RPOS 383 American Foreign Policy
Class Meeting Location: Humanities 024
Class Meeting Time: MWF 10:25-11:20 am
Office Hours: MWF 9:30-10:15am (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.

Learning Objectives:
By the end of the course, all students should be able to
1. Identify key concepts in readings and describe the steps of an argument
2. Critically evaluate common readings in discussions with instructor and fellow students
3. Ask incisive questions of texts as well as of fellow class participants
4. Speak and write effectively about course topics

Accommodations:
Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning, and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please go here http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml and arrange for an academic accommodation letter to be sent to me. If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course, please also inform me as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity:
Don’t do unethical stuff, or your grade could suffer catastrophically. For a good survey of potential dangers, see http://www.albany.edu/eltl/academic_integrity.php.

Assignments and Grading:
The course will be assessed on a typical A-E scale (100-93% A, 92.9-90% A-, 89.9-87% B+, etc.).

Participation: 10%
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. We will dedicate a few minutes of each class to a discussion of current events related to U.S. foreign policy. Students are asked and expected to contribute to these discussions, as well. Read the news and come prepared to talk.
Random Short Quizzes: 30%
At the beginning of each class I will roll a four-sided dice to determine if there is a quiz for that day. There is consequently a 1-in-4 chance of a quiz in any given class. The quiz will be very short and will cover material covered in lecture or readings since the last quiz (or since the beginning of the semester for the first such quiz). I will drop the bottom 20 percent of quizzes in calculating this portion of the final grade. In other words, there will be an estimated ten quizzes over the course of the semester, of which I will use, in expectation, the best eight quizzes to calculate your final grade. There will be no make-up quizzes for students who miss a quiz without prior instructor permission, or without a valid medical excuse (http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcelude.shtml). I sympathize in advance with all of your unexpected car problems.

Op-ed: 15%
Each student will be asked to write a short piece (no less than 800 and no more than 1,200 words) of persuasive public writing designed to engage a non-specialist audience. The op-ed ought to avoid technical language, succinctly explain the issue, and advocate for a (set of) policy recommendation(s). This is due in class on Monday, December 11.

Movie Reflection: 15%
Each student will be asked to write a short (no less than 750 and no more than 1,000 words) reflection on what one of the following movies tells us—or fails to correctly tell us—about American foreign policy: (1) Restrepo, (2) Dr. Strangelove, or (3) Fog of War. Each student will be responsible for identifying a way to watch his/her preferred movie. Students are encouraged to watch the same movie together if they so prefer, so long as they do not collaborate on the writing project. This is due in class on Monday, November 27.

Final Examination: 30%
A final examination will be administered during finals period on Thursday, December 14th from 3:30–5:30pm. The final examination will consist of five short (define-and-identify) questions and two essay questions.

Course Schedule:

1. Monday, August 28 – First class

2. Wednesday, August 30 – Theories


3. Friday, September 1 – Organization of the U.S. national security apparatus


    Monday, September 4 – NO CLASS [LABOR DAY]
4. Wednesday, September 6 – Grand Strategy


5. Friday, September 8 – Spiral/Deterrence Model


6. Monday, September 11 – Road to World War II in Europe

Justus D. Doenecke and John E. Wilz, From Isolation to War, 1931-1941 (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2003), 82-129.

7. Wednesday, September 13 – Pearl Harbor

Doenecke and Wilz, From Isolation to War, 130-187.

8. Friday, September 15 – Containment, part 1


9. Monday, September 18 – Containment, part 2

Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 53-86.

10. Wednesday, September 20 – Korean War

Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 87-124.

Friday, September 22 – NO CLASS [ROSH HASHANAH]

11. Monday, September 25 – Selective Rollback in Iran


12. Wednesday, September 27 – Bureaucratic Politics


13. Friday, September 29 – Cuban Missile Crisis, part 1

14. Monday, October 2 – Cuban Missile Crisis, part 2

15. Wednesday, October 4 – Vietnam [What Happened]

Friday, October 6 – NO CLASS [INSTRUCTOR ON THE ROAD]


17. Wednesday, October 11 – Generational Turnover

18. Friday, October 13 – Reagan

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

20. Wednesday, October 18 – Rwanda, pt. 1

21. Friday, October 20 – Rwanda, pt. 2

22. Monday, October 23 – 9/11, pt. 1
23. Wednesday, October 25 – 9/11, pt. 2


24. Friday, October 27 – Afghanistan, pt. 1


25. Monday, October 30 – Afghanistan, pt. 2


26. Wednesday, November 1 – Afghanistan, pt. 3


27. Friday, November 3 – Nuclear Weapons


28. Monday, November 6 – Nuclear Taboo, pt. 1


29. Wednesday, November 8 – Nuclear Taboo, pt. 2


30. Friday, November 10 – Iraq, pt. 1


31. Monday, November 13 – Iraq, pt. 2

32. Wednesday, November 15 – ISIS, pt. 1

[TBD/TBA]

33. Friday, November 17 – ISIS, pt. 2

[TBD/TBA]

Monday, November 20 – NO CLASS [INSTRUCTOR ON THE ROAD]

Wednesday, November 22 – NO CLASS [THANKSGIVING BREAK]

Friday, November 24 – NO CLASS [THANKSGIVING BREAK]

34. Monday, November 27 – Syria

MOVIE REFLECTION DUE IN CLASS.

[TBD/TBA]

35. Wednesday, November 29 – North Korea, pt. 1


36. Friday, December 1 – North Korea, pt. 2


37. Monday, December 4 – Rise of China


38. Wednesday, December 6 – South China Sea


39. Friday, December 8 – Iran

40. Monday, December 11 – Climate Change [LAST DAY OF CLASSES]

**OP-ED DUE IN CLASS.**


41. Thursday, December 14, **3:30-5:30pm** – FINAL EXAMINATION