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American Foreign Policy Since World War II

FIFTEENTH EDITION

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Chapter 1.

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American troops and others from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) greet Kosovar refugees after NATO's liberation of the Yugoslav territory in June 1999. The U.S.-led NATO mission in Kosovo was one of many that tested American foreign policy in the turbulent post–Cold War decade.

CHAPTER ONE

The American Approach to Foreign Policy

The United States entered the twenty-first century as the world's preeminent power. American military forces maintained an unmatched global presence, the nation's economic output far exceeded that of any other country, and the American political system, for all its highly publicized faults, served as a model for many other governments. Taken together, all these factors gave the United States "unprecedented freedom of action in international affairs." [1]

Yet despite this good fortune, many Americans felt unsure about the country's role in the world. Old questions were raised anew about what obligations, if any, the United States should assume beyond its borders. This sense of detachment, common in times of peace and prosperity, took on a sharper edge during the 1990s as several regional crises shat-

1. David A. Lake, *Entangling Relations: American Foreign Policy in Its Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 198.

tered the "new world order" that had been widely anticipated after the Cold War. The Berlin Wall had barely come down in 1989 before Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait and threatened the Persian Gulf's oil supplies. Soon afterward, Yugoslavia broke apart as the dominant Serbs unleashed a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" against Muslims that was reminiscent of Nazi Germany. In Africa renewed tribal warfare produced casualties on a gruesome scale. And in East Asia a prolonged economic boom suddenly went bust, provoking political chaos, military unrest, and economic shocks in other regions.

A string of foreign interventions by the United States merely fueled citizens' doubts about the nation's global responsibilities. American troops took the lead in expelling Iraq's Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, but the Bush administration's unwillingness to oust the Iraqi dictator led to endless postwar sanctions, punitive air strikes, and growing opposition to these moves by other countries. Armed forces were again deployed to "restore hope" in the African nation of Somalia, but they withdrew hastily after coming under fire from rival militias. And after the United States brought the Balkan rivals together to create a new government in Bosnia, the leader of Yugoslavia simply set his sights on a new target: the province of Kosovo and its population of ethnic Albanians. The American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) tried to rescue the Kosovars by bombing the Yugoslav heartland, but that strategy triggered the very outcome NATO tried to prevent—mass murders and expulsions, systematic rape and torture, and the plundering of Kosovo.

Meanwhile, foreign leaders were dismayed by America's internal squabbles over foreign policy, by the mixed signals coming from Washington, and by the seemingly arrogant attitude of American leaders on a variety of global issues. The United States was openly condemned for failing to pay its more than $1 billion in back dues to the United Nations; for cornering the global arms market at a time of heightened concern over weapons proliferation; for opposing global bans on chemical weapons, land mines, and nuclear testing; and for maintaining ineffective economic sanctions against several "rogue states." In addition, America's commitment to "sustainable development" was questioned as Congress slashed foreign aid budgets and opposed measures to curb global population growth. In short, as one analyst put it, the United States was widely perceived abroad as "intrusive, interventionist, exploitative, unilateralist, hegemonic, [and] hypocritical . . . with a foreign policy driven overwhelmingly by domestic politics." [2]

Much of this hostility toward the United States was a carryover from the Cold War, when the goal of "containing" communism shaped every

2. Samuel Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* (March–April 1999): 43.

aspect of American foreign policy and led the United States into numerous foreign interventions. Yet despite its flaws, the containment strategy had given some clarity to America's world role. In the 1990s such clarity was not to be found. Reflecting the nation's detachment from foreign affairs and preference for addressing domestic issues—crime, education, and health care—the American people had turned for leadership in 1992 and again in 1996 to Democrat Bill Clinton, a former governor with no experience in foreign policy. In keeping with the national mood, President Clinton converted foreign policy into an extension of his domestic agenda, based primarily on promoting the nation's economy. As the world scene grew more chaotic, Clinton called on the United States to "remain the indispensable nation." But his appeal, which seemed half-hearted, was met with public skepticism. When congressional leaders sought a more modest American role in world politics, one based primarily on the country's self-interests rather than global concerns, Clinton, whose priorities and energies were directed elsewhere, did not put up a fight.

Lacking a coherent strategy and strong direction by the president, American foreign policy fell prey to competing interests—both within and outside the federal government.[3] The crippling political stalemate between Clinton and the Republican-led Congress, which led to the president's impeachment in 1998 over a sex scandal, further diminished the prospects for a united front in foreign policy. Unfortunately, the general public offered no guidance to policy makers. When asked to identify the biggest foreign policy problem facing the United States in 1999, respondents in a prominent national survey most often replied, "Don't know." [4] Although the survey registered strong *general* support for an active American role in world politics, most respondents favored a cautious and limited response to problems overseas that did not directly affect the United States.

In this void, the central questions about American foreign policy remain unresolved today: What is the appropriate role of the United States in world politics? Should Americans be concerned only about matters close to home, or should they also be concerned about global problems such as population growth, environmental decay, terrorism, and the spread of nuclear weapons? How deeply should the American government be immersed in the world economy, and on whose behalf?

3. For elaborations on the domestic politics of this period, see James M. Scott, ed., *After the End: Making U.S. Foreign Policy in the Post–Cold War World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); and Randall B. Ripley and James M. Lindsay, eds., *U.S. Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

4. John E. Rielly, ed., *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), 11.

Under what conditions and for what purposes should the United States intervene in conflicts overseas? How strongly should the United States press other governments to create democratic institutions and respect human rights? Finally, what ties should the United States maintain with its potential adversaries in Russia and China, which remained formidable powers long after the Cold War?

