Overview

In debates about American foreign policy, it is often said that “politics stops at the water’s edge.” While matters of domestic policy—taxes, welfare, regulation, crime, etc.—are legitimately contested in the political arena, foreign policy is too arcane, too distant from people’s lives, and ultimately too dangerous to embroil in the push and pull of domestic politics. In this view, foreign policy is the domain, not of politicians, but of statesmen—leaders who sit above the political fray and attempt to pursue the “national interest” in an enlightened manner. This course challenges this perspective by exploring how domestic and international pressures influence the formation and execution of U.S. foreign policy.

Some of the questions we will consider include:

1. To what extent are decisions about the use of force guided by the “national interest”? What does this term mean?
2. How do domestic political factors such as public opinion, the media, interest groups, and Congress influence presidential decisions? Does being a democracy help or hinder the conduct of American foreign policy?
3. What is the impact of important bureaucratic actors such as the Defense and State Departments?
4. What criteria should be employed when deciding whether or not to use military force?

Much of the focus is on recent and contemporary events, though some historical material is provided for background.

Requirements and Method of Evaluation

Grades will be based on an in-class examination (40 %), a 12-15 page research paper (50 %), and participation in class discussions (10 %). It is crucial that students keep up with the weekly reading assignments, which are the basis for class discussion and average 100-150 pages per week. To complete the research paper requirement, students will select a course of action the United states pursued as a part of its foreign policy and assess, in the context of the theories learned in class, why the course of action was taken.

Readings

The following book is available for purchase at the UCLA bookstore:


Other readings are accessible through the course website at http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/09W/polisci121a-1/.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

Introduction

• Course Overview and Expectations (Jan. 5)

• Politics and the Water’s Edge (Jan. 7)

• Statesmen or Politicians? Models of Foreign Policy-Making (Jan. 9)

Domestic Influences on Foreign Policy

• Public Opinion and the Media (Jan. 12, 14)

• Interest Groups (Jan 16, 21)

• NOTE: No class on Jan. 19 (Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday)

• Congress (Jan 23, 26)

War and Peace
• The Vietnam War (Jan. 28, 30)

• “Humanitarian” Intervention in Somalia (Feb. 2)

• September 11 and the War in Afghanistan (Feb. 4, 6)

• War on Terror (Feb. 9, 11, 13)

• NOTE: No class on Monday, Feb. 16 (Presidents’ Day holiday)

• IN-CLASS MIDTERM: Wednesday, Feb. 18 and Friday, Feb. 20

• The Iraq War (Feb. 23, 25, 27)


• Nuclear Non-Proliferation (March 2, 4)


Foreign Economic Policy

• Trade and Globalization (March 6, 9)


Foreign Environmental Policy

• The Kyoto Protocol (March 11)


Summary and Conclusions (March 13)

RESEARCH PAPER: Due on Friday, March 20