

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: INTRODUCTION

I. COURSE QUESTIONS REQUIREMENTS AND READINGS

A. Questions addressed in 17.40 include:

1. **What explains** past and present U.S. policies?
2. **Were the premises behind U.S. policies valid or false?**
Were their results good or bad? Were these results desired or undesired by policy makers? We will **evaluate U.S. policies.**
 - a. Were the policy's effects on the USA and U.S. interests good or bad? Consider four U.S. interests:
 - > National security interests: preserving U.S. sovereignty and avoiding war. Did past or present wars, interventions, doctrines and policies make the U.S. more or less secure in these terms?
 - > Economic interests. Did U.S. policies advance these?
 - > Other interests: environment, public health, e.g., protecting against new pandemics. Do U.S. policies protect these?
 - > Philanthropic interests--promoting human rights or otherwise "doing the right thing" by others. What code of ethics should guide foreign policy? Have U.S. policies measured up to it?
 - b. The policy's effects on other peoples and states.
3. **What should now be done?** Regarding, e.g., al Qaeda, ISIS/Iraq/Syria, the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs, China's rise, national ballistic missile defense, trade policy, climate change, Ukraine/Russia, Afghanistan/Pakistan.
4. **Predictions:** what will be done?
We will focus on question #2, **evaluation**, especially of **national security policy.**

B. Class requirements and readings.

- > Discussion sections ("recitation sections") are required and important. Please attend and please 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 an ~8 pager must be submitted in advance to your TA.
- > Two 15-minute quizzes.
- > One final.
- > Readings.

C. Syllabus organization. We progress in this order: (1) national security overview; (2) general theories; (3) grand strategies; (4) historical cases and policy problems (national security policy, foreign economic policy, and terror); (5) implications for current policy.

- D. Class missions, expectations.
- > Broad course missions: students will learn how to ask questions, devise and frame explanations and arguments, and marshal and present evidence.
 - > We focus on developing your communication skills. Past MIT alumni reported that they needed more communication and leadership skills to realize their goals in life. We are here to help with that.
 - > **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.

II. WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?

- A. Experimentation vs. observation. Both methods can work well.
- B. Large-n (statistical) studies vs. case studies. Both methods work. The nature of the data decides which method is stronger.
- > Natural experiments--situations in history that resemble controlled experiments--are especially strong tools of investigation.
- C. To test theories: (1) Infer predictions from the theory stating what we expect to observe in the world if the theory is valid, and what we should observe if it is false. (2) Assess the degree of congruence between our predictions and our observations. Congruent = theory is corroborated; incongruent = theory is infirmed.
- D. Accidents, chaos theory, and history:
- > Does politics have regularities--laws of motion--like those of the natural world?
 - > If accidents, personalities, and serendipity shape history, how can general theories explain the past? Annie Oakley could have killed Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm in ~1889. If so, could she have saved us from the 20th century? (Maybe!)
- E. Why has political science achieved less than the natural sciences?
- F. Controversies in social science about how to do it.
- > Social scientists debate the best way to test theories. Some claim that large-n methods and/or controlled experiments are inherently stronger than case methods. Others argue that no method is inherently stronger;

rather, the stronger method is the one that suits the data available. This varies by topic.

- > In U.S. history departments the study of international and military history has been sidelined and replaced by social history (e.g., race, class and gender issues). These are very important but so is international history! Its demise is harming our ability to study U.S. foreign policy.

III. THE GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER, 1789-PRESENT. See the maps of the world scaled to GDP by Edwin Reischauer, in three versions (plain, Germania, and Sovietania); the 2005 map; tables 6, 17, 18, 30, 31, 35, and chart 2 from Paul Kennedy, Rise and Fall of the Great Powers; and Table 4-1 from Kenneth Oye, ed., Eagle in a New World.

A. U.S. national security turns on (1) the global distribution of power, and (2) the intentions of other states and actors. Can others harm you? Will they try?

B. Four questions about the nature of international power:

1. Before 1945, what was national power made of?

Strategists then argued that industrial power = military power = power. They believed that other elements of power--population, military bases, control of critical raw materials like oil--also mattered but were secondary to industrial power. Industrial power, measured in GDP, was seen as the key index of power.

2. What is national power made of today? Is industrial power still key? Or do weapons of mass destruction (WMD) change everything? Can actors with little industrial power acquire WMD? If they do, are they powerful despite their lack of industrial power?

> North Korea, an impoverished state, has build nuclear devices.

> Some worry that stateless terrorists might buy or steal or be given weapons of mass destruction, or the materials to make them.

Do these possibilities make obsolete the use of industrial power as our key measure of national power?

3. Offensive vs. defensive power: which dominates?

> Was defense or offense easier among states before nuclear weapons arrived (1945)? By how much? What implications follow?

> Have nuclear weapons changed the offense/defense equation? If so, how? Some argue that nuclear weapons make conquest impossible among major powers. Are they right?

4. Related: is destruction easier or harder than defense against destruction?

C. The evolution of U.S. and global power, 1789-present.

> U.S. industrial power grew vastly during 1789-1938. See tables 6, 17, 18.

> U.S. standing military power grew much less, 1789-1942, due to America's mobilization strategy. See tables 19, 31, 35.

- > Industrial power was concentrated in the a few places: North America, Europe, and Japan. See especially the world maps drawn to GDP size and Oye table 4-1.
- D. Did American foreign and military policy make power-political sense?
 1. Did Germany and its allies have any hope of defeating the US and its allies in 1914 and 1939? If not, should the U.S. have been able to deter German expansion in 1914 and 1939?
 - > U.S. mobilization strategy: frugal prudence or strategic blunder?
 2. Did U.S. efforts against Germany in 1917 and 1941 and the Soviet Union in the Cold War avert real dangers? Specifically, if these states had conquered all of industrial Eurasia (that is, Western Europe, Russia and Japan) would they then have had enough power to conquer the U.S.? See maps and table 4-1.
 3. Did U.S. Cold War interventions in the Third World (Vietnam, Korea, Guatemala, Chile, Iran, Congo) make sense? See maps and table 4-1.
- E. Will China's further rise threaten U.S. security? Will the spread of WMDs to non-state actors threaten U.S. security? If so, how should the U.S. respond?
 - > Should the US move to contain China and/or impede its rise? Is this necessary? Could it succeed?
 - > Is a rising power always a danger to be stopped? Britain did not stop Prussia in 1870 and paid. Britain did not stop the U.S. in 1861-65 and profited.
 - > Does the U.S. face other more serious threats (for example WMD terror and climate change)? Should it cooperate with China (and Russia) to defeat these threats?
 - > Compare four threats: China, Russia, WMD terror, & climate change. Which is greatest?

IV. THE EVOLUTION OF U.S. POLITICS & SOCIETY

- A. Ignorance: American knowledge of the world was low, then rose, now falls.
 - > Americans now learn less about the world from the press than 40 years ago. Schools teach less international history.
 - > Unlike Europeans and Asians, Americans have never suffered the full horrors of war in their homeland. Are they naive about it?
- B. U.S. foreign policy was once run by aristocrats. This is no longer true. But who now dominates? DC thinktanks & lobbies are increasingly important. Who controls them??
- C. The changing U.S. economy:
 - > Fears of depression abated after 1941--until we forgot Keynes after 1980, creating a new risk of depressions.
 - > Economic inequality diminished sharply in the U.S. during 1941-1980, has expanded sharply since 1980.
- D. U.S. white racism & antisemitism greatly diminished after ~1940.

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