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

One way to address these questions is to examine how past leaders defined American interests and how well they succeeded in achieving their goals. Furthermore, because foreign policy not only adjusts to new circumstances but also demonstrates continuities over time, historical experience can usefully inform and guide both those who study foreign policy and those who practice it.

The post–World War II era witnessed the longest and most active involvement of the United States in world affairs in its history. This book examines how the United States defined its national interests during that turbulent period and how U.S. leaders pursued these interests. The chapters that follow also consider how American actions reflected the nation's proclaimed moral principles and to what extent the country's behavior contradicted these principles. They describe as well how the ambivalent attitude of many Americans suggested a return to historic patterns established long before the United States became a global superpower. By understanding American foreign policy since World War II, readers can more fully grasp the dilemmas currently facing America's leaders. They also can understand more easily why the post–Cold War world, which was expected to usher in new era of peace, has in fact been so troublesome.

This study begins at the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Cold War. Anyone who doubts the continuing relevance of the Cold War—why it erupted and how it was fought—need only consider the events that followed it. If the Cold War were still on, there likely would not have been a war in the Persian Gulf, nor would there have been an exchange of recognition in 1993 between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, two longtime bitter enemies. And certainly it is doubtful whether Czechoslovakia would have fragmented into two separate republics, or whether Yugoslavia would have dissolved into a vicious and bloody civil war. Nor is it likely that the United States would have intervened in Somalia to feed its people or in Haiti to restore its elected leader who had been overthrown by a military junta. Finally, it is worth considering that India and Pakistan waited until after the Cold War to cross the nuclear threshold.

Coming to terms with the problems confronting the United States since World War II begins with the proposition that the American people, like those in other countries, have a distinctive perspective on world politics. How nation-states act in the international arena depends in large measure on their geography, resources, and historical backgrounds, as well as the environment in which they coexist with other states. These "national styles" vary considerably, but all states bring them to bear as they adapt to the rules of the power game and do what they must to ensure their survival and achieve a measure of security.[5]

Because for most of its existence the United States detached itself politically and militarily from the European powers, its national style was molded far more than that of other Western powers by its domestic experiences and cultural traditions. Not schooled by continuous immersion in international politics, Americans approached foreign policy in a way that was peculiarly their own. The contrast in approaches to foreign policy was particularly strong between the United States and the Soviet Union, which emerged after World War II as America's chief adversary. Perhaps one reason for their different approaches was that the United States felt secure in the Western Hemisphere, but czarist Russia (later the Soviet Union) could never feel secure because of its proximity to many other great powers which, over the centuries, had their own problems and ambitions. Thus the United States confronted a formidable rival, one that combined this historic insecurity with strong, often repressive centralized control, abundant natural resources, and a revolutionary ideology based on the inevitable global expansion of its political and economic system.

This book, then, explores how America's political culture, or national style, has influenced the conduct of its foreign policy and how these cultural factors have led American leaders to perceive allies and adversaries in a certain way. More directly, it questions whether America's approach to foreign affairs contributed to its victory over the Soviet Union, or whether that approach might instead have prolonged the struggle. Indeed, in the post–Cold War period many observers have expressed doubts about whether America's policy of "containment" really was a prerequisite for the Soviet defeat.[6] Finally, this book considers how America's style of foreign policy has helped or hindered the nation's ability to adapt to the more complex, and in many ways more unstable, international system of the post–Cold War era.

5. Robert Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy: Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

6. See, for example, Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

THE VOLATILE STATE SYSTEM

American foreign policy since World War II is largely the story of the tension between the nation-state system, created long before the United States was founded, and the American style of dealing with other countries. Both the monumental achievements of the United States and its failures can be attributed to this uneasy relationship.

In the nation-state system, each member—especially the great powers, its principal actors—is prone to a high degree of insecurity. In the absence of a world government able to safeguard it, each state ultimately must depend on itself for its preservation and safety. Understandably, then, national leaders tend to regard their counterparts as potential adversaries, threats to their nation's territorial integrity and political independence. Indeed, the very nature of the state system breeds such feelings of insecurity, distrust, suspicion, and fear.

But neither the flaws in human nature nor the desires of political leaders to acquire ever-greater power account for what is popularly called *power politics.* Rather, power politics stems from each state's essential concern for its security, the essential prerequisite for citizens' enjoyment of their way of life. Because states often view the external environment as a threat to their security, they are prone to enhance their power relative to that of other states. In such an environment it does not take much for one state to arouse another's suspicions and to stimulate reciprocal images of hostility that each finds easy to substantiate by its opponent's behavior. Indeed, in most instances this enmity is maintained despite contradictory evidence and even avowedly friendly acts. Conciliatory behavior is often seen as a sign of weakness and may invite exploitation. Or it may be regarded as a trick to persuade a state to relax its guard. In view of this "security dilemma," and in the absence of a world government, a balance of power among the strongest states is required to keep this volatile system from breaking down. As the balance of power among nation-states shifts at both the regional and global levels, it alters the strategic environment, defines the options available to states, and informs their policy choices.

