

US Foreign Policy

2026-09-10

Course Meeting Information

Instructor: Michael Flynn

Semester: Fall 2026

Meeting Time: MWF 12:30–1:20 PM

Meeting Location: 116 Calvin Hall

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Instructor Office: 115 Calvin Hall

Course Summary

Does politics really stop at the water's edge? Why does the US use military force, and when? Do voters really not care about foreign policy? What tools does the US use to advance its foreign policy goals? And who determines those goals? This semester we'll try to tackle all of these questions, and more, as we develop a better understanding of US foreign policy, its causes, and its consequences.

While it can seem removed from our every day lives, foreign policy has an enormous impact on how we experience the world. From the booming sounds of Ft. Riley to the prices we pay at the grocery store, foreign policy is, in fact, a very local thing! And while we'll be focuses on "big" issues concerning the US and how it relates to the world, we'll also try to make connections between those big issues and more local concerns to help students appreciate the impact of foreign policy on their everyday lives.

Our goal is to ultimately develop a better understanding of the actors, institutions, interests, and issues that have defined US foreign policy since the 1700s. To that end, this course begins with a general historical overview of US foreign policy since the 1700s. We then move into a discussion of the central actors and institutions that affect foreign policymaking. Finally, we transition to a focus on selected topics in US foreign policy, including the use of military force, security cooperation, trade, monetary policy, and more.

Course Objectives

1. The overarching goal is to develop an understanding of the actors, institutions, interests, and issues and systematic forces that shape US foreign policymaking. Please note that this is different than prescribing what policy should be (though this is also an important consideration when considering our motivations for studying the topic and reading course materials).
2. Identify the key actors that influence foreign policy.
3. Understand how and when the influence of actors varies (e.g. across time, issue area, etc.).
4. Identify the key issues confronting policymakers and society.
5. Identify general trends in US foreign policy over time.
 - What's changed?
 - What stays the same?

- When and why do we see changes in behavior or policies?
6. Students should develop a familiarity with social science research processes, practices. Specifically, students should have:
- A basic understanding of how to read social scientific research articles.
 - A basic understanding of research design considerations
 - A basic understanding of the scope and limitations of research articles

If you have any additional questions please don't hesitate to ask! Thanks!

Course Format

The course will be part lecture and part student participation. I encourage students to ask questions if the readings of lecture materials are unclear. In addition to class lectures students will be responsible for keeping up with readings and other class-related material as the semester progresses.

Required Books

There are two required books and several required articles (listed below in the course schedule). You can view the full citation in the reference list at the end of or hover your cursor over the citation below for a preview of the full title.

- Cook (2024)
- Norris (2021)

Additional Readings

There are a number of additional readings that students are accountable for over the duration of the semester. The readings are listed in the course schedule below.

Please note that students are accountable for retrieving the articles themselves. Some articles are accessible via hyperlink in the course schedule. Others may require accessing through the K-State Libraries. Please ensure you are familiar with these resources and how to access them.

Current Events

Students should also make an effort to stay informed on current events. Below are some examples of good sources for keeping up with global events. Please note that some of these publications may be pay-walled, but you should have access through the university library.

- BBC News
- Good Authority
- The Monkey Cage (No longer active)
- Political Violence @ a Glance
- Foreign Affairs
- Foreign Policy Magazine
- The Conversation
- The Washington Post
- The New York Times
- The Economist
- The Financial Times

Course Requirements

1. *Attendance: 15%*

A major component to being successful in this class is just showing up. Every topic we cover will build upon ideas, lessons, themes, etc., that we covered in previous weeks. To do well you must be present.

Life also happens, and so students will be given three class periods to miss without penalty. After that, students will be given an attendance grade based on the proportion of classes attended relative to the total number of classes.

2. Collaborative Discussion: 20%

While the course has a heavy lecture component students will also spend time reflecting on class materials and discussing that material with classmates. We will use a combination of open discussion and small group discussions. Students will be required to submit 2 discussion questions to Canvas prior to the class discussion meeting for a given topic. Students will be graded on a combination of the quality of the questions they submit, but also on the quality of their in-class contributions.

I drop the lowest grade for the collaborative discussion entries. Accordingly there will be no makeup assignments.

3. Exams: 35%

There will be three short exams as a part of this course. These will be closed note and closed book in-class exams. Each exam will cover one of the three parts of the course, including historical background content, actors and institutions, and selected topics.

4. Crisis Simulation: 30%

During the final two weeks of the semester students will participate in a crisis simulation. The goal of this simulation is to provide students with an opportunity to apply the knowledge that they have acquired throughout the semester to a simulated crisis requiring the attention of US foreign policymakers.

