

Power and Purpose: Understanding U.S. Foreign Policy

University of California Washington Center, Spring Quarter 2022
Tuesdays, 6:30 – 9:30 pm

Instructor: Christopher A. Preble

Office Hours:

- Tuesdays, 5:00 - 6:00 pm
- 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 in history at Temple and my BA (also in history) 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 5 pm on Tuesday** (before class) in order to receive full class participation credit.

In addition, you will be expected to attend **at least one foreign policy-related event** and to report briefly to the class on what you learned. The one-page write-up will be graded as a written assignment (Field Trip Report).

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 Tuesday 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 four written assignments, that you complete 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%
Field Trip Report (maximum 1 page)	10%
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 **Tuesday, April 12th**.

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 completed your chosen reading, 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?

You must choose your topic no later than the end of our second class on **Tuesday, March 29th**, and choose your paper or article by the end of our third class on **Tuesday, April 5th**.

The final written assignment is due no later than **Tuesday, May 10th** 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 handed out at the end of class on **May 24th**, and your response is due no later than **Noon (EST) on Monday, June 6th**.

4) Field trip report As part of UCDC's unique experiential learning mission, you will be expected to participate in **at least one foreign policy-related event** 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 report no later than **6:30 pm on Tuesday, May 31st**.

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. If you are required to miss class, please notify me ahead of time, if possible.

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 class (on Tuesday evenings starting at 6:30 pm EST) I will address the major topics and themes of the course and as they correspond with assigned readings and videos. Much of this material will also have some connections to guest speakers. Accordingly, you should complete the assigned readings and watch the videos *before* the beginning of class.

Pre-Class Exercise: *Before* the first class, take the survey from Ian Bremmer's book *Superpower*. 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.

Week One (3/22) – 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 (3/29) - 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).

You must choose your week/topic for the letter to President Biden by the end of class.

Week Three (4/5) – Debating Bremmer: Independent, Moneyball, or Indispensable?

Watch: [Is America in Decline?](#)

Read: Bremmer, *Superpower*, Chapter 6 and Conclusion (pp. 163-204); 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)

You must choose the subject (paper or article) for the letter to President Biden by the end of class.

Week Four (4/12) - NO CLASS

The first exam is due before the beginning of class.

Week Five (4/19) – 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: Evan S. Medeiros and Jude Blanchette, “[Beyond Colossus or Collapse: Five Myths Driving American Debates about China](#),” *War on the Rocks*, March 19, 2021; Ryan Hass, “[The ‘New Normal’ in US-China Relations: Hardening Competition and Deep Interdependence](#),” Brookings Institution, August 12, 2021.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments (Continued)

Week Six (4/26) – The United States, Russia and Europe

Watch: [Putin’s war on Ukraine, explained](#)

Read: Jen Kirby and Jonathan Guyer, “[Russia’s war in Ukraine, explained](#),” Vox.

Week Seven (5/3) – The Arab Reform Movements and The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

Watch: [Responsibility to Protect?](#)

Read: “[The Rise and Fall of the Responsibility to Protect](#),” World 101, Council on Foreign Relations; Mina Al-Oraibi, “[‘Responsibility to Protect’ Is One More Casualty of the Syrian War](#),” *Foreign Policy*, June 14, 2021.

Week Eight (5/10) - Part I - Transnational Challenges: Pandemics, Migration, and Climate Change

Watch: [Will COVID Kill Globalisation?](#)

Read: Kelly M. Greenhill, “[When Migrants Become Weapons: The Long History and Worrying Future of a Coercive Tactic](#),” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2022); Aaron Mehta, “[Climate Change Is Now a National Security Priority for the Pentagon](#),” *Defense News*, January 27, 2021.

Part II – The United States (and China) in Africa

Read: Associated Press, “[China’s Africa Outreach Poses Growing Threat, US General Warns](#),” VOA News, May 6, 2021; Rama Yade, “[Africa Is America’s Greatest Geopolitical Opportunity. Does the US Know It?](#)” AfricaSource, Atlantic Council, May 25, 2021.

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

Week Nine (5/17) – Iran, Iraq, and the Greater Middle East

Watch: [The Middle East’s Cold War Explained](#)

Read: Marc Lynch, “[The End of the Middle East: How an Old Map Distorts a New Reality](#),” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2022).

Week Ten - (5/24) – Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Problem of Failed States

Watch: President Joe Biden, “[The War in Afghanistan Is Now Over](#),” August 31, 2021

Read: Jeff Greenfield, “[The Hidden Message in Joe Biden’s Afghanistan Speech](#),” *Politico*, August 31, 2021; Editorial, “[A Dishonest Afghanistan Accounting](#),” *Wall Street Journal*, August 31, 2021 ; CRS, “Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief,” ([pdf](#)), June 11, 2021 (Optional).

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

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments (Continued)

Week Eleven - (5/31) – 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.

Field Trip Report is due before the beginning of class.

The Final Exam is due no later than Noon (Eastern Time) on Monday, June 6th.