THE SHIFTING BALANCE OF POWER

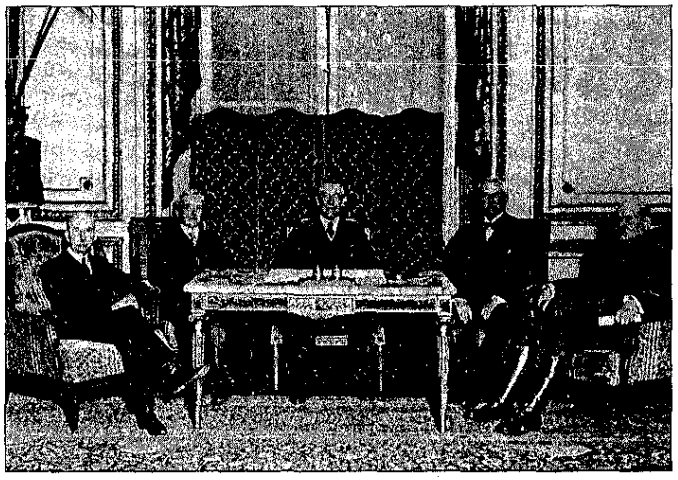
During the nineteenth century the United States was able to enjoy an unprecedented degree of security because a balance of power, created at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, existed on the European continent and was effectively maintained by Great Britain together with France, Austria, and Russia. The Concert of Europe imposed a rare degree of stability on Europe. Furthermore, it allowed the United States to fulfill President George Washington's pledge, made as he left office in 1796, to "steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world."

Some seventy-five years later, Germany's unification in 1870 and the demise of several European-based empires shattered the balance and forced the United States to play a pivotal role as a great power. The growing strength of Germany coincided with and hastened the decline of Great Britain's power. Indeed, the early years of World War I showed clearly that even when British power was thrown in on the side of France and Russia, the three allies could barely contain Germany. With the collapse of czarist Russia in 1915 and the transfer of almost two million German soldiers from the Russian to the western front, a German victory became a distinct possibility. The United States would then have faced a Germany astride an entire continent, dominating European Russia and, in alliance with Austria-Hungary and perhaps the Ottoman Empire, extending German influence into the Balkans and the Middle East. It was at that point that Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare, which included attacks on American shipping, led to a U.S. declaration of war. With America's entry into the conflict, the Allies were able to contain Germany's spring 1918 offensive, leading to its defeat.

After its victory the United States retreated into its hemispheric shell, but only after a failed attempt by President Woodrow Wilson to make the world "safe for democracy." In his famous "Fourteen Points" speech delivered in January 1918, Wilson called for all countries to reduce arms, end colonialism, refrain from secret diplomacy, respect freedom of the seas, and take other steps to establish trust and goodwill. In addition, Wilson proposed that a "League of Nations" be established to prevent future wars through a system of "collective security." Under this system, member countries would agree to defend any nation that had been invaded. Given such a deterrent, foreign aggression would presumably never be contemplated. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Wilson was so convinced of the righteousness of his cause that he personally represented the United States at the Paris Peace Conference, which lasted six months. Almost single-handedly, Wilson persuaded European leaders to sign the Treaty of Versailles, which ended the war, and join the League of Nations, which was established by the treaty. Upon returning from France, Wilson proclaimed victory and declared that "America is the hope of the world."

In seeking to transform world politics, however, Wilson forgot about American politics, particularly the role of Congress in ratifying treaties. Senate leaders felt snubbed by Wilson, who excluded them from the peace conference. More important, they questioned whether the League would undermine the nation's sovereignty by forcing the United States to deploy troops overseas even when its own vital interests were not

IMPACT AND INFLUENCE



WOODROW WILSON

The American style of foreign policy was personified nearly a century ago by President Woodrow Wilson (center). Wilson, the son of a Presbyterian minister, often described world politics as a struggle between good and evil. The United States, he believed, had a moral responsibility not merely to promote its own self-interests, but also to free the interstate system from its anarchic structure and warlike tendencies.

Wilson led the United States and its allies to victory in World War I, and then chaired the U.S. commission (pictured) at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. He proposed "Fourteen Points" to reform world politics, including global disarmament, decolonization, freedom of the seas, and the abolition of secret diplomacy. Wilson also called for an "association of nations" to maintain order through a system of collective security. More than sixty foreign governments approved his plan and created the League of Nations. But Wilson, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts, could not persuade leading members of the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles.

threatened. The Senate therefore rejected the treaty, and the United States never joined the League of Nations.

Although the postwar U.S. economy rivaled that of all Europe and the United States exercised great economic influence, the government refused to define for the nation a political and military role consistent with its economic power. U.S. military power had been decisive in Germany's defeat, but the United States wanted nothing to do with great-power politics. To the contrary, the United States sought again to abolish war, this time through the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, in which sixty-

two countries renounced war "as an instrument of national policy." Then, as Adolf Hitler consolidated his power in Germany in the 1930s and as Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator, moved into Africa, the U.S. Congress passed two Neutrality Acts that prevented an assertive American response. At the same time, a congressional committee held hearings to probe allegations that U.S. involvement in World War I had been inspired by international banks, arms manufacturers, and other "merchants of death."

The United States began to play a political role again only when the balance of power in Europe was upset once more by the eruption of World War II in 1939 and the defeat of France in 1940. With America facing the possibility of Britain's defeat and the control of Eurasia by Germany and its allies, President Franklin Roosevelt undertook several measures to help Britain withstand any Nazi assault. He sent fifty old destroyers to defend the English Channel and established a "lend-lease" program to provide munitions, food, and other material support. This commitment to Britain was necessary even though Roosevelt's actions increased the risk of war with Germany. In fact, by the time Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States was engaged in an undeclared naval war with Germany in the Atlantic. Full-scale war was merely a matter of time.

THE AMERICAN CONCEPT OF SECURITY

In any assessment of U.S. actions leading up to World War II, two points deserve emphasis. First, the defense of the United States always has involved more than physical security. The German threat during World War I was not one of an immediate invasion, nor was an invasion the main threat even after the defeat of France early in World War II. Then why did the United States twice forsake its "splendid isolation" from foreign entanglements? Surely the width of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans would protect the United States.

