POLI 142A: United States Foreign Policy

Outline

- Syllabus

- The plan of the course

- What is Foreign Policy?

- Lecture 1: Levels, Methods and Concepts

What is foreign policy?

- Policy: process of establishing rules or norms for a government/society/people.
- Foreign: anything delineated outside of a country's border(?)
  - Diplomats, aliens, extra-territoriality
- Characteristics/pathologies of foreign policy
  - why do we need a policy?
  - who benefits (most)? Who pays?

Why study foreign policy?

- Important: things happen in the world and we want to understand why they occur.

- Salient: these things happen to us, or those we care about; we want to influence policy

- Knowable: foreign policy is the product of forces that can be analyzed and understood
  - Could be complex, obscure, "noisy"

- Timely: changes are ongoing, evolving. Not enough to understand what has happened.

American Exceptionalism

- American Exceptionalism: the view that the United States is different from other countries
  - Facts: how different is the US from other countries (i.e. do its foreign policies differ)?
  - Interpretation: what are the reasons for any differences (identify causes)?
  - Analysis: how can we assess exceptionalism (how do we know if our claims are wrong)?
  - Forecasting: how will these differences play out in the future?

Multipolarity

- Unipolarity: Hegemony, one country much more powerful than other countries
- Multipolarity: De-centralized world power, having several powerful nations in the world.
  - Multipolar systems are more complex, more difficult to manage, may lead to more war.
  - Transition from unipolar to multipolar may be particularly difficult to achieve peacefully.
  - Rise of China, BRICs, poses new challenges to the US and to the world in general.

How do we study FP?

- The truth about a subject is largely or wholly independent of personal taste
- Want to look at what explains the world
  - Not at what one likes or dislikes (taste)
  - Change can only occur through real understanding of causes and effects
- Same thing is true about examples
  - There are examples of almost anything
  - Question is really about what is common
    - Modal tendencies
    - Knowledge of the population of cases

Seek truth from facts...

- Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping

- Which facts?

- Empirical subjects involve measuring things and estimating relationships.

  - Sampling - which cases?

  - Inference - what truths?

  - Impact - how much?

Problems of inference

- Tendencies and multiple or latent causality
  - Social science phenomena are probabilistic
  - Most behavior has latent or multiple causes
- Most common approach: case study
  - Existence proof - something happened once
  - Sampling - how representative is the case?
  - Attribution - which factors matter, how much?
  - Disprovability - when is a theory wrong?
  - Circularity - theory --> case, case --> theory

Reducing things to Numbers

- "You cannot reduce human events, behavior, etc. to numbers on a spreadsheet."
  - We "reduce" human behavior to words which is literally "quantifying" (words are discrete units).
  - Details may be lost, but things are gained, too.
- All knowledge is simplification of reality
  - Most debates are about which simplifications are most interesting, effective, and elegant.
  - How can we test probabilistic claims without an approach to testing that captures probabilities?

Levels of Analysis

- International (Kenneth Waltz "third image")
  - Does the world system have its own logic?
- Domestic ("second image")
  - To what degree is U.S. foreign policy a product of domestic forces/interests?
- Individual ("first image")
  - Do individuals/groups shape foreign policy or are all of us "products of our time"?

Paradigms

- Well-worn perspectives in world politics
    - Realism
    - Liberalism
    - Constructivism
- Normative versus positive reasoning

Realism

- Realism draws its name from "realpolitik"
  - Champions a sober look at what "really" drives the behavior of international actors
- Tenets of Realism:
  - Actors: states
    - States are egoists (seek to realize prefs)
  - Preferences: States seek power/security
  - Structure: International system is anarchic
    - Security dilemma: self-help system

Liberalism

- Realism draws its name from the 18th-19th century social enlightenment movement
  - Not modern left liberal politics
- Tenets of Liberalism:
  - Actors: more diverse, not just states
  - Preferences: welfare, often economic
  - Structure: markets and institutions

Constructivism

- Constructivists argue that preferences are endogenous (anarchy is what we make of it)
- Tenets of Social Constructivism:
  - Actors: less important than communities
    - Identities form in opposition ("the other")
  - Preferences: are constructed by the group
    - Social interaction/pressure guides prefs.
  - Structure: norms more than institutions
    - Institutions can be an intermediate step