



President Barack Obama forcefully told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu it was time to restart the Palestinian peace process, in a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House, May 18, 2009, in Washington, D.C. (AMOS MOSHE MILNER—GPO VIA GETTY IMAGES)

THE CONSTITUTION has been described as an “invitation to struggle” between the President and Congress over the making of foreign policy.

Look at the tugging and hauling of the last several decades. The post-World War II bipartisan consensus that produced such epic breakthroughs as the creation of the United Nations, the Marshall Plan for European economic recovery and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization foundered in the turmoil of the Vietnam War. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the lack of agreement on the U.S. role in the post-cold-war world generated even more contention. Following the horrific events of September 11, 2001, the country found itself in a perilous new time, and, ironically, conflict between the branches continued unabated:

- The Congress creates a new executive Department of Homeland Security that the President initially opposed due to fears of inefficiency and redundancy.
- The President unilaterally withdraws from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, even though the Senate had ratified the treaty. The President believes that he has a constitutional right to abandon treaties at his discretion.
- Congress authorizes a special, bipartisan federal commission on the intelligence failures prior to 9/11. The White House originally opposed the independent panel as unnecessary.
- The President asks for an \$87 billion grant to rebuild Iraq; the Senate instead approves a loan that must be paid back relatively quickly.

• Opposition from some Republican senators threatens the ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in 2010, a cornerstone of President Barack Obama’s “reset” of U.S.-Russia relations; treaty ratification requires the support of at least 67 senators.

How can a President provide effective leadership abroad if Congress blocks his policy initiatives? How can Congress give the President full rein over foreign policy without abdicating powers vested in it by the Constitution? In making foreign policy, should the President lead or be a coequal partner? Which branch of government determines the nation’s foreign policy and which one is responsible for carrying it out? And what is the role of the public?

America’s foreign policy is the expression of its goals in the world and of how it proposes to achieve them. It is a reflection of the nation’s interests, the most basic of which are sovereignty and independence. But there are many more: democracy, economic security, protection of human rights, environmental security.

Foreign policy is also an expression of how a nation relates to other countries. If the nation turns inward and chooses to have nothing to do with its neighbors, that choice is its foreign policy. Today such a choice is hardly practical because the

This article was written by Nancy Hoepli-Phalon, FPA’s editor in chief from 1981 to 1998. It has been updated by FPA editors.

world has become too interdependent for any country, least of all the U.S., to isolate itself. Every facet of life in America is affected by decisions made in other parts of the world.

And foreign policy is an expression of preferences for particular instruments, such as diplomacy or economic power or military force.

Compared to every other liberal democracy, the U.S. makes its foreign policy in a cumbersome way. The framers of the Constitution, wary of impulsive decisions that could embroil the country in war, built into that document a number of safeguards that have prevented tyranny, but sometimes at the cost of speed and efficiency. These safeguards frequently pit Congress against the executive branch, make it difficult to develop and implement a cohesive foreign policy, create uncertainty as to what that policy is, and give foreign governments and special interests an opportunity to apply pressure at many points, not just one.

The complexity of foreign policymaking has greatly increased with the blurring of the distinction between foreign and domestic issues. More and more the two overlap as a

consequence of global interdependence and the breakdown of traditional barriers. Among many examples, the near-collapse of the global financial system in 2008 only affirmed the extent of the world's linkages. In turn, the definition of foreign policy expands into issues ranging from financial regulatory reform to climate change.

Economics—and especially trade—is one of the areas in which foreign and domestic concerns invariably intersect. U.S. tax policy is domestic, but it affects an American manufacturer's cost of doing business and the competitiveness of his products. American labor laws affect the number of workers hired, the number of jobs available in the U.S. and the number of Americans who are—or who are not—looking for work. In fact, almost every law relating to business or labor also has an impact, directly or indirectly, on American foreign trade.

Finally, developments that the framers of the Constitution could not have foreseen have added to the complexity of policymaking. These include the growth in the outreach and influence of the media (especially the internet), political organizations and special-interest groups. ■

CONGRESS, THE PRESIDENT AND FOREIGN POLICY

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION divides power between the three branches of government: the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. It also gives each branch some check on the other. The President can veto legislation; Congress can override the President's veto; the courts can declare a law of Congress or an act of the President unconstitutional—although they have been reluctant to act on the issues of “high policy” that have traditionally been the realm of foreign affairs.

The Founding Fathers, conditioned by their colonial experience, were suspicious of executive power, which they equated with the oppressive British monarchy and colonial governors. They regarded Congress as the most “democratic” of the three branches.

Congress's power to tax and control government spending—the “power of the purse”—is possibly its most important. Although the President usually cannot spend money not appropriated by Congress, he has always been granted some latitude in emergencies. President Bill Clinton, during the Mexican peso crisis of 1994–95, circumvented Congress, which opposed a bailout for Mexico, by making a loan from funds at his disposal.

The Constitution assigns the Senate a distinctive role in the foreign policy process—to advise the President in negotiating agreements, to consent to them once they have been signed and to approve presidential appointments, including the secretary of state, other high officials of the State Department, ambassadors and career Foreign Service Officers. The Senate does not have to consent to or reject a treaty. The Senate can approve a treaty and in the process amend it or attach reservations. These must be approved by the other country or countries signing the treaty before it enters into force.

Since the Vietnam War, Congress has become more assertive in foreign affairs. This is partly a result of the breakdown of the postwar bipartisan consensus in foreign policy (the principle that politics stops at the water's edge); partly in reaction to what Congress saw as the executive's abuse of power; and partly due to the fact that money has become more important in carrying out foreign policy—and Congress controls the money.

The Senate used to confirm nominees routinely. That is no longer the case. Competent ambassadorial designates are sometimes held up or denied, while less-competent ones may sail through. Sometimes a nomination may be delayed by one or more members of the committee as a bargaining tactic in order to gain leverage with the Administration. The U.S. Senate has so far indefinitely delayed the nomination of Matthew Byrza to the post of U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan, a position that has been vacant for over a year and a half, in part due to the influence of domestic Armenian and Azeri lobby groups.

The President's role

Under the Constitution, the President serves as head of state and head of government. In most other governments (Britain's and Germany's, for example), the two functions are separate. As head of state, the President is, in effect, the personification of the U.S.—its visible image, its official voice and its primary representative to the outside world. As head of government, he formulates foreign policy, supervises its implementation and attempts to obtain the resources to support it. He also organizes and directs the departments and agencies that play a part in the foreign policy process. Along with the Vice-

President, he is the only government official elected nationally. This places him in a unique position to identify, express and pursue the "national interests" of the U.S.

The President's specific foreign policy powers under the Constitution are few and restricted. He serves as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy; nominates and appoints ambassadors and other public ministers, subject to the advice and consent of the Senate; and makes treaties, by and with the advice of the Senate, provided two thirds of the senators present concur.

