

## **Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy**

**Distance Learning Course  
American University  
School of International Service**

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**Summer 2004 (May 21-July 14)**

### ***COURSE SUMMARY:***

Human rights advocates have reached considerable success in framing policy choices in human rights terms and in influencing the discourse of U.S. foreign policy. The continued presence of human rights as an influential foreign policy theme – even during the most skeptical presidential administrations -- can be explained by both the institutionalization of human rights and the centrality of human rights for American identity. This does not mean that each presidential administration has embraced human rights and responded in a consistent manner to human rights concerns. On the contrary, the story of human rights in U.S. foreign policy is one of perpetual tension and resistance, of interpretation and reinterpretation. This course explores the nature of this dynamic process, exposing the way in which it involves both acceptance of and resistance to human rights.

Given the topical nature of the course, it will likely have wide appeal across the university. It may be of particular interest to students of Human Rights, U. S. Foreign Policy, International Politics, Ethics, Peace and Global Affairs, International Law and International Peace and Conflict Resolution.

### ***COURSE ORGANIZATION:***

The course is divided into four learning modules, each of which will require the completion of a written assignment based on a specific type of policy analysis: empirical, normative, prescriptive and an integrative analysis.

- First, the course begins with an examination of early historical antecedents to contemporary U.S. foreign policy, and asks the students for an empirical analysis of trends in this period.
- Second, the course analyzes U.S. foreign policy in relation to human rights and democratic development abroad, with particular attention to efforts during the Reagan years. This section asks students for both an empirical and normative

analysis of the ways in which the U.S. has chosen to promote democracy abroad in line with national interests.

- Third, the course turns post-cold war trends in human rights and U.S. foreign policy, noting continuities and discontinuities between the last three presidential administrations and underscoring the impact of Congress, the media, public opinion and other contextual factors. Students are asked for a prescriptive analysis as they examine the impact of human rights ideas on the U.S. military, underscoring changes in behavior and identity and identify the role of civil society.
- Finally, the course concludes with an analysis of a specific contemporary problem shedding light on the role human rights in U.S. foreign policy in the future. For this final unit, students are asked to produce policy analysis that integrates the empirical, normative and prescriptive approaches.

### ***LEARNING OBJECTIVES:***

The purpose of this course is two-fold. First, the course seeks to impart information about the nature and significance of human rights in U.S. foreign policy. For the student of human rights, the course adds a foreign policy dimension; for the student of foreign policy, the course adds a human rights dimension; and for all students, the course provides the opportunity to think about the complex, dynamic relationship between the two fields. Second, the course also teaches skills in policy analysis and provides students with an opportunity to improve their writing skills. Frequent written assignments and unusually rapid and frequent feedback from the instructor enhance the skill-building objectives of this course.

Having completed this course, students should be able to:

- Understand how human rights factor into the U.S. foreign policy making process;
- Discuss the role played by various civilian and military actors and institutions in this process;
- Identify historical trends in the relationship between human rights and U.S. foreign policy;
- Debate with authority contemporary developments pertaining to the usage of human rights in U.S. foreign policy;
- Conduct original policy analysis of contemporary problems; and
- Think creatively and effectively about whether and when the U.S. has the responsibility to address international human rights problems.

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### ***COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS:***

