

PS271:US Foreign Policy

Seminar Leader: Aaron Allen
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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description

This multidisciplinary course explores the structural evolution of the United States' role in the world and the institutions shaping elite policy-making. Through an interactive approach, students will be able to contextualize contemporary American foreign policy challenges from their geographic, material, and ideational roots. Furthermore, course activities and assignments are tailored to assist students in becoming foreign policy practitioners fully capable of applying national security decision theories. The curriculum threads together historical cases, international relations scholarship, and security studies in order to provide a holistic understanding of all the constituent parts influencing America's external posture. How did a nation once known for its relatively isolationist disposition become a global superpower and key enforcer of the liberal international order? What are the unique attributes of American-style foreign policy that have remained consistent across presidential administrations since the end of World War II? A critical appraisal of topics such as hard and soft power, alliances, globalization and multilateralism, bureaucratic politics, and the rise of the military industrial complex offers students the necessary tools to answer these core questions. The complementary emphasis on professional development will allow participants to garner practical skills through simulations, seminar debates, and presentations.

Requirements

Readings:

1. Course reader available at the library.
2. Halperin, Morton H., Priscilla Clapp, and Arnold Kanter. 1974. *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*. 2nd Edition. Brookings Institution Press. (978-0815734093)
3. Nye, Joseph. 2005. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Public Affairs. (978-1586483067)
4. Kerr, Gordon. 2015. *A Short History of The Vietnam War*. Oldcastle Books Ltd. (978-1843442134)
5. Bush, George H. W., and Brent Scowcroft. 1999. *A World Transformed*. Vintage Books. (978-0679752592)
6. Stent, Angela. 2015. *The Limits of Partnership*. Princeton University Press. (978-0691165868)
7. Hartung, William D., and Ben Freeman. 2025. *The Trillion Dollar War Machine: How Runaway Military Spending Drives America Into Foreign Wars and Bankrupts Us at Home*. Bold Type Books. (978-1645030638)

Class Preparation:

For each class, please read the assigned texts thoroughly and come prepared to discuss:

- The main arguments put forth by the author(s);
- The role of individual actors, domestic considerations, and other similar factors needed to comprehend evolving trends in U.S. foreign policy;
- And how each reading relates to the larger themes of bureaucratic politics, elite decision-making, and contemporary challenges.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Please know that there will be a sign-in sheet for each session. Up to two absences will not affect one's grade or require documentation. Every additional absence without approved leave will result in the subtraction of one point from the overall final grade. If you need a Leave of Absence, please contact the instructor as soon as possible to make the appropriate arrangements.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credits for any course if a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. Students facing a long-term, serious medical or personal emergency (generally lasting more than two weeks) may request a Leave of Absence, to be approved by the Dean, Associate Dean, Head of Student Life, or Director of Academic Services. The 30% rule applies even in these cases. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook in Section 2.8.

Academic Integrity:

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accessibility:

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for longer-term accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement. If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within

the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the Bard College Berlin Accessibility page. Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Assignments, Grade Breakdowns and Deadlines:

Written:

Policy Recommendation Memo	45%
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Students are required to write a policy memo to the current U.S. President that recommends a proscribed action on a matter of national security. This written assignment must be narrowly tailored, well organized and have a clear and concise style. The memo must include an executive summary, background information, policy options with analysis, and a final recommendation. More detailed information will be provided in class.

Memo Length and Formatting Requirements: word length between 3500 - 4500 words, single-spaced, 1-inch margins, and Chicago style footnotes (no work cited page required).

- Topic: Submit via Google Classroom 2-3 sentences describing your topic for approval.
Due September 11, 2026 at 17:00 CEST
- Policy Memo Outline: Submit a 3–5 page outline of your policy memo via Google Classroom. **Due October 2, 2026 at 23:59 CEST. (5% of total grade)**
- First Draft: Submit the first draft of your memo via Google Classroom. **Due October 31, 2026 at 11:59 CEST. (10% of total grade)**
- Second Draft w/ Group Review: After revising your first draft, you will be placed into a small group for a peer review. **Your second draft will be due to your peers by November 29, 2026 at 12:00 CEST. (10% of total grade)**
- Final Draft: Submit final draft of memo via Google Classroom on **December 13, 2026 at 23:59 CEST. (15% of total grade)**
- Presentation: You will deliver a 10–15 minute presentation on your policy memo during completion week on **December 14, 2026** at our regular class time. **(5% of total grade)**

Policy on Late Submission of Papers:

Papers that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). The instructor will not accept any papers that are more than 24 hours late.

Oral:

Class Participation	20%
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This seminar involves thoughtful and active participation in class discussions, reflections on current affairs, and working groups. The classroom is a protected space and you should feel free to voice your arguments and comments. Your class participation grade will be based on: (1) engagement in course discussions; (2) current affairs updates; (3) simulations; (4) debates; (5) and working groups.

Group Presentation	15%
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Each student will be placed in a group that will be assigned a topic on a U.S. response to an international challenge. Your group must prepare a 45-minute presentation exploring the different facets influencing U.S. foreign policy decision making on your topic. After the presentation, your group will facilitate a class discussion for the remainder of the session. More detailed information will be provided in class.

