

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 and present 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. 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 enhance these?
 - > Other welfare interests: environment, public health, e.g., protecting against avian flu. Do U.S. policies protect these?
 - > Philanthropic interests--promoting human rights or otherwise "doing the right thing." What code of ethics should guide foreign policy? Did U.S. policies measure 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, Iraq, Afghanistan/Pakistan, the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs, 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.
 - > Broad course missions: to help students learn how to ask questions, how to devise and frame explanations and arguments, how to marshal and present evidence. How to distinguish the trivial from the essential. How to think.
 - > 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.
 - > Diane Hendrix is the writing tutor for this class. Make full use of her immense erudition.
 - > **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.
- F. An unrelated point: Watch for depression in others and yourself. MIT = stress. Depression is common, dangerous, and treatable. Take action to get anyone suffering depressed into treatment. For information on depression and suicide see the useful MIT medical website: <http://web.mit.edu/medical>, click on "Sadness, Loss and Depression--Important Information," then on "Depression" and "Suicidal Thoughts," which take you to NIH, ULifeline and other good sites.

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.
 - 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. She could easily have killed Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm. If so, could she have saved us from the 20th century?
 - > Does politics have regularities--laws of motion--like those of the physical world?
 - D. Why has political science achieved less than physics, chemistry, astronomy biology?
 - E. Controversies in social science about how to do it.
 - > Social scientists heatedly debate the best way to test theories. Some claim that large-n methods are inherently stronger than case methods. This is untrue--neither method is inherently stronger. Rather, the stronger method is the one that suits the data available. This varies by topic.
 - > In the history field the study of international and military history is being sidelined and replaced by social history, especially race, class and gender issues. Questions of race, class and gender are very important but so are international and military history! Their demise is harming our ability to study U.S. foreign policy.
- III. IMAGE III BACKGROUND FACTORS: THE EVOLUTION OF THE GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER, 1789-present. See world map, and 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.
 1. Before 1945 geopoliticians argued persuasively that industrial power = military power = power.
 2. Does appearance of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) change everything? Can actors with little industrial power acquire WMD? If they do, is power now in their hands, despite their lack of industrial power?
 - > North Korea, an impoverished state, has build a nuclear arsenal.
 - > Some worry that stateless terrorists might buy or steal or be given weapons of mass destruction.
 Do these possibilities change make obsolete the use of industrial power as our key measure of national power?
 - B. The vast 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. Could/should the U.S. have deterred German expansion in 1914 and 1939?
 2. U.S. mobilization strategy: frugal prudence or strategic blunder?
 3. 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.
 4. 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, p. 20. Is a rising power always a danger to be stopped? Britain did not stop Prussia in 1870 and paid. Britain did not stop the United States in 1861-65 and profited. Will China's further rise pose a threat that the U.S. should confront? Or does the U.S. face other more serious threats (for example WMD terror and climate change) that it should cooperate with China (and Russia) to defeat?
- IV. IMAGE II BACKGROUND FACTORS: 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. Schools teach less international history.
 - > Americans have never experienced the full horrors of war, as Europeans and Asians have. Do they need a "continental comeuppance"?
 - B. The democratization of U.S. foreign policy making.
 - 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 & antisemitism and the growth of tolerance.

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