

Sean McFate

Research Interests

Irregular Warfare, US National Security Strategy and Foreign Policy, Great Power Competition, Mercenaries and the Privatization of War, Deterrence Theory, Grand Strategy and Hegemonic Victory, Future Warfare

Education

- Ph.D. London School of Economics and Political Science 2012**
Doctorate in International Relations with a focus on Security Studies
Advisor: Christopher Coker
Dissertation: Durable Disorder: The Return of Private Armies and the Emergence of Neomedievalism
Grants: Smith Richardson Foundation (\$50,000), Departmental grants (\$25,000)
- M.P.P Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government 2006**
Master of Public Policy, concentrating in International Security Policy
Advisor: Ash Carter, Graham Allison
Honors: White House Fellowship Finalist
- B.A. Brown University 1992**
Double major in History and Religious Studies
US Army ROTC Scholarship and Distinguished Military Graduate (top 15% nationally)
Note: I enrolled in Providence College because ROTC is banned at Brown

Experience

- Professor College of International Security Affairs (CISA) at the National Defense University, Washington, DC 2009-present**
- Promoted from Assistant to Associate Professor 2014
 - Promoted from Associate to Full Professor 2019
 - Taught 11 graduate courses (more than any other faculty member):
 1. Strategic Thought
 2. Power, Ideology and Legitimacy [political philosophy]
 3. Introduction to Security Studies
 4. Politics and Strategy in Irregular Warfare
 5. Small Wars Lost and Found
 6. Warriors of the Mind: Strategic Influence in the 21st Century
 7. The American Way of War
 8. Origins of Conflict and War
 9. Policy Analysis & Critical Thinking [Research Methods]
 10. Strategic Leadership Foundations Course [Phase I]
 11. Strategic Advising For Contemporary Challenges

- Courses Developed and Directed:
 1. Strategic Thought [core course]
 2. Strategic Leadership Foundations Course [core that I overhauled in 2016]
 3. Warriors of the Mind: Strategic Influence in the 21st Century [elective]
- Courses Directed:
 1. Strategic Thought [core]
 2. Strategic Leadership Foundations Course [core]
 3. Introduction to Security Studies [core]
 4. Warriors of the Mind: Strategic Influence in the 21st Century [elective]
- As a core Course Director, I supervised 7 faculty members on two campuses: Ft McNair and Ft Bragg
- Supervised 66 Master thesis students on 20,000 word theses
- Consistently receive among the highest student evaluations at CISA
- Sabbatical 2017-2018:
 - Visiting Fellow, Changing Character of War Program, Pembroke College, Oxford University
 - Researched and wrote: *Mercenaries and War: Understanding Private Warfare Today*. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2019).
 - Field research: Switzerland, Italy, Israel
 - Grants received: \$35k Minerva Foundation, \$16k Israel Institute
- Supported CISA administration for PAEJE visit 2016 and Middle States accreditation process
- Served on the Sabbatical Committee [NDU level], Admissions Committee, Academic Promotion Committees, Hiring Committees, and Director of the Curriculum Review (2009)
- Consultant to Department of Defense, Department of State, and the intelligence community
- Hold a TS-SCI clearance

Adjunct Professor **Georgetown University, Walsh School of Foreign Service, Washington, DC** **2013-present**

- Teach in the Security Studies Program (Masters degree), evening classes
- Developed and teach: The Art of War and Grand Strategy (SEST-675)
- Teach 2 graduate electives:
 1. US National Security Policy (SEST-510)
 2. The Art of War and Grand Strategy (SEST-675)
- *Ad hoc* instructor for core courses:
 1. Theory and Practice of Security (SEST-500)
 2. Grand Strategy and Military Operations (SEST-501)
 3. Research Seminar (SEST-710)

Adjunct Professor **Syracuse University, Maxwell School, Washington DC Program** **2021-present**

- Teach in the Masters degree program, evening classes at CSIS think tank
- Developed and teach core course: 21st Century Strategy (PAI 700 -M004)

