



College of Europe
Collège d'Europe



Natolin

ECTS CARD

STUDY PROGRAMME(S) / STUDY TRACK(S)

Master of Arts in European Interdisciplinary Studies (Study Track: European Security and Strategy)
Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs (Study Track: European Interdisciplinary Studies - European Security and Strategy)

YEAR

2026-2027

COURSE TITLE

Theories of War and Dimensions of Strategy

SEMESTER

1

PROFESSOR(S)

HEUSER Beatrice

ACADEMIC ASSISTANT(S)

KIVI Emmi-Ilona

COURSE TYPE

Core Course

MAJOR(S)

Not applicable

ECTS CREDITS

4

TEACHING HOURS

20

INDIVIDUAL & GROUP STUDY TIME

80

TUTORIAL(S)

COEFFICIENT

1

LANGUAGE(S)

EN

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The module essentially comprises three tiers. The first foundational tier is an understanding of the causes and aims of war/armed conflict on physical (resources, climate, geography, demography), socio-economic, ideational and structural levels, and their interplay. The second is that of the Rules-Based International Order within which EU Member States operate, while many other States do not or only partially. The third is that of the tools of statecraft that can be applied to deter or resolve international conflicts, including especially but not only the use of armed force, and the complex consequences of their use for the adversary, our own societies (politically, economically, socially) and regionally or even globally. This part requires the introduction to, and the critical understanding and application of the conceptual lexicon of Strategic Studies.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who successfully complete this course will be expected to demonstrate:

1. An appreciation of the causes and aims of wars (armed conflicts):
 - a. existential needs (competition for vital resources);
 - b. greed (economic gains-driven expansionism, *cupiditas dominandi*);
 - c. ideas (missionary zeal and ideological competition);
 - d. structural factors as causes or solutions: world orders;
 - e. structural factors as causes or solutions: alliances, supra-state structures and institutions (the EU, NATO, the ICJ, the ICC) (A1, ESSST3, ESSST4, MATA1.1);
2. An understanding of the basic types of wars and their elements (A1, ESSST3, ESSST4, MATA1.1);

3. A basic understanding of the UN Charter's rules on war and the Laws of Armed Conflict (International Humanitarian Law) and the ability to comment on recent/ongoing conflicts in the light of this (B6, ESSST3, MATA2.4);
4. What is meant by "Strategy", "Grand Strategy", "Military Strategy" (A1, ESSST3, ESSST4, MATA 1.1);
5. An understanding of the respective tools and components of (Grand resp. Military) Strategy (A1, ESSST3, ESSST4, MATA1.1);
6. How these tools relate to each other in Strategy Making (A1, ESSST3, ESSST4, MATA1.1);
7. An understanding of the key role of the Enemy in Strategy Making (A1, ESSST3, ESSST4, MATA1.1);
8. An understanding of problems of rational analysis of Enemy intentions, capabilities, and larger strategic context (A1, ESSST5, MATA1.1);
9. An understanding of the political challenges in humanitarian interventions (B6, ESSST5, MATA 1.7 MATA 2.4);
10. The ability to apply all of the above to the analysis of recent and ongoing armed conflicts (B4, B6, ESSST3, ESSST4, ESSST5, MATA 2.2, MATA 2.4).

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION

Students should read the following:

Heuser, Beatrice: 'Multi-Level Chess: Thinking Differently about Strategy', *Human-Magazin* (July 2026) https://human-magazin.de/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/humanForward_Strategy_englisch.pdf

'The Changing Nature of War', *Human Forward* (Sept. 2025), pp. 97-101. https://human-magazin.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/humanForward_DefendingEuropeEN.pdf

Start reading this which will be one of two main texts:

Heuser, Beatrice: *War: A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022)

... and listen to these podcasts:

Former UN Ambassador and National Security Advisor Sir Mark Lyall Grant <https://www.rusi.org/podcasts/talking-strategy/episode-22-delivering-national-security-strategies>

Professor Olivier Schmidt: <https://www.rusi.org/podcasts/talking-strategy/episode-20-preparing-war-adaptable-forces-and-societies>

TEACHING METHOD(S)

In the first week, lectures with Q&A.

In the second week, seminars with student presentations.

ASSESSMENT METHOD(S)

Assessment will be based on the the following elements:

- **Oral Presentation** (40% of the final mark): in class, about 10-20 mins, supported by Powerpoint presentation, which is also to be distributed as a printed handout with text commentaries and references to literature. The exact format of the exercise (individual or group presentations) will depend on the number of participants.

- **Final exam** (60% of the final mark): 2h, written, digital, closed-book, on-site examination. Students will answer two from a choice of six questions.

COURSE CONTENTS

- Definitions
- Causes and Aims of War: Need, Greed, and Ideas
- Causes of War or Solutions to Conflict: World Orders
- Force Multiplier vs Sovereignty: Alliances
- Typology of Wars
- Elements of War
- The Laws of Armed Conflict (International Humanitarian Law)
- Definitions and the Dimensions of Strategy
- The Enemy: Analytical Framework
- Relating Strategy to the Other “Strategic” Tools of Statecraft (Grand Strategy)
- Classical Concepts of Strategy
 - Maritime Strategy
 - Air Warfare (incl. Missiles, Drones, Space)
 - Asymmetric Warfare
 - Hybrid War
- Problems of Military Interventions in Armed Conflicts
- Lessons of Recent Wars

COURSE MATERIALS (readings and other learning resources/tools)

Readings will be provided (see Course Outline).