



**LIVERPOOL  
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International  
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Association

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**US Foreign Policy**

## **Ukraine, Russia and the US**

*For panels that consist of 4 speakers you will have 12 minutes maximum  
For panels that consist of 6 speakers you will have 10 minutes maximum*

09:30-10:30 registration and drinks

### **10:30-12:00 session 1: Ukraine, US and Russia**

Student Life Building (SLB) room 205  
Chair Trevor McCrisken (Warwick)

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1. *Distorting fundamental norms of international law to resurrect the Soviet Union: the international law context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine* by Sofia Cavandoli (LJMU) and Gary Wilson (LJMU).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine which commenced on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 represented just the latest, albeit most devastating, intervention in a neighbouring former Soviet state. This article considers the legal justifications for Russia's actions and finds them to be far from satisfactory. The claims advanced by Russia closely mirror those made in respect of its prior interventions in the former Soviet space, underlining an attempt to distort some of the most fundamental norms of international law in order to afford an air of legitimacy to its actions. Although it is too soon to conclude with any certainty what the longer term implications of the recent conflict will be, both politically and legally, it is apparent that it can be seen as part of a wider policy objective on Russia's part to maintain and/or reassert influence over its 'near abroad.' While in some respects indicative of the possible emergence of a new 'Cold War,' the international reaction to its intervention in Ukraine suggest that any intention to manipulate or reconstitute legal norms in support of its agenda is meeting with mass rejection.

2. *Taking Russia seriously: US foreign policy, Russian ontological security, and the war against Ukraine* by Ruth Deyermond (KCL)

Russia's war against Ukraine, framed by the Russian government as a battle against US hegemony and Western aggression, has raised urgent questions about US policy towards Russia since the collapse of the USSR, with attention largely focused on strategic issues. This paper suggests that the failure of the US-Russia relationship in the post-Soviet period is, more fundamentally, a product of mismatched perceptions of the relationship and of its interaction with questions of national identity. US policymakers have largely failed to appreciate the ways in which Western policy towards Russia and the rest of the post-Soviet space has been understood by the Russian political elite as an ontological security problem. This is evident in relation to issues such as NATO expansion and support for democratisation (in Russia and in the 'colour revolutions' of Ukraine and Georgia). Beyond this, it also informs Russian understanding of US involvement in Russia's post-Soviet transition in the 1990s, shaping retrospective narratives of hostility, betrayal, and civilisational conflict. In contrast, for most of the post-Soviet period, US foreign policymakers and analysts have seen Russia as peripheral to US priorities, treating engagement with the Russian state as a short-term, problem-solving exercise. Although the war has forced a recognition of the importance of Russia for US and global security questions, calls for off-ramps and a return to some form of status quo ante indicate a continuing failure to recognise what the war means for Russia, for US-Russia relations, and thus its transformative effects on US and global security.

3. *Anchoring U.S. strategy – Russia's place in U.S. strategic culture and nuclear policy*  
by Valentina Cassar (Malta)

This paper argues that the United States' global outlook and strategic culture have been underpinned by the possession of nuclear capabilities and nuclear policy. The U.S. has subsequently sustained a posturing and strategic culture based on maintaining primacy, whilst advancing an international liberal order and an engaged extended deterrence, and this has been reflected in both broader strategy and defense documents as well as nuclear posture reviews.

The symbiotic and inextricable relationship that exists between U.S. Strategic Culture and nuclear policy has in turn ensured that, whilst undergoing occasional shifts between sub-cultures in strategic approach, continuity in US policy has persisted despite the broader systemic changes that have taken place over the past decades.

Central to the nuclear posturing and strategic culture of the United States – primarily during the Cold War, but also to varying degrees during the post-Cold War period, has been the cognisance of Russia that emerges from U.S. policy documents. U.S. concerns over Russia's posturing and threat have sustained U.S. international engagement, as well as U.S. perceptions of its own primacy, the management of the international liberal order, and the United States' approach towards extended deterrence.

Despite the tumultuous developments of the past two decades – including the 9/11 attacks, financial crisis, U.S.' overstretch, the rise of China, concerns over proliferation by rogue states and non-state actors, and increasingly polarised domestic politics - Russia remained a central point of concern within U.S. strategic culture and global and nuclear posturing, and determines the way the United States views its nuclear and conventional capabilities, and also determines the way the United States sees itself.

This paper will therefore explore the way narratives on Russia have served as an anchor within the United States' strategic culture and nuclear posture, and are engrained within its geopolitical outlook. These narratives are all the more pertinent to explore within the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, the subsequent restructuring of U.S. and European posturing, and the implications on U.S. policy and international order.

