

# 2

## THE GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Power, Role, and Politics on the World Stage

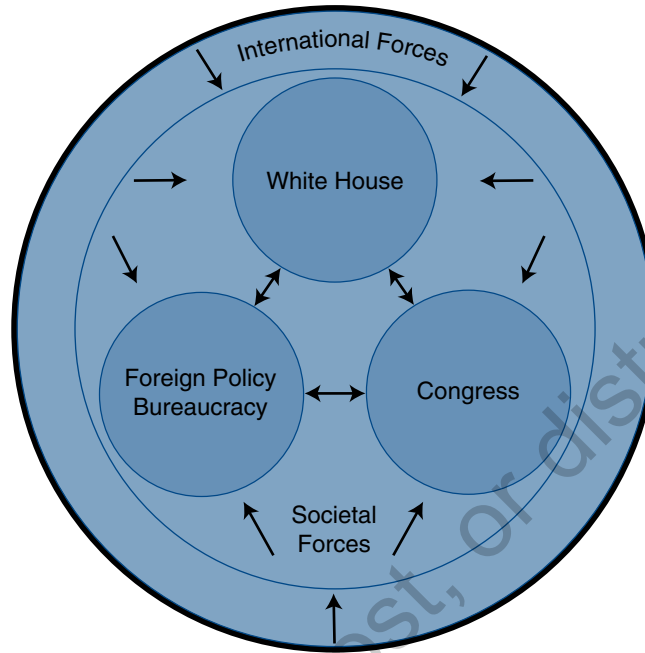


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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Know the meaning and significance of the global context as a factor in US foreign policy.
2. Understand the meaning and limits of the isolationism-internationalism debate.
3. Identify the nature and characteristics of the Continental, Regional, and Global eras of US foreign policy.
4. Assess the relationship between the global context and the historical patterns of US foreign policy.

**FIGURE 2.1** ■ Power, Role, and Politics on the World Stage in the Shifting Leadership and Politics Framework



## INTRODUCTION: THE GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE

The global environment plays a significant role in the policies and politics of US foreign policy. US foreign policy responds to the nature of the global context, and the dynamics, threats, and problems of the global context affect foreign policymaking. However, recent US administrations have taken very different approaches. In his sole term in the White House, President Donald Trump pursued a broad, often controversial agenda to reverse the course of current policies in many arenas. In foreign policy, the Trump administration retreated from decades of bipartisan commitment to free trade, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and support for the European Union, to name a few examples. According to some observers, President Trump's pursuit of a muscular nationalism seemed "determined to challenge the policies and practices that have cemented America's vast power and influence in the 20th and 21st centuries" (Sestanovich 2017). After defeating the sitting president in the 2020 election, President Joseph Biden sought to reverse these changes, but was forced to contend with challenges stemming from his predecessors policies, changes in the US position and role in the world, the lingering consequences of the global pandemic, and new challenges generated by the actions of other states to assert themselves in this changing

world, including the unprovoked and brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and a host of transnational problems creating new challenges for security, prosperity, cooperation, and competition.

As at numerous points in history, US policymakers now grapple with questions about the nature of world politics and US role in the world. After seventy years of relative consensus over US global leadership and engagement, debates over the nature and purpose of US involvement in world affairs and the US relationship to the rest of the world raise questions about almost all aspects of US foreign policy. Some observers point to potentially far-reaching shifts in global power and to problems and major changes in the US relationships with its allies and friends, competitors, and adversaries that impact US security, freedom, and prosperity as well as US roles and policies in the international arena.

Contemporary American foreign policymakers have strategic choices to make about US foreign policy engagement and policy in this current time of transition and change. Understanding the politics and processes of US foreign policy choices in this critical time begins with understanding the broad global context—the outer circle of our analytical framework introduced in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1.2). The present and future of US foreign policy are shaped in part by this context and by the past decisions and actions of US policymakers in response to it. In this chapter, we consider how and why US foreign policy—in national security and economics—evolved after independence as the United States became a global power in the twentieth century, and how the global environment has affected American policy and power from the Cold War in the first quarter of the twenty-first century (Figure 2.1).

## THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: PATTERNS AND DEBATES IN US FOREIGN POLICY

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The global context—or setting, environment, or milieu—refers to phenomena external to the institutions, beliefs, and processes of human interaction in government and society. This context refers to such elements as the country's power (military and economic), resources, and level of technology, and to the larger global arena of which the United States is a part, all of which influence the complex politics of US foreign policy in the past, present, and future.

The global environment plays a significant role in the politics of US foreign policy in two principal ways. First, global structures and patterns set the underlying conditions or parameters of likely US foreign policy. For example, the general patterns that prevail throughout the globe affect the international role power of the United States, thus setting the stage on which the politics of US foreign policy operates in society and government. Second, world events and relationships often have an immediate impact on domestic politics and the US policymaking process. For example, international crises (commonly defined in terms of surprise, a threat to values, and little time to respond) are events that catapult an issue onto the political agenda

and often play an influential role in the politics of US foreign policy. Similarly, international conflict and war present problems and challenges to which the United States might respond and shape the politics and processes of those responses. Therefore, both general patterns and immediate events in America's global context affect one another and are often mutually reinforcing (see Gilpin 1981; Hermann 1969; Lebow 1981; Morse 1973; Waltz 1959). Set in this global context, the foreign policy of the United States has a long and rich history since American independence and understanding the connections between the international system and US foreign policy through the rise of American power is important to understanding where we are today.

## A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

### Competing Global Theories

In the aftermath of World War II, the study of international relations became a serious discipline, especially within the United States and academia. Since the 1970s, three different global theoretical approaches (or perspectives or paradigms) have dominated: (1) classical realism, (2) liberal idealism (or internationalism), and (3) social globalism (see Knutsen 1997).

Classical realism tends to see the world as relatively anarchical and conflictual. In this view, the primary actors are (sovereign and independent) states, the most important issues revolve around national security and the use of force, and the principal motivation is the promotion of national power and wealth and prestige. So-called realists focus on the tremendously uneven distribution of power among states, on great power conflicts (and alliances and empires), the rise and decline of power, the maintenance of stability and order, and the utility of force as a means to settle disputes and international conflict. Conservative realists tend to be more pessimistic about the future possibilities of a world of greater peace, prosperity, and human development. According to Michael Doyle (1997, 18) in *Ways of War and Peace*, to realists it is "the nature of humanity, or the character of states, or the structure of international order (or all three together) that allows wars to occur. This possibility of war requires that states follow 'realpolitik': be self-interested, prepare for war, and calculate relative balances of power."

Liberal idealism (or internationalism) tends to see a world of more cooperation and complex interdependence. Although they see states as important actors, liberal idealists contend that the dominance of states has diminished with the advent of other influential actors, such as international organizations (governmental actors like the United Nations or the International Monetary Fund [IMF], and nongovernmental ones like private voluntary organizations), multinational corporations, and ethnic groups. Such complexity allows for a much more interdependent (capitalist) international political economy, in which a variety of issues may be significant, including not just national security but political, economic, social, and cultural issues as well. This suggests that despite a world of considerable conflict, there is also much cooperation and order that regularly does and can occur—hence, the importance of such forces as international law; international norms and rules; international networks; international markets, finance, and commerce; and democratic institutions. Liberal idealists tend to be much more optimistic about the potential for greater cooperation and peace, prosperity, and human development throughout the world. In their view, the state is not a hypothetical single, rational, national actor in a state of war (as it is in the classical realist view) but, instead,

is a coalition or conglomerate of coalitions and interests, representing individuals and groups and transnational actors.

Social globalism tends to see the existence of a global system, but one in which power and wealth is incredibly unevenly distributed throughout the world. The world is often divided into different classes: a small, wealthy class of powerful or “core” states (and actors—basically the “developed countries” or “First World”); a predominantly poor class of weak or “peripheral” states (and actors—the “developing countries” or “Third World”); and a small group of industrializing or “semi-periphery” states (and actors—such as India and Brazil). These political and especially economic distinctions between different classes of people also seem to exist within different countries and societies. The emphasis is on the international political economy, the dominance of the capitalist system, and the inherent inequalities and dependencies that result for the poor relative to the wealthy that are difficult to change. Social globalists are extremely pessimistic about the future, given the global system of inequality and injustice; at the same time, they remain optimistic or hopeful that major or radical changes can occur to dramatically increase peace, prosperity, and human development for all.

**What are the implications of these three competing perspectives for American power and US foreign policy?**

### From Isolationism to Internationalism?

The original thirteen colonies—established because of European (especially English and French) colonial expansion—rebelled against England in the American Revolution. To the British crown, the thirteen colonies were an integral part of the British colonial and mercantile empire and the colonists rightfully were subjects of British imperial rule. From the perspective of the colonists, the British increasingly were abusing their power as they denied representation, taxed the colonies, and controlled trade with the rest of the world.

Eventually the political and economic conflicts escalated to the point of a formal Declaration of Independence in 1776. With significant French assistance, the ensuing five-year “war of independence” resulted in American independence and official recognition with the signing of the Treaty of Paris of 1783 (by England, France, Spain, and the United States). The treaty gave the US territory from the upper Great Lakes almost to the Gulf of Mexico (Spain held Florida and the Gulf Coast) and reaching westward to the Mississippi.

In his 1796 farewell address, America’s first president, George Washington, offered the following advice: “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. . . . It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.” In 1801, President Thomas Jefferson used his inaugural address to call for “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations—entangling alliances with none.” Two decades later, then-Secretary of State John Quincy Adams emphasized similar limits on US involvement in world affairs, declaring, “Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”

Taken together, comments such as these, and some of the ensuing features of US foreign policy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have led some observers to characterize the US approach to the world as a contest between isolationism and internationalism. In this perspective, isolationism dominated until World War II, with a brief period of engagement around the end of World War I, and internationalism has dominated since then. However, this simple breakdown of US foreign policy distorts much more than it enlightens. For one, European expansion and power politics were heavily involved in the creation of the United States and would continue to play an important role in US foreign policy after independence. Furthermore, if one defines isolationism to mean noninvolvement abroad, the United States has never truly been isolationist during its history. Even if one defines isolationism more narrowly to mean no involvement in European *political* affairs, it would still be stretching reality.

