

The end of the us isolationist foreign policy essay examples

[War, World War 2](#)



The End of the US' Isolationist Foreign Policy

The United States, at present, is considered the only remaining superpower in the globe after its successes in the World Wars and the Cold War. Its humble beginnings were filled with strife as it has first fought a gruesome war against its European oppressors before it has gained its independence. Upon the early years after the Revolutionary war, they have adopted a more isolated stance regarding international affairs and a more withdrawn stance in intervening in other's affairs. If this is the case, how did the United States of America become a powerful and influential actor in the international political arena? What led them to withdrawing their isolationist tendencies and adapt a more active and influential stance? Did these wars influence their ideological standpoint and push for a more active America? What made these Americans risk their recently achieved peace and freedom to stop all oppression? These wars have made Americans aware that they cannot just uphold isolationist policies as peace will continuously be threatened. Isolationism also lost its lustre and bite as Americans slowly realized that their position in the international arena would make or break peace and the balance of power around the globe. These wars and ideological changes also paved the way for the US to finally move away from isolation and into its current position as the world's only superpower.

After the Revolutionary War, the Founding Fathers and the rest of the survivors of the bloody war became weary of foreigners. They grew a sense of doubt over the Europeans despite the fact that some European nations helped them during the war. Krieger and Crahan (2001) noted that the early

US foreign policy was weak and it was non-existent. Isolationism was their response to protect their trading and commercial interests. The government has continuously been pressured by many ideologies when the debate with protection of freedom and self-determination is placed in the stands, including the threat of the growing European power. Most of the Founders, such as George Washington, vehemently demanded that all forms of free action would enable the nation to choose from both peace and war. All of these pressures paved the way for isolation to properly exist in the minds and actions of the Americans, moving their focus away from major changes in the international arena. Somehow, the US became more involved in each European-induced war in the Atlantic. The Founders also had the notion that the United States would not benefit from meddling in other affairs, such as international wars or major power development outside the country, since this would do more harm to the nation. This non-involvement of the US made it possible for Europe to increase drastically. The citizens of the United States saw isolation as a form of security from European conquest .

Aside from Isolationism, there were other ideological movements already transpiring in the country. These groups believed that isolationism is only a temporarily solution to preserving peace in the nation. Oskamp and Schultz (2005) noted that internationalism or interventionism became the number one competitor against the isolationists, with the former pushing for a more active America in the international arena. Dautrich and Yalof (2011) noted the contradiction of the isolationists with regards to a more active America and why they perceive it as a bad idea. Isolationists believe that intervention

would cause more strife and with the country still recovering from the Revolutionary War, the problems of the nation must be resolved first. The argument itself is acceptable to many as intervention would require billions of dollars and armed troops that may result to more casualties to be involved. The fight may also be returned to their territory if the war continues. Apparently, isolationists also see public opinion to be without importance as to how the government allots their budget. Isolationists believed that the public may pressure the government for other expenses that may not be good for the nation.

But the counterarguments of the interventionists/ internationalists are also true in their points. They believe that a more active America will enable other countries to experience the same freedom and rights they have achieved after the Revolutionary War. Due to their victory, they are now slowly rising up as an influential power in international affairs. With this power, it is up for the United States to give others a chance to freedom, not doing so will forsake others this same privilege. Intervention may also provide advantages to the country in the form of economic trading, military additions and political leverage. Despite the reasonable arguments of the interventionists, isolationism reigned for almost a century before it waned down drastically. On 1797 before he stepped out of his office, George Washington stated in his final address that he hopes that his successors would never allow any interference to other's affairs to happen. The country may interact with them, but only up to the degree that it is only for business. Loyalists of the ideology accepted his speech; however, the thought did not

last for long as the country slowly responded into the border threats from 1812, 1846 to 1898. Apparently so, there were fields that were not applied with the isolationist policy. One of these fields are culture and commerce. As Washington have noted, America freely made business with other nations and with that, they learned about cultures different from theirs and products they do not have .

The isolationist stance is also not applied in the 1823 declaration of the Monroe Doctrine by President James Monroe according to Bardes, Shelley and Schmidt (2011). The doctrine noted that the North and South Americas are not to be conquered and known as “ future colonies of Europeans” and would consider it an act of war against the nation if any European power threatens the peace of the US. Aside from the North and South Americas, any island or country part of the Atlantic is also covered by the Doctrine. European nations, like Britain for example, accepted this doctrine and strayed away. However, it has been pointed that they had reasons for accepting these rules. Once the European powers already reached their highest potential, the Americans immediately used the Monroe Doctrine to enter into war. Instances such as the Venezuela-Britain war in 1895, and the Latin American conflicts in 1907 and 1911 are just some of the conflicts the United States intervened in the name of the Doctrine .

Slowly, the isolationist policy slowly became weak by 1898 up to 1908 as the Spanish-American War ensued. The US gained custody of the Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. Eventually, these countries were put under American rule and served as the US hub in the

Asian region. Marley (2008) noted that upon the start of the First World War in 1914, Americans immediately went on the offensive and attacked. They declared war against the Nazis on April 6, 1917 in lieu of Germany's continuous refusal to stop sinking ships headed to Britain. The nation and the Allied Powers then devised a way to drive Germany to the brink and launched a full-scale attack over Western Germany, succeeding in killing Adolf Hitler himself. Shortly after the war, the US returned back to its isolationist position given that the economy has rapidly declined from military spending and other related expenses .

