

# Foreign policy in united states of america history essay



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After the Civil War foreign policy issues in America take a back seat to domestic economic and political issues and the Infrastructure which was destroyed by the war is gradually rebuilt. Perhaps most importantly the industries, created out of the necessities of war, expand in a growing domestic economy. The political union which was shattered by the war is also rebuilt. Western America which was already partly occupied before the war saw a mass of immigrants. Some were escaping the destruction left by the Civil War however many were fleeing the economic and political hardships in Europe.

During the formative years early American colonists and political leaders envision a United States which incorporates all the territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific and for the most part, appear to be satisfied by pursuing purely continental domination. They seem to express very little interest in imperialistic expansion beyond the North American continent. On the other side of the Atlantic however, the European nations are actively pursuing the construction of around-the-world empires. The Europeans carve up Asia and Africa into colonies, occupied territories, and zones of influence.

However, the foreign policy issues, which America chose to neglect in it's pursuit for domestic development, return to the forefront in the 1890s. The U. S. becomes more aggressive in asserting its international position by establishing a navy base in Hawaii, defending its fishing and sealing rights against the Canadians, meddling in the domestic politics of Chile, and arbitrating a boundary dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana.

Towards the end of the 1890's Cuba becomes the overwhelming issue in American foreign policy. Spanish human rights violations anger humanitarians and force calls for war. The President at the time, Grover Cleveland, refrains from intervening in Cuba even though both the U. S. House and Senate pass resolutions favoring intervention in 1896. By 1898, however, humanitarian and imperialist cries for intervention intensify to a point where war is inevitable. A widely publicised Spanish insult of new President McKinley and the suspicious sinking of the American battleship Maine, leads to a one-sided war in which the U. S. takes possession of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, the latter accomplished in the face of resistance from native Filipino guerrilla fighters, led by Emilio Aguinaldo.

Aguinaldo was initially in charge of the Filipino forces that allied with the Americans to eradicate Spanish control of the Philippines. But when the United States refused to recognize Philippine independence, Aguinaldo led his troops in a guerrilla war against American military intervention.

Aguinaldo strongly believed that America had become a laughing stock to the rest of the world due to it's double standards, saying " did America recognize this fact, she would cease to be the laughing stock of other civilized nations, as she became when she abandoned her traditions and set up a double standard of government – Government by consent in America, government by force in the Philippine Islands..." (Emilio Aguinaldo pg. 97). These sentiments however, seemed to have little impact on the American government, in fact the way in which they moved towards an imperialist nation grew even stronger.

Drunk with victory over Spain, America flexes its muscle internationally, demanding a world “ open door” trade policy granting equal trading opportunities for all countries, especially in Asia (1899), constructing the Panama Canal (1904), semi-assertively opposing Japanese expansionism in Asia (1905, 1915), and sending the “ Great White Fleet” around the world to strengthen the American reputation, especially in Asia (1907). The U. S. reissues the Monroe Doctrine to warn European nations to stop meddling in Latin American nations in order to collect debts owed by those Latin nations (1904). The U. S. temporarily takes control of the Dominican Republic (1905) and Haiti (1915) to prevent European takeovers and to guarantee Dominican Republic and Haitian territorial integrity while these countries struggle out of debt. The U. S. actively governs its new possessions taken from Spain, intervenes in a Nicaraguan revolution to protect American citizens and interests (1910), intervenes diplomatically in a Mexican revolution (1913) and intervenes militarily in a number of other revolutions in a number of other Latin nations, including the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico. The U. S. then purchases the Virgin Islands in order to keep Germany out of the Western Hemisphere and finally annexes Hawaii as a United States Territory following the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy by American missionaries and businessmen and the temporary establishment of a Hawaiian Republic. Then, the United States finds itself drawn into World War I, largely against the will of the American public.