- *Does the class meet?* No, the class never “meets” in the traditional sense of us all sitting down at the same time. You never have to all log in at the same time, but you do “meet” by posting comments to each other on the “Discussion Board” provided for the course.
- *How do you make sure we participate on the Discussion Board?* I can read your postings. In addition, the system is set up so I can always access a record of who logs in when and for what duration. The fact that a large percentage of your grade is based on participation is a pretty good incentive.
- *But what about the lectures, aren't there any lectures?* No. This class is designed more like a British tutorial. You read books and articles and respond to them, and your professor stimulates discussion and provides feedback. The twist here is that your classmates provide feedback as well.
- *I want to have contact with my professor!* You will. The way this course is set up, you actually have more individual attention from the professor than in a traditional course. Believe me, I will be on your tail!
- *Do you have office hours?* There will be no in-person office hours, but I will set aside time each week for call-ins. Also, you can always email me. In addition, you may call if the issue is better addressed off email.
- *How do you make sure I keep up?* We have a very tight schedule and you will be heavily penalized for falling behind. Again, grades are a good motivator.
- *Is this course as rigorous as traditional courses?* Yes! You should plan to spend as much time on this class as you would on a traditional summer school course.
- *Why should I consider a distance learning course?* The flexible hours might be appealing for a variety of reasons: you work all day; you live in Japan; you will be traveling sporadically during the term; you have two small children, etc. In addition, you might also be looking for the more individualized instruction that this course provides. (Isn't it ironic that a distance learning class brings instructors and students closer together?) You might also seek to build skills in policy analysis and practice your writing. See below for more on what to expect in a distance learning course.

### ***WHAT TO EXPECT IN A DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE:***

You should expect to find a challenging learning environment. In some respects, it will be similar to traditional classes. Your instructor will provide quality readings, exercises, and assignments; as with regular classes, what you get out of it is related to how much you put into it. Expect to spend the same amount of time and energy on an online class; in fact, online classes can take **more** time and energy than regular classes.

In three crucial respects, online learning is different from the classroom.

- Work habits: Online classes are convenient and flexible but students have to be disciplined enough to make time to study and participate.
- Learning styles: Online learning is best for those who learn by reading and writing; if you learn better by hearing lectures or making presentations, an on-campus class might be a better fit.
- Skills: The instructor can't see students and won't know if you are confused, bored, or frustrated unless you are willing to talk to her/him about it.

Successful online students are active learners who are willing to take responsibility for their own learning. Online learning is not for everyone. Please consider carefully whether it is for you before you enroll in this course.

### ***THE LEARNING PARTNER SYSTEM***

During the first week of this course, each participant in this course will a “learning partner,” that is a fellow classmate who can act as a buddy, helper, prodder, fellow traveler. The purpose of this system is to:

- Build community;
- Promote a positive learning experience;
- Provide an outlet for stress and anxiety;
- Establish a “fall back” option in the event that technology fails (i.e., you can call your learning partner if your system crashes and you need something that you both had on your computers);
- Provide another source of feedback.

### ***REQUIRED READINGS:***

1. Walter Russell Mead, "Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World," Routledge, 2002.
2. Sara Steinmetz, "Democratic Transition and Human Rights: Perspectives on U.S. Foreign Policy," SUNY, 1994.
3. Julie Mertus, "Bait and Switch: Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy" Routledge, 2004.
4. Debra Liang-Fenton, "Implementing U.S. Human Rights Policy," United States Institute of Peace, 2004.
5. Julie Mertus, ed., "Foreign Policy Reader on Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy," (self published course reading packet, available from campus bookstore)
6. Other readings to be included in RESOURCES or posted to class.

### ***ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:***

For successful completion of this course, you will be expected to:

- **PARTICIPATE AND COMMUNICATE! (20% grade):**  
Keep up with the timetable posted below; respond thoughtfully to other student papers; post 2-4 items on the discussion board as indicated in the timetable; work with learning partner as indicated. Comments on student papers should be 1-2 pages in length, and should point to both positive and negative aspects of the work. Please remember to be constructive in your criticism and respectful of your colleague's efforts.
- **READ AND WRITE! (50% grade – the first paper is 10%, the next two are 20%)**  
three short (6-10 page) papers on specific assignment on course readings:
  - a) *Historical Antecedents/ Empirical Analysis:* Based on your reading of Meade, write a paper identifying the problem: How do human rights ideas find their way into U.S. foreign policy? Explain the nature, significance, dynamics, and trends of the situation.
  - b) *Democracy Promotion/ Empirical and Normative Analysis:* Based on your reading of Steinmetz and Liang-Fenton, write descriptive paper of trends in U.S. democracy promotion and human rights, including both a "birds eye" overview and a closer look at a specific geographic area (use Liang-Fenton for the geographic focus). Given your empirical analysis, state your assessment

of the ethical issues and group interests, the values and interests you support, and your preferred outcome and explain why.