The President's specific powers may be few but his role in foreign policy, many believe, is crucial. "Only the President, by defining and articulating our interests," writes Lee Hamilton, who served for 34 years as Democratic Representative from Indiana, "can restrain the experts and bring along voters and a reluctant Congress in support of American leadership." Attention to domestic issues can often supplant foreign policy ones in the context of American politics, so the President's ability to communicate the importance of U.S. engagement with the world to the public will be increasingly significant.

Treaty-making

The framers deliberately made treaty-making cumbersome so that the country could not enter into alliances lightly. Thomas Jefferson wrote concerning treaties, "...our system is to have none with any nation, as far as can be avoided." Behind that proscription was a fear of "entangling foreign alliances" that might lead to war.

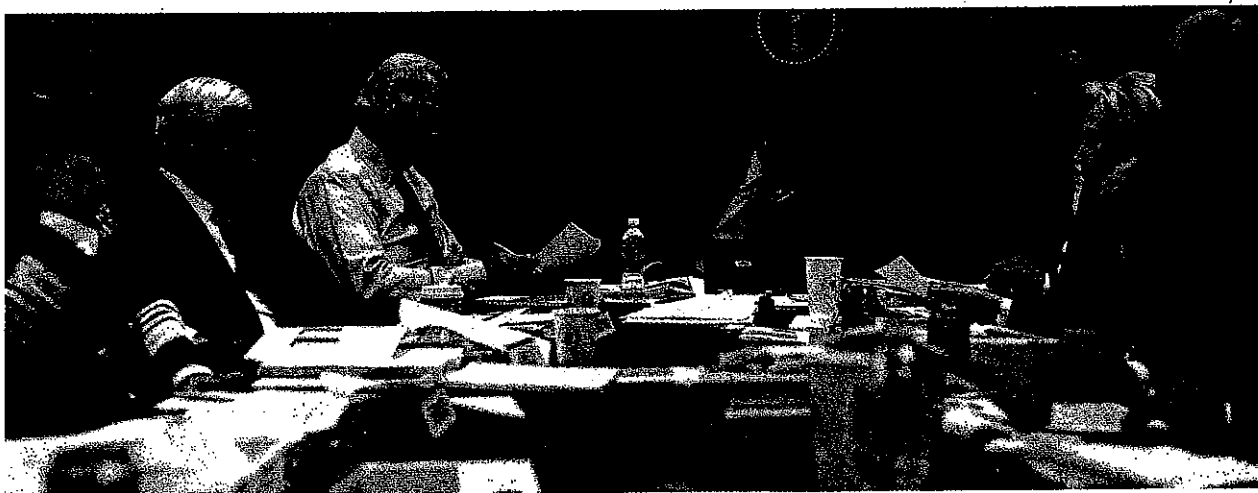
The difficulty of convincing two thirds of the Senate to consent to controversial treaties has prompted Presidents to substitute executive agreements with other countries for treaties. (Executive agreements are either written or oral and they usually commit the parties to undertake certain steps or to accept obligations.) Most of the understandings and commitments between the U.S. and foreign governments today

take the form of executive agreements, although these are nowhere mentioned in the Constitution. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and U.S. membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) are considered congressional-executive agreements: both were voted on and passed by a simple majority vote in the House of Representatives and Senate under the terms of preexisting legislation. While the use of this mechanism has been challenged in the third realm of U.S. politics—the judicial—so far the Supreme Court has refused to rule on the issue.

Power to make war

Although the President is the Commander in Chief, the power to declare war rests with Congress. Did the Constitution intend that all uses of force be declared by Congress? Scholars disagree. In any event, Congress has only exercised the right in response to a presidential request. There have been only five *declared* wars in the nation's history (World War II, 1941–45, was the last declared war), a fact which illustrates both the changes in the nature of international conflict and the shift to the President of the power to employ the armed forces without a legal authorization by Congress. The most recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq were no exception, as the Congress only gave its support of the President's right to use force at his discretion.

The President also has the power to receive foreign ambassadors and, in effect, to recognize foreign governments. The President has two additional informal but influential powers in foreign affairs. One of these is the ability to determine the national agenda—or bring issues to the forefront of public attention and concern. The other—which ranks among the President's most potent weapons for controlling foreign policy—is the power to commit the nation to a particular course of action diplomatically. Once he does so, it can be extremely difficult for the President's opponents to alter that course.



President Obama meets with his advisers about the situation in Pakistan in the White House Situation Room, October 7, 2009. With him (left to right) are Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Vice President Joe Biden, (Obama), National Security Adviser Gen. James Jones, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, then Director of National Intelligence, Adm. Dennis C. Blair, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Leon Panetta. (PETE SOUZA—THE WHITE HOUSE/GETTY IMAGES)

THE POLICYMAKING MACHINERY

MAKING FOREIGN POLICY requires the participation of the President, the executive branch, Congress and the public. Conducting foreign policy, on the other hand, is the exclusive prerogative of the President and his subordinates in the executive branch. The distinction is fuzzy but important: you *make* policy when you decide to protect the security of the Persian Gulf; you *conduct* policy when you send the Navy to do it.

Until World War II, one agency, the Department of State, established in 1789 and the highest-ranking Cabinet department, and one individual, the secretary of state, who is directly responsible to the President, managed foreign affairs. The traditional functions of the State Department and its professional diplomatic corps, the Foreign Service, include negotiating on behalf of the U.S. government with foreign governments and in international organizations; defending the U.S. position in the world; reporting on and analyzing conditions in foreign countries and institutions such as the UN; representing the American people and current U.S. policies to the world; promoting relations with decision-makers abroad; advancing U.S. trade and investment; and protecting U.S. nationals overseas from discriminatory and/or inhumane treatment. It currently directly employs nearly 20,000 people worldwide and another 30,000 local employees to help support department needs abroad in some 250 embassies, missions, consulates and branch offices.

The U.S. emerged from World War II a nuclear superpower with global interests. The National Security Act of 1947, among other things, created a Department of Defense, a permanent intelligence agency and a small Cabinet-level National Security Council (NSC), which includes the President, the Vice-President, the secretaries of State, Defense and Treasury, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of National Intelligence, to help the President manage and coordinate foreign policy. The NSC staff, headed by the President's national security adviser, consists of specialists in geographic areas and functional issues, such as arms control.

Policymaking machinery tends to expand or contract,

depending on the exigencies of the situation. The outbreak of the cold war with the Soviet Union within months of the Allied victory in World War II put U.S. security and the containment of communism at the top of the nation's agenda. This meant that the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) frequently shared the foreign policy limelight with the State Department. A host of new agencies was also created to deal with security issues, from the National Security Agency, which collected, evaluated and disseminated intelligence gleaned from electronic communications, to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency which proposed, implemented and monitored measures to limit or reduce weapons of war.

Cold-war agencies. Other agencies created during the cold war to deal with America's expanded global responsibilities were the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). USIA planned and conducted informational and propaganda programs abroad. Its radio arm, the Voice of America, is a powerful shortwave radio network capable of beaming programs to most countries.

