

DRAFT: November 21, 2016

The American Academy of Diplomacy
remarks of
Robert B. Zoellick
on
“American Diplomacy”
November 30, 2016

Today’s event—and the American Academy of Diplomacy’s recognition of my service—is especially meaningful for me, because I’ve been reflecting on the people and ideas that have shaped American Diplomacy throughout the country’s history.

Moreover, Presidential transitions always provoke speculation about the future course of U.S. diplomacy. Indeed, this election has prompted questions about whether the United States will remain committed to the international order that America created and sustained over the past 70 years.

Some 20 years ago, I first read Henry Kissinger’s magisterial book, Diplomacy. I enjoyed how Dr. Kissinger drew on the past to illuminate the art of diplomacy.

Yet I sensed that Dr. Kissinger’s perspective—however wide-ranging and insightful—was rooted in the European experience.

Dr. Kissinger was one of the great U.S. practitioners of statecraft, and he cited examples from U.S. history to make his case, but his subtext is that America’s experience with diplomacy reflected, as Bismarck allegedly observed, that “God always looks after fools—and the United States.”

In fact, the luck and innocence perceived by Europeans actually reflected diplomatic design and, well... some good fortune, too. Indeed, America’s diplomatic tradition is rich with experience and ideas that offer insights for today.

To illustrate my perspective, today I’ll offer examples from three eras: the founding and early years of the United States; the opening decades of the 20th Century; and the early Cold War.

Three Founding Fathers—Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson—left storied legacies for American diplomacy.

George Washington was the “Pathfinder” for both the new American Republic and for American Diplomacy.

Washington was drawn to the frontier—as a young surveyor, soldier, and land speculator. His westward orientation shaped the first President’s perspective on the potential of a new, expanding American Republic. Washington’s “continentalist” outlook provided the frame of reference for U.S. foreign policy for over a century: The United States became an actor in the Atlantic world, but its strategic orientation was toward what a European would term the “marchlands,” or borderlands. U.S. foreign policy competed for these lands, whether with European, Latin American, or indigenous peoples.

John Jay’s unpopular treaty with Britain—a cornerstone of Washington’s policy—secured a period of peace and specific objectives in the West, the future source of power. Washington recognized—as many later revolutionaries did not—that his new government, an experimental republic, needed a reprieve from revolution. This wise observation was the grounding for Washington’s “Farewell Address” and his warning against “permanent Alliances” that might reduce the Republic’s room for maneuver.

Alexander Hamilton complemented Washington by serving as the “Architect of American Power.” Hamilton was drawn to power—economic, military, political, and personal—and, more importantly, to systems of national power. His early years in the Caribbean led him to recognize commercial power and the vast possibilities of meritocracy, mixing peoples and nationalities in a new system.

Hamilton’s principal project was the creation of an integrated financial system that connected national debt, a national bank, a customs information and tax system, good credit, and incentives for commerce and investment. This enterprise had institutional and international implications. Hamilton’s economic system enabled the United States to borrow abroad, paid for an army and navy, encouraged participation in international trade, and signaled the emergence of a rising economic power. Hamilton was more eager than Washington to embrace the “Atlantic world,” which the President viewed realistically while keeping at arms-length. In contrast with Jefferson and Madison, Hamilton’s economic diplomacy reflected an admiration for British systems, which the Virginians feared would encourage the “corruption” of government powers, aristocracy, and even the imposition of despised monarchy.

Jefferson, in turn, was the “Futurist” of American Diplomacy. Whereas Hamilton’s vision was for arrangements of power, Jefferson had an eye for the potential of the human spirit.

Consider the achievements that Jefferson chose to record on his tombstone: the Virginia Declaration of Rights; the Declaration of Independence; and the University of Virginia.

