

GU POLITICS FELLOW MARIE HARF

DISCUSSION GROUP OUTLINE

A TRUMP PRESIDENCY MEETS THE WORLD

EXAMINING THE INTERSECTION OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY & DOMESTIC POLITICS THROUGH A TOUR OF GLOBAL HOTSPOTS

Discussion Group Synopsis

Conventional wisdom among political operatives has long held that American voters do not care about foreign policy, while foreign policy experts tend to look down on the nitty-gritty political battles fought here at home. In this discussion group, we will examine the ways in which both sides are wrong – and why each side needs to understand the other now more than ever – by looking at a series of hot-button international issues that directly intersect with American politics.

Voters use foreign policy issues as proxies for leadership and judgment: Who do you want ordering young men and women into battle, or holding the keys to the nuclear codes? Domestic constituencies help determine foreign policy positions, and foreign policy decisions can have domestic political repercussions. Politics do not, contrary to the old adage, stop at the water's edge.

Barack Obama campaigned on a promise to change the way America conducts itself overseas by restoring diplomacy to the center of US foreign policy, using force as a last resort, and emphasizing that US exceptionalism resides not just in our military might but also in our values and our economy. Over the course of his administration, Republicans accused the White House of weakening America's leadership in the world, appeasing our enemies, and allowing threats to grow – all arguments that Donald Trump used eight years later in his campaign against Hillary Clinton.

Mr. Trump campaigned on his own unique philosophy of foreign policy, different from both Democrats and Republicans before him. He frequently argued for keeping the United States out of foreign entanglements, while also pledging to expand our nation's military spending and arsenal. He used unusually-undiplomatic rhetoric with our traditional allies, and conciliatory rhetoric with countries where we have much more complicated and sometimes adversarial relationships. He turned the politics of trade on their head, bucking a large majority of his own party by opposing multilateral deals – a policy position that formed a key component of his popularity in places like the Rust Belt. Democrats, in turn, accused him of not having an overall strategic vision and lacking both a basic understanding of complicated global issues and the temperament to deal with them.

In this first year of the Trump administration, foreign policy and national security have frequently taken center stage. Has President Trump ushered in an across-the-board rejection of his predecessor's policies,

as he promised? Has his unique political coalition here at home pushed him in certain directions overseas? How has the current media landscape covered these issues? How have the American people responded to President Trump's actions as our nation's commander-in-chief and top diplomat? How much has the controversy over Russian interference in our election overshadowed everything else? We'll address these questions and more by puzzling through eight pressing foreign policy issues that have repercussions back home.

Week 1 – Setting the Stage: Where are we now?

To begin the conversations about where we are going, we first must take stock of where we are today – a time when the United States faces serious foreign policy and national security challenges in every region of the world. To set the stage for the specific issue group sessions that will follow, we'll start the semester by discussing:

- How have various domestic political strains in the US – such as populism, isolationism, free trade-ism, internationalism, and others – shaped how we have looked at the world throughout our history? Which one (or several) has appeared to guide the current team as they confront a number of global hotspots?
- We'll take a look at the situation the Trump administration inherited. What principles guided President Obama's foreign policy? What areas did he focus on? And, most importantly for our purposes, what were the domestic politics underpinning these issues during his terms?
- How did previous Republican administrations treat foreign policy? What tenets did they rely on, and which issues did they prioritize? What were the domestic politics that have traditionally underpinned their policies?
- How did President Trump talk about foreign policy and national security during the 2016 campaign? What do President Trump's personnel choices say about his policies and his politics? Is a "Trump Doctrine" emerging, and how do the American voters feel about his leadership (from his base, to middle-of-the-road voters, to his opposition)?
- To give one example of a foreign policy issue with domestic political implications, we'll begin with a discussion on Cuba. Being anti-Castro used to be the third rail of domestic politics in Florida – so much so that it cut across party lines in a way few issues do. Now, as demographics there have shifted and the Cuban-American population has grown younger, the politics have changed as well, and Cuba was not a significant issue in the 2016 presidential campaign. We'll discuss how and why this happened, which will be a good introduction to the theme of the seminar: the intersection of foreign policy and domestic politics.