USAID administers foreign economic assistance programs. In consultation with foreign governments, it formulates aid projects, establishes procedures for carrying them out, and provides experts and other personnel.

The Pentagon. Military power serves as an instrument of diplomacy—as a means of achieving goals defined by civilian officials of the government. The head of the Defense Department is a civilian secretary who serves in the President's Cabinet. The principal military adviser to the President is the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a strategy board consisting of the senior officers of the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. The chairman is designated by the President.

When, where and to what extent the U.S. should use its armed forces to achieve its foreign policy objectives is a highly charged issue. Since World War II, U.S. troops have served in Korea, Southeast Asia, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the 1990s, the will to send U.S. troops abroad seemed to dissipate. In the aftermath of 9/11, however, the U.S. has engaged in two major military actions, in Iraq and Afghanistan, involving hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Additionally, the U.S. has taken on the burden of a worldwide war on terrorism, leading many to wonder whether the U.S. remains ambivalent about sending troops abroad.

Intelligence. The "intelligence community" is a group of federal agencies that includes the CIA, the National Security Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency. Since the intelligence reforms in response to 9/11, one could arguably add the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the



Aerial photograph of the Pentagon, September 26, 2003 (ANDY DUNAWAY—USA/GETTY IMAGES)

Federal Bureau of Intelligence (FBI) and various other acronyms to the list (see topic on "American National Security Since 9/11," p. 23). They collect information (for example, how many nuclear weapons China possesses), assess its accuracy and reliability, and disseminate the information to decisionmakers. In addition, the intelligence community, most notably the CIA, undertakes, with the approval of the President, clandestine operations.

Other executive departments. Since the earliest days of the Republic, the Treasury Department has played a major role in foreign relations. It is concerned today with the stability of the dollar abroad, foreign-exchange rates, commodity prices, debt service on foreign loans and bread-and-butter issues that affect the well-being and prosperity of the American people. The Office of Foreign Assets Control within the Treasury is also responsible for implementing and enforcing various U.S. economic and trade sanctions.

Other executive departments deeply involved in foreign policymaking are Commerce (which in 1995 the Republican majority in Congress hoped to abolish), the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Labor, Agriculture and Energy. Following the demise of the cold war, the priorities on the U.S. global agenda shifted pronouncedly from national security concerns to the creation of new opportunities for trade, commerce and investment. Hence the consolidation of some of the cold-war agencies. In October 1998, both the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the USIA were abolished and their duties were assigned to the State Department. While USAID still remains in business, its staff now reports to the secretary of state instead of directly to the White House.

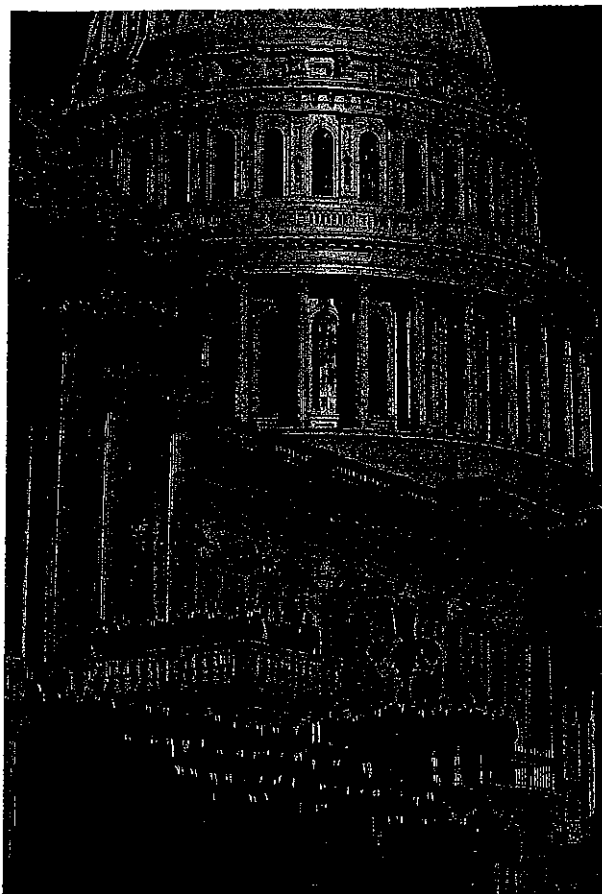
More recently, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, which began functioning in early 2003, substantially altered the role of executive departments in foreign policy matters. The department, which comprises over 230,000 employees from 22 separate agencies, has become extremely powerful in matters relating to trade, borders, immigration and security.

Formulation

George Washington once remarked that the U.S. ought to have the most successful foreign policy of any country in the world because it had so many self-styled secretaries of state. Since his day, the difficulty of developing a cohesive, relevant and feasible foreign policy has increased enormously.

Theoretically, the process of formulation should begin with a clear definition of the national interests, followed by a delineation of the policies that would promote those interests and the course of action by the various departments and agencies that would further those policies, as well as the allocation of the resources needed to carry them out.

In practice, no system is likely to produce a cohesive, viable and supportable foreign policy. The national interest is a cluster of particular interests, and the agencies and staffs involved may have very different views as to what it should be. ■



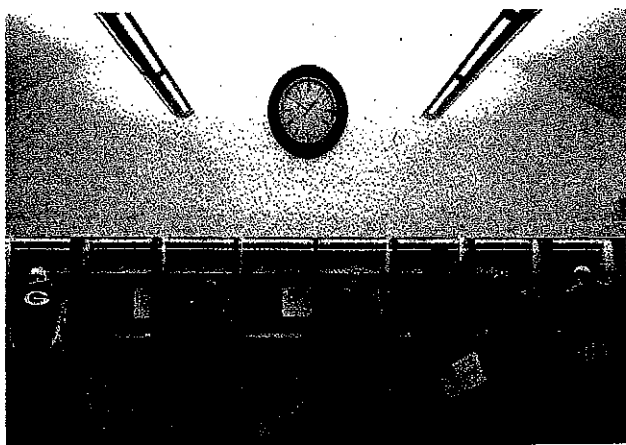
Newly elected freshmen members of the upcoming 112th Congress pose for a group photo on the steps of the U.S. Capitol on November 19, 2010, in Washington, D.C. They are due to take office in January 2011. (MARK WILSON—GETTY IMAGES)

THE AMERICAN POLITICAL PROCESS

Throughout most of U.S. history, a very small group of people conducted foreign affairs. In the minds of this "elite," public participation had no place in the management of foreign relations. It was President Woodrow Wilson, a tireless champion of democracy, who was determined to "democratize" diplomacy—to do away with "secret deals" arrived at "behind the backs of the people" in favor of "open covenants openly arrived at." His ideas had a profound impact on the U.S. conduct of international relations long after his era.

Not all members of the public exert the same degree of influence on policymaking. Social scientists tend to classify the public into three groups: the public-at-large or mass opinion, the attentive public and organized interest groups.

