Fall 2012

Ideological Roots of U.S. Foreign Policy
POLS/History 497
Saturdays: 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

INSTRUCTOR: Mohan R. Limaye, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
Boise State University

NO TEXTBOOK

INTRODUCTION:

You will agree that, in the post 9-11-2001 world, it makes sense to take a fresh look at the United States foreign policy (USFP), to track where we were and where we are now in terms of our international relations. We will also address a possible reshaping of America into an ethically sound nation, “friendly” to itself in the long run.

Some of the readings and student assignments in this course may appear on the surface not closely connected with the theme of our course. But I’m going to leave it to the student to realize the connections and linkages, discover differences and similarities in the themes or topics of the books recommended for the Book Report, and build his or her own understanding of US foreign policy through the readings, class discussions, and the assignments. The ambiance of the classroom and the structure of the course will be relaxed and flexible, and hence should be conducive to student participation.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS COURSE

▪ We will explore various influences on the shaping of the USFP:

As a class, we shall delve into the “psyche” of America, into the cultural, political, and sociological ideals and “myths” that have shaped the United States. We shall explore the various ideologies that have guided America in its foreign policy pursuit. Preferably and ideally, our search will yield one American dominant belief, one over-riding value, one constant preoccupation that has driven USFP.

▪ We shall critically evaluate today’s domestic or internal forces:

We shall explore to what extent the foreign policy of a nation is a reflection of its domestic workings. We shall study the structural influences on USFP (for example, the Constitutional provision for the President to be the Commander in Chief). I argue that there is a strong correlation between a country’s domestic policy/philosophy and its international relations. Our treatment of other nations
mirrors our care or neglect of our own people. In this context, we shall also examine the nexus among industry, military, and government. Another topic for investigation would be in what ways special interest groups and large corporations exercise a great deal of influence on all three branches of the U.S. government.

- **This course will be taught as a seminar:**

  The class will be loosely organized. It will depend heavily on student participation and student-teacher interaction. Attending class regularly and being prepared for discussions are crucial to any seminar experience. **Total freedom of expression for the students will be a hallmark of the course.** What this characteristic of the course also means is that lecturing will be minimal in the delivery of this course. The main responsibility for learning, gathering information, and doing thorough research on various topics relevant to the course will rest with the students. The students will write essays and research papers. My role will be mainly to guide, coach, monitor, critique, and evaluate student effort.

- **Teaching and learning are revolutionary activities:**

  I believe that teaching involves more than just giving information; it encourages radical (going to the roots) thinking and debate. In my judgment, teaching and learning at the University challenge mainstream or accepted thinking. University education should “decenter” a student. **Just imparting information or only building skills constitutes training, not education, and is the surest way of making oneself obsolete or outmoded.** University education should transform both the teacher and the taught. I’d like the students not just to work hard but to work smart. This is the position in critical pedagogy I believe in.

**TWO ADDITIONAL EMPHASSES IN THE COURSE**

(1) This course will provide plenty of opportunities for both the students and the instructor to learn from one another. For one, the students being American (most of them born and brought up in the U.S.) will have different perspectives on USFP from the perspective the instructor has had being raised in India. He has inevitably different perceptions of America, even though he has lived in the US for over 45 years and even though his graduate education occurred here, both the Master’s and his Ph.D.

(2) Secondly, the book summary assignment will allow several opportunities for all of us to be better informed than any of us could hope to be, if left to our own individual resources. Oral presentations of the books (in addition to the written reports), allowing Q-A periods, will be one more mode of reinforcing and deepening peer learning.
SOME POSSIBLE/POTENTIAL PROPOSITIONS (Students can choose any one from the following for their paper):

1. The most significant driver of USFP is American Exceptionalism, the historical legacy inherited from Americans’ belief that they are uniquely suited to fight evil (as Superman or Spiderman does). Blessed by God, Americans think that they have to take over the mantle of world guardianship.

2. Even though it is said that “America’s business is business,” other European imperial powers such as Spain, France, Netherlands, Britain were no different from the U.S. in that they all were seeking assured markets for their commercial activity and economic gain. One can still maintain that American global businesses serve as instruments or vehicles of USFP. Big business plays the role of a willing cheerleader or partner of U.S. government, when not playing the instigator of USFP.

