Course Description

"America First" was a slogan and a perspective on foreign policy adopted by isolationists like Charles Lindbergh in the 1930's. In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and the Second World War, a strong bipartisan consensus emerged around the principles of liberal internationalism and isolationist/unilateralist perspectives were marginalized in American foreign policy. Appreciating this historical context is essential to understanding President Trump’s highly controversial approach to world politics. With his election in November 2016, the American presidency is now in the hands of someone who proudly claims the “America First” mantle. As the course unfolds, students will develop a keen understanding of the contrast between the views of Trump and those of the American foreign policy establishment over issues such as NATO & Russia, China, North Korea, conflicts in the Middle East, nuclear proliferation, immigration and trade, terrorism, and the future of American grand strategy and leadership in the world.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Our expectations of you are especially high. The pedagogical design of this seminar is highly interactive. Achieving the course learning objectives relies heavily on your extensive preparation and participation in class. Students should only enroll if they are prepared to work hard, focus and meaningfully participate in seminar discussions. Towards that end, here are the course requirements:

a. **Class Participation.** 20% of final grade.

We will have 13 class meetings. The first will be 20-25 minutes long and organizational in nature. By the end of that meeting students will understand the structure and requirements for the course. That will be followed by 12 substantive meetings. These classes will meet on Monday evenings for 2 hours and 40 minutes (with a 10 minute break at the midpoint). **We expect that students will spend at least 6 hours each week preparing** for our Monday sessions. Each week a number of students will present on the readings (see next requirement for more information) and the rest of the class will be expected to engage meaningfully in discussion, reacting to the
student presentations, assessing and evaluating the readings (this is your 30% class participation grade). Students will also have a formal counseling session with the instructors prior to spring break to receive feedback on their class participation (including their grade for Class Participation I which will constitute 10% of the final grade) in the course up to that point. Class Participation II will be worth 10% of the final grade and will be assessed following completion of all seminar meetings.

b) 2x Commentaries on the readings/facilitating class discussion. 20% of final grade.

When presenting on the readings (each student will present on the readings twice during the semester), students will write an 800 - 1,000 word analytical essay (op-ed length) critically analyzing the reading in relation to the week’s focus and then discuss their piece with the class. Your piece should react to the readings, containing an overall thesis and a significant argument (one that is not obvious or trivial). Your paper should not summarize or describe the assigned reading. It must be turned in via email or hard copy by noon so we have a chance to read it prior to class.

c) Mid-term Analytical Essay. 25% of final grade.

Each student will submit a 2500-word analytical essay due high noon, Thursday, March 19th. The prompt will be handed out at the conclusion of Lesson 4. This will be a thought piece requiring you to engage with the readings and demonstrate an understanding of the previous traditions in US grand strategy that President Trump is consciously rejecting. The essay will cover all the course material up to that point.

d) Final Analytical Essay. 35% of final grade.

Each student will submit a 3000-word analytical essay due at high noon, Wednesday, May 20th. The prompt for that will be handed out at the conclusion of Lesson 10. This will be a comprehensive thought piece requiring you to engage with the readings, synthesizing and evaluating aspects of President Trump’s Grand Strategy.

Teaching Assistant: Michael Gibson-Prugh is the TA for the class. He can be reached at mdg4@williams.edu

Required Materials

There are no required books assigned in this course. The instructors and TA will distribute the course packets in class. We will not be using the packet room. Part 1 and 2 will be distributed at the organizational meeting.

Course Schedule

Feb 5: Organizational Meeting
Feb 10: Lesson 1 American Grand Strategy: Constitutional Foundations and the original expression of “America First”

Mark Landler, “Trump, the insurgent, breaks with 70 years of American foreign policy,” *NY Times*, December 28, 2017.

Walter Russell Mead, “The Jacksonian Tradition in American Foreign Policy.”


Amy Zeigart, “A Foreign Policy for the Future.”


*Declaration of Independence*

President George Washington, “Farewell Address.”

President James Monroe, “The Monroe Doctrine.”

Chris Gibson, “Principled Realism and the Monroe Doctrine.”

“James K. Polk & Manifest Destiny.”

President Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address.”

President Theodore Roosevelt, “State of the Union Message” December 3, 1901. selected passages

President Theodore Roosevelt, “Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine,” (selected passages), December 6, 1904.


*Discussants/Analytical Essay*

Is Grand Strategy possible and is President Trump reconstructing it? (Maria)

US Grand Strategy during the Founding Era (Washington thru Madison): What was it and was it successful? (Michael)

US Grand Strategy in the 19th Century (Monroe to Lincoln): In relation to the Founding era was this continuity or change? Explain. (Jackson)
President Teddy Roosevelt and US Grand Strategy: In relation to the Founding era was this continuity or change? Explain. (Riley)

Feb 17: Lesson 2 American Global Leadership: Liberal Internationalism from Wilson to Trump


(Students: Erin, Ezekiel, Matt, Jakob)

Feb 24: Lesson 3 Republican Establishment Foreign Policy: Conservatives (Reagan) and Neoconservatives (Bush 43).

President Ronald Reagan, “First Inaugural Address.”

President Ronald Reagan’s address to the nation on the situation in Poland, (December 1981).

President Ronald Reagan, “SDI speech.”

