Contents

Introduction

THE LONG AMERICAN CENTURY

The questions have been there from the start. From the founding of the republic in the eighteenth century, Americans have debated their country's place in international affairs and the purpose of their foreign policy. Their rise to global prominence by the onset of the twentieth century only catalyzed competing arguments over if, and if so how, the United States should engage others—on their continent, within their own hemisphere, and, ultimately, globally.

The passage of time changed but never decided these debates. Indeed, the end of the Cold War—and the onrushing twenty-first century—only reinvigorated them. The Soviet Union's end, coupled with globalization and the apparent triumph of democracy, led many to wonder if the world still needed American power and influence spread across all the globe's time zones. Was such a global reach even in the country's own best interest? Former secretary of state Henry Kissinger, perhaps the world's most recognized living diplomat, worried that many of his fellow citizens thought their country too powerful and the world too peaceful to give much thought to what lay beyond their borders. "At the dawn of the new millennium, the United States is enjoying preeminence unrivaled by even the greatest empires of the past," he wrote in 2001 in a book with an intentionally provocative title: *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?*[1]

Perhaps it did, though not to confront the problems Kissinger expected. Only months after publication, the terrorist group al-Qaeda launched the devastating 9/11 attacks against targets in New York and Washington, D.C. Thousands died, and a new era began. But what kind of era would it be? Nothing could have shown Americans more clearly that they certainly needed a foreign policy following the Cold War, yet Kissinger (and, to be fair, most of the nation's national security establishment) had missed a great deal. His book made no mention of al-Qaeda or its leader, Osama bin Laden, and offered only a brief discussion of international terrorism. As Kissinger would be the first to admit, foreign policy priorities are apt to change, often suddenly and unpredictably.

[1] Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 17.

When they do, as when World War II or the Cold War ended, after a shocking terrorist blow or a global pandemic, or as once-moribund great-power rivalries surged anew in the 2020s, Americans have found themselves locked in ferocious, albeit familiar, debates over how their country should act on the world stage. Such debates invariably hinge upon history. American successes and mistakes in past years helped latter-day strategists and politicians craft, justify, and legitimate plans for the present and future. Making claims about the past is common practice. Yet misperceptions about the history of American foreign relations are just as common; public debate, almost by its very nature, often lacks knowledge, context, or specificity.

Distortions, half-truths, and catechisms of national faith made without regard to evidence, offered by all parts of the political spectrum, typically prevail during highly politicized debates about America's "proper" role in the world. Three decades removed from their seemingly triumphant Cold War victory, and two decades after 9/11 shook the country and in turn the world, Republican and Democratic presidential candidates routinely submitted divergent foreign policy prescriptions for treating their ongoing international problems, offering different visions of America's place in the world, and of its past. Determined to "make America great again," which is inherently a claim about the past, Donald Trump additionally claimed during his final days in office that he had "restored American sovereignty at home and American leadership abroad" by making "America first" the hallmark of his diplomacy.[2] His successor disagreed, both with Trump's conclusion and his underlying approach. "I want the world to hear today: America is back," President Joe Biden declared soon after taking office, which meant back, as before, to the assumption it was the world's indispensable nation, responsible for safeguarding much more than its own interests. "The United States is determined to reengage," he told America's allies, "to consult with you, to earn back our position of trusted leadership."[3]

That Trump and Biden disagreed shocks no one who lived through the contentious 2020 election. Yet of far greater importance to historians, and to those who seek to understand America's past, is the simple truth that their words could easily have been uttered by political opponents in any decade since the Spanish-American War in 1898.

By bringing together important and revealing original documents from every era of that long American engagement with the world since the late nineteenth century, we hope that this second and updated edition, *America*

[2] "Foreign Policy," https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/foreign-policy/#:~:text=President%20Trump%20restored%20American%20sovereignty,security%2C%20prosperity%2C%20and%20peace.