Senior Fellow **The Atlantic Council, Washington, DC** **2012-2023**

- Unpaid, non-residential position
- Serving expert at Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security and the Africa Centre
- Contributor to multiple short reports on US National Security Strategy and Foreign Policy, African Security
- Working on independent research for the Council's "Strategic Foresight Initiative" on future warfare
- Conduct press interviews, host multimedia events, and interact with donors

Adjunct Social Scientist RAND Corporation, Arlington, VA 2011-2016

- Contributor to 12 reports on US foreign policy and national security strategy, geopolitical threat analysis, defense structure
- Major contributor to *Out of the Shadows: The Health and Well-Being of Private Contractors Working in Conflict Environments*, (Santa Monica: RAND Press, 2013).
- Brief senior policy makers and flag-level officers on issues pertaining to irregular warfare, future of war, and national security strategy

Schwartz Fellow The New America Foundation, Washington, DC 2008-2009

- Paid, residential Senior Fellow equivalent
- Developed a theory of “Durable Disorder” to understand an emerging paucity global security governance
- Hosted multimedia events and interacted with press and donors
- Supported fundraising efforts and development campaigns

Associate Booz Allen Hamilton, McLean, VA 2008-2009

- Led a three-person team that did curriculum development and short course delivery at NDU
- Developed and managed a three-week course “Whole of Government Planning” for the Civilian Response Corps, managed by the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations
- Assisted the development of the Civilian Response Corps’s two-week “Foundations Course” on interagency functions and operations at the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute
- Instructor at the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute for Provisional Reconstruction Teams deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan

Independent Consultant US Institute of Peace, Washington, DC 2007-2009

- Helped found the organization’s Security Sector Governance Center
- Developed the Institute’s conceptual framework regarding Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) on how a state can reestablish its monopoly of force post-conflict
- Recommended project organization and priorities, budget programming, and outreach strategy
- Helped design and deliver short course on post-conflict reconstruction for the US interagency
- Published 2 *Special Reports* on conflict management and organized 4 conferences (100 people each)

Program Manager DynCorp International 2004-2006

- Developed and managed bespoke security programs in the most challenges places in Africa for US government contracts
- Post-Civil War Liberia:
 - Safely demobilized war lords, Charles Taylor’s corrupt army, and raised a new army and MoD “from scratch” to govern the failed state
 - The program was much more successful than US efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan with substantially less resources
 - Managed 400 personnel (75% Liberians, 15% third country nationals, 10% US) in conflict conditions
 - Managed a \$10m budget (State Dept PKO money)

- Innovated new techniques for Security Force Assistance. Example: I designed a human rights vetting process for new recruits that the International Crisis Group said was: “a notable success – the best, several experts said, they had witnessed anywhere in the world” (*Liberia: Uneven Progress In Security Sector Reform Africa Report N°148*, 13 January 2009)
- Worked closely with the Liberian Minister of Defense, US Ambassador and Country Team, United Nations (UNMIL), multiple NGOs, multinational companies in the area (e.g., Firestone, Mittal Steel), local firms, and Liberian civil society
- Authored the first draft of Liberia’s National Defense Strategy for the government
- Post-Genocide Burundi:
 - Program Manager that prevented an imminent genocide in the Great Lakes region
 - Professionalized the elite Presidential Guard to protect the President and other high-level officials from assassination by extremist groups hiding in the eastern Congo (Kivus)
 - Interfaced directly with President of Burundi and senior US diplomats. Managed 6 employees, a 110 person program, and \$1.1m budget in conflict conditions
- Civil War Sudan:
 - Assisted planning the Security Sector Transformation program of the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in South Sudan
 - Negotiated directly with SPLA leadership in Juba, South Sudan, in conflict conditions
 - Planned a comprehensive support operation for refugees of the Darfur genocide in West Sudan, but the US government chose not to fund the contract
- Eastern Europe:
 - Conducted legal arms transfers from Eastern Europe to Africa

Policy Adviser Amnesty International USA 2000-2003
London, New York City, Washington DC

- Member of the Military, Security, and Police Working Group that helped set organization policy
- Advised executive staff on human rights, armed conflict, and civil-military relationship issues
- Briefed members of Congress and senior policy makers, worked across the NGO community, and met with high-end donors
- Helped develop Amnesty International’s concept of “Humanitarian Space”

