

17.403 // U.S. Foreign Policy
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Exam Date: Thursday, December 21, 1:30-4:30

FINAL EXAM STUDY QUESTIONS

Please bring this list to the exam.

You may outline your answers on the back of these study-question sheets, and on the extra attached sheet, but you will not be allowed to consult other materials.

You will be asked to answer two from a choice of three of these questions, plus some short identifications.

You are encouraged to study together as you prepare your answers.

The exam will last 2.5 hours: one hour for each essay, and half an hour for short identifications.

1. What foreign policy should the United States adopt to keep itself and the world at peace? Some people argue an activist U.S. foreign policy only leads to U.S. involvement in wars like Korea and Vietnam. Others argue that an isolationist policy permits wars among other states; then the U.S. is eventually drawn in, as in 1917, 1941, and 1950. They suggest a paradox: "To preserve peace, we must threaten war."

Still others argue that the distinction between "activist" and "isolationist" policies is too simple, and suggest that an active or an isolationist policy can cause war or peace, depending on specific policies and circumstances.

Discuss these views with reference to relevant history.

2. Identify the single most serious avoidable calamity in American foreign policy since 1900; explain why you believe it was singularly serious and avoidable; identify a feasible and superior alternative course of action; and explain what changes (e.g., in identity of U.S. policymakers, in their ideas, or in the U.S. policymaking process) might have permitted the selection of this superior alternative policy.

3. What has been the net impact of the United States on the Third World since 1900? Critics paint the U.S. as an evil empire that fostered dictatorship, sparked war, and spread poverty in the Third World. They argue the best favor the U.S. could do the Third

World today is leave it alone. Others claim the U.S. has been a white knight that spread democracy and peace in the Third World. Which view is closer to the truth? What current policy prescriptions follow from your answer? (Should the U.S. pursue an active or isolationist policy toward the Third World today?)

4. The Cold War witnessed a sharp debate over American grand strategy for national security. What strategies were proposed during the Cold War? In retrospect, which strategy seems wisest? And did the U.S. choose wisely, or would different strategic choices have produced better results? Offer an assessment of American strategic ideas and choices, using 20-20 hindsight and your knowledge of general principles of international politics.

5. The press has criticized the Clinton Administration for failing to enunciate a clear grand strategy for national security. Please write a short memo to the next President--whoever that may be--that frames such a strategy. Your memo should identify the main threats to American security that now exist or are emerging (if any); and should briefly frame a grand strategy to address these threats. In your answer, make reference to previous grand strategy concepts. If they still apply, say so; if they are obsolete, explain why. Refer also to general principles of international politics.

6. Some scholars emphasize the role of misperceptions in international affairs, while others discount their importance.

Please discuss the role of misperceptions in shaping American foreign policy during one of two periods: (a) 1914-1945; or (b) 1945-present. Was their role large or small? What were the sources of misperceptions that played a significant role?

7. Write a memo to the president of the United States on how the U.S. should manage its future relations with China. Consider in your answer the possibility that China's economy will continue its rapid growth and China's GNP will eventually rival America's. Use relevant history and relevant theories (if any) to support your arguments.

8. Address the following two questions:

A. How well has twentieth century U.S. foreign policy upheld the ideals of national freedom, human rights, and democracy? Specifically, how hard has the U.S. tried to uphold these ideals? How well has it succeeded?

B. Do you think that the U.S. should make the protection or propagation of these ideals a high priority?

Use historical evidence to support your argument.

9. Discuss the effects of the nuclear revolution on U.S. calculations about national security. How have nuclear weapons affected these calculations? How should they have affected these calculations? What future U.S. policies do nuclear weapons call for?

10. Assess the overall quality of the U.S. foreign policy making process. How closely does it match the rational-scientific ideal? Specifically, are decisions informed by careful analysis of all relevant information? Or do they reflect the snap judgments of blundering bureaucrats and ignorant voters?