

Power and Purpose: Understanding U.S. Foreign Policy

University of California Washington Center, Spring Quarter 2021
Wednesdays, 2:00 – 5:00 PST

Instructor: Christopher A. Preble

Office Hours:

- Mondays, 2:00 - 3:00 pm PST
- Fridays 8:00 – 9:00 am PST
- Or by appointment

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Overview:

This course explores the ideas and assumptions that guide U.S. foreign policy. We will discuss how U.S. leaders choose to engage with the rest of the world -- and consider how they might in the future. The topics are those that you see in the news every day, including: relations with China and Russia; nuclear proliferation; the importance of culture and national identity; transnational threats such as infectious disease and climate change; the problems of weak and failing states; democracy promotion; terrorism and counterterrorism; resource competition; and the economics of national security. *The key objective for the course* is for you to understand -- and be able to explain to others -- how and why the United States behaves as it does on the world stage.

About the Instructor:

I am the co-director of the New American Engagement Initiative at the Atlantic Council. I have written or edited eight books, plus many shorter papers and book chapters on U.S. foreign policy, and I am also the co-host of the Net Assessment podcast in the War on the Rocks podcast network. I earned my PhD at Temple and my BA at George Washington. I was also a Surface Warfare Officer in the U.S. Navy.

Books:

- Ian Bremmer, *Superpower: Three Choices for America's Role in the World* (Portfolio/Penguin, 2015)
- Christopher Preble, *Peace, War, and Liberty: Understanding U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cato, 2019) (*Optional -- [and free here](#)*)

Other Course Materials:

Because I want the course to be focused on contemporary issues, most of our weekly readings will be short articles or think tank papers published within the last year. I will always post the required readings on Canvas. I may also post optional readings, e.g. stories or papers that I come across, and you are invited to read those that you find interesting.

I have also posted one short video (most less than 20 minutes) for each week of class. Watch the video and record your thoughts in the discussion thread. In each case, how might you apply the key themes of the class to analyze the material? What surprised you? What did you find confusing or unclear? What are the implications for US policy? You must do this for the videos **before 1 pm PST on Wednesday** in order to receive full class participation credit.

In addition, you will be expected to participate virtually in **at least two foreign policy-related events** and to report briefly to the class on what you learned. The one-page write-ups will be graded as written assignments (Virtual Field Trip Reports 1 and 2).

You are encouraged to explore areas of particular interest to you. If you encounter an article pertaining to U.S. foreign policy from a major news outlet (e.g. *NY Times*, *LA Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, Associated Press, Reuters), summarize the story or argument *in your own words* and post to Canvas, with a link. (I'll show you how)

Lastly, I want this class to be as participative as possible. A portion of the class every week will involve me setting forth some key ideas or concepts. Several guest speakers will also drop in during the quarter. But most of the three-hour period every Wednesday will involve class discussion and self-directed research and analysis, so please be prepared to interact with me and each other.

Learning Goals:

Goal #1: You will be able to understand -- and be able to explain to others -- how and why the United States behaves as it does on the world stage.

Goal #2: You will be able to relate your internship with the skills and substance learned in this course.

Goal #3: You will experience a cultural, historical, policy or other event that relates to this course.

Goal #4: You will improve your ability to communicate in writing and orally.

Goal #5: You will be able to critically examine competing arguments and use empirical evidence to apply theory to practice.

Assignments and Grading:

The class will have five assignments, that you will write in the week between classes (i.e. not during assigned course hours), plus a grade for class participation:

First Exam (maximum 6 pages)	20%
Letter to President Biden (maximum 4 pages)	25%
Final Exam (maximum 8 pages)	30%
Virtual Field Trip Report 1 (maximum 1 page)	5%
Virtual Field Trip Report 2 (maximum 1 page)	5%
Class Participation	15%

1) The first exam will test your understanding of the material discussed in Jentleson and Bremmer as it relates to President Trump and Biden’s foreign policy (e.g. National Security Strategy, plus relevant speeches and other official documents). The exam is open book, take home, and is due no later than the beginning of class on **Wednesday, April 14th**.

2) Letter to President Biden This assignment enables you to focus on one of the regional case studies or thematic areas that is of particular interest to you, or which has special relevance to your other studies. During our first class session, I will work with you to identify an appropriate reading. Then, after you have read the article or study, you will draft a memo or letter to President Biden that begins “*Mr. President, you should read [TITLE by AUTHOR] because...*” describe how the material either aligns with or contradicts elements of President Biden’s foreign policy priorities, and also explain why that may be (different assumptions, new information, changing circumstances, etc).