The greatest of Jefferson’s visions of the future resulted in the Louisiana Purchase. The sweep of this foreign policy accomplishment was as wide-ranging as the territory. The purchase removed European powers from physical proximity to the United States, providing security. Western farmers gained sole access to the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans, the critical transportation route for their livelihoods. The American vision—and power—would be peopled by future generations that could move unimpaired across the continent. Jefferson even sharpened his vision of the future with the scientific explorations of Lewis and Clark’s Corps of Discovery.

Jefferson the Futurist had a pragmatic streak, too. He creatively abandoned his strict construction of the Constitution by interpreting the right to “govern” territory as justifying the right to “acquire” it.

Jefferson’s “Empire of Liberty” also depended on the visionary legislation that he proposed to Congress even before the Constitutional Convention: The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 treated newly settled territories as potential self-governing, co-equal states with the original founding thirteen; that design offered a striking contrast with Russia’s eastward expansion or Europe’s colonies.

Yet some of Jefferson’s visionary ideas failed. His Embargo cost Americans dearly without stopping British or French depredations at sea. The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions—a response to Federalist threats to liberties—planted the seeds of ideas that later led to secession and Civil War. And Jefferson could never overcome the evil of slavery.

Two designers of American foreign policy in the succeeding generation, John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay, added complementary ideas to the Founders’ diplomacy. Adams and Clay defined “American Realism.”

Dr. Kissinger’s first book, A World Restored, related the diplomatic reaction within Europe, following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, to

radical nationalism, republicanism, and militant public passions. In contrast to the “Holy Alliance” that was the capstone of that restored 19th Century European balance of power, Adams and Clay designed an “American System.”

Adams shrewdly acquired Florida from Spain, secured the western edge of the Louisiana Purchase and renunciation of Spanish claims in the northwest, and pushed Russia to cede its American claims south of 54 ° 40’. Summarizing his strategic goal, Adams asserted that the “American continents are no longer subjects for any new European colonial establishments.” This is the logic of what came to be known as the Monroe Doctrine.

To achieve an “American System” in the Western Hemisphere, which would stand in opposition to Europe’s Holy Alliance, the United States would support revolutionary governments in the former Spanish provinces—but not fight for them. Adams knew that Britain’s Royal Navy would serve to enforce this doctrine, but Adams still refused to align with London’s policy because he did not want the United States to “come in as a cock-boat in the wake of a British man-of-war.”

According to Adams, the new U.S. Government would not go “abroad in search of monsters to destroy.” In response to calls for U.S. support for Greeks rebelling against Ottoman overlords, Adams replied with what became the classic statement of American Realism: “[The United States] is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”

Henry Clay’s “American System” was a domestic program to expand the national economic market. As Adams’ Secretary of State, Clay sought to extend that system throughout the hemisphere, offering a vision of the Americas that has shone, faded, and reappeared time and again over the centuries. For Clay, the new American republics would be a counterpoint to the Holy Alliance’s dim assembly of mysticism, state religion, and reactionary politics. Clay’s practical purposes were political, commercial, and defensive. Unfortunately, tensions over slavery and differences with Latins doomed Clay’s first try as a “Hemispheric Planner.”

Yet Clay had planted seeds of ideas that have periodically blossomed in U.S. diplomacy: the New World vs the Old; a democratic hemisphere; and opportunities for free trade and closer economic integration throughout the Americas.

By the end of the 19th Century, U.S. foreign policy faced the strategic question of aims beyond the “neighborhood” of North America and the Americas. Trade,

finance, and immigration connected the United States to Europe and Asia throughout the first 125 years. U.S. missionaries, educators, engineers, and soldiers-of-fortune also journeyed around the world, becoming actors in networks that extended “policy” beyond the state-centered order. The experience abroad of dreamers, hustlers, and practical men and women shaped U.S. public attitudes toward the wider world.

Consider then a second era of American Diplomacy: The opening of the 20th Century set the stage for two giants, Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, to redefine the U.S. perspective on global power and international orders.

