

Saint Michael's College
Political Science 410A
W 230-530

Fall 2009
Dr. Jeffrey Ayres
STE 376

Senior Seminar: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Obama Era

Course Description

American foreign policy-makers in the year 2009 face a challenge unknown for over six decades. Rather than simply map out tactics based on a known adversary and predictable world, policy makers must respond to (and identify) new events, trends and concerns. It seems at times as if American foreign policy makers are being asked to address every type of problem in every corner of the world. The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, moreover, demonstrate that non-state actors as well as states must increasingly be figured into the thinking of US policymakers, complicating an already confusing international environment. Moreover, the Bush Administration's increasingly tarnished foreign policy doctrine, involving albeit increasingly questioned, a strategy of the preemptive use of force, challenged decades of US foreign policy conventional wisdom. Clearly, American foreign policy is in a state of flux, and we will explore many of the challenges facing today's American foreign policy-makers.

This seminar will focus on the challenging and rapidly changing international environment facing the United States in what might be called a "post-post 9/11 world." By that, I mean that the Bush era is nearly at its end, and numerous challenging issues, trends and actors await the next administration's foreign policy response well beyond the current preoccupations with terrorism and Iraq. To approach this topic, the seminar will be roughly divided into two parts: the first half of the seminar will be dominated by substantive reading and discussion of recent analysis of current U.S. foreign policy challenges, while the second half of the semester will be preoccupied by student presentations of case studies, which will culminate in student research papers.

The course goals include: 1) improving student critical reading, research, writing and presentation skills; 2) deepening student interest and knowledge of the many challenges facing U.S. foreign policy makers at this turbulent time for the U.S. and; 3) developing the ability to work with theoretical or conceptual frameworks to apply them to better understand challenges facing the U.S. in the international arena.

Course Requirements

Readings

Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (Norton 2008).
Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (Knopf 2008)
Stefan Halper with Jonathan Clarke, *The Silence of the Rational Center: Why American Foreign Policy is Failing* (New York: Basic Books 2007).

Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (New York: Basic Books 2007).

John Ikenberry, Thomas Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Tony Smith, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton 2008).

The above books are required reading and available for purchase at the campus bookstore. All other readings listed on the syllabus will either be handed out in class or will be available through eCollege or the SMC's library electronic journal indexes (*EJ).

Staying Current

It is imperative that you read consistently a newspaper that covers U.S. and international politics during this semester, particularly in this important Presidential election season. My favorites, which I peruse daily, include the *New York Times* (www.newyorktimes.com) or the *Washington Post* (www.washingtonpost.com).

Course Format

This course is designed as a seminar, which encourages creative dialogue and the exchange of ideas with one another, all with the guidance of a professor. I do not intend to lecture at all, but instead I will strive to provide background material to frame the major themes set up for discussion and analysis for that class session. I will also provide support as each of you ultimately lead a class session on your chosen case study focusing on contemporary challenges facing the U.S. in a post-post 9/11 world, and in turn research and write a substantive paper on this topic.

Almost immediately, students will lead discussion, making reading summary presentations to the entire class from the readings for that day. This is an essential part of the course, where students will be responsible for teasing out the main points the authors are trying to make. Students not assigned as daily discussants will also be asked to prepare written questions of the presenters. All students are required to complete the readings for each session, not just those whose day it is to present or serve as formal discussants. I have frankly grown tired of weak and uninspiring class presentations of readings—and expect a substantive analysis and breakdown of major themes from the assigned readings. I will assign at the end of each class session the presenters and response discussants for the following week. Missing your assigned dates for presentations or discussion will significantly damage your participation grade.

Participation

As is elaborated above, I expect all of you to participate actively in class discussion. The participation grade will be broken down into three categories: 1) quality of reading presentations; 2) weekly questions; 3) general willingness to discuss and interact with your classmates during discussions and; 4) attendance.

Class Presentation/Research Paper

You will pick a topic—a trend, issue or actor (state or non-state actor) that you feel presents a fundamental challenge to U.S. foreign policy today—and organize and lead a class session on this theme. You should aim broadly, providing relevant background to the challenge, how the U.S. has approached this challenge in the past and recommendations for future action and why. There will be designated peer reviewers for each presentation who will be required to ask questions of each presenter, although I also expect the entire class more generally to engage in discussion. We will set aside the last half roughly of the semester for these presentations and peer review interactions, and I encourage you to use a variety of mediums (powerpoint, film, slides, Internet, smartboard) to present your material. You must choose your topic by **Monday, September 21**, and in turn research and write a substantive research paper. Brief (3-5 pages) proposals for this research paper will be due on **Monday, October 19**. The final research paper will be due in my office on **Monday, December 7** between 4-5 p.m. The research paper should be approximately 20 pages (typed, double-spaced), and include an additional substantive bibliography.

