



**WAR JARGON – THE JARGON,
THE LAW, THE LIMITS**

By Gary Wolfstone

<http://www.wolfstonelaw.com>

**Midnight Hammer (Iran) June 22, 2025
Operation Epic Fury (Iran) Feb 28, 2026**

**What follows here are WAR JARGON.
Language in combat is frequently a short
burst of words or word fragments, and**

**the words used are rarely polysyllabic!
This list contains duplicates for punch!**

FUBAR

from the film with Tom Hanks (“Fucked up beyond all recognition”)

In Saving Private Ryan (1998), Tom Hanks’ character, Captain Miller, uses the military acronym FUBAR.

Declaration of War

Article One, Section Eight of the Constitution says "Congress shall have power to ... declare War." However, that passage provides no specific format for what form legislation must have in order to be considered a "declaration of war" nor does the Constitution.

Fog of war

Carl von Clausewitz in On War (1832). He used Nebel des Krieges (“fog of war”) to describe the

uncertainty, confusion, and imperfect information inherent in battle.

Clausewitz is most famous for his seminal work *On War* and the insight that "War is nothing but a continuation of politics with the admixture of other means"

DEFCON 1

DEFCON (Defense Readiness Condition) is a five-level alert system used by the U.S. Armed Forces to indicate nuclear defense readiness, ranging from DEFCON 5 (normal peace time) to DEFCON 1 (maximum readiness/imminent nuclear war). It indicates threat severity, with levels 2 and 3 representing significant, heightened readiness.

- Current Status: While specific levels are classified, reports in late 2025 suggested a heightened state, with some analysis indicating a DEFCON 3 status.

-

How many divisions does the Pope have?

Joseph Stalin famously asked, "The Pope? How many divisions does he have?" during a discussion about the Vatican's influence, at the 1945 Potsdam Conference.

**The Dead Only Know One Thing—
It is Better to be Alive**
Full Metal Jacket, (1987) film.

Rhett Butler

("I apologize for all of my shortcomings.")
(Responding to Charles Hamilton's insult)

Mr. Hamilton: Are you hinting that the yankees can lick us? Mr. Butler: No, I'm not hinting. I'm saying very plainly the yankees are better equipped than us. They have

factories, coal mines, a fleet that can bottle up our harbors and starve us to death. All we got is cotton, slaves, and arrogance. Mr. Hamilton: I refuse to listen to any of this renegade talk! Mr. Butler: I'm sorry if the truth offends you.



Prince Klemens **von Metternich** (1773–1859) was an Austrian diplomat and architect of the conservative European order post-Napoleon (the **Congress of Vienna**, 1814-1815 which lasted nearly 100 years until the First World War.



Gary Wolfstone's List

A War of Choice, A War of Necessity

A Forever War

A War of Aggression (Nuremberg)

The Flames of War (China)

Fog of war

Mission creep

Escalation — Def con 1

Boots on the ground

The OPTICS are/are not good

Cease fire

Friendly fire

Locked and loaded

Fox hole (no atheists)

War crimes (Nuremberg)

Embedded reporter

Scorch the earth

The day after (plan)

Illegal orders (Nuremberg)

Regime change

Escalation

The Point of No Return

Escalation dominance

Psych-war-fare

A timeline

Tipping point

The human factor

The tail that wagged the dog

Churchill: The beginning of the end

A War of Aggression (Nuremberg)

No Duty to follow Illegal (Nuremberg)

The Unknowns

Donald Rumsfeld

The unknowns (ones known, ones not known) Donald Rumsfeld, the former U.S. Secretary of Defense, famously stated "the known unknowns" and "the unknown unknowns" during a Department of Defense news briefing on February 12, 2002.

Crush depth (submarine)

Sabotage (sabot shoe into machine)

Bunker

Refugee

Air superiority

Deconfliction

Pay Back (You can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?)

A War of Attrition

The Iranian Regime is Toast (Pete Hegseth)

Survival mode

The Reality on the Ground

War Coverage Insurance

War Games

Stealth (Stealth aircraft)

Skunk Works - Stealth Aircraft (Lockheed)

Shock and Awe

Rogue Regime

Battlefield Damage Assessment

Shahed (“martyr”)

JDams

Hellfire missiles

Cruise missiles

Patriots

THADs

Politics and war

Ai autonomous systems

Air campaign

Genocide

Sleeper cells

Launch-on-warning

Iron Beam (Israel)

Swarms of drones

That promotes inertia rather than innovation

Majority rules and minority rights

Ad hominem attacks

An inside track on the job

Not only a source for investment but also a destination for investments

Visionary leadership

Operational & Strategic Jargon

These terms describe how wars are planned, escalated, or executed.

