

Geopolitics: Insurgency, State Fragility, and Global Power Competition

Language

English

Mode

Classes: online

Final exam: in person

Course content and objectives

This course examines the dynamics of insurgency and state fragility within the broader context of global power competition. We begin by identifying the key factors that define insurgencies and explore how these movements operate in the modern strategic environment. Through focused case studies — including Libya in the chaotic aftermath of Qadhafi's fall and Afghanistan as a long-standing arena of great-power engagement — students will engage directly with real historical and contemporary challenges.

The course also looks forward, addressing the evolving character of conflict — from cyber operations to future concepts of warfare — and considers the multifaceted role of private military companies (PMCs) in today's international system.

At the conclusion of this course, students will:

- Understand the international environment which has given rise to insurgencies.
- Understand the ends, ways, and means by which these conflicts are being waged.
- Understand the implications of insurgencies for the stability of the regional order.
- Recommend policy solutions that address the base causal factors inherent in insurgencies.

Syllabus

Session 1 - Key factors that define insurgencies

- The importance of definitions
- Political Grievances and Legitimacy Gaps
- Asymmetric Tactics and Guerrilla Warfare
- Popular Support and Social Embedding
- External Support and Safe Havens
- Adaptive Organizational Structures

Session 2 - The modern strategic environment

- Collapse of Ottoman Empire in 1918 and the long-term regional instability
- The deteriorating post-Cold War world order
- Arab Spring, regional regime collapse, civil wars, and frozen conflicts
- Globalization and the end of the Westphalian order: the rise of mercenaries

Session 3 - Case study: Libya - Chaos in the aftermath of Qadhafi: an old, new proxy war

Session 4 - Case study: Afghanistan - Graveyard of Empires and the American abandonment of Afghanistan

- **Guest speaker** – General John R. Allen, USMC (Ret.)

Session 5 – War in the future – From cyber to hyper war

- **Guest speaker** – General John R. Allen, USMC (Ret.)

Session 6 – Much more than Mercenaries: the role of PMCs in the global context

Evaluation Methodology

To pass the exam, participants must correctly answer at least **8 out of 15 multiple-choice questions**. Admission to the final exam is subject to meeting the minimum attendance requirement (at least 5 out of 6 classes). The final exam will be held **in person**.

Faculty for the course

Federica Saini Fasanotti: ISPI Senior Associate Fellow. Former Senior Fellow in the Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, of the Foreign Policy program at The Brookings Institution. Specialist of counterinsurgency and military historian expert in African colonies.