

# MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC SECURITY STUDIES

**National Defense University | College of International Security Affairs**



**U.S. ARMY JOHN F. KENNEDY SPECIAL WARFARE CENTER AND SCHOOL**  
*The Special Operations Center of Excellence*



# MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC SECURITY STUDIES

## **Illuminating.**

“The most enjoyable part of this experience is the in-class discussion and debate on contentious global issues. Prepare to have your assumptions questioned and your perceptions challenged. I gained a theoretical and historical foundation in strategic security studies from a multidisciplinary faculty, strengthening my mind for future complex problems.”

—MSG Bearden '22





Commanding General  
& Commandant  
Brigadier General  
Guillaume N. Beaurpere



Deputy to the Commanding General  
Ms. Erin Thede



Command Sergeant Major  
Command Sergeant Major  
Lionel A. Strong



Command Chief Warrant Officer  
Chief Warrant Officer 5  
Steven C. Finney



We owe the SOF community  
**the best possible education,**

leadership, and mentorship we have to offer.  
The Master of Arts in Strategic Security Studies  
delivers on our promise to produce a resilient,  
culturally intelligent, and all-domain capable force.



**GUILLAUME N. BEAURPERE**  
**BRIGADIER GENERAL, USA**  
COMMANDING GENERAL

# National Defense University

The National Defense University (NDU) educates joint warfighters and other national security leaders in critical thinking and the creative application of military power to inform national strategy and globally integrated operations, under conditions of disruptive change, in order to prevail in war, peace, and competition.

NDU consists of five colleges, including the:

- College of International Security Affairs (CISA).
- College of Information and Cyberspace.
- Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy.
- Joint Forces Staff College.
- National War College.





# The College of International Security Affairs

In coordination with the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, the College of International Security Affairs offers the Master of Arts in Strategic Security Studies at Fort Bragg.



MASTER OF ARTS IN  
STRATEGIC SECURITY STUDIES

# NDU and CISA Leadership



President  
National Defense University  
Lieutenant General  
Michael T. Plehn, M.S., M.A.



Chancellor  
College of International  
Security Affairs  
Ambassador (Ret.)  
Greta Holtz, M.A., M.S.



Dean of Faculty and Academics  
College of International  
Security Affairs  
R. E. Burnett, Ph.D.



Dean of Administration  
College of International  
Security Affairs  
Troy Glassman, Ph.D.



Dean of Students  
College of International  
Security Affairs  
Colonel  
Wayne R. Zuber, M.S.







