

MSc International Relations: IR448

American Grand Strategy

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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 one-hour lectures beginning week one of MT and 10 ninety-minute seminars beginning week one of MT. 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 MT.

Course assessment

Summative assessment will be based on a 4000-word essay in the LT (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 LT.

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

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, 'When 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: Contemporary American statecraft

Week 9: Obama, the Middle East, and "the pivot"

Required reading

- Jeffrey Goldberg, 'The Obama Doctrine,' *The Atlantic* (April 2016)
- Charles Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz, 'Dead Center: The Demise of Liberal Internationalism in the United States,' *International Security* 32 (Fall 2007): 7-44
- Timothy Lynch, *In the Shadow of Cold War: American Foreign Policy from George Bush Sr. to Donald Trump* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), chapters 6-7, conclusion

Background reading

- Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts, 'Did Obama have a grand strategy,?' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40 (2017): 295-234
- Dan Drezner, 'Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy? Why We Need Doctrines in Uncertain Times,' *Foreign Affairs* 90 (July/August 2011): 57-68

- David Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and the Surprising Use of American Power* (Broadway, 2013)
- Theda Skocpol and Lawrence Jacobs, 'Accomplished and Embattled: Understanding Obama's Presidency,' *Political Science Quarterly* 127 (March 2012): 1-24
- Zaki Laïdi, *Limited Achievements: Obama's Foreign Policy* (Palgrave, 2012)

Week 10: The Trump era: strategy or chaos?

Required reading

- Richard Haass, 'Present at the Disruption,' *Foreign Affairs* 99 (September/October 2020): 24-34
- Jonathan Kirshner, 'Gone But Not Forgotten: Trump's Long Shadow and the End of American Credibility,' *Foreign Affairs* 100 (March/April 2021): 18-27
- Nadia Shadlow, 'The End of American Illusion: Trump and the World as It Is,' *Foreign Affairs*, 99 (September/October 2020): 35-45

Background reading

- Michael Mastanduno, 'Trump's Trade Revolution,' *The Forum* (January 2020): 523-48
- Walter Russell Mead, 'The Jacksonian Tradition and American Foreign Policy,' *National Interest* 58 (Winter 1999/2000): 5-29
- McTague and Peter Nicholas, 'The World Order That Donald Trump Revealed,' *The Atlantic*, October 20, 2020
- Carla Norrlof, 'Hegemony and Inequality: Trump and the Liberal Playbook,' *International Affairs*, 94 (January 2018): 63-88
- Patrick Porter, 'Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment,' *International Security* 42 (Spring 2018): 9-46
- Hilde Eliassen Restad, 'What Makes America Great? Donald Trump, National Identity, and U.S. Foreign Policy,' *Global Affairs* 6 (2020): 21-36

Week 11: Biden and the shape of things to come

Required reading

- Dan Deudney and John Ikenberry 'The Intellectual Foundations of the Biden Revolution,' *Foreign Policy* July 2, 2021
- Margaret MacMillan, 'Which Past is Prologue? Heeding the Right Warnings from History,' *Foreign Affairs* 99 (September/October 2020): 12-23
- Peter Trubowitz and Peter Harris, 'The End of the American Century? Slow Erosion of the Domestic Sources of Usable Power,' *International Affairs* 95 (May 2019): 619-39

Background reading

- Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century,' *International Security* 40 (Winter 2015/16):7-53.
- Jorge Castañeda, *America Through Foreign Eyes* (Oxford University Press, 2020)
- Wang Jisi, 'The Plot Against China? How Beijing Sees the New Washington Consensus,' *Foreign Affairs* 100 (July/August 2021): 48-57
- Robert Kagan, 'A Superpower, Like It or Not: Why Americans Must Accept Their Global Role,' *Foreign Affairs* 100 (March/April 2021): 28-39
- Charles Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz, 'Home Front: Why Internationalist Foreign Policy Needs a Stronger Domestic Foundation,' *Foreign Affairs* 100 (May/June 2021): 92-101
- Inderjeet Parmar, 'The US-led Liberal International Order: Imperialism by Another Name?,' *International Affairs* 94 (January 2018): 151-72