

## **IR448: American Grand Strategy**

**Autumn 2025**

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### **Course content**

This course explores American foreign policy at the broadest level of analysis – the level known as grand strategy. The course showcases the main theoretical perspectives that inform the study of grand strategy and applies them to historical and contemporary cases of American statecraft. In this connection, we will assess the relevance of the U.S. experience for theorizing about power politics and the implications of alternative theories for thinking critically about American behaviour. Emphasis is placed on the debates and controversies that animate the study of grand strategy, as well as of the unique challenges posed by making foreign policy in the American political, economic, and cultural context.

### **Teaching format**

There are 10 ninety-minute lectures beginning week one of Autumn Term and 10 ninety-minute seminars beginning week one of Autumn Term. Lectures will provide an overview of the topics to be considered in greater depth in seminar. You are expected to complete all the readings before the due date, attend all lecture and seminar meetings, and actively engage in seminar discussion. You should come to seminar prepared to discuss each reading on its own terms (e.g., what is the author's basic argument, how does the author develop and support his/her claims, etc.), as well as how it relates to other readings for previous sessions.

### **Formative coursework**

Students are expected to write short weekly blogs on Moodle in response to a question posted about the assigned reading. Your responses should run no more than a paragraph and be posted by 17:00 on Tuesdays. Each week one or two members of the seminar will also be asked to briefly summarize and discuss the posts. Presentations are to run no more than 5 minutes.

As part of the formative coursework, everyone will also write an 800-word outline of their assessed essay. Topics will be selected from a list of questions provided by the course teacher. These are to be submitted the end of Week 8. They will be returned with comments and feedback by the end of Autumn Term.

### **Course assessment**

Summative assessment will be based on a 4000-word essay in the Winter Term (100%). To answer these questions, you will be required to engage the arguments in the course readings. Essays will be due at the end of Week 1 of the Winter Term.

### **Course materials**

Essential texts are on reserve at the LSE Library. Please note that some essential readings are in G. John Ikenberry and Peter L. Trubowitz, *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays* (Oxford, 2014). Most of the readings in this volume are also available

electronically through the library's website. For those who want to review US foreign policy and diplomatic history, George Herring's, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford, 2008) provides a helpful overview. A copy is on reserve at the library.

### **Scholastic dishonesty**

LSE policies regarding scholastic dishonesty are strictly enforced in this class. On what constitutes plagiarism and scholastic dishonesty, see [here](#).

### **Topics and readings**

#### **Week 1: Strategy and Statecraft**

Required reading

- Walter McDougall, 'Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?,' *Orbis* 61 (Spring 2017): 474–93
- Nina Silove, 'Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of "Grand Strategy,"' *Security Studies* 27 (August 2017): 1–31
- Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton University Press, 2011), chapters 1 and 2
- Roth Douhat, 'Trump and Vance are Stripping Away Foreign Policy Illusions,' *New York Times*, March 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/01/opinion/trump-vance-zelensky.html>

Background reading

- Daniel W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, and Randall Schweller, 'The End of Grand Strategy,' *Foreign Affairs* 99 (May/June 2020): 30–40
- Andrew Ehrhardt and Maeve Ryan, 'Grand Strategy is No Silver Bullet, But It Is Indispensable,' *War on the Rocks*, May 19, 2020
- David Gethin Morgan–Owen, 'History and the Perils of Grand Strategy,' *Journal of Modern History* 92 (June 2020): 351–85.
- Hew Strachan, 'The Lost Meaning of Strategy,' *Survival* 47 (Autumn 2015): 33–54

### **PART 1: Competing approaches to US grand strategy**

#### **Week 2: Geopolitics and American interest**

Required reading

- Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton University Press, 1998), entire

Background reading

- Michael Mastanduno, 'The United States Political System and International Leadership: A "Decidedly Inferior" Form of Government?' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 227–43
- Sebastian Rosato and John Schuessler, 'A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 115–36
- Thomas Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino–American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton University Press, 1996), chapters, 1–4, 7
- Kenneth Waltz, 'Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power,' in Ikenberry, and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 73–94
- Linda Weiss, *America Inc.? Innovation and Enterprise in the National Security State* (Cornell University Press, 2014), chapters 1–2

