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Have Universities Seen the End of War?

By Thomas K. Lindsay

Is war a fixed part of human nature? "Yes" has been the answer given by historians and philosophers for centuries, going at least as far back as Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, which chronicled the conflict between Athens and Sparta from 431 to 404 B.C. There, in what's called the **"Melian Dialogue,"** the Athenians argued th "the question of justice arises only between parties equal in strength," whereas "the strong do what they can, and th weak submit." Why? Because "men, by a natural law, always rule where they are stronger." Twenty-three centuries later, Santayana **observed**, "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

If the seeds of war are planted in human nature, the study of human nature, the humanities, needs to take account it. For this reason, American history courses had always -- up until recently -- offered military-history courses. No more: Observers have **noted** an alarming decline in military-history courses in university history departments nationally. Their concern appears warranted. In 2004, Edward Coffman, an emeritus history professor, surveyed *U.S. News and World Report*'s top 25 history departments. He **found** that "of over 1,000 professors, only 21 identified war as a specialty."

How did we get here? Several factors have been fingered, including post-Vietnam War pessimism coupled with Cold War exhaustion. Perhaps the most powerful explanation comes from Victor Davis Hanson, who **writes** that "the sixties had ushered in a utopian view of society antithetical to serious thinking about war." Universities came to believe and teach that "government, the military, business, religion, and the family had conspired ... to warp the naturally peace-loving individual. Conformity and coercion smothered our innately pacifist selves."

Small wonder, then, that while the past several decades have seen the end of war studies, they simultaneously have given rise to university programs in "peace studies" **across the country**.

The University of Texas-Austin may be reversing this trend. Last year, UT launched the Clements Center for History, Strategy & Statecraft to strengthen the fields of military and diplomatic history and apply their insights to current national-security policy. **The center** is named after former Texas governor and deputy secretary of defense William Clements, one of the Pentagon's most consequential leaders. His Pentagon legacy includes developing many of the weapons platforms that have composed the backbone of American force projection for the last several decades, including the F-16 and F-18 fighter jets, the M-1 battle tank, and the Tomahawk cruise missile

The Clements Center looks to train the next generation of national-security scholars and policymakers. In contras to many history departments today, the Clements Center's core mission includes a commitment to studying history to strengthen American citizenship and cultivate public-spiritedness, and to bridging the gap between scholarship and national-security policymaking.

This semester, undergraduates are taking a strategy and military-history class, "War and Society in the Ancient Mediterranean," taught by Clements post-doctoral fellow and Army combat veteran Steele Brand. Clements Cente founder and executive director William Inboden is teaching a graduate class on "Presidential Leadership and National Security," in which students are required to write briefing memos for, and then participate in, a war-game exercise with the Marine Corps Staff College in Quantico.

The center also has forged a partnership with the War Studies Department of Kings College London. This began wi a conference at UT-Austin on "Diplomacy, Alliances, and War: Anglo-American Perspectives on History and Strategy in the September 11th Era." The conference brought together former Bush administration senior policymakers and the Tony Blair government to reflect on the U.S.-U.K. alliance to fight terrorism after the 9/11 attacks. In addition, the center has helped launch the "Intelligence Studies Project" at UT, which collaborates with the U.S. intelligence community to conduct interdisciplinary research on intelligence and national security. The center's inaugural gala included a keynote speech from former secretary of defense Robert Gates and video remarks from former secretary of state Henry Kissinger.

The center also sponsors numerous campus lectures and speakers. Its series "Strategic Insights from the Ancient World" examines how ancient diplomacy, warfare, and strategy can help us understand human nature and modern international relations. Clements's impact on the UT-Austin student body will expand next year with the launch of its undergraduate fellows program to teach and mentor undergraduates interested in national security service.

If the seeds of war are planted in human nature, no less is the longing for peace. In a 1780 letter to his wife, Abigail John Adams wrote, "I must study Politics and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy. My sons ought to study Mathematics and Philosophy, Geography, natural History, Naval Architectur navigation, Commerce and Agriculture, in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Music, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelain."

Although Adams long ago saw the end of war, his wish for his descendants, as Thucydides forecasted, has not come to pass. Until it does, we should be encouraged by the renaissance of military and diplomatic studies launched by the Clements Center.

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