

War and International Law

America's Foreign Policy: A Brief History

A central function of the U.S. government is to conduct relations with the almost 200 other nations in the world. A nation is a sovereign country, and as such, possesses the highest authority over its territories. All sovereign states are theoretically equal.

Foreign policy determines how America conducts relations with other countries. It is designed to further certain goals. It seeks to assure America's security and defense. It seeks the power to protect and project America's national interests around the world. National interest shapes foreign policy and covers a wide range of political, economic, military, ideological, and humanitarian concerns.

America's foreign policy has changed over time reflecting the change in its national interest. As a new nation after the Revolutionary War, America's prime national interest was to maintain its independence from more powerful European countries. Protected by the Atlantic Ocean, its major foreign policy, as typified by the Monroe Doctrine, was to limit European attempts of further colonization of the Western Hemisphere.

Through the 19th century, America concentrated on creating a nation that spanned the continent, and it avoided foreign entanglements. Once industrialized and more prosperous, it began looking for foreign markets and colonies.

By the turn of the 20th century, the United States had become a minor imperial power, fighting a war with Spain for Cuba and the Philippines and annexing Hawaii and several other territories. World War I engaged the United States in European affairs, but after the war, a wave of isolationist feeling swept the country. Refusing membership in the League of Nations, America turned inward once again. Absorbed by the prosperity of the 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s, America let its military strength erode. It was not prepared for war when the Japanese struck the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor in late 1941.

Emerging from World War II as the most powerful economic power on Earth, the United States changed its foreign policy dramatically. It took the lead in founding the United Nations. It invested billions of dollars through the Marshall Plan to help strengthen war-devastated European democracies. It created a system of alliances, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Central to America's foreign policy in the post-war period was the containment of the Soviet Union

and communism. During the Cold War, the United States and its allies competed with the Soviet Union and its allies militarily, economically, and ideologically. Both sides created massive military forces and huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Although the two superpowers never went to war, the policy of containment led the United States into the bloody Korean and Vietnam wars.

The Cold War ended when the Soviet Union, economically exhausted from competing with the West, disintegrated. This left the United States the only remaining superpower in a world no longer ruled by the logic of containing the Soviet Union.

Through time, various constitutional principles and values have shaped American foreign policy. American foreign policy has favored the self-determination of nations for independence. Based on our commitment to constitutional government, we often favor and support nations that practice democracy. These principles, however, sometimes have conflicted with the goals of national security, economics, or the realities of international politics. In certain cases, America has supported dictatorial governments or intervened to curtail popular political movements.

Taken from: <http://www.crf-usa.org/war-in-iraq/foreign-policy.html>

Discussion

What is foreign policy? How would you characterize American foreign policy during most of the 19th century? At the beginning of the 20th century? Following World War II? Today? What do you think accounts for the differences?

1. **United Nations (UN)**-An international organization formed in 1945 to increase political and economic cooperation among member countries. The organization works on economic and social development programs, improving human rights and reducing global conflicts.
 2. **Containment** was a United States policy to prevent the spread of communism abroad. A component of the **Cold War**, this policy was a response to a series of moves by the Soviet Union to enlarge communist influence in Eastern Europe, China, Korea, Africa, and Vietnam.
 3. **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**- an organization formed in Washington, D.C. (1949), comprising the 12 nations of the Atlantic Pact together with Greece, Turkey, and the Federal Republic of Germany, for the purpose of collective defense against aggression.
 4. **Korean War**- A war, also called the Korean conflict, fought in the early 1950s between the United Nations, supported by the United States, and the communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). The war began in 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea. This was never officially declared a war. This was a "police action" led by the United States and United Nations to prevent the spread of communism.
- * **Note:** The Vietnam War was fought for very similar reasons to the Korean War.
5. **detente** (French word meaning "easing of tensions")- The policy that the United States began to take beginning with President Richard Nixon in the 1970s in which the U.S. began to open up talks with communist countries (especially the Soviet Union and China). Before this, the U.S. had a strong distrust of communist countries, even to the point where the U.S. didn't acknowledge China's communist government. This didn't solve all of the problems, but it was a huge reversal of dealing with communist countries.

If you need further clarification of these terms, flip to the back of this paper.

"Cold War"
A Mr. Wiesen original
To the tune of "Can't Hold Us"
By Maclemore feat. Ryan Lewis

Verse 1

Now when we talk about the Cold War, here's who's involved:
Uncle-Sam and the Soviet mob
It started in the aftermath of World War II
Truman and Stalin could not be friends, so they were through
Stalin's troops set up the Iron Curtain across Eastern Europe
Back in the U.S., this created quite a stirrup
Russia has nukes and the Commies are spreadin'
So the U.S. reacts with the help of George Kanan
Containment's the word, we gotta keep them from movin'
The Marshall Plan follows suit so that Europe starts improvin'
Stalin says no to any dollars from this plan
It becomes a success, people say, "Truman, you da man!"
In the city of Berlin, the people begin to wail
Progress is must faster in the West because they get bail
Why not go to the other side, they have all the aid
Stalin see this, cuts off food, and forms a blockade
The Commies thought they could cripple West Berlin, with a whip or a cane
But the U.S. struck back with the use of a plane.
The airlift drops supplies just short of one year
Stalin gives up and Americans cheer

Refrain

Here when we go back, this is the COLD WAR
Tonight is the night, we'll fight till it's over
So we put our NUKES up like the ceiling can't hold us, like the ceiling can't hold us.
X2

Verse 2

Containment continues when NATO is born
Europe's ideas of government are clearly torn
When China falls to Communism, the U.S. really panics
China turns Red and we can't cure that with Xanax
Conflict in Korea between the North and the South
A proxy war begins and MacArthur can't shut his mouth
The U.S. and U.N. try to reclaim it all
But China comes in, and gives the momentum a stall
A stalemate is reached, its clearly a tie
At the 38th parallel is where we see the divide
So the Cold War's begun, and this lesson is taught
But this is only the beginning, and its about to get hot