In fact, the United States was never uninvolved with Europe, whether in North America or across the Atlantic. As historian A. J. Bacevich (1994, 75) stated,

Only by the loosest conceivable definition of the term, however, could “isolation” be said to represent the reality of United States policy during the first century-and-a-half of American independence. A nation that by 1900 had quadrupled its land mass at the expense of other claimants, engaged in multiple wars of conquest, vigorously pursued access to markets in every quarter of the globe, and acquired by force an overseas empire could hardly be said to have been “isolated” in any meaningful sense.

For example, consider the regular use of US armed forces outside the country between 1798 and World War II (see Table 2.1). Before World War II, US armed forces were used abroad 163 times. Before the Spanish-American War of 1898, there were ninety-eight uses of US armed forces abroad. Overall, the frequency of US armed intervention has remained pretty much the same over time—an average of about one “armed intervention” per year for more than 140 years. Although many of the cases might be considered “minor” incidents, especially from a twenty-first-century perspective, they all involved the “official” use of US armed forces in conflicts with other states while pursuing American interests. Moreover, this list does not include the use of US armed forces against Native American people as the United States expanded westward during the nineteenth century. Although the scope of armed intervention tended to be concentrated in the Western Hemisphere and Asia, Table 2.1 shows that the United States intervened in other parts of the world as well. Such interventionist behavior indicates that the United States was quite active internationally (see Braumoeller 2010).

**TABLE 2.1 ■ US Military Interventions before World War II**

1798–1801—Undeclared naval war with France	1812—East Florida (Spanish Territory)
1801–1805—Tripoli	1812–1815—Great Britain
1806—Mexico	1813—West Florida (Spain)
1806–1810—Gulf of Mexico	1813–1815—Marquesas Islands
1810—West Florida (Spanish Territory)	1815—Tripoli

1816—Spanish Florida	1853–1854—Japan
1816–1818—Spanish Florida (First Seminole War)	1853–1854—Ryukyu and Bonin Islands
1817—Amelia Island (Spanish Territory)	1854—China
1818—Oregon	1854—Nicaragua
1820–1823—Africa	1855—China
1822—Cuba	1855—Fiji Islands
1823—Cuba	1855—Uruguay
1824—Cuba	1856—Panama
1824—Puerto Rico	1856—China
1825—Cuba	1857—Nicaragua
1827—Greece	1858—Uruguay
1831–1832—Falkland Islands	1858—Fiji Islands
1832—Sumatra	1858–1859—Turkey
1833—Argentina	1859—Paraguay
1835–1836—Peru	1859—Mexico
1836—Mexico	1859—China
1838–1839—Sumatra	1860—Angola, Portuguese West Africa
1840—Fiji Islands	1860—Colombia
1841—Drummond Islands	1863—Japan
1841—Samoa	1864—Japan
1842—Mexico	1865—Panama
1843—China	1866—Mexico
1843—Africa	1866—China
1844—Mexico	1867—Nicaragua
1846–1848—Mexico	1868—Japan
1849—Smyrna	1868—Uruguay
1851—Turkey	1868—Colombia
1851—Johanna Island	1870—Mexico
1852–1853—Argentina	1870—Hawaiian Islands
1853—Nicaragua	1871—Korea

*(Continued)*

**TABLE 2.1 ■ US Military Interventions before World War II (Continued)**

1873—Colombia	1903—Syria
1873—Mexico	1903–1904—Abyssinia
1874—Hawaiian Islands	1903–1914—Panama
1876—Mexico	1904—Dominican Republic
1882—Egypt	1904—Tangier, Morocco
1885—Panama	1904—Panama
1888—Korea	1904–1905—Korea
1888—Haiti	1906–1909—Cuba
1888–1889—Samoa	1907—Honduras
1889—Hawaiian Islands	1910—Nicaragua
1890—Argentina	1911—Honduras
1891—Haiti	1911—China
1891—Bering Sea	1912—Honduras
1891—Chile	1912—Panama
1893—Hawaii	1912—Cuba
1894—Brazil	1912—China
1894—Nicaragua	1912—Turkey
1894–1895—China	1912–1941—China
1894–1896—Korea	1913—Mexico
1895—Colombia	1914—Haiti
1896—Nicaragua	1914—Dominican Republic
1898—Spain	1914–1917—Mexico
1898–1899—China	1915–1934—Haiti
1899—Nicaragua	1916—China
1899—Samoa	1916–1924—Dominican Republic
1899–1901—Philippines	1917—China
1900—China	1917–1918—World War I
1901–1902—Colombia	1917–1922—Cuba
1903—Honduras	1918–1919—Mexico
1903—Dominican Republic	1918–1920—Panama



**TABLE 2.1 ■ US Military Interventions before World War II (Continued)**

1918–1920—Soviet Russia	1926—China
1919—Dalmatia	1926–1933—Nicaragua
1919—Turkey	1927—China
1919—Honduras	1932—China
1920—China	1933—Cuba
1920—Guatemala	1934—China
1920–1922—Russia	1940—Newfoundland, Bermuda, St. Lucia, Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, Trinidad, and British Guiana
1921—Panama, Costa Rica	1941—Greenland
1922—Turkey	1941—Dutch Guiana
1922–1923—China	1941—Iceland
1924—Honduras	1941—Germany
1924—China	1941–1945—World War II
1925—Honduras	
1925—Panama	

Source: US Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information on the Use of U.S. Armed Forces in Foreign Countries*, 1975 Revision, Committee Print (94th Cong., 1st Sess., 1975).

Instead of the simple—and misleading—distinction between isolationism and internationalism, another way to think about the development and trajectory of US foreign policy after independence is to divide it into three major eras since independence: (1) the Continental Era, 1776–1865; (2) the Regional Era, 1865–1940; and (3) the Global Era, 1941–present.

### The Continental Era, 1776–1865

From its earliest days as an independent state, the United States had an active foreign policy. Indeed, the noted addresses by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson might be better interpreted as arguments for “nonalignment”—whereby the United States should avoid permanent alliances and entanglements—rather than for isolationism. During this period, most US actions focused on the surrounding North American continent until the latter half of the nineteenth century. During this time, American leaders tended to focus on two general goals: nation-building and continental expansion.

Nation-building was critical since the United States was a new and relatively weak (emerging) country at the turn of the nineteenth century. It had won its national independence from the global superpower of its time, England, but it faced many of the problems that any new country with a colonial history faces upon gaining independence. As Walter LaFeber (1994, 11) has stated, “From the beginning of their history, Americans lived not in any splendid isolation, far from the turmoil

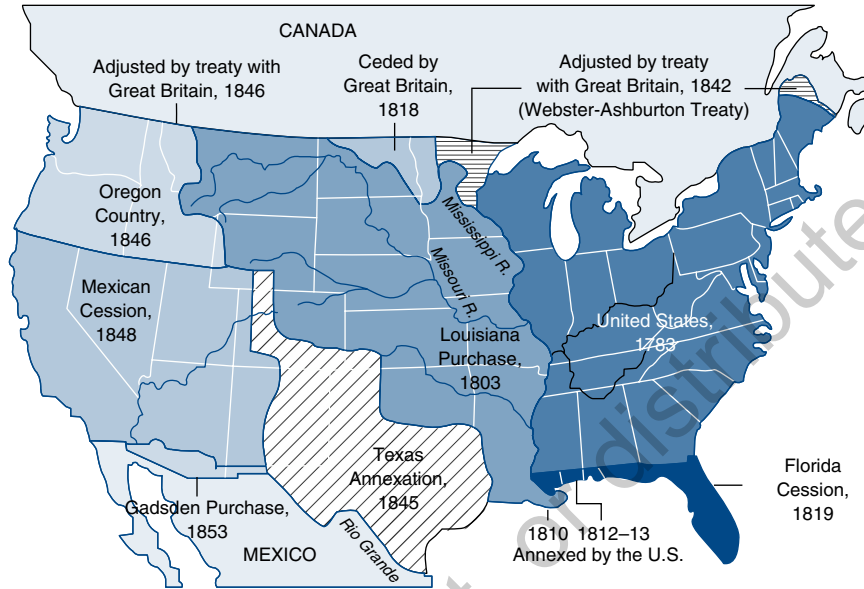
and corruption of Europe many had hoped to escape. They instead had to live in settlements that were surrounded by great and ambitious European powers.” The economy of the North American colonies also was dependent on the English economy. Given this environment, a priority for most Americans was nation-building: to build an independent country safe from its neighbors, construct a strong national economy, and establish a stable democratic polity. Therefore, much of the focus was on strengthening the internal situation in the United States.

The second goal, continental expansion, was closely linked to nation-building. What better way to protect the nation from potentially hostile neighbors than to expand its territory and push the British, French, Spanish, and Russians (as well as the Mexicans and Native Americans) farther and farther away from the eastern seaboard, preferably off the North American continent and out of the Western Hemisphere? What better way to build a strong economy than through the acquisition of more land that could be put to work? Strengthening national security and the national economy also contributed to political stability. But this meant that “Americans—whether they liked it or not—were part of European power politics even as they moved into the forests and fertile lands beyond the Appalachian Mountains.” (LaFeber 1994, 12; see also Weeks 1996).

Up to and including the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, US foreign policy aimed at acquiring and/or annexing increasing amounts of territory throughout the North American continent. Although such territory was inhabited predominantly by Native Americans, the United States acquired it from European states: from England in the North and Northwest, such as northern Maine and the Oregon territories; from France in the Louisiana Territory to the west; from Spain in the Florida territories to the south; from Mexico in the Southwest, such as Texas and the southwestern territories (including California); and from Russia in the farthest reaches of the Northwest (Alaska) (see Map 2.1). Native American peoples suffered the most from this expansion. According to Walter LaFeber (1994, 10), “A central theme of American diplomatic history must be the clash between the European settlers and the Native Americans”—a population estimated to be between 8 million and 10 million inhabitants throughout North America by the time Christopher Columbus first arrived. Clashes were constant with Native Americans—misnamed “Indians”—as Americans expanded westward.

The agents of US continental expansion were not only the government, especially the army, but also thousands of private and entrepreneurial Americans spilling westward in search of land, gold, profit, and freedom. The net result was that by the 1860s, the United States had grown from thirteen colonies on the eastern seaboard to a country that spanned the continent. In the words of diplomatic historian Thomas Bailey (1961, 3), “The point is often missed that during the nineteenth century the United States practiced internal colonialism and imperialism on a continental scale.”

