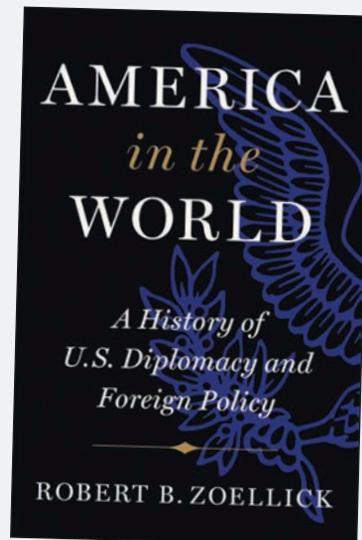

**America in the World:
A History of U.S. Diplomacy and
Foreign Policy**

By Robert Zoellick
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Reviewed by Thomas Pickering



With two endless wars still churning, diplomacy has become or should become a more important subject.

After four decades of practice and two of intense retirement, I have gained a new perspective on this subject. Almost as old as war itself, and a rival for “oldest” profession, diplomacy—especially American diplomacy—adopted traditional practices in the 19th century, built on change in the 20th, and evolved in a new and challenging era at the beginning of the 21st .

For both diplomatic and military officers, the challenge is to think through just how mutually important and even mutually dependent their two respective pursuits have become in defense and promotion of our national interest. This is but one of the many trenchant subjects our “Insider”—author Robert Zoellick—treats with wisdom and careful thought in a new and engrossing book.

Decades ago, in the midst of the Cold War, particularly following the Cuban missile crisis, we went from hiding children under desks to seeing an unfolding vision of potential global nuclear devastation. While mutually assured destruction was a partial answer to that apocalyptic vision, we found

that it could and should be supplemented with mutually assured nuclear stability and security. We saw then that accidents and miscalculations, among them the Cuban events, were an existential danger. When Harry Truman was once asked, “What were America’s vital interests,” he replied, “survival and prosperity.” That strategic conclusion still applies today, supplemented perhaps by adding, “and that of our allies.” Increasingly, as the Insider shows us, we are being challenged by threats that no single field of action alone—neither defense nor diplomacy nor development—is capable of answering. The Insider has mapped well the evolution from the “no entangling alliances” of George Washington’s Farewell Address in 1796, to our alliance and coalition creation of 1946–47, to the new multipolarity and China challenge of 2021.

World War II illustrated the strength of overwhelming force united in a central alliance and supported by a civilian structure that included diplomacy from Argentinia Bay (Atlantic Charter) to Yalta (division of Europe). Axis unconditional surrenders led to an excursion in state rebuilding of friend and

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foe alike and was perhaps the last time a victorious alliance—even when vexed by the Cold War—would have the time and reason to manage a new order.

The decades following the collapse of communism in 1991 reminded us that planetary extinction is a potentially man-made disaster but also that pure military strength was not the quick and easy answer many had hoped it to be for major international differences. Diplomacy helped advance a solution to a nuclear standoff in avoiding some accidents while we actually experienced near misses on both sides that were frightening and hidden for years under President Jimmy Carter and Leonid Brezhnev.

Similarly, the notion that diplomacy is slow challenged America's penchant for instant solutions. The military on the other hand was thought, unwisely, to be the kind of instant answer that we should use in Iraq and Afghanistan, due to our misperception that a "unilateral moment" would allow us to prevail alone and without allies and partners. This was despite the open lessons of the new, unsolved equations of internal instability, religiously inspired violence, and spreading oppression.

Indeed, new forms of warfare—asymmetry in combat actions, information and cyber operations, terror and woeful government action—led to the stifling thinking that military victory alone would make a democratic solution whole and complete. Offensive strategies prevailed; exit strategies were absent. It was not long though before we turned to diplomats to do something they had hoped to avoid—state-building under combat conditions. Our diplomacy had never achieved the size, capacity, or interest to become a colonial service. Together with the military, diplomats did their best, but it was not good enough.

There is little acceptance in the United States that diplomatic action to avoid wars is a first priority, help to end them is a second, and picking up the pieces afterward is a third. No wars end without a political result; it is better to shape the result than allow fate and inattention to do so.

For the military, there now seem to be potentially two new major admonitions that join the "No land wars in Asia" aphorism of the 1950s and 1960s: "Fight wars in defense of our homeland and citizens," and "Wars of choice should be a last resort failing all else, most especially diplomacy." Diplomacy's role is to be at the heart of problem-solving in order to avoid conflict. Diplomats have often told me that Americans have a special diplomatic advantage of having a first-class military on their side of the negotiating table. A strong economy and widely admired values and principles confer negotiating advantages. The military role in this case should be the development of leverage above and beyond sanctions, political steps, and other means of persuading an opponent, but doing so in ways that never pose only the choice of going to war or backing down.

I have heard more than once from the four-star level that "No negotiations now; we need more progress on the battlefield." Whether this is a deep distrust that diplomacy is compromise, and compromise may lose what is gained on the battlefield, is uncertain, but there is a sense that it is a factor. So too is the idea that while the military will deliver on the battlefield, someone else must shape the ultimate outcome.

