

## Has the United States Become an Empire?

Fall semester, 2020

Thursday, 10am-12pm

Class Location: Zoom

Offered by the University of Arizona

Instructor: David N. Gibbs, Professor of History, [dgibbs@arizona.edu](mailto:dgibbs@arizona.edu)

Since the ending of the Cold War, the United States has been widely viewed as an imperial power, in the sense of having a truly global level of influence, with no peer. Instead of colonies, the United States possesses hundreds of military bases throughout the world, whether for better or worse. The "imperial" characterization is now accepted by both supporters and critics of official policy. This class will evaluate the genesis of the US empire, beginning with the Cold War in the late 1940s and extending through more recent conflicts with Serbia, post-communist Russia, and elements of the Islamic world.

Throughout the class, there will be an emphasis on conflicting interpretations of US policy, particularly with regard to the motives of US policymakers. In the section on the Vietnam War, for example, students will be encouraged to consider *why* the United States acted as it did; to evaluate several potential explanations for U.S. actions in Vietnam; and to decide which of these possible explanations seems most plausible.

### Required text:

Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Available from Amazon in paperback, [click here](#).

**\*\*[Class Announcements](#)\*\***

### October 1

Interpreting International Relations

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chap. 1.

Irving Kristol, "The Emerging American Imperium," *Wall Street Journal*, August 18, 1997. For full text, [click here](#).

### October 8

Competing Perspectives on the Origins of the Cold War

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chaps. 2, 3.

John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, chaps. 1, 10.

### October 15

NSC-68 and the Korean War

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chap. 4.

US Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Justification for US Military Intervention in Cuba," March 13, 1962, recently declassified, from the National Security Archives, Washington, DC. For full text, [click here](#).

Robert Buzzanco, "What Happened to the New Left? Toward a Radical Reading of American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 4, 1999.

## **October 22**

Covert Operations and the Cold War

Arindrajit Dube, Ethan Kaplan, and Suresh Naidu, "Coups, Corporations, and Classified Information," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126, no. 3, 2011. For full text, [click here](#).

US Senate, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975, chap. 3. For full text, [click here](#).

## **October 29**

Vietnam and the Politics of Defeat

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chaps. 7, 8.

Robert Buzzanco, "What Happened to the New Left? Toward a Radical Reading of American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 4, 1999.

## **November 5**

The "Vietnam Syndrome" during the 1970s

John Rosenberg, "The Quest against Détente: Eugene Rostow, the October War, and the Origins of the Anti-Détente Movement, 1969-1976," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 4, 2015.

General David M. Shoup, "The New American Militarism," *Harper's*, September/October, 1969.

## **November 12**

The Reagan Doctrine

David N. Gibbs, "Reassessing Soviet Motives for Invading Afghanistan: A Declassified History," *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 2, 2006. For full text, [click here](#).

## **November 19**

The Rise of Humanitarian Intervention

David N. Gibbs, "The Principle of 'First Do No Harm,'" in Roger MacGinty and Jenny H. Peterson, eds., *Routledge Companion to Humanitarian Action*. London: Routledge, 2015. For full text, [click here](#).

Alan J. Kuperman, "Rwanda in Retrospect: A Hard Look at Intervention," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000. For full text, [click here](#).

## **December 3**

The War on Terror

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chap. 6.

Julie Kosterlitz, "Troops and Consequences: America's Track Record in the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan Suggests that Today's Solutions can Lead to Tomorrow's Problems," *National Journal*, Nov 3, 2001.

### **December 10**

US Relations with Post-Communist Russia

John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 2014. For full text, [click here](#).

Michael A. McFaul, "Confronting Putin's Russia," *New York Times*, March 23, 2014. For full text, [click here](#).

Thomas L. Friedman, "Foreign Affairs: Now a Word from X," *New York Times*, May 2, 1998. For full text, [click here](#).

Uwe Kluffmann, Matthias Schepp, and Klaus Wiegrefe, "NATO's Eastward Expansion: Did the West Break its Promise to Moscow?" *Der Spiegel International*, November 26, 2009. For full text, [click here](#).