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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
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## **U. S. FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

A lecture delivered  
at the Naval War College  
on 27 October 1953, by  
*Dr. William T. R. Fox*

Gentlemen:

Today is the ninety-fifth birthday of Theodore Roosevelt, who did so much to move the United States out from a side eddy into the main stream of world politics and to transform the United States Navy into an instrument appropriate for carrying out the foreign policy of a great power. This is a particularly good day on which to talk to a Naval War College audience about the development of American foreign policy.

Theodore Roosevelt is firmly associated in our minds with a reawakening of American interest in foreign policy and in naval power, but we ought to remember that it is a *re-awakening*. The remarkable group of men who presided over our national defenses when our Republic was very young were wholly cognizant of the relation between armed force and foreign policy. They knew why the infant republic on the overseas periphery of the Western European civilization area had a chance to grow to maturity. They understood that the predatory powers of Europe would allow this country to continue to exist, free and independent, not so much because they wanted to see a noble experiment in popular government succeed (which they did not), as because their own conflicts with each other made it unfeasible for them to spare the force for the subjugation of the young American nation which would have to be sent overseas from Europe to accomplish this end.

The American Revolution had amply demonstrated that it was no easy task for even a great European power to bring to bear in Continental North America the force necessary to put down rebellion. How much more difficult, then, would it have been for

a European power to destroy the independence of the young Republic once it was given an opportunity to develop efficient central government, the kind of government which would make possible a much greater mobilization of the country's resources than had been possible in the days of the Continental Congress under the Revolutionary military leadership of George Washington?

When the authors of *The Federalists Papers* described the object of American naval strength as being to incline the balance in this part of the world so as "to dictate the terms of the connection between the Old and the New World," it is worth noting that it was not part of the policy of this first generation of American statesmen to dictate to Europe regarding the course of European affairs, but only to ensure that American issues should not be decided by powers concerned chiefly with European interests.

It is perhaps worth reading a quotation from *The Federalist Papers*, No. 11, in which Alexander Hamilton wrote:

". . . Our situation invites and our interests prompt us to aim at an ascendant in the system of American affairs. The world may politically, as well as geographically, be divided into four parts, each having a distinct set of interests. Unhappily for the other three, Europe, by her arms and by her negotiations, by force and by fraud, has, in different degrees extended her dominion over them all. Africa, Asia, and America have successively felt her domination. The superiority she has long maintained has tempted her to plume herself as the Mistress of the World, and consider the rest of mankind as created for her benefit. Men admired as profound philosophers have, in direct terms, attributed to her inhabitants a physical superiority and have gravely asserted that all animals, and with them the human species, degenerate in America — that even dogs cease to bark after having breathed a while in our atmosphere.

Facts have long supported these arrogant pretensions of the Europeans. It belongs to us to vindicate the honor of the human race, and to teach that assuming brother, moderation. Union will enable us to do it. Disunion will add another victim to his triumphs. Let Americans disdain to be the instruments of European greatness! Let the thirteen states, bound together in a strict and insoluble union, concur in erecting one great American system, superior to the control of all transatlantic force or influence and able to dictate the terms of the connection between the Old and the New World!"

This, I take it, is a statement of the most fundamental of our original American foreign policies, a policy that we use as a base when we are talking about "developments" since then. Alexander Hamilton and the men of his generation recognized that under the conditions prevailing at the end of the eighteenth century, the United States could guarantee itself the opportunity for growth to national adulthood by maintaining a fairly small force to incline the balance as between the European Powers, any one of whom might be tempted to send small fragments of their total national military power into the New World.

The Founding Fathers, then, were sophisticated about the international politics of their day. They were just as sophisticated about national politics. Under the Constitution, they made the President so strong that there has never been any question of his power to evoke Congressional consent whenever he asks for a declaration of war. He is sufficiently unfettered so that he can conduct the nation to the brink of war, at which point Congress, of course, has no effective choice.