Officer US Army, Fort Liberty (Bragg) and Germany 1992-2000

- Served mainly as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division under LTC Stanley McChrystal, COL John Abizaid, and COL David Petraeus
- Platoon Leader of a 38-man paratrooper platoon and 135-man paratrooper company in the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division capable of no-notice deployment anywhere in the world within 18 hours
- Operations Officer (S3) for a 3500-soldier Patriot Missile Brigade in Germany and participated in NATO operations
- ‘Battle Captain’ for Joint Task Force *Noble Safeguard*, a no-notice emergency deployment to northern Israel of 200+ personnel, 24 Patriot missiles, and heavy equipment to defend against Iraqi SCUD-B missile attacks in 1998
- Graduated several elite training schools such as Airborne, Jump Master, and the Jungle Expert Warfare School in Panama
- Left as a Captain.

Non-Fiction Books and Monographs

The New Rules of War: How America Can Win—Against Russia, China, and Other Threats (New York: HarperCollins, 2019). Translated into 11 languages. Named a “Book of the Year 2019” by the *Economist* and *The Times* (London). On multiple Commander’s reading lists in the US and UK.

Goliath: Why the West Doesn’t Win Wars. And What We Need to Do About It (London: Penguin, 2019). NB: This is the same book as *New Rules* but slightly modified for a European audience.

Mercenaries and War: Understanding Private Warfare Today (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2019).

The Modern Mercenary: Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Building Better Armies: An Insider’s Account of Liberia (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, 2013).

Fiction Books

Note: All novels translated into 7 languages.

High Treason: A Novel (New York: William Morrow, 2020).

Deep Black: A Tom Locke Novel (New York: William Morrow, 2017).

Shadow War: A Tom Locke Novel (New York: William Morrow, 2016)

Academic Articles, Book Chapters and Book Reviews

Foreword. Arduino, Alessandro. *Money for Mayhem: Mercenaries, Private Military Companies, Drones, and the Future of War*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

“SOF-Like? The Rise of Private Security Companies,” in *American Special Operations Forces in the Modern World*, eds. Stephen M. Grenier and Michael P. Noonan (Washington DC: Georgetown Univ Press, 2023).

“The U.S.’s Maginot Mentality,” in *The Future Faces of Irregular Warfare: Great Power Confrontation in the 21st Century*, eds. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Varsha Koduvayur (Washington DC: Irregular Warfare Center, 2023).

“Mercenaries and Privatized Warfare: Current Trends and Developments.” Prepared for the United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations, 2020).

“The Origins and Evolution of Private Warfare,” eds. Joakim Berndtsson and Christopher Kinsey, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Outsourcing Security: The Role of the Market in 21st Century Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2016).

“Private Security Companies and Security Sector Reform,” eds. Rita Abrahamsen and Anna Leander, *Handbook of Private Security Studies* (London: Routledge, 2015).

“Law and Order: Tools for Building State Protection Capacity,” *Policy Analysis Brief* (Muscatine, IA: Stanley Foundation, December 2013).

“There’s a New Sheriff in Town: DDR-SSR and the Monopoly of Force,” in *The Monopoly of Force*, ed. Melanne Civic and Michael Miklaucic (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2011): 213-232.

With John Blaney and Jacques Paul Klein, “The Larger Lessons for Peacebuilding: What Worked in Liberia.” *Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief* (Muscatine, Iowa: Stanley Foundation Press, 2010).

“From Lawless to Lawful: DDR-SSR Linkages in Conflict-Affected Countries,” *US Institute of Peace Special Report* 238 (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2010).

Book review of *Privatising Peace: A Corporate Adjunct to United Nations Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Operations* by Malcolm Hugh Patterson, *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, June 2010.

“Red Star Rising in Africa: Strategic Implications of China’s Expansion into Africa,” in *Crossroads Africa: Perspectives on US-China-Africa Security Affairs*, eds. Robert Tomes and Angela Sapp (Washington, DC: Council for Emerging National Security Affairs, 2009): 106-116.