4. *The war in Ukraine amid US-Russia-Ukraine relations* by Vitor Fernandes (Lusiada University)

This paper argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was triggered by President Zelensky's signing of the Decree No 117/2021 of March 24, 2021—about a year before the invasion. This decree, entitled “On the Strategy of de-occupation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol”, followed the decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of March 11, 2021. Its main objectives were, particularly, the restoration of territorial integrity and ensuring the state sovereignty of Ukraine within internationally recognized borders; ensuring national unity, stability, and cohesion of Ukraine; and the cessation of the use of the occupied territory that threatens the national security of Ukraine and that may pose a threat to international security and peace. To my knowledge, this argument has not been put forward until now. In fact, and most surprisingly, this Decree seems to have attracted very little attention until now. Sometime after the signing of this Decree, some movements of Ukrainian Armed Forces began to occur towards the south and east of Ukraine. And a few weeks before the start of the invasion the OSCE also reported an increase, albeit modest, of ceasefire violations in the Luhansk region. The argument is that, following the historical dynamics of USA-Russia relations since 1991—in which NATO's eastward expansion plays a very important part—but also with Ukraine, Putin may have considered that he needed to act, preventively or preemptively, in order to defend Russian interests, particularly after the events in 2014, in what he considers to be Russian territories. Importantly, this argument provides an explanation for the invasion, but it does not attempt to condone or legitimize it. Significantly, President Zelensky vowed again recently to “liberate” Crimea as well as the Donbass.

5. *Understanding Congressional Narratives and US Public Opinion on the Ukraine War* by Jonny Hall (LSE)

This paper provides the first systematic review of US public opinion concerning the Ukraine War prior to the 2022 midterm election. Studying opinion polls and elite discourses vis-à-vis Ukraine, the paper explores the importance of factors such as inflation and the perceived state of the war in influencing narratives in Congress and US public opinion. Given the significance of US military aid to the Ukrainian war effort, understanding the causes and importance of the emergence of partisan fractures concerning Ukraine is vital to a fuller understanding of the war. It also represents an important test of theories concerning public opinion in democracies. The paper finishes with a discussion of future potential trends in public opinion concerning Ukraine and the implications this could hold for US foreign policy more broadly.

6. *Public Diplomacy: US Credibility vs. Kremlin Propaganda in the Russo-Ukrainian War* by Carl Mirra (Adelphi)

US centric analysts of the Russo-Ukrainian War largely overlook Russian foreign policy goals and its irredentism. As such many US analysts, from the realist Mearsheimer to the left-leaning Chomsky, distort the historical record by focusing almost exclusively on US motives without a corresponding examination of Moscow's expansionist agenda. As such, this paper will illustrate how US centric, both realist and radical, advance misleading interpretations of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. These distortions often echo Russian disinformation, and

Putin's rhetorical strategy to challenge US credibility, such as bemoaning US unilateralism and the unauthorized invasion of Iraq, provide an air of veracity to Moscow's propaganda. Part of the problem with much of the critical appraisals of US policy in the states is the lack of attention to Russian and Ukrainian sources. This paper will explore the Surkov leaks (hacked emails of the Kremlin's policymaker for Ukraine), oral history interviews and a survey conducted in Ukraine during the summer 2022 by the author with an aim toward correcting several common misperceptions regarding the Russian invasion. This "balancing," or enrichment of source material to capture a more complete record, is essential in terms of public diplomacy, particularly given perceptions of US lacking credibility after unilateral wars and the stumbling withdrawal from Afghanistan.

### **12:00-1:15 lunch**

Student Life Building (SLB) room 205

### **1:15-2:45 roundtable: The Russian invasion of Ukraine and its impact on international and domestic politics**

Student Life Building (SLB) room 205

Chair: Matthew Alan Hill (LJMU)

Participants are Ruth Deyermond (KCL), Trevor McCrisken (Warwick), Alexander Evans (LSE and FCDO), Maria Ryan (Nottingham).

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### **2:45-3:15 tea break**

### **3:15-4:45 session 2a: Conceptualising US foreign policy**

Student Life Building (SLB) room 205

Chair: Jan Andre Ludvigsen (LJMU)

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1. *What is Great Power Competition?* By Nick Kitchen (Surrey).

The United States, along with a number of Western allies, have begun to characterise the strategic environment they face as one characterised by the return of great power competition.