- c) *Broadening the Field/ Prescriptive Policy Analysis:* Using the Mertus text and the remaining Foreign Policy reader articles, write a paper that is not only descriptive, and normative, but also critical and prescriptive. State what the executive branch, military and civil society should be doing with respect to human rights and U.S. foreign policy. Be sure to explain why you are advocating this position over alternative courses of action.
- **ANALYZE! APPLY AND INTEGRATE KNOWLEDGE (30% grade)**  
Final Policy Analysis Paper: Each student will write a 10-12 page policy analysis paper on a human rights and U.S. foreign policy topic to be chosen with the consultation of the course professor.

See RESOURCES for “how to write a policy paper.” (We will discuss these guidelines “in class.”) Papers cannot be simply a statement of ideology or rhetoric conviction. Nor can they be a statement of political philosophy as it relates to a policy problem. Instead, the term paper must present evidence and provide a critical analysis that underscores both the policy-relevant implications and limitations of the evidence presented. There is no room for any flowery descriptive language or "filler" in such a relatively short paper. Papers must present a scholarly, fair and systematic (not an incomplete, partisan, or one-sided) discussion of the evidence. Be sure to note the limitations of your analysis.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, in accordance with a recognized citation style, and include a title page, appropriate endnotes, and reference list. (The notes and references are not included in the page count).

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- \* Human rights and the U.S.-declared war on terrorism
- \*U.S. human rights policy in Rwanda and the failure to avert genocide compared with U.S. policy in Kosovo [or compare two other geographic regions]
- \*Monitoring human rights in China and U.S. foreign investment
- \*U.S. human rights foreign policy and U.S.-Pakistan relations [or another relationship with the U.S.]
- \*Evaluating the impact of U.S. human rights policy on the end of apartheid in South Africa [or evaluating the impact on another “success story”]
- \*Lessons learned (or yet to be learned) from U.S. human rights policy in Guatemala and El Salvador [or another area such as the former Soviet Union]
- \*Korea [or pick another country] and the future of U.S. human rights policy

## ***TIMETABLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY:***

Week 1: ends May 28

*By this day:*

- Introduce yourself to class
- Respond to 2 student intros and reply to responses to your intro
- Read introductory readings (Liang Fenton ch. 1 and articles to be announced from Foreign Affairs Reader)
- Post 2-3 comments to discussion list in response to questions posed by instructor and in response to other student's comments (all comments should be on average 1-2 pages in length)
- Choose a "learning partner" and exchange email introductions
- Begin reading Meade

Week 2: ends June 4

*By this day:*

- Email first paper to instructor and post to class (on historical antecedents – Meade book)
- Post 2-3 comments to discussion list in response to questions posed by instructor and in response to other student's comments
- Check in with "learning partner" and compare notes on readings

Week 3: ends June 11

*By this day:*

- Respond to 2-3 student first papers and reply to responses to your first paper
- Email second paper to instructor and post to class (on U.S. democracy promotion and human rights, Steinmetz and Liang-Fenton books; Check in with "learning partner" and discuss writing process and selection of final paper topic)

Week 4: June 18

*By this day:*

- Respond to 2-3 student second papers and reply to responses to your second paper
- Email third paper to instructor and post to class (on a critical look at human rights and U.S. foreign policy, Mertus)
- Hand in final paper topic (email one paragraph description to instructor)

- Check in with “learning partner” and discuss writing process and selection of final paper topic

Week 5: June 25

*By this day:*

- Respond to 2-3 student third papers and reply to responses to your third paper
- Post reaction to reading on “how to do policy analysis”
- Respond to any instructor questions about final paper topic
- Check in with “learning partner” on doing policy analysis

Week 6: July 2

*By this day:*

- No postings during this period (except emails to instructor or learning partner) -- work on final paper

Week 7: July 14

*By this day:*

- Final paper due
- Submit to instructor completed “Personal Assessment of Participation”