Grading Guidance:

Note: this guidance is rather extensive and is meant to be read by both the grader of the examinations and by students after the examination. I have written rather a lot in order to cover the range of possible answers I see for these questions. The following should be understood: 1) students have three hours in which to answer 5 of these 6 questions, and this will clearly limit how much time they will have for each question and 2) there may be other, intelligent answers to these questions that I have not anticipated. Other, good, information-based – and pensum-based – answers are also acceptable. The best answers will: 1) show empirical knowledge (that is specific rather than general or vague knowledge); 2) show analytical ability and 3) be clearly formulated. Oh yes – they will actually answer the question.

1. Consider Woodward’s book Obama’s War. This book gives an inside account of policymaking within the administration of President Obama at a time when he was faced with making a major foreign policy decision. Explain what major decision Obama had to make. Does the portrayal of decision-making found in the book conform to the Rational Actor Model (RAM) of decision-making? Why or why not? Examples would be helpful.

First, the book concerns whether more troops should be sent to Afghanistan. The action in the book takes place in the span of time starting in November 2008, right after the presidential election and June 2010, about when Stanley McChrystal was fired as the US commander in Afghanistan. The book in fact deals with two deployments of troops, one which happened fairly early on (early 2009) and a second one in which Obama had to decide whether to send more. Note that the timeline is not very clear in Woodward, so what is important is that student know that there are two sequential decisions, and less important that they know when these happened. (The sequence should be right).

Woodward’s book can both support and suggest the weakness of the RAM. First, the student should have some notion of what the RAM is. In lectures, this was presented as the standardized ideal. It is the notion that decisions are made by a unified national actor as responses to strategic situations. The actions chosen are “rational choices”, taken after a logical assessment of the objectives, options, and consequences of various options. It works on a value maximizing behavior assumption. The book shows that Obama ordered up several studies of the options available. There were many discussions about what the goals of the war should be and efforts by many to match the resources committed to the goals. Obama himself was determined not to make the same mistakes made in Vietnam, when no one was willing to stand back and rethink assumptions. Reidel, McChrystal and others made studies.

However, there are a number of things here that suggest that the RAM is not an adequate explanation. The superior examination will make reference to the Organizational Behavior Model and the Government Politics Model the (latter also known as the Bureaucratic Politics model in Hastedt). The student may also bring up aspects as how Small Group decisionmaking can affect the “rationality” of decisions (such as the impact of Group Think). Organizational behavior: events such as what the military actually did with respect to the first troops sent (it took a really long time to get them there, they were sent somewhere which made no sense given the strategy – ie. Helmand province where there were few people despite the “protect the people” idea of the strategy; the reluctance of the military to provide a set of serious options to the president -- for example, pg 103 in my edition suggests that the Reidel report conforms to Kissinger’s classic description of how the bureaucracy gets the decision it wants by giving three options, two of which are ridiculous, pushing the decisionmaker to choose the one the writer wants; there is also the discussion of the “enablers” – or support personnel-- who the Pentagon did not seem to count as part of the number of troops they were authorized to send. The latter was a source of confusion and hard feelings within the
government. Governmental Politics/bureaucratic politics model: There is evidence of politics and of the decision as a negotiated outcome or of politics internal to the US government: the way the military seems to push for its options regardless of what seemed to be a firm decision (establishing the goals of the war, how many troops were going to be sent); the struggle between the CIA vs the Director of National Intelligence; the friction between the White House people/people around Obama and the Pentagon/uniformed military. Students might also make references to Psychology, personality/perception and Personality and cognitive style. In general, the Woodward book presents a complex decisionmaking process in which many actors are involved – they have different understandings of the situation, favor different solutions, push to have their views accepted, dispute with each other, and find it difficult to take no for an answer. There are also some examples of domestic politics coming into play (Obama and his staff take into account the timing of the next election). All of this suggests that the state is not a unified actor, with a clear set of goals and options that are form the basis of some relentlessly logical decisionmaking. Instead, the processes of making the decision matters. I am less concerned by whether the student places all of these examples in exactly the correct box (the gov politics and organizational behavioral thing are hard to keep straight) than with whether they have a good grip on the ideas involved. It is always an advantage when the student can be precise about the individuals or agencies involved.

Note: the Hastedt book has another name for the government politics model, calling it the Bureaucratic Politics Model. Either name is fine – it is the concepts rather than the name that interests me. Either way, the essence of the model is that foreign policy is a negotiated outcome rather than logically determined. Hastedt does describe the RAM, which was discussed also in lectures. There are therefore a number of ways to answer this question. I am less concerned with exactly which events are pulled out and more concerned that student know what the RAM is and be able to come with a reasonable and coherent discussion drawing upon some mixture of the approaches mentioned above.

2. What was the Iran-Contra scandal? Why was it significant? Include in your discussion consideration of the “checks and balances” of the US Constitution.