## Tailored to fit the unique needs of the **special operations community.**

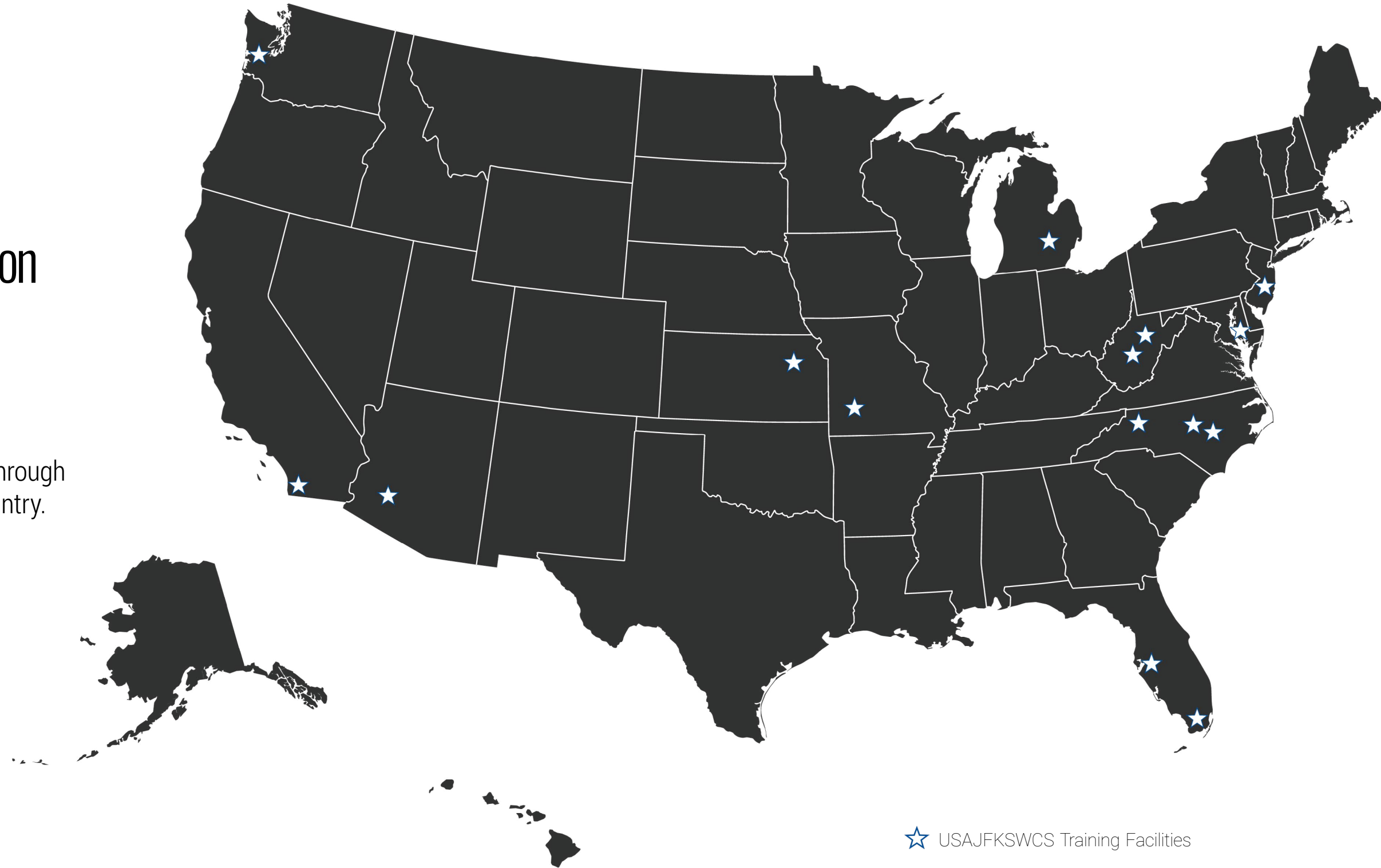
“The Master of Arts in Strategic Security Studies is the ultimate SOF think tank. At no other time in my career will I be able to interact with and discuss past, present, and future events with such a diverse group of classmates. The program is incredibly difficult, eye-opening, outside the box, and worth it.”

—SFC Trotta '22



# Partnerships enable collaboration **within and outside the operational force.**

Students experience diverse learning opportunities through strong ties to academic institutions across the country.



★ USAJFKSWCS Training Facilities





## The Triangle Institute for Security Studies extends your network across **North Carolina's Triangle Region.**

An ongoing partnership with the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) provides students a unique opportunity to network and attend events in the Triangle Region.



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL



**NC Central**  
UNIVERSITY



## The alumni network spans across the world.

With 503 graduates, the Master of Arts in Strategic Security Studies prepares senior leaders to think and operate effectively in a dynamic, complex, and unpredictable international security environment.

CISA **graduates** form a network that includes more than 1,945 graduates from 108 countries. **[Click here](#)** to learn more about CISA podcasts, publications, panel discussions, alumni events, and more.

*[CISA Recent Engagement Events](#)*

*[Eagle Eye Newsletter](#)*





# Transformative.

“Don’t miss out. Give yourself this opportunity to get very smart very fast. You will gain a deeper understanding of the world—history, global relationships, and what motivates people. Armed with this new knowledge, government professionals can make better decisions for the nation and help shape any environment more effectively.”

—Ms. Beal '23



# MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC SECURITY STUDIES

## OVERVIEW

This unique program draws on diverse experiences to emphasize conceptual and strategic points of view, particularly in the context of irregular warfare and strategic competition.