In 1930, years after the First World War, polls have shown the opinion of the American public especially with regards to the country's continuous apprehension over foreign relations. It showed how irrational the isolationist policy implementation came to be. In the case of World War I, the public believed that it should have been the " war to end all wars". The public showed in most polls, such as the Gallup Poll in 1937, that they would not support any war similar to World War I. 95% of Americans noted that it would become another disaster if they allowed this to happen. Two years later, 66% of Americans believed that the country should not side in either side if Germany and its allies attack England and France. The legislative assembly, namely Congress, followed this same resentment over America's involvement. Woodrow Wilson, a man who advocated for the creation of the League of Nations, was immediately shot out of his own proposal in making the United States be part of such organization. The Congress also passed legislation that would restrict the country to sell any form of military

equipment or arms to other nations. This led Britain to only ask for US supplies in a form of “lend-lease” when they are in the brink of losing against Hitler’s army. The American Public only became fully accepting on the fact that they must step in in the European War and World War I when Hitler managed to take control over Holland, Belgium and France by 1940 .

Many have also pointed out the misgivings of the isolationist argument as noted by Kennedy (2002). The isolationists failed to explain as to how isolation would continue to safeguard peace in the region. Power politics began to gain popularity with the interventionists and citizens were accepting these arguments, Power politics is seen to be unstable and incapable of protecting peace according to Isolationists so many wondered why it is the case. Looking closer in the suggestions of the isolationists, they had a hint of power politics in them especially when suggesting the strategies to contain the Axis Powers. Herbert Hoover and Robert Taft, two of the major Republicans at that time, also presented contradictions with their positions regarding power politics. For Taft, he suggested that Germany and Italy are going to be defeated because Britain and France are known as one of the best Allied military forces. Hoover also had this mistake when he was asked regarding Western European production of military armament and sees these items as a deterrent for any other possible threat. Isolationism also fails to answer their notion when it comes to the country’s own security. Typically, their responses pertain to the notion that America is vastly protected by its geographical location and its military forces. Should anyone try to attack the country, the country can use force. This argument alone

shows a big contradiction to the isolationist concept of not using drastic force to oppose others. Without a clear solution and a strategy to continuously stray away from war, the isolationists began to lose its hold over the people .

After a couple of years, the US would have continued its isolationist stance even in the dawn of the Second World War. However, this all changed according to Vanaik (2007) as the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii has been done on December 7, 1941. This surprise attack took the lives of almost 2, 403 Americans both civilian and military and left 1, 143 others wounded. The Second World War also discredited isolationism and magnified exceptionalism. The US military production of armaments and artillery were immediately enforced, resolving at the same time the economic and social crisis of the 1930s. Civilians also took part in labor unions to help out production and the economy. In comparison to its Allies, the United States was far from the war zone and thus experienced less damage. The Americans fought for a cause to save and destroy the threat of a growing tyranny in the European region. Eventually, this paved the way for the United States to become an economic and military superpower .

Florig (1992) adds that the isolationist stance eventually ended when Franklin Roosevelt became president. Like Woodrow Wilson, he believed that it is necessary for the country to enter international disputes and help settle them. In World War II, he was prepared to enter the war and already started mobilizing his troops in case of battle. It was Pearl Harbor which gave him all the reasons to officially enter the war. To some, it was seen as his way of stating that he attacked to save his country and self-defence. Nevertheless,

it opened everyone's minds with the dangers of new technology utilized by the Japanese. Kaufman (2009) noted that the Second World War was crucial in terms of how it was enacted by the actors. The new technologies introduced by each side made it clear for all parties that whichever country had the most advanced and powerful technology, the country would have a big influence in international affairs. This then shows that even before the war could end; there was a looming war similar to the Cold War as everyone raced to achieve technological dominance. The war also made the US fear Germany as they may be the first ones to harness new technology and retaliate against the Allies. America had to launch its own military program to develop new weapons. It was an achievement for the United States to not only pulling off new weapons in the war, but to also incorporate atomic weapons became a key factor in the war.

Once the Second World War ended, the international community changed especially in the side of the United States. The country emerged as a major power and its military developments became key for their international influence. Since the war was not held anywhere near the country, the US did not have casualties when it comes to their industrial bases. The economy also thrived from the World War as they helped their Allies and their opponents to recover. It is also through the United States that redefined the Post-War Era which is reflected to the notion of the United Nations . From Roosevelt, the United States firmly stayed in a more active stance around the globe. However, this stance of the US ended up causing a rift between them and the Soviet socialist movement. The Cold War became a result of

this rift and created another debate inside the American sphere.

With the Second World War finally eliminating the isolationist stance, the US foreign policy debate revolved in identifying the position of the US in the international arena. The Cold War presented four policies each administration used: peace movement, hegemonic flexibility, national security state and holy war. Aside from these policies, the Cold War created and supported what is now known as a bipartisan consensus. However, there are still debates as to how to define bipartisanship and what it covers.

Clinton's administration became the foundation to formally end all possibilities of succumbing back to isolationism as each legislative assemblies pressed on for internationalism and peace throughout nations . Now that the United States is considered one of the world's remaining superpowers, there is still a question if the country could even rethink of returning back to an isolationist stance. There are still traces of this stance in American politics and policies, but considering the country's solidified position in the international community as the dominant state, the possibilities are no longer possible. Internationalism and interventionism continues to reign in the hearts of the million Americans who want to fight for peace and continue to cherish it, whether domestically or internationally. Other countries have also modelled their stances like the United States and sought to end all conflicts diplomatically. War is inevitable and even if a country uses isolation as a means to escape this war, the threat still lingers. The United States stood against the challenge and understood how important international affairs are in ensuring peace and balance throughout the globe.

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