During the Continental Era, the United States was active outside North America as well, but this activity was more sporadic in nature. American commerce and merchants were active in all areas of the globe, especially Europe, the West Indies (i.e., the Caribbean), the Orient (i.e., Asia), and the slave trade of Africa. “During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,” according to Alfred Eckes (1995, 1), “the founders of US foreign policy pressed to open markets and attacked mercantilistic barriers abroad in order to bolster the domestic economy and secure independence.” Interruption of American commerce by the British during the Napoleonic War, for example, was a major cause of the War of 1812 between the United States and England.

**MAP 2.1 ■ US Territorial and Continental Expansion by the Mid-Nineteenth Century**


Source: Walter LaFeber (1994, 132).

Despite the “spirit of commerce” since colonial times, American merchants were unable to open mercantilist control of trade by the European powers. Consequently, the United States adopted a policy of economic nationalism, including the use of tariffs to encourage (and protect) the growth of domestic manufactures. Increasingly, tariff policy became trade policy in the nineteenth century (e.g., Eckes 1995; Kindleberger 1977).

The US government was also politically and militarily active beyond the continent, especially through the Navy. The first diplomatic consulate established overseas by the new government was in Canton, China, in 1789. As early as 1821, “the navy began operating a squadron off the west coast of South America; and by 1835 intercourse with China and the East Indies reached the point where it justified the establishment of a separate East India squadron” (Van Alstyne 1974, 126).

Regarding Latin America, the Monroe Doctrine (declared in 1823) insisted on an end to European interference and colonization in the Western Hemisphere, for which the United States promised noninterference in European affairs. As early as 1850, the United States negotiated the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty for rights to build an interoceanic canal. And attempts also were made to annex Cuba and Santo Domingo (now known as the Dominican Republic) to the US republic. In Asia, the United States, led by Daniel Webster, negotiated the 1844 Treaty of Wanghia, giving Americans “most favored nation” status (like other European countries) in trade and extraterritorial rights with China. Americans, led by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, forced Japan to open its ports to foreigners and commerce in 1854, and the Hawaiian and Midway Islands were occupied as transit points for American commerce with Asia.

## The Regional Era, 1865–1940

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the United States had been quite successful in building an independent and transcontinental country that was growing more powerful. By the end of the Civil War, the United States no longer faced immediate threats from its neighbors in the hemisphere. The Civil War also settled the divisions between the North and the South, allowing political stability at the national level. The national economy flourished and the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869. According to Van Alstyne (1960, 10), the United States “soon joined in the international scramble for material wealth and power,” best exemplified by the Spanish-American War of 1898 in which Cuba and the Philippines became US colonies.

As the United States reached the limits of continental expansion, more and more Americans during the latter half of the nineteenth century were beginning to speak of the future of the United States in terms of a manifest destiny. According to William Weeks (1996, 61), “Manifest Destiny was founded on the *a priori* conviction of the uniqueness of the American nation and the necessity of an American empire.” Such an orientation reflected three key themes (see also Stephanson 1995):

The special virtues of the American people and their institutions; their mission to redeem and remake the world in the image of America; and the American destiny under God to accomplish this sublime task. Under the aegis of virtue, mission, and destiny evolved a powerful nationalist mythology that was virtually impossible to oppose.

*(Weeks 1996, 61)*

In fact, ideas of US exceptionalism, mission, and destiny had existed from the time of the Puritan settlements in New England. They were popularized by John Winthrop’s sermon in 1631 that the Puritan colony in Massachusetts Bay represented a “city upon a hill” from which the regeneration of the world might proceed. Many Americans came to characterize the United States as a special place where human society might begin anew, uncorrupted by Old World institutions and ideas, giving it a special mission and role in the world.

Following the Civil War, US foreign policy actively promoted political stability and economic expansion abroad, especially in Latin America and Asia. The US government and American business dramatically increased their presence in Latin America throughout Central America and the Caribbean. The US government promoted friendly political regimes in the region that would be unresponsive to European involvement, open to American trade and investment, and stable enough to pay back their American bank loans. In turn, American business intensified with the rapid expansion of American trade, loans, and investment in the region.

Increased US involvement in Latin America—a region that was experiencing decolonization, nation-building by independent states, and considerable political instability—resulted in frequent American military intervention and occupation, especially after the turn of the century. The Olney Proclamation—named for turn-of-the-century Secretary of State Richard Olney—reinforced the original purpose of the Monroe Doctrine, that the United States had the right, and now the power, to intervene in and dominate its “own backyard”—foreshadowing what was to come with the Spanish-American War and after.

From President Theodore Roosevelt's "Big Stick" policies to William Howard Taft's "Dollar Diplomacy" and Woodrow Wilson's "New Freedom," through the Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover administrations, the United States regularly sent the Marines to crush local rebellions, prop up old or new regimes, and restore political stability in virtually every major state in Central America and the Caribbean, often only to return again and again. Military intervention often meant subsequent financial "supervision," which lasted thirteen years in Nicaragua (1911–1924), twenty-five years in Haiti (1916–1941), thirty-six years in the Dominican Republic (1905–1941), and sixty years in America's colony of Cuba (1898–1958). American leaders so badly wanted a canal to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans that in 1903 President Roosevelt actively instigated and supported Panamanian secession from Colombia. He then immediately recognized the new country and signed a treaty giving Panama \$10 million, plus \$250,000 a year for rights "in perpetuity" for a ten-mile-wide strip—which became the Panama Canal Zone—that cut the new country literally in half.

Thus, American involvement and power had carved out a regional sphere of influence. This was the period during which the United States acquired its earliest colonial possessions (and "protectorates") in the area, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Not until the 1920s and 1930s, under Herbert Hoover and then Franklin Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policy, was direct intervention of American troops into the domestic affairs of US neighbors temporarily abandoned.

American foreign policy was in search of political stability and US economic expansion in Asia as well, with China being the major prize. "Merchants, missionaries, adventurers, sea captains, naval officers, and consular officers crowded into the Pacific during the nineteenth century and spun a web whose strands extended to every part of the ocean" (Van Alstyne 1974, 125). Unlike Latin America, which was Christianized by the Spanish, there was a large American missionary presence in Asia, particularly in Japan and in China (over 3,000 by 1905). And during the crisis with Spain over Cuba, the US Navy, just before the Spanish-American War began, attacked the remnants of the Spanish empire in Asia, producing American Samoa, Guam, Wake Island, and, most important, the Philippines as colonies of the United States (see also Rosenberg 1982).

However, American involvement in Asia and the Pacific resulted in more limited uses of force because of the region's distance from American shores and the strong military presence of England, France, Russia, and Japan. US foreign policy in China, for example, emphasized an Open Door approach in order to maximize American involvement and trade (Williams 1988). Therefore, America's military and commercial involvement resulted in fewer costs and fewer gains. Nevertheless, the United States sent more than 120,000 American troops from 1899 to 1902 to fight its first noncontinental counterinsurgency war, eventually defeating a national independence movement in the Philippines to preserve its new colonial control.

Even though US foreign policy was oriented toward the regions to its immediate south and distant west, the final two decades of the Regional Era saw increasing engagement in European and world affairs as well. Entering the twentieth century, France and especially Great Britain were the two global powers that dominated the global status quo. At the same time, Japan and Germany rapidly grew in power and challenged Great Britain, France, and the status quo.

Ironically, the resulting two world wars contributed to the shift from Europe as the center of world politics to the rise of American power and the international leadership of the United States.

While officially neutral during the early part of World War I, the United States eventually became a major participant in bringing about the war's outcome. Woodrow Wilson was, in fact, highly instrumental in influencing the Treaty of Versailles, which officially ended the war and attempted to create a new liberal world order through the League of Nations. During 1918–1919, the United States even sent 14,000 troops—along with the British, Canadians, French, Czechs, and Japanese—to occupy part of the newly declared Soviet Union in an effort to aid the anti-Bolsheviks and reestablish a Russian front against Germany.

After World War I, the 1920s and 1930s are popularly thought of as a return to isolationism. The US rejection of American participation in the League of Nations, the rise of isolationist sentiment among the American public and a strong peace movement, and American reluctance to become actively involved in European conflicts (especially during the Great Depression and the early years of World War II) provide good evidence of the more isolationist orientation during the interwar period. However, as diplomatic historian William Cohen (1987, xii) has argued, “rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and lack of membership in the League had little impact ... on American involvement in world affairs in the decade that followed. In the 1920s the United States was more profoundly engaged in international matters than in any peacetime era in its history.”

In addition to the active regional foreign policy engagement already discussed, the United States undertook several important global diplomatic initiatives. From November 1921 to February 1922, the United States hosted and actively promoted a major naval disarmament conference in Washington, DC, that resulted in the first major arms control treaty in modern times, along with the Four Power Treaty and the Nine Power Treaty involving Pacific Island possessions and the rivalry in China. In 1928, the United States and France jointly sponsored the Kellogg-Briand Pact to outlaw war. The United States also began to play a more active, though unofficial, role in League of Nation activities.

Just as important, the United States became increasingly important to the international political economy following World War I. As a result of the debts and damage incurred by the war, European economies became increasingly dependent on the US government and on American business as a source of trade and finance. According to Cohen (1987, 41), “Clearly, the impact of American trade, investments, and tourism on the world economy in the 1920s was enormous. No other nation even approximated the United States in economic importance.” Nevertheless, as the British role declined, the United States also continued its embrace of protectionism in trade—especially in the 1930s—and refrained from taking a strong political leadership role in the international economy, which contributed to the world falling into a great depression (Kindleberger 1977).

## The Global Era, 1941–Present

The results of World War II on European power and the global system contributed to the rise of American leadership and engagement in world politics. With the decline of Europe following

World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States filled the political vacuum in world affairs. The ascendance of the Soviet Union and the United States in the wake of the European collapse resulted in a global context of bipolarity in which American assertiveness in world politics and an American-Soviet conflict of some type were almost inevitable.

World War II lifted the American economy out of the Great Depression of the 1930s and catapulted it into unprecedented prosperity. American economic production was the key to Allied success in the war and was responsible for producing almost half the value of the world's goods and services following the conflict. American multinational corporations and financial investment, which had been expanding since the turn of the century, came to dominate the postwar international marketplace. The United States emerged from World War II not only as a superpower but as the hegemonic power of its time (Ikenberry 1989).