Roosevelt was the “Balancer-of-Power.” His foundation was military power, especially the “Big Stick” of the U.S. Navy, which he built to a size exceeded only by Britain’s. Roosevelt secured the “continental base” of U.S. power through aggressive negotiations with Britain over rights in the Caribbean and claims over the Alaskan “Panhandle”. Then TR midwived the creation of an independent Panama, where he engineered what he considered to be his greatest achievement: a Canal that linked the Atlantic and Pacific.

In East Asia, after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, Roosevelt mediated a peace that reestablished balance while preserving the “Open Door” of commercial access to China. The Root-Takahira Agreement of 1908 codified a “status quo” with the rising power of Japan in the Pacific while supporting the independence and integrity of China.

In Europe, Roosevelt sought a balance without domination by any power. As the Kaiser threatened to overrun Europe in World War I, Roosevelt wanted to join the Allies. He was a supporter of a League of Nations, but one based on principles of power that differed from Woodrow Wilson’s model.

Wilson was one of America’s first scholars of “political science,” a new study that sought to categorize, analyze, and reform political systems.

At home, Wilson sought to remake the federal government along parliamentary lines.

Wilson the Internationalist wanted to create an analogous model of reform for world affairs: He was the “Political Scientist Abroad.”

Wilson's initial resistance to involvement in World War I reflected both his experience growing up in a devastated South after the Civil War as well as his belief that Europe's conflagration was a predictable punishment for the old, militarized European political order. When Wilson's efforts to maintain neutrality failed, he reached for war aims that differed from those of the past: "Peace without victory"; a "world...safe for democracy"; and then his 14 Points of January 1918. The United States entered the war as an "Associated Power," not as an ally, to avoid alliance commitments and preserve freedom of diplomatic action.

The League of Nations emerged as Wilson's central idea for breaking with old-style European politics. Wilson became the first sitting President to leave the United States in order to negotiate peace himself, an early example of a President's "personal diplomacy." But Wilson ignored the Senate, and he ultimately rejected reservations to the Versailles Treaty that would probably have given him his League while retaining Congressional prerogatives over issues of war and peace.

As Kissinger explains in his book Diplomacy, Wilson's stroke and political failure led to later interpretations that Wilson's "internationalism" was martyred by America's "isolationism." Yet history suggests otherwise.

Charles Evans Hughes and Cordell Hull each represent an important dimension of America's internationalism in the inter-war period. The themes they embodied have persisted.

After the U.S. rejection of the Versailles Treaty in 1920, Secretary of State Hughes launched a dramatic effort during the 1920s to reduce and limit naval armaments. Hughes, the "Arms Negotiator," called for an even bolder world order than the one negotiated in Paris.

Battleships were the "strategic weapons" of the 1920s, like ICBMs and bombers of later eras. For Hughes and President Harding, naval arms control was an outgrowth of both strategic and budgetary logic. With the German fleet scuttled, the Anglo-Americans dominated the Atlantic. Hughes' plan for the Pacific was to use naval arms control to secure an Anglo-American advantage while supplanting pre-World War I imperial competition and the Anglo-Japanese alliance. The nine treaties (all ratified by the U.S. Senate) that arose from the Washington Conference of 1921-22 sought to reanimate the Open Door policy for China and end great power maneuvering to dominate China. Hughes' initiative also recognized post-war economic and political shifts in Britain and Japan, as well as pressures in the U.S.

Congress to cut military spending. Taken as a whole, the treaties partially reversed failures at Versailles and added a valuable focus on the Asia-Pacific.

Yet Hughes was taking a strategic risk. Neither the U.S. nor the Royal Navy had enough capital ships to dominate the Atlantic and the Pacific simultaneously. Follow-up conferences had difficulty limiting cruisers and destroyers, and the innovative ships that commanded the later Pacific War, aircraft carriers and submarines, were not included. The liberal internationalists in Japan lost power, and China's internal conflicts created openings for Japanese aggression.

Hughes' experience suggests lessons for arms control. Unless arms control measures are connected to power relations and ongoing assessments of risks to security, limitations on weapons may not preserve the peace.