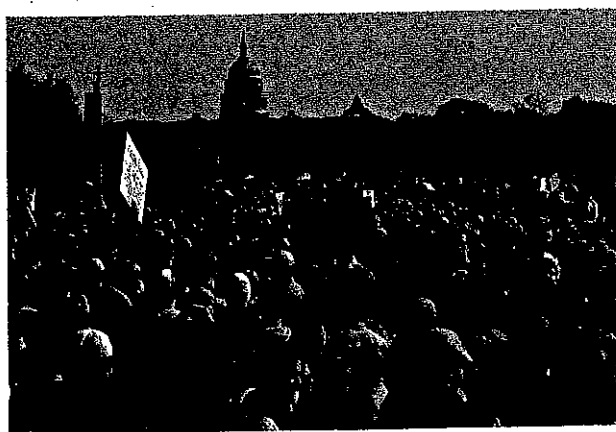
The public-at-large tends to have less interest in foreign policy issues than in local and family concerns. It tends to be poorly informed and sometimes distressingly ignorant. In a study conducted a few years ago, most high-school students could not identify the U.S. on an unlabeled map of



Voters cast their ballots in Westport, WI, on November 2, 2010, in elections that recalibrated the balance of power in Washington and across the nation. (NARAYAN MAHO—THE NEW YORK TIMES)

the world. The public-at-large is also crisis-oriented. Its interest is aroused by vivid television coverage—for example, the events of 9/11—that demand some kind of response. Finally, the public's foreign policy outlook tends to change with some regularity—from isolationist to interventionist and back.

The attentive public—or elite opinion on foreign policy—represents perhaps 10%–20% of the American people. It consists of citizens who are genuinely interested and involved. They tend to be better educated and more informed. Many communicate their views to policymakers in Washington. They write letters, sign petitions, visit their representatives. The attentive public helps focus the attention and arouse the interest of the apathetic. They participate in the activities of organizations like the Foreign Policy Association, World Affairs Councils, the United Nations Association of the U.S.A., the American Association of University Women and the League of Women Voters, which have contributed significantly to raising the level of public interest in and understanding of foreign affairs. The public-opinion elite also serves as a source of new and creative ideas for policymakers and as informed critics of prevailing policy.



Tens of thousands of people streamed onto the National Mall in Washington, D.C. on October 30, 2010, for a rally hosted by liberal comics Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. (NICHOLAS KAMM—AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

The third category consists of organized interest groups. There are literally thousands of these. In addition to the “big three”—business, labor and agriculture—they represent every segment of society imaginable—religious denominations, war veterans, Foreign Service Officers, ethnic groups, environmental groups and human-rights advocacy organizations. Many individual business corporations with foreign interests maintain permanent offices in Washington, D.C.

Some of the most intensive and successful lobbying is conducted by executive agencies and officials of the U.S. government. The President has several White House assistants whose responsibility is “legislative relations.” Their primary goal is to gain support for the President’s foreign and domestic programs on Capitol Hill. The Department of State, along with nearly all other executive departments, has a Bureau of Congressional Relations, which monitors Capitol Hill.

Democratization of foreign policy

The foreign policy process is continuously evolving and has become more pluralistic, primarily as the result of the growing interdependence of the U.S. with the rest of the world and the dramatic expansion of the role of the media, particularly the internet. Decisions can no longer be made by the executive branch alone in consultation with a small group of foreign policy experts on the outside. Notes a report by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, a presidential commission created by Congress to provide bipartisan oversight: “America still needs diplomacy between governments, but policies and negotiated agreements will succeed only if they have the support of publics at home and abroad.”

Once engaged, how can citizens make their voices not only heard but effective? What they need most of all is an understanding of the policymaking process. They can then develop an effective strategy for exerting their influence. This includes expressing their goals in a clear message and demonstrating that they have a strong political base and speak for key constituencies. The proliferation of sources for news and opinion, including blogs and online forums, has aided this trend immensely, with the public able to organize and make their views known to opinion-makers as never before.

Wider participation or pluralism in the formulation of policy brings new voices into the process, and as a result decisions are likely to be based on a broader consideration of the issues and a fuller assessment of the alternatives. But greater participation also makes the foreign policy process more cumbersome. Extensive public discussion does not necessarily lead to consensus; it can be divisive and inconclusive, as evidenced in the debate on the U.S.-led attack on Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and President George W. Bush’s war on terrorism. It is especially unsuited to formulating long-range national strategy or addressing complex issues. But democracies are often unwieldy and untidy. As the British statesman Sir Winston Churchill once remarked, democracy is “the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” ■

CHAPTER ONE

The American Approach to Foreign Policy



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.

Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence. In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage. We seek instead to create a balance of power that favors human freedom.... We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.

President George W. Bush
Introduction, "National Security Strategy of the
United States of America"
September 2002

These words capture the global ambitions of an American president who, despite his optimistic tone, was still recovering from the deadliest attacks ever on his country. The United States lost more than lives when terrorists struck on September 11, 2001. Its sense of invulnerability, engrained for more than two centuries, was shattered. Still, the nation had overcome greater challenges during its rise to world power, and no other country came close to matching its wealth and military muscle. The United States would rise again.

The rest, as they say, is history. When President Bush left office in January 2009, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks was still at large. Afghanistan and Iraq remained war zones rather than the flowering democracies expected by Pentagon strategists.¹ At home, years of reckless bank lending had sparked the worse economic crisis since the Great Depression. Making matters worse for American foreign policy, the United States had lost much of its moral influence, or "soft power." Public opinion surveys found that the citizens of most foreign countries had lost respect for the United States since Bush came to power and launched his "forward-leaning" military policy. By 2005 the United States was widely seen as the primary threat to world peace.² The economic crisis, which quickly assumed global proportions, prompted even more resentment because it was "made in the USA."

Not so long ago, the United States enjoyed the stature of global pre-eminence, having defeated the fascist states of Germany and Japan in World War II. The nation emerged victorious again in 1991 from its half-century of struggle with the Soviet Union. For many Americans, the outcome of the Cold War affirmed the superiority of their political and economic system. The combination of individual liberty and free enterprise had proven superior to the one-party governments and state-owned industries of the communist bloc. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Chinese leaders had long since scrapped their communist economy in favor of capitalism. One noted scholar observed, "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of history, but the end of history as such, that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."³

Winning the peace, however, proved difficult for the United States. As smoldering ethnic and religious conflicts reignited in many regions in the 1990s, government officials could not agree on a defense strategy to

1. Nearly 5,000 American troops died in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars between 2002 and 2008. The costs of these wars exceeded \$800 billion, or about \$3,000 for every American citizen. General Accountability Office, "Global War on Terrorism: Reported Obligations for the Department of Defense," September 15, 2008, www.gao.gov/new.items/d08853r.pdf.

2. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Trends 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2005).

3. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest* (Summer 1989): 4.

replace communist "containment," the doctrine that had linked all Cold War administrations. Unable to reach a consensus, Washington went in every direction at once. President Bill Clinton pledged to "engage" friends and foes alike, but Congress froze U.S. dues payments to the United Nations, slashed foreign aid, and blocked a variety of international agreements. American troops intervened in Somalia, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia, but not in Rwanda and Burundi, sites of the worst genocide since World War II.

For its part, after the Cold War the general public showed little interest in foreign affairs. Repeated terrorist attacks on U.S. targets, including New York City's World Trade Center in February 1993, did not arouse much public concern or provoke strong countermeasures. Domestic controversies, including the marital infidelities of President Clinton, dominated press coverage. The terrorist threat, it seemed, could be put off for another day.⁴

But that tranquility soon gave way to shock. Anti-American sentiments, voiced even in the friendly capitals of Europe, were put aside in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks by al Qaeda terrorists, who espoused a radical brand of Islamic militarism that threatened all industrialized nations. Yet goodwill toward the United States quickly dissipated as the "Bush Doctrine" alarmed foreign countries with its call for the indefinite extension of American primacy.

In January 2009, President Barack Obama came to power, with global financial markets, foreign governments, and countless citizens at home and abroad looking to him for a way out of the morass. Not only were basic institutions and millions of personal livelihoods at risk, but so was the American dream of unending prosperity and opportunity. Underlying the fears and doubts was a widespread sense that the United States had begun an irreversible decline in its global power. Pessimists saw in the Bush Doctrine the arrogance of American power, tempting other governments to strengthen their own capabilities or form alliances with other countries as a matter of self-preservation. With its military forces depleted and its economy giving way to foreign competition, the United States could only prepare for a "soft landing" into a multipolar world.⁵

At this momentous point in world history, several questions are central to students of American foreign policy. Can the United States restore

4. When asked to identify the biggest foreign policy problems facing the United States in 1999, respondents in a national survey most often replied, "Don't know." John E. Rielly, ed., *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999* (Chicago: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), 11.

5. See Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008) and Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited," *International Security* 31 (Fall 2006): 7-41. For a more optimistic view of American power, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).

its military strength after nearly a decade of war? Can the nation regain its stature as the locomotive of global economic growth? In today's turbulent world, should the United States be primarily concerned with advancing its national interests, or should it seek solutions to global problems such as nuclear proliferation and climate change? Should the United States act as a global policeman—that is, in the skeptical words of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, should the United States “go abroad in search of monsters to destroy?”

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Coming to terms with these questions begins with recognition that American citizens and their leaders, like those of other countries, have a unique perspective of the world beyond their national borders. Many factors affect how governments conduct foreign policy, including the pressures imposed by the international system, the demands of civil society, and the structure of political institutions. Taking into account such factors, along with shared historical experiences, each government adopts a distinctive approach to world politics. National “styles” of foreign policy vary considerably, but all governments exhibit distinctive patterns of behavior as they strive to make sense of developments around them.

As a consequence of the historical detachment of the United States from the European powers both politically and militarily, its national style was molded by its domestic experiences and cultural traditions more than that of other major powers. Such detachment permitted the United States to consolidate its system of government, develop an advanced market economy, and expand its territory across North America. Yet the nation found this detachment difficult to sustain once it emerged as a great power early in the twentieth century and played a decisive role in the two world wars. Still, until the tragedy of 9/11, Americans felt largely insulated from the perils of the “outside world”—a luxury no longer possible after that fateful day.

This book explores how America's national style has influenced its conduct of foreign policy as a great power. Beginning in the aftermath of World War II and stretching into the global war on terror, it will consider how the ambivalent attitude of many Americans—a fluctuating love-hate relationship with the interstate system—reflects historical patterns established long before the United States joined the ranks of the great powers. The first half of this book (Chapters 2–7) examines how this approach to foreign affairs both complicated and contributed to America's victory in the Cold War. The second half (Chapters 8–13) reviews the U.S. government's efforts to consolidate its gains and adapt to the more complex international system of the twenty-first century.

Of particular concern in the final chapters is the U.S. response to the terrorist attacks of September 2001, to a wave of regional conflicts overseas, and to the global economic crisis that began late in 2008 and persists today. The book concludes by considering the prospects for the renewal of American power and global leadership under President Obama.

The
American
Approach
to Foreign
Policy

THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN PRIMACY

American foreign policy since World War II is largely the story of the tension between the interstate system and the nation's political culture. Both the monumental achievements of the United States and its failures can be attributed to this uneasy relationship. In the anarchic nation-state system that came into place a century before America's independence, each state must ultimately depend on itself for its preservation and safety. Heads of state in such a system tend to regard their counterparts as potential competitors, and it does not take much for one state to arouse another's suspicions and to conjure reciprocal images of hostility. This unstable global context, however, historically has been alien to many Americans, who have felt free of overseas pressures and secure in their own system of government and civil society. Although such aloofness was possible during the nation's formative years, it proved more difficult to sustain after the United States emerged as a major world power in the twentieth century. Still, American foreign policy continued to reflect the cultural attitudes and beliefs that prevailed earlier. The experience of the United States today can be traced in large measure to these persistent cultural influences.

SHIFTS IN THE BALANCE OF POWER

Prior to the twentieth 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 Britain together with Austria, France, and Russia. The Concert of Europe, devised to implement the decisions of the Congress of Vienna, imposed a rare degree of stability on Europe. It also allowed the United States to fulfill President George Washington's pledge to avoid "permanent alliances."

That balance was shattered, however, by Germany's unification in 1871 and the subsequent demise of several European empires, which forced the United States to play a pivotal role as a great power. The growing strength of Germany hastened the decline of Britain's power. With the collapse of czarist Russia in 1917 and the transfer of almost two million German soldiers from the Russian to the western front, a German

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victory in World War I became a distinct possibility. The United States would then have faced German domination across Europe. 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 ultimately crushed Germany's imperial ambitions.

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. 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. Almost single-handedly, Wilson persuaded European leaders to sign the Treaty of Versailles, which ended the war, and to join the League of Nations. "America is the hope of the world," Wilson declared upon his return from France.

In seeking to transform world politics, however, Wilson neglected American politics, particularly the role of Congress in ratifying treaties. Senate leaders felt snubbed by Wilson, who had 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 at stake. The Senate therefore rejected the treaty, and the United States never joined the League.

Although the postwar U.S. economy rivaled that of all Europe, the U.S. government refused to define for the nation a political and military role consistent with its economic power. The United States was decisive in Germany's defeat, but its leaders wanted nothing to do with great-power politics. On the contrary, the United States sought to abolish war 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, Congress passed two Neutrality Acts that prevented an assertive American response.

The United States was forced back into the fray when Europe's balance of power was upset by the eruption of World War II in 1939 and the German defeat of France in 1940. With America again facing the possibility of Britain's defeat and the control of Eurasia by Germany and its allies, President Franklin D. Roosevelt undertook several measures to

The
American
Approach
to Foreign
Policy

IMPACT AND INFLUENCE



WOODROW WILSON

The American style of foreign policy was personified nearly a century ago by President Woodrow Wilson (left). 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.

