1 Course Description

This course analyzes processes of decision-making in the context of national and international security. The substantive focus is primarily on foreign policy decisions, often in crisis situations. The class is divided into two parts. In Part I, we will cover a range of theoretical explanations and frameworks for understanding decision-making, including Prospect Theory, personality psychology, groupthink, rational choice and the use of analogical reasoning. In doing so, we will also discuss different methodological approaches to understanding decision-making, including the use of case studies, psycho-biography, experiments and quantitative analysis. In Part II of the course, we will assess 5 crucial decisions in international politics (1 per week). In this part of the semester, the focus will be on applying the insights of Part I to critically assess existing explanations for these consequential episodes in world politics.

This course is an advanced undergraduate seminar. It does assume some background knowledge of international relations. It also requires a commitment to keep up with the readings, which will be more intensive than they would be in a beginning lecture course. Because the course is a seminar, it will also require a commitment to consistently participate in discussions, which count for a healthy part of your final grade. The primary assignment in the course is a research paper (8-12 pages). This will require some independent research by you, though I will provide guidance throughout the semester on this project.

2 Guidelines

For this specific class:

- If you ever have any questions, or are confused about something, please do not hesitate to come to office hours and meet with me. Please also consider making an appointment just to introduce yourself and tell me how the course is going. Office hours are Tuesdays between 1:30-3:15 PM, and you can make an appointment at the following website: https://calendar.wisc.edu/scheduling-assistant/public/profiles/jSWjsloX.html If you
are unavailable at that time due to a conflict with another class, you can email me to schedule an appointment.

- You are responsible for the readings listed under each class.

- If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance, please contact me early in the semester so that we can consider accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities.

- Obviously, academic misconduct is not tolerated. Please make sure you are familiar with the policies outlined by the Dean of Students.

- If you have any questions about anything related to the course, email me and I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.

- One exception: I will not respond to emails sent the night before an assignment is due.

Some general guidelines that probably apply to any class you take:

- Do the readings in preparation for each class. If you miss one, don’t ignore it and move on, but make an effort to catch up.

- Come to class on time.

- It’s fine to use a computer to take notes, but please don’t bring your computer so you can write emails and read the news during class (it’s much more obvious than you realize).

- There are legitimate reasons to have to miss class, but if you must, please email me ahead of time to let me know.

3 Assignments

1. Sign up for one class as “class discussion leader”

   - Each week, one student will be assigned to lead discussion for the first half of class. This student will be responsible for reviewing the readings assigned and the discussion questions submitted by their fellow classmates, preparing some questions to get discussion going, and moderating discussion for the first part of class.

2. Weekly discussion questions

   - Each week (except for the first and last class), you will be expected to submit one discussion question on any of the readings assigned that week by no later than 3:00pm on Monday (the day before class). I will not evaluate the content of these questions, but they should either be a clarification question or a substantive question on the assigned readings that you think would be useful to discuss in class. The discussion leader will also use these questions as they prepare comments for our seminar. These can be turned in via the course’s Learn @ UW course dropbox.

3. Memo on “lessons learned” (1-2 pages), due Thursday, April 30th.
• A short assignment due after the last substantive class, this is designed to get you thinking about lessons from the course. We will use these memos as a basis for discussion in the last class on May 5th (this also means that there will be no readings for the last class, when the research paper is due).

4. Final research paper (8-12 pages), due Tuesday, May 5th.

• Topic: Use a theory of decision-making to explain an aspect (any aspect you choose) of U.S. decision making in the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

• We will discuss this assignment in detail in class, but the basics are as follows. You will be assigned a topic at the beginning of the semester for the paper. The topic will be a decision-making episode not covered in our course. Your assignment is to use theories covered in class (or, if you wish, other theories) to analyze the events and provide a compelling explanation for them. You must sign up for at least one appointment at office hours to discuss your paper (but feel free to sign up for more!). It is highly recommended that you bring an outline of your paper idea to the appointment.


4 Grading

Your final grade will be composed of:

• 45% - Class Participation (includes being discussion leader for class)

• 15% - Weekly discussion questions + memo on “lessons learned”

• 40% - Research paper

5 Readings Used in the Course

Journal articles and edited book chapters - These are generally available through the UW Library website. If they are not accessible online, then there will be a clickable link on the syllabus.