#### **Week 3: Political economy of American power**

Required reading

- Fred Block, 'Economic Instability and Military Strength: The Paradoxes of the 1950 Rearmament Decision,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 139–54
- Jeff Frieden, 'Sectoral Conflict and U.S. Foreign Economic Policy, 1914–1940,' in

- Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 171–9
- Kevin Narizny, 'Rational Idealism: The Political Economy of Internationalism in the United States and Great Britain, 1870–1945,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 195–223

#### Background reading

- Lynn Eden, 'Capitalist Conflict and the State: The Making of United States Military Policy in 1948,' in Charles Bright and Susan Harding, eds., *Statemaking and Social Movements: Essays in History and Theory* (University of Michigan Press, 1984), 233–61
- Thomas Ferguson, 'From Normalcy to New Deal: Industrial Structure, Party Competition, and American Public Policy in the Great Depression,' *International Organization* 38 (1984): 41–94.
- Peter Gourevitch, 'Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,' *International Organization* 32 (1978): 881–912
- Rebecca Thorpe, *The American Warfare State: The Domestic Politics of Military Spending* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), chapters 1 and 2
- Peter Trubowitz, 'Political Conflict and Foreign Policy in the United States: A Geographical Interpretation,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 263–76

#### **Week 4: Presidents and American statecraft**

##### Required reading

- Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton University Press, 2011), entire

##### Background reading

- Robert Jervis, 'Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?,' *Security Studies* 22 (May 2013): 153–179
- Yuen Foong Khong, 'Seduction by Analogy in Vietnam: The Malaya and Korea Analogies,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 551–58
- Rebecca Friedman Lissner, 'Process Learning in Foreign Policy: From the Bay of Pigs to the Berlin Crisis,' *Political Science Quarterly* 134 (Winter 2019–20): 641–673
- Samantha Power, 'Bystanders to Genocide, Why the United States Let the Rwandan Tragedy Happen,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 375–99.
- Elizabeth Saunders, 'Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 521–50
- Karen Yarhi-Milo, 'In the Eye of the Beholder: How Leaders and Intelligence Communities Assess the Intentions of Adversaries,' *International Security* 38 (Summer 2013): 7–51

### **PART 2: American grand strategy in action: case studies**

#### **Week 5: Truman, Soviet power, and containment**

##### Required reading

- John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, revised edition (Oxford University Press, 2005), chapters 1–4

##### Background reading

- Melvyn Leffler, 'The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–1948,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 73–94.
- Jeffrey Legro, 'Whence American Internationalism,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 323–52
- Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2011)
- Deborah Larson, 'The Origins of Commitment: Truman and West Berlin,' *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13 (Winter 2011): 180–212

- Thomas McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After*, second edition (Johns Hopkins Press, 1995): chapters 2–4

## **Week 6: Reading Week**

### **Week 7: Nixon, Vietnam, and the China card**

#### Required reading

- John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, revised edition (Oxford University Press, 2005), chapters 8–9

#### Background reading

- Elizabeth Drew, *Richard M. Nixon* (St. Martins, 2007)
- Samuel Huntington, 'American Ideals Versus American Institutions,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 297–322
- Thomas McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After*, second edition (Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), chapters 6–7
- Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford 2015), chapters 2–7
- Phil Williams, 'Détente and U.S. Domestic Politics,' *International Affairs* 61 (Summer 1985): 431–47

### **Week 8: Bush, Iraq, and the pursuit of primacy**

#### Required reading

- Dina Badie, 'Groupthink, Iraq, and the War on Terror: Explaining US Policy Shift Toward Iraq,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 469–88
- Timothy Lynch, *In the Shadow of Cold War: American Foreign Policy from George Bush Sr. to Donald Trump* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), Introduction, chapters 4–5
- Jack Snyder, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, 'Free Hand Abroad, Divide and Rule at Home?,' *World Politics* 61 (January 2009): 155–87

#### Background reading

- Alejandro Colás, 'Open Doors and Closed Frontiers: The Limits of American Empire,' *European Journal of International Relations* 14 (2008): 619–643
- Neta Crawford, *Accountability for Killing: Moral Responsibility for Collateral Damage in America's Post-9/11 Wars* (Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Robert Jervis, 'Understanding the Bush Doctrine,' *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (Fall 2003): 365–88
- James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (Penguin, 2004)
- Jon Western, 'The War over Iraq: Selling the War to the American Public,' in Ikenberry and Trubowitz, eds. *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 353–74
- Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2008)

