

# SUMMER SCHOOL SYLLABUS



## CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT ANALYSIS: ACTORS, ISSUES & TECHNOLOGIES OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY WARFARE

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# SUMMARY

Owing to the ever-changing nature of warfare, the field of conflict studies requires an informed approach towards answering the question of why various actors resort to violent conflict. This summer school equips scholars and professional practitioners alike with cutting-edge knowledge and transferable skills for mapping, analysing and responding to warfare in the 21st century: who is fighting and how do they relate to one another (actors); what are they fighting over and why (issues and interests); and how exactly are they fighting (technologies and practices).

# DESCRIPTION

Rarely a day passes without the media reporting on violent uprisings, military coups, international interventions, suicide bombings, drone attacks, and civilian casualties all over the world. In conflict studies, these events are often discussed using a range of concepts such as 'civil war', 'protracted social conflict', and 'terrorism'. More recently, new terms such as 'hybrid warfare', 'remote warfare' and 'algorithmic warfare' have been coined to try and capture the essence of contemporary conflict. Despite this proliferation of terms, clarifying the complexity of violent conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century remains a challenging task.

After following this course you will be a conflict analyst, able to untangle the challenging realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. Rather than focusing on a single theory, concept or case, this summer school programme covers a range of theoretical topics, such as conflict mapping, theories of violent conflict, and war propaganda, as well as more empirical subjects, such as the role of the (non) state actors, paramilitarism, special operation forces, technology, and civilian harm. These topics will be covered with reference to empirical cases from around the world, such as Iraq, Syria, Mali, Uganda, Sri Lanka and Colombia.

Throughout the course we will address pressing issues in contemporary warfare like: How are terrorist organisations able to mobilize people towards violent action? How do rebel groups govern the territories they control? Why do states outsource violence to paramilitaries and special operation forces? If advanced militaries are able to wage war from a distance, will they become less war prone, or more? What does it mean when algorithms define who is worthy of elimination and protection in 21st century warfare? And why is tracking civilian harm so important for democratic control over contemporary warfare?

Collectively, grappling with these different layers of analysis in isolation and in relation to one another will sharpen your conceptual and analytical capacities greatly. You will acquire valuable skills and knowledge relating to the actors, issues and technologies involved in 21st century warfare. With a solid foundation in conflict analysis, you will be well-equipped to apply this to a range of academic and professional contexts, such as fieldwork in (post-) conflict areas, conflict management, negotiation, and tracking civilian harm.

This course is delivered through a combination of lectures and interactive workshops. All participants receive the book *Theories of Violent Conflict* by Demmers (2017) and a reader with the course literature at the beginning of the course. The reader contains a number of scholarly, policy-oriented and operational articles, as well as specific readings relating to the cases covered in the course. Each day you will complete an in-class assignment and at the end of the programme you will present a conflict map on a case study of your choice. Academic lecturers and practitioners from the field delivering this course either belong to or are closely linked with the Intimacies of Remote Warfare programme and the Centre for Conflict Studies (CCS) of Utrecht University.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

This course provides a concise overview of the contemporary topics and debates in the field of conflict and security studies. It is therefore appropriate for students and professional practitioners looking to acquire knowledge and skills for theorising, mapping and analysing present day warfare. This course also provides a useful bridge towards the MA in Conflict Studies & Human Rights offered by Utrecht University.