After the United States entered World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States were cautious partners who found themselves in an alliance of convenience during the war. The United States set its sights not only on defeating Germany and Japan but also on establishing a postwar order that would promote stability and security. Under President Franklin Roosevelt, the United States took an active leadership role in planning for a global order that learned the lessons of the interwar period and their consequences for the Great Depression and World War II. Thus, the Roosevelt administration sought to establish structures and practices that would better ensure economic stability and prosperity and promote peace and multilateral cooperation.

In the world economy, the American strategy, arrived at in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in 1944, was to promote multilateral efforts with American allies to restore and manage an increasingly liberal, global market economy, based on a new system of fixed exchange rates and open, free trade. What came to be called the Bretton Woods system would provide necessary assistance and rules for economic transactions principally through the creation of three multilateral international organizations: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD, known as the World Bank) to make loans for economic recovery and development, the IMF to support the stability of national currencies based on gold, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to promote and govern open trade (originally the ITO, International Trade Organization, was to be created but was opposed by the US Senate). Success on the economic front in promoting a liberal capitalist world order was thought to be crucial for ensuring peace and minimizing threats to international stability, as had occurred when the Great Depression led to the rise of Adolf Hitler (Gardner 1980; Ikenberry 1992).

The United States also sought to construct a new international political order that would promote cooperation and prevent the outbreak of further wars. Under Roosevelt, the United States initially emphasized a strategy of multilateral cooperation based on a sphere-of-influence approach and the creation of a new international organization to replace the League of Nations—the United Nations. Roosevelt's strategy depended on global cooperation among members of the "Grand Alliance" during the war: the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, and China. The instrument for maintaining cooperation among the "big five" and preventing a challenge to the status quo, which could lead to the outbreak of a new war, was the United Nations, and especially the operation of the United Nations Security Council (a body in which each of the big five held veto power). Roosevelt also assumed that each of

the five so-called great powers would exercise power over its regional sphere of influence: the United States in Latin America, the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, Great Britain and France in Europe and their colonial possessions, and China in East Asia. However, Roosevelt's death left the White House to Harry Truman, who was unfamiliar with Roosevelt's postwar plans and lacked Roosevelt's considerable experience. Moreover, as war ended, it was soon clear that the European economies were in much worse shape than most people had thought and were in need of assistance beyond that which the Bretton Woods–devised multilateral international organizations were capable of providing.

Hope for lasting cooperation among members of the Grand Alliance to achieve national security eroded quickly as distrust, fear, and conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union escalated. Roosevelt's grand strategy gave way to the realities of the postwar context. Within the United States, for example, disputes over postwar European economic reconstruction; the fate of Germany; the rise of communism in Eastern Europe; the Soviet-American conflict over Iran, Greece, and Turkey; the fall of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist government in China; the North Korean attack on South Korea; and the Soviet explosion of an atomic bomb all contributed to the growing Cold War environment both abroad and at home.

American foreign policy was soon dominated by a view of the Soviet Union as an evil enemy attempting to achieve world empire. Americans in both government and society saw a “free world” led by the United States pitted against a “totalitarian world” led by the Soviet Union in a global Cold War throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Thus, soon after World War II, the Global Era of US foreign policy emphasized American internationalism in the form of engagement and leadership or hegemony. After the early postwar years, the US approach to the world passed through four phases: (1) the Cold War Consensus, 1947–1968; (2) the Cold War Dissensus, 1969–1989; (3) the post-Cold War years, 1990–2001; and (4) the post-9/11 years, 2002–present.

***The Cold War Consensus, 1947–1968.*** For roughly twenty years, through the administrations of President Truman and President Lyndon Johnson, US foreign policy experienced considerable continuity based on the twin goals of national security and economic prosperity. The twin goals were based on the quest for global security and stability from a perception of the rising “threat” of Soviet communist expansionism and the promotion of a liberal international market economy based on the principles of free, open trade and fixed exchange rates. The Cold War era also represented the height of the president's power to lead the country in foreign policy, as we discuss further in subsequent chapters.

Following the war, for the first time since independence and the Continental Era, Americans began to perceive an external threat to their national security: the advance of Soviet communism. In the postwar international context—a bipolar world with two “superpowers”—US engagement became more important. Because the new fear of Soviet communism became the key problem for most Americans, national security concerns drove US foreign policy and was defined in terms of global security and stability. In the bipolar world, the threat was perceived to be global and American leaders believed that, with the collapse of the British and French empires, only the United States had the power to respond. Although the United States and the Soviet Union never



engaged in a “hot war” (i.e., a direct military clash), the United States prepared for a direct military confrontation with the Soviet Union and engaged in a global Cold War.

The US foreign policy strategy during this phase rested on a broad policy consensus that had four central pillars. First, US policymakers broadly shared a commitment to American engagement and leadership in world affairs. Although elements of both the left and the right in American politics dissented, a substantial bipartisan consensus supported internationalism and active American leadership, and the importance of American power to the security and stability of the international order.

Second, under American leadership, a containment strategy was developed that aimed to deter, by the threat of coercion, the spread of Soviet communism, first in Europe, then in Asia with the Korean War, and eventually throughout the world. The containment strategy was initially embodied in the Truman Doctrine, announced in 1947 and directed at containing Soviet expansion in the eastern Mediterranean countries of Greece and Turkey. In the words of one analyst, its future implications for US foreign policy were to be global and quite profound:

The Truman Doctrine contained the seeds of American aid, economic or military, to more than one hundred countries; of mutual defense treaties with more than forty of them; of the great regional pacts, alliances, and unilateral commitments: to NATO, to the Middle East, to the Western Hemisphere, and to Southeast Asia. It justified fleets of carriers patrolling the Mediterranean and the South China Sea, nuclear submarines under the polar icecap, air bases in the Thai jungle, and police advisers in Uruguay and Bolivia. In support of it, an average of a million soldiers were deployed for twenty-five years in some four thousand bases in thirty countries. It contained the seeds of a habit of intervention: clandestine in Iran, Guatemala, Cuba, the Philippines, Chile, and the CIA alone knows where else; overt in Korea, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

*(Hodgson 1976, 32)*

Grounded firmly in anticommunism, containment focused on surrounding the Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe and mainland Asia with American allies, alliances, and military (conventional and nuclear) forces in order to deter the Soviet Union from initiating a military strike and possibly triggering World War III—which came to be known as “deterrence theory.” In the Third World, where the US-Soviet confrontation tended to be fought more indirectly, the United States relied on foreign assistance, counterinsurgency, and the use of covert paramilitary operations to promote friendly regimes. The United States also pursued containment of the Soviet Union and its allies (such as in Eastern Europe and Cuba) through the use of broad economic sanctions (i.e., boycotts). Diplomacy and other less coercive instruments of policy were put aside by the United States in East-West relations and superseded by the threat and use of coercion to deter and contain what American leaders saw as major challenges to American national security commitments and national interests (see George and Smoke 1974; Jentleson 1987; Mastanduno 1985).

Third, the bipartisan US global strategy involved a commitment to a liberal international economic order (LIEO). As Western European economies struggled to recover from the Great

Depression and the war, the United States took the lead in unilaterally sustaining and expanding Roosevelt's Bretton Woods system to promote a stable and prosperous international market economy built around economic openness and multilateral management. The original Bretton Woods system was to be based on a multilateral effort by the Europeans and Americans, but the war-torn European economies needed recovery, and the Soviet bloc remained outside the system, which prevented the Bretton Woods system from operating as originally agreed. Instead, the United States shifted to Bretton Woods II, in which the strength of the American economy allowed the United States to unilaterally support the Bretton Woods system and focus on European economic recovery.

The Bretton Woods II LIEO was to be accomplished by providing massive capital outlays (of dollars) in the form of American assistance (such as the Marshall Plan for aid to Europe), private investment and loans by US multinational corporations, and trade based on opening the US domestic market to imported goods. Therefore, the Bretton Woods international economic system based on free trade and fixed exchange rates became dependent on the United States acting as the world's banker. Although primarily European oriented, and later also Japanese oriented, US foreign economic policy was also active in promoting a market system in the Third World through its support of private investment and development abroad (see Kuttner 1991; Spero and Hart 2009).

Fourth, the Cold War Consensus also included a commitment to liberal norms and values. This pillar included broad agreement on the importance of multilateralism through cooperative international institutions, and a rules-based international order, as well as commitment to the importance of democracy and human rights. Unfortunately, while the first strand was actively embraced, the second was often relegated to the back seat as the United States pursued its anti-communist/anti-Soviet containment strategy in the political and economic world. To be sure, rhetorical support for freedom, democracy, and human rights was central to American policies. In practice, however, that support was often compromised by more strategic concerns for power and prosperity in the Cold War calculations of the period.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### War, Peace, and the Pendulum Effect

As a country founded on the principles of liberty and limited government, the United States has grappled regularly with the tension between the requirements of those principles and the demands of national security in an anarchic and dangerous world. One way to understand the consequences of the tension and trade-offs between democracy and national security is to examine the patterns in terms of a pendulum effect. During times of war and danger when perceptions, real and imagined, of threat and fear of enemies increase, US leaders have tended to embrace policies to curtail the civil rights and liberties of Americans, sometimes dramatically, in the name of national security. As the periods of national emergency and danger pass, and perceptions of threat decline, leaders have generally taken steps to restore and protect liberties and roll back the security measures that were adopted. Thus, the pendulum swings between these two competing objectives, as it has done throughout US history (see Farber 2008; Stone 2007).

We could trace this pattern back to the earliest days of the United States (e.g., the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798; measures such as the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus and the imposition of martial law during, and after, the American Civil War), but let's consider examples of this pendulum effect from the last 100 years or so. These examples illustrate the actions and reactions that form the pattern and make for a good discussion of the dilemmas between liberty and security over the course of American history.