There were, however, two major restraints placed upon executive power. The President had to seek the advice and consent of two-thirds of the Senate for any international agreement

so solemn that it had to be in treaty form. This two-thirds Senate requirement reflected a clash of interests that was then capable of setting the sections of the country in conflict with each other. The interests of maritime New England were concerned with establishing the rights of New England fisherman to fish off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. The southern states, on the other hand, were concerned about navigation rights on the Mississippi. The two-thirds Senate treaty requirement insured that during this formative period no one section could, by a bare majority vote in the Senate, sacrifice the economic interests of another section of the country in order to conserve its own.

A second effective restraint on the President's conduct of foreign and military policy was Congressional control over taxes and appropriations. While two-thirds Senate treaty requirement may have become obsolete as sectional conflicts of interests have declined in foreign affairs — I say "may" because a number of people, and notably Senator Bricker, believe that it is not only obsolete but not strong enough — the significance of the Congressional grip on the power of the purse has risen steadily. Practically every important international engagement today requires that Congress appropriate large sums of money if the United States is even to begin to fulfill its treaty obligations. Furthermore, as national security policy has come to require protracted, high-level mobilization, both in the fields of foreign policy and military policy, Congressional control has been greatly strengthened. For mobilization in advance of war requires huge appropriations which in the past Congress has been willing to grant to the President only after the war crisis had actually occurred. This means that, as never before, the Chief Executive and his foreign and military policy advisers have to carry the support of Congress and public opinion along with them as they develop American foreign policy. For without a willingness of the people to be taxed to support a given foreign policy objective, the government will be largely impotent in its conduct of foreign and military affairs so as to attain that objective.

Our Constitutional arrangements and the foreign policy orientations of the first generation of American statesmen reflected, then, their skillful understanding of the relations between *armed force* and *foreign policy*, and of these two to domestic policy, particularly as it relates to taxes and appropriations.

The enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, we may take as the culmination of a foreign policy based on taking constructive advantage of Europe's strife in order to develop America's strength. As the United States became, in the nineteenth century, preoccupied with the "winning of the West" — the American West, the West of the prairie, the buffalo and the Indians, the West of the sagebrush and the cactus, not the West in its twentieth century "anti-Soviet Russia" sense — this intimate relation between armed force and foreign policy ceased to be understood quite so clearly. With England so powerful as to bar any other European power from New World intervention and with Canada growing every year more and more of a hostage to good Anglo-American relations, the United States enjoyed a risk-free, cost-free national security almost without parallel in the history of the Western state system. We seemed to need neither army nor navy to guarantee national safety. We had the benefits of an English alliance at the peak of England's strength, without the disadvantage of an English alliance, an alliance which might have brought us into intermittent hostilities with England's enemies.

We did have an army and a navy (including a marine corps), but their glorious deeds of valor were not so much in defense of national security as in support of the private rights of Americans who chose to live abroad or chose to live on the frontier. In Kipling's words, we used our armed forces to bring into line "the lesser breeds beyond law." The Army was preoccupied with making the American West a fit place for white men to live in and an unfit place for red men, while the Navy and the Marine Corps were making Central and South America (to say nothing of the shores of Tripoli and Yokohama Bay) a fit place for Americans to trade, travel, invest, and dwell.



One might almost say that during most of the nineteenth century the function of the armed forces was to make sure that the Bill of Rights and the United States' Constitution would be upheld, not only in our own West, but wherever Americans traded and traveled, except in Europe, where standards of law and order resembling our own were maintained, whatever the degree of friendliness or hostility the government might maintain towards the United States. In Europe, the United States' armed forces had no function whatever and, for that matter, no chance of operating successfully even if there had been a function to perform. It would not be too far wide of the mark to describe the task of our armed forces during much of the nineteenth century as being "to spread the blessings of due process of law to ever wider areas of American activity." So far as our government was in a position to do so, life, liberty and property (at least the life, liberty and property of Americans) was protected by our Army in the West and our Navy and Marine Corps abroad.