Prior to the simulation students will be assigned a particular role for the simulation activity. For example, one student will be the President, another will be the Secretary of State, another will be the Secretary of Defense, etc. Students will be expected to prepare for the simulation by reading background materials and preparing a briefing for the President on their assigned topic. Each student should have a list of questions and proposals for the president to consider.

Students will ultimately be evaluated on their contributions during the simulation meetings, as well as on the basis of a reflection paper that will be due at the conclusion of the simulation.

One final note—depending on the size of the class students may be assigned roles and responsibilities on an individual basis, or in pairs. These decisions will be finalized once the class roster has settled for the semester.

Classroom Policies

1. Be kind. College can be stressful. Many of you are working jobs in addition to attending class. Some of you may also be responsible for the care of family members. Whatever your situation, let's work together to make this semester as educational and enjoyable as possible.
2. Be professional. We're all here to learn, and many of the issues that we discuss have real-world impacts that affect people we know, or in our broader community. We're here to work together to develop a better understanding of these issues.
3. Study guides and extra credit. The class is the study guide. I do not offer extra credit.

4. Because students are given three free missed classes and their lowest discussion grade is dropped, I do not offer makeup assignments for these grade components. Exams and Crisis Simulation materials may only be made up as a result of a University Excused Absence.
5. Grade Appeals. If you believe that I have given you an incorrect grade on an exam, you may submit a written appeal. All appeals must be in writing (they may not be made in person) and must contain an explanation for why the grade is incorrect. I will also require you to wait 24 hours after receiving a grade to submit a written appeal. Please note that even if your appeal is granted, I reserve the right to regrade the assignment in its entirety, meaning that your grade may go up or down depending on my reevaluation of the assignment.
6. The Syllabus. The syllabus is a living document that can and will be altered throughout the duration of the course based both on need and design. Generally, this may mean readings will be removed or added as needed. All changes will be announced in class and via email. Additionally, I maintain the right to all of my own intellectual property presented in this course, whether it is the course lectures or this syllabus. Materials from this course may not be reproduced without my expressed permission. Please see the additional copyright notification statement on the University Syllabus Statements page.
7. Classroom conduct. All student activities in the University, including this course, are governed by the Student Judicial Conduct Code as outlined in the Student Governing Association By Laws, Article V, Section 3, number 2. Students who engage in behavior that disrupts the learning environment may be asked to leave the class.

Contacting the Instructor

The best way to get in touch with me is through email. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about course content or your ability to complete the assigned material.

Final Grades

A: 90+

B: 80–89.99

C: 70–79.99

D: 60–69.99

F: 0–59.99

Tentative course schedule begins on next page

Tentative Course Schedule

August

						01
02	03	04	05	06	07	08
09	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

September

		01	02	03	04	05
06	07	08	09	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

October

				01	02	03
04	05	06	07	08	09	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

November

01	02	03	04	05	06	07
08	09	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

December

		01	02	03	04	05
06	07	08	09	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Assignment

	Exam 1: Historical Background		Cook Discussion
	Exam 2: Actors and Institutions		Thanksgiving Break
	Exam 3: Selected Topics		Crisis Simulation
	Norris Discussion		

Week 01, 08/24 - 08/28: Course Introduction and Historical Background

Readings and Assignments

- Why does foreign policy matter?
- What tools do foreign policymakers have at their disposal?
- Declaration of Independence
- Washington's Farewell Address
- An Address...Celebrating the Declaration of Independence
- Anti-Federalist Papers: Brutus X

Week 02, 08/31 - 09/04: Historical background (cont.)

Readings and Assignments:

- The Significance of the Frontier in American History
- Wilson's 14 Points

! Friday 09/04: Discussion Day

Readings from Historical Background lectures:

- Declaration of Independence
- Washington's Farewell Address
- An Address...Celebrating the Declaration of Independence
- Anti-Federalist Papers: Brutus X
- The Significance of the Frontier in American History
- Wilson's 14 Points

Week 03, 09/07 - 09/11: The Cold War and US Hegemony

Readings and Assignments:

- Read Norris (2021)

Recommended Readings

- United States National Security Council (1950)
- Sources, Conduct, and Kennan (1947)
- The Truman Doctrine

Week 04, 09/14 - 09/18: The Cold War and Domestic Politics

Readings and Assignments:

- Dudziak (2004)
- Fordham (2007)

! Friday 09/18: Discussion Day

- Norris (2021)

Week 05, 09/21 - 09/25: The Presidency and Congress

Readings and Assignments:

- Lupton (2017)
- Weissman (2017)

! Friday 09/25: Exam 1: Historical Background

This exam will cover the historical background content from Weeks 1–4.