Shown here with French president Raymond Poincaré, Wilson led the United States and its allies to victory in World War I, and then chaired the U.S. commission 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, and the United States never joined the League of Nations.

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. Roosevelt, however, registered little concern about Japan's military expansion across East Asia. By the time Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December 1941, a second and even bloodier world war was inevitable. Its outcome would determine the balance of power for the rest of the twentieth century.

Before the world wars, the United States did not maintain a global military or diplomatic presence. The nation was secure in the Western Hemisphere, which during the century after the American Revolution had witnessed the dismantling of European colonial control. Still, the great powers of Europe engaged in unending spasms of political violence that threatened to draw in the United States, a prospect that had little appeal. "Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns," President Washington observed in his 1796 Farewell Address. "Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course." Washington's successors followed his advice, expanding westward without assistance and avoiding peacetime military alliances for more than 150 years.

By 1900, the United States, along with Japan, had joined the ranks of the great powers through a combination of regional military expansion and global economic trade. But unlike Japan, which lacked many vital natural resources and began the twentieth century as a "predator" state, the United States was largely satisfied, both with its ample domestic resources and the absence of foreseeable threats across its borders. Maintaining that security, while effectively distancing the United States from the disputes of the other great powers, had served the nation well. The rise of Germany in Europe and Japan in Asia, however, threatened America's "splendid isolation" in the Western Hemisphere.

The timing of the U.S. entry into the world wars was determined by events overseas. Berlin's decision in 1917 to launch submarine warfare forced the United States into military action, and Tokyo's decision in 1941 to attack the U.S. fleet at anchor in Hawaii led to the American declaration of war against Japan. 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 would constitute a grave threat to their own security. That the United States twice allowed others to dictate its security strategy stemmed from its own peculiar national style.

The defense of the United States has always involved more than physical security. The German threat during World War I was not one of immediate invasion, nor was an invasion the primary threat even after Germany's defeat of France early in World War II. Rather, the United States was forced to intervene because American *society* was threatened. If Germany controlled Eurasia, the United States would have to be on constant alert for attack. To maintain its hemispheric security, it would

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

The same cultural influences shaped the nation's actions during and after the Cold War. Yet during this more recent period, the threats posed by adversaries prompted American leaders to create a massive military machine that would be maintained in war and peace. After World War II, the U.S. War Department became the U.S. Defense Department, a change that underscored the permanence of American military primacy. American security, including its cultural values, would be always threatened, whether by communist governments, terrorist groups, or other adversaries seeking to challenge the United States.

THE AMERICAN SENSE OF DESTINY

The style reflected in the U.S. response to war in Europe and later to the Cold War was the product of domestic experience. 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 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. The nature of democracy has to be considered as well. The United States saw itself as the world's first constitutional democracy and, as such, the first country whose government would hold its leaders accountable to the public at large. In this sense, the United States was the world's "first new nation."⁶

Democratic theory posits that people are potentially rational and moral, which means that they can settle their differences by reasoned deliberation and moral exhortation. Americans generally believed that peace—the result of harmony among people—was a natural condition, whereas conflict was a deviation caused primarily by wicked leaders—that is, those whose morality and reason had been corrupted. "Power politics," the defining element of Old World statecraft, was an instrument used by selfish and autocratic rulers for whom war was a grand game. They could remain in their palatial homes and suffer none of war's hardships. The burdens fell upon the ordinary people, who had to leave their families to fight, endure 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, whereas

6. Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

democratic nations, in which the people controlled and regularly changed their leaders, were peaceful and moral.⁷

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. Democracy and peaceful behavior were thus logically viewed as synonymous. Americans rarely wondered whether democracy was responsible for the peace they enjoyed or whether it 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. To quarantine itself from Europe's hierarchical social structures and violent conflicts, the United States had to maintain its hemispheric detachment, which was the morally correct policy. "Repudiation of Europe," novelist John Dos Passos once said, "is, after all, America's main excuse for being."

From the beginning, 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 considered it their providential mission to inspire other societies to follow their lead, and the massive wave of immigration of the late nineteenth century reinforced this sense of destiny. The United States, then, would voluntarily reject power politics as unfit for its domestic or foreign policy. The Monroe Doctrine, proclaimed in 1823, first stressed 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. In this spirit, Monroe warned, "We should consider any attempt on [Europeans'] part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety."⁸

This view also allowed the United States to behave hypocritically by acting like other nations in its continental expansion while casting its motives in the noblest of terms. This was not the last time the United States would invoke such a double standard, proclaiming a moral position loftier than that of other great powers and then behaving in much the same way. In advocating U.S. military expansion into Mexico in 1845, for example, journalist John O'Sullivan argued that it is "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

7. These assertions form the basis of democratic-peace theory, a prominent school of thought in the study of world politics. For an elaboration and critique, see Tony Smith, *A Pact with the Devil* (New York: Routledge, 2008), chap. 4.

8. Quoted in Armin Rappaport, ed., *Sources in American Diplomacy* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 53.

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, comprising hundreds of happy millions ... governed by God's natural and moral law of equality."⁹

By drawing the distinction between the New and Old Worlds, by warning Europeans to keep their hands off the Western Hemisphere, and by depicting themselves as agents of providence, Americans were in effect opening the way for U.S. primacy on a worldwide basis. This primacy would not take the form of an *empire* or the assumption of sovereign authority over distant territories. Instead, the United States would expand its informal sphere of influence, or *hegemony*, from its base in the Western Hemisphere to the international system as a whole. Such an extension of power by any other state would be highly distressing. And yet American values were presumed to be universal, and American hegemony seemed natural and beneficial to all nations.

THE DEPRECIATION OF POWER POLITICS

The American perception of an international harmony of interests contrasted sharply with the state system's emphasis on the inevitability of conflict and differing interests among states. As noted, Americans traditionally regarded conflict as an abnormal condition, whereas 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, they were attributed to wicked leaders (who could be eliminated), authoritarian political systems (which could be reformed), or misunderstandings (which could be resolved if the adversaries approached each other with sincerity and empathy). Once these obstacles were removed, peace, harmony, and goodwill would reign supreme.

The association of peace with democracy was not the only reason for the American depreciation of power politics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The European countries were, by and large, three-class societies. In addition to a middle class, they contained in their bodies politic an aristocracy, devoted either to keeping itself in power or to recapturing power and returning to the glorious days of a feudal past, and a proletariat, born out of the urbanization and industrialization of the nineteenth century. Because it felt it did not receive a fair share of the national income, the proletariat became a revolutionary class. By contrast,

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

America was, as French political observer Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1835, “born free” as an egalitarian, 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.”¹⁰

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. They never shared this wealth or political power; in fact, the “peculiar institution” of slavery so defied America’s democratic values that it thrust the country into civil war. Otherwise, the United States was politically secure, socially cohesive, and economically prosperous. It resolved most political differences peacefully, and its people could believe in an evolutionary, democratic, economically prosperous historical process. Revolution and radicalism were condemned from this perspective.

