

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: INTRODUCTION

I. COURSE OVERVIEW, REQUIREMENTS AND READINGS

- A. Staff backgrounds: who we are.
- B. Questions addressed in 17.40 include:
 1. **Explanations** and families of explanations for U.S. policy: which are valid?
Image I: The nature of individuals.
Image II: The nature of states and societies.
Image III: The distribution of international power, and the nature of states' international environment.
 2. **Evaluation** of past U.S. policy. Were the premises behind policy valid or false? Were its results good or bad? Were these results desired or undesired by policy makers?
 - a. The policy's effects on the USA and U.S. interests: good or bad?
 - National security interests: preserving U.S. sovereignty and avoiding war. Have past wars, interventions, doctrines and other policies made the U.S. more or less secure in these terms?
 - Economic interests. Have past U.S. policies enhanced these?
 - Other welfare interests: environment, public health. Have past U.S. policies protected these?
 - Philanthropic interests--promoting human rights or otherwise "doing the right thing." What code of ethics should guide foreign policy? Have past U.S. policies measured up to it?
 - b. The policy's effects on other peoples and states.
 3. **Policy prescription**: what should now be done? Regarding, e.g., Al Qaeda, the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Iraq, North Korean nuclear weapons, China and Taiwan, Darfur, national ballistic missile defense, trade policy, global warming, emerging lethal diseases, and more.
 4. **Predictions**: what will be done?
In 17.40 we will focus on issue #2, **evaluation**, especially of **national security policy**.
- C. Class requirements and readings.
 - Discussion sections ("recitation sections") are required and important. So ... Please show up for section and come prepared to participate. We need your help to make sections work!
 - In sections you will present to the National Security Council and participate in debates.
 - Four papers: two 2-pagers and two 8-pagers. A draft of a long paper must be submitted in advance to your TA.
 - Two 15-minute quizzes.
 - One final.
 - Readings.
- D. Syllabus organization. We move from general theories to historical cases to conclusions and implications for current policy. But in the middle of our cases we pause to consider general problems: national security policy, foreign economic policy, and terror.
- E. Class missions, expectations.
 - We focus on developing your communication skills because **you will need communication skills to succeed in the real world**. Past MIT alumni reported that they later found they needed more communication and leadership skills to rise to the top in life. We are here to help with that. You will thereby be empowered in your future life.
 - Janet Thompson is the writing tutor for this class. Make full use of her wisdom.
 - Absolutely no background knowledge of U.S. foreign policy/diplomatic history is assumed** for this course.
 - Feel free to consult 17.40 staff about non-17.40 stuff like planning your career. We will offer what wisdom we can.
- E. An unrelated point: Be alert to your fellow students' mental wellbeing. MIT is stress city. Sometimes students suffer depression. Watch for this in yourself and others. MIT students must take care of each other! For information on depression and suicide see the useful MIT medical website: <http://web.mit.edu/medical>, click on the "Sadness, Loss and Depression--Important Information" link, then the "Depression" and "Suicidal Thoughts" links, which take you to NIH, ULifeline and other informative sites.

II. WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?

- A. Experimentation vs. observation. Both methods can work well.
- B. Large-n studies vs. case studies. Both methods work; the nature of the data decides which method is stronger.
- C. Accidents, Chaos Theory, and History:
 - If accidents, personalities, and serendipity shape history, how can general theories explain the past? Consider

Annie Oakley's central role in world history.

--Does politics have regularities--laws of motion--like those of the physical world?

D. Why is political science primitive?

III. IMAGE III BACKGROUND FACTORS: THE EVOLUTION OF THE GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER, 1789-present.

See tables from Paul Kennedy, Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, and Kenneth Oye, Eagle In a New World, esp. tables 6, 17, 18, 31, 35, 4-1, and chart 2 on pages 3, 6, 7, 15, 16, 19, and 20 (handwritten numeration) of handout.

- A. The nature of international power. Past geopoliticians argued that industrial power = military power = power. Is this still true? If stateless terrorists buy or steal weapons of mass destruction are they powerful? (Yes!)
- B. The amazing growth of American industrial power, 1789-1938. See especially Kennedy tables 6, 17, 18 (pages 3, 6, 7, by handwritten page numbers).
- C. The delayed growth of American military power, 1789-1943. See especially Kennedy tables 19, 31, 35 (pages 7, 15, 16 by handwritten page numbers).
- D. The concentration of industrial power in the a few places--North America, Europe, and Japan. See especially Oye table 4-1 (page 19).
- E. Did American foreign and military policy make power-political sense?
 - 1. U.S. mobilization strategy: frugal prudence or strategic blunder?
 - 2. U.S. geopolitical engagements: did they avert real dangers? Specifically, if a state conquered all of industrial Eurasia (that is, Western Europe, Russia and Japan) would it then have enough power to possibly conquer the U.S.? See table 4-1.
 - 3. U.S. and the Third World: did U.S. Cold War intervention make geopolitical sense? See table 4-1.
- F. The rise of China and the future of global politics. See chart 2.

IV. IMAGE II BACKGROUND FACTORS: THE EVOLUTION OF U.S. POLITICS & SOCIETY

- A. Waning ignorance: the growth of American knowledge of the world.
- B. The democratization of U.S. foreign policymaking.
- C. The changing U.S. economy:
 - The end of fears of depression after 1941.
 - The levelling of American society after 1941.
- D. The decline of U.S. white racism and the growth of tolerance.

V. OVERVIEW OF U.S. DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, 1789-PRESENT, AND DEBATES ABOUT IT: 11 WARS, 5 CRISES & 30+ INTERVENTIONS IN A NUTSHELL

- A. Old-time wars (we won't cover in 17.40):
 - 1. The "Indian Wars," 1492-1890.
 - 2. The War of 1812, 1812-1815.
 - 3. The Mexican War, 1846-1848.
 - 4. The U.S. Civil War, 1861-1865.
 - 5. The War with Spain, 1898; the U.S.-Filipino War, 1899-1902.
- B. World War I, 1914-1918: causes of U.S. entry? Wisdom thereof? Wisdom of the peace?
- C. World War II, 1939-1945: causes of U.S. entry? Was entry wise? Did the U.S. wage the war wisely? Was the war preventable? If it was preventable, who was most responsible for its outbreak? (FDR? U.S. isolationists? Woodrow Wilson and his misbegotten Versailles Treaty?)
- D. The Cold War, 1946-1989: who/what caused it? Was it preventable? Was it necessary? Was it wisely conducted?
- E. The Korean War, 1950-1953: who started it? Why did it escalate? Why didn't it lead to World War III? Was U.S. entry wise or necessary? Was U.S. crossing of 38th parallel wise or necessary?
- F. The Great Crisis: Cuba 1962.
- G. The Indochina War, 1950-1975: causes of U.S. intervention? Validity of U.S. beliefs?
- H. Lesser interventions: Iran 1953, Guatemala 1954, Cuba 1961, Dominican Republic 1965, Chile 1973, the Reagan Doctrine wars of 1981-91, Panama 1989, Persian Gulf 1990-1991, Somalia 1992-93.
- I. The ongoing U.S.-Al Qaeda war; the 2003 U.S.-Iraq war; the U.S.-North Korea crisis; U.S.-China relations.