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