In your letter, you should attempt to answer the following questions:

- What would President Biden learn from reading this?
- Which of his policies, if any, might change based on the material?
- Which of the key themes in Jentleson and Bremmer are reflected in this work?

This assignment is due no later than **Wednesday, May 5th** at the beginning of class.

A related assignment is for you to serve as a “go-to expert” for the relevant class, and this will be considered as part of your class participation grade.

3) The final exam will test your understanding of the material discussed throughout the course. The exam is open book/take home. The exam prompt will be posted at the end of class on **May 19th**, and your response is due no later than **9 am (Pacific Time) on Tuesday, June 1st**.

4) Virtual field trip reports As part of UCDC’s unique experiential learning mission, you will be expected to participate virtually in **at least two foreign policy-related events** and to report orally to the class on what you learned. The written report should not exceed 1 page, and answer the journalistic questions: *Who, what, where, and when*, as well as *why* the discussion was important and useful. Extra credit if you ask a question and it is used during the event. You must submit your first report no later than **2 pm on Wednesday, April 28th** and your second no later than **2 pm on Wednesday, May 26th**.

5) Participate in class. This class will mostly consist of short lectures, followed by discussion. Participation in these discussions is essential to helping you grasp key themes, and thus to achieve the primary learning objective of this class: to understand -- and be able to explain to others -- how and why the United States behaves as it does on the world stage. Demonstrating a mastery of the material is an important part of your grade, but there are many ways to do that, including live (i.e. synchronous) during class, or in the discussion threads on Canvas.

Of course, good *attendance* is also crucial, since you cannot participate if you are not present, but I recognize that technology can be a challenge. If you have trouble accessing the class during the appointed hours, starting at 2 pm PST on Wednesday afternoons, send me a text or DM me on Twitter and explain what is going on.

Lastly, it is also important to be prepared; you should complete, and be ready to discuss, the video and reading assignments *before* the designated class time. Prepare by creating a reading notes entry in your course journal at Canvas, or include a link to a Tweet or meme that ties to it.

General Notes on Written Assignments:

All written assignments -- including the first and final exams, the letter to President Biden, and the virtual field trip reports -- must be typewritten, double-spaced, with one-inch margins in a standard 10- or 12-point font. All papers should have the student's name and the total word count at the top right-hand corner of the first page.

Papers must be submitted no later than the *beginning of class* on the given due date.

Due dates for assignments will be strictly enforced, unless you obtain my prior approval. Late papers will automatically receive a full letter grade deduction, and additional deductions for every additional day they are late.

Policy on Academic Misconduct

UCDC has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, and any other form of dishonesty. Students should refer to their home campus Student Code of Conduct for the regulations that apply to them. The burden is on each student to know what behaviors constitute cheating and plagiarism. Ignorance of these behaviors is not an adequate defense.

Academic honesty affirms our regard for each other and the nature of our work together. Students should review closely and follow in both letter and spirit the principles expressed on academic integrity. (For example, see UC-Davis's Code of Academic Conduct, <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/cac.html>.)

I take plagiarism, in particular, very seriously. Do not plagiarize. I will never penalize you for doing research and citing your references. Do not pass off someone else's work as your own. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to raise them with me. Plagiarized work will result in failure and referral to the appropriate campus administrative office.

Statement on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence

The University of California is committed to creating and maintaining a community where all individuals who participate in University programs and activities can work and learn together in an atmosphere free of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Every member of the community should be aware that the University prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence, and that such behavior violates both law and University policy. The University will respond promptly and effectively to reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and will take appropriate action to prevent, to correct, and when necessary, to discipline behavior that violates this policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence.

Students who wish to report sexual misconduct or to ask questions about UCDC policies and procedures regarding sexual misconduct, may do so with any UCDC faculty or staff, or contact Debbie Deas, Acting Director of Student Services (debbie.deas@ucdc.edu, 202-872- 8937). Please note that because the University California is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, the confidentiality of reported misconduct cannot be guaranteed.

Statement on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

In compliance with the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Public Law 93- 112) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336), University of California policy prohibits unlawful discrimination on the basis of disability in its programs, services, and activities. If you require accommodation for class, please let me know at our first meeting (if not earlier) so the necessary arrangements can be made.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

During each week's virtual session (on Wednesday afternoons from 2-5 pm PST) I will address the major topics and themes of the course and as they correspond with assigned readings. Many of these readings will also have some connections to guest speakers. Accordingly, you should complete the assigned readings *before* the beginning of class.

Generally speaking, the first half of the class (60-90 minutes) will be synchronous/on Zoom (including when guest speakers join us), with the remainder of the time consisting of self-directed work as individuals, or in small groups. We will generally reconvene on Zoom at the end of the appointed time to review that week's key points, and address any outstanding questions.