Week 06, 09/28 - 10/02: The Policymaking Process

Readings and Assignments:

- Miller (2016)

Week 07, 10/05 - 10/09: The Bureaucracy / The State Department

Readings and Assignments:

- Council on Foreign Relations: Revitalizing the State Department
- New York Times: How Marco Rubio Is Running Venezuela From Afar

! Friday 10/09: Discussion Day

**** Discussion Questions will be submitted online only. No class meetings due to Wildcat Pause Day.****

- Council on Foreign Relations: Revitalizing the State Department
- Miller (2016)

Week 08, 10/12 - 10/16: The Defense Department and the Military

Readings and Assignments:

- Krebs and Ralston (2022)
- The War Horse: Women Have Served in Combat Roles for a Decade. The Pentagon is Reopening the Debate
- The Recruiting Surge Was Engineered. Can It Last in a War with Iran?
- Could the US Bring Back the Draft? Who Would Be Called First — and Who Qualifies
- House Passes Plan to Officially Rename the Department of Defense to ‘Department of War.’ Here’s Why It Matters

! Friday 10/16: Discussion Day

- The War Horse: Women Have Served in Combat Roles for a Decade. The Pentagon is Reopening the Debate
- The Recruiting Surge Was Engineered. Can It Last in a War with Iran?
- Could the US Bring Back the Draft? Who Would Be Called First — and Who Qualifies

Week 09, 10/19 - 10/23: The Use of Military Force

Readings and Assignments:

- Cook (2024)
- Podcast: War on the Rocks: Reopening the Strait of Hormuz & Saving Downed Pilots
- As the US pauses the war with Iran, is Trump really running out of weapons?
- The US Missile Stockpile is Dangerously Low
- Podcast: Modern War Institute Podcast: Bunker Busters and B-2s

Additional selected readings:

- Watch Restrepo
- Read United States Government (2019)

! Friday 10/23: Discussion Day

- Read Cook (2024)
- Modern War Institute Podcast: Bunker Busters and B-2s

Week 10, 10/26 - 10/30: Security Cooperation

Readings and Assignments:

- Council on Foreign Relations: U.S. Aid to Israel in Four Charts
- Council on Foreign Relations: Here's How Much Aid the United States Has Sent Ukraine
- Center for Strategic and International Studies: Can Ukraine Fight Without U.S. Aid? Seven Questions to Ask
- Congressional Research Service: Transfer of Defense Articles: U.S. Sale and Export of U.S.-Made Arms to Foreign Entities
- The Conversation: Why does the US pay so much for the defense of its allies? 5 questions answered
- The Conversation: The US military presence in Europe has been declining for 30 years – the current crisis in Ukraine may reverse that trend

! Friday 10/30: Exam 2: Actors and Institutions

This exam will cover material on the actors and institutions material from weeks 5–9.

Week 11, 11/02 - 11/06: Trade, Finance, and Monetary Policy

No Class on Friday

Readings and Assignments:

- Trade Talks: What happened on Trump's tariff day?
- Paul Musgrave: Oh no, I betrayed America

Week 12, 11/09 - 11/13: Trade, Finance, and Monetary Policy (cont.)

Readings and Assignments:

- CRS: Introduction to U.S. Economy: Monetary Policy

! Friday 11/13: Discussion Day

- Trade Talks: What happened on Trump's tariff day?
- Paul Musgrave: Oh no, I betrayed America
- CRS: Introduction to U.S. Economy: Monetary Policy

Week 13, 11/16 - 11/20: Human Rights Issues

Readings and Assignments:

- Power (2001)
- Council on Foreign Relations: The US Immigration Debate
- 'You Are All Terrorists': Four Months in a Salvadoran Prison

! Friday 11/20: Exam 3: Selected Topics

This exam will cover all of the special topics material from weeks 9-13.

Week 14, 11/23 - 11/27: Thanksgiving Break (No Class)

Readings and Assignments:

1. Get some rest
2. Enjoy yourselves
3. Eat good food
4. Take a good nap

Week 15, 11/30 - 12/04: Crisis Simulation Week 1

Monday, November 30

- Introduce crisis simulation
- Provide overview of the crisis scenario
- Students present initial positions to the President

Wednesday, December 2

- Review proposals
- Clarify obstacles, risks, benefits, opportunities, threats, etc.
- Evaluate positions

Friday, December 4

- Narrow the options
- Provide time for groups to discuss changes with one another

Week 16, 12/07 - 12/11: Crisis Simulation Week 2

Monday, December 8

- Introduce crisis simulation
- Provide overview of the crisis scenario
- Students present initial positions to the President

Wednesday, December 10

- Review proposals
- Clarify obstacles, risks, benefits, opportunities, threats, etc.
- Evaluate positions

Friday, December 12

- Reflection Day
- Complete reflection memo
- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What about the process surprised you?

References

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Power, Samantha. 2001. "Bystanders to Genocide: Why the United States Let the Rwandan Tragedy Happen." *The Atlantic Monthly*: 84–108.

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