

Special providence book review

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Book Review on Walter Russell Mead's, Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World

The book *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* by Walter Russell Mead gives an analysis of the United States' foreign policy and the effects that it has had to different parts of the world. The author lays more emphasis on the origin and the history of the US foreign policy, the developments it has had and the effects that the foreign policy to both the United States and other countries across the globe. This book gives a very good history of the America's foreign policy. The author offers a cerebral outline which is based on four major approaches that have influenced the US foreign policy since the country's earliest days. The four approaches can also be considered as schools of thought and have been used in the representation and presentation of information about the United States' foreign policy.

The approaches also called schools of thought which include:

i. Hamiltonian:

This is concerned with the United States Economic well-being at home and abroad. It lays more emphasis on how the United States can increase its economic production both within and outside its borders. The author adds that this school of thought supports international associations. He states that the main goal of this principle is to open the foreign market and expand the economy of the country. This method regards a strong alliance between the national government and big businesses. He argues that the alliance is the key to both domestic stability and to achieve an effective action abroad. This

school of thought is the one that is behind the establishments of US agencies abroad to aid in the acquisition of revenue from the countries that they operate in.

ii. Wilsonian

This school of thought is the driving force behind the impulse to publicize the United States values throughout the world. He adds that these are like moral missionaries who make the world safe for democracy through the creation of international watchdogs like the United Nations Organizations. The author states that this principle is majorly concerned with ensuring that good moral values are disseminated all over the world.

iii. Jeffersonian

This principle focuses on protecting American democracy in an unsafe world. It is primarily concerned with bringing liberty at home and ensuring that no American is oppressed in anyway whatsoever. Mead adds that in this school of thought, there is suspicion on having big military and large scale international projects as these are seen to jeopardizing the efforts of ensuring democracy.

iv. Jacksonian

This principle/school of thought is also known as the populist school of thought. Its main commitment is to ensure that the United States' interests and honor are preserved all over the world. According Mead, they support a strong military for protection. This military is to be used not quite often but when it is applied, then the enemies must be stopped from advancing to the

country or causing more harm to the nation. The author states that this school of thought has the security of the Americans as its first duty.

The four schools of thought are sometimes in conflict with each other. For instance, Jacksonian advocates for a strong military establishment whereas Jeffersonian is suspicious of having big military. All the four principles are good in their own way and may also be considered as bad in other ways. According to Mead, each of the four schools has their strengths and faults. They however keep each other in check so as to ensure that none of the schools dominates over the others. This ensures that a consensus is reached for a smooth application of the US foreign policies. In the book, Mead further worries that the United States foreign policy is really unfocussed in the present times. He therefore suggests that we could learn more from the interactions in the past of the four schools. The principles in the schools of thought are elevated when they have useful information. However when they advocate for inappropriate policies, they are simply ignored and an option sought for. This has led to the success of the United States foreign policy according to Mead. He adds that most of the success of America can be attributed to the useful and wise guidance offered by her people and the effective unique responsive political system.

The author argues out his points regarding the waging wars that the United States has indulged in with some countries in the past. He also demonstrates the effects of those wars to the general image and the security of the United States.

The author also gives us a new perception of the place of the United States of America in the world. He also gives an account of a historically grounded view of the America's foreign policy. The author had a good chance to take an insightful view of the America's internal politics and the outside world. The perception was quite different before the September 11th attack of the United States by the Muslim Fundamentalists. The arguments that the author gives in the book have remained very useful even in the recent past when there has been a shift in the view of the America's foreign policy.