- During World War I, the US government imposed a broad array of restrictions on socialist, anarchist, and other groups, including German Americans, in the name of security. This included the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 (regulating antigovernment speech and opinion) and continued with the anti-Bolshevik and antisocialist Palmer Raids in 1919–1920 led by J. Edgar Hoover and the early FBI. In the years following World War I, almost all of these restrictions were rolled back by the Supreme Court and Congress.
- World War II led to the infamous presidential decision in Executive Order 9066 to relocate and intern more than 100,000 Japanese Americans in a series of “War Relocation Camps,” actions later rescinded in 1945, and the Smith (or Alien Registration) Act of 1940, which required non-US citizens to register with the government and established criminal penalties for advocating—or belonging to a group advocating—the overthrow of the US government.
- During the early Cold War, the threat and fear of communism led to numerous congressional investigations (such as by the House Committee on Un-American Activities); loyalty oaths; official lists of supposed subversive organizations; informal “blacklists”; and domestic surveillance, investigations, and infiltration of thousands of individuals and groups by the government and local leaders (such as *Operation Cointelpro* under J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI). This came to be known as McCarthyism and produced a powerful backlash with the rise of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements.
- After 9/11, the Bush administration quickly submitted an antiterrorism bill known as the USA Patriot Act, which became law in October 2001. The USA Patriot Act increased penalties for acts of terrorism and for harboring or financing terrorists or terrorist organizations. It expanded the government's ability to conduct electronic surveillance; get subpoenas for e-mail, Internet, and telephone communications; acquire nationwide search warrants; detain immigrants without charges; and penetrate (and sanction) money-laundering banks. It also permitted government officials to share grand jury information to thwart terrorism and relax the conditions under which judges may authorize intelligence wiretaps. Beginning in 2005, when the Iraq War went badly, the act became increasingly controversial and was later challenged and modified (but not outright eliminated).

According to Geoffrey Stone (2007), it is almost as if the United States has two constitutions: one for war and one for peace. This typically occurs because most segments of society tend to rally behind the president and the government to fight the enemy abroad (and at home). War and national emergencies, in particular, tend to be times when fear increases, and little tolerance exists for individuals and groups that publicly criticize or challenge the government's foreign policy or the status quo within society.

**Is the United States currently in a time of war, a time of peace, or “war in a time of peace”? What should be the appropriate balance between the demands of liberty and security in times of war?**

For twenty years, American leaders from both political parties broadly embraced this strategy of “liberal hegemony” (Posen 2018). As Ikenberry (2017) summarized, American power and leadership was directed to a “liberal international order” organized around economic openness, multilateral institutions, security cooperation, democratic solidarity, and internationalist ideals. Global containment and deterrence were at the core of US national security policies as American policymakers emphasized trying to prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its communist empire. American policymakers believed that protecting other countries from the Soviet threat indirectly protected the United States and enhanced its national security. Hence, the United States drew lines, labeled countries as friend or foe, and made national commitments to and alliances with friendly regimes. And when foreign threats were perceived, the United States responded. Moreover, the broad bipartisan policy consensus also led to a procedural consensus in which presidential leadership—even preeminence—in the politics and processes of US foreign policymaking flourished (e.g., Melanson 2015).

This policy and procedural consensus centered on US leadership, global containment, and the LIEO inevitably led to American interventionism abroad and the tragic involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War. Over four different presidential administrations from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, the steady and increasing American commitment to South Vietnam was never seriously challenged within the executive branch or by members of Congress. American policymakers were operating within the Cold War Consensus in which South Vietnam was seen as an independent state threatened by the expansionist designs of a communist monolith (North Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union). Therefore, the United States could not afford to appease the so-called expansion anywhere in the world for fear that this would feed the appetite of the aggressor and allow other countries to fall (like dominoes) to communism.

***The Cold War Dissensus, 1969–1989.*** Changes in the global context and the effects of international events like the Vietnam War had significant consequences for US foreign policy and its politics. The most important changes in the global context included perceived parity between the United States and the Soviet Union; the economic recovery and rising power of Europe and Japan; growing economic influence from the newly industrializing countries of the developing world and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC); and the growth of Third World nationalism and independence. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the relative decline of American power and a more pluralistic and interdependent world made it increasingly difficult for the United States to pursue its Cold War policies abroad.

As the world became more pluralistic and interdependent, the US ability to order the world declined relative to its post–World War II apex. Indeed, as Europe, Japan, and the Soviet Union recovered from the devastation of the war, American power could only decline in comparison. The United States continued to be the most powerful country in the world but no longer was as able to exercise the kind of economic, political, and military influence that it enjoyed at its height during the late 1940s and 1950s.

In many ways, the Cuban Missile Crisis (with its crystal ball–like revelations about the potential consequences of unrestrained US–Soviet confrontation) and the growth in Soviet

military power contributed to perceived parity between the United States and the Soviet Union. Economically, although the United States remained the preeminent power, its economic influence nonetheless declined quite dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s from its post–World War II peak. Between 1950 and 1976, for example, America’s economic role in the world declined in the following ways:

- The percentage of total world economic production produced within the United States declined from almost 50 percent to 24 percent.
- The American share of world crude steel production fell from 45 percent to 17 percent.
- American iron ore production shrank from 42 percent to 10 percent of the world total.
- Crude petroleum production declined from 53 percent to 14 percent.
- The percentage of international financial reserves decreased from 49 percent to 7 percent.
- American exports fell from 18 percent to 11 percent of world trade.
- Even American wheat production as a percentage of global production declined from 17 percent to 14 percent (Krasner 1982, 38).
- Very simply, economic production had increased more rapidly in Europe and Japan and throughout the world than in the United States.

The American failure in the Vietnam War—its first defeat in war (with its harsh exposure of the costs of the logic of global containment)—and the rising nationalism and independence of the Third World highlighted the limits to the ability of the United States to achieve its goals and control outcomes in the developing world. Simply put, after investing as much as \$30 billion a year and more than 500,000 troops during the height of the fifteen-year American involvement, the United States’ containment strategy was unsuccessful in keeping South Vietnam an independent, noncommunist country. As a result, the policy of global containment of Soviet communism, which had prevailed since World War II, was challenged by competing foreign policy perspectives.

Economically, the relative decline of the United States and the rise of new forces in the developing world and the international economy led to major changes to US foreign economic policy. In 1971, President Richard Nixon responded to increasing international pressure on the US economy by discarding the convertibility of the US dollar to gold and placing a 10 percent surcharge on Japanese imports. In doing so, he violated the principles of fixed exchange rates and free trade, contributing to a situation in which the Bretton Woods system could no longer be sustained. This reflected a relative decline in the US economy, the economic recovery of Europe and Japan, and the rise of OPEC. Currencies would now float: The German Deutschmark, the British pound, the French franc, and the Japanese yen increased in value relative to the dominance of the US dollar (the euro did not exist until 1999). The price of oil would rise periodically. International trade and

investment grew tremendously between the increasingly developed countries, while developing countries increased their foreign debt. In summary, the international economic system became increasingly market oriented, complex, and open to periods of rapid growth and prosperity, while economic instability, recessions, and the periodic collapse of different economies occurred throughout the world. The United States and a recovered Europe (the Group of 7 or G-7) found it increasingly difficult to manage these changes—a trend that has intensified to the present day.

Additionally, the United States found it more difficult to threaten and use force successfully abroad after the Vietnam War. The US government found it increasingly difficult to promote political stability and to exercise overt and covert military force. In Iran, for example, the United States was able to covertly overthrow the Iranian government with relative ease, restoring the shah to power in 1953. Twenty-five years later, however, the United States could not stop the Iranian revolution and the rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini, triggering the Iran hostage crisis in American politics. Even in Central America, the traditional region of American hegemony, the United States faced new obstacles to the exercise of foreign policy influence. Small military or covert US operations had determined the fate of Central American countries throughout most of the twentieth century; by the 1980s, however, the Ronald Reagan administration's covert war in Nicaragua involving more than 10,000 Contras was unable to defeat militarily the Sandinistas. Quick and easy military victories, such as in Grenada and Panama, were still possible, but they became more costly politically and, with the rise of global complexity, they were the exception to the rule.

These changes in the global context, and the US foreign policy response to them, resulted in major challenges to the policy and policymaking procedures of the Cold War Consensus. First, a policy of containment continued to have its share of advocates, but other policy orientations gained legitimacy and influenced the policymaking process (e.g., Melanson 2015). Second, with the growth of economic problems at home and abroad, foreign economic policy grew in importance to the foreign policy agenda. Although most American leaders continued to see the need for a stable and liberal international market economy, they were often unsure over the particular strategy and means to promote economic stability. Third, in contrast to the Cold War years, after the Vietnam War, it became very difficult for any president or administration to dominate foreign policymaking, devise a foreign policy that responded successfully to changes in the global environment, and obtain substantial domestic support over time. Indeed, concerns over the excesses of US foreign policy during the Cold War Consensus—including US reliance on the use of force and interventionism and the growth of what many viewed as excessive presidential power and influence over policy—led to both substantive and policy debates and challenges as well as efforts to challenge and limit the dominance of an “imperial presidency” (e.g., Schlesinger 1989).

Although US foreign economic policy became more important in the Cold War Dissensus phase, it tended to lack coherence in an increasingly globalized economy despite the simple rhetoric of “free markets.” This is because of the growing difficulty that governments have addressing complex and intractable economic issues—such as inflation, unemployment, energy needs, deficits, currency fluctuations, “bull” and “bear” markets, environmental concerns, and the like—in

both the domestic and international arenas. This meant that US foreign economic policy has tended to be reactive to domestic and international economic problems as they have arisen.

In the national security area, inconsistency in US foreign policy was also visible. The Nixon and Ford administrations represented the first real change from the Cold War emphasis on containment of Soviet communism to ensure global security to a “realpolitik” orientation and a policy of détente focused on counterbalancing the Soviet Union as a traditional great power to promote global stability and order. The Carter administration entered office with a relatively optimistic vision of global change and a liberal internationalist orientation. In 1981, US foreign policy under the Reagan administration fully returned to an emphasis on global containment of Soviet communism through the threat and use of force reminiscent of the Cold War era of the 1950s and 1960s, while retreating from multilateralism as well, until the latter years when greater cooperation with the Soviet Union emerged with the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev.

Thus, from World War II until Vietnam, American national security policy was devoted to containing the threat of Soviet communism throughout the globe and was supported by a foreign economic policy based on American leadership of the international political economy. Changes in the global context and events like the Vietnam War and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system challenged the US ability to promote a global containment policy and to maintain economic prosperity at home. After Vietnam, successive administrations embraced different foreign policy initiatives to address the new context, and foreign economic policy was restored to a significant place on the foreign policy agenda.