“From Policy to Practice: Security Sector Reform in Liberia,” in *The United Nations, Past, Present, and Future: Proceedings of the 2007 Francis Marion University UN Symposium*, eds. Scott Kaufman and Alissa Warters (Hauppauge NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2009): 15-35.

Book review of *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace*, by Chris Alden, Daniel Large, Ricardo Soares De Oliveira (eds.), *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, March 2009.

Book review of *Guide for Participants in Peace, Stability, and Relief Operations*, by Robert Perito (ed.), *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, summer 2009.

“US Africa Command: Next Step or Next Stumble?” *African Affairs* 107 (2008): 111–120.

“Outsourcing the Making of Militaries: DynCorp International as Sovereign Agent,” *Review of African Political Economy* 118 (2008): 645-654.

“Lessons Learned from Liberia: Security Sector Reform,” in *International Peace-Building for the 21st Century: The Tswalu Protocol and Background Papers (UK Whitehall Report)*, eds. John Mackinlay, Terence McNamee and Greg Mills (London: Royal United Services Institute Publications, 2008): 156-169.

“Securing the Future: A Primer on Security Sector Reform in Conflict Countries,” *US Institute of Peace Special Report* 209 (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2008).

“US Africa Command: A New Strategic Paradigm?” *Military Review* (January/February 2008): 10-22.

Book review of *War Plc: The Rise of the New Corporate Mercenary*, by Stephen Armstrong Faber, *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, December 2008.

“Lessons Learned From Liberia: Security Sector Reform in a Failed State,” *Royal United Services Institute Journal* 153 (2008): 62-66.

“The Art and Aggravation of Vetting in Post-Conflict Environments,” *Military Review* (July/August 2007): 79-87.

“My Lai Massacre” and “Andersonville Trial,” in *War Crimes and Trials: A Historical Encyclopedia, from 1850 to the Present*, eds. Larry Hufford and Elizabeth Pugliese (Austin: ABC-CLIO, 2005).

Written Commentary (Selected)

"Sneaky War: How to Win the World Without Fighting," *The Irregular Warfare Initiative*, West Point, NY, 5 Sep 2023.

"Prigozhin's Real Legacy: The Mercenary Blueprint," *New York Times*, Sep 3, 2023.

"Die Macht der Manipulation," *Der Pragmaticus* (Austria), Aug 18, 2023.

"Wie man Söldner besiegt," *Der Pragmaticus* (Austria), May 12, 2023.

"How to Defeat Russia's Mercenaries," *Newsweek*, Mar 6, 2023.

"The Real Winners of the 2024 Election Could be China and Russia," *Time*, Dec 21, 2022.

"Irregular warfare will win 'strategic competition,'" *The Hill*, Dec 4, 2022.

"To Win Wars, Cut the U.S. Defense Budget," *Merion-West*, May 9, 2022.

"Why it's smart to slash the US defense budget," *The Hill*, Apr 24, 2022.

"How to deal with Putin's mercenaries," *The Hill*, Apr 18, 2022.

"The Mercenaries Behind the Bucha Massacre," *The Wall Street Journal*, Apr 12, 2022.

"Learning All the Wrong Lessons." *Defense Procurement International*, Q1 2022.

"How to keep Russia from winning in Ukraine: Get sneaky," *The Hill*, Feb 27, 2022.

"[La privatisation des conflits aura bien lieu](#)," *Éléments* magazine, Jan 31, 2022

"Ukraine's 'Back to the Future' scenario: Deploying troops is a Cold War solution" *The Hill*, Jan 25, 2022.

"Commoditising conflict: What the rise of mercenaries implies for warfare." *TRT World*, Oct 30, 2021.

"America's unfortunate 9/11 legacy: Low strategic IQ." *The Hill*, Sept 11, 2021.

"Shifting the blame: How the Pentagon lost Afghanistan." *The Hill*, Aug 17, 2021.

"What the Return of Mercenaries Means for the World Politics," *Politics Today*, May 18, 2021.

"Leaving Afghanistan: Is it victory or defeat?" *The Hill*, April 15, 2021.

"The F-35 tells everything that's broken in the Pentagon," *The Hill*, March 3, 2021 (nearly 7,000 shares).