American security was threatened for one reason: any state—especially an antidemocratic state—that controlled all the resources of Eurasia, the Middle East, and Africa, and then converted those resources into military power, might someday be able to attack North America. This would be particularly true if Great Britain were defeated and the British navy no longer guarded the sea highway to the Western Hemisphere. Even if Britain sank its navy rather than see it joined with the fleets of Germany and its allies, the German navy might come to dominate the Atlantic approaches to the Western Hemisphere. Such circumstances would require the United States to mobilize its resources fully and be on constant alert for attack by an opponent with superior resources. Moreover, to match this dominant Eurasian power, the United States would proba-

bly have to transform itself into a "garrison state"—a disciplined, militarized society that, in the name of security, would have to sacrifice democracy and individual liberty in the name of self-defense.

The broader rationale for U.S. intervention was that the security of a democratic America was inextricably interwoven with the survival of other democracies, especially France and Britain. After France collapsed in 1940, Roosevelt explained to the American public why the United States had to assist Britain: America could not survive as a lone democratic island surrounded by totalitarian seas—that is, democracy in America could not flourish unless democratic values prospered in other societies. There might be no physical threat to the nation, but the aim of American foreign policy had never been just the security of the United States as a piece of real estate. It had always sought to defend the security of a democratic America, which required that democratic values flourish internationally.

The second point deserving emphasis is that despite the U.S. concern with security in Europe, the timing of the interventions in 1917 and 1941 was not in each case a rational decision made in Washington. It was Berlin's decision in 1917 to launch unrestricted submarine warfare against all shipping to England that brought the United States into the war, and it was Tokyo's decision in December 1941 to attack the U.S. fleet at anchor in Hawaii that led to the American declaration of war against Japan. Without Hitler's reckless 1941 declaration of war against the United States—a country he held in great contempt—U.S. power would have been directed only against Japan, and Germany, the far stronger power, would have faced only Britain and Russia, both already reeling from German blows. Therefore, but for German and Japanese mistakes, the United States might *not* have entered the two world wars, even though the balances of power in Europe and Asia were transformed. The United States, in this respect, was saved from itself by its enemies.

Great powers usually do not leave decisions about their security to their adversaries. The strategy of the major states in the state system is—or should be—to oppose any state that seeks predominance because such predominance would constitute a grave threat to their own security. The failure of the United States twice to act according to the logic dictated by the balance of power largely stemmed from its own particular national style.

THE AMERICAN NATIONAL STYLE

The style reflected in the American response to war in Europe and later to the Cold War was the product of domestic experience. By giving priority to internal political and economic tasks—a characteristic of the

United States since its founding—the nation had successfully remained aloof politically and militarily from European power politics. With nonthreatening neighbors to the north and south and open seas to the east and west, the United States could take its security for granted. Free from external threats, it could focus on its own economic and political development.

THE AMERICAN SENSE OF DESTINY

The ability of the United States to maintain its detachment from great-power politics for such a long time cannot be attributed *only* to the nation's distance from Europe, or to Europe's preoccupation with industrialization and class conflict at home and colonialism abroad, or to the strength of the Royal Navy. The nature of democracy has to be considered as well. The United States saw itself as more than just the world's first "new nation"; it also was the world's first constitutional democracy and, as such, the first country in history whose government was self-consciously designed to make its leaders politically accountable to the public at large. The "more perfect union" was to be an egalitarian society. European concepts of social hierarchy, nobility and titles, and bitter class struggles were not to be planted in America's democratic soil.

From the very beginning of their national life, Americans professed a strong belief in what they considered to be their destiny—to spread, *by example,* freedom and social justice and to lead humankind away from its wicked ways to the New Jerusalem on earth. Early settlers declared America to be "a city on a hill" and considered it their providential mission to inspire other societies to follow their lead. The massive immigration of the late nineteenth century served to reinforce this sense of destiny. "Repudiation of Europe," novelist John Dos Passos once said, "is, after all, America's main excuse for being." In the popular mind, Europe stood for war, poverty, and exploitation; America, for peace, opportunity, and democracy. But the United States was not merely to be a beacon of a superior democratic domestic way of life. It also was to be an exemplar of a morally superior pattern of international behavior. The United States, then, would voluntarily reject power politics as unfit for its foreign policy.

Democratic theory posits that people are potentially rational and moral, which means that they can settle their differences by reasoned deliberation and moral exhortation. Since people are endowed with reason and a moral sense, what quarrels could not be settled given the necessary goodwill? Peace—the result of harmony among people—was considered the natural or normal condition. Conflict, on the other hand, was considered a deviation caused primarily by wicked leaders whose morality and reason had been corrupted by their exercise of uncon-

strained authority. Power politics was an instrument of selfish and autocratic rulers—that is, leaders unrestrained by democratic public opinion—who enjoyed wielding it for personal advantage. To them, war was a grand game. They could remain in their palatial homes, continuing to eat well and to enjoy the luxuries of life, and suffer none of the hardships of war. These fell upon the ordinary people who had to leave their families to fight, endure the higher taxes to pay for the war, and possibly see their homes and families destroyed. The conclusion was clear: undemocratic states were inherently warlike and evil; democratic nations, in which the people controlled and regularly changed their leaders, were peaceful and moral.

The American experience seemed to support this conclusion: the United States was a democracy, its economy was growing steadily, and it generally was at peace with foreign powers. Furthermore, peace seemed to be the normal state of affairs. It was logical, then, that democracy and peaceful behavior and intentions should be thought of as synonymous. Americans rarely asked themselves whether democracy was responsible for the peace they enjoyed, or whether peace was the product of other forces. The frequent wars in Europe appeared to provide the answer: European politics was power politics, reflecting the feudal origins of European regimes. Americans had cut themselves off from Europe and its class conflicts and power politics after the Revolutionary War; America had to protect its democratic principles and abstain from any involvement in the affairs of Europe lest it be soiled and corrupted. Hemispheric detachment, therefore, was the morally correct policy, for it allowed the United States to quarantine itself from Europe's hierarchical social structures and violent conflicts.