Pre-Class Exercise: *Before* the first class, take the survey. Are your views closest to Independent America, Moneyball America, or Indispensable America? Or somewhere in between? Find out by completing the survey sent via email and posted on Canvas.

Week One (3/24) – Course Introduction and Overview - Choice vs. Necessity

Read – Bremmer, *Superpower*, Introduction, and Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-46); Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy*, Chapter 1 - The Strategic Context: Foreign Policy Strategy and the Essence of Choice (pp. 2-26); Readings 1.1 through 1.4 (pp. 216-33) (Available on Canvas).

Week Two (3/31) - Power, Peace, Prosperity, Principles - Foreign Policy in the Trump-Biden Era

Watch: How America Became a Superpower (Vox)
Read: Bremmer, *Superpower*, Chapters 3-5 (pp. 47-162).

Week Three (4/7) – Debating Bremmer: Independent, Moneyball, or Indispensable?

Watch: Is America in Decline as the Superpower of the World?
Read: Bremmer, *Superpower*, Chapter 6 and Conclusion (pp. 163-204); The White House, [The National Security Strategy of the United States](#), December 2017; The White House, [Interim National Security Strategic Guidance](#), March 2021; and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again> (Optional)

Week Four (4/14) - The United States in Asia: Japan, the Koreas, and China-China-China

Watch: Kishore Mahbubani, “How the west can adapt to a rising China”
Read: Michael R. Pompeo, “[Communist China and the Free World's Future](#),” U.S. Department of State, July 23, 2020; and Richard Haass, “[What Mike Pompeo Doesn't Understand about China, Richard Nixon and U.S. Foreign Policy](#),” *Washington Post*, July 25, 2020.

The first exam is due before the beginning of class.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments (Continued)

Week Five (4/21) – Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Problem of Failed States

Watch: America's Failed War

Read: John Glaser and John Mueller, "[The Taliban Agreement Isn't Ideal, but the U.S. Military Has to Get Out of Afghanistan](#)," Responsible Statecraft, March 17, 2020; Vikram J. Singh et al, "[Five Things to Know About the Afghan Peace Talks](#)," US Institute of Peace, September 14, 2020; CRS, "Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief," ([pdf](#)), June 25, 2020 (Optional).

Week Six (4/28) – The Arab Reform Movements and The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

Watch: Responsibility to Protect?

Read: Aaron David Miller, Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky, "[What Trump Actually Gets Right about Syria](#)," Politico, October 18, 2019; Alan Kuperman, "[Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene](#)," Policy Brief, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, September 2013 (Optional)

Virtual Field Trip Report 1 is due before the beginning of class.

Week Seven (5/5) – Transnational Challenges: Pandemics, Climate Change, and Migration

Watch: Will COVID Kill Globalisation?

Read: Vernon Silver, "[Vaccine Nationalism Makes a Deadly Disease Even Worse](#)," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, August 12, 2020; Matthew Lavietes, "[Climate change could pose 'catastrophic' security threat, experts warn](#)," Reuters, February 24, 2020.

The letter to President Biden is due before the beginning of class.

Week Eight (5/12) - Iran, Iraq, and the Greater Middle East

Watch: The Middle East's Cold War Explained

Read: Barbara Slavin, Holly Dages, "[The JCPOA: A bittersweet anniversary for Iran, the US and the wider world](#)," July 13, 2020, IranSource, The Atlantic Council; James Phillips, "[Trump Applies More 'Maximum Pressure' on Iran](#)," June 11, 2020.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments (Continued)

Week Nine (5/19) – The United States, Europe, and Russia

Watch: Why Russia wants to expand

Read: Rose Gottemoeller, Thomas Graham, Fiona Hill, et al, "[It's Time to Rethink Our Russia Policy](#)," *POLITICO*, August 5, 2020; and David J. Kramer, et al, "[No, Now Is Not the Time for Another Russia Reset](#)," *POLITICO*, August 11, 2020.

The final exam prompt will be handed out at the end of class.

Week Ten (5/26) – The United States and the Western Hemisphere

Watch: Competing for Influence: China in Latin America

Read: Rocio Cara Labrador, "[Backgrounder: Venezuela: The Rise and Fall of a Petrostate](#)," Council on Foreign Relations; and Alex Ward, "[The 'Ridiculous' Failed Coup Attempt in Venezuela, Explained](#)," Vox.com, May 11, 2020.

Virtual Field Trip Report 2 is due before the beginning of class.

The Final Exam is due no later than 9 am (Pacific Time) on Tuesday, June 1st.