

## POLITICAL SCIENCE 75 – CAPSTONE SEMINAR

### FOREIGN POLICY MISTAKES

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Meeting Times: Wed. 7pm-10pm  
Office Hours: Daily from 1pm-2pm

#### Seminar Description

In the *Apology*, Plato recounts Socrates' inquisition into human wisdom. The story begins with the journey of Socrates' pupil, Chaerephon, to the Oracle in Delphi where he asks the question, "Who is the wisest of all men?" The Oracle responds, "No one is wiser than Socrates." Socrates, knowing that he himself has no wisdom, subsequently seeks out a politician reputed for his wisdom and aims to demonstrate the fallibility of the Oracle. To his disappointment, Socrates finds that the politician has no wisdom either. He concludes, "Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is – for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think I know" (Plato, 1892). It is perhaps this recognition, i.e., Socrates' self-insight, that vindicates the Oracle.

Philosophers from Socrates through Michel de Montaigne, Baruch Spinoza, and Immanuel Kant to Isaiah Berlin remind us that true wisdom and full knowledge may be a utopian fantasy, that uncertainty is an inescapable fact. They stress that any action, however carefully undertaken, involves the risk of error and potentially disastrous consequences. Indeed, uncertainty may be one of only two certainties in life. The other certainty is that humans will go on making statements and engage in action even in a world of uncertainty. The obvious implication is the need to develop a calculus of uncertainty. The philosophers' answer to this need is rather simple. The calculus is an ethic of (political) humility and modesty.

Uncertainty as an inescapable fact of the human condition is compounded by the ingrained tendency in human nature to be less than rational about recognizing and calculating the risks associated with making decisions. In a famous, late 15<sup>th</sup> century painting, *The Ship of Fools*, Hieronymus Bosch portrays humans as sailing on a sea (the human condition) guided by the biases, weaknesses, and limitations of human beings that make us drift aimlessly and never reach a safe harbor. The point of the painting is that none of us are immune to human folly, i.e., to making mistakes as passengers on the ship of fools. It is noteworthy that the fools are not limited to the irreligious, the skeptics about truth among us, as the passengers in the painting include a monk and a nun. The painting probably reflects the influence of a religious satire by a German theologian, Sebastian Brant (1494), in which he wrote a series of 114 brief essays on human foibles illustrated by woodcuts, which inspired the passengers on the boat in the painting.

The combination of an ocean of relative uncertainty sailed by a ship of human beings with significantly limited powers of navigation is clearly a recipe for making inevitable

mistakes. Some of the shortcomings identified by Brant and illustrated by Bosch are captured in contemporary terms by Dawes (1976) when he discusses the limitations of the human mind in processing information from the environment without distortions due to the influence of cognitive and motivated biases. These biases appear in the form of ideologies, self-convictions, emotions, memories, misperceptions and other contingent elements of the human mind that make us apt to make mistakes.

A telling exchange in the aftermath of 9/11 and following the U.S. invasion of Iraq underlines the importance of the insights of Brant, Bosch, and Dawes. It has also served as the immediate catalyst for this seminar about foreign policy mistakes. In a news conference on 13 April 2004, President George W. Bush was asked to name his biggest mistake since 9/11 and what lessons he had learned since then. In his response Bush joked, "I wish you'd have given me this written question ahead of time so I could plan for it." He then took a longer pause before adding, "I am sure something will pop into my head here in the midst of this press conference, with all the pressure of trying to come up with an answer, but it hadn't (sic.) yet." Ultimately, the President wandered in meandering style from an affirmation of his decisions to invade Afghanistan and Iraq to his unshaken belief that the former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and would be inclined to put them to use. In the end, however, President Bush could not identify any mistakes he had made since 9/11.