At the start of the war in Europe in 1914, the American government attempts to remain neutral in thought as well as action. America attempts to maintain its commercial and trading relationships in all countries of Europe. In political

campaigns, presidential aspirants promote peaceful negotiations as a solution to the European conflict rather than calling outright for entry into the war. But the American people are gradually taking sides and the politicians are gradually losing faith in non-military solutions. There is considerable sympathy for Germany, especially among the sizable German-American population. It is possible to see Germany as a victim of Russian and French aggression and Austrian stubbornness. But, American ties to Great Britain are hard to overcome. America and Britain share culture and language, share significant commercial interests, and share three centuries of a love-hate relationship.

Americans are eventually swayed to support Britain and the allies by (1) British propaganda falsely claiming German human rights violations and war atrocities and claiming secret German motives for starting the war, (2) the German violation of American freedom of the seas through German submarine activities, (3) the British-provoked German sinking of a British passenger liner, now known to be carrying smuggled war munitions, and (4) the Pro-British biases and British ancestral links of several important American leaders, including President Woodrow Wilson. It was President Wilson's address to congress in 1917 that was the final nail in the proverbial coffin. In his speech he tried to outline America's reasons for entering the war, what actions would be necessary and the motives for which the nation would fight. He tried to appeal to the congresses sense of moral reason by saying " I am not now thinking of the loss of property involved, immense and serious as that is, but only the wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of non-combatants" (Woodrow Wilson pg. 124) He added " The present

German Submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind". (Woodrow Wilson pg. 124) The eventual declaration of war in April 1917 was not unanimous though, the vote was 82-6 in the Senate and 373-50 in the House.

The U. S. helps define the previously undefined allied objectives in the war with President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points". The Germans surrender in November 1918, based on those 14 points. Wilson takes a very personal role in both the declaration of war bringing the United States into the war and in the peace conference following the war. This helps politicize the war domestically. Wilson's Democratic Party suffers losses in the November 1918 congressional elections and Wilson fails to get congressional approval of the final peace treaty or congressional support for a proposed League of Nations to prevent future wars. Congress terminates war with Germany by resolution in October 1920.

By its entry into World War I, the United States militarily intervenes in a major European war on the European continent for the first time in U. S. history. American military power proves decisive in altering the balance of power among European states. Americans return triumphantly to the homelands of their ancestors and, hopefully, help promote liberalism and democracy on the continent.

However, the adventure is not satisfying; the U. S. soon becomes distressed and disenchanted by the squabbling among the European nations concerning war reparations and the territorial claims of the victors. The United States soon washes its hands of Europe and of European

entanglements and, following the advice of the nation's first president, George Washington, returns to isolation and non-involvement in European affairs. American negotiators dabble in the various peace and disarmament initiatives of the 1920s and 1930s but largely remain distant from the European scene. American leaders become increasingly focused on domestic economic and social problems caused, first, by the boom of the 1920s and, second, by the bust of the 1930s. American intellectuals are enamored by Italian fascism and Soviet communism and only slightly alarmed by German fascism. Japanese aggression in Asia is outside the scope of most American leader's attention.

The British, French, German, and Soviet study of geopolitics, coupled with national selfishness and national self-interest, and with fascist and communist ideology, lay the foundation for a second world war. Germany becomes obsessed with assuring its geopolitical health; that obsession should have been seen as a signal of the war to come, but most American intellectuals and diplomats were either unfamiliar with geopolitical concepts or were unwilling to see the threat building before them.

In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt attempts to establish a "good neighbor policy" toward Latin American nations and agrees to cease intervention in Latin national domestic affairs. The Neutrality Act of 1939 allows American citizens and business to export arms and munitions on a cash and carry basis. The United States is neutral, but at the same time, involved.

American neutrality is finally broken when the U. S. transfers 50 over-age destroyers to Britain in September 1940, three months after Paris falls to the Germans. The destroyers help Britain maintain control of its territorial waters and maintain its shipping in the face of German submarine attacks. In return for the destroyers, the U. S. receives rights to use various British-controlled ports. In his state-of-the-union address, January 1941, President Roosevelt recommends a lend-lease bill to support the allies; it takes two months of heated debate to get the bill through Congress. Americans are reluctant to get into another European war. The U. S. begins convoy escorts in the Atlantic in support of “ freedom of the seas” and promises aid to Russia, invaded by Germany in June 1941. However, the United States remains reluctant to become a primary belligerent in a European war, in spite of pleas from Britain.