Books (to purchase)


Schedule

1. Introduction [January 20]
   - NO READINGS

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PART I: THEORIES OF DECISION MAKING

2. Rational Actor Model...and its critics [January 27]

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3. Cognitive & Judgmental Biases I: Prospect Theory [February 3]
   - Selections from Risk Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy (2001), Rose McDermott (University of Michigan Press, MI):
     - Prospect Theory, pp. 15-45. [link]
     - The 1956 Suez Crisis, pp. 135-165. [link]
4. Cognitive & Judgmental Biases II: Overconfidence and other sources of misperception [February 10]

- Why Hawks Win (2007), Daniel Kahneman and Jonathan Renshon, *Foreign Policy* 158: 34-38. [link]

5. Psychological Profiling of Leaders [February 17]

  - Leader Personality Assessments in Support of Government Policy, Jerrold M. Post, pp. 39-61. [link]
  - Profile of Saddam Hussein:
    * Saddam Hussein of Iraq: A Political Psychology Profile, Jerrold M. Post, pp. 335-366. [link]
    * Saddam Hussein: Personality Traits and Motivational Biases, Walter Weintraub and David Winter, pp. 367-374. [link]
    * Saddam Hussein’s Leadership Style, Margaret G. Hermann, pp. 375-386. [link]
    * Saddam Hussein: Beliefs and Integrative Complexity, Stephen G. Walker, Mark Schafer, Michael D. Young & Peter Suedfeld, pp. 387–398. [link]

6. Physical and Mental Illness [February 24]

- Selections from *Presidential Leadership, Illness and Decisionmaking* (2007), Rose McDermott (Cambridge University Press):
  - Aging, Illness and Addiction, pp. 19-44. [link]
  - The Exacerbation of Personality: Woodrow Wilson, pp. 45-83. [link]
- Selections from *When Illness Strikes the Leader: The Dilemma of the Captive King* (1993), Jerrold M. Post and Robert S. Robins (Yale University Press):
  - When the Throne Room Becomes the Sick Room, pp. 1-30. [link]
  - The Mad King: Mental Illness Among the Mighty, pp. 31-61. [link]
7. Analogies and Learning from History [March 3]

  - Analogical Reasoning in Foreign Affairs: Two Views, pp. 3-18. [link]
  - Dien Bien Phu, pp. 148-173. [link]


- Selections from *Groupthink* (1982), Irving Janis (Wadsworth Publishing):
  - Why so many miscalculations?, pp. 2-13. [link]
  - A Perfect Failure: The Bay of Pigs, pp. 14-47. [link]
  - The Groupthink Syndrome, pp. 174-197. [link]

9. Bureaucracies and Organizations [March 17]

**Part II: The Cases**

10. Woodrow Wilson and the end of WWI [March 24]
   - Selections from *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (1964), Alexander George and Juliette George (Dover Publications):
     - Background: Introduction and chapters 1- 3, 8.
     - The Decision: chapters 11-15.

11. The British Decision to Resist Hitler in the 1930’s [April 7]

12. Success or Failure? U.S. Decision making in the Cuban Missile Crisis [April 14]
     [link]
     [link]

13. Failure of Intelligence: The U.S and the Shah of Iran [April 21]

**Background**

- Selections from *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (1962), Roberta Wohlstetter (Stanford University Press):
  - Foreword (by Thomas Schelling), pp. vii-ix. [link for all Wohlstetter selections]
  - Surprise, pp. 382-401.
Shah Case

  - Adventures in Intelligence, pp. 1-15. [link]
  - Failing to See That the Shah Was in Danger, pp. 15-123. [link]

14. President Carter and the Iran Hostage Crisis [April 28]

- Selections from *Guests of the Ayatollah: The Iran Hostage Crisis* (2007), Mark Bowden (Grove Press, NY) (selections TBD).

⇒ Memo on “lessons learned” due Thursday, April 30th

15. Reflections and Conclusions [May 5]

⇒ Final research paper due!