It was the Monroe Doctrine, proclaimed in 1823, that first stressed, officially and explicitly, this ideological difference between the New World and the Old World. President James Monroe declared that the American political system was "essentially different" from that of Europe, whose nations engaged frequently in warfare. The implication was very clear: democratic government equals peace, and aristocratic government—which was identified with despotism—means war. In this spirit Monroe warned, "We should consider any attempt on [Europe's] part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety." [7]

This view also allowed the United States to behave hypocritically by acting like other nations in its continental expansion but disguising its motives in the noblest of terms. In advocating U.S. military expansion into Mexico in 1845, for example, journalist John O'Sullivan argued that it was

> the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of Liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us. Its floor shall be a hemisphere—its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation a Union of many Republics, compromising hundreds of happy millions . . . governed by God's natural and moral law of equality.[8]

By drawing the distinction between the New and Old Worlds, and by warning the Europeans to keep their hands off the Western Hemisphere, Americans were in effect opening the way for the establishment of U.S. preeminence and dominance. It would not be the last time the United States would invoke such a double standard, proclaiming a moral position loftier than that of other great powers—then behaving in much the same way.

THE DEPRECIATION OF POWER IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The American perception of an international harmony of interests contrasted sharply with the state system's emphasis on the inevitability of conflict and differences of interests among states. Americans traditionally regarded conflict as an abnormal condition; the rest of the state system perceived harmony to be an illusion. The United States, long isolated from Europe and therefore not socialized by the state system, did not accept the reality and permanence of conflicts among its members. Indeed, differences between nation-states were considered unnatural. But when they did occur, such differences should not be deep or long-lasting. Rather, they were attributed to wicked leaders (who could be eliminated), authoritarian political systems (which could be reformed), or misunderstandings (which could be straightened out if the adversaries approached each other with sincerity and empathy). Once these obstacles were removed, peace, harmony, and goodwill would reign supreme.

Because the United States considered itself a morally and politically superior society, its attitude toward the use of power internationally was dominated by the belief that any struggle could be avoided either by refraining from intervention in great-power conflicts or by crusading against those countries indulging in power politics. Moralism in foreign policy proscribed the use of power in peacetime; power should be

7. Quoted in Armin Rappaport, ed., *Sources in American Diplomacy* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 53. For a recent assessment, see Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945–1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994).

8. Quoted in Howard Jones, *The Course of American Diplomacy: From the Revolution to the Present*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988), 143.

employed only in confrontations with unambiguous aggression, transformed then into an obligation to fight on behalf of righteous causes. In short, only the use of power for democratic purposes was legitimate. The perception of power as simply the raw material of international politics—its use as an instrument of compromise, conciliation, and moderation in interstate politics, its discriminating application toward achievement of specific and less-than-total objectives—was clearly antithetical to the American understanding of power. The term *power politics* was itself an anathema, a reminder of a way of doing things that the New World hoped it had left behind.

The association of peace with democracy was not the only reason for the American depreciation of power politics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Another was that the United States was largely a one-class society, in which most citizens shared a belief in a common set of middle-class, capitalistic, and democratic values. America was unique among nations in this respect. The European countries were, by contrast, three-class societies. In addition to the middle class, they contained in their bodies politic an aristocratic class, whose energies were devoted either to keeping itself in power or to recapturing power and returning to the glorious days of a feudal past. Moreover, European urbanization and industrialization during the nineteenth century had given birth to a proletariat which, because it felt it did not receive a fair share of the national income, became a revolutionary class. The nations of the Old World were a composite of these three elements: a reactionary aristocracy, a small but democratic middle class, and a revolutionary proletariat. These nations had, in an intellectual as well as a political sense, a right, a center, and a left.

The United States had only a center, both intellectually and politically. It had never experienced a feudal past and therefore possessed no large, powerful aristocratic class on the right. Because it was by and large an egalitarian society, it also lacked a genuine left-wing movement of protest, such as socialism and communism. America was, as French political observer Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1835, "born free" as a middle-class, individualist, capitalistic, democratic society. "As a result one finds a vast multitude of people with roughly the same ideas about religion, history, science, political economy, legislation, and government." [9]

This widespread agreement on the fundamental values of American society and Europe's intense class struggles reinforced the American misunderstanding of the nature and functions of power on the international scene. Dissatisfied groups never developed a revolutionary ideology because the growing prosperity spread to them before they could translate their grievances against the capitalist system into political action. African Americans were an important exception because they never shared this wealth or political power; in fact, the "peculiar institution" of slavery so defied America's democratic principles that it thrust the country into a calamitous civil war. Otherwise, the United States was politically secure, socially cohesive, and economically prosperous. It was able to resolve most of its differences peacefully, and its people could believe in an evolutionary, democratic, economically prosperous historical process. Revolution and radicalism were condemned from this perspective. In sharp contrast, because of their internal class struggles and external conflicts among themselves, the nations of Europe fully appreciated that social conflict was natural and that power played a crucial role in resolving conflict.

9. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 56.