[3] "Remarks by President Biden at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference," February 19, 2021. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/19/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-2021-virtual-munich-security-conference/

in the World: A History in Documents Since 1898, will contribute to a deeper understanding of America's role in the world by promoting the study of the past on its own terms and for its own sake and by informing present and future debates. Above all, we hope that readers, both students and the broader public, will come to appreciate through the following pages the sheer complexity of America's historical encounters with the outside world and the myriad factors—economic, political, cultural, ideological—that have driven U.S. behavior since the late nineteenth century.

Dating the rise of American international power is no easy task. When the Time-Life publishing baron Henry R. Luce proclaimed the advent of "the American century" in early 1941, he intended to suggest that the United States had suddenly arrived as a great power and was likely to dominate global affairs in the future.[4] By dating the emergence of the United States to the World War II era, however, Luce underestimated the historical spread of U.S. power and influence. In fact, the American century's origins lie farther back, in the late nineteenth century, when the nation's unprecedented industrial growth enabled its leaders to play an increasingly prominent world role. World War II may have marked a new highpoint of America's rise as a global superpower, but the process began much earlier.

Our book charts this process through an examination of the documentary record. Surveying what might be called the "long" American century from the 1890s to the third decade of the twenty-first century, we offer snapshots of the thoughts and perspectives of a wide variety of Americans who grappled with the complexities of their evolving global role. Americans, in the past as now, rarely agreed on how to use their power. The best way to appreciate these arguments is by listening to the voices that originally made them. It is instructive as well to heed foreign voices, which commented with increasing urgency and insight on the place of the United States in international affairs.

For ease of use—and because the first step for any student of history is to develop a timeline of events—documents are presented in chronological order within each chapter. But close reading reveals not a single line of narrative so much as the recurrence and intermingling of several themes that have cut across the history of U.S. relations with the outside world.

One central theme is the expanding definition of "national security," from a narrow concept of continental self-defense to an expansive, even limitless, global vision. Even outer space and the moon became battlegrounds for playing out American policies and influence during the Cold War. Another key

[4] Luce's phrase originally appeared in "The American Century," *Life*, February 17, 1941. In 1999, the journal *Diplomatic History* reprinted Luce's essay along with sixteen essays of commentary on the notion of an "American century." See "The American Century: A Roundtable (Part I)," *Diplomatic History* 23 (Spring 1999), 157–370; and "The American Century: A Roundtable (Part II)," *Diplomatic History* 23 (Summer 1999), 391–537.

theme is the concern Americans have often had for the influence of private capital and industry—what President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously called a "military-industrial complex"—on their nation's foreign policy. Equally, we are interested in exposing the ideological currents that have driven American engagement in the world or, conversely, given Americans pause about ever-expanding international ambitions. We also examine the waging of wars and opposition to them, the importance of human rights and democracy in the exercise of U.S. power, American efforts to respond to unforeseen challenges driven by technological change, and the intersections between race, religion, empire, and revolution in Americans' views of the world.

In choosing these themes, we have been guided partly by interest in a much-debated question that has preoccupied generations of historians: In making policy toward the outside world, have U.S. leaders been guided principally by ideology, material ambitions, or geostrategic calculation? Evidence exists for each possibility. Many of the documents provide windows into the ways in which these three types of motives weighed, and intermingled, in the minds of American decision makers. But we have also been guided by two newer concerns that have decisively reshaped the writing of U.S. foreign-relations history in the last few decades.

First, in keeping with a trend away from exclusive focus on decision-making elites, we include documents that reflect how Americans outside the rarified world of Washington thought about international affairs. We highlight the voices of academics, activists, clergy, novelists, poets, and songwriters in addition to presidents, cabinet secretaries, and military officers. To be sure, the book contains plenty of "classics," indisputably important landmark documents often written by easily recognizable figures familiar to any student of American foreign relations. By emphasizing the perspectives of Americans who never served in government alongside those of policy makers, however, we hope to capture a fuller, richer, and more nuanced interpretation of U.S. diplomatic history than is sometimes conveyed in textbooks or documentary collections surveying the history of American diplomacy.

