1. The formation of foreign policy can be said to be the result of the interaction of international and domestic factors. What aspects of the US constitution affect how the US responds to international events? Identify and explain.

This is a question that invites the student to discuss the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances that characterize the US constitution. The president and the executive branch takes the lead on foreign policy questions, but he (and it) have to work with Congress, and to lesser degree, within the guidelines set by the Supreme Court. While the president is a powerful actor, he must still take Congress into account. The President (via his representative) negotiates international treaties, but the, the Senate must ratify them in order for these to be in effect (requiring a 2/3rds vote). The president can send US troops to foreign countries, but it is the Congress that provides the funding for the military and could theoretically force the withdrawal of US troops. However, Congress has often found it difficult to put effective limits on the president’s power, particularly with respect to foreign policy. The President, with power united in a single individual, has at his disposal many resources for collecting information and carrying out his policy – the State Department, the Defense Department and many, many more. The power of Congress is divided up among its many members, making it more difficult for it to act effectively. In addition, the Congress finds it politically difficult to force the President to withdraw troops once the troops are sent into action. There are therefore, institutional but also political aspects of the power balance among these two branches of government.

Note that while the Constitution attempts to divide up power among the branches of government, it is written vaguely enough that what each branch of government is able to do is subject to interpretation, and thus changes from time to time and event to event. The Supreme Court, the official interpreter of the Constitution, has given the President the lead in foreign policy making, but not a free hand. Congress has tended to lose power over time to the President, in particular with respect to foreign policy, but periodically attempts to reassert itself (as in the passing of the War Powers Act). Again, it is frequently political factors that make it difficult for Congress to reassert itself, but there are issues rooted in the Constitution as well (as noted above)

The student might note as well that the demands of being a first a major power, and then a super power, has tended to shift the balance of power in favor of the president, so it is not just the constitution that impacts the US’s response to international events, but also international events that impact the functioning of the US constitution. Here international conditions interact with the structure of the US government to produce this effect. For example, during the Cold War, it was felt that the US would have to react quickly in case of attack by the USSR – something it is hard for Congress to do. In addition, the demands of being a superpower (need to use troops, intelligence operations) tend to involve the military a lot (which the executive branch essentially controls and has the greater expertise about) and the need for secrecy (Congress is “leaky” – it is hard to keep secrets). This sort of thing shifted power to the president. The rationale for this diminished in the post Cold War era, but was strengthened again in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001.
2. What is the ideology of the United States? Explain. Identify and explain two factors that contribute to this ideology.

A couple of answers are acceptable here. I have in mind “anti-statism”, as outlined in class. However, liberalism (especially classical liberalism) or even “American exceptionalism” or “manifest destiny” might be acceptable here, as these are pulled out by some writers and were identified as important aspects of the US mindset in class. By “anti-statism” I am getting at the dislike that Americans seem to have for a strong central government (and government solutions to various social ills). This is supported by: 1) the political philosophy of classical liberalism with its notion of the limited need for the state and stress on the significance of the individual (this is the tradition of John Locke); 2) the enshrinement (and freezing) of this political philosophy in the Constitution; 3) the Protestant tradition in the US (strong individualist overtones for example); and 4) the multiplicity of churches in the US that meant resistance to a strong state that might impose uniformity. Students might also talk about Capitalism as a major support of the liberal ideology (of the Adam Smith variety – note that Wealth of Nations was written 1776). Other supporting factors might be 1) US history (US revolution against “tyranny” of King George III); 2) the British tradition with the importance of rights – and also its liberal political and economic ideologies; and 3) the strong regionalism of the US which led to a federalist constitution and a dislike of national over-riding of state and local authorities. (Note that the 1788 constitution created a strong central government than did the first constitution, the Articles of Confederation, in which the individual states were much more significant). If “American exceptionalism” is chosen, then the student would have to define this (as the idea that the US is not bound by the same laws as other nations. “Laws” has a dual sense here, as 1) the regularities, or patterns or arc of development that other countries seem to follow and 2) since the US acts in the interests of all or some higher good (i.e., like democracy), it is not bound by the same international legal restrictions that other countries are). For both of these, the astounding rise of the United States from small, provincial backwater to superpower in 200 years has had a major impact on thinking. In addition, the student can draw upon some of the same elements mentioned above – such as Protestantism. Here, however, it is the sense of divine mission that should be identified as supporting either American exceptionalism or Manifest Destiny. Note that the US sense of mission transcends the specifically religious, and is also about the spread of liberty!! Manifest Destiny means that the US has a larger mission in the world – the expansion of liberty! (In a more limited sense, it also means the expansion of the US across the North American continent). Manifest Destiny was also fed by the ideas of Social Darwinism that were very popular everywhere in the late 1800s.

