# **Power and Principle: U.S. Foreign Policy Traditions**

**MVZn5034**

**Dr. Aaron T. Walter**

## **Course Description**

This course explores the major traditions and competing schools of thought that have shaped U.S. foreign policy from the founding of the republic to the present day. Emphasis is placed on the Jacksonian and Wilsonian traditions, as well as Jeffersonian restraint and Hamiltonian realism. Students will examine historical documents, key events, and contemporary policy debates to understand how principles such as nationalism, democracy, morality, security, and economic interests have guided U.S. global engagement.

## **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

* Identify and distinguish between key U.S. foreign policy traditions.
* Analyze major historical events and decisions through different foreign policy lenses.
* Understand the ideological foundations behind U.S. international behavior.
* Apply theoretical perspectives to current foreign policy issues.
* Evaluate how domestic politics influence foreign policy choices.

## **Required Texts**

* Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*
* Bruce Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Choice in the 21st Century*
* H.W. Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*
* Additional articles and primary sources (posted in course materials)

**Classroom Code of Conduct**

To pass this course, a student must attend all class sessions, do all assigned readings, actively

listen to and focus on lecture material, take notes, and don’t be afraid to ask questions or

participate in discussions. I use “cold calling”, i.e., calling on students regardless of whether they have raised their hands or not, to encourage class discussion, so be attentive and familiar with the reading materials.

**Mobile phones should be turned off.**

Laptops and tablets should ONLY be used for academic purposes, and not for emails, browsing

the internet, social media and other non‐course related activities.

Lastly, be courteous and respect the opinions of your classmates.

**Plagiarism Statement**

Plagiarism means the use of the thoughts ideas words, phrases or research of another person or source as oneʹs own without explicit acknowledgment. In keeping with this definition, all work, whether written or oral, submitted or presented by students as part of course assignments must be the original work of the student unless otherwise specified by the instructor.

Cheating on examinations of any kind (midterms and finals) includes copying another student’s answers, exchanging information, using notes or books unless expressly permitted to do so by the instructor, or gaining access to examinations prior to the actual taking of such examinations. Other examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, copying or preparing another person’s work; buying prepared papers. Helping anyone to engage in any of the violations described above qualifies as academic dishonesty.

**Late Submission Policy**

I prefer that students submit their assignments on time unless they have a concrete and relevant reason (illness, family crisis etc.) that was brought to my attention as early as possible. Not 1 or 2 days before the deadline for example.

To avoid different types of plagiarism discussed in the previous section, I will accept late submissions. Yet papers submitted after the due date will result in 1 full grade penalty and only 48 hours.

**Required Readings**

For this course, the readings will range widely. There is no one textbook. There are several. I have select chapters assigned. Also, I have select PDF and various journal and OpEd articles, taken from a wide range of authors. Each will be found in the course materials folder.

The instructor reserves the right to edit required readings.

## **Weekly Schedule**

### **Week 1: Introduction to U.S. Foreign Policy Traditions**

* **Topics**: What is foreign policy? Realism vs. idealism, power vs. principle.
* **Readings**:  
  + Jentleson, Ch. 1
  + Mead, Introduction

### **Week 2: The Hamiltonian Tradition – Realism and Economic Engagement**

* **Topics**: Trade, strong government, and alliances with power.
* **Readings**:  
  + Mead, Ch. 1 (“The Hamiltonians”)
  + Federalist Papers excerpts (#11, #23)

### **Week 3: The Jeffersonian Tradition – Restraint and Anti-Imperialism**

* **Topics**: Isolationism, democracy at home, and skepticism of entanglements.
* **Readings**:  
  + Mead, Ch. 2 (“The Jeffersonians”)
  + Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address
  + Jentleson, Ch. 2

### **Week 4: The Jacksonian Tradition – National Honor and Populist Nationalism**

* **Topics**: Honor, unilateralism, military response to threats.
* **Readings**:  
  + Mead, Ch. 3 (“The Jacksonians”)
  + Selected Jackson speeches and modern parallels

### **Week 5: The Wilsonian Tradition – Moralism and Democratic Globalism**

* **Topics**: Idealism, human rights, and the promotion of democracy.
* **Readings**:  
  + Mead, Ch. 4 (“The Wilsonians”)
  + Wilson’s Fourteen Points
  + Jentleson, Ch. 3

### **Week 6: Competing Traditions in the Founding to the Civil War Era**

* **Topics**: Washington’s Farewell Address, Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny
* **Readings**:  
  + Primary source excerpts (Washington, Monroe, Polk)
  + Jentleson, Ch. 4

### **Week 7: U.S. Foreign Policy in the 20th Century: From Isolationism to Global Leadership**

* **Topics**: WWI, WWII, and the rise of American power
* **Readings**:  
  + Brands, Ch. 1–2
  + Jentleson, Ch. 5

### **Week 8: The Cold War – Grand Strategy in a Bipolar World**

* **Topics**: Containment, Truman Doctrine, Nixon and détente
* **Readings**:  
  + Brands, Ch. 3–4
  + Truman Doctrine speech
  + Jentleson, Ch. 6

### **Week 9: Post-Cold War Foreign Policy – Primacy or Restraint?**

* **Topics**: Unipolarity, humanitarian intervention, Clinton doctrine
* **Readings**:  
  + Brands, Ch. 5
  + Mead, selected conclusion
  + Jentleson, Ch. 7

### **Week 10: The War on Terror and Neoconservatism**

* **Topics**: Bush doctrine, preventive war, democracy promotion
* **Readings**:  
  + Brands, Ch. 6–7
  + Selected Bush speeches
  + Jentleson, Ch. 8

### **Week 11: America First? Foreign Policy Under Trump**

* **Topics**: Populism, nationalism, and strategic retrenchment
* **Readings**:  
  + Articles on Trump’s foreign policy (provided)
  + Jentleson, Ch. 9

### **Week 12: Biden, Ukraine, and the Return of Great Power Competition**

* **Topics**: Renewed NATO leadership, U.S.-China rivalry
* **Readings**:  
  + Selected articles and White House strategy documents
  + Jentleson, Ch. 10

### **Week 13: Student Presentations & Course Wrap-Up**

* **Activities**:  
  + Student research presentations
  + Roundtable discussion: What future for U.S. foreign policy?
  + Course evaluations and final review

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

* **Weekly Reading Reflections**: 20%
* **Midterm Essay**: 25%
* **Final Research Paper**: 30%
* **Oral Presentation**: 10%
* **Participation**: 25%