to these three interrelated phenomena: revolution, war, and militarism. After surveying the relevant literature, three historical cases are examined: (1) America, from the War of Independence and the Civil War through the two world wars and the Cold War, to the current War on Terror; (2) France, from the Great Revolution and Napoleonic wars through the rebellious century to the present day; and (3) Iran, covering the Pahlavi dynasty, the Iranian Revolution, and the Islamic Republic that followed. The objective of these extended histories is to uncover the causes and outcomes of revolution, and the role of collective violence in regime transformation.

Teaching & Assessment:

This course is taught in twelve two-hour lectures (total 24 hours) in Michaelmas and Lent, and assessed by a 3-hour examination. Required readings are starred. Further readings, for those eager to expand their knowledge, are listed at the end of the syllabus.

Lecture (1-3)—REVOLUTION, WAR, MILITARISM

These lectures present main theoretical approaches to the causes and outcomes of revolution, before applying them to Arab revolts (2011-present). The lectures then explore the literature on conventional and revolutionary wars, with the war on ISIL (2014-present) as case study. And finally, we cover militarism in policy-making, focusing on the American case.

Revolution: Causes and Comparability


—Skocpol, Theda. 1994. *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Introduction; CH 4-‘Explaining Revolutions: In Quest of a Social-Structural Approach’]


**Warfare: Revolutionary and Conventional**


Militarism: Domestic and Foreign


Essay Questions:
(1) Critically discuss causality in revolution.
(2) ‘Revolution begets war; war begets revolution’. Comment.
(3) Explain the social and political aspects of militarism.

Lectures (4-6)—AMERICA

These lectures deal with the origins and development of the American War of Independence in the eighteenth century, before turning to the Civil War, a century later. They then survey changes in American war doctrine through Vietnam, the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs in the 1990s, the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns, and the shift to drone warfare. Finally, these lectures examine the lurking militarism in American state and society.

The War of Independence


The Civil War

Contemporary America
*—Davies and Pereira. 2008. Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation. [CH 14-‘The Ghost of Vietnam: American Confronts the New World Disorder’ by Ian Roxborough]

Essay Questions:
(1) How revolutionary was the American War of Independence?
(2) Was the Civil War inevitable? Why (not)?
(3) Discuss the development of the American war doctrine.

Lectures (7-9)—FRANCE
These lectures trace France’s turbulent revolutionary century (1789-1871), highlighting its groundbreaking developments in the field of war (especially under Napoleon), and the
downturn it experienced (under his nephew, and during the opening stages of the two world wars). They then consider how the French were among the first to deal with insurgencies, during their occupation of Spain, and later in Algeria and Vietnam. It ends with a survey of France’s contemporary situation, politically and militarily.

**The Great Revolution**

**Napoleonic Wars and the Rebellious Century**

**Contemporary France**
Essay Questions:
(1) Was violence essential to the success of the French revolution?
(2) Was Napoleon the ‘Revolution on horseback’?
(3) Why did France lose its position as a global military power?

Lectures (10-12)—IRAN

These lectures examine the preconditions and consequences of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, considering particularly how the Islamist militias and revolutionary guards were central to consolidating power, and how war with Iraq shaped the new regime. It ends with a discussion of Iran’s current situation, also in reference to its involvement in the Syrian civil war.

The Shah Dynasty and the 1953 Coup

The Islamic Revolution


**Contemporary Iran**


—Heydemann, Steven, and Reinoud Leenders. 2013. Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran. Stanford University Press.


Essay Questions:
1. Why was the old regime in Iran weak?
2. Was the Iranian revolution peaceful?
3. Discuss civil-military relations in Islamist Iran.

**Further Readings**

**REVOLUTION**


**WARFARE**


**MILITARISM**


**AMERICA**

*War of Independence*


**Civil War**


**Contemporary America**


**FRANCE**

**The Great Revolution**

**Napoleonic Wars and the Rebellious Century**

**Contemporary France**


**IRAN**

**The Shah Dynasty and 1953 Coup**


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