One may wonder whether the President's remarks were simply ingenuous, a reflection of his character, or an indication of a real puzzle that needs to be investigated. In this seminar we assume the third possibility, that foreign policy mistakes pose a real puzzle. One can be confident that Presidential historians, political scientists and commentators will judge President George W. Bush to have made genuine mistakes. This assertion follows from the recognition that mistakes are unavoidable facts of daily life for citizens and politicians alike. This inescapable fact plagued the first President of the United States, every President since then, and will also befall every future President of the country. Given the ubiquity of this problem, we ask a series of fundamental questions in this seminar. What are foreign policy mistakes? How and why do they occur? What can be done to avoid them?

### **Assignments**

**1. Moral Mistakes? Can the positions of John McCain and Hillary Clinton be justified?** Expected length: 10 pages, 1 ½ spaced Times New Roman (20 points)

**2. Procedural Mistakes? Could 9/11 Have Been Avoided?** Expected length: 10 pages, 1 ½ spaced Times New Roman (30 points)

**3. Procedural Mistakes? Was the Decision to go to War with Iraq a Mistake?** Expected length: 10 pages, 1 ½ spaced Times New Roman (30 points)

**OR**

**3. Procedural Mistakes? Was the Post-War Planning for Iraq a Mistake?** Expected length: 10 pages, 1 ½ spaced Times New Roman (30 points)

**4. Participation** (20 points).

### **Grading and Late Papers**

Your final grade is a composition of the items described above. Late papers are generally not tolerated and will lead to a deduction of 2 points per day on that particular assignment. Here is the grading scheme:

95-100 = A	78-79 = C+	60-64 = D-
90-94 = A-	75-77 = C	Below 60 = F
88-89 = B+	70-74 = C-	
85-87 = B	68-69 = D+	
80-84 = B-	65-67 = D	

Any student with a disability or special need should speak with me as soon as possible so that we can make any necessary arrangements or accommodations.

### **Classroom Courtesy**

No laptop computers are allowed in the classroom. Members of the class will be expected to exhibit appropriate behavior to the instructor and each other. Most importantly, students are required to give to others the respect and consideration they would wish for themselves. At its best, a classroom operates as a marketplace of ideas, where open discussion permits students to digest and evaluate information. Students must realize that while it is permissible to question a competing point of view, it is never appropriate to allow the conversation to degenerate into personal attacks. It is also expected that students will exhibit good manners, listen when others are talking, and generally behave in a professional manner. Students who behave inappropriately may be asked to leave the classroom and will have points deducted from their final grades.

### **Academic Honesty**

Cheating on a test or other assignment will result in an automatic loss of all points for that assignment and possibly an F for the entire course. Cheating includes looking at notes/readings during closed-book tests. Cheating also includes copying any part of a classmate's work or plagiarism of any kind. If you have any questions concerning what constitutes cheating and/or plagiarism, please consult with me.

## SEMINAR SCHEDULE

### I. The Stage for the Study of Mistakes

**Meeting 1:** Introduction to the Seminar; Documentary: *Why We Fight*

**Meeting 2:** Fulbright, William (1966) *The Arrogance of Power*. New York: Random House.

Robert Jervis (2006) *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, ch1.

Fred Greenstein (1967) The Impact of Personality on Politics: An Attempt to Clear Away Underbrush. *American Political Science Review* 61: 629-641. (available through JSTOR)

### II. The Origins of the Scientific Study of Mistakes

**Meeting 3:** Brecher, M., B.S. Steinberg, and J.G. Stein (1969) A Framework for Research on Foreign Policy Behavior. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13: 75-101. (available through JSTOR)

Snyder, R., H.W. Bruck, and B. Sapin (Eds.) (1954) The Decision-Making Approach to International Politics. In J. Rosenau, ed., *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, pp. 199-207. New York: Free Press

Sprout, H. and M. Sprout (1969) "Environmental Factors in the Study of International Politics." In *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, edited by James Rosenau, pp. 41-56. New York: Free Press.