Arms control efforts need to recognize technological innovations in warfare, too. And insufficient spending on defense has left militaries unprepared regardless of agreements. Deterrence—and resilience—shape assessments of risk as much or more than treaties.

Cordell Hull of Tennessee, the “Free Trader,” was also an important diplomatic innovator between the World Wars. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 was the apotheosis of protectionism. It was the culmination of over a century of tariff acts through which Congress listed specific taxes on thousands of individual items.

Hull embodied the perspective of those commodity exporters who favored reducing trade barriers abroad while also lowering taxes on imports. Hull's thinking was that of Wilsonian internationalists, who argued that favoring merchants over monarchs would encourage nations to value peace over war.

Yet unlike Wilson, Hull was adept at creating a system that would become the engine of a free trade plan.

The Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934, Hull's legacy, delegated to the President the authority to “bargain” lower tariffs within certain bounds. Over the next 10 years, Hull negotiated 32 trade agreements with 27 countries, chipping away substantially at Smoot-Hawley's high tariffs. Moreover, Hull's agreements incorporated the “Most-favored Nation” (MFN) principle, which meant that if one of the parties agreed to lower a tariff for another country, all MFN parties would gain the same benefit.

Hull wanted Congress to grant the Executive branch this “bargaining” authority without time limit. But Congress dictated the term, subject to renewal. Over the next 80 years, Congress would grant analogous trade negotiating authorities in various forms.

After World War II, Under Secretary of State Will Clayton united Marshall Plan aid with both European economic integration and the negotiation of lower global trade barriers through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Japan’s recovery after World War II depended on its exports, at first principally to the United States. South Korea, and then other East Asians, followed the same path.

Trade negotiations—and the pursuit of free trade—have always been politically difficult. Trade agreements have had to seek a conjunction between international and domestic interests.

Starting in 1985, the United States turned to bi-lateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and then regional FTAs, in addition to global trade negotiations. FTAs reflected both economic and foreign policy interests with friendly countries. FTAs removed traditional barriers to trade and also permitted the United States to create and expand new international rules for sectors of increasing importance. The deeper economic integration of FTAs enabled private sector actors to leverage U.S. strengths and innovation with trans-national partners. FTAs helped developing economies make internal reforms and adopt rule-of-law systems. The active FTA agenda created a “competition in liberalization” that added to U.S. influence and enhanced the attractiveness of the U.S. market as a “magnet.” The emerging networks of U.S. FTAs even provided an underpinning of economic, business, and person-to-person interests that supported security cooperation and alliances.

Nevertheless, despite these advantages, today U.S. free trade agreements face an uncertain –and perhaps bleak—political future.

I’ll turn now to the third era of American Diplomacy: The early Cold War, when the task of shaping U.S. policy—and world order—fell to George Marshall, Harry Truman, Dean Acheson, and Dwight Eisenhower.

George Marshall was “The Organizer” of America’s post-war diplomatic effort. As Chief of Staff of the Army, Marshall had overseen creation of a Citizen Army and the U.S. military victory. After President Truman asked Marshall to lead the State Department in 1946, the General deployed his executive skills to build a

modern organization from the sidelined gentleman's club it had become under FDR. Marshall created an important Policy Planning staff, relied on talented subordinates in key roles, and used his high standing with Congress to restructure U.S. foreign policy.

The Secretary of State's signal achievement was the Marshall Plan. The strategic assumptions underpinning this plan served as the cornerstones of U.S. relations with Europe for at least the next 40 years. In contrast with America's past, the United States assumed a leadership role in Europe, while recognizing the need for European political ownership and economic integration.

The economic integration and recovery of Europe required the participation of a new Federal Republic of Germany. Marshall maneuvered the Soviets to exclude themselves from his plan, inevitably creating a showdown over the future of Berlin and Germany.

Through all this effort, Marshall recognized the need to keep Congressional support and build the commitment of the U.S. public.