Shock and awe – overwhelming force used to paralyze an opponent's will to fight.

Blitzkrieg – lightning-fast, concentrated attack meant to break defenses before they can react.

Preemptive strike – attacking before the enemy can act.

Surgical strike – a narrowly targeted attack intended to minimize collateral damage.

Rules of engagement – formal limits on when and how force may be used.

Force multiplier – something that increases effectiveness without increasing manpower.

Asymmetric warfare – conflict between unequal forces using different tactics (e.g., guerrilla vs. conventional army).

Hybrid warfare – blending military force with cyberattacks, propaganda, and economic pressure.

Decapitation strike – targeting leadership to collapse command structure.

Flanking maneuver – attacking from the side to exploit weak points.

War of attrition – wearing down the enemy through sustained losses.

Pyrrhic victory – a win so costly it's effectively a loss.

No-man's-land – dangerous, unoccupied territory between opposing forces.

Friendly fire – accidental attack on one's own side.

Collateral damage – unintended harm to civilians or non-military targets.

Theater of operations – a defined geographic area of conflict.

Boots on the ground – deploying actual troops rather than remote or air power.

Force projection – ability to deploy and sustain military power abroad.

Psychological & Information Warfare

Propaganda war – competing narratives to shape public opinion.

Hearts and minds – efforts to win civilian support.

Psy-ops (psychological operations) – tactics to influence enemy morale or behavior.

Disinformation campaign – deliberate spread of false information.

Fifth column – internal supporters of an external enemy.

Red line – a boundary whose crossing triggers retaliation.

War footing – shifting into a high-alert, resource-mobilized posture.

Destruction, Withdrawal & Endgame

Scorched earth – destroying resources to prevent enemy use.

Cut and run – rapid withdrawal to avoid further losses.

Last stand – final, desperate defense.

Armistice – temporary halt to fighting.

Demobilization – standing down forces after conflict.

Surrender terms – negotiated conditions for ending resistance.

Exit Strategy – ending the war.

War Metaphors

Battle lines are drawn – sides have taken clear positions.

Silver bullet – a single, decisive solution.

Take no prisoners – act ruthlessly to achieve a goal.

On the front lines – directly confronting a major challenge.

Collateral damage – unintended negative consequences.

Going nuclear – using the most extreme option available.

Opening salvo – the first aggressive move in a dispute.

Trench warfare – slow, grinding struggle with little progress.

Operational & Strategic Jargon

Shock and awe – overwhelming force used to paralyze an opponent's will to fight.

Blitzkrieg – lightning-fast, concentrated attack meant to break defenses before they can react.

Preemptive strike – attacking before the enemy can act.

Surgical strike – a narrowly targeted attack intended to minimize collateral damage.

Rules of engagement – formal limits on when and how force may be used.

Force multiplier – something that increases effectiveness without increasing manpower.

Asymmetric warfare – conflict between unequal forces using different tactics (e.g., guerrilla vs. conventional army).

Hybrid warfare – blending military force with cyberattacks, propaganda, and economic pressure.

Decapitation strike – targeting leadership to collapse command structure.

Tactics, Maneuvers & Battlefield Language

Flanking maneuver – attacking from the side to exploit weak points.

War of attrition – wearing down the enemy through sustained losses.

Pyrrhic victory – a win so costly it's effectively a loss.

No-man's-land – dangerous, unoccupied territory between opposing forces.

Friendly fire – accidental attack on one's own side.

Collateral damage – unintended harm to civilians or non-military targets.

Theater of operations – a defined geographic area of conflict.

Boots on the ground – deploying actual troops rather than remote or air power.

Force projection – ability to deploy and sustain military power abroad.

Psychological & Information Warfare

Propaganda war – competing narratives to shape public opinion.

Hearts and minds – efforts to win civilian support.

Psy-ops (psychological operations) – tactics to influence enemy morale or behavior.

Disinformation campaign – deliberate spread of false information.

Fifth column – internal supporters of an external enemy.

