Lesson Title: Thinking and Reading Critically

Lesson: 1101/3 (AY-19)
Author: Dr. B. M. Jensen

1. Introduction
How do you analyze political crises, instability, battles, campaigns, and the phenomenon of war broadly defined? A central task of the military profession is to not only understand the full spectrum of conflict, but to anticipate its changing character. The purpose of this lesson is to establish some techniques to that end. Your faculty will introduce you to ways of thinking and reading critically that take into account the inherent challenges of studying conflict.

The lesson consists of three parts. First, read the assigned readings in the prescribed order. Try to distill what Clausewitz means by “critical analysis” and how you can apply it to assess a conflict or evaluate courses of action (i.e., “means employed”). Second, attend a lecture on the topic. Last, attend a seminar on the art of thinking and reading critically in the military profession. Your civilian faculty advisor will assign additional readings no later than 4 August for the seminar. These readings, if assigned, are designed to help you apply Clausewitz’s concept of critical analysis specifically, and the art of reading critically more generally. At the conclusion of seminar, you should have some ideas on how to research conflict, evaluate sources, and develop arguments that you can draw on over the course of your year at Command and Staff College.

2. Student Learning Outcomes
4.1 Recognize the complexity and nature of problems.
4.2 Apply systematic research methods to inform analysis
4.3 Evaluate the data, assumptions, and logic that underlie analysis.
4.4 Analyze cognitive processes that affect decision making.
4.5 Apply insights from history and other academic disciplines to enhance decision making.
4.6 Frame problems critically and creatively
5.2 Apply concepts of change and risk in order to lead organizational innovation and adaptation.
7.1 Evaluate the purpose, quality, and effectiveness of oral and written communications.

3. Supporting Educational Objectives
a. Comprehend critical thinking and decision-making skills needed to implement change and sustain innovation. [CSC 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 5.2; JPME 6b]
b. Examine critical thinking and decision-making as a concept and as a process in terms of the relationship between critical thinking and military operations. [CSC 4.5, 5.2; JPME 6b]
c. Become acquainted with the concept of argumentation. [CSC 7.1]
d. Analyze what is meant by the phrase “5,000 year old mind.” [CSC 4.1, 4.2, 7.1]
e. Classify the parts and purpose of each section of a book. [CSC 4.2, 4.3, 7.1]
f. Evaluate the how best to contextualize a book on a subject you are not familiar with beforehand. [CSC 4.2, 4.3, 4.6, 7.1]
g. Judge the qualifications and source material the author employs to make his argument. [CSC 4.2, 4.3, 7.1]
h. Examine the logic of arguments presented by author to make his case. [CSC 4.3, 7.1]

4. Student Requirements

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<td>Preparation for Seminar:</td>
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<td>Focus on how Clausewitz describes critical analysis as an analytical method a military professional can use to understand battles and campaigns. Do not get bogged down in his military examples. You will cover many of them in War Studies later in the year.</td>
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<td>Pay particular attention to each author’s core argument and how they support their claims as well as how they attack other authors.</td>
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Attend “The Reflective Practitioner: Critical Thinking in the Study of War” Lecture Dr. B. Jensen, (1 hr)

Contribute to Seminar (2 hr)

Supplemental Material:


Below are links to major databases and research centers that study modern conflict. If you have not familiar with them, you should explore them to understand the types of data scholars collect and analyze to understand modern warfare.

• Correlates of War Project (COW): http://www.correlatesofwar.org/
• International Crisis Behavior (ICB): http://sites.duke.edu/icbdata/
• National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism (START): https://www.start.umd.edu/
• Center for Systemic Peace: http://www.systemicpeace.org/
• Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO): https://www.prio.org/

5. Issues for Discussion

a. What are the attributes of critical analysis for Clausewitz?

b. What are inherent challenges associated with analyzing conflict for Clausewitz?

c. Though Clausewitz’s framework for critical analysis is oriented towards assessing battles and campaigns, apply the technique to evaluate the competing arguments in the article, “The Decline of War.” What are the core arguments? What sources do they base their arguments on?
What is the causal logic in each argument? What are key assumptions? How would you test each argument?

6. Relationship to Other Instruction

The entire curriculum at Command and Staff College will challenge you every day to think critically about complex professional and academic issues. You will, in fact, spend a considerable amount of time examining and discussing how important thinking critically is to assimilating new information, making decisions, and conveying your ideas in oral and written forms. The idea is not to teach you what to think but rather how to think. This is essential both for this academic year and for your future assignments.

7. References

a. General Books on Critical Thinking

(b) Political and Social Science Research Methods (Security Studies)
(c) Historical Research Methods (War Studies)
(1) Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995)
(11) Harvey J. Graff, "The Shock of the 'New' (Histories)': Social Science Histories and Historical Literacies", *Social Science History* 25.4 (2001) 483-533
Marine Corps University / Command and Staff College
Think, Decide, and Communicate: Skills for the Military Professional


Lesson Hours:

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<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Guest Lecturer</th>
<th>Seminar Discussion</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Practical Application*</th>
<th>Staff Ride/ Battle Study*</th>
<th>Evaluation/Test</th>
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JPME Data (JPME Phase I):

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