Course Overview

In debates about American foreign policy, it is often said that “politics stops at the water’s edge.” While matters of domestic policy—taxes, welfare, regulation, crime, etc.—are legitimately contested in the political arena, foreign policy is too arcane, too distant from people’s lives, and ultimately too dangerous to embroil in the push and pull of domestic politics. In this view, foreign policy is the domain, not of politicians, but of statesmen—leaders who sit above the political fray and attempt to pursue the “national interest” in an enlightened manner. This course challenges this perspective by exploring how domestic and international pressures influence the formation and execution of U.S. foreign policy.

Some of the questions we will consider include:

1. To what extent are decisions about the use of force guided by the “national interest”? What does this term mean?
2. How do domestic political factors such as public opinion, the media, interest groups, and Congress influence presidential decisions? Does being a democracy help or hinder the conduct of American foreign policy?
3. What is the impact of important bureaucratic actors such as the Defense and State Departments?
4. What criteria should be employed when deciding whether or not to use military force?

The focus is on contemporary and historical events, from World War II to the more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Students should have at least a basic understanding of most major national security events from this era.

Course Requirements and Method of Evaluation

Grades will be based on two in-class midterm examinations (20% each), a final exam (40%), and participation in discussion sections (20%).

1. Midterm Exams (March 27, 29)

The midterm exams will consist of two equally weighted parts: (1) identification questions (March 27) and (2) short-answer questions (March 29). All the questions will be based on the assigned material. I will hand out a study guide one week before each exam. Keep in mind that the best way to do well on the exam is by keeping up with and understanding the weekly readings.
2. Final Exam (May 15)

The final exam will be cumulative and will consist of essay questions. All the questions will be based on the assigned material. I will hand out a study guide one week before the exam, but note that your best chance of doing well is by keeping up with the weekly readings.

3. Section Participation

Everyone is expected to complete the weekly readings and attend section meetings prepared to engage in discussion based on the assigned material. Students who, for non-medical or otherwise excusable reasons (to be determined after a consultation with Mr. Toukan), cannot adhere to the attendance/participation rules should drop this class and give their spot to someone on the waitlist who is able and willing to follow the rules.

Students needing special accommodations to enable full participation in the course should contact me or Mr. Toukan as early as possible. All information will remain confidential. You also may contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center, 1305 Linden Drive, (608) 263-2741 regarding questions about campus policies and services.

Required Materials

Students should purchase the following books:


In addition to the readings, we will watch *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*, a documentary about the Vietnam War. There is no need to purchase this film; we will watch it in class.

Other readings will be accessible through the course website at [https://learnuw.wisc.edu](https://learnuw.wisc.edu).

Schedule of Classes and Readings

1. Introduction

- Course Overview and Expectations

- Politics and the Water’s Edge

- Statesmen or Politicians? Models of Foreign Policy-Making
2. Domestic Influences on Foreign Policy

- Public Opinion and the Media
  - Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler. Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4.

- Interest Groups

- Congress

3. Case Studies in War and Peace

- The Vietnam War

- Intervention in Somalia and the Problem of Failed States


**Coercion and Military Intervention in the Balkans**


**September 11 and the War on Terror**


**The War in Afghanistan**


**The Iraq War**


– Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

**Nuclear Proliferation: Iran and North Korea**


4. Conclusion and Reflections

• Review and Discussion