

**The Changing International System  
Implications for U.S. National Security**  
24 September 2012

This lecture will provide a brief history of how the international system has evolved over the past hundred years as we have moved from the classic balance-of-power system to a more integrated, interdependent global system. National security is too often defined in terms of military power. I will challenge this focus and place military power in the context of other elements of power, especially economic power and national will.

In a sense, this will be John Johns' "State of the Union." I will give my views on how the United States can best adjust to the evolving system to avoid providing another chapter to Paul Kennedy's book, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers." This will provide a conceptual framework for the following sessions of the course. I have sent three articles directly to class members as suggested reading for the second session, Monday, 24 September. The first article is *Limits of Universalism*, by Henry Kissinger, which gives an analysis of the two competing ideologies that vie for American foreign policy. You can use this article as a framework for assessing the Obama and Romney approaches to foreign policy. For session five, I will distribute timely articles that describe the two approaches as they are articulated by the two candidates. Undoubtedly, most of you have followed the events of the last week concerning the Israeli issue and the Embassy sieges and you can easily infer the ideologies of the two candidates, but I will leave that up to you. There are stark contrasts.

The second article, *New Bretton Woods*, argues that the current world economic system established after WWII at Bretton Woods, may have to be replaced. That system, dictated for the most part by the United States, gives the United States many advantages and is based on economic theories of "free enterprise" that have become a given for our policies. This article questions the viability of this system. In the later class on Economic Policy, session six, I will distribute articles focusing on the contrasting economic ideologies of the two parties. As with the non-economic ideologies of the two parties, there are stark differences in economic ideologies.

The third article is a review, *Book-club picks for Election 2012*, (23 March 2012, Washington Post) by David Ignatius of three books that give different views of the new world order. I believe these three views provide a good framework for assessing the two candidates' approach to foreign policy.

The following outline provides the main points of the lecture:

- 1. International system in flux, outcome uncertain.**
  - A. Movement from balance-of power system to global interdependence; systemic/structural changes.
  - B. History of mankind is toward larger political organizations.
  - C. Evolution toward centralized authority is always resisted; unilateralism/go-it-alone appeals to voters. A president (Bush II) states "we are an empire and we define

- reality,” and his VP proclaims that we don’t need to ask the permission of the United Nations to defend our interests.
- D. The U.S. is still struggling to create a “more perfect union” internally while facing the task of adapting to a “more perfect union” of the international system.
  - E. Other countries, and Europe, are facing the same dilemma.
- 2. National security and elements of power:**
- A. Military.
  - B. Economic.
  - C. Political.
  - D. Moral Suasion.
  - E. National Will and Cohesion.
- 3. Military:**
- A. WWII left U.S. dominant. This led to an ethos of “American Militarism.”
  - B. Belief in “Total Victory” a la unconditional surrender in WWII. Korea outcome; VN, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. hard to accept.
  - C. COIN: Mission impossible. Terrorism as “War of ideas,” the side that has the moral high ground has the advantage.
  - D. World policeman? Peace dividend in 1992
  - E. Where is the threat?
  - F. Current National Military Strategy.
- 4. Economic:**
- A. At the end of WWII, the U.S. had the only strong economic infrastructure and we were the sole super power. We dictated the terms of the world economic system. The Bretton Woods agreement established our currency as the world standard; the World Bank and International Monetary Fund were crafted to fit our economic theory, and we dominated the global economy for several decades.
  - B. Our control has eroded; the “coordinating body of the leading economic actors now numbers 20 (G-20).
  - C. 2008 NIE conclusion: Economic conditions, not terrorism, are the greatest threat to our national security.
  - D. Debt and debt throughout the world in a global economy is a sword hanging over the necks of all countries. It almost led to a world-wide depression and we are not out of the woods yet.
  - E. The public in all countries demands services and low taxes; these are incompatible demands. The free lunches went on for 30 years in the U.S. It is now time to bite the bullet.
  - F. Politicians cannot level with the voters regarding the sacrifices that must be made and expect to be elected.
  - G. Voters don’t understand the problem. Many don’t even know the difference between the national deficit and the national debt.
  - H. The conflicting solutions offered by the competing ideologies (Keynesian v. Classical Economic theories) are beyond the grasp of most voters; they respond to simple bumper-sticker solutions that promise economic prosperity with little pain.

I. 2012 election *should be a choice on how to cope with the changing world environment and how best to meet our challenges!* There is abundant evidence that voters don't understand the issues; rather, they vote on personality and other factors..

J. Eventual train wreck?

**5. Political: Ultimate Problem**

A. Jim Fallows: The system is broken; unless we fix it, we will have a new constitution or a coup.

B. Political gridlock.

C. Wilsonian Idealism: Our political and economic systems are appropriate for the entire world.

D. Arab Spring?

E. Role of UN, IMF, WTO, World Bank.

F. American "Exceptionalism". When various countries proclaim that they are "exceptional," there is little room for compromise on political, economic, and military conflict

G. Law of the Seas

**6. Moral:**

A. In domestic affairs, do we favor a community approach, or individual responsibility for one's welfare?

B. In international affairs, what is the role of morality? World standing. If the "War on Terrorism" is in fact a war of ideas, are we winning or losing?

**Conclusions (State of the Nation):**

A. We are in uncharted waters; volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity cloud the nature of the problems we face and the appropriate solutions.

B. Democracy reflects will of the people, but they must know what they want. "Throw the rascals out" is not good enough. Anger and hate without solutions is a dead end.

C. Leaders must understand the systems (economic, political, military—at all levels).

**D.** We are a **Republic**; leaders should decide what is best for the country, not what gets them re-elected. But, is this realistic?

E. Do our Constitution and the political system it requires meet the challenge?