3. NATO should have been disbanded right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since it was an alliance formed mainly to defend against aggressive Soviet intentions, it has no raison d’etre (no reason for existence) any more. It militates against the other supra/international body, the United Nations, by intervening in conflicts outside its geographic sphere. In fact, it undercuts the authority of the UN.

4. American hyper-patriotism explains USFP: The United States does no wrong. It is always there to defend liberty and democracy. “We don’t conquer; we liberate.”

5. “Your enemy’s enemy is your friend”; that seems to be the strategic foreign policy doctrine the U.S. believes in, even though its futility has been proven again and again.

6. Lack of empathy, inability to put oneself in the other’s shoe (total unawareness of other countries’ sensibilities) has been the hallmark of US international relations. America’s ignoring of the golden rule, Do unto others what you’d have done to you, explains a good deal about America’s international relations.

7. One can reasonably argue that what characterizes USFP is the opposite/reverse of “He shall cast stones who has not sinned”. The US often stands at the forefront of sinners ready to cast stones at others.

8. Expansionism seems to be an enduring, abiding goal of the US. Even the Founding Fathers had a covetous eye on other territories; for instance, Thomas Jefferson dreamed of acquiring some of the Caribbean islands for the new nation. However, one can say that the Louisiana Purchase and the purchase of Alaska were “fair and square” deals. France and the U.S. were willing seller and buyer, respectively. So were Russians -- willing sellers.

9. USFP and the American Dream are closely linked; they are interdependent. One feeds on the other.

10. The world expects the U.S. to run to the rescue of every nation that finds itself in trouble -- from civil wars, droughts, starvation, genocides, aggressions, all the way, to calamities like earthquakes, and tsunamis. However, some countries then
complain that the U.S. takes unilateral action when resolving international issues. That is not fair; one cannot have it both ways.

11. Most Americans of all persuasions agree on the principal contour of USFP, leading to its continuity. Consequently, regardless of the party affiliation of the President and regardless of which party holds a majority in Congress, USFP changes little, with a few exceptions.

12. It seems that Manifest Destiny, the idea that the U.S. has Providence guiding its course, is still a central belief, a driving force propelling USFP.

13. As a US Navy ad asserts, the United States is “a global force for good” on the world stage. The United States tries its best to uphold, to ensure, “Pax Americana” by keeping rogue nations in check.

14. Our political leaders insist that the goal of USFP is to spread democracy, free trade, and a US-style form of government throughout the (some times quite an intractable, intransigent) “third-world” countries for their own good.

15. Washington seems to go back and forth from Realism to Idealism in its pursuit of USFP.

16. (Choose a country) views USFP this way (Make an assertion). Elaborate on why that specific nation has this kind of perception of the United States and its foreign policy.

17. USFP is driven by the desire: a. To maintain America’s exceptional status in the world, b. To maintain its military strength superior to any other country’s, and c. To maintain a high level of prosperity.

18. Taking into account that there were massive protests in the United States during the Vietnam conflict, while hardly any during the Iraq war, makes one argue plausibly that whenever the military draft (conscription) is in operation U.S. citizens get actively involved in the conduct of the USFP.

19. (Numbers 19 and 20 are later insertions): Unofficial (though determined and continuous) support for religious conversion all over the world is an instrument of USFP. These converts, and their later generations, become the “insurgents” or fifth columnists for U.S. causes upsetting the political and demographic stability or balance in their native countries.

20. When one compares the U.S. “empire” with other {Choose THREE} empires in documented human history, one notices some similarities {Name a couple} and some differences {Name two}.

21. American “benign” ventures on the world stage, cultural and developmental, such as the Fulbright or similar scholarships and the Peace Corps often serve as soft tools to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives. Two examples of spectacular success are Steve Jobs and President Obama; both are sons of foreign students.

22. The spread of (Western-style) nationalism throughout the world in the last one hundred years or so, in place of tribal and royalist loyalties, has severely limited and constrained the efficacy of the hard/military power of U.S.-led coalitions in recent times.

23. The world today is neither bi-polar nor uni-polar. The rise of regional powers has rendered it multi-polar.
24. American foreign policy is often guided by the subconscious premise, a given, that perpetual growth is the birthright of the United States and it is unpatriotic to question this assumption.