Armed force had little to do with national security policy for a period of several decades. Not even the American Civil War brought military force and foreign policy back into any sort of relation to each other. In fact, the Civil War experience may very well have been misleading. In the Civil War, the Union Forces could have but one objective, "absolute victory." Any cessation of hostilities which left the Confederacy in existence would have been a defeat for the side that was seeking to preserve the Union intact. It was particularly appropriate that General Ulysses S. Grant should have earned the sobriquet of "Unconditional Surrender Grant." Armed rebellion is the only kind of war in which unconditional surrender is the automatic policy objective, in which there is no problem of adjusting military means to policy ends.

The Civil War, if it did not teach Americans anything about the relations between armed force and foreign policy, did teach the powers of Europe a good many things. It was the first major war after the railway networks of the advanced industrial states

had been completed. It dramatically called the world's attention to the existence of a potential world power in North America. But the colossus of the Western World dismantled the Civil War's military establishment and went back to sleep.

A career in the United States Army in the 1870's, as in the 1850's, meant being shipped from one small outpost in the West to another. As did so many other Naval officers, the Naval War College's own Captain Mahan had ample leisure to reflect upon America's future as he cruised along the West Coast of South America. The most exciting events for our Naval officers again appeared in connection with the efforts to regularize the payment of interest on bonded debts and the protection of other rights of American citizens in Latin America. Just as President Franklin Pierce, in 1853, had justified the bombardment of Greytown, a Nicaraguan port, by describing the town as a "marauding establishment, too dangerous to be forgotten and too guilty to pass unpunished," so Secretary of State Bayard, a generation later, was to describe the visit of an American war vessel to Guayaquil, Ecuador, to effect the release of an imprisoned American citizen as "one of peace and good will, to the end of exciting the moral influence of our flag toward discreet and mutually honorable solution." In both cases, the somewhat euphemistic language of American officialdom describes the use of American armed force in support of the private rights of Americans abroad.

The reemergence of a concept of American military and naval power as something to be related to the preservation of national security, including the physical safety of the Continental homeland and the way of life carried on in that homeland, was still, at the end of the Civil War, nearly a generation away. The generation which followed the Civil War saw the final disappearance of the frontier as a force in American life, and it may very well be true that with American energies liberated from the successful effort of conquering the "Wild West," these energies became available for the promotion of American interests abroad.

The exuberant attitude of some Americans in this period is illustrated by the statement attributed to Secretary of State Seward, falsely: "On the map, South America looks like a ham and Uncle Sam has always been fond of pork." This, by the way, is the same Seward whose purchase of Alaska in 1867 led to that important territory being known by "Seward's Folly," or alternatively, as "Seward's Icebox."

It is well for us to remember that those who in the last quarter of the nineteenth century expressed concern that America should have substantial armed power at its disposal, and particularly naval power, did not do so in the reluctant, half-apologetic way in which many Americans, like myself, do so today. Today, we explain the necessity for more or less semi-mobilization by saying that the free ride in national security which the United States experienced during the last three-quarters of the nineteenth century is gone, and, unfortunately, gone for good; by saying that the great good fortune which enabled us to dispense with costly armies and navies, and not wholly reliable allies, has gone; and by saying that, much as we may regret it, the United States cannot again hope to stay out of the main stream of history. All that we can expect, and we should count ourselves lucky if we get it, is that our country shall have the minimum armed strength necessary to guarantee security; further, we ask only that as much as possible of the nation's productive energy shall be released for the satisfaction of civilian wants.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, there were many who had a quite different rationalization for the expansion of American armed might. They may have felt that it was humiliating for a nation with such enormous industrial potential — our population was about that of any two of Western Europe's Great Powers, and steel production was surpassing that of England — to be so feeble in military affairs. Perhaps they felt it was wrong for our country not to have policy objectives commensurate with its power potential, wrong for the United States not to be asserting itself