Red line – a boundary whose crossing triggers retaliation.

Political & Bureaucratic War Language

War footing – shifting into a high-alert, resource-mobilized posture.

Saber-rattling – threatening military action to intimidate.

Escalation ladder – stages of increasing conflict intensity.

Quagmire – a conflict that becomes impossible to exit cleanly.

Coalition of the willing – ad-hoc alliance formed for a specific conflict.

Peace dividend – economic benefit from reduced military spending.

Destruction, Withdrawal & Endgame

Cut and run – rapid withdrawal to avoid further losses.

Last stand – final, desperate defense.

Armistice – temporary halt to fighting.

Demobilization – standing down forces after conflict.

Surrender terms – negotiated conditions for ending resistance.

Exit Strategy – ending the war.

Battle lines are drawn – sides have taken clear positions.

Silver bullet – a single, decisive solution.

Take no prisoners – act ruthlessly to achieve a goal.

On the front lines – directly confronting a major challenge.

Collateral damage – unintended negative consequences.

Going nuclear – using the most extreme option available.

Opening salvo – the first aggressive move in a dispute.

Tactics, Maneuvers & Battlefield Language

Flanking maneuver – attacking from the side to exploit weak points.

War of attrition – wearing down the enemy through sustained losses.

Pyrrhic victory – a win so costly it's effectively a loss.

No-man's-land – dangerous, unoccupied territory between opposing forces.

Friendly fire – accidental attack on one's own side.

Collateral damage – unintended harm to civilians or non-military targets.

Theater of operations – a defined geographic area of conflict.

Boots on the ground – deploying actual troops rather than remote or air power.

Force projection – ability to deploy and sustain military power abroad.

Psychological & Information Warfare

Propaganda war – competing narratives to shape public opinion.

Hearts and minds – efforts to win civilian support.

Psy-ops (psychological operations) – tactics to influence enemy morale or behavior.

Disinformation campaign – deliberate spread of false information.

Fifth column – internal supporters of an external enemy.

Red line – a boundary whose crossing triggers retaliation.

Saber-rattling – threatening military action to intimidate.

Escalation ladder – stages of increasing conflict intensity.

Quagmire – a conflict that becomes impossible to exit cleanly.

Coalition of the willing – ad-hoc alliance formed for a specific conflict.

Peace dividend – economic benefit from reduced military spending.

Withdrawal & Endgame Terms

Scorched earth – destroying resources to prevent enemy use.

Cut and run – rapid withdrawal to avoid further losses.

Last stand – final, desperate defense.

Armistice – temporary halt to fighting.

Demobilization – standing down forces after conflict.

Deconfliction

Surrender terms – negotiated conditions for ending resistance.

War Metaphors

Fog of war

Carl von Clausewitz in On War (1832). He used Nebel des Krieges (“fog of war”) to

describe the uncertainty, confusion, and imperfect information inherent in battle. Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military strategist, is most famous for his seminal work *On War* and the insight that "War is nothing but a continuation of politics with the admixture of other means".

Real-world examples

Battle of Gettysburg (1863) – Union and Confederate commanders repeatedly made decisions based on incomplete or incorrect information about troop positions.

D-Day, Normandy (1944) – Allied commanders struggled with weather, misdrops of airborne units, and disrupted communications.

Gulf War (1991) – Rapid maneuver warfare and electronic interference created major situational-awareness gaps for both sides.

It became a metaphor for any situation where leaders must act without full information – politics, business, crisis management.

Mission creep

First widely used by journalists and analysts during the U.S. intervention in Somalia (1992–1993). The original humanitarian mission expanded into peace enforcement and then into combat operations.

Real-world examples

Vietnam War – Advisors → combat troops → full-scale war.

Afghanistan (2001–2021) – Counterterrorism → nation-building → counterinsurgency.

Libya (2011) – No-fly zone → regime change.

Scorched earth

Ancient tactic: destroy crops, infrastructure, and supplies to deny them to the enemy.

The term itself became common in the 19th century.

Real-world examples

Russia vs. Napoleon (1812) – Russian forces burned villages and food stores as they retreated, contributing to Napoleon's disastrous winter.

Sherman's March to the Sea (1864) – Union forces destroyed Confederate infrastructure across Georgia.

World War II (Eastern Front) – Both German and Soviet forces used scorched-earth tactics during retreats.

