

American Grand Strategy

Boston College

POLI 2507

Spring 2025

Professor: Joshua Byun

Time: Tuesday & Thursday, 10:30 am – 11:45 am

Room: Campion 302

Office Hours: Thursday, 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm

Course Description: This course examines grand strategy—a state’s “theory” of how to employ the military instrument to achieve national security—in the context of American diplomatic history. The first part of the course assesses how International Relations (IR) theory informs modern discussions of grand strategy, fleshing out the theoretical underpinnings of ideal-type grand strategies like “restraint” or “deep engagement” featured in today’s U.S. foreign policy debate.

In the second part of the course, we delve into key events in the evolution of American grand strategy since the late 19th century, when the United States began to emerge on the world stage as a great power. We will learn why an extraordinarily powerful state—despite facing no plausible rival in its neighborhood and being geographically insulated from faraway competitors—decided to directly involve its military might in the security affairs of distant regions at several historical junctures.

Finally, we will circle back to core issues in today’s grand strategy debate. Attention will be paid to the relationship between contrasting grand strategic visions and key issues in post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy, such as NATO’s eastward expansion, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the rise of China. The central objective is to identify the larger theoretical claims that underlie competing positions on each issue and to evaluate their logical and empirical bases.

Course Requirements: *This is a reading-intensive course.* Every student is expected to do all assigned readings, attend every class, and actively participate in the classroom discussions. The final grade will be based on attendance/classroom participation (33%), a midterm exam (33%), and a final exam (33%).

Required Readings: The following books are assigned in their entirety, or close to it. I recommend purchasing them through the Boston College Bookstore or Amazon.

- Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014).
- Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

- Dale C. Copeland, *A World Safe for Commerce: American Foreign Policy from the Revolution to the Rise of China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2024).

I will provide PDFs when discrete book chapters or unpublished manuscripts are assigned. All remaining material should be available through the Boston College library resources.

Participation: My lectures will comprise the bulk of each session. That said, I will incorporate short discussions to encourage student participation and close engagement with the readings. At minimum, students should come to class ready to share their views on the following questions:

- What is the research question or puzzle of each reading?
- What is the central argument?
- What kind of evidence is presented in support of this argument? Is it convincing?
- What are the major competing arguments? Is the author's research design able to properly adjudicate between these and the central argument?

A Note on Content: In addition to this seminar, students are encouraged to explore courses such as "Introduction to International Politics (POLI108101)," "Seminar: Institutions in International Politics (POLI356301)," "International Political Economy (POLI780201)," and "Seminar on International Security (POLI4598)" to develop a broad-based understanding of the study of International Relations.

Email Policy: I may not read or respond to student emails in the evenings or on weekends. Do not expect immediate replies.

Academic Integrity: Any form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with, and following, [university policies](#) on this matter. Being found guilty of academic dishonesty is a serious offense and may result in a failing grade for the assignment in question, and possibly for the entire course.

Disability Accommodations: If you feel you may need accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs after obtaining requisite documentation from the BC Disability Services Office (disabsrv@bc.edu).

Course Outline:

Part 1: The U.S. Grand Strategy Debate

Week 1. Introduction

Session 1-1 (Tuesday, January 14): What is Grand Strategy?

- Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), Introduction.
- Nina Silove, “Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of ‘Grand Strategy,’” *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-57.

Session 1-2 (Thursday, January 16): The Landscape of the American Grand Strategy Debate

- Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, “Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation,” *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 5-48.
- Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment,” *International Security* 37, no. 3 (Winter 2012/2013): 7-51.
- Robert Jervis, “American Grand Strategies: Untangling the Debates,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, eds. Thierry Balzacq and Ronald R. Krebs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), ch. 27.

Week 2. Deep Engagement

Session 2-1 (Tuesday, January 21): Deep Engagement and its Critics

- Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), chs. 4-6; 9-10.
- Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), Introduction and ch. 1.
- Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “The Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries: Why it Doesn’t Pay to Preserve the Peace,” *Security Studies* 10, no. 4 (2001): 1-57.

Session 2-2 (Thursday, January 23): The Restraint Alternative

- Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), ch. 2 and Conclusion.

Week 3. Restraint

Session 3-1 (Tuesday, January 28): The Case against Restraint

- Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), chs. 7-8.
- Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Misplaced Restraint: The Quincy Coalition versus Liberal Internationalism," *Survival* 63, no. 4 (2021): 7-32.