in the councils of the world. Our Navy would then need to be expanded if American views were to sound authoritative. Whether or not because of some vulgarized interpretation of Darwin's conception of evolution in terms of the survival of the fittest, the feeling was widespread in the 1880's and 1890's that a great nation ought to have a great navy or the world might find some defect in its claim to greatness. Whatever the explanation, with Alfred Thayer Mahan as the leading professional Naval exponent of the political advantages of expanded naval power and Theodore Roosevelt as his civilian counterpart, the United States forged ahead in a general naval expansion at the turn of the century so that it stood third among the powers of the world at the outbreak of World War I.

Meanwhile, the railroad, which at first had seemed to confer such great benefits on the centrally located land-based powers of Europe to the disadvantage of British sea power, now began to operate on the other side. In the first phase of the railroad's impact on world politics, the great mobility which the railroad gave to centrally located Prussia weakened the hold which Britain had formerly had upon Europe by virtue of its control of the narrow seas surrounding that continent. Once the route which led through the English Channel and around the Western European peninsula into the Mediterranean at Gibraltar had ceased to be the main stream of the world's commerce, once the British-controlled narrow seas were no longer the only route by which goods and men could be transported cheaply and quickly from one part of Europe to another, the decisiveness of England's naval dominance was greatly lessened. The next turn of the wheel restored the advantage to the sea powers and, paradoxically, it is the railroad which was largely responsible.

The industrialization of Western Europe, which the railroad and the rapidly advancing technology of steam and steel made possible, had as its second consequence an increasing dependence of Europe on overseas sources of food and other raw materials. As

the railway networks were being extended in the United States, in Canada, in Australia, in Argentina, overseas-produced foodstuffs could be brought to nearby seaports, carried across the oceans, and laid down in European port cities at a fraction of the cost of producing the same goods on European farms — not only foodstuffs, but such things as nitrates, too, as Germany learned in the First World War. Agricultural production in Europe entered into permanent decline after about 1878, and the expanding urban population came more and more to depend on overseas food and raw materials.

Thus, as the power of naval blockades in the narrow seas surrounding Europe ceased to be so all-important, the power of naval blockade in denying overseas raw materials to Continental European industrial powers increased. In a war of attrition among European powers, victory would henceforth go to that group of powers which could deny to the others the use of the world's waterways, while keeping them open for its own use. Notice, it is the *world's* waterways now, not the control of the narrow seas.

The new use of the British Navy for blockading transoceanic routes rather than routes around the European land mass could not, of course, be effective *against* an overseas power with an independent industrial base of its own, such as the United States; but used in conjunction with American naval power, it could be decisive in a war of fixed positions and slow economic strangulation. American sea power was, we have seen, thanks to the efforts of men like Theodore Roosevelt, providentially ready for its great test in a joint Anglo-American effort to strangle the land-based Central Powers. However, it is an open question how many Americans had planned it that way.

The lessons of the First World War were not lost upon the makers of the Versailles Treaty. The Covenant of the League of the Nations reflected the prevailing belief in the compelling effectiveness of blockades based on Anglo-American sea power. Article

XVI of the League's Covenant provides for economic sanctions to go into effect automatically, presumably on the theory that the military sanctions can follow at their leisure because the cutting of the trade lanes would be so effective that it would be possible to bring the war to an end without ever really having to spill very much blood. The Covenant offers eloquent testimony to the decisiveness of sea power in the First World War. So did the victors in this First World War when they promptly entered into naval competition with each other at the end of that war.

It is only a third of a century ago that the doctrinary ideologists of sea power in Britain and America were discovering in the size of each other's navy portents of future conflict and war. Woodrow Wilson's belief that what he called "British navalism" was almost as much of a menace as Prussian militarism added an element of moral righteousness to the American effort to establish a lead in the naval arms race. It is one of the most remarkable facts of twentieth century inter-Great Power relations that American naval power was able to catch up with and surpass the naval power of Britain without the two countries having engaged in a naval war, as the United States began to draw abreast.

