

Notes for POL 23700 - Modern Weapons And International Relations

Zeke Ulrich

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Course Introduction

This course introduces the student to the roles that modern weapons systems play in contemporary international relations.

Learning objectives:

1. Identify and explain the elements and requirements of nuclear deterrence.
2. Discuss the role of technology in the emergence of modern total warfare.
3. Analyze the impact of contemporary information technologies on the conduct of warfare.

Military revolutions

RMA: Revolution in military affairs. A major change in warfare brought about by a new application of technology. :

Technology is the great equalizer. Whereas historically power was held by trained warriors and those who commanded them, the democratization of force through modern war machines enables a nineteen-year-old boot camp graduate to have the same effect on the battlefield as a soldier with decades of experience.

The five most important RMAs are, in chronological order:

1. The gunpowder revolution
2. The Napoleonic revolution
3. The industrial revolution
4. The airpower revolution
5. The nuclear revolution

In general, these things are true of RMAs:

- They involve new technologies
- Technology is not limited to Weapons
- Strategic competition encourages military innovation
- Innovation in warfare is driven by the basic struggle of defense vs offense
- RMAs are driven by technology, which is self-accelerating. Thus each RMA occurs faster than the previous

The gunpowder revolution

The gunpowder revolution lasted from the 1400s to the 1700s. Prior to this, political power was decentralized amongst many of smaller powers. In Europe this manifested as hundreds of lords guided by the overarching influence of the Catholic church. Defense had the advantage. Sieges could last months or years, allowing the defenders an ever-present option to retreat. By and large, knights were the dominant power. The footmen were composed of untrained peasants forced into service by nobles. Between the 1400s and 1850 saw countries emerge from the disjoint political units.

The Napoleonic revolution

The industrial revolution

The airpower revolution

The nuclear revolution