# OUTLINE PROGRAMME

**MORNING** 10:00-12:30  
**AFTERNOON** 13:30-16:00

**LOCATION:**  
**TO BE ANNOUNCED**

Week	Day	Time	Topic	Leader
Week 1	<b>1</b> (19/7)	Morning	Introduction to Conflict Analysis	Lauren Gould
		Afternoon	Conflict Mapping	Lauren Gould
	<b>2</b> (20/7)	Morning	Theories of Violent Conflict	Lauren Gould
		Afternoon	Theories of Violent Conflict cont.	Lauren Gould
	<b>3</b> (21/7)	Morning	Mobilisation of the Non-State Actor	Mario Fumerton
		Afternoon	Rebel Governance	Niels Terpstra
	<b>4</b> (22/7)	Morning	The State Actor	Georg Frerks
		Afternoon	Remote Warfare	Lauren Gould
	<b>5</b> (23/7)	Morning	The Paradox of Remote Warfare	Lauren Gould
		Afternoon	Special Forces	Jack Davies
Week 2	<b>6</b> (26/7)	Morning	Paramilitarism	Iva Vukusic
		Afternoon	Conflict Prevention and Negotiation	Jan Reinder
	<b>7</b> (27/7)	Morning	Technology	Neil Wilson
		Afternoon	Hybrid Warfare	David Snetselaar
	<b>8</b> (28/7)	Morning	Civilian Harm	Marrit Woudwijk
		Afternoon	Civilian Harm	Laurie Treffers
	<b>9</b> (29/7)	Morning	In class presentations	Lauren Gould
		Afternoon	Recap	Lauren Gould
	<b>10</b> (30/7)	Morning	Awards Ceremony	Lauren Gould

## DAY 1 [19/7/21]

Morning

### **Introduction to Conflict Analysis**

**Dr. Lauren Gould**

In this session, an introduction will be given to the field of conflict studies, the most important assumptions, concepts and definitions herein, and how the field and the nature of violent conflicts around the world have developed over time.

Afternoon

### **Conflict Mapping**

**Dr. Lauren Gould**

In this session, we will reflect on a number of analytical models in the field of conflict studies and how you can use them to engage in the skill of conflict mapping. Conflict mapping is a key tool in making a sound analysis of the complex dynamics and actors involved in contemporary violent conflict.

## DAY 2 [20/7/21]

Morning

### **Theories of Violent Conflict**

**Dr. Lauren Gould**

There exists a wide range of theoretical explanatory models for explaining and understanding how and why people resort to violent action against others, each with their own assumptions. In this session, we will discuss these different models, paying particular attention to group formation, the dynamics of interaction, and collective action. Equipped with this knowledge, you will be well placed to analyse contemporary conflicts through a variety of theoretical lenses and - crucially - you will be able to identify the fundamental assumptions others base their analysis on.

Afternoon

### **Theories of Violent Conflict**

**Dr. Lauren Gould**

As above, cont.

## DAY 3 [21/7/21]

Morning

### **Mobilisation of the Non-State Actor**

**Dr. Mario Fumerton**

In this session, we will consider how intrastate armed conflicts happen not as the inevitable outcomes of emotions and motivations like fear, inter-ethnic hatred, or grievance, and not just of conditions such as poverty or inequality, but rather as a product of human choice and co-ordinated collective human action by non-state actors that is organised through socio-political mobilisation.

Afternoon

### **Rebel Governance**

**Dr. Niels Terpstra**

Whereas traditional perspectives on rebel groups focus on warlordism, looting, human rights abuses, and their role as 'spoilers' in development and democratization, in practice, the activities of rebel groups over the world and throughout history vary considerably. This session focuses on governance performed by rebel groups in violent conflict and civil war. Rebel groups can have substantive involvement in several governance domains, and as such acquire authority and legitimacy among their constituents. International actors, such as states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), struggle to decide on whether or how to engage with rebel groups. The governance efforts of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka and the Taliban's shadow judiciary in Afghanistan will serve as case studies throughout this session.

## DAY 4 [22/7/21]

Morning

### **The State Actor**

**Prof. Dr. Georg Frerks**

Whether as the overt oppression of protests, use of surveillance against political groups, or the withdrawal of public services, state violence can be conceptualised in many different ways. In this session, we will consider the ways in which states can impose harm, which (individual and group) actors they impose it on, and to what ends.

Afternoon

**The Turn to Remote Warfare****Dr. Lauren Gould**

While the protracted social conflicts discussed so far are generally defined as intrastate conflicts, there are multiple international influences, linkages and actors involved in these kinds of conflicts. This session looks at the international dimensions of these conflicts. In particular, it looks at how the international community, with a specific focus on the West, has increasingly assembled practices of remote warfare to intervene in local settings of violent conflict.