"Trump's pardons complete the wrongs of 'Blackwater'," *The Hill*, Dec 21, 2020

"Irregular warfare with China, Russia: Ready or not, it's coming — if not already here," *The Hill*, Oct 11, 2020

"The right debate question for Trump, Biden: How do we fight our next war?" *The Hill*, Sept 28, 2020

"Venezuela Shows How Mercenaries Have Become a Global Security Threat," *Washington Post*, May 14, 2020.

"Billionaire Warlords: Why the Future is Medieval." *BigThink.com* February 16, 2019.

"Outsourcing War to Mercenaries Is a Lousy Idea: Privatizing war distorts warfare in shocking ways, and the world is not ready for it." *The Daily Beast*, January 27, 2019.

"Technology Doesn't Win Wars. Why the US Pretends It Does." *BigThink.com* January 27, 2019.

"The Return of Mercenaries, Non-State Conflict, and More Predictions for the Future of Warfare." *Medium.com*, January 22, 2019.

"From Pavarotti to Prisoners of War, the Surprising Relationship Between Opera and War." *Quartz.com*, January 22, 2019.

"Forget Iran. Russia is the real threat to the US in the Middle East," *CNBC*, May 22, 2018.

"I Was a Mercenary. Trust Me: Erik Prince's Plan Is Garbage," *Politico*, Aug 31, 2017.

"The 'Blackwater 2.0' Plan for Afghanistan," *The Atlantic*, Jul 17, 2017.

"America's Addiction to Mercenaries," *The Atlantic*, Aug 12, 2016.

"We need an American Foreign Legion," *Washington Post*, May 19, 2016.

"How the U.S. Can Defeat Putin's Shadow War," *The Daily Beast*, May 13, 2016.

"10 Things You Don't Know About Mercenaries," *Military.com*, May 12, 2016.

"Rising Use of Mercenaries Heralds World with More War," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, February 15, 2016.

"The Return of Mercenaries," *Aeon.com*, January 25, 2016.

"How to Take Over a Small Country in 10 Easy Steps," *War on the Rocks*, May 13, 2015. (2nd most read article for WOTR 2015, 11th most read article in history of *War on the Rocks*)

"Reining in Soldiers of Fortune," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2015.

"Secrets of modern mercenaries: Inside the rise of private armies," *Salon.com*, January 25, 2015.

"Killing People Overseas Will Always Be a Growth Industry," *Vice Magazine*, December 4, 2014.

"The Blackwater Verdict Signals America's Growing Dependence on Wall Street to Wage War," *The New Republic*, October 24, 2014

"Raising an Army: Ten Rules," *War on the Rocks*, July 14, 2014.

"I Built an African Army: Now Here's What It Will Take to Build Afghanistan's" *Foreign Policy Magazine*, January 7, 2010.

The Musical Mercenary Blog. <http://musicalmerc.blogspot.com/>. A blog about the confluence of opera and war, and featured on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, August 5, 2007.

Media (Selected)

New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, CNN's Amanpour, MSNBC Morning Joe, FOX, Fox and Friends, BBC World, Deutsche Welle, al Jazeera, NPR (Morning Edition, All Things Considered, Diane Rehm Show, "On Point" with Tom Ashbrook, Here and Now), Sky News, The Economist, The Atlantic, AP News, Reuters, McClatchy, The New Republic, Foreign Policy, Politico, Daily Beast, Voice of America, The Hill, New York Post, Salon, Vice/HBO, The Discovery Channel, and American Heroes Channel, War on the Rocks, Pragmaticus, Éléments magazine, and other international outlets.

I maintain my own YouTube channel called [The Art of War](#) about strategic thought.

Referee

Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Yale University Press, Stanford University Press, Cornell University Press, Routledge Press, RAND Press, Cambridge Journal of International Affairs, Journal of Global Security Studies, Stability: International Journal of Security and Development, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, Millennium: Journal of International Studies, Foreign Policy Analysis, Smith Richardson Foundation, National Defense University Press, African Security Review, US Department of Defense

Organization Membership

International Studies Association
American Political Science Association
International Thriller Writers Association

References

Dr. William Olson

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