Psychologically, there is a time as you gain strength and the other side realizes it, that you must begin the engagement process. But if all of your leverage is expended in *getting* to the table, little is left for *gaining* at the table. As in current-day war, no negotiation ever ends with everything you wanted when you began, but diplomacy is less costly than violent conflict, and if pursued in a coordinated, whole-of-government fashion, somewhat more likely to resolve the issue at hand sooner and more favorably.

The Insider writes cogently about this in the aftermath of World War II, Vietnam, the Cold War, and today's two unfinished conflicts: "Yet the success and effectiveness [of the U.S. military] can create a temptation for American foreign policy. Civilian

leaders may overestimate what military power can accomplish (pp. 354). He continues: "... as Bundy reflected [about Vietnam] decades later, 'No one asks . . . what kind of war it will be and what kind of losses must be expected.' The military of 1965 are almost always trained not to ask such [cowardly] questions." (pp. 354) Later, Bundy also admitted that our most trenchant error in Vietnam was to underestimate the dedication of the North to win both on the battlefield and politically. The author concludes, "Ironically, the lessons learned by the U.S. military after Vietnam, and its professionalism, made U.S. military power look like a potential answer to many subsequent diplomatic problems." (pp. 355)

The Insider brings personal experience to the fore. His role in negotiating agreements and his deep interest in and experience with economic power is a worthy addition to the traditional literature on the history of American diplomacy, which tends to focus on either political security or on economic issues without presenting the relevant and significant linkages between them.

Similarly, a portrayal of the work of Vannevar Bush in science and technology during and after World War II is a welcome and important addition to foreign policy, introduced at the suggestion of John Deutch at MIT.

The Insider presents biographies of leaders who have contributed to American foreign policy but are less well known to most Americans, including John Quincy Adams, William H. Seward, Charles Evans Hughes, Elihu Root, and William L. Clayton.

Quincy Adams followed James Monroe as president, and the doctrine named after Monroe. Adams was seconded by Henry Clay and together they set the groundwork for the "Good Neighbor" policy after a suggestion by Simon Bolivar, counterpointing Monroe's doctrine, and adopted years later by Franklin Roosevelt.

Seward, who negotiated the purchase of Alaska in 1867, also toyed with purchasing British

Columbia but was rebuffed by its citizens. In the Trent Affair in 1861, when two Confederate Commissioners en route to the United Kingdom were taken off their ship by the Union Navy, the UK threatened conflict. In an astute observation to Seward, after the latter had pushed toward confronting the UK, Abraham Lincoln said famously "One war at a time Mr. Seward." The latter diplomatically took the United States off the domestic hook by noting that the UK had historically taken sailors off American merchant ships to man the Royal Navy and therefore returning the Confederates was a part of historical U.S. policy.

Charles Evans Hughes was Warren G. Harding's Secretary of State. He is rarely heard of or written about, and his efforts at arms control in 1921 were later disparaged with the rise of Fascism and war preparations, which caused them to be discarded in the 1930s. Inspired by the killing and costly tragedy of World War I, he fought for significant limits on naval armaments and won. In a bold and unexpected U.S. plan, he proposed not just limits, but reductions in large naval vessels, suggesting destroying 66 U.S., British, and Japanese capital ships of 1.8 million tons. The final result, made possible by careful planning and inspired public and personal diplomacy, was close to his original proposal and was implemented by the parties.

Elihu Root, Secretary of State in the first decade of the 20th century for Theodore Roosevelt, was devoted to the codification and extension of international law and the establishment of the World Court, which he helped to design after the Senate rejected the League of Nations. He never succeeded and died in 1937. Many of his proteges became judges on the Court as early as 1921.

William Clayton, called by the author the least known of the architects of America's new alliance policy, was a Tennessee businessman, free trader, and assistant to Nelson Rockefeller in post-World War II efforts to integrate the U.S. and Latin

American economies. He was particularly well known for helping to arrange a delayed U.S. loan to the UK at a time the island nation was attempting to recover from the destruction and economic adversity of World War II.

The book, written over 12 years and braced with solid research, is a strong must read for anyone interested in U.S. foreign policy. It brings special insights into the Insider's participation in the events related in the final chapters in succinct and lucid writing. It is particularly valuable for the many analytical insights, often at the end of each chapter, of a true Insider. Zoellick offers well-informed and carefully crafted views, putting each of his chapters into the long development of American foreign policy, showing its overall evolution and the reasons behind the changes. He is a close colleague of James Baker, the old friend and adviser to George H.W. Bush; he is to Baker what Baker was to Bush—an advocate, adviser, and admirer. No book on such a subject can escape without some controversy. I and others have wondered at the choice of key personalities who figure in the chapters rolled out historically, many associated with conflicts. A significant focus is on Thomas Jefferson's acquisition of the Louisiana territory from Napoleon's France, with the Mexican War of 1846–1848 treated only cursorily, as is the War of 1812 and that with Spain. Richard Nixon, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, and Barak Obama are given center stages with Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton less so, and Trump, bald disdain.

The book should deservedly become a canonical text for students and teachers of U.S. foreign relations, American and foreign diplomats, and importantly, the U.S. military.