RPOS 484/584 American Foreign Policy Formulation and Implementation

Class Meeting Location: Husted 302
Class Meeting Time:
Undergraduates: Wednesday, 5:45-8:25 pm
Graduate Students: Wednesday, 5:45-9:25 pm
Office Hours: Tuesday, 9:30-11:30 am (Uptown Campus, Humanities B-16 Contact Office)
By Appointment (Downtown Campus, Milne 220)

Course Description
The United States is the most powerful country in the world. Since the end of World War II, the United States has fought wars against or conducted major military operations in at least sixteen different countries. The United States spends three to four times as much on its military as China, the next biggest spender. While a tiny part of the U.S. budget, the United States is the largest provider of foreign aid globally. U.S. decisions in international trade and climate negotiations have global effects. As a result, we should all try to better understand how the United States behaves in international politics, how it has behaved in the past, why it behaves that way, and how it should behave. This writing-intensive course will introduce students to theories of foreign policy that may explain U.S. behavior, along with more detailed case studies of important episodes in U.S. diplomatic and military history and reviews of contemporary U.S. foreign policy challenges. Students will leave the course with a greater knowledge of historical and contemporary U.S. foreign policy as well as a theoretical toolkit they can employ to understand international politics more broadly.

Assignments and Grading:
Participation: 20%
As a discussion-based course, active participation is a crucial component of the grade. This includes both regular attendance in class and contribution to class discussion. Students should therefore complete all readings before attending class.

Reading Notes: 10%
Each week students are responsible for selecting a passage from the readings (as short as a sentence but no longer than a paragraph) which they find particularly compelling. The excerpt must be e-mailed to me (cclary@albany.edu) by Tuesday evening each week, followed by a 3-5 sentence reflection by the student.

Memos: 20%
Over the course of the semester, students will prepare two types of documents commonly featured in the U.S. national security bureaucracy. An information memorandum summarizes new information that a more senior policymaker may need. An action memorandum prompts a more senior policymaker to take a specific action by offering the official at least two alternatives (one of which is always to continue with present policy, i.e. “do nothing”) and recommending an action to the policymaker for his/her acceptance or rejection. Writing prompts will be distributed in class during the semester for both memoranda. Hard copies of the information memorandum are due on October 5. Hard copies of the action memoranda are due on November 30.

Research paper: 50%
The research paper is the most important component of the final grade, so students should begin work on this as early as possible. Papers should be between 20 and 30 double-spaced pages and can be on any topic related to American foreign policy. The papers must include (1) a brief literature
review, (2) a clearly stated argument or hypothesis (derived from the readings, another source, or an original argument), (3) a description of how the argument/hypothesis will be evaluated empirically, and (4) an evaluation of the argument using evidence from at least one historical case. While students are encouraged to evaluate an argument advanced in the course readings, they cannot use the same case(s) to evaluate the argument as are used in the readings.

In week 5 (September 28), students are required to submit a research paper proposal (1-2 pages) that identifies the argument/hypothesis to be tested and the case(s) that will be examined. In week 9 (October 26), students are required to submit a progress report updating and expanding the research proposal, along with enumerating and describing major theoretical, empirical, and/or historical works from which the student intends to draw. I will provide written feedback to both the research paper proposal and the progress report.

Students are permitted to submit and receive feedback on one rough draft, but this must be submitted electronically no later than November 16. I will provide comments within two weeks of receiving a rough draft. Students are also encouraged to consult with university-wide resources for writing assistance, such as the Writing Center (HU 140), or meet me during office hours or by appointment to discuss the paper. The final draft of the paper is due electronically on December 15. Failure to turn in the paper on time will result in substantial penalties.

Required Text:


Course Schedule:

*** Signifies Readings for Graduate Students Only ***

Week 1 – Introduction [August 31]

Week 2 – What is Grand Strategy? [99 pages + 48 pages] [September 7]


Week 3 – Cold War/Containment [100 pages + 24 pages] [September 14]


Week 4 – Cuban Missile Crisis / Bureaucratic Politics [115 + 34 pages] [September 21]


Week 5 – Vietnam/Escalation [102 + 38 pages] [September 28]


**RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE IN CLASS.**

Week 6 – Reagan/Generational Turnover [91 + 42 pages] [October 5]


INFORMATION MEMORANDUM DUE IN CLASS.

Week 7 – NO CLASS (Yom Kippur) [October 12]

Week 8 – Rwanda/Moral Hazard/CNN Effect [117 + 44 pages] [October 19]


Steven Livingston, Clarifying the CNN Effect (Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government (June 1997), 1-18.


Week 9 – Trade/Sanctions/Two-level Games [95 + 25 pages] [October 26]


**RESEARCH PAPER PROGRESS REPORT DUE IN CLASS.**

Week 10 – Nuclear Nonproliferation/Norms and Selection Effects [93 + 31 pages] [November 2]


Week 11 – 9/11/Intelligence Failures [132 pages] [November 9]


Week 12 – Iraq War 2/Threat Inflation and “Oversell” [94 + 50 pages] [November 16]


Week 13 – NO CLASS (Thanksgiving) [November 23]

Week 14 – Drones/Secrecy [88 + 17 pages] [November 30]


**ACTION MEMORANDUM DUE IN CLASS.**

Week 15 – Non-governmental Organizations / Lobbying [89 + 30 pages] [December 7]


Finals Week [December 15]

**RESEARCH PAPER TO BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY.**