Week 2 – Iran

One of the most significant ways President Obama broke with his predecessors was to begin a dialogue with Iranian leaders, which our country had not done in any real way since the 1979 Revolution. While we did not officially re-establish diplomatic relations, our two countries opened lines of communication that could be used to address problems when they arose. The Obama administration was heavily criticized for this – there's probably no issue that was more politically controversial than our work with Iran. In this session, we'll discuss:

- The American domestic political legacy on Iran, and how the hostage crisis set a course for how the US has viewed the country that has lasted decades, through administrations of both parties.
- How Iran became an issue during the 2008 presidential campaign, and where the idea of the necessity of talking to the Iranians came from. What the domestic political constraints were on the Obama administration's ability to pursue its preferred policy options vis-à-vis Iran.
- How did the Obama administration make the case to Congress and the American people for its negotiations with Iran, and ultimately for the nuclear deal?
- How has the Trump administration dealt with Iran, both politically and diplomatically?
- How do the voices in the US arguing against any engagement with Iran compare politically with the anti-war progressive coalition that supports the nuclear deal and diplomacy with Iran in general?

Week 3 – Israel

America's relationship with Israel has been a prominent political issue for decades. While American Jews have traditionally voted more frequently for Democratic candidates than Republicans, over the past eight years the GOP hammered very hard on what they characterized as a cooling between our two countries, based in large part on the chilly personal relationship between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu. But when it comes to policy, the US has had long-standing positions on issues related to Israel that span both parties' time in office, such as our high level of military aid and the importance of a two-state solution to the peace process. In this session, we'll discuss:

- As Israel veers farther to the right politically, many observers predicted that the Trump administration would steer US policy toward Israel in the same direction – for example, by moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a promise presidential candidates often make but have never followed through on. So far, however, the Trump team has surprised some by pressuring the Israelis on issues like settlements in much the same way as the Obama administration did. What might describe this shift? Will it have political consequences back home?
- The positions that prominent American Jewish organizations took during the campaign and have taken since the election, on issues both pertaining to Israel and to combatting the rise of anti-Semitism that we've witnessed in the US.
- Data from 2016 that speaks to how American Jews voted in this election, and why (especially in comparison to other elections).

Week 4 – Russia and Europe

The Russian government's interference in the 2016 presidential election has been called "an act of war," underscoring the severity of foreign meddling in support of one candidate during our most important democratic process. This issue has only grown in public prominence over the beginning months of the Trump presidency, as Congressional and FBI investigations continue and Special Counsel Robert Mueller digs into a host of Russia-related issues. At the same time, Mr. Trump as a candidate argued strongly for

improving ties with Russia, a position that often put him at odds with both Democrats and Republicans. During his time in office, he has attempted to work with Russia on issues like Syria. We'll discuss:

- What is President Trump's posture towards Russia, and how does it compare to previous administrations? What guiding principles underlie this posture?
- How has the domestic uproar over Russian meddling and the subsequent ongoing investigations impacted President Trump's political capital? How big is the political cloud hanging over the Trump administration, and what might cause it to lift?
- How should the Trump administration handle, politically and from a public relations perspective, the Russia investigations?
- How has the media covered the twists and turns of such a complicated and secretive story, especially one laden with partisan politics?