In the past, in fact, Americans have been so in accord on basic values that whenever the nation has been threatened externally it also has become fearful of internal disloyalty. It is one of the great ironies of American society that, while Americans possess this unity of shared beliefs to a greater degree than most other people, their apprehension of external danger has repeatedly led them, first, to insist on a general and somewhat dogmatic reaffirmation of loyalty to the "American way of life," and, second, to hunt for internal groups that might betray this way of life. Disagreement often has become equated with disloyalty; people have been accused of "un-American" thinking and behavior and labeled "security risks." Perhaps only a society so committed to one set of values could be so sensitive to internal subversion and so fearful of internal betrayal. By contrast, perhaps only a society in which two or more ideologies have long since learned to live together can genuinely tolerate diverse opinions: after all, who has ever heard of "un-British" or "un-French" activities? The United States often has been called a "melting pot" because of its many different nationality groups, but, before each generation of immigrants has been fully accepted into American society, it has had to be "Americanized." Indeed, few Americans have ever accepted diversity as a value. American society, in fact, has taken great pride in destroying diversity through assimilation.

Politics did not, in any event, seem very important to Americans during the nineteenth century when, in an era of rapid economic growth, the basic assumption was that people were motivated by their own material welfare. Self-interest governed economic behavior. Manufacturers and providers of services, seeking to maximize their profits, produced what consumers wanted. The laws of supply and demand and the free market therefore transformed each person's economic selfishness into socially beneficial results—"the greatest good for the greatest num-

ber." Politics mattered little in this utilitarian system based on entrepreneurs whose combined efforts improved the general welfare. The best government, as Thomas Jefferson declared, was the government that governed least. Arbitrary political interference with the economic laws of the market only upset the results these laws were intended to produce. Private property, profit, and the free market were the keys to ensuring the happiness of people by providing them with abundance. Capitalism, in short, reflected the materialism of the age of industrialization.

When distilled, these views came down to one simple statement: economics was good and politics was bad. The United States would not isolate itself from the outside world in a commercial sense. Far from it. Economic expansion based on foreign trade was a central element of early American foreign policy. The key was assuring that no political strings would be attached. As George Washington proclaimed in his Farewell Address, "The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign Nations is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little Political connection as possible."

This simple dichotomy between economics and politics came naturally to the capitalist middle class. For them, the benefits of economic freedom were as "self-evident" as the truths stated in the Declaration of Independence. Many asked: had not this economic freedom been gained only through the long and bitter struggle of Europe's middle class to cut down the authority of the powerful monarchical state and, in France, to overthrow it by revolution? As this middle class grew more prosperous and numerous, it became increasingly resentful of having to pay the taxes from which the aristocracy usually was exempt, of the restrictions placed on trade and industry, of the class barriers to the social status that came with careers in the army and the bureaucracy, and of the general lack of freedom of thought and expression.

Because the middle class identified the power of the state with its own lack of freedom, it struggled to restrict this power. Only by placing restraints on the authority of the state could it gain the individual liberty as well as the right to private enterprise it sought. Democratic philosophy stated these claims in terms of the individual's "natural rights." The exercise of political authority was equated with the abuse of that authority and the suppression of personal freedoms. The power of the state had to be kept to a minimum to ensure the individual citizen's political and economic liberties.

It was with this purpose in mind that the drafters of the U.S. Constitution divided authority between the states and the federal government, and, within the latter, among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The principles of federalism and separation of powers were deliberately designed to keep all governments—and especially the national government—weak. Domestic conflicts would be resolved not

by the state's political actions, but by the individual citizen's own economic actions in society in peacetime.

The American experience reflected this philosophy; millions of people came to the United States from other lands to seek a better way of life. America's territory was so vast that seemingly everyone could earn a respectable living and pursue happiness in his or her own way. Abundant natural resources, innovative technologies, individual enterprise, and supportive government policies enabled the American people to become the "people of plenty." [10] A good income was sought for two reasons: economically, to attain a comfortable standard of living and, psychologically, to gain social status and earn the respect of one's fellow citizens.

It was hardly surprising that in these circumstances the solution to international problems in America's first century was considered a matter of economics—not politics. Economics was identified with social harmony and the welfare of all peoples; politics was equated with conflict, war, and death. Just as the "good society" was to be the product of free competition, so the peaceful international society would be created by free trade. Trade depended on mutual prosperity; by contrast, war impoverished and destroyed and created ill will among nations. Commerce, which benefited all the participating states, created a vested interest in peace; war was economically unprofitable and therefore obsolete. Free trade and peace, in short, were one and the same cause.[11]

THE PENCHANT FOR CRUSADING

As noted earlier, America's leaders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries drew a clear-cut distinction between war and peace in their approach to foreign policy. Peace was characterized by a state of harmony among nations; conflict was considered abnormal and war a crime. In peacetime one needed to pay little or no attention to foreign problems; indeed, to do so would divert people from their individual concerns and professional aspirations. The effect of this attitude was clear: Americans turned their attention toward the outside world with reluctance and usually only when provoked—that is, when a foreign menace had become so forbidding that it could no longer be ignored. In other words, the United States rarely initiated foreign policy; the stimulus that dictated America's response generally came from beyond its borders.

But once Americans were provoked and the United States had to resort to force, the employment of force was justified in terms of the moral principles with which the United States, as a democratic country,

10. David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

11. These ideas were most thoroughly developed at the time by Scottish economist Adam Smith in his 1776 book *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

identified. War could be justified only by presuming noble purposes and completely destroying the immoral enemy who threatened the integrity, if not the existence, of these principles. American power, then, had to be "righteous" power; only by exercising it fully could Americans ensure salvation or the absolution of sin. Moreover, the national aversion to violence became transformed on occasion into a national glorification of violence, and wars became ideological crusades to destroy the enemy state and then send its people to democratic reform school. Making the world "safe for democracy"—Woodrow Wilson's stated objective during World War I—was to be achieved by democratizing the populace of the offending nation—in this case, Germany—making its new rulers responsible to the people they governed, and thereby converting the menacing regime into a peaceful democratic state and banishing power politics for all time. Once that aim had been achieved, the United States could again withdraw into itself, secure in the knowledge that American works had again proved to be "good works."