Indeed, this phrase has become ubiquitous in recent years as a means of describing the character of contemporary international relations, as well as offering a policy prescription: compete. But what exactly does it mean to say that competition has returned, or the international system is more competitive? This paper interrogates the concept of great power competition, in order to assess its utility as an analytical tool and normative framing.

2. *Constructivism, narratology, and the protagonist: US foreign policy in Syria – beyond identity binaries, towards narrative power* by Jack Holland (University of Leeds) and Xavier Mathieu (University of Liverpool).

This article analyses the ‘value added’ of narratology for constructivism in International Relations. In doing so it develops two contributions to critical IR literatures. First, we argue that narrative analysis can help constructivist and discourse analytic research to move beyond a propensity for identity binaries. More nuanced relational identities are formed in the web of characters that populate stories. The opening analytical move underpinning this argument is key – the figure of the protagonist looms large in foreign policy narratives and that character is not necessarily the Self, as author. Second, narratology adds to constructivism the analytical leverage of narrative power which helps to explain how stories propel forwards and inspire (in)action. This, then, in combination with the agency of the author, speaks to the structural force of stories, which arises from audience expectations of narrative closure – we already know how a story will end from its opening scenes and the introduction of our protagonist. To illustrate this argument in context, we interrogate US foreign policy during the opening chapters of the Syrian Civil War, with a focus on the storying of the conflict and characterisation of the protagonist, the Syrian people. As well as shedding light on narrative power and the importance of identity and character construction beyond binaries, we are the first to locate America’s debilitating ends-means gap (a policy of regime change in lieu of a commitment to undertake military intervention) as emerging specifically from the writing of Syria’s protagonist and the narrative power this characterisation engendered.

3. *The US-China ‘tech war’: Decoupling and the Case of Huawei* by Maria Ryan (Nottingham) and Steve Burman (Sussex)

This paper will offer an early analysis of the unfolding US-China ‘tech war.’ We argue that a ‘tech war’ is now underway and that Washington is the driving force behind it. Our conclusions are tentative because the parameters of the tech war are still, in some respects, unclear, and disagreements persist over both the direction of policy and over the granular details of it. What is clear, however, is that there has been a decoupling between the Huawei and over 150 of its affiliates and high-end US technological content, wherever it is produced. We explain why Huawei became the first target in the tech war, and what effect the 2020 sanctions have had. More broadly, we ask how much further the ‘tech war’ might plausibly go, and what this means for the future of the US-China rivalry.

4. *Mr Wilson goes to Kiev* by Ashley Cox (SOAS)

This paper will look at the War in Ukraine as a Wilsonian conflict. It will argue the underlying influences of Wilsonianism on American foreign policy is a key factor in understanding American support for Ukraine. This paper will argue that when looked at within this framework

we can better understand the rare bi-partisan agreement on support for Ukraine. As a conflict, this war has been presented as a clear case of a hostile and non-democratic state invading a democratic state looking to exercise its right to self-determination. This right would include the right to collective defence and economic alignment with any nation or alliance of nations that Ukraine wishes. This paper will look at why Ukraine has received disproportionate support compared to its size and value to Western powers. The analysis will critique the Realist understanding of American foreign relations, which should have led to the United States abandoning the Ukrainian cause in the interest of stabilizing global oil prices and recognising a Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. This paper will also engage with Mearsheimer's argument that the war has been predominantly caused by Western expansion since the end of the Cold War.

### **3:15-4:45 session 2b: US foreign policy in practice**

Student Life Building (SLB) room 204

Chair: Rohan Mukherjee (LSE)

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#### *1. The infrastructure of democracy promotion: democratisation and US national security from Bush to Biden* by Robert Pee (Reading)

This paper examines the position of the democracy promotion programs conducted by US organisations such as USAID, the State Department, and the National Endowment for Democracy, which aim to strengthen pro-democratic civil society groups and parties overseas, in the Biden Administration's foreign policy strategy. It argues that while Biden has been more rhetorically supportive of these programs than Trump, they no longer constitute an important element of US strategy.

During the final decade of the Cold War and the initial decade of the War on Terror, sub-state programs to strengthen democratic forces in authoritarian states played an important role in combatting anti-American ideologies. In addition, on occasion they helped to foster democratic transitions – and to convince high-level US policymakers to exert diplomatic pressure to support such transitions – in authoritarian states important to US security interests. However, high-level support for these programs has declined over the previous decade. This is not due primarily to shifts in US ideology/values, but to a combination of local and international factors. Internationally, the US has increasingly faced security challenges which democracy promotion cannot assist in resolving. At the local level, constraints to the operation of US democracy promotion programs have made them more challenging to execute. This has resulted in a progressive “stepping away” from democracy promotion as a policy imperative, as US officials have imposed constraints on democracy promotion programs and shied away from providing them with support at the state-to-state level.