Week 5 – Trade

The 2016 election saw trade emerge as a somewhat surprisingly divisive political issue, with candidates on both sides of the aisle at times bucking their own parties' orthodoxies. When President Obama ran for re-election in 2012, Mitt Romney criticized him for not putting in place *more* trade deals. Four short years later, the GOP candidate did not support the current multilateral free trade proposals – unlike a majority of Republicans – and as a result upended political discussion on this issue. The success of Bernie Sanders in the primary had a similar effect on the Democratic side. We'll discuss:

- What the future holds for trade in this country, and whether President Trump has delivered on the promises he made to the working and middle classes about jobs, which were based in part on his opposition to many current and proposed trade deals.
- How do our politics on trade today impact our foreign policy and standing in the world? What's the future of NAFTA? What are the domestic and international consequences of floating the possibility of re-opening that trade deal?
- What about the Trans-Pacific Partnership? What does pulling out of that agreement mean here at home, and in other parts of the world (especially vis-à-vis China)?
- How can both parties talk about trade in parts of our country that have not felt the full benefits of the recent recovery, in a way that is honest about the global economy *and* the future of work in our country?

Week 6 – Climate Change

There is probably no issue that impacts the future of the entire world more than how we confront our changing climate. It is also an issue that crosses some traditional political divides – for example, the Paris climate agreement is supported by both progressive organizations and many evangelical churches. The domestic political arguments have generally fallen into buckets that center around economics: people against international climate agreements believe that environmental regulations and standards hurt business, while those in favor of them argue that there is a huge amount of capital and innovation to be found in the clean energy sector (not to mention the environmental benefits). We'll discuss:

- How did the various political actors who both supported and opposed the climate agreement make their arguments to the Trump team in advance of his decision to withdrawal from the Paris accords? What role did the business community played in this conversation with the administration?
- What is the impact of President Trump's withdrawal on American leadership in the world today? Have other countries stepped up in our absence?
- What roles are cities, states, and businesses in the US now playing to fill the void of the federal government in combatting climate change?
- Do the environmental regulations that President Trump has rescinded play a role in the international debate?

Week 7 – Asia: The Rise of China, a Nuclear North Korea, and Enduring Alliances

The Obama administration heralded its “rebalance” to Asia, which included stepped up military, economic, and diplomatic engagement. The world’s fastest-growing region was not a focus of the 2016 campaign, with the exception of rhetoric about “unfair trade” and some debate about the role of our alliances there. Asia quickly burst onto the scene, however, early in the Trump administration as a result of North Korean provocations – which have only escalated since then. We’ll discuss:

- What tools does the Trump administration have to pressure North Korea over its nuclear and missile programs?
- How do the American people view the situation in North Korea, and what do they believe is the right course of action? Is there a difference between Americans’ views on North Korea based on location – i.e. do people in Guam, Alaska, and California worry more than East-Coasters?
- How might we prepare our population for this growing threat without causing panic? Are the American people ready for what some have suggested could end in a large-scale military conflict?
- Did early steps like hosting the Japanese leadership and sending high-profile advisors to visit South Korea portend a change in course from President Trump’s often-negative campaign rhetoric about alliances, especially in Asia?
- How has the Trump administration worked to ensure the US stays strong in the face of a rising China, especially after rejecting the Trans-Pacific Partnership? Should getting China’s help on North Korea trump cracking down on it because of its trade practices?

Week 8 – Syria: The Civil War, the Fight Against ISIS, and the Humanitarian Crisis

Syria is a massive foreign policy crisis that the Trump administration inherited – dealing with the ongoing brutal civil war, continuing to confront ISIS, and reckoning with the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. While there are no easy answers from a policy perspective, the situation in Syria encompasses a number of important issues that have domestic political implications here at home. We’ll discuss:

- What is President Trump's strategic vision to end the bloodshed in Syria? How has he sold that vision to the American people, especially when it comes to use of military force? How worried are voters today about "mission creep"?
- The American people, according to polling, are not eager to get bogged down in another war in the Middle East. But there is also a prevailing sense that we should be doing something more, a dichotomy we'll explore.
- The differences between the Obama administration's response to Assad's use of chemical weapons in 2013 and President Trump's in 2017 – and how members of Congress and the media treated both from a domestic political perspective.
- The politics of refugees have changed drastically over the last several years, from what used to be bipartisan consensus that welcoming those fleeing violence was a good thing to the fear today that refugees could bring terror to the United States. Where does this issue stand today? How does the Trump administration's "travel ban" fit into this debate?