## MISSION

The mission of the Master of Arts in Strategic Security Studies program is to prepare select commissioned, warrant, and noncommissioned officers, along with interagency personnel and foreign partners, to address the challenges of the international security environment.

The intellectual diversity of the students and academic strength of the faculty are second to none. The faculty have high-level strategic advising experience, as well as expertise in history, anthropology, political science, international relations, conflict resolution, and linguistics.



# MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC SECURITY STUDIES

# 40

Students per year are selected in the rigorous Master of Arts in Strategic Security Studies program.

The curriculum evolves to address current events—including political perturbations in Venezuela, the Russian-Ukrainian War, and the intensification of disinformation campaigns by our adversaries—while embracing lessons in strategy, power, and conflict.

Students have opportunities for in-depth exploration of a wide range of relevant topics, including—

- The roles of North Atlantic Treaty Organization and special operations in integrated deterrence in the United States European Command area of responsibility.
- The dynamics of China as a pacing competitor in the United States Indo-Pacific Command and United States Africa Command areas of operation.

- The challenges of intelligence during the Cold War.
- The importance of the maritime domain in great power statecraft.
- The dynamics of regional geopolitics and substate violence in the United States Southern Command area of operations.
- The global nexus of economics, corruption, organized crime, and terrorism.

Students read classics of political and military thought, such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Carl von Clausewitz, and study contemporary thinkers like John Mearsheimer and Joseph Nye.





# FACULTY AND STAFF

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**Peter Eltsov, Ph.D.**

Chair and Associate Professor

**Carolyn Davidson, M.A., LL.M., M.Phil.**

Assistant Professor

**Christopher Bassford, Ph.D.**

Professor

**Christopher Marsh, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor

**Craig Deare, Ph.D.**

Professor

**David Hadley, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor

**Holger Moroff, M.E.S., M.A.**

Visiting Professor

**Lindsey DeCoursey, M.B.A.**

Academic Specialist

**Melanie Eckner**

Writing Coach

**Russell Burgos, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor

**Spencer Meredith, Ph.D.**

Professor





# FACULTY AND ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS



## Medical Outreach Provides Life-Saving Care

MSG Briones '17 (pictured left), chief instructor for the Civil Affairs culmination exercise at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, participates in a medical outreach project in central Peru.

## What Drives You to Work?

MAJ Spence '20 appears in the 4th Psychological Operations Group's **first episode** of a new docuseries exploring the character, innovations, and lifestyles of special operations forces practitioners from across the Psychological Operations Regiment.

## A Departure from the Norm

SGM Aryana '19 is featured in the article **Green Berets Hone their Destruction of Enemy Air Defenses Skills for a Peer Conflict.**



# Faculty Publications

Click [here](#) to see recent scholarly publications by the College of International Security Affairs faculty.





- ▶ The interdisciplinary faculty and strict class enrollment caps enable students to share perspectives, build teams, and extend the global special operations forces network across branches, services, agencies, and countries.

## Eligibility Requirements

Officers, noncommissioned officers, warrant officers, and civilians on assignment to—or slated to return to—a special operations organization may apply. For more information, visit [socoe.libguides.com/edu/NDU](https://socoe.libguides.com/edu/NDU).

## Location

The fully accredited, full-time Master of Arts in Strategic Security Studies program is located at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

## Commitment

The academic year runs from August to early June. Students incur a service obligation upon completion of the program.



# ACADEMIC PROSPECTUS



U.S. ARMY JOHN F. KENNEDY SPECIAL WARFARE CENTER AND SCHOOL  
— *The Special Operations Center of Excellence* —



# CORE COURSES

## Strategic Leadership Foundation Course

NDU 6000 | 4 credits

This course provides students with a common intellectual foundation essential for success at NDU and CISA, and longer-term success as senior leaders. The course provides—

- A foundation for developing the skills for creative and critical thinking.
- An overview of the principles, skills, and challenges associated with strategic leadership.
- An introduction to the strategic aspects of joint professional military education.

