

Key Foreign Policy Speeches and Mead's Folkways

Section 9/16/21

Era of British Hegemony (Late 18th and 19th Century)

George Washington, 1776:

Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence (I conjure you to believe me, fellow-citizens) the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government... Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none, or a very remote relation. . . . It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.

James Monroe, 1823:

We owe it, therefore, to candor, and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers, to declare, that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere, as dangerous to our peace and safety... Our policy, in regard to Europe, which was adopted at an early stage of the wars which have so long agitated that quarter of the globe, nevertheless remains the same, which is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers...

America Rising (1914-1945)

Woodrow Wilson, 1919:

Every member of the League promises to respect and preserve as against external aggression - not as against internal revolution - the territorial integrity and existing political independence of every other member of the League; and if it is necessary to enforce this promise...

That is the guarantee of the land titles of the world which have been established by this treaty. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Yugoslavia - all those nations which never had a vision of independent liberty until now - have their liberty and independence guaranteed to them.

Cold War (1945-1989)

Harry Truman, 1947:

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way. I believe that our help should be

primarily through economic and financial aid, which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes.

Dwight Eisenhower, 1961:

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist.

Unipolar Moment (1989-2016ish)

Bill Clinton, 1996:

Nowhere are our interests more engaged than in Europe. When Europe is at peace, our security is strengthened. When Europe prospers, so does America... America will be stronger and safer if the democratic family continues to grow, if we bring to our ranks partners willing to share the risks and responsibilities of freedom.

George W. Bush, 2002:

States like these [North Korea, Iran, Iraq], and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world... all nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security... I will not wait on events while dangers gather.

Return to Multipolarity (Present)

Donald Trump, 2017

The first duty of our government is to serve its citizens, many of whom have been forgotten. But they are not forgotten anymore. With every decision and every action, we are now putting America first... We have made clear that countries that are immensely wealthy should reimburse the United States for the cost of defending them. This is a major departure from the past, but a fair and necessary one — necessary for our country, necessary for our taxpayer, necessary for our own thought process.

Joe Biden, 2021

American leadership must meet this new moment of advancing authoritarianism, including the growing ambitions of China to rival the United States and the determination of Russia to damage and disrupt our democracy.

We must meet the new moment accelerating [...] global challenges — from the pandemic to the climate crisis to nuclear proliferation ... We can't do it alone.

... we must start with diplomacy rooted in America's most cherished democratic values: defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal rights, respecting the rule of law, and treating every person with dignity.