Truman and Acheson, the "Founders of Alliances," launched a revolutionary shift in U.S. diplomacy as bold as Marshall's. From Washington and Jefferson through Wilson, Americans had been schooled to avoid alliances, which the United States associated with Europe's old diplomacy of wars and domination. Truman and Acheson's new approach persisted over 40 years of Cold War and now for the 25 years since its end. U.S. alliances have depended on the backing of a sizeable standing military, posted around the globe, and a reliable nuclear deterrent.

After FDR's hope for post-war cooperation was stymied by implacable Soviets, Truman and Acheson changed strategies. The Truman Doctrine committed the United States to support Greece and Turkey, and Truman's language warned of a larger struggle for freedom. The Marshall Plan established the precedence of Western Europe over cooperation with the Soviets. West Germany assumed a critical place in both Europe's economy and its security, and German rearmament could only take place within the Alliance led by the United States. NATO moved the frontier of U.S. and Canadian security to the heart of Central Europe. Berlin assumed a symbolic role—of the U.S. commitment to the Germans—and of Germany's alignment with the West.

U.S. diplomacy forged a different alliance structure across the Pacific, “spokes of a wheel” pointing to a U.S. hub. Ironically, the Asia-Pacific, a “Naval Theater,” became the battleground for two land wars that tested the Army.

Across both the Atlantic and Pacific, the sustainability of U.S. alliances over decades required calculations of U.S. economic interest and the management of disputes. U.S. diplomacy had to address conflicts with Europe over dollar policy, trade, and sharing of defense burdens. Export-led growth in East Asia contributed to wrenching adjustments in the U.S. economy.

Over time, the successors of Truman, Marshall, and Acheson added security commitments—if not formal alliances—in the Middle East. Israel’s security, energy security, and commitments to Gulf States, plus fears of nuclear proliferation, led to new types of partnerships, wars, and U.S. diplomacy in search of peace and stability.

Dwight Eisenhower’s diplomacy was the bookend for the mid-20th Century burst of creative and expansive American diplomacy. Eisenhower, the “Prudent Executive,” viewed his vital mission as calming the fever pitch of the early Cold War so as to prepare Americans for the long-term challenge. Eisenhower’s model for his Presidency was George Washington; just as Washington had laid the foundation for a new Constitutional Republic, Ike would institute policy principles and processes to guide U.S. foreign policy in a new international order.

These creators of America’s internationalism after World War II were the forerunners of George H.W. Bush. By background, outlook, temperament, and personal style, Bush was unusually suited to lead the NATO Alliance at the end of the Cold War and then to forge an unprecedented coalition to reverse Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

Bush recognized the opportunity to work with Soviet leader Gorbachev in 1989, but first Bush—like Marshall, Acheson, Eisenhower, eventually JFK, and Reagan—started by shoring up the Alliance with Europe. Bush’s bold proposal in May 1989 to slash and equalize conventional forces in Europe shifted the negotiating priority from nuclear weapons to that core issue, one that had divided Europe since 1945. Bush’s diplomatic offensive responded to Gorbachev’s challenge, prodded large Soviet forces to leave Central and Eastern Europe, and met the political needs of Germany, America’s key ally on the central front.

By the end of 1989, Bush and Chancellor Kohl of Germany backed Germany's unification within NATO. The United States kept past faith with its German ally when others in Europe faltered. Yet Bush was also looking ahead to a stable outcome that could reassure Western and Eastern Europe, and even the USSR. Furthermore, the U.S. partnership with Germany recognized the unified Germany's future importance within Europe and to trans-Atlantic relations.

In 1990, Bush and Secretary of State Baker faced the challenge of creating an historic coalition—including the Soviet Union and Arab states—to reverse Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. Bush established limited objectives, with an eye toward a future regional order. The United States built support and added legitimacy by working through the UN Security Council. Coalition partners paid for the war. After liberating Kuwait, Baker capitalized on success by launching direct peace negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Bush also recognized that NAFTA could be the foundation for a new and deeper North American integration and partnership in a post-Cold War World. Similarly, Baker helped initiate APEC in 1989 to create a framework for a new trans-Pacific economic order that would complement U.S. regional security alliances.