### III. Conceptualizing Foreign Policy Mistakes

**Meeting 4:** David Baldwin (2000) Success and Failure in Foreign Policy. *Annual Review of Political Science* 3: 167-182.

Walker, Stephen and Akan Malici (2006) U.S. Presidents and Foreign Policy Mistakes in the Exercise of Power: Conceptual and Empirical Perspectives

Charles Hermann (1990) Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy. *International Studies Quarterly* 34: 3-21 (read pp. 3-14).

#### IV. Case Study # 1: The 9/11 Attacks

**Meeting 5:** Clarke, R. (2004) *Against All Enemies. Inside America's War on Terror*. New York: Free Press, chapters 10-11.

Parker, Charles and Eric Stern (2002) Blindsided? September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise. *Political Psychology* 23: 601-629.

*The 9/11 Commission Report*. (2004) Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Printing Office.

Documentary: 9/11 for the Record

#### V. "Pathological" Cognitive Processes and Foreign Policy Mistakes

**Meeting 6:** Monroe, Kristen (1995) Psychology and Rational Actor Theory. *Political Psychology* 16: 1-22.

Nisbett, R. and L. Ross (1980) *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Festinger, Leon (1957) A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Stanford: Stanford University Press. (read chapter 1

Aronson, Elliot (1968) Dissonance Theory: Progress and Problems." In Abelson, R.P., E. Aronson, W. J. McGuire, T. M. Newcomb, M. J. Rosenberg, and P. H. Tannenbaum, eds. *Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook*. Chicago: Rand McNally. (read pp. 5-10)

#### VI. Beliefs, Perceptions and Foreign Policy Mistakes

**Meeting 7:** Jack Levy (1994) Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield. *International Organization* 48: 279-312. (available through JSTOR)

Larson, D. (1994) The Role of Belief Systems and Schemas in Foreign Policy Decision-Making. *Political Psychology* 15: 17-33.

George, Alexander (1969) The Operational Code: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making. *International Studies Quarterly* 13: 190-222.

**Meeting 8:** Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (1974) Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. *Science* 185: 1124-1131.

Khong, Y. F. (1992) *Analogies at War. Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press.

## **VII. Personality Dimensions, Motives, Groupthink and Foreign Policy Mistakes**

**Meeting 9:** Bill Peterson, David Winter and Richard Doty (1994) Laboratory Test of a Motivational-Perceptual Model Conflict Escalation. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38: 719-748. (available through JSTOR)

Hermann, M. (1980) Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Leaders. *International Studies Quarterly* 24: 7-46. (available through JSTOR)

Richard Crutchfield (1955) Conformity and Character. *American Psychologist* 10: 191-198.

Paul Kowert (2002) Groupthink or Deadlock. When Do Leaders Learn from Their Advisors?

## **VIII. Case Study # 2: The Iraq War**

**Meeting 10:** Documentary: Truth, War and Consequences

Blix, Hans (2004) *Disarming Iraq*. New York: Pantheon Books.

**Meeting 11:** Woodward, Bob (2004) *Plan of Attack*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Fallows, James (2004) Blind Into Baghdad. *The Atlantic Monthly* (January/February): 52-74. (Available Through Academic Search Premier)

Documentary Rumsfeld's War

(Documentary: Endgame)

(Documentary No End in Sight)

#### **IV. Avoiding Foreign Policy Mistakes**

**Meeting 12:** Larson, D. (2003) “Good Judgment in Foreign Policy: Social Psychological Perspectives.” In *Good Judgment in Foreign Policy*, edited by S. Renshon and D. Larson. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

George, Alexander (1980) *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press (ch. 1).

George, Alexander (1980) *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press (chapters 7-12).

George, Alexander (2003) “Analysis and Judgment in Policymaking.” In *Good Judgment in Foreign Policy*, edited by S. Renshon and D. Larson. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Braybrooke, D. and Lindblom, C. (1963) *A Strategy of Decision*. New York: Free Press.

**Meeting 13: Wrap Up**