While Biden has attempted to reconfigure some aspects of democracy promotion to increase its effectiveness in light of local and international changes, the Administration's main

imperative is now to safeguard existing democracies rather than to focus on the expansion of democracy. This leaves democracy promotion in stasis, as its utility and original rationale fade.

2. *Afghanistan: Transatlantic lessons learnt from 20 years of democracy, development and security* by Osman Hassan (Warwick)

With the return of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, questions remain over why the international communities' efforts to support democracy, development and security over the last two decades failed so abruptly. Whilst there has been considerable reflection within the EU member states and institutions, the United States and international organisations such as NATO, more research needs to be undertaken if we are to understand, acknowledge and address collective success and failures. The United States Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (US SIGAR) has concluded that 'the single most important factor in the ANDSF's [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces] collapse in August 2021 was the US decision to withdraw military forces and contractors from Afghanistan through signing the U.S.-Taliban agreement'. More broadly, US SIGAR has conducted the most comprehensive analysis of the lessons the US needs to learn from its twenty-year reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. A great deal within such reports needs to be reflected upon by both the US and Europe. As the leading architect of the war and post-war reconstruction, American failures in strategy contextualise and structure any understanding we have about Europe's overall performance and provide critical relational lessons moving forward. The EU recognises that in parallel to its strategy in Afghanistan, its leading international partner was faced with failures of strategy, criminality and fraud, unrealistic timelines, sustainability failures, personnel issues, lack of contextual understanding and failed monitoring and evaluation points. Yet, notably absent within US SIGAR reports is any recognition of the European Union's efforts. This paper will look at the War in Afghanistan through a Transatlantic lens, asking substantial questions about the current *capability-expectations gap* in EU External Affairs and the tensions between *Atlantic solidarity* and *European integration*.

3. *US corporate elite decision-making in the occupation of Iraq – from subverting democracy to shifting regional and global power dynamics* by Bamo Nouri (UWL)

The 2003 occupation of Iraq by the United States of America (US) was arguably the most documented war in history, largely due to its significance in the war on terror, the broadcast purpose of the occupation and the amount of personnel involved. However, the promise – democracy and freedom for the Iraqi people and stability in the Middle-East – never reached fruition. This subsequently raised questions around the US agenda in Iraq, the decisions US occupation authorities – the Coalition Provision Authority (CPA) and the US elites who gave the orders - took and simply put, what the true purpose of the occupation was. This scope of this talk extends beyond theory not meeting practise, with analysis of the unfathomable sequence of events that took place, starting with the undemocratic processes that US corporate elites commissioned which solidified divisions in Iraq, eventually resulting in the emergence of ISIS in the country. Amid the events that took place in the region, and as a result of what happened specifically in Iraq, there were also major regional and global power dynamic shifts, namely the growing role of Iran in the region and the influential rise of China in the world. This chapter locates the 2003 Iraq occupation as a key driver in regional and global power shifts through an analytical overview of the key and influential events that took place inside Iraq, the immediate repercussions they brought and the longer-term legacies they left.

4. *Coups, narcotics, and terrorists: norm contestation and the ban on assassination under H. W. Bush and Clinton* by Luca Trenta (Swansea)

Recent scholarship has interpreted the ban on assassination contained in Executive Order 12333 as a norm. Scholars have argued that before 9/11, this norm was at its maximum strength. However, previous work by the author has shown that this argument overlooks the contributions of the Reagan Administration in undermining the ban. Building on scholarship on norm robustness, this research showed how the Administration engaged in contestation that challenged the remit (applicatory), meaning, and validity of the ban.

This paper traces how – under Bush and Clinton – US officials built on Reagan-era precedents to further contest the ban. Meaning contestation aimed at reshaping the ban to permit a more assertive CIA role in the context of coups and regime change. Applicatory contestation permitted to exclude counter-terrorism operations from the remit of the ban. This shift changed US counter-terrorism policy, but it also influenced US policy in the realm of counter-narcotics. Like the terrorist, the ‘narco-terrorist’ became a permissible target. Based on primary and secondary sources, the article will show how – compared to the covert contestation of the Reagan years – challenges to the ban were publicly debated, thus setting the stage for the open post-9/11 contestation identified in norm scholarship.

**4:45-5:25 AGM**