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacks Pearl Harbor in an effort to deny the U. S. the ability to intervene in the Pacific to stop on-going Japanese imperialist expansion throughout Asia. At this point Franklin D. Roosevelt requests a declaration of war on Japan. His speech is far more succinct than the one of his predecessor Woodrow Wilson when addressing the congress over the first world war, However after an attack on American soil The public and congress needed little convincing that retaliation was the only possible option. In his speech to congress he said simply that “ I ask that the congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire”(Franklin D. Roosevelt pg. 187) War is officially declared on December 8. Germany and Italy, both Japanese allies, declare



war on the U. S. and on December 11 and the U. S. reciprocates. America suddenly finds itself in the middle of a world-wide war in which the armies of fascism have the upper hand.

Following the defeat of Japan and Germany, the U. S. finds itself firstly rebuilding its allies devastated by war and also providing humanitarian relief to the conquered Japanese, Italians and Germans. There was however a new threat, in the form of expansionist Soviet and Chinese communism. The Soviet Union looked to construct a geopolitical empire with a buffer zone around itself and to export communist revolution around the world.

President Truman eventually draws the line on communist expansion in Berlin, Greece, Turkey, Iran and Korea. The Western and non-communist world quickly allies itself to defend against communist advancement and to rebuild its economic and military strength. Communism lowers an “ iron curtain” to isolate itself from the West and proceeds with its own economic and military development.

The European nations, all former colonial powers, are too weakened from World War I, the world-wide depression, and World War II to continue their colonial empires. During the 1940s, 1950, 1960s, and 1970s, former colonies are either given independence by their former masters or the colonies wrest their independence away from their former colonial masters through force. In time, many of these new nations turn to the U. S. for economic and military assistance, adding to America’s burden, or turn to the communist bloc, compelling the U. S. to attempt to outbid the Soviets for the allegiance of these developing nations.

The U. S. leads the defense against communist expansion, both diplomatically and militarily throughout the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s with international anti-communist alliances, military action, and support of anti-communist regimes in Greece, Korea, the Middle East, Central America, Vietnam and scores of other hot-and cold-war battle zones. American diplomats often have difficulty distinguishing between nationalist revolutions, ethnic self-determination movements, and communist aggression and often engage in short-term foreign policy initiatives that work to the long-term detriment of American interests.

The policy of “containment” of communism, begun by President Harry Truman in the late 1940s and practiced by Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy, is modified by Presidents Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter to include some effort to understand and cooperate with the communists. Some trade and cultural exchange is encouraged. But, communism’s aggressive nature remains unchanged. The Soviets, Chinese, and Cubans continue support for communist revolution throughout the developing world.

In the 1980s, President Reagan decides to break the back of communist expansion by bankrupting the Soviet industrial system. Military and economic foreign aid is used to outbid the Soviets and Chinese for allies; world-wide free trade breaks Soviet monopoly trade relationships, a massive arms race overwhelms the Soviet and Chinese industrial capacity.

Communism can not match capitalism in material, war, and technological production. Soviet communism collapses from popular withdrawal of support by the citizens of the Soviet Union, The Union disintegrates into its

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constituent republics, each adopting more western-style democratic and capitalist- or semi-capitalist- economic systems. Around the world, communism declines in popularity and, one by one, communist or communist-leaning regimes around the world fall before a world-wide pro-democracy movement. Only mainland China and Cuba remain as isolated bastions of communism.

For anyone studying modern American History and specializing in the history of foreign policy it is clear that over the past decade there have been some significant changes. There is an obvious homogeneity between foreign and domestic policy and at times they even cross over each other. The main trend regarding the history of U. S. foreign policy since the American Revolution is the shift from isolationism before and after World War I, to its growth as a world power and global leader during and since World War II and the end of the Cold War. It is because of these massive shifts that I think it will be impossible to see what the future holds for America as a global super power, only time will tell.