Session 3-2 (Thursday, January 30): No in-person session due to D.C. Grand Strategy Conference

Week 4. Offshore Balancing

Session 4-1 (Tuesday, February 4): The Case for Offshore Balancing

- John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition (2001, repr., New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), chs. 2; 7; 10.
- Rosemary A. Kelanic, *Black Gold and Blackmail: Oil and Great Power Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2020), Introduction and chs. 1; 6.

Session 4-2 (Thursday, February 6): The Case against Offshore Balancing

- Stephen Van Evera, "Why Europe Matters, Why the Third World Doesn't: American Grand Strategy after the Cold War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, no. 3 (1990): 1-51.
- Patrick Porter, "A Matter of Choice: Strategy and Discretion in the Shadow of World War II," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 3 (2012): 317-343.

Part 2: Grand Strategy in U.S. History

Week 5. Extraregional Expansion in the 19th Century

Session 5-1 (Tuesday, February 11): The "Open Door" Interpretation of America's Early Expansion

- Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (1963, repr., Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), ch. 1; 3.

Session 5-2 (Thursday, February 13): Alternatives to the Open Door Interpretation

- Paul Poast, “Lincoln’s Gamble: Fear of Intervention and the Onset of the American Civil War,” *Security Studies* 24, no. 3 (2015): 502-527.
- Dale C. Copeland, *A World Safe for Commerce: American Foreign Policy from the Revolution to the Rise of China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2024), Introduction, chs. 1-2; 5.
- Aroop Mukharji, “The Meddler’s Trap: McKinley, the Philippines, and the Difficulty of Letting Go,” *International Security* 48, no. 2 (Fall 2023): 49-90.

Week 6. American Intervention in World War I

Session 6-1 (Tuesday, February 18): The “Open Door” Interpretation of U.S. Intervention in World War I

- William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 50th Anniversary Edition (1959; repr., New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), Introduction and chs. 2-3.
- Galen Jackson, “The Offshore Balancing Thesis Reconsidered: Realism, the Balance of Power in Europe, and America’s Decision for War in 1917,” *Security Studies* 21, no. 3 (2012): 455-489.

Session 6-2 (Thursday, February 20): The Strategic Logic of U.S. Involvement in World War I

- Dale C. Copeland, *A World Safe for Commerce: American Foreign Policy from the Revolution to the Rise of China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2024), ch. 6.

Week 7. American Intervention in World War II

Session 7-1 (Tuesday, February 25): Why American Intervention was not a Foregone Conclusion

- Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020), Introduction and chs. 1-2.
- John M. Schuessler, “The Deception Dividend: FDR’s Undeclared War,” *International Security* 34, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 133-165.

Session 7-2 (Thursday, February 27): The Strategic Logic of U.S. Involvement in World War II

- Robert J. Art, “The United States, the Balance of Power, and World War II: Was Spykman Right?” *Security Studies* 14, no. 3 (July-September 2005): 365-406.

- Dale C. Copeland, *A World Safe for Commerce: American Foreign Policy from the Revolution to the Rise of China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2024), ch. 7.
- Norman J.W. Goda, “The Riddle of the Rock: A Reassessment of German Motives for the Capture of Gibraltar in the Second World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 2 (April 1993): 297-314.

Week 8. America’s Military Commitment to Western Europe

Session 8-1 (Tuesday, March 11): Why the United States made a Continental Commitment—The “Open Door” Again?

- Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), chs. 1 and 3.
- Melvyn P. Leffler, “The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945-48,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 2 (April 1984): 346-381.

Session 8-2 (Thursday, March 13): Why the United States Stayed

- Mark S. Sheetz, “Exit Strategies: American Grand Designs for Postwar European Security,” *Security Studies* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 1-43.
- Joshua Byun, “Regional Security Cooperation against Hegemonic Threats: Theory and Evidence from France and West Germany (1945-1965),” *European Journal of International Security* 7, no. 2 (May 2022): 143-162.
- Joshua Byun, “Stuck Onshore: Explaining the U.S. Failure to Retrench from Europe during the Early Cold War,” *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2024): 9-36.

Week 9. Midterm Exam Week

Session 9-1 (Tuesday, March 18): Midterm review session

Session 9-2 (Thursday, March 20): Midterm Exam

Part 3: Core Debates in America’s Contemporary Grand Strategy

Week 10. The Unipolar Moment and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony

Session 10-1 (Tuesday, March 25): Liberalism and NATO Expansion

- Hal Brands, “Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era,” *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 2 (March 2018): 8-33.
- G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), chs. 3 and 7.
- John J. Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security* 43, no. 4 (Spring 2019): 7-50.
- c.f., George F. Kennan, “A Fateful Error,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1997, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/05/opinion/a-fateful-error.html>; Open letter to President Bill Clinton from 50 current and former policymakers opposing NATO expansion, June 26, 1997, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997-06/arms-control-today/opposition-nato-expansion>.

