

## CRISES OF CONSCIENCE

### IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

An inquiry into the link between ethics and the formation of American foreign policy is most effectively begun by looking at specific historical cases familiar to the student, and/or at historic events actually taking place during the current semester. Three such cases of special urgency for Americans include : (1) The still controversial decision by Harry Truman to use a largely unknown but ominous new weapon, the atom bomb, against the cities of *Hiroshima and Nagasaki* in August 1945. (2) The *American war in Vietnam*, especially between 1961 and 1968, the Kennedy and Johnson years. Despite the deeply traumatic engagement of the U.S. in Vietnam, precise recollection of the principal turning points and consequences of the war is surprisingly faint only 30 years later, even among veterans of the war. Ethical assessment of that war has been still less adequate. (3) The ongoing *war in Iraq*, undertaken five years ago by the U.S. and Great Britain, even though several of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (including France, Russia and China) had proposed a resolution to initiate a four-month intensive, countrywide, armed inspection for weapons of mass destruction, with the prospect of a subsequent war if inspectors were denied access to areas of concern in Iraq. The resolution was withdrawn before a vote in the Council. No such weapons were ever discovered as the war progressed. The (February 2, 2007) unclassified conclusions of the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE, the combined assessment provided to Congress by the Central Intelligence Agency, correlating the separate estimates provided by the sixteen American intelligence agencies) state that the accelerating levels of violence, while not simply a civil war, do contain ominous elements of such a fundamental rift in the society. We will focus our study on the still roiling military and political developments of this conflict, in which the U.S. is now virtually alone confronting wholly unforeseen and seemingly intractable challenges from many competing sectors of Iraqi society.

The **Hiroshima** study will begin with a reading of John Hersey's ever new account of the apocalyptic experiences of six survivors of the bomb, *Hiroshima* (1946). Study will include a detailed analysis of the historical developments leading up to this crisis, essentially a determination by the Americans to bring the war to a swift close that would prevent Japan from quickly resuming their earlier imperialistic wars. To comprehend the crisis of August 1945, it will be essential to study the dynamics of U.S.- Japan relations over the previous century, going back to the voyage in 1853-1854 of Commodore Matthew Perry to Japan. Perry's abrupt and uninvited "visit" immediately awakened an acute sense of vulnerability in Japan, igniting their urgent desire to acquire an empire of their own in self-defense. Eventually Japanese expansion across the Pacific led to a totally intractable situation between the two nations, resolved finally by the use of an American terrorist attack against Japanese citizens, with a weapon whose potential long-range risks are still not completely known. It is clear that, even after the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war, controversy still reigns across the globe over the justice and prudence of Truman's choice. While we will likely not be able to resolve this controversy definitively, we will seek to become intelligently familiar with the essential elements of the controversy.

The second text for this section of the course will be the historical chapters of the instructor's manuscript, *Remembering Hiroshima : Was it Just ?* The manuscript, to be published next year by Ashgate Publications (the UK), will be available for purchase at the Georgetown bookstore. The study seeks to examine the historical elements of this crisis and the ethical justifiability (or unjustifiability) of the atomic solution to the crisis adopted by the Americans. Episodes of the TV documentary "The World at War : The Pacific" will be viewed in class sessions.

**Vietnam** was described recently as "the shrapnel we (Americans) carry in our hearts". Analysis of the Kennedy and Johnson policies in Southeast Asia may provide the instrument to heal this national trauma by discovering the mix of ethical and unethical decisions leading to a struggle that eventually proved tragic both for Vietnam and the United States. The study begins by tracing the Kennedy administration's engagement in Vietnam to its ethically sound instinct to escape the dangers of a European nuclear war by displacing the Cold War strategy of "containment" in Europe to an apparently less hazardous region, Southeast Asia. Our earlier study of the bombing of Hiroshima will allow us to understand that the Vietnam strategy of Kennedy was inspired by an effort to escape the threatening ramifications of the American introduction of atomic weapons into the dynamics of international relations. This formerly unrecognized historical link between Hiroshima and Vietnam will thus complement and deepen our earlier study of the atomic bombings of 1945. For the Kennedy administration, to its lasting credit, proposed to avoid the potential global catastrophe of a European nuclear war by displacing the East-West struggle to the seemingly less volatile region of Indochina. President Kennedy then, in 1963, doomed this already risky initiative by overthrowing his Vietnamese ally, President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam. Our inquiry will seek to identify Kennedy's reason for this quizzical decision. We will then examine President Johnson's futile effort to overcome this tragic mistake of Kennedy by replacing the Vietnamese military effort with an Americanized war.

Reading and discussion of the instructor's study, *The Year of the Hare : Kennedy in Vietnam, January 25, 1963 to February 15, 1964*, will be supplemented by viewing segments of the PBS series : "Vietnam : A Television History."

**The War in Iraq.** As the campaign in Iraq continues unabated in its fifth year, the omens for its successful conclusion seem increasingly dire. The current military and political situation in Iraq seems to belie the confidence voiced by the American administration at the heady moment of "shock and awe". Deterioration of the security situation and paralysis in Iraqi political development bode ill for future internal sectarian and criminal battles, that might also draw neighboring nations into their destructive orbit, and portend that the original American-British intervention could lead to a regional downward spiral into chaos in an already fractious and resource-rich area. Even in the present contentious political season, scarcely anyone has been able to confidently project an exit strategy that might not entail still greater destruction, of perhaps long duration.