The Iran-contra scandal was a major event in the later years of the Reagan administration. It has to do with the interlinking of two foreign policy events during the Reagan administration. The scandal is complex, linking US attempts to release hostages held by Iranian allies in Lebanon to the Reagan administration’s attempt to fund the Contras, a group working to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. It led to a significant Congressional investigation, with Reagan testifying once he stepped down from office. The affair was significant for several reasons: 1) the administration sold weapons to Iran, which was illegal; 2) the US Congress also outlawed the use of US money and agencies (which were named) from attempting to overthrow the government of Nicaragua; 3) it became a big scandal and Congressional investigation during the Reagan administration, and led to jail time for a few; 4) it seemed to give significant power in making and carrying out foreign policy to low level officials; and 5) – and this links to the last bit of the question – it was an example of President and his administration attempting to get around attempts by Congress to stop these behaviors. (One might add that it was an early example of what has become the prominent hostility between liberal and conservative forces in the US, although this is an inference from the material). For example, the proceeds of weapons sales helped finance the Contra effort. In addition, the administration found an agency not-named in the legislation (known as the Boland amendments) and used them as active agents – the NSC staff (previously and since these have been staff support people and analysts). The general Iran-Contra scandal led to revelations about the use of private money and money from foreign actors to finance US activities. In short, this was a major event in the struggle between the President and Congress over which would have the power to define US foreign policy, a major constitutional event. This event is discussed in the Hastedt book, where it is called an abuse of the Reagan Doctrine, and an event which brought
Reagan’s competence, integrity and sense of judgment into question. It is described as an illegal operation

3. People in the United States have been characterized in this course as having, generally speaking, an anti-statist attitude. What does this mean and what factors may have contributed to this attitude?

This question draws upon the lectures but is also on the readings. I have argued that political philosophy (liberalism), economic philosophy (capitalism), and religious orientation (Protestantism) all work to support this perspective. Liberalism focuses on the individual, and sees the government as essentially unnecessary and potentially destructive when it steps outside of a narrow range of action. Capitalism supports the idea of freedom of the individual and a limited role for the state. With respect to religion, I argued that the lack of a dominant church/denomination works in favor of weaker state (state for some denomination to ally with), and that a strongly religious society (as I argue the US has been and to some extent still is) wants a private sphere that is large and a public sphere (where the government is involved) that is small (weak state, strong society). In addition, the content of pluralism tends also to support liberalism and capitalism (focus on the individual, for example). Anti-statism is also discussed in the article by Deudney and Meiser, where anti-statism is described as deeply rooted in liberal thinking, and the US as “different and exceptionally liberal compared to other liberal democracies – and this is linked to the nature of the US government with its system of checks and balances.

4. What was the Grand Strategy of the United States during the Cold War? Who was its principle architect?

Here I am looking first and foremost for “containment” and for George Kennan. The better answer would pick up on the long telegram and NSC-68. Kennan was of course the author of the long telegram (and also the x article). Paul Nitze was the author of NSC-68, which translated Kennan’s thinking into the formal policy of the United States, and that would be a good answer too. The better answers would delve into what “containment” is and its basis. It would also be acceptable to write about the various doctrines, but that is a second best answer: the Truman Doctrine, for example, is a specific version of the larger containment idea.

5. What are the three levels of analysis as used in this course? Give examples of each. Is one better than the others? Why?

The levels of analysis are the international (especially with a systemic mode of analysis), the national and the individual. The original idea comes from Kenneth Waltz (he uses other terms such as “Images” but I have not bothered with that in the course). The course was organized around these levels of analysis and they were explained in the opening lecture and mentioned in the course summary. At the international level, the international state system and the international economic system were discussed both theoretically and empirically. At the national level, the course focused on the domestic political system/institutions of the US, on decisionmaking processes, and on various aspects of national characteristics and values (such as an anti-state attitude (with secular/liberal and religious aspects), manifest destiny/American exceptionalism, and briefly, capitalism. There was not so much at the individual level, but if students write about the personal characteristics of the individual presidents or other key actors, that would be good. Hastedt covered both “presidential personality” and “presidential managerial style” in his chapter on the presidency – both are acceptable as examples of the individual level, although the level of the presidential style could be debated I suppose. It is really enough that they are aware of that the third level is to get high marks for this question. As to which is best: the requirement here is for a coherent reason. I have
discussed these levels as complementary, which is a fine. The international level has been characterized as creating the setting and supplying the situations to which the US must respond, the national level factors as conditioning the view the Americans and American decisionmakers perceive these challenges and how they respond to them. However, a reasonable and coherent argument for one or another of the levels is also acceptable.

6. One of the Founding Fathers of the US, Thomas Jefferson, once suggested that the US was building an “empire for liberty”. What might he have meant by that? Has this idea been relevant for US foreign policy in the post-World War II era? Explain your answer.

This is about the American exceptionalism and mission that figured in the lectures, was discussed in Hook and Spanier (“The American Sense of Destiny”) and in one of the chapters from Cox and Stokes that is on the pensum. Students might also draw upon Hastedt’s discussion of the American National Style which has a number of different elements, such as moral pragmatism, legalism and unilateralism) which together combine to produce specific traits in US foreign policy such as a double standard in judging the actions of states (the US is held to a different standard).

The students are not required here to have specific knowledge about Jefferson as such, but rather to interpret the meaning of such a statement in light of the US sense of mission and exceptionalism. The US has seen itself as having a special mission both with respect to its political systems – understood to be the high point of political development – and also with respect to religion (which was especially then held to be purer than the versions practiced elsewhere.) While the latter was more prominent in an earlier era, the undercurrent of Protestant Christianity that is still important in the United States continues to support this special sense of destiny. American exceptionalism is the view that the US is not like other countries, different in its fundamental nature and exempt from the both the problems that beset those countries and the international rules than need bind such flawed countries. It is sometimes hard to disentangle these various strands of thought. In short, for Jefferson way back when and for Americans in the post World War II world, the spread of American influence and institutions was understood to be a liberating, positive factor and certainly not to be understood as empire-building in the old, particularly European sense. The better answers would give some examples about this operating in the post-World War world.

The article by Daniel Deudney and Jeffrey Meiser was on the required reading list but not discussed much in class. Their understanding of this was American exceptionalism is more complex: they link it very much to liberalism and are clear on the negative aspects of this way of thinking.