## **PART 3: End of the American Century?**

### **Week 9: Coping with China's rise**

#### Required reading

- Jo Inge Bekkevold and Oystein Tunsjo, 'The Geopolitical Foundations for U.S. Strategy in a New U.S.–China Bipolar System,' *China International Strategy Review* 4 (2022): 39–54
- Pearson, Margaret, M.; Rithmire, Meg; Tsai, Kellee (2022), 'China's Party-State Capitalism and International Backlash: From Interdependence to Insecurity,' *International Security* 47: 135–76.
- Odd Arne Westad, 'Sleepwalking toward War,' *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2024.

#### Background reading

- Graham Allison, 'The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?', *Atlantic Monthly*, 2015.
- Wang Jisi, 'The Plot Against China? How Beijing Sees the New Washington Consensus,' *Foreign Affairs* 100 (July/August 2021): 48–57
- Fareed Zakaria, 'The New China Scare: Why America Shouldn't Panic About its Latest Challenger,' *Foreign Affairs* 99 (January/February 2020): 52–69.
- Sheena Chestnut Greitens, 'Xi Jinping's Quest for Order,' *Foreign Affairs*, October 3, 2022
- Michael Mastanduno, 'Biden's China Dilemma,' *China International Strategy Review* 3 (2021): 217–33
- Tao Xie, 'The Great Delusion of Engagement: How China Should Compete with the US,' *China International Strategy Review* (2020): 73–85
- William Hurst and Peter Trubowitz, "The Fantasy of a Grand Bargain between America and China: Why Deadlock is More Likely than Détente," *Foreign Affairs*, July 3, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/fantasy-grand-bargain-between-america-and-china>

### **Week 10: The Populist backlash**

#### Required reading

- Peter Trubowitz and Brian Burgoon, 'Make the Center Vital Again,' *Foreign Affairs* May 3, 2023: 1-9
- Jonathan Kirshner, 'Gone but Not Forgotten: Trump's Long Shadow and the End of American Credibility,' *Foreign Affairs* 100 (March/April 2021): 18–27
- Stefanie Walter, 'The Backlash Against Globalization,' *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24 (2021): 421–442

#### Background reading

- Michael Kazin, 'Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New Bottles,' *Foreign Affairs*, October 6, 2016.
- Walter Russell Mead, 'The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order,' *Foreign Affairs* 96 (March/April 2017): 2–7
- Carla Norrlof, 'Hegemony and Inequality: Trump and the Liberal Playbook,' *International Affairs*, 94 (January 2018): 63–88
- Patrick Porter, *The False Promise of Liberal Order*. London: Polity.
- Peter Trubowitz and Brian Burgoon, *Geopolitics and Democracy: The Western Liberal Order from Foundation to Fracture*. New York: Oxford, 2023

### **Week 11: Trump and the future of American power**

#### Required reading

- Jennifer Lind and Daryl Press, 'Strategies of Prioritization: American Foreign Policy After Primacy,' *Foreign Affairs*, June 24, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/strategies-prioritization-lind-press>  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/ungoverning-america>
- Russel Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum, 'Ungoverning America,' *Foreign Affairs*, September 5, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/ungoverning-america>
- Phillips O'Brien, 'How to Build a Post-American Liberal Order,' *Foreign Affairs*, September 12, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/how-build-post-american-liberal-order>
- Peter Trubowitz and Peter Harris 'The end of the American century? Slow erosion of the domestic sources of usable power,' *International Affairs* 93 (2019): 619-639.

#### Background reading

- Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, 'The Myth of Multipolarity: America's Staying Power,' *Foreign Affairs* 102 (May/June 2023): 76-91.
- Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, 'The Weaponized World Economy: Surviving the New Age of Economic Coercion,' *Foreign Affairs*, August 19, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/weaponized-world-economy-farrell-newman>

- Daekown Son, 'China's strategic opportunity in the era of "America First,"' *International Affairs*, 101, September 2025, 1899-1912, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaf140>
- Nadia Schadlow, 'A World Reordered,' *The National Interest*, February 24, 2025, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/a-world-reordered>
- Steve Rosen, 'A Better Way to Defend America,' *Foreign Affairs*, March 14, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/better-way-defend-america>