## Policy Analysis and Critical Thinking

CISA 6744 | 3 credits

This course introduces students to critical thinking, as well as writing and research techniques used to answer questions in the fields of international relations, security studies, and policy analysis. Students learn to—

- Read published research.
- Collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data.
- Communicate research results.
- Distinguish between empirical, ideological, theoretical, and ethical questions.
- Formulate research questions.
- Construct arguments.

Students use these foundational principles in guided thesis work to develop a strong research problem statement, apply and evaluate sources of evidence, and apply analytical frameworks to research questions while understanding the basics of argumentation and critical thinking in published research. Students then examine how these skills apply to policy development and analysis.







**Strategic Thought**  
CISA 6901 | 3 credits

This course is designed to teach students to think in a strategic, disciplined, critical, and creative manner about the geopolitical environment through a focus on the evolution of strategic thinking—in both theoretical and practical terms. The course integrates the disciplines of history, political science, and international relations to form a coherent approach that provides the conceptual framework needed to analyze complex strategic problems. Students examine the elements of strategy, grand strategy, and military strategy, and apply them to four case studies. Students use this knowledge to—

- Think strategically and critically about all types of warfare.
- Understand the political nature of war and the relationship between strategy and politics.
- Differentiate between strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war while understanding their interrelationship.
- Comprehend the fundamental theories of strategy.

This course teaches students how to apply these concepts to complex, ambiguous, “wicked” problems.

**Introduction to Security Studies**  
CISA 6920 | 3 credits

This course examines fundamental questions that are at the core of global politics and security—

- Why do actors fight and why do they cooperate?
- What do we mean by security?
- What counts as security threat?
- What makes strategy successful?

The course explores the history and theories of security studies, examines the actors and structures within the global system, and surveys a selection of current global security challenges. The course introduces theoretical approaches used to analyze dimensions of the contemporary security environment and major issues in international security studies. Students—

- Evaluate national and international security at a theoretical and practical level.
- Determine the dimensions of the security environment and prioritize security challenges.
- Analyze the use of force to address those challenges.

**Power, Ideology, and Legitimacy**  
CISA 6929 | 3 credits

This course provides an overview of how philosophers and scholars have looked at the proper role of government, the source of power and authority, and the relationship between the people and the government. The course traces different interpretations of these concepts from classical antiquity to the modern world, examining how theorists have applied ideas of power and legitimacy to their prescriptions for government. This is a core course in political philosophy that examines primary texts in ethics, philosophy, politics, and theology, as well as secondary scholarly analysis and application of those texts. Students analyze the proper sources of power and authority, and the impacts of beliefs, cultures, ideas, and religious traditions on the exercise of power. After acquiring a core foundation in these principles and theories, students examine how modern nation-states and non-state actors use power and legitimacy to meet contemporary challenges. Students also develop a sophisticated set of analytical tools to critically evaluate contemporary political controversies and assess the role and impact of competing and divergent views of political society on current global affairs.



# ENRICHMENT PROGRAM AND ELECTIVES



Core Courses (continued)

### Themes in American Foreign Relations

CISA 6906 | 3 credits

This seminar focuses on the history of American Foreign Relations with a view to informing analysis of current foreign policy dilemmas and the nature of strategic competition. Students examine—

- Historical continuity and change in American strategy and statecraft.
- How the U.S. has managed competition and conflict in the past.

Through discussion of successive U.S. administrations, the class tackles—

- Leadership and the concept of grand strategy.
- U.S. engagement in local, regional, and global dynamics.
- Major challenges to democracy, stability, and security.
- The nature and evolving character of irregular warfare.

The main deliverable is the development of an essay that illuminates a contemporary challenge by applying knowledge of a historical theme, event, strategy, or leader.