Why it spread

It became shorthand for any strategy that sacrifices assets to prevent an opponent from gaining advantage – politics, business, litigation.

Shock and awe

Developed in the 1996 U.S. military doctrine Rapid Dominance by Harlan Ullman and James Wade. It refers to overwhelming force and spectacle to paralyze an enemy's will to resist.

Real-world examples

Iraq War (2003) – The opening air campaign was explicitly branded “Shock and Awe,” using massive precision strikes to collapse Iraqi command structures.

Blitzkrieg

German for “lightning war.” Not an official doctrine at first, but a journalistic term describing German operations in Poland (1939) and France (1940): fast armored thrusts, close air support, and rapid encirclement.

Real-world examples

Fall of France (1940) – German Panzer divisions bypassed the Maginot Line and collapsed French defenses in weeks.

Operation Barbarossa (1941) – Early phases used blitzkrieg principles before bogging down.

Surgical strike

Cold War era, especially with the rise of precision-guided munitions in the 1970s–1980s. The term implies accuracy and minimal collateral damage.

Real-world examples

Operation Opera (1981) – Israeli airstrike on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor.

U.S. strikes on Libya (1986) – Targeted retaliation for terrorism.

Kosovo War (1999) – NATO emphasized precision bombing.

No-man's-land

Medieval English property law used the term, but it became globally known during World War I to describe the deadly ground between opposing trenches.

Real-world examples

Western Front (1914–1918) – Areas between trenches were exposed to machine-gun fire and artillery, making movement extremely dangerous.

It now describes any unclaimed, dangerous, or ambiguous space – literal or metaphorical.

War of attrition

Ancient concept, but the phrase became prominent during World War I, when industrialized armies tried to wear each other down through sustained losses.

Real-world examples

Verdun (1916) – German strategy explicitly aimed to “bleed France white.”

Yom Kippur War aftermath (1973–1974) – Egypt and Israel engaged in a prolonged War of Attrition along the Suez Canal.

Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) – Both sides fought grinding battles with little territorial change.

Popularized during the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960), where British counterinsurgency emphasized winning civilian support.

Real-world examples

Vietnam War – U.S. commanders used the phrase to describe pacification programs.

Iraq (post-2003) – Counterinsurgency doctrine again emphasized civilian engagement.

Coined during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Nationalist General Emilio Mola claimed he had four columns attacking Madrid and a “fifth column” of supporters inside the city.

Real-world examples

World War II – Used to describe suspected internal sympathizers of Axis powers.

Cold War – Applied to alleged communist infiltrators in Western countries.

Why it spread

It became shorthand for internal subversion or hidden supporters of an opposing faction.

Opening salvo

Originally a naval gunnery term: the first coordinated volley of cannon fire.

Real-world examples

Battle of Tsushima (1905) – Japanese opening salvos crippled the Russian fleet.

World War II naval battles – Opening salvos often determined early advantage.

Why it spread

It now describes the first aggressive move in any conflict – legal, political, rhetorical.

Last stand

Ancient military concept; the phrase became common in English during the 18th–19th centuries.

Real-world examples

Thermopylae (480 BCE) – Spartan and allied forces held a narrow pass against Persia.

Battle of the Alamo (1836) – Texian defenders made a final stand against Mexican forces.

Rorke's Drift (1879) – British garrison held out against Zulu attacks.

D-Day

VE-Day

Vietnamese New Year (TET)

The Battle at midway

The Battle of the Bulge

Custer's Last Stand

The Battle of Britain

Barbarosa

1938 Kristallnacht

Midnight Hammer

Operation Epic Fury

Hawks

Doves

CALL SIGNS

Hotel 6

Roger that

Dolly Test

Fighter Ops

Command to commence/cease firing

Free fire zone

Fire at will

Fire when ready

Read, Aim, Fire

Launch on warning

Cease firing

Planning or Impulse

Deploy; Deployment

Trigger happy

Charismatic leadership

Elusive goals

Galvanize the popular uprising

An Opportunity Cost
Opposing forces are brittle
That's a lot of trigger pulling
No Black Hawks Down
No Mogadishu moments

The Decision To Start a War in Retrospect
PTSD, Injury, Lethality – the troops
Cost Benefit Analysis
Leadership or Paranoid Schizophrenia
War Crimes
Future Risk Analysis
A proxy war