Private enterprise and economic development further reinforced this disregard for power politics. John Locke, the British political theorist who inspired the American Founders, believed the role of the state should be to promote “life, liberty, and the pursuit of property.” The best government, Thomas Jefferson declared, was the government that governed least. Arbitrary political interference with the economic laws of the market only upset the results—widespread prosperity and public welfare—these laws were intended to produce. The United States, therefore, would not isolate itself from the outside world in a commercial sense. Indeed, economic expansion based on foreign trade was a central element of early American foreign policy. The key was ensuring that no political strings were attached. As 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 Americans, for whom the benefits of economic freedom were as “self-evident” as the truths stated in the Declaration of Independence. Abundant natural resources, free enterprise, and supportive government policies would enable the American people to become the “people of plenty.”¹¹ Because Americans viewed the power of the state as threatening, they struggled to restrict this power. It was with this purpose in mind that the drafters of the U.S. Constitution divided authority

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

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

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 limit the power of the central government. Domestic conflicts would be resolved by the individual citizen's own economic actions in society.

It was hardly surprising that in these circumstances the solutions to international problems in America's first century were considered to be 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. In short, free trade and peace were one and the same cause.¹²

FOREIGN POLICY AS MORAL MISSION

Americans' perception of their nation as *exceptional*, or qualitatively different than others, is based not on a common ethnic identity, language, or religion, but on widely shared beliefs about individual liberties, limited government, and a vigorous civil society. Such principles form a "civil religion" in the United States that defines the relationship between state and society and provides the basis for American nationalism.

Because Americans have commonly viewed themselves as part of an exceptional society, their attitude toward government has been animated historically by a sense of moral mission. John Winthrop, the Puritan defector from the Church of England and first governor of Massachusetts, declared New England in 1630 to be a "city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." The European settlers of North America, he proclaimed, would establish a haven of piety, solidarity, and just government far from the corrupted halls of religion and government in the Old World. "If we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken," Winthrop warned, "we shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going."¹³

References to religious values and symbols have since been common in the discourse of American politics and foreign policy. To Thomas Jefferson,

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

13. Quoted in Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 37–38.

Americans were “the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, in whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.”¹⁴ In the midst of the Spanish-American War, President William McKinley claimed that he received divine guidance to “educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died.”¹⁵ And as Ronald Reagan observed during the revived Cold War of the 1980s, “There is sin and evil in the world, and we’re enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might.”¹⁶

This sense of divine mission extends to American citizens as well. A 1998 survey of the citizens of forty-three countries found that Americans ranked first in believing in a “personal God,” in following “absolute guidelines about what is good and evil,” and in assigning religion a “very important” role in their lives.¹⁷ Such views, in turn, shape the foreign policy views of American citizens. In a 2004 survey, nearly three-fourths of respondents believed “following moral principles” should be a top foreign policy priority (see Table 1-1).¹⁸

Although more pronounced in recent years, these religious attitudes have long influenced American foreign policy. Frequently, their impact is even profound, especially on the use of military force. The immoral enemy who threatens the integrity, if not the existence, of the nation’s democratic principles has to be destroyed. American power, then, has to be “righteous” power; only by exercising it fully can Americans ensure salvation. Thus the world wars of the early twentieth century became profound moral as well as geopolitical challenges. 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—and making its new rulers responsible to the people they governed, thereby converting the menacing regime into a peaceful democratic state and banishing power politics for all time. Once that aim was achieved, the United States could again withdraw into itself, secure in the knowledge that American works had once more proved to be “good works.”

14. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Imperial Temptations: The New World Order and America’s Purpose* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1992), 30.

15. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 112.

16. Remarks made to the National Association of Evangelicals, March 8, 1983, and reported in Strobe Talbott, ed., *The Russians and Reagan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 113.

17. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “Foreign Policy Attitudes Now Driven by 9/11 and Iraq,” August 18, 2004; Ronald Inglehart, Miguel Basanez, and Alejandro Moreno, *Human Values and Beliefs: A Cross Cultural Sourcebook* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

18. Religious beliefs are so closely tied to foreign policy opinions that a “divine divide” has appeared in recent surveys. See Daniel Yankelovich, “Poll Positions,” *Foreign Affairs* 84 (September–October 2005): 2–16; and James L. Guth, John C. Green, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Corwin E. Smidt, “Faith and Foreign Policy: A View from the Pews,” *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 3 (Fall 2004): 3–9.

TABLE 1. American Foreign Policy Priorities: American Public Opinion, 2004

	Percent who believe . . . should be the top priority in American foreign policy
Following moral principles	72
Being cautious	66
Being decisive	62
Being practical	58
Being compassionate	54
Being flexible	40
Following religious principles	33
Being idealistic	25
Being forceful	23

Source: PEW Research Center for the People and the Press, "Foreign Policy Attitudes Now: Driven by 9/11 and Iraq," August 18, 2004, 23.

For similar reasons, American leaders divorced force from diplomacy during the nation's early years. In peacetime, diplomacy was supposed to preserve the harmony among states. Although Americans regarded diplomacy as a rational process for straightening out misunderstandings between nations, they also were extremely suspicious of it. Diplomacy, in their view, required bargaining and compromise among states that would lead inevitably to the sacrifice of the nation's moral purity. 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. As for the use of military force, early American leaders feared that a standing army would ultimately threaten the central government and the liberty of private citizens. When military muscle was required, the Department of War would be called on to mobilize a largely reserve force, which would be disbanded after the conflict.

This pattern has been observed historically in American foreign policy: a pendulum-like swing "back and forth between the extremes of an indiscriminate detachment from great-power politics and an equally indiscriminate internationalism or globalism."¹⁹ Woodrow Wilson's frustrations over the League of Nations most clearly illustrate this schizophrenic approach, as the U.S. government veered from its attempt to save the world toward an equally determined effort to escape from it. According to Harvard professor Stanley Hoffmann, "Both extremes have

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

in common the intention to avoid the contamination of unhealthy foreign troubles.”²⁰

Since the Cold War, both impulses have been evident at once. President Clinton’s engagement policy coincided with Congress’s backlash against UN peacekeeping and foreign aid. His successor’s quest to make the Middle East safe for democracy reinforced his retreat from a variety of global agreements. Even when the United States is “engaged,” its interests are protected through special treatment: veto power in the UN Security Council, weighted voting in the World Bank, command of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces, and exemptions from key provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the International Criminal Court treaty.²¹ The war on terrorism naturally lends itself to the belief that America again faces a climactic showdown between good and evil, and that all measures must be used to see that justice prevails. Compromise is not possible, nor can one submit to the delays and constraints posed by international law and organizations. Even the concerns of presumed allies must be disregarded if they stand in the way of the exercise of righteous power.