## Enrichment Program

### Triangle Institute for Security Studies

Enrichment Program | CISA 6001 | 1 credit

This program provides a unique and unrivaled opportunity for students to enrich their learning by participating in events held at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, and Duke University. The Triangle Institute for Security Studies Enrichment Program promotes interdisciplinary cooperation among faculty, graduate students, and the public by drawing on a large network of resources and research in the field of national and international security. This program encourages rigorous academic debate on and exposure to a wide range of research and opinion while allowing students to connect and interact with academic experts. Students are required to attend a minimum of three events per semester during the academic year.

## Electives

### Special Operations Hybrid Warfare

CISA 6035 | 3 credits

This course addresses the role of special operations forces in full-spectrum conflicts and great power competition. The curriculum encourages students to analyze political warfare and the emerging security environment by evaluating the core concepts and practices used by state and non-state actors within political, economic, and social settings. The course provides the analytical frameworks required to operate within the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational environments. Students examine the special operations paradigm within the competition space that is defined by political warfare—more specifically, they identify and evaluate special operations forces approaches to the human domain.

### Comparative Political Analysis

CISA 6750 | 3 credits

This course analyzes the fundamental concepts and processes of governance as they relate to the study of irregular warfare and counter-terrorism. This course examines governance based on political regime type while providing analytical frameworks and theories that define what should be examined and how. Additionally, this course dissects all elements of national power, democracy, nationalism, development, and corruption. Students use critical thinking to—

- Understand the processes and behaviors of political systems.
- Research and evaluate the connections between key attributes of governance.
- Examine the fundamental relationship between the state and society as it relates to security policy and strategic decision making.

Throughout the course, students identify commonalities and differences between political systems and their influence on domestic conditions, international relations, and civil-military relations in the context of irregular warfare and counterterrorism.



# Electives

## Strategy: Brand-X

CISA 6756 | 3 credits

This course looks at varied and unfamiliar ideas about how the world works. The course emphasizes the difficult parts of strategy—so much so that it may often appear to suggest our concept of strategy is a meaningless delusion—and asks, “Why is it hard?” and “What is the nature of the difficulties?” And we mean the word nature quite literally. We see a great deal of pattern, design, and what certainly looks like planning and strategy in nature, including events we instinctively label success and failure. Nature is presumably unconscious and thus cannot be strategic in the sense that we usually mean when we use the term strategic. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to apply the “if it looks like a duck” approach. That is, it seems reasonable to suggest that if something looks like strategy, then maybe it can teach us something about strategy.

## Force & Statecraft: Empires

CISA 6902 | 3 credits

This course presents an opportunity to examine the role of imperial states in the creation and maintenance of international system stability. Especially since September 11, 2001, but actually since the very origins of the American republic, there has been a great deal of talk and speculation about the existence and future of an “American empire.” This course provides students with a chance to compare America’s world role to some provocative historical precedents.

## Economic Statecraft: Political Economy for Security Practitioners

CISA 6751 | 3 credits

This course serves as an introduction to the economic statecraft of great powers by building on the foundations that students developed in previous courses. This course explores the theoretical terms and concepts comprising the geoeconomics field by addressing the issues of political economy and security. Students analyze how nation-states—and especially great powers—use economic instruments of power to advance their strategic goals. Students also analyze and synthesize the relationship of military and grand strategy to economic strategy while assessing ways rising powers use economic power as a substitute for military power. Additionally, students analyze the potential and limitations of economic coercion within great power competition and associated proxy/irregular wars.

## Origins of Conflict and War

CISA 6903 | 3 credits

This course promotes understanding of the various ways in which scholars—historians, anthropologists, and political scientists—have addressed the origins of conflict and war.

The course—

- Establishes a basic understanding of what war and conflict are and how they differ from other forms of political violence.
- Examines historical trends and discusses fundamental theories while studying specific cases.
- Explores the tension between social science models based on theory and general principles and more particularistic case-focused explanations.

The aim of this course is to study some of the central questions of the conflict and war studies: Is war inevitable or is it an invention that one day can be replaced by another mechanism for solving conflicts? Are there regularities in the causes for conflict and war in human history?