3. The president often takes the lead in making decisions about foreign policy. However, he is surrounded by many other actors. The government politics model (also known as the bureaucratic politics model) understands foreign policy decisions as the outcome of bargaining/struggles among these various actors (including the president). Use the required readings to help identify key actors and give examples of how this happens.

This question asks the student to identify key actors in the making of foreign policy. The government politics model in particular trains attention on the complex set of actors that make up the executive branch, but Congress and the public might be brought in as well. In the Hastert book and in class, actors such as the Departments of State and Defense and their “Secretaries” are mentioned in particular. Intelligence agencies are also important – as is the military itself (which is not the same necessarily as the DoD, which is run by civilians. The Joint Chiefs of Staff for example can disagree with the Secretary of Defense. There are many other actors in the Executive branch: the other departments (Treasury and Commerce, for example), the National Security Council (especially the Advisor and the staff, since most of the members are Secretaries of the various departments) and the Vice President. Note that the intelligence community is huge – there are 17 of them. The CIA is well
known, but DoD has several of its own, and there is the now famous National Security Agency (NSA) as well as the Director of National Security. The White House staff can be a player in its own right. The best source for examples is the Woodward’s book, Obama’s Wars. Here you have an account of how the Obama administration decided to send more troops to Afghanistan. You see the struggle among the various agencies to push their views, which tend to reflect the interests of the agency represented. The book provides many examples in which the military (for example, General Petraeus) seemed to be (or was believed to be) pushing the Obama administration into the decision that the military (or he) wanted. Vice President Biden pushes his own analysis of the war and argued strongly for an alternative policy. Obama works to resist pressures and looks for independent assessments (for example asking Reidel to make a report). Note that Petraeus himself struggles inside his own service (the US Army) to push his view forward. The White House staff is very powerful and is resisted and disliked by other agencies. The CIA works to push the Director of National Security out of the loop.

Beyond the examples that can be drawn from the Woodward book, the Cuban Missile crisis may provide examples, as the White House struggled to make the Navy do its bidding and to keep the Air Force in check.

Congress has in many ways been squeezed out of many of the key decisions in foreign policy, especially the use of force, but frequently attempts to insert itself back into the process. Congress suffers from fractured power relative to the president but can still be a player, as it must approve the budget, treaties, and etc. It has occasionally tried to fight back against the “imperial presidency” –by for example invoking the War Powers Act. However, it remains politically expedient for the president to listen to influential members of Congress, who can on occasion become important. Congress can on occasion force the president to make a decision he does not want to make. For example, while Clinton and Gore very much wanted to ratify the Kyoto agreement on the climate, there was no chance, ever, that the Senate would approve it (and it never did).

The bottom line for this answer is: the student should identify key actors and provide good, concrete examples of this in operation.

Section II

The international position (its power and its role in the world) of the United States in the international system(s) changed over the course of the 20th century. Outline the course of this “journey”. Begin your outline in 1898 and conclude in about 2004, at the end of the first term of the presidency of George W. Bush.

The student should answer this question with reference to the international system of states and international economic system. This question requires the student to have good basic knowledge of the rise of the US from being a major regional power to being a major international power and then a superpower. Over the course of the 1800s, the US grew to be the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere. In 1898 the United States entered what is frequently called the Spanish-American War. This was the acknowledged, overtly imperialistic phase of US foreign policy. The United States openly entered the race for colonies, gaining the Philippines, Guam, and a protectorate over Cuba. While the US had become a major power by 1914 (judging by its economic power, size and increasingly global presence), its role in the core balance of power system (centered in Europe) was still undetermined and the US was not universally understood to be one of the great powers. That system was still dominated by the European powers, and particularly the United Kingdom, the first among those. The US entered WWI (rather late in the game, with significant numbers of troops arriving in later 1917).