The author calls the four views of the world a new paradigm for understanding the American foreign policy. He also adds that each of the views/schools of thought is valuable in its own unique way. The value of each of the view can be best seen on how they outplay each other. He adds that the views can be used in an alternating manner as they are capable of complementing each other. The American foreign policy therefore gets most of its benefits from the flexibilities and the strong continuities of purpose of the four views/schools of thought. Te author further adds that the competition of the four schools helps in gaining a foreign policy that is better than the product of a single school of thought. If one school of thought is applied then there is a likelihood of having a conflict of interest which can have very adverse effects to the American's as a whole. The author can be seen to be impartial in the presentations of his arguments. He adds that the schools serve the Americans best by ensuring that there is voice to their views. This is achieved through the provision of consistent pressure on the national policy according to Mead. However, it is very rare for that policy to be given a free reign. There has to be checks and balance which are aimed

at ensuring that the interest of the Americans is met. Therefore according to the author, the United States foreign policy has been a hybrid of the four different schools of thought. As the author illustrates, the defining moment in the history of American foreign policy came with the adoption of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823. (Russell, 2002) He further adds that the doctrine has defined America's basic vision of the role of the Americans in the world in eternity.

According to the author, the Monroe Doctrine that formed the defining moment of the American foreign policy was an anti-isolationist. It shows that the safety of America depended greatly on the balance of power in Europe. He accounts that the strategic principles that were in the Monroe Doctrine have been applied without any form of interruption in order to shape up the America's foreign policy. Some of the proclamations in the Monroe Doctrine can be seen when America intervened in the World wars and during the cold war.

Mead's opinion that the American foreign policy has been uniquely successful can be attributed to the fact America has been guided by the foreign policy to participate in three world wars and emerged victorious. It can also be attributed to the fact that their position as the super power has remained unchallenged for the last one century.

The author also states that the balance of power in Europe still affects the America's foreign policy even at a time when it was not supposed to affect it in any way. The author argues further that the Jeffersonian tradition is

currently the most needed quality of the American foreign policy as it can easily bring about a good consensus for the United States foreign policy.

The author writes the book based on his experience that he has regarding the United States foreign policy. He argues out his points in a very systematic order using the knowledge and experience that he has regarding this subject. This book is very informative as it helps a person to gain an insight view of the American foreign policies and the factors that have contributed towards the United States imposing sanctions to some countries across the globe.

The book however has some shortfalls and therefore difficulty in accepting some of the ideas presented therein. The author requires us to accept the fact that the balance of power in Europe substantiated when America became powerful enough to defend its own interests. This argument could be false as the balance of power in Europe was no longer an issue when America became more independent and able to defend its territory.

The author has tried to bring about different points in quite a comprehensive and an all inclusive manner. He introduces the four schools of thought and demonstrates how they have been used in the America's foreign policy. The author further goes ahead to show us the relationship that has existed between America and other European countries. He successfully demonstrates his points and the relationship that exists between the current American foreign policy and The Monroe Doctrine of 1823. He gives this subject a very good and orderly approach which is easy to understand.

The author Walter Russell Mead is senior personnel for the United States Foreign Policy at the council on foreign relations. He has a wealth of experience and knowledge on the United States foreign policy. The accounts that he gives about the United States foreign policy are based on experience and from a professional point of view. Due to the experience and the professional approach given by the author, I highly recommend this book for anyone who is willing to study the US foreign policy.

The writing style of the author is formal and all the information that is presented in the book is from a professional point of view. He has used his experience to present the points in his book. His way of presenting the points is quite complicated especially to a person who does not understand anything about the history of America or the America's foreign policy. However, he gives an explanation on each of the four approaches that he has introduced that makes it easy for the readers to understand. His writing style is coherent and logical that makes his work interesting to read. The book has been of much benefit to me as a reader as it has helped develop more knowledge on the America's foreign policy and how it has affected the country and its neighbors. The book has also expanded my knowledge on the actions that have been taken by the American government in terms of managing its operations abroad and how it manages its affairs with other countries.

In summary, the book: *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* has a lot to offer as far as the US foreign policy is concerned. Even though there have been a series of developments and

adjustments in the US foreign policy, most of the principles in the Monroe Doctrine still remains the same. The author argues that American foreign policy has actually been the most successful foreign policy in history. He states what the Americans need to do in order to remain successful in centuries to come. The author explores the history of the American policy from the time the republic was founded to the present time and gives a very good and comprehensive follow up of the same. I therefore find this book very useful as the information presented therein is very useful and straight to the point.

REFERENCES

Walter Russell Mead (2002) *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* Routledge Publishers ; 1 edition