## Conflict Resolution Strategies

CISA 6973 | 3 credits

This course takes an interdisciplinary approach that examines the conflicts between individuals, groups, and nations by analyzing political, economic, and social factors, as well as psychological, religious, and international influences on how people understand various interpersonal interactions. Through the lens of irregular warfare, this course focuses on the origins, characteristics, and termination of conflict, highlighting decision making and use of military capabilities at all levels of war and policy. The curriculum outlines practical ways to target identities and interests to find common ground between rival parties to facilitate dialogue and compromise. This course uses case studies to analyze principles behind reducing violence and creating peace within the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational environment. Students learn to—

- Identify motives and unspoken interest.
- Interpret communication signals.
- Present accurate messages and adapt to problems as they arise.
- Use critical thinking to analyze interests of participants and processes for conflict resolution.
- Research and evaluate connections between political, social, and economic systems as they relate to security interests.
- Apply conflict resolution techniques.







**Political Corruption**

CISA 6034 | 2 credits

Political corruption has been a ubiquitous phenomenon at all times and in all political systems, whether in democracies or autocracies. Many corruption cases in recent decades have been linked to questions of party, campaign, and political finance. Populists exploit the narrative of corrupt elites versus the pure people all over the world. Perspectives on the common good, responsive politics, and constituency service are utilized to delimit the concept theoretically. This seminar focuses on political corruption from comparative and international relations perspectives. Students explore its history, causes, effects, and efforts to combat corruption. Special attention is given to the comparative analysis of corruption cases and international efforts to fight corruption as part of global “good governance” strategies. Governments in small and fragile countries are especially susceptible to being pressured or bribed by strong state and non-state actors, unleashing the forces of Great Power Competition. Thus, corruption provides the nexus between political and economic warfare in a fight for legitimacy.

**Information, Influence, and Political Warfare**

CISA 6036 | 2 credits

This course provides a grounding in the basics of information and the ways information has been employed by state and non-state actors to promote interests or to undermine the interests of adversaries, challengers, or rivals. The course draws on 100 years of scholarly and policy-centered research from economics, diplomatic and military history, marketing, media studies, political science, psychology, public opinion, and strategic studies. Given limits of time, we exclude technology as information (for example cyber attack, cyber defense, and so on), focusing instead on information in the human domain.

**Intelligence and Covert Action in the Cold War**

CISA 6731 | 2 credits

This course examines U.S. approaches to intelligence and covert action, the role of intelligence and covert action within U.S. grand strategy, and the changing relationship of the intelligence community with Congress and the U.S. public. While much of the subject matter is historical in nature, this is a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing particularly on political science and media studies in addition to history. The goal of this course is to critically analyze the role intelligence and covert action have played in national security and emphasizes on the challenges of conducting such activities in a manner consistent with a liberal social order. The course highlights the need to understand the extent to which the intelligence community is closely tied to the Cold War, as the community emerged in a mature and organized form relatively late over the course of the U.S. ascent to

superpower status. It was the decades of Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union that truly established a U.S. intelligence tradition and the U.S. approach to covert operations. The contours of the conflict also resulted in significant concerns with regard to intelligence and covert activity’s place within the constitutional framework of the United States.

**Governance, Strategy, and Violence**

CISA 6915 | 2 credits

Through an overview of social, economic, and political developments in contemporary Latin American and Caribbean countries, the course invites the student to explore what causes political violence and to analyze policies and strategies to confront that violence. Throughout the lessons, the student is given the opportunity to—

- Understand dynamic socio-economic-political contexts.
- Assess the interaction of actors.
- Evaluate the possibilities of preventing or neutralizing political violence within democratic governance responding to rule of law.

The course analyzes various country cases. The main criteria in case selection are the political actuality and the high degree of violence observed. Select situational and structural contexts provide elements for students to develop answers to framing questions. Students assess how political violence in specific countries affects American security interests and future trends in the relations with these regional actors, especially in regard to counterterrorism and counter-organized crime efforts.