***The Post-Cold War Years, 1990–2001.*** With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States entered a new phase of its Global Era in foreign policy. The end of the Cold War in 1989 and 1990 made the world an even more complex place, with contradictory implications for American power and US foreign policy. Two key features of the post-Cold War global context have been most important for the politics of US foreign policy: (1) the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union, and (2) the rise of globalization.

The most significant long-term development in the global environment has been the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union. After Mikhail Gorbachev came to power as the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985, he embarked on a course of domestic and foreign policy reforms to improve Soviet political and economic structures, policies, and performance and the Soviet Union’s relations with the United States and Europe. Gorbachev led efforts to decentralize economic policymaking and open greater political participation, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press at home. He also sought to reduce Cold War tensions and improve cooperation with the United States and Western Europe, while rejecting the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine, which asserted the Soviet Union’s right to intervene militarily in other communist countries (e.g., in Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, and elsewhere) if their Marxist-Leninist governments were under threat.

In 1989, the Soviet-aligned governments of Central and Eastern Europe fell peacefully to popular movements seeking to replace them, although the revolution to remove the Ceausescu regime in Romania turned violent. The Soviet Union did not interfere, even as East Germany and West Germany began the process of reunification while remaining in the NATO alliance.

However, as the movements for independence spread to the republics of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev resisted, facing opposition from hard-line military and Communist Party leaders. In August 1991, the hard-liners attempted a coup against Gorbachev, which failed largely due to the resistance of Boris Yeltsin, the elected president of the Soviet Republic of Russia. Yeltsin pushed hard with other republic leaders for the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and in December 1991, Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union, which was dissolved in favor of a loose federation of its former republics, now independent, in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

This dramatic change removed the central challenger to American power and influence in world politics and led to dramatic changes in the global context. Widely regarded as an American and Western victory in the Cold War, the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union led to what columnist Charles Krauthammer (1990) called a “unipolar moment”: “The true geopolitical structure of the post–Cold War world ... [is] a single pole of world power that consists of the United States at the apex of the industrial West. Perhaps it is more accurate to say the United States and behind it the West.”

The end of the Cold War also expanded and accelerated globalization (Keohane and Nye 2011), which had been under way for decades. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing changes resulted in a single, integrated international political economy of growing interdependence and complexity. The collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, along with the economic transition within China since the death of Mao Zedong, reintegrated these areas of the world within the larger international political economy, and accelerated the integration of other areas of the world deprived of an alternative to the US-led LIEO. Most of the world became increasingly interdependent in a single global economy.

In this context, the end of the Cold War provided the United States with new opportunities and constraints in the conduct of foreign policy. Certainly, the central axis of US foreign policy after World War II was removed, opening opportunities for US leadership and greater cooperation in the rules-based liberal international order. However, the end of the Cold War also removed the central strategic focus of post–World War II US foreign policy—the containment of the Soviet Union—leading to uncertainty over the direction of policy. In fact, the Cold War’s end led to a world of greater complexity, where global issues proliferated and power became more diffused. One key area of greater concern soon emerged—transnational terrorism. In addition, other types of problems become more salient, including the following:

- Disputes arising from traditional rivalries and state boundaries such as in the Middle East and between India and Pakistan
- Changes in the power and influence of state actors, such as in China, Russia, and the European Union
- Nuclear proliferation, such as in Iraq, Iran, and North Korea
- Ethnic groups and loyalties, over and within state boundaries



- Movements and migrations of peoples, demographic changes, and the growth of refugee populations
- Demands and needs for scarce resources such as water
- Economic competition and growing inequality between rich and poor, around the globe and within regions and states
- International economic instability and limits to growth, not just for poorer countries but also for developing and developed countries, especially the core economies of the United States and the European Union
- Profound technological developments occurring with greater speed and uncertainty, especially in information and communications technology
- Environment and pollution problems including deforestation and global warming and more

The end of the Cold War created increasing global complexity and the rise of globalization, but it also resulted in the proliferation of global conflicts, crises, wars, and lots of future uncertainty. As James Woolsey, director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1993 to 1995 noted, “We have slain a large dragon, but we live now in a jungle filled with a bewildering variety of poisonous snakes. And in many ways, the dragon was easier to keep track of” (Jehl 1993). These new challenges posed new issues for the exercise of American power and leadership.

President George H. W. Bush directed his administration’s attention to managing the disruptions generated by the collapse of the Soviet Union; ensuring peaceful transitions in Europe, including the reunification of Germany; and taking steps toward greater cooperation in what he called a “new world order.” The Bush administration was driven by a pragmatic approach committed to managing the effects of the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and elsewhere (Beschloss and Talbott 1994). Beyond that, confronting and reversing Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1991 was seen not only as an important step to resist international aggression but also as “a big idea; a new world order ... [with] new ways of working with other nations ... peaceful settlement of disputes, solidarity against aggression, reduced and controlled arsenals and just treatment of all peoples” (President Bush, quoted in Nye 1992).

President Bill Clinton’s administration sought to direct American attention to liberal internationalist goals in the post–Cold War global context. However, as its predecessor found, the Clinton administration faced an increasingly complex international and domestic environment in which the days of the Cold War’s grand design gave way to a more pragmatic time of muddling through (Danner 1997; Layne 1997; Rosati 1997; Scott 1998). President Clinton aimed US foreign policy at preserving and extending American leadership and engagement in world affairs, expanding free trade and the cooperative structures and institutions of the global economy, empowering multilateral cooperation and problem-solving, and the support for and promotion of democratic governance. The president highlighted the dilemma in a 1993 interview, commenting on the implications of the loss of the anti-Soviet foreign policy framework that

dominated the preceding forty years: “Gosh, I miss the Cold War. Finding a workable framework for this new era and sorting out America’s role could take years” (Devroy and Smith 1993).

President Clinton did manage to initiate several significant foreign policy actions in Haiti, Mexico, Bosnia, and the Middle East. Also, the administration had great difficulty in responding to the continuing Yugoslavian crisis, and in getting its NATO allies to work together multilaterally, until war resulted in Kosovo through a massive bombing campaign. For the most part, major national security failures were avoided while the administration highlighted domestic policy and international economics. Most prominent in this regard were passage of NAFTA and the Uruguay Round of GATT, which produced the WTO. However, the Clinton administration was accused of considerable vacillation and hesitancy in the conduct of US foreign policy and often tended to be reactive rather than proactive abroad.

In the post–Cold War context, both President Bush and President Clinton faced another set of challenges as well, this time centered on the politics of US foreign policy and the prospects and challenges for presidential leadership. Consensus over the proper role, important interests, and necessary actions of the United States in the world was noticeably lacking. As noted by Holsti and Rosenau (1984) and Holsti (1994), policymakers and the public were increasingly divided, often along partisan lines, on the basic issue of the appropriate role of the United States in the world and on what constituted acceptable foreign policy goals, actions, and instruments. Hence, great debate over foreign policy ensued and presidents have faced growing challenges to their leadership of foreign policymaking.

***The Post-9/11 Years, 2002–Present.*** For US foreign policy, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC, mark another significant shift in the global context. For the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, three central features of this context were most salient. First, ten years after the end of the Cold War, American power remained dominant in world politics. As Brooks and Wohlforth (2002) put it, “If today’s American primacy does not constitute unipolarity, then nothing ever will.” Second, the post-9/11 global context was characterized by the continued broadening and deepening of globalization. Finally, the global context after 9/11 highlighted the growing challenges of transnational terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Together, these features of the global context created a complex array of challenging dynamics for US foreign policy.

During George W. Bush’s 2000 election campaign, much emphasis was on the need to lessen commitments, emphasize vital national interests, and exercise greater humility abroad in response to what was commonly described as a more benign and favorable international environment (see Rice 2000). However, in reaction to the September 11 attacks, the administration openly embraced a more aggressive foreign policy, revolving around a global war on terrorism, preemption, and the pursuit of international primacy and unilateralism. In the words of National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice: “I really think that this period is analogous to 1945 to 1947 in that the events so clearly demonstrated that there is a big global threat, and that it’s a big global threat to a lot of countries that you would not have normally thought of as being in the coalition. That has started shifting the tectonic plates in international politics” (quoted in Lemann 2002, 44). Numerous members of the administration tended to view power, especially

military power, as the essential ingredient for American security, while also rejecting traditional emphases on deterrence, containment, multilateralism, and international rules and agreements. It was, in short, a view fundamentally committed to maintaining a unipolar world and acting unilaterally (see Daalder and Lindsay 2003; Ikenberry 2011).

New enemies—Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, Saddam Hussein and Iraq, and terrorism—replaced the old enemy of communism. The new foreign policy orientation was based on deterrence, containment, and preemptive strikes on terrorism and alleged terrorist threats throughout the world. After 9/11, in the minds of members of the Bush administration, “the United States was [now] faced with an irreconcilable enemy; the sort of black-and-white challenge that had supposedly been transcended in the post-Cold War period, when the great clash of ideologies [had] ended, [and] had now reappeared with shocking suddenness” (Hirsh 2002, 18). Bush’s global war on terrorism resulted in a major defense buildup, an emphasis on “homeland security,” an effort to distinguish between friends and foes, and a heavy reliance on the use of force abroad, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This policy orientation became known as the Bush Doctrine, reflected in Bush’s 2002 foreign policy address at West Point. The war on terrorism became the core and the mantra of the Bush administration’s foreign policy, to the neglect of numerous other foreign policy issues and approaches, including the international political economy. In the words of one critic, “The Bush Doctrine has been used to justify a new assertiveness abroad unprecedented since the early days of the Cold War—amounting nearly to the declaration of American hegemony—and it has redefined US relationships around the world” (Hirsh 2002, 19).

At first, the public and Congress rallied around this action. However, with the initial military campaign in Afghanistan and Iraq over, the more difficult task of nation-building ensued. Moreover, Bush’s rejection of the international community left the United States isolated and widely distrusted overseas. For example, by late 2006, citizens in thirty-three of thirty-five countries surveyed believed that the war in Iraq had increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks around the world (Program on International Policy Attitudes 2006). Ninety-eight percent of European Commission members and 68 percent of members in the European Parliament disapproved of Bush’s foreign policies (Center for the Study of Political Change 2006). At home, a July 2008 survey found “improving America’s standing in the world” to be the general public’s top US foreign policy priority (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2008).