In retrospect, it is perhaps easy to see why an Anglo-American war proved so easy to avoid. Conflict has not taken the form of sea power *versus* sea power. Leviathan, the great sea monster, had found his mortal struggle to be not with other sea powers but with Behemoth, the great land monster. Perhaps because their leaders recognized all this, Britain had retreated at every point where she might have found herself clashing with the United States, and she had retreated long before American naval power assumed its 1919 dimensions.

The retreat began even before 1900. Germany's rapid industrialization and favored location in a railroad age, her tremendous diplomatic successes under Bismarck, and her restless and apparently unlimited diplomatic ambitions in the era of William II and

Admiral Tirpitz had so alarmed British statesmen that they mended their diplomatic fences with Japan, France, Russia, and, above all, the United States. In Anglo-American relations, for example, in the years around the turn of the century, Britain yielded to Secretary Olney's famous ultimatum of 1895, at the time of the Venezuelan boundary disputes, "Today the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition." She yielded, in the Second Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, Britain's incontestably good legal right to share in the building of a canal across the Isthmus of Panama, a right which was provided for in the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of a half-century earlier. She dismantled her defenses and withdrew British troops from Caribbean garrisons. And, finally, she abandoned Canada's interests in the Alaskan-Canadian boundary dispute under circumstances that were particularly galling to the Canadians. Given this almost unqualified recognition of American paramountcy in the New World, it is difficult now to see what fundamental clashes of interest could have brought about an Anglo-American War. In the tense days, however, of the naval competition, which was only brought to a halt by the Washington Conference of 1921-22, this was not so clear.

While one may perhaps doubt that, in the absence of such a conference, Britain and the United States would have drifted into war, a failure to bring this naval arms race to a close might have very dramatically reduced the capacity of the two governments to cooperate when Nazi Germany brought a second war to the world. Nor should we forget that on the eve of the Washington Conference, Britain still had an alliance in force with Japan. If we are now sometimes tempted to think that the capital shipbuilding holiday, which was inaugurated by the Washington Treaty, was an act of folly, it is worth noting that we thereby brought the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to an end and laid the basis for pooling Anglo-American power in the critical time of trouble which was to come within two decades.

All the emotional outpourings which are characteristic of, let us say, Pilgrim Society banquets in London, where one hears the theme continually reiterated that "blood is thicker than water," the "hands across the sea" theme of Anglo-American friendship, ought not to obscure the world political pattern which has driven the great sea powers on the two sides of the North Atlantic into almost unavoidable collaboration. This may be the most important development in American foreign policy since the early period when we fought two wars against Great Britain.

For many decades, men on both sides of the Atlantic had understood that a pooling of British and American efforts could have far-reaching consequences. In fact, more than a hundred years ago the *London Economist* editorialized as follows:

"independently . . . of England and the United States together commanding the whole navigation of the world, which gives them a power infinitely greater than is possessed by all the despotisms of the earth, any opinion, political or other, common to them, backed by their world success and their vast power, must become, not to say the common creed of mankind, but very widespread and powerful."

If there had been for several generations now an opportunity for Anglo-American collaboration to sway the destinies of the world, it has only been in the last half-century that this opportunity seemed on both sides of the Atlantic to have become a necessity. If what I have said earlier in this lecture is true, namely, that Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton all understood that during the conditions prevailing at the end of the eighteenth century, America's safety lay in Europe's strife, it follows that these same men would have preached a very different foreign policy doctrine in a period in which some one power, or bloc of powers, either Germany or Russia, or Germany and Russia together, should threaten to bring an end to the European balance system. That ultimate nightmare, a world war in which Germany and Russia are



allies, we escaped by a hair's breadth in 1940, when *Monsieurs Chamberlain and Daladier* showed so much more zeal in going to the aid of beleaguered Finland than in perfecting Western defenses. Americans, like myself, who were egging them on, would probably still be fighting World War II if the reckless gamble of Chamberlain and Daladier had not been checked by Sweden's vigorous neutrality in the big war, while Sweden herself helped Finland generously in the little war.