This has been the historic pattern of American foreign policy: a pendulum-like swing "back and forth between the extremes of an indiscriminate isolationism and an equally indiscriminate internationalism or globalism." [12] According to Harvard professor Stanley Hoffmann, "both extremes have in common the intention to avoid the contamination of unhealthy foreign troubles." [13] As a self-proclaimed morally and politically superior country, the United States could remain pure only by abstaining from involvement in a corrupt world or, if the world would not leave it alone, by destroying the source of evil through the application of maximum force and total war. In short, both the isolationist and the crusading impulses sprang from the same source. These swings tended, moreover, to be accompanied by radical shifts of mood: from one of optimism, which sprang from the belief that America was going to reform the world, to one of disillusionment as the grandiose objectives the United States had set for itself proved beyond its capacity to reach. Feeling too good for this world, which clearly did not want to be reformed but preferred its old, corrupt habits, the nation retreated in order to perfect and protect its way of life. Having expected too much from the use of its power, Americans then also tended to feel guilty and ashamed about having used their power at all.

For similar reasons, American leaders consistently divorced force from diplomacy. In peacetime, diplomacy unsupported by force was supposed to preserve the harmony among states. But in time of war

12. Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 15.

13. Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 98.

political considerations were subordinated to force. Once the diplomats had failed to keep the peace with appeals to morality and reason, military considerations became primary, and the soldier was placed in charge. The United States, then, rejected the concept of war as a political instrument and Carl von Clausewitz's definition of war as the continuation of politics by other means.[14] Instead, Americans regarded war as a politically neutral operation that should be guided by its own professional rules and imperatives. Military officers conducted their campaigns in a strictly apolitical, technically efficient manner. Politics and strategy were unrelated; strategy began where politics ended.

Thus for Americans, war was a means employed to abolish power politics. This same moralistic attitude also militated against the use of diplomacy in its classical sense: to bring contending states to the bargaining table to conciliate their differences, and to moderate and isolate conflicts. Although Americans regarded diplomacy as a rational process for straightening out misunderstandings between nations, they also were extremely suspicious of it. For this reason, the U.S. government refused to create a large, permanent diplomatic corps until long after the nation's arrival as a great power.

If the United States was by definition moral, it obviously could not compromise, for a nation endowed with a moral mission could hardly violate its own principles. That constituted appeasement and national humiliation. The nation's principles would be transgressed, the nation's interests improperly defended, the national honor stained. Moreover, to reach a settlement with enemies rather than wiping them out in order to safeguard American principles would be to condone moral compromise. This attitude toward diplomacy—which, in effect, made its use as an instrument of compromise difficult—reinforced the American predilection for violence as a means of settling international problems. War allowed the nation to destroy its evil opponent but permitted it to keep its moral mission intact and unsullied by compromise.

SELF-DOUBTS AND REVISIONIST HISTORIES

One of the most telling characteristics of America's national style in conducting foreign policy has been the scrutiny and criticism applied during and after every major war to the reasons for the country's participation in the struggle. Antiwar activists organize demonstrations

14. This phrase sums up the essence of Clausewitz's famous book, *On War*. First published in 1832, it remains the most outstanding effort in Western history to understand war's internal dynamics and its relationship to political policy and goals. The best modern translation and editing are by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

and encourage resistance; former government officials challenge the country's behavior on the op-ed pages of national newspapers; and scholars "revise" the historical record to rebut the conventional wisdom.

Over the years the revisionist histories have featured two common themes. First, the conflicts in which the United States became entangled did not in fact threaten its security interests. Second, the United States became involved because its leaders were seduced by propagandists who aroused and manipulated public opinion, by military officials with bureaucratic motives, and, above all else, by bankers and industrialists—the "merchants of death" of the 1930s, the "military-industrial complex" of the 1960s—whose economic interests benefited from the struggle. In the early stages of World War I, the prospect of German hegemony across Europe was downplayed by many, as was Hitler's juggernaut in World War II. As the Cold War settled in, critics of American activism doubted that Joseph Stalin, the Soviet ruler, was really as committed to a hostile relationship with the West as he claimed to be in his public statements. America's entry in the two world wars of this century, as in the Cold War, was therefore a mistake; it was really unnecessary or immoral, if not both. The enemy identified as the aggressor and *provocateur* actually did not represent a direct threat to American security at all; to the contrary, the threat came from within.

A central critique among revisionists was that a "power elite," including a small group of government and business leaders, propelled the United States into war.[15] Writing in the late 1950s, William Appleman Williams, the foremost proponent of this view, contended that the United States was driven to global expansion and foreign conflicts by the threat of economic stagnation and the fear of social upheaval at home.[16] Similarly, Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko argued that American foreign policy after World War II was driven "not by the containment of communism, but rather more directly the extension and expansion of American capitalism." [17] Writing at the end of the Cold War, Michael Parenti observed that the "primary task" of the American government during the struggle was "to protect capitalism as a system." [18] And in the aftermath of the Cold War, Thomas McCormick argued that "short-term

15. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

16. William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959). For a related critique of early American foreign policy, see Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963).

17. Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 480.

18. Michael Parenti, *The Sword and the Dollar: Imperialism, Revolution, and the Arms Race* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 198.

concerns over the American and global economies" led the United States to war in the Persian Gulf.[19]

These critics challenged the traditional view that the pursuit of economic gain served as an acceptable objective for the United States and its citizens because it reduced rather than increased the nation's appetite for war. Economic expansion, they argued, far from serving as a worthy objective, risked corrupting America's very soul because it diverted attention and resources from reform at home to military preparation and war. This viewpoint, originally maintained by a small group of critics, became widespread as the United States intervened repeatedly in regional conflicts during the Cold War, particularly in Vietnam. Not surprisingly, skepticism about American motives persisted into the 1990s as American leaders embraced global economic integration as a primary foreign policy goal.