I strongly encourage you to frequently refer to my website (<http://academics.smcvt.edu/jayres>, and look under “course syllabi and scroll down) as well as the link to Thomas Cronin’s *The Write Stuff: Writing as a Performing and Leadership Art* (<http://www.whitman.edu/president/cronin/articles/thewritestuff.cfm>) for guidelines for writing research papers. All assignments in this course must be typed (12 point font), double-spaced and have standard one-inch margins. Assignments are due on the scheduled class session. You should make a copy of all assignments before handing anything in to me. **Late proposals or research papers will lose a half a letter grade per day late.** Exceptions will be made only in the most extreme circumstances.

Course Administration and Ethics

1. You are expected to arrive at every seminar on time and stay until the class period ends. Please let me know ahead of time if a situation demands that you leave a particular class session early. We meet once a week and you therefore should use the restroom, get coffee, talk or text message on your cell-phone and address any other need before coming to class. **Please consult with me if you feel it is necessary to use a laptop in class.** Failure to arrive on time and to attend regularly will have a serious and negative impact on your participation grade. Do not miss twenty class sessions and come to me at the end of the semester to ask to make up material (real live happenings usually occurring once a semester) as you will by then have failed the course.
2. You are expected to treat both myself and your fellow students with respect. This includes, in addition to arriving on time, refraining from talking and making noise, as well as listening to comments and questions of your peers. **I do not want to look out and see you texting on your cell phone, as this will undermine your course participation grade.**

- Plagiarism will result in automatic failure for the course and will be reported to the College. You should make a copy of all assignments before handing anything in to me. You are all expected to adhere to the policies of academic integrity outlined in the Saint Michael's College catalogue and in the more extensive *Student Handbook and Code of Conduct*. As the catalogue notes, "simply expressed, academic integrity requires that one's work be one's own...violations of academic integrity include the following: plagiarism, unauthorized assistance, interference, and multiple submission."

Grading

Midterm Exam 20%
Research Paper 40%

Class Presentation 15%
General Participation 25%

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A = 94-100 A- = 90-93 B+ = 87-89 B = 83-87 B- = 80-82
C+ = 77-79 C = 73-76 C- = 70-72 D+ = 67-69 D = 63-66
D- = 60-62 F = 0-59

Office Hours

You should feel free to see me with any questions or concerns. My office hours for the fall 2009 semester are:

Tuesday and Thursday 2:30-4 p.m.; Wednesday 8 – 11 a.m.; and by appointment
Office 347 St. Edmund's Hall Office Phone 654-2680
Email jayres@smcvt.edu Web: <http://academics.smcvt.edu/jayres/index.htm>

Course Outline

Weeks 1/2

Course Introduction: Paradigm "Still" Lost

Readings: *EJ: Graham Fuller, "Strategic Fatigue," *The National Interest* (Summer 2006). Available at: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=21201673&site=ehost-live>
*EJ: James Chace, "Present at the Destruction," *World Policy Journal* (Spring 2003). Available at: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9629125&site=ehost-live>
*EJ: Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Eagle Has Crash Landed," *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2002). Available at: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=6824986&site=ehost-live>

*EJ: Charles Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz, "Grand Strategy for a Divided America," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2007). Available at:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=25610519&site=ehost-live>

*EJ: Andrew Becevich, "Requiem for the Bush Doctrine," *Current History* (December 2005).

Available at:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=19228771&site=ehost-live>

*EJ: Drexler, "The New New World Order,"

Foreign Affairs (March/April 2007). Available at:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24151461&site=ehost-live>

*EJ: Haas, "The Age of Nonpolarity," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2008). Available at:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=31700689&site=ehost-live>

Week 3 Exploring the Complexities of a Post-Post Cold War World

Readings: Zakaria, *The Post-American World*

Week 4 The Tenacity of Geo-Politics and the Struggle for Power

Readings: Kagan, *The Return of History*

***Research Paper Topic due Monday, September 21**

Week 5 Is Something "Wrong" with our Foreign Policy?

Readings: Halper and Clarke, *The Silence of the Rational Center*

Week 6 A Critique of the Post-Cold War Lost Paradigm

Readings: Brzezinski, *Second Chance*

Week 7 The Consequences of Iraq and America's Place in the World

Readings: Ikenberry et al., *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy*

***Research Paper Proposal due Monday, October 19**

Week 8 Midterm Readings Exam

Weeks 9-15 Student Class Presentations

***Note: I will update and pass out this syllabus once students have chosen their research topic and picked their slot for class presentations**

***No Class Wednesday, November 25—Thanksgiving Break**

***Research Paper Due, Monday, December 7**