**DAY 5 [23/7/21]**

Morning

**The Paradox of Remote Warfare****Dr. Lauren Gould**

Violence is commonly exercised without exposing Western military personnel to opponents in a declared warzone under the condition of mutual risk. This lecture aims to understand why we see this shift to remote warfare and reviews the moral and political challenges that this new way of war has given rise to. The key argument is that the secrecy around remote warfare operations, their portrayal as 'precise' and 'surgical', as well as the asymmetrical distribution of death and suffering they entail, thwarts democratic political deliberation on contemporary warfare. We foresee that it is these qualities of remote warfare that will make Western liberal democracies more war prone, not less. This is the remote warfare paradox: the military violence executed is rendered so remote and sanitized, that it becomes uncared for, and even ceases to be defined as war.

Afternoon

**Special Forces****Jack Davies (MA)**

In today's seemingly endless wars, when public opinion may be faltering, Special Operations Forces (SOF) are an attractive tool in the arsenals of state actors. In this session, the tactical, strategic, political and financial advantages of using SOF will be considered, as well as the potential costs and side-effects of engaging in covert operations in this manner.

## DAY 6 [26/7/21]

Morning

### **Paramilitarism**

**Dr. Iva Vukusic**

Governments can respond to violent uprisings by non-state actors in various ways; through negotiations, alliance formation, resignation, fleeing, suppression, policing, state terrorism, and outright military intervention. In this session, we will discuss how states often deploy paramilitary units as violent actors in (internationalised) intrastate violent conflicts and present the main characteristics of paramilitary engagement across historical contexts. The focus will be on the former Yugoslavia, however the features discussed are common to many instances of paramilitary mobilisation throughout the last half-century: plausible deniability for the state, diversity between units, and the dynamic and diverse relationships they tend to have with sponsoring regimes.

Afternoon

### **A practical perspective on conflict prevention in the EU.**

**Jan Reinder**

Diplomacy and dialogue are vital to preventing and ending violent conflicts. Despite an abundance of organisations and mechanisms for engaging in such actions between states, armed groups, and other actors, however, the processes by which they take place are frequently misunderstood. In this session, you will learn practical lessons from a practitioner with first-hand experience of international negotiations.

## DAY 7 [27/7/21]

Morning

### **Technology**

**Neil Wilson (MA)**

From the primitive spears wielded by tribes to the sophisticated drones operated by contemporary pilots, warfare has always been inextricably tied to technological innovation. In this session, we consider how scientific advances from gunpowder to the atomic bomb to AI affect how wars are fought and peace is achieved today. As well as considering the technologies themselves, we will consider how they are developed, by whom, and to what end.



Afternoon

**Hybrid Warfare****PhD David Snetselaar**

The 'battlespace' today is a diffuse and nebulous concept, encompassing everything from physical battlefields, cities, and infrastructure, to cyberspace, international law and financial networks. In this session, 'hybrid warfare' will be discussed as a term used in Western policy to help make sense of the perceived changing nature of war and the multi-domain threats to 'our' democratic societies.

**DAY 8 [28/7/21]**

Morning

**Civilian Harm****PhD Marrit Woudwijk**

As the battlespace has expanded to urban areas, civilians are increasingly bearing the brunt of it. Today, when explosive weapons are used in built-up environments, nine out of ten casualties are civilians. However, civilian victims of contemporary wars often remain 'un-recognized': experiences and narratives of those who fight/suffer/live inside wars is little accounted for. In this session, we will explore how state discourses relate to 'local' narratives and how authoritative knowledge on contemporary war is produced. How can we possibly research human experience of war and what is its added value?

Afternoon

**Civilian Harm****Laurie Treffers**

Conflict researchers increasingly rely on Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) methods to investigate civilian harm and create a more accurate view of the experience of civilians living in conflict areas. Organisations such as Airwars use open source investigation to count civilian casualties as the result of international air and artillery strikes in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Somalia. In this session, we will take a more practical look at the methods and technologies that are available - and how you can incorporate those in your own research.

## DAY 9 [29/7/21]

Morning

### **Presentation Conflict Maps**

**Dr. Lauren Gould**

In this session, students will present their conflict maps.

Afternoon

### **Recap**

**Dr. Lauren Gould**

In this session, we will recap and reflect on the preceding sessions. Students will have the opportunity to discuss the issues, themes and ideas covered in an open plenary.

## DAY 10 [30/7/21]

Morning

### **Awards Ceremony**

**Dr. Lauren Gould**

In this final session, students will be awarded a certificate confirming their participation in the summer school.