Over the past 25 years, the United States has been struggling to determine America's place in the changing world order—and the aims of U.S. diplomacy.

The U.S. diplomatic heritage offers some guidance.

One theme is the importance of America's home continent. Geography still matters. North America has unrealized potential, both for a stronger partnership among three democracies with half a billion people and as a continental base from which to extend power and values globally.

Throughout the American experience, debates over alliances have framed questions of how the United States should relate to other countries, especially on issues of security.

Over the course of 40 years after World War II, the United States devised, adjusted, and persisted with trans-Atlantic and Pacific alliances, as well as special security ties in the Mideast. After the end of the Cold War, the United States continued this system under different premises—democratic enlargement, primacy,

stability, and deterrence. The United States has experienced successes, setbacks, tragedies, and today, public uncertainty. Sometimes it seems as if the stability and security of the 70-year old order has been taken for granted in the United States and elsewhere.

Beginning with Alexander Hamilton, the United States incorporated political economy into its diplomacy: dealing with issues of finance, credit, money, trade, and development. The diplomacy of political economy is closely linked to America's private sector initiative. Economic dynamism at home fuels economic diplomacy. The economic "connectivity" of the world is likely to continue, and the United States must decide if it will lead in shaping future arrangements.

The U.S. experience in the Americas has been characterized by visions and realities, advances and setbacks. Slowly, the politics of the Western Hemispheric political outlook has been shifting from a North-South perspective to one that is East-West, focusing on how the Hemisphere can adapt to—and perhaps shape—global economics, politics, and security. Events in Brazil and Argentina may offer new opportunities for partnerships with the Pacific Alliance of Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Chile, in concert with the United States and Canada.

America's diplomacy has also depended on military power and defense diplomacy. Today's military posture reflects the current alliance system and its expeditionary requirements. New technologies and new dangers will require continual adaptation, including relations with other countries. The American experience has demonstrated that the U.S. military can be a powerful—even overwhelming—tool, but it cannot solve all problems. U.S. success at combining military means with political ends has been mixed and lessons on ending wars have had to be continually relearned.

The United States believed it could move beyond the old diplomacy of 18th and 19th Century Europe. And, to a degree, it has. Over the course of some 240 years, U.S. diplomacy has sought a higher purpose. The American Experiment became American Exceptionalism. Yet Americans are students of power, too.

Ultimately, the traditions and themes of American Diplomacy have been woven together with a vital strand: Pragmatism. Ben Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay struck an opportunistic deal to secure independence. Washington accumulated power to give the United States time to take root. Jefferson interpreted the Constitution to complete the Louisiana Purchase. Lincoln fought one war at a time, avoiding intervention by Britain and France. FDR cautiously mobilized

public support for a global war after the Great Depression. Eisenhower prudently looked to the long haul. JFK learned to deal pragmatically in crises. Reagan set ambitious goals, yet was willing to negotiate and accept step-by-step results. George H.W. Bush combined bold moves with careful restraint and constant diplomatic outreach.

Over 240 years, the results of U.S. diplomacy stand up well to those of others.

As we look to the years ahead—and assess the foreign policy of the next Administration—consider the core elements that stand out from the shadows of the past:

- relations with our North American neighbors, which are our potential partners in shaping the future global order;
- the nature, reliability, and shared responsibilities of U.S. alliances;
- healthy international economic linkages, development of economic rules, and opportunities for private actors around the world;
- opportunities—and risks—in the Western Hemisphere;
- the realistic and measured use of military power and defense diplomacy; and
- the nature of American Exceptionalism that fits the challenges of the era.

The charge for the future is to find new pragmatic approaches—enriched by the experience, and recognition of the antecedents, of American Diplomacy.