Our inquiry in the course will concentrate on the urgent question of "the lessons of Iraq" : what led the president and the Congress to launch this war of choice, and why was the future course of the war so hidden from the imaginations and the plans of the governments that

undertook it. We will turn here to the *New Yorker* correspondent, George Packer, whose 2006 study built on his frequent visits to and travels throughout Iraq, *The Assassins' Gate*.

Packer's contribution seems especially illuminating for our investigation, for he seems to have initially approved of the war and, during his reporting visits to the area, found still more evidence to support his earlier conviction that the Coalition had the right to overthrow Saddam Hussein on the grounds of his tyrannical rule there. In the course of his visits, however, he gradually came to the conclusion that the country-wide and trans-sectarian resistance to outside intervention had become an invincible obstacle to securing peace and stability in the region. These successive judgments on the nature of the struggle in Iraq will furnish a rich opportunity to make our own judgments on the justice of the war. From this vantage point, we may be able to formulate our own outlooks on the legitimacy of military intervention to correct humanitarian abuses within other nations. Such humanitarian intervention seems to be becoming the *leit-motif* of post-Cold War statecraft, as was also evident in the continuing struggle over the independence of Kosovo.

We will add to our discussion the crucial matter of the legality (or illegality) of the war, which did not constitute a response to an earlier attack by Iraq, nor was it authorized by the Security Council. We may also speculate on the possible link between illegality and the apparent lack of success in the war.

*Course Methodology* : discussion of the texts, and group analysis of the ethical and political arguments applicable to these disparate cases, supplemented by viewing documentary films of these events themselves.

Student essays on each of these three topics will be evaluated for : comprehension of the historical situation and political-military context within which each crisis arose; the cogency of the ethical analysis applied to the situation; and the adequacy of the prose style of the essays. An outline of *one* such ethical method of analysis, namely, the *natural law theory* of political ethics, will be outlined in an essay by the instructor, to be distributed in class. Students may adopt any systematic approach to relating the relevant ethical principles to the historical dynamics of each situation.

*Disabilities Statement*: If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center ([arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu)) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Saturday (10:00 - 1:00) May 31; June 7, 14, 21, 28; July 12, 19, 26; August 2

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will write a paper at the conclusion of each of the three segments of the course, to be submitted at the following Saturday session. All students will write a five-page (double-spaced) paper, while DLS may be requested in addition to present brief reports to the class on cognate topics not covered explicitly in the joint readings. Students will be *expected to document, with ample footnote reference* to the texts studied, and to the documentaries seen, all the arguments and historical observations made in their essays. The essays will be returned to the students in individual conferences with the instructor following the class after the papers were submitted.

Absence from class, except in the case of illness, requires notification in advance. Deadlines for paper submission are expected to be respected.

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The instructor's website can be found at : [www.georgetown.edu/faculty/wintersf/ethics](http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/wintersf/ethics)  
<http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/wintersf/ethics>.

March 3, 2008

## CRISES OF CONSCIENCE IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

### *Chronology of Inquiry*

May 31 Introduction to the Course.

Student Questionnaire and Introduction of Students.

### **PART I : The Ethics of the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima**

Documentary : "Pacific Century": Part 2 : "The *Meiji* Revolution" VHS 1566, Part 2

June 7 Discussion of John Hersey, *Hiroshima*. Students should bring their copy of the text to class for reference and analysis.

And of Winters, REMEMBERING HIROSHIMA,  
Chapter 1. "A Comet, A Tsunami, A Cloud"

June 14 Discussion of REMEMBERING HIROSHIMA,  
Chapter 2. "Ballet of Blood"  
Documentary : "Victory in the Pacific" DVD 1412 ("American Experience")

June 21 : Discussion of Winters, REMEMBERING HIROSHIMA  
Chapter 3. "Deus Ex Machina :  
*Hirohito* Intervenes to Demand Surrender"  
Chapter 5 : "The Crucible of Conscience : Five Judgments on  
Hiroshima"

June 28 *First Course Essay Due* : "Was Truman's Decision Reasonable?"

## **Part II : The American War in Vietnam : 1961 – 1968**

The Kennedy and Johnson Years

June 28 Discussion : Students' images (and memories?) of the war in Vietnam

And of Winters, *The Year of the Hare* :  
*America in Vietnam : January 25, 1963 - February 15, 1964*,  
Preface and Prologue  
And Part II, "*The Players*"

Documentary : "*Vietnam : A Television History*",  
Part 2, "America's Mandarin" VHS 6632, part 2

July 4 - 5 *OBSERVANCE OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE*  
Readings : Winters, "*The Year of the Hare*", Part I, "*The Drama*" chs. 1 - 9

July 12 Second Course Essay due : "*Lessons of Vietnam*"

Discussion of the lessons of Vietnam, including the narrative in chs. 1 - 9.  
Documentary : "*Vietnam : A Television History*",  
Part 4 "LBJ Goes To War" VHS 6632. Part 3 ?

## ***PART III : THE WAR IN IRAQ***

July 12 Discussion of Packer's *The Assassins' Gate*  
*chs. 1 - 4* : how the Americans decided to go to war in Iraq

July 19 The fleeting welcome to the Americans and the erosion of trust  
Packer, *The Assassins' Gate*, ch. 5 - 9

- July 26 The insupportable burden of occupation  
*The Assassins' Gate*, ch.10 - 12 and Epilogue
- August 2 Submission of the third course essay, "*Lessons of Iraq?*"  
Discussion of the essay topic and student answers thereto.
- Course evaluations.

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