With the costs of the war spiraling upward, Bush began to face increased unrest and challenges, and his public approval began to decline steadily. Distance from the 9/11 attacks, coupled with increasing costs in Iraq, persistent questions about the success of his global war on terrorism, and the decline of American prestige and reputation around the world (along with domestic economic problems and other challenges) eroded Bush’s support. It exacerbated his lame-duck status to the point that his presidency was effectively crippled in November 2006, when the Democrats seized control of both houses of Congress in a stunning political backlash against Bush.

Riding public discontent with the Bush administration, Obama emerged as the victor in the 2008 presidential elections. Across his two terms in the White House, Obama sought to restore American prestige and reputation and reengage with the world so as to repair relations with

friends and allies and assert American power and influence in a softer and more conciliatory fashion. While contending with the so-called Great Recession of 2008–2010, Obama sought American “indispensability” instead of primacy or dominance.

The administration’s first priority was to prevent the economic situation from deteriorating further and potentially collapsing into a great depression reminiscent of the 1930s. Because the economic crisis was global in its scope, the administration also highlighted the need for a multilateral response (through the Group of 20 [G-20] countries and international financial institutions). In addition, the Obama administration also had to contend with the legacy of the Iraq invasion, challenges stemming from the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan (where the Taliban and al-Qaeda had reemerged as viable opponents), regional security and nonproliferation challenges in North Korea and Iran, and changes in the Arab world with the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011. In addition, other issues needed to be addressed, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, the future of Russia, oil dependency, immigration, and urgent environmental issues such as global warming. Furthermore, Obama also confronted a political environment in Washington, DC, more divided along partisan lines than ever before in recent memory.

The Obama administration tried to restore confidence in US leadership and renegotiate the liberal international order to reestablish US leadership and promote multilateral responses to address such global problems (Ikenberry 2011). In contrast to Bush, Obama argued that American power was applied most effectively in the velvet glove of cooperation, relying more on soft power based on persuasion and ideational appeal, and with greater concern for global problems than American dominance (Walt 2005). He thus aggressively pursued diplomatic engagement and multilateral cooperation. The new administration stressed a conception of American national interest that incorporated transnational concerns, a conception of power that included soft as well as hard forms of power, an emphasis on diplomacy and economic statecraft to a greater degree relative to military power, and greater involvement in multilateral institutions and support for international law (Hook and Scott 2012; Ikenberry 2011).

As President Obama (2009) articulated early on:

The United States remains the most powerful, wealthiest nation on Earth, but we’re only one nation, and ... the problems that we confront, whether it’s drug cartels, climate change, terrorism, you name it, can’t be solved just by one country. And I think if you start with that approach, then you are inclined to listen and not just talk. ... Countries are going to have interests, and changes in foreign policy approaches by my administration aren’t suddenly going to make all those interests that may diverge from ours disappear. What it does mean, though, is, at the margins, they are more likely to want to cooperate than not cooperate.

## Trump and Biden in a Changing World

The Trump response to the post-9/11 context was quite different from that of all his predecessors. After unexpectedly winning the 2016 presidential election, his administration faced a global context dominated by questions of American power and the nature and consequences of globalization and transnational issues, especially terrorism. Surely, the United

States remained the most powerful single actor on the global stage. However, US power and leadership faced growing challenges, as other states adopted increasingly assertive stances in world politics.

Understanding these challenges involves important factors related to the nature of the global context. As Richard Betts (2002, 33) wrote early in the post-9/11 years, “Not all the world sees US primacy as benign.” Three reactions are often generated in response to hegemonic power, in this case, the United States, especially in the post–Cold War and post-9/11 years. First, the predominance of American strength might prompt other powers to accommodate and cooperate with the United States, “bandwagoning” (joining in), “bonding” (build close ties and hope to influence US decision-making as a trusted ally), or attempting to “penetrate” American politics (taking advantage of the open society and multiple access points to American officials in the executive branch and Congress to persuade decision makers to adopt favorable policies). Second, US hegemony might trigger efforts by other states to rein in American power and resist American domination. These efforts might take the form of “binding”—attempting to use norms and institutions such as the United Nations and others to constrain American freedom of action. They could also resort to “blackmail,” which involves threatening to take action that Washington opposes unless the United States offers compensation. They might also prompt efforts at “balancing” American power, “balking” (ignoring US requests), or “foot-dragging” in response to American requests to hinder American efforts. Third, to encourage and spread resistance to American leadership, others might attempt “delegitimization,” portraying the United States as irresponsible, arrogant, and selfish (see Walt 2005).

By 2016, over two-and-a-half decades of the “unipolar moment” contributed to significant increases in the second and third types of reactions to hegemony. Continuing trends from the end of the Cold War Consensus years, friends and allies in Europe and Asia took more independent roles on a variety of issues. China’s rapid growth in economic and political power led it to challenge US leadership on a variety of matters, while other regional powers such as Brazil, India, and Iran pursued more assertive policies as well. Vladimir Putin’s Russia engaged in increasingly aggressive challenges to the liberal international order and US leadership and policy, including its sophisticated campaign of cyberattacks on the 2016 US presidential elections and its aggression against its neighbors in Georgia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, and others. The expansion of these types of reactions to hegemony fueled concerns that the global environment was undergoing a significant power transition, which would have major consequences for the international order and for the patterns of cooperation, competition, and conflict in it (e.g., Allison 2017; Ikenberry 2011; Tammen et al. 2000).

The second key feature of the global context involved the accelerating effects and consequences of globalization and transnational issues. The forces of globalization have unleashed a more complex and uncontrollable world of interdependence; technological change; uneven development; identity and culture clashes; and transnational issues and forces, including transnational terrorism, global environmental problems, and challenges generated by the movement of people across borders. Economically, for the United States, economic competition from increasingly wealthy states, the consequences of trade competition for American jobs and workers, and growing inequality between the wealthiest Americans and the rest of society spurred significant public disillusionment with the LIEO. Issues of sustainability, security, stability, and

culture generated by the transnational problems fostered by globalization further fueled societal tension, fear, and conflict and amplified the disagreements and lack of consensus among US policymakers over goals and policy responses.

Trump seized on these matters during the 2016 presidential election campaign, adopting a populist, nativist, and unilateralist approach. In office, the Trump administration's foreign policy response suffered from significant incoherence, as the president and contending factions of advisers struggled to formulate policy without well-structured policymaking processes. Nevertheless, the administration's overall approach reflected a two-pronged response to the challenges of the global context.

First, the Trump administration largely rejected the post-World War II American commitment to a liberal international order. Convinced that the US commitment to this order long resulted in America "losing" to others, the Trump administration's embrace of an "America First" strategy largely repudiated the foundations of American foreign policy on which most preceding administrations had built. President Trump once even asserted that the post-World War II international order, which all presidents since Harry Truman have been committed to building and sustaining, was "not working at all" (Landler 2017). In their place, the Trump administration fully embraced unilateralism and abandoned support for the institutions and cooperative practices of post-World War II multilateralism (e.g., Ikenberry 2017). In addition, the Trump administration pursued a blend of primacy and neo-isolationism disconnected from the liberal norms of support for democracy, human rights, or international institutions; long-standing American alliance commitments to NATO, Japan, and South Korea; and the US commitment to global problem-solving—all in pursuit of "illiberal hegemony" and an "independent America" (e.g., Bremmer 2016; Posen 2018). Finally, the Trump administration adopted an amoral transactionalism, implementing an improvisational foreign policy framework that stressed discrete wins rather than coherent strategy; treated foreign relations bilaterally and without distinction between democracy and autocracy, allies or nonallies; and resisted the alignment of means and ends (Zenko and Lissner 2017).

Second, the Trump administration pursued foreign policies aimed at economic nationalism, extreme homeland security, and a muscular but constrained American military. The Trump administration abandoned the long post-World War II commitment to a global free trade regime, which it viewed as a threat to US economic success, instead withdrawing from trade deals and negotiations and implementing tariffs and other pressure on trade partners. Motivated by a focus on the dangers of radical Islamic terrorism and immigration, the administration advocated for and enacted harsh border security policies including a ban on refugees and immigrants from (mostly) Muslim countries and the construction of a wall along the US-Mexico border. The administration also sought the expansion of US military power and increased defense spending, while seeking to withdraw American military commitments and deployments around the world (e.g., Kahl and Brands 2017; Lissner and Rapp-Hooper 2018; Posen 2018; Zenko and Lissner 2017).

The Trump response to the post-9/11 global context generated controversy and conflict at home and abroad. In one key consequence related to the global context and questions of

**FIGURE 2.2 ■ US Favorability Ratings in Key Countries, 2000–2022**

**U.S. favorability**  
 % who have a **favorable** view of the U.S.  
 ■ Highest rating ■ Lowest rating

	'00	Mar		May		'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'21-'22 change	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
South Korea	58	52	-	46	-	-	-	-	58	70	78	79	-	-	78	82	84	-	75	80	77	59	77	89	▲12	
Sweden	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	46	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	69	45	44	45	33	57	66	▲9	
Australia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	31	47	54	▲7	
Germany	78	60	25	45	38	42	37	30	31	64	63	62	52	53	51	50	57	35	30	39	26	59	63	▲4		
Netherlands	-	-	-	-	45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	65	37	34	46	30	57	60	▲3	
Canada	-	72	-	63	-	59	-	55	-	68	-	-	-	64	-	68	65	43	39	51	35	61	63	▲2		
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	56	56	0	
UK	83	75	48	70	58	55	56	51	53	69	65	61	60	58	66	65	61	50	50	57	41	64	64	0		
Singapore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	51	51	0	
Japan	77	72	-	-	-	63	61	50	59	66	85	72	69	66	68	72	57	67	68	41	71	70	71	70	▼1	
Spain	50	-	14	38	-	41	23	34	33	58	61	64	58	62	60	65	59	31	42	52	40	62	60	62	60	▼2
France	62	62	31	42	37	43	39	39	42	75	73	75	69	64	75	73	63	46	38	48	31	65	57	65	57	▼8
Italy	76	70	34	60	-	-	-	53	-	-	-	-	74	76	78	83	72	61	52	62	45	74	61	74	61	▼13
Greece	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35	39	34	-	38	43	36	54	-	63	48	63	48	▼15
Poland	86	79	-	-	62	-	61	68	67	74	70	69	67	73	74	74	73	73	70	79	-	-	91	-	-	
Israel	-	-	-	78	-	-	-	78	-	71	-	72	-	83	84	81	-	81	83	83	-	-	83	-	-	
Malaysia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	44	-	

Note: Statistically significant changes over time in bold. 2000 trend is from 1999 or 2000 and provided by the U.S. Department of State. Prior to 2020, Australian surveys were conducted by phone. See topline for results. Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey, Q5a.   
 \*International Attitudes Toward the U.S., NATO and Russia in a Time of Crisis.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

Source: Pew Research Center, "International Attitudes toward the U.S., NATO and Russia in a Time of Crisis," p. 14.