Although Americans traditionally have regarded their values as universal and their government’s actions on the world stage as inspired by “special providence,” they frequently have disagreed about the appropriate *means* for achieving foreign policy goals.²² The first and more modest path—leading by example—would encourage citizens to focus on domestic development, restrain Washington from reckless foreign adventures, and prevent the rise of a strong, expensive, and potentially oppressive military establishment. The second path—proactively intervening overseas and acting as the world’s policeman—would accelerate the historical trend toward global freedom and vindicate the nation’s moral mission.

“Exemplarists” followed George Washington’s call for detachment in the nation’s first century, whereas the “vindicationists” such as Woodrow Wilson have generally prevailed since the United States became a great power.²³ When President George W. Bush took office in 2001, he embraced the nation’s earlier tradition. “I think the United States must be humble,” Bush said in a presidential debate in October 2000. “We must be proud and confident of our values, but humble in how we treat nations that are figuring out how to chart their own course.” However, the events of September 11, 2001, represented the “perfect vindicationist

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

21. For an elaboration, see David Skidmore, “Understanding the Unilateralist Turn in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1 (July 2005): 207–228.

22. Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

23. H. W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

storm," because they combined overwhelming American military power, a direct attack on the United States by "nonbelievers," and a surge of religious fundamentalism among American citizens.²⁴

President Bush, who was instantly converted to the cause of vindicating American values rather than taking a more passive approach, established the promotion of democracy as the nation's primary mission. As Bush proclaimed at his second inaugural address in 2005,

The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.... Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation's security, and the calling of our time. So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.

Bush's sweeping rhetoric reflected the dramatic changes during his first term, but his call for "ending tyranny in our world" once again revealed the American style of foreign policy. The balance of power did not matter so much as the character and values of America's friends and enemies. World politics was indeed a struggle between good and evil, as Bush's predecessors believed, and it was a moral imperative for the United States to continue its quest to "make the world safe for democracy."

SELF-DOUBTS, REVISIONISM, AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

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 and encourage resistance, former government officials challenge the country's behavior on the op-ed pages, and scholars "revise" the historical record to rebut the conventional wisdom. Such self-criticism is common among democratic states that encourage public dissent. In the United States, however, the public discourse reveals fundamental doubts about the link between the stated goals of American foreign policy and the means chosen to achieve them. In a typical recent critique, historians Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton concluded that American forces throughout history "have fought less to preserve liberty than to extend the power of the United States *in the name of liberty*."²⁵

24. Jonathan Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and U.S. Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy," *International Security* 29 (Spring 2005): 140.

25. Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (New York: Viking, 2005), emphasis in original.

The revisionist historians of the twentieth century advanced two main arguments. First, with the exception of the two world wars, the conflicts in which the United States became entangled did not in fact threaten its security interests. Therefore, the American military interventions that occurred frequently after 1800 were “wars of choice” that were unnecessary or immoral or both.²⁶ The enemy identified as the *provocateur* actually did not represent a direct threat to American security at all. To the contrary, the threat came from within.

Second, the United States became involved in conflicts because its leaders were manipulated by public opinion, by self-serving bureaucrats, 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 struggles. William Appleman Williams, the foremost proponent of this view, argued in 1959 that the United States was driven to global expansion by the fear of economic stagnation and social upheaval at home.²⁷ Similarly, Joyce and Gabriel Kolko argued in 1972 that American foreign policy after World War II was propelled “not by the containment of communism, but rather more directly the extension and expansion of American capitalism.”²⁸

These critics challenged the traditional view that America’s “exceptional” government and social values drove leaders to promote democracy and human rights overseas. (Godfrey Hodgson finds this rendering of American history a “myth.”²⁹) Historians also challenged the notion that the pursuit of economic gain served as an acceptable objective for the United States because it reduced the nation’s appetite for war. Economic expansion, they argued, could not succeed without political and military coercion. 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.

Inspired by the revisionist historians, a new generation of political scientists now contends that concepts such as democracy, liberty, national interests, and balance of power are “socially constructed” by government leaders and are therefore not a legitimate basis for

26. The U.S. government resorted to military force on 330 occasions between 1798 and 2008, and 109 of these uses of force took place after the Cold War. Formal war declarations were issued in just eleven instances, the last one for World War II. Since then, Congress has approved most military interventions through less formal authorizations. Richard F. Grimmett, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 2, 2009).

27. William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959). See also Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963).

28. 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.

29. Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

diplomatic relations.³⁰ In dominating the discourse of American foreign policy, constructivists argue, American leaders have routinely glorified the nation's values, vilified adversaries, and exaggerated overseas threats in order to preserve America's dominant position in the world. The Cold War, David Campbell observed, "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."³¹

The bitter domestic debates over America's intentions and conduct in the three global conflicts of the twentieth century were revealing, particularly in view of the favorable outcome of each for the United States. Such divisions continued after the conflicts of the post-Cold War era. Thomas McCormick has argued that "short-term concerns over the American and global economies" led the United States to war with Iraq in 1991.³² Efforts by the United States in 1993 to bring order to Somalia and later in that decade to stop ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia provoked charges at home of neo-imperialism. Even the attacks of September 11 provided an opportunity for self-criticism. Noam Chomsky, a prominent critic of America's world role, predicted that the war against terrorism would be difficult to win because the United States was itself "a leading terrorist state."³³

The second war in Iraq, launched in 2003, especially provoked criticism because the Bush administration's stated rationale for the war—removing Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction—proved erroneous. President Bush's shift toward democratic state building in Iraq, a mission that drew on America's traditional values and sense of identity, fueled charges that American leaders were acting hypocritically by supporting military dictators (in Pakistan) and repressive monarchs (in Saudi Arabia), by violating the human rights of war prisoners, and even by secretly spying on Americans at home. Those who argued that the war was "all about oil" found sufficient evidence for their argument in President Bush's and Vice President Dick Cheney's past associations with the oil industry.

In summary, today the United States faces the world with attitudes and behavior patterns formed by its long and ambivalent relationship with foreign powers. The Cold War dominated world politics for nearly half a century, with profound implications for the domestic and foreign

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

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

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

33. Noam Chomsky, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 16.

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policies of nearly every other country. The country's erratic behavior since that conflict, its hostility toward international institutions, and its call for a world order based on American primacy are equally vital to world politics today. The United States faces no direct challenge from another world power, and the Bush Doctrine did not spawn anti-American alliances to counter the nation's predominance. Still, U.S. actions provoke opposition and resentment from many foreign governments and societies, and these tensions are unlikely to dissipate soon. The election of Barack Obama in 2008 raised hopes overseas that the United States would "rejoin" the international community, although urgent problems at home were likely to consume much of the new president's energy.

America's love-hate relationship with the world beyond its shores is an enduring reality that must be understood. 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. These lessons of the past are critical as students of American foreign policy, along with America's leaders, consider the nation's future opportunities—and its limitations—in managing the turbulent world beyond its shores.