The end of the WWI saw the decline of the power of the European powers, and the arrival of the (and acknowledgement of) the US as an established world power. The war drained the power of
those countries, while the US emerged unscathed: it lost few soldiers and grew richer rather than being bankrupted (like most of the Europeans). The US attempted to play a large role in the creation of post war institutions (such as when Wilson attempted to base the peace agreements on the 14 points, including the League of Nations), but was frequently outmaneuvered by the European victors. Few of his views survived the peace conference (many new states were created as was the League of Nations).

The course of the interwar period was very volatile, plagued by all the issues arising out of the Treaty of Versailles (such as war reparations), the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, and the great Depression (setting in, in 1929) and – growing out of all of this, the rise of the communist Soviet Union (following the 1917 revolution) and Nazi Germany. It was the US that was the epicenter of the Great Depression (although the burden of paying the German war reparations hit Germany hard before that). The Great Depression indicated the central role of the US economy and also the limitations of the City of London as the dominant economic power that “ran” the world financial system. This was the start of the shift of being the greatest of the great powers to the United States.

WW II in a sense completed the work of the first, seeing the United States emerge as the single greatest power in the world. European countries were further bankrupted and destroyed. The British began to lose their grip on their empire. The US developed strongly economically and lost little in the way of manpower or infrastructure. The development of nuclear weapons made the US a “superpower” rather than merely a great power. The US played a major role in the development of many post war institutions, ranging from the UN to the international financial system known as the Bretton Woods system. The US occupied a central role in both, being the economic power that set the rules for and acted as the guarantor for the international financial system.

The Soviet Union emerged as a center of opposition to the United States, and sometime in the late 1940s, the bipolar “Cold War” between the two emerged. The US then played the role of leader of the coalition against the Communist countries until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The student might mention some of the ups and downs of the US in the period of the Cold War: in the state system, there were events like the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War (which eventually proved very divisive at home and abroad), Détente (under Nixon and Kissinger) and the renewed Cold War under the leadership of Ronald Reagan), but the key point is that the US did function as the leader of the non-communist block in this period, often intervening to “contain” the spread of communism. (note that it is often pointed out that the Soviets were significantly weaker than the United States for much of this period, with rough military parity being achieved only around 1968). In the international economic system, the student might note that the US retained a leading role, but that its economic strength deteriorates in the 1970s, when Nixon was forced to dismember much of the Bretton Woods system – for example, taking the US off the gold standard. The US began to have problems being economically competitive and was hit (like many) by the rise in the price of oil in the 1970s.

The US seemed to renew its strength in the 1980s under Reagan. When the Soviet Union disintegrated after 1991, the US stood alone as the single most powerful country in the world. This was the era of what has been called the “unipolar moment”: The apparently strong economy of the US combined with its massive military apparatus and nuclear arsenal to make the US extremely powerful. US “neo-liberalism” washed over the world and the US was able to lead undertaking such as the first war against Iraq, backed up by a broad international coalition. The apparent power of the US was, however, challenged by the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States by al Qaeda. While the US had sympathy and support from allies for an attack on Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was far more controversial, and few major US allies were willing to back the US up (the UK was an important exception). The subsequent development of the war, combined with the failure to find the weapons of mass destruction that seemed to be the reason for the attack and the strong economic recession (depression?) that grew out of financial abuses in the United States (and the US budget problems and internal divisions at home), led to serious questions about the ability of the United States to lead. In addition, the United States is now faced with the rise of China. Serious
questions have been raised in this post Cold War era about the will, ability and desirability of the US as the dominant power. The role of institutions such as NATO is now questions and questions are being raised about the ability of the US play its still major role in the international financial system (even as the dollar remains the reserve currency for the world).