**Maritime Security and Great Power Competition**

CISA 6947 | 2 credits

This course focuses on understanding the ocean as—

- A source of food and energy.
- An avenue for the flow of goods, people, and ideas.
- An arena for struggle, competition, and warfare.

The curriculum integrates diplomatic, economic, environmental, geographic, and strategic perspectives to explore the challenges presented by contemporary maritime issues around the world. Students explore maritime dynamics and security threats associated with globalization and great power competition, as well as maritime piracy and international disputes. Additionally, this course focuses on the world’s most important maritime domains and how countries are working to address security threats within them. Students study the dimensions of the current maritime security environment and the International Law of the Sea, and learn to assess the spectrum of threats faced in the maritime domain from state and non-state actors.



**Joint Exercise Control Group**

CISA 6957 | 2 credits

This course enables students to apply theoretical components of previous courses into a strategic level exercise. Students research, develop, and design an exercise that incorporates strategic, multinational-level decisions and negotiations. Students then evaluate key attributes of political, economic, and social systems, as well as the actors who operate within them. This course establishes an understanding of the fundamental relationship between the state and society as it relates to security within an exercise development context. Students are responsible for all aspects of exercise development and execution—from task organization and scenario development to logistic coordination and exercise execution. The curriculum provides the framework for strategic planning, and builds on student experiences with tactical and operational planning.

**Terrorism and Crime**

CISA 6978 | 2 credits

This course focuses on terrorism, insurgency, and transnational crime. Students examine the convergence of these topics with illicit financial activities, such as narcotrafficking, human trafficking, and terrorism finance. The curriculum challenges students to investigate the increasingly blurred lines between what constitutes terrorist or insurgent activities versus what have traditionally been considered criminal activities. Students closely examine the role of the state as both a victim of terrorism and criminality, as well as a perpetrator, facilitator, and supporter of illicit activities. Students conduct research on irregular warfare, crime, and the national security threats they pose. Additionally, students evaluate the differences of terror as a tactic and as a strategy while describing the ends, ways, and means of these and other networks.

**NATO and European Security**

CISA 6983.01 | 2 credits

This course explores NATO and Transatlantic Relations from the origins of the Cold War through today. The class examines the evolution of the transatlantic relationship to build understanding of formal alliance arrangements, and the security architecture of the European region. Students gain an understanding of the political and military role of NATO, major European threats, and the role of the European Union. Each student adopts a NATO member state to follow through the semester and develops a policy brief on a functional area of European security.







**THESIS**  
Information Warfare: America's  
Front-line in Modern Great  
Power Competition



**THESIS**  
Irregular Warfare: A Study on  
Foreign Election Interference  
and Influence



**THESIS**  
Great Power Competition through  
Irregular Warfare: A Requirement  
for United States Special  
Operations Forces Integration



**THESIS**  
Countering Chinese Strategic  
Influence and Power in  
East Africa



**THESIS**  
Artificial Intelligence and Machine  
Learning - Setting Realistic  
Expectations and Conditions  
for Integration



**THESIS**  
The Universal Leadership Truths:  
Exploring Leadership Across  
Multiple Fields



**THESIS**  
Evolving Strategy:  
A Different Approach to  
Analyzing and Solving  
Recruitment Challenges



**THESIS**  
Designing Allied Resilience:  
What Historical Lessons Can  
NATO Learn from Initiatives in  
Europe During the Cold War?



# Worth it.



Photo courtesy of USASOC Public Affairs Office.

“The program offers exposure to an extremely knowledgeable and experienced faculty, and the unprecedented opportunity to exchange ideas on topics of national security—all while networking and developing lasting relationships. Anyone desiring to challenge their current comprehension of present and future strategic events owes it to themselves to apply to a Master of Arts program in NDU’s College of International Security Affairs.”

—LTC Moore, USA, Ret. '23





Connect your experiences to the greater strategic picture.

Apply by July 30.

[socoe.libguides.com/edu/NDU](https://socoe.libguides.com/edu/NDU)



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Produced by the Literature Development Division



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