We have seen that in two world wars United States' intervention prevented an overturn of the European power balance. Thus, we have seen the Anglo-American relationship transformed from the original hostility in the American Revolution and in the War of 1812, to the almost compulsory collaboration of the mid-twentieth century. We have seen the doctrine of "no foreign entanglement" replaced by a doctrine of explicit alliance, buttressed by the most detailed inter-Great Power political and military planning the world has even known in peacetime.

It may not be entirely fair to characterize NATO as one English visitor to this country did recently when he said that NATO was "like the *Venus de Milo* — all SHAPE and no arms," or, as Lord Ismay said: "Too much harness and not enough horse." These descriptions of NATO's shortcomings suggest that everybody expects NATO to be much more than a set of paper agreements. Why is this true, even in, and especially in, America?

There are two main themes which could be used to describe American relations with Europe, that part of the world where the dozen wars originated and which have since the seventeenth century in each involved all or almost all of the Great Powers of the world.

The first theme is the theme of "no prior commitment." From the end of the Revolutionary War to the beginning of the Second World War, there was never any prior commitment by the United States to go to the aid of any European Power; nor, ironi-

cally, and this is the second theme, was there any failure on the part of the United States to become involved in any European war in which it could possibly have been involved. We got into each war once and the Napoleonic Wars once on each side. This refusal to make an advanced commitment was combined with a level of defense mobilization in America so low that twice a prospective German aggressor counted on several years during which the American industrial potential would not be brought to bear in Germany's conflict with the Western democracies. This calculation may have hastened both the world wars of our century. Certainly, on each occasion the German government must have felt that there was a real chance of victory being achieved before the United States could become involved, could become mobilized, and, finally, could bring its massive might in to tip the scales. Thus, the outstanding development of the American foreign policy in the period since 1945 is the step that we have taken by our treaty commitments, our coalition military planning, and our massive rearmament to try to teach the rulers of Soviet Russia not to make the same miscalculation that the Kaiser and the Fuhrer made in 1914 and 1939.

The Americans have come to this realization almost at the last possible moment. Whereas, in World War I, it took American power to break the apparently interminable stalemate of trench warfare, based on the machine gun and barbed wire, in the period since 1945 it takes a very full mobilization of American power simply to make a war in Europe last long enough for the United States to move from semi-mobilization to full mobilization. We are seeking to convince our prospective Soviet opponents that the march to the Channel will be more than a picnic; that the war cannot, in fact, be won before American weight can be thrown in the balance. And we are finding that it is taking nearly 20% of our national income to achieve this modest objective.

We see that our American political institutions have been flexible enough to permit the development of this new American

foreign policy as our country has become exposed to new threats of totalitarian aggression. I think it is worth asking if our policy-making branches of the government are capable of making such further policy changes as the future may require. The answer that I can give is not wholly comforting. It took the tragedy of Pearl Harbor to liberate the energies of the American people to achieve their own salvation in World War II. It took the coup of February, 1948, in Czechoslovakia, to shock our Congress into approving the appropriations necessary to make Marshall Plan aid possible. It took the aggression in Korea in June, 1950, to trigger the rearmament in which we have been engaged since that time.

Can we count on Soviet leadership a third time to shock us into the adoption of a military and foreign aid policy which will protect our national security? Do we have the institutions and the men capable of producing adequate national security policies, and getting them adopted, if our prospective enemy is so unkind as to fail to give us this kind of advanced warning of the gravity of his intentions and the totality of his ambitions? I do not know. But I do know that it is the need for such institutions and such men that gives so much importance to the effort of professional military men like yourselves to understand the bearing of major developments in foreign policy on the tasks of the national defense establishment and to the efforts of some of us in civilian universities to understand how military means can best be made to serve foreign policy ends.