Exams:

Midterm Exam	20%
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Students will take an in-class midterm exam on October 15, 2026. More detailed information will be provided in class

Schedule

**Week/
Beginning**

Tuesday

Thursday

**Week 1
August 30**

Course Introduction:

- United States Constitution
- 2025 National Security Strategy of the United States of America
- Mead “The Jacksonian Tradition: And American Foreign Policy”

US Foreign Policy (1777-1945):

- Kissinger, “Diplomacy, Chapter 2”
- Kaufman, “A Concise History of U.S. Foreign Policy, Chapters 2 & 3”

**Week 2
September 6**

Cold War Containment:

- Kennan, “The Source of Soviet Conduct”
- Gaddis, “Strategies of Containment” (pp. 3- 86)

Cold War Statecraft:

- Hanhimäki, Schoenborn and Zanchetta "Transatlantic Relations Since 1945: An Introduction, Ch. 1"
- Pollard, “Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War: Bretton Woods, the Marshall Plan and American Rearmament (1944–50)”
- Stuart, “Constructing the Iron Cage: The 1947 National Security Act”

**Week 3
September 13**

Bureaucratic Politics Pt. I:

- Halperin, Clapp, and Kanter, “Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy” (Ch 1-6)

Bureaucratic Politics Pt. II:

- Halperin, Clapp, and Kanter, “Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy” (Ch. 7-12)

**Week 4
September 20**

Bureaucratic Politics Pt. III:

- Halperin, Clapp, and Kanter, “Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy” (Ch. 13-18)

Case Study: Containment in the Pacific and the Korean War:

- Green, "By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783 (Ch. 7)"
- Hybel, “Harry Truman and the Decision to Intervene in the Korean War”

Week 5 September 27	Soft Power: ● Nye, “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics”	Case Study: U.S-Israeli Special Relationship in the Cold War ● Brecher, "US Secretary of State George C. Marshall's Losing Battles against President Harry S. Truman's Palestine Policy" ● Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel Since 1948: A "Special Relationship"?" ● Mearsheimer and Walt, "The Israel Lobby"
Week 6 October 4	Case Study: The Vietnam War: ● Kerr, “A Short History of the Vietnam War”	Nuclear Policy & Arms Control: ● Nichols, “Nuclear Strategy, 1950–1990: The Search for Meaning” ● Congressional Research Services, “Arms Control and Nonproliferation: A Catalog of Treaties and Agreements” ● Watch: The Cuban Missile Crisis: At The Brink
Week 7 October 11	Intelligence and Covert Action: ● Kennedy, “Of Knowledge and Power: The Complexities of National Intelligence” ● Talbot, “The Devil’s Chessboard”	****Midterm Exam****
October 18- 24	*****Fall Break*****	*****Fall Break*****
Week 8 October 25	The End of the Cold War and the New World Order: ● McMahon, “The Cold War: The Final Phase, 1980-1990” ● Bush and Scowcroft, "A World Transformed (Ch. 1-12)"	Simulation- Congressional Committee Legislation Markup: ● Demarest, “Resourcing the National Security Enterprise: Connecting the Ends and Means of US National Security, Chapter 3” ● Griffin and Waxman, “War Powers: Congress, the President, and the Courts”

**Week 9
November 1**

Case Study- The First Gulf War:

- Jones, “America, Oil, and War in the Middle East”
- Bush and Scowcroft, "A World Transformed (Ch. 13-19)"
- Watch: [The Gulf War](#)

Post-Cold War US-Russian Relations:

- Stent, “The Limits of Partnership” (pp. 1- 158)

**Week 10
November 8**

Great Debate: NATO Expansion:

- Sarotte,” How to Enlarge NATO: The Debate inside the Clinton Administration, 1993–95”
- Albright, “Why Bigger is Better”
- NATO, “Russia's Accusations - Setting the Record Straight”
- Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin”
- Friedman, “Now a Word From X”

U.S.- Sino Relations:

- Council on Foreign Relations, [“Timeline of US-Chinese Relations since 1949”](#)
- Benvenuti, "US relations with the PRC during the Cold War”
- Green, "By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783 (Ch. 12-15)"

**Week 11
November 15**

Simulation: National Security Council

- Galui, “Resourcing the National Security Enterprise: Connecting the Ends and Means of US National Security, Chapter 4”
- Watch: [An Introduction to the National Security Council](#)

9/11 & the Global War on Terrorism:

- Zegart, "September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies"
- Singh, “The Bush Doctrine”
- Johnson, “Blowback”
- Gordon, “Can the War on Terror Be Won?”

Week 12
November 22

Group Presentation I- War in Afghanistan

- Watch: [America and the Taliban Documentary \(Parts 1-3\)](#)

Group Presentation II- War in Iraq:

- Watch:
Buying the War:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KzYL6e3sV0>

Part 1: Bush's War
<https://www.pbs.org/video/frontline-bushs-war-part-1/>

Part 2: Bush's War
<https://www.pbs.org/video/frontline-bushs-war-part-2/>

Week 13
November 28

The Deep State Part I:

- Hartung and Freeman, "The Trillion-Dollar War Machine: How Runaway Military Spending Drives America into Foreign Wars and Bankrupts Us at Home (Ch. 1-6)"

The Deep State Part II:

- Hartung and Freeman, "The Trillion-Dollar War Machine: How Runaway Military Spending Drives America into Foreign Wars and Bankrupts Us at Home (Ch. 7-Epilogue)"

Week 14
December 6

The Re-Emergence of a Multipolar World:

- Cooley and Nexon, "How Hegemony Ends"
- Allison, "China vs. America: Managing the Next Clash of Civilizations"
- Tellis, "Balancing without Containment: A U.S. Strategy for Confronting China's Rise"

Final Course: Guest Speaker