25. Covert action, targeted assassinations, and “outsourcing” of soldering to private mercenary outfits are three increasingly frequent strategies the U.S. government employs for the implementation of its foreign policy.

POLICIES

(1) Tardiness and absences are discouraged: Each unexcused absence will cost 20 points. Serious reasons and unavoidable circumstances are okay, but no “frivolous” excuses!

(2) The presenter should make every effort to finish the oral report within the allotted time.

(3) Oral presentation grades are non-negotiable.

(4) The use of standard, “educated” English is required for all assignments. (Please proofread carefully before submission). Correct language is not just for “English” courses; it is for ALL communication.

(5) Once oral presentation dates are set, students will be expected to stick to the schedule (They can, however, provide substitutes).

(6) Late assignments one week tardy will be accepted with some penalty; assignments that are two weeks late will cost steeper penalties. And assignments later than two weeks will not be accepted at all (which means they will get a zero).

EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The First Assignment: In-Class Essay (200 points)

Due date: September 1, 2012

You will write an analytical essay (approximately 1,000 words) about your assessment of USFP, about how you evaluate it. First, describe what it is, what its mission and goals have been, what are its successes and failures (weaknesses and strengths). Be sure to create a thesis; think of an idea that in your judgment drives American behavior in the global arena. No external sources are needed or expected. This is totally your creation.

My purpose in asking you to write this impromptu in-class essay is to get an idea of how you write – your “feel” for language (your style), how you develop a thesis or a core idea, and how you craft a coherently sustained piece of writing with supporting examples or evidence.
The Second Assignment: Book Summary and Critique (300 points for the written report and 100 points for the oral presentation: 400 total)

Due date for the written paper: To Be Announced

Each student selects a book from the list provided by me as a separate handout. No book shall be chosen by more than one student. The only exceptions are books longer than 400 pages. The written book report should consist of two parts: (a) a summary and (b) a critical evaluation. Please also demonstrate in what ways the theme and its treatment in the book deepen or contribute to your understanding of USFP.

The report (the two parts together) should be approximately 2,000 words, about 10 to 12 pages (typed double-spaced).

1. If you must go outside my list for some reason, select only scholarly books, published preferably after 2000.
2. You must also include your own, original critical evaluation of the book, not from amazon.com or other (external-to-you) sources. The report must clearly demonstrate that you have read and reflected upon the book.
3. The report will be written, and presented in class orally.
4. An annotated bibliography of 10 articles related to the topic/thesis of the book should be attached.
5. A question-and-answer period will be an essential part of your oral presentation.

The student gives a hard copy of the report to the instructor and presents the book orally to the class.

The Third Assignment: Miscellaneous Research Project (200 points)

Due date: To Be Announced

Each student chooses one proposition out of those listed above. You can take either a pro or a con position. Preferably, I’d like all of them covered. Once all of those are taken, you can go out of the list and create your own propositions.

Find at least ten sources regarding the proposition you have chosen and ANNOTATE/EVALUATE them (your views). My goal for this project is to find out the depth and the breadth of your research skills. Your final product, an essay, with your annotations and your critical comments, together, should be about eight to ten pages, double-spaced. The objective is that any body that has not read your sources/original articles should still be able to get the main points so that the reader of your paper will know the context in which to readily grasp your thesis and analysis AND what other scholars you cite have to say about the proposition you have chosen. Please do not attach the articles or documents themselves, unless I ask for (some of) them. Just provide an annotated bibliography.
Oral presentations will follow.

The Fourth Assignment: Analysis and Reflection (200 points)

Due date: To Be Announced

The students should demonstrate in their essays their end-of-semester understanding of USFP. They may want to self-consciously examine whether (and to what extent) their views of USFP have undergone a change due to their “exposure” to this semester of readings and class participation.

At least TEN annotated sources (that influenced your thinking the most) are expected. Length of the essay: Approximately 2,000 words (No rigidity there; I don’t count words). Let me see you there in your paper.

Notes:

My grade and evaluation of the oral portions of your assignments will take into account how competently and confidently you field questions from the audience.

Total freedom of expression for every student is guaranteed in this class.