Session 10-2 (Thursday, March 27): Wars against “Rogue” States

- Nuno P. Monteiro, “Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity is Not Peaceful,” *International Security* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2011/12): 9-40.
- Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives versus Realists,” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 191-220.
- c.f., “War with Iraq is Not in America’s National Interest,” *New York Times*, September 26, 2002, https://sadat.umd.edu/sites/sadat.umd.edu/files/iraq_war_ad_2002_2.pdf.
- Ahsan I. Butt, “Why did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?” *Security Studies* 28, no. 2 (2019): 250-285.

Week 11. Allies and Partners

Session 11-1 (Tuesday, April 1): Alliances and Balancing

- Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 3-43.
- Hugo Meijer and Stephen G. Brooks, “Why Europe Cannot Provide for Its Security if the United States Pulls Back,” *International Security* 45, no. 4 (Spring 2021): 7-43.
- Darren J. Lim and Zack Cooper, “Reassessing Hedging: The Logic of Alignment in East Asia,” *Security Studies* 2, no. 4 (2015): 696-727.

Session 11-2 (Thursday, April 3): Sources of Alliance Credibility

- Daryl G. Press, “The Credibility of Power: Assessing Threats during the ‘Appeasement’ Crises of the 1930s,” *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/2005): 136-169.

- Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, “Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics,” *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 473-495.
- D.G. Kim, Joshua Byun, and Jiyoung Ko, “Remember Kabul? Reputation, Strategic Contexts, and American Credibility after the Afghanistan Withdrawal” *Contemporary Security Policy* 45, no. 2 (2024): 265-297.

Week 12. Nuclear Weapons and Grand Strategy

Session 12-1 (Tuesday, April 8): (De)valuing Counterproliferation

- Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 1-3.
- Kenneth N. Waltz, “More May be Better,” in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, eds. Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), ch. 1.
- Scott D. Sagan, “More will be Worse,” in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, eds. Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), ch. 2.

Session 12-2 (Thursday, April 10): The Specter of Nuclear Terrorism

- Alex Braithwaite, “Transnational Terrorism as an Unintended Consequence of a Military Footprint,” *Security Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 349-375.
- Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, “Why States Won’t Give Nuclear Weapons to Terrorists,” *International Security* 38, no. 1 (2013): 80-104.

Week 13. Global Peacekeeping and Human Rights Promotion

Session 13-1 (Tuesday, April 15): 9/11 and the Specter of Terrorism

- Lise Morjé Howard and Alexandra Stark, “How Civil Wars End: The International System, Norms, and the Role of External Actors,” *International Security* 42, no. 3 (Winter 2017/2018): 127-171.
- Edward N. Luttwak, “Give War a Chance,” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4 (July-August 1999): 36-44.

- Rochelle Terman and Joshua Byun, “Punishment and Politicization in the International Human Rights Regime,” *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 2 (May 2022): 385-402.

Session 13-2 (Thursday, April 17): No class—Easter holidays

Week 14. The Rise of China and U.S. Grand Strategy

Session 14-1 (Tuesday, April 22): No Class—“Substitute Monday Class Schedule” Day

Session 14-2 (Thursday, April 24): The U.S. Response to China’s Rise

- David M. McCourt, “Knowledge Communities in U.S. Foreign Policy Making: The American China Field and the End of Engagement,” *Security Studies* 31, no. 4 (2022): 593-633.
- Michael Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia: How China’s Neighbors can Check Chinese Naval Expansion,” *International Security* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 78-119.

Week 15. The Rise of China and U.S. Grand Strategy (Continued)

Session 15-1 (Tuesday, April 29): What is to be Done?

- Brendan Rittenhouse Green and Caitlin Talmadge, “Then What? Assessing the Military Implications of Chinese Control of Taiwan,” *International Security* 47, no. 1 (Summer 2022): 7-45.
- Rachel Metz and Erik Sand, “Defending Taiwan: But...What are the Costs?” *Washington Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2023): 65-81.
- M. Taylor Fravel and Charles L. Glaser, “How Much Risk Should the United States Run in the South China Sea?” *International Security* 47, no. 2 (Fall 2022): 88-134.

Session 15-2 (Thursday, May 1): Final Review session

Week 16. Final Exam Week

Final Exam: Date and Time TBD