Second, consistent with efforts by scholars to view the United States as just one participant within a complex web of international relationships, we include numerous non-American sources. The book in particular highlights materials from the Soviet bloc that became available following the end of the Cold War, and which in turn transformed historians' ability to write about the East-West conflict that dominated international affairs for half a century. But the book, especially in this updated version, also contains non-American documents from earlier and later periods. Our hope is that such documents from once-closed archives and new arenas—comprising approximately one quarter of the entire collection—will generate discussion of U.S. behavior by revealing what foreign observers, as well as Americans, thought about it.

This material reminds us that U.S. foreign policy generated a tremendous amount of comment abroad during the American century. As Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau once explained in a speech in Washington, D.C., "Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant; no matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt."[5] Like many clichés, this one bears more than a ring of truth. Americans make up roughly 4.5 percent of the world's population yet a far greater share of wealth, power, and influence. As one British commentator noted in 2004 during a presidential election that many believed would shape the fate of the entire world, non-Americans felt "increasingly helpless" at not having a say over the outcome. "[U]nless you happen to be a voter in a handful of swing states, there's little you can do about the final result. If you're not American, the situation is more acute" because "the actions of the US impact on our lives in overwhelming ways."[6]

We hope that the inclusion of non-American documents, from adversaries as well as allies, captures a sense of international sentiment and illustrates just how deep and profound America's effect on the rest of the world can be. However, we hasten to add that while our book examines foreign perceptions of U.S. behavior, it does not analyze policy decisions by other countries. Such analysis lies beyond this book's scope and size.

One of the most difficult challenges in compiling this book was to select a relatively small sample of documents from a monumentally vast pool of material. To address this problem, we have organized each chapter around one or two broad interpretive questions and selected material that in some way relates to that central agenda. Such questions are spelled out in the introduction to each chapter and, we hope, lend coherence to a project that clearly could spill in an infinite number of directions. If we have been successful, each chapter will read not as a loose collection of material organized around historical topics but as sustained considerations of major interpretive questions that have preoccupied historians of American foreign relations.

We hope, of course, that this approach proves useful to teachers and provokes classroom discussion. We also hope that our consideration of the role played by economic, ideological, and cultural factors in driving U.S. behavior abroad will dovetail with the flourishing debate within and beyond academic circles about which of these impulses has been most important in explaining American decision making. Finally, we hope that our juxtaposition of documents reflecting geostrategic calculation with other materials illuminating the political and cultural landscape of the United States will

[5] Pierre Trudeau, quoted in John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 250.

[6] Oliver Burkeman, "My Fellow Non-Americans . . . ," *Guardian*, October 13, 2004, 2.

promote consideration of the extent to which foreign policy grows from—and is restrained by—the nation's internal character. Put simply, domestic politics matter when considering foreign policy, and accordingly they play their part in our story as well.

Even as we have been heavily influenced by the long-standing preoccupations of diplomatic historians with questions of power, politics, and ideological perspective, we have also been guided by a sense of which questions about the past might resonate in future debates over American foreign relations. For this reason, we have included many documents that reflect on the questions of how deeply the United States should be involved in international affairs, how the nation should balance self-interest and principle, and how closely Americans' self-perceptions correspond to the opinions held by foreigners of the role the United States plays on the global stage. We readily acknowledge the futility of any effort to predict issues that will stand out in the future. After all, many of our selections provide abundant evidence that prognosticators about the global order have a decidedly mixed track record.

Future generations will undoubtedly pose questions about the past we cannot yet anticipate. Yet one point from this book is likely to stand the test of time: The American century has given rise to an extraordinary array of commentary that defies generalization. The documents that follow reflect a spectrum of opinion from ecstatic faith in the United States as global leader to certainty of American malfeasance. Who was right is perhaps a less interesting question than how various authors made their arguments, why they wrote as they did, and what kinds of responses they generated. Reckoning seriously with these matters will, we hope, enable new generations to deal meaningfully with problems inherited from the past. History is an imperfect guide, to be sure. But it remains the best we have and resides at the heart of any attempt to chart the future.

Index

Page numbers in *italics* indicate an illustration.