American power, leadership, and influence, by 2020 the administration’s foreign policy course had substantially eroded American support and prestige around the world. According to the Pew Research Center, for example, favorable views of the United States and its leadership from key American friends and allies had plummeted. As Figure 2.2 shows, favorable ratings fell precipitously from the Obama years to the Trump years, with most ratings in the 20–40 percent favorable range, well below the preceding eight years.

The onset of the global pandemic in 2020 caused by a virulent new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2, often referred to by the disease it causes, COVID-19) created even more challenges for the Trump administration. At home, the inadequacy of the administration response was a key reason for Donald Trump’s loss to Joseph Biden in the 2020 election. By the time of the 2020 election, the virus had swept across globe, infecting more than 25 million people in 188 countries, and resulting in almost 1 million deaths. Countries struggled to respond, with some, such as New Zealand, Taiwan, and South Korea, more successful than others, such as the United States and Brazil, where the virus continued to spread at an alarming rate. Unfortunately, although the global and transnational nature of the pandemic and its public health consequences clearly demonstrated the need for international engagement and cooperation (e.g., Brown and Susskind 2020), the

Trump administration resisted most efforts to do so, despite a G20 virtual summit in April 2020 that resulted in pledges by member states to develop health measures, expand medical supplies and research, and increase spending to sustain and boost the global economy. In fact, in September 2020, the Trump administration would not even cooperate with the World Health Organization and the rest of the world to develop and distribute a vaccine.

In his inaugural address in 2021, President Joseph Biden promised to reengage with the world, “not to meet yesterday’s challenges, but today’s and tomorrow’s.” Challenges at home and abroad included contending with Donald Trump’s legacy and charting a different course to take the United States in a different direction than his predecessor’s response to the twin features of the global context described in the preceding paragraphs. Although the challenges of changes in global power and the consequences of globalization remained central, the Biden administration’s response was one of reversal and restoration.

Rejecting the “America First” approach of his predecessor, President Biden sought to reestablish a structured process for foreign policy decision-making, renew American relationships with core friends and allies, restore American engagement in international institutions and multilateral agreements, and reassert American influence in world politics. As Antony Blinken (2016), President Biden’s Secretary of State, put it “the world is safer for the American people when we have friends, partners, and allies.” Early in his first year, President Biden’s Interim National Security Strategy (Biden 2021) put it this way:

We will build back better our economic foundations; reclaim our place in international institutions; lift up our values at home and speak out to defend them around the world; modernize our military capabilities, while leading first with diplomacy; and revitalize America’s unmatched network of alliances and partnerships. ...

...When we strengthen our alliances, we amplify our power and our ability to disrupt threats before they can reach our shores. When we invest in the economic development of countries, we create new markets for our products and reduce the likelihood of instability, violence, and mass migrations. When we strengthen health systems around the world, we reduce the risk of future pandemics that can threaten our people and our economy. When we defend equal rights of all people—of women and girls, LGBTQI individuals, indigenous communities, people with disabilities, and people of every ethnic background and religion—we help ensure that those rights are protected for our own children here in America.

The Biden administration thus stressed a changing global context: a “a competitive international environment where heightening geopolitical competition, nationalism and populism render ... cooperation even more difficult” (The White House 2022, 6). In its 2022 National Security Strategy (The White House 2022), the administration identified two strategic challenges. Characterizing the world as at an “inflection point,” with the post-Cold War world era ending, the Biden administration emphasized that a “growing competition ... is underway between the major powers to shape what comes next” (The White House 2022, 6). This competition challenged the United States to address changes in the distribution of power and the challenges presented by competitors such as China, Russia, and regional actors as well,



which the administration argued demanded response and partnership, and the revitalization of America's role and participation in international institutions and multilateral engagement. The administration also emphasized the transnational challenges of many kinds that presented new tests for American foreign policy. Consequently, the Biden administration stressed the need to “cope with the effects of shared challenges that cross borders—whether it is climate change, food insecurity, communicable diseases, terrorism, energy shortages, or inflation” (The White House 2022, 6). The administration viewed these issues as “at the very core of national and international security,” and ones that demanded engagement and cooperation, not isolation and unilateralism.

The Biden administration also recognized the issues underlying its predecessor's “America First” approach, especially those stemming from the pressures of new challenges from rising competitors and global markets, even as it took a different course to address them. Accordingly, the administration embraced a “Foreign Policy for the Middle Class,” to try to draw the connections between US security, prosperity, and values by stressing economic growth and competitiveness “the linkages between American domestic strength and US ability to maintain international competitiveness” (Smeltz et al. 2021; see also The White House 2022). Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, summed it up by presenting a simple foreign policy metric: “Is it going to make life better, safer, and easier for working families?” (White House 2021). Connecting the dots, President Biden (2021) explained “We must demonstrate clearly to the American people that leading the world isn't an investment we make to feel good about ourselves. It's how we ensure the American people are able to live in peace, security, and prosperity. It's in our undeniable self-interest.”

In pursuit of this renewed commitment to engagement and to American domestic strength and competitiveness, the Biden administration undertook a variety of initiatives in its first two years, despite the constraints of a 50-50 party split in the US Senate, which delivered the narrowest of majorities for Democrats. These included leading the OECD and others (130 countries) to set a minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent, making COVID-19 vaccine commitments to the poorest countries of the world that led the rest of the G-7 countries to do likewise, reengaging the United States in the Paris climate agreement, restarting discussions with Iran, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Germany over Iran's nuclear program, and reinvigorating American diplomacy and cooperation with NATO allies and other partners and friends. At home, despite the razor thin margin in the Senate, the administration successfully passed major initiatives such as the American Rescue Act (a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package and COVID relief program) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (a \$550 billion package of Federal investment in roads, bridges, mass transit, water infrastructure, and broadband, among other things) in 2021. In 2022, while contending with rapidly accelerating inflation, and global economic struggles affecting most countries, the administration added the CHIPS and Science Act (a \$280 billion package to strengthen American manufacturing, supply chains, and national security, and invest in research and development, science and technology, and the workforce to improve American competitiveness in the global economy) and the Inflation Reduction Act (a package of about \$240 billion in deficit reduction and almost \$400 billion in spending on climate change, renewable energy, health care, and other items).

The Biden administration also responded directly to old and new foreign policy challenges reflecting changing international realities. In 2021, the administration completed US withdrawal from Afghanistan, ending a twenty-year intervention that began in the fall of 2001 and cost 2,456 American military deaths and almost 21,000 American military casualties. The US-backed regime quickly collapsed, even as the US withdrawal was being completed, and the Taliban took back power.

In February 2022, after a long buildup, Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine, seeking to replace its pro-west regime and annex much of its territory. The Biden administration laid the groundwork for support of the Ukrainian regime throughout 2021 and early 2022, building consensus among NATO allies and others. American and Western aid poured into Ukraine, helping a determined Ukrainian resistance to first blunt the initial wave of Russian attacks in the south, east, and north of Ukraine. Increased assistance, including extensive intelligence-sharing and other support led by the United States, helped the Ukrainian regime to turn Russia away from Kiev in the Spring, and then turn the tables with counterattacks in the northeast (around Kharkiv) and south (around Kherson) that liberated much of the territory seized by the initial Russian attacks. Adroit diplomacy and coalition-building by the administration and increasingly sophisticated assistance and weaponry exceeding billion to Ukraine from January 2021 to the end of 2022 were essential. In a major geopolitical development, the administration also shepherded the application of both Finland and Sweden to NATO membership to further isolate Russia, with accession expected in 2023. Finland officially became a member in April 2023. All of NATO's 30 members except Turkey had ratified Sweden's application, despite their commitments of support in the June 2022 NATO summit. At the same time, the administration carefully managed its approach to China, seeking to prevent its outright alignment with Russia while reining in growing US-Chinese hostility over Ukraine and issues such as tariffs/trade, human rights, Taiwan, and disputes in the South China Sea.

## **SUMMARY: THE GLOBAL CONTEXT AND THE CHALLENGE FOR US FOREIGN POLICY**

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As we have seen, the global environment plays a significant role in the policies and politics of US foreign policy. US foreign policy responds to the nature of the global context, and the dynamics, threats, and problems of the global context affect foreign policymaking. The long and rich history of US foreign policy has played out against the backdrop of the international system, which has contributed to the patterns and developments we have discussed in this chapter. Although the future of the United States is both promising and full of challenges, the patterns that have unfolded over time, especially in the Global Era of the post–World War II years, signal an uncertain future.

However, several things seem relatively clear. We may have entered a time of world history when the future of the United States will probably be unlike that experienced by any other previous great power. Throughout history, great powers in decline have traditionally faced a great power war that accelerated their fall—a most unlikely future scenario for the United States given key aspects of the global context, including the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons and

the increasing interdependence of the world. At the same time, as the United States seeks to apply its power and influence in the global arena, the old levers of power and influence are harder to identify and still harder to apply, and reliable foreign policy instruments such as military force face new constraints at home and abroad in their application.

Finally, the differing approaches of recent administrations to the post–Cold War and post-9/11 environments highlight the centrality of the politics and processes of US foreign policy-making. Our analytical framework places the players of the governmental institutions at the center, and their nature, characteristics, occupants, and actions are at the heart of understanding US foreign policy. In Part II, we turn to major governmental institutions and players from the White House, the foreign policy bureaucracy, and Congress to examine their characteristics, roles, and interactions in the complex and messy politics of US foreign policy.

### THINK ABOUT THIS

In 1993, President Bill Clinton said, “Gosh I miss the Cold War!” Think about the nature of world politics, the role of the United States in the world, and US foreign policy discussed in this chapter.

*What might explain President Clinton’s nostalgia for the Cold War?*

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