Inspired by the revisionist historians of the Cold War, a new generation of political scientists argued in the 1990s that concepts such as sovereignty, anarchy, and "Third World" (see Chapter 4) were "socially constructed" by government leaders and were therefore not a legitimate basis for diplomatic relations.[20] In their view, American leaders dominated the "discourse" of foreign policy during the Cold War. Their public speeches routinely glorified the nation's values, vilified the communist countries, and frequently exaggerated overseas threats in order to preserve America's dominant position in the world. The news media—primarily television networks and large, corporate-owned newspapers—served as an accomplice in this effort by the U.S. government to manipulate public opinion. "The Cold War, then, was both a struggle which exceeded the military threat of the Soviet Union, and a struggle into which any number of potential candidates—regardless of their strategic capacity to be a threat—were slotted as a threat." [21]

Such critical interpretations brought needed attention to the cultural foundations of foreign policy. Cultural values are intimately linked to political institutions and, in turn, to the domestic and foreign policies of all states. Indeed, the considerable impact of American cultural values—and of such commonly used expressions as "manifest destiny"—is a central assumption of this book. But any comprehensive understanding of American foreign policy also demands recognition of a broader context—of the global setting that surrounds the state; of the prevailing

19. Thomas McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After*, 2d ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 248.

20. See Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46 (spring 1992): 395–424.

21. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 34.

norms of interstate relations; and of the national characters, historic inclinations, and ongoing practices of other states. In this respect, the process of "social construction" does not occur in a vacuum, but in a complex global environment in which other states and societies exist with very different cultural traditions, national styles, and global ambitions. These external forces, often reflecting inescapable conflicts of interest, create their own pressures on foreign policy.

External pressures clearly were brought to bear on American leaders during and after World War II. The Japanese empire, which by 1941 included most of China and East Asia, threatened the United States in the most direct fashion by attacking U.S. forces at Pearl Harbor. This aerial assault was immediately followed by Hitler's declaration of war against the United States, whose government had stubbornly refused to intervene during the previous two years despite passionate appeals for assistance by the occupied European powers. After the war the United States faced a formidable challenge from the Soviet Union and its leader Joseph Stalin. His prolonged assault on his own people in the 1930s led to the deaths of more than 10 million Soviet citizens, even before another 25 million were killed in World War II.[22] American leaders who knew and worked with Stalin during World War II were deeply concerned in the postwar period: Would the aging Soviet dictator, strengthened by nuclear weapons and the extension of his empire into central Europe, commit even more unspeakable acts against other nations, including the United States? The answer to this question was unclear. But in Stalin's internal policies prior to World War II, his public statements, and his actions immediately after the war, American leaders and their allies found nothing to reassure them.

Indeed, America's Cold War adversaries proved to be the true masters of social construction. The writings of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Zedong formed the basis of primary education and established a rigid government line that was transmitted daily by a state-controlled press and was immune from public debate or criticism. When political opponents or religious leaders challenged these regimes, they were imprisoned or executed en masse. In the Soviet Union social engineering was imposed with little regard for the diversity and spiritual aspirations of its people. In China Mao's attempts to impose a new social order reached ghastly proportions during the Great Leap Forward, initiated in 1958, and the Cultural Revolution of the mid-1960s. The Great

22. When the Soviet archives were opened in the late 1990s, the depths of Stalin's internal repression both before and during the Cold War become better known. See John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and R. C. Raack, *Stalin's Drive to the West, 1938–1945: The Origins of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

Leap Forward, designed to accelerate agricultural and industrial development, instead produced an economic calamity that required decades to overcome. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao's Red Guards violently cracked down on teachers, workers, and peasants who allegedly defied his revolutionary vision.

These events were not lost on the United States, explicitly identified as the primary adversary of both regimes and by many revolutionary movements in the developing world. The American strategy of "containment," described in Chapter 2, recognized this challenge and called for a sustained response on a global scale. To critics of this strategy, the Soviet Union was a "satisfied" power that did not seek expansion. Thus the assertive American response was unjustified. But this was hardly the signal sent by Stalin in the postwar years as he broke his promises to Iran and Poland, staged a coup in Czechoslovakia, blockaded West Berlin, and approved North Korea's invasion of South Korea.

The bitter domestic debates over America's intentions and conduct in the three global conflicts of the twentieth century were revealing, particularly given the favorable outcome of all three conflicts for the United States. And these divisions have persisted long after the Cold War. Disagreements about America's global responsibilities have been further sharpened by the absence of any single challenger to U.S. military and economic preeminence. In any case, the domestic quarrels are much more than academic exercises. Unresolved questions about foreign policy dampen the prospects for concerted action between Congress and the White House. Meanwhile, America's allies have difficulty conducting their own foreign policies when the United States fails to provide coherent leadership. Potential adversaries are then tempted to exploit the lack of American resolve.

In sum, in the new millennium the United States faces the world with attitudes and behavior patterns formed by its long and ambivalent relationship with foreign powers. The Soviet-American rivalry dominated world politics for nearly half a century, with profound implications for the domestic and foreign policies of nearly every country in the world, and the legacy of the U.S. role in that rivalry continues to be felt in the twenty-first century, at home and abroad. The country's erratic behavior since the Cold War has equally profound consequences for the new century. The chapters that follow will explore both the Cold War experience and the subsequent conduct of the United States in the context of this enduring style of foreign policy.