President Ronald Reagan, “pre-Geneva speech (1985)”

President Ronald Reagan, “Berlin Wall speech”

President Ronald Reagan’s Farewell address.


President George W. Bush, “Axis of Evil address”

President George W. Bush, “Saddam and his sons have 48 hours speech”


https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/is-trump-ending-the-american-era/537888/ (eliot cohen)

*Discussants/Analytical Essay*

Approaches to the Cold War in 1980s: President Reagan versus the Establishment/Detente: who was right? (Rocco and William Jeffries. One discussant will argue for Reagan and one will argue for the Establishment)

President Bush 43’s grand strategy of “Preemption” - Is President Trump’s criticism of neo-conservatism warranted? (William Kingham)

The Establishment Strikes Back: Who do you agree with Cohen & Sanger or President Trump? (Melissa)

**Mar 2: Lesson 4 What Went Wrong? The Nationalist Critique of Globalism and the Return of an “America First” Grand Strategy**


Jeff Colgan and Robert Keohane, “The Liberal Order is Rigged: Fix it Now or Watch it Wither,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2017), pp. 36-44.

(Ella, Devon, Alexis, John)

**March 9: Lesson 5 Trump and Obama: Democratic Foreign and National Security Policy in the Obama Era and After**


David Milne, “Obama’s Foreign Policy is Winning the 2020 Democratic Primary,” Foreign Policy, January 22, 2020.

Michael Brenes, “Pete Buttigieg is No Foreign Policy Maverick,” December 18, 2019.


(Zia, Maddy, Lucy, Elliot)


Note: Mid-term essay due on March 19th

Individual counseling sessions: Tuesday 9am - 12:00 noon and 1pm-5pm and Thursday 9am - 12:00 noon and 3pm - 5pm


Mark Landler, “Trump, the insurgent, breaks with 70 years of American foreign policy,” NY Times, December 28, 2017. (review this piece from week 1)

Walter Russell Mead, “The Jacksonian Tradition in American Foreign Policy.” (review this piece from Week 1)
Presidential Candidate Donald Trump, Campaign Kick-off address, June 15, 2015


Matea Gold, “Paul Ryan warns that the GOP is engaged in a ‘fight for the soul of our party’ over free market principles,” Washington Post, August 1, 2016.

https://nationalinterest.org/print/feature/why-trump-right-target-china-tariffs-31842

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kincaid-tariffs-commentary-idUSKCN1L81NX


Victor Davis Hanson, “Trump Constructive Chaos,” Hoover Institution, October 18, 2017.

Bob Inglis TED Talk on climate


Jeffrey Sachs, “Trump’s failure to fight climate change is a crime against humanity,” CNN, November 23, 2018.


Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, preface and Chapter 1.
*Discussants/Analytical Essay*

Is it good to have a President so highly focused on domestic politics when it comes to making grand strategy decisions; more specifically, is it a good thing to have a President so “transactional” to achieve both re-election and better outcomes for the American people? (Erin and Ezekiel. One discussant will argue “yes” and one discussant will argue “no”)

Is it possible to advance an American First” grand strategy while still being a good steward of the environment? Assess the Trump administration decision to withdraw from the Paris Accord. (Matt)

Is it possible to advance an “America First” grand strategy while bringing the nation together on immigration, refugee policy and border security? Assess the Trump administration on these issues. (Jakob)

**April 6: Lesson 7 Guest Speaker Lieutenant General (retired) H.R. McMaster, former National Security Advisor to President Trump (Gibson)**

Readings: TBD.

**April 13: Lesson 8: Trump, Putin’s Russia, and the Future of NATO (McAllister)**


(Maria, Michael, Jackson, Riley)

**April 20: Lesson 9 Trump and the Middle East (McAllister)**


Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, “A Force for Good: America Reinvigorated in the Middle East,” Speech in Cairo, Egypt, January 10, 2019.


(Rocco, William J., William K., Melissa)

**April 27: Lesson 10 Trump, China, North Korea, and the Future of Asia (McAllister)**


“Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China,” Speech at Hudson Institute, October 4, 2018.


Mark Bowden, “How to Deal with North Korea,” The Atlantic (July/August 2017).


(Zia, Maddy, Lucy, Elliot)

May 4: Lesson 11 President Trump and his Advisors (Gibson)

Victor Davis Hanson, The Case for Trump. selected passages.


Mark Bowden, “General Chaos,” *The Atlantic*

*Discussants/Analytical Essay*

President Trump thinks you should no longer view political conflict in terms of conservatives v. progressives, and instead, view this as a struggle between nationalists vs. globalists. Were you persuaded? What are the implications of this potential change? And, what role are advisors playing in this debate?

Is there a “Deep State?” What are the implications of this debate for the professionalism in our diplomatic corps? Implications for U.S. grand strategy? (we will have two discussants for this question)

Is President Trump changing the norms in U.S. Civil-Military Relations? What are the implications of this debate for professionalism in our military? Implications for U.S. grand strategy and American politics?

(Ella, Devon, Alexis, John)

**May 11. Lesson 12 Course wrap-up discussion & course critiques (Gibson)**

Victor Davis Hanson, *The Case for Trump*. Epilogue.


Student preparation: Review course syllabus and class notes, think about the discussion questions distributed the week prior to class