

Introduction :

Since 1918, the USA has been a major player in international relationships.

The USA's foreign policy can be described as an equilibrium between:

- pragmatism (Realpolitik or power politics: defending its own national interests)
- and
- idealism : the "manifest destiny"
= they believe that Providence gave them a mission, to lead the world and spread their values all over the world (democracy, peace, human rights and... liberalism)
= the myth of Manifest destiny

Cf the painting



This painting shows "Manifest Destiny". In 1872 John Gast painted a popular scene of people moving west. Called "Spirit of the Frontier" and widely distributed as an engraving portrayed settlers moving west, guided and protected by Columbia (who represents America and is dressed in a Roman toga to represent classical republicanism) and aided by technology (railways, telegraph), driving Native Americans and bison into obscurity. It is also important to note that Columbia is bringing the "light" as witnessed on the eastern side of the painting as she travels towards the "darkened" west

The doctrine Monroe (1823) : a doctrine of Pdt Monroe

= A US foreign policy towards Europe and America. United states wanted the New and the Old world to remain separately. This policy is likened to **isolationism**.

But in reality, US led a foreign policy of conquest in the Pacific Ocean and in Latin America ("America to American" (= US))...

Despite of those principles, US became already the world's most powerful economy since 1890 (because the industrial civilization). So, the country had to create or to sustain relationships with the world (migrations and trade during the second industrial revolution).

Key-question for this chapter:

- How the United States became the most powerful state in the world during the XXth century?
- What definition of the power did they invent and impose to the world?

1. 1918-1941 : between power and hesitations for commitment

I.1. The 14 points of Pdt Wilson : "a new diplomacy" ?

See sources : [wilson's profile](#), [the fourteen points abstract](#) and [the original text](#)

Question : *comment on the text*

- [Introduce the source in a context](#)

Context :

Democrat Woodrow Wilson, was re-elected President of the USA in 1916 with the promise: "*He kept us out of war*".

But, because of the submarine war, many American ships were destroyed (even with passengers and not only trade)... That's why they declared war to Germany in April 1917.

In July 1917, General John J. Pershing led the U.S

The text :

A speech made the 8th of January 1918 : ten month before the armistice

Adressed to the Congress of US (the parliament) and, the world...

- [Description and explanation :](#)

He was already preparing post-war World order.

Four topics can be seen in the text :

- The first one is [the need for frank diplomacy](#) (1-2) :

no secret meetings or arrangements of any sort, open democracy.

-The second one is [the territorial question](#) (4-12):

Wilson adresses many border problems in Europe : Belgium, Russia, Germany and even the Ottoman Empire.

Within this territorial question, the main principle is the '[Self Determination of people](#)' which stipulates that even colonized populations should be given the right to choose their rulers.

[The question of nationalities](#) appears with great accuracy because democracies (the US being part of them) fought against multi-national empires in which minorities had no rights.

Moreover, the Armenian genocide by the Turks in 1915 made this issue even more pressing.

But this territorial issue with the right for self-determination has something of an innuendo: France and UK are both very powerful colonial empires and that prevents the US to make free trade with these colonies. The US, as an emerging power, would like to open these markets and this can only be accomplished through freedom for the colonies. What is more, the rivalry between the US and France or the UK is biased by these colonies and Wilson knows that the next step to the American World domination is the disappearance of colonial powers.

-The third one is the [free trade agreement](#) (3):

Wilson defends the American view of free trade against European protectionism.

Free trade is seen as the basis of American democracy as they were themselves built on free-trade issues, but Americans also believe that free-trade leads to development and wealth and that wealth provides a democratic system based on capitalism...

At last (14): [the creation of a league of nations](#).

He believed that the nations should co-operate to achieve world peace.

Conclusion :

He was an idealist and his ideas faced oppositions (France and UK) and at home.

The League of Nations was set-up but without the US, because the Congress never ratified the Treaty of Versailles.

At last, the treaty of Versailles became a text with a spirit of revenge and destruction against Germany.

Many ideas seemed impractical to apply; for example the self determination (it would be very difficult to give the people of eastern Europe the chance to rule themselves because they were scattered across many countries [25 % of the population of Czechoslovakia were neither Czechs, nor Slovaks !])

In spite of this refusal, Wilson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1920.

And his ideas inspired the foreign policy of many democrat Presidents.

Note :

The Briand-Kellogg pact was signed in 1928 between French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand and US Secretary of State Frank Kellogg. Even if this pact was signed outside the League of Nations, it is directly related to it as the main purpose was to make war illegal (after the trauma of the Great War).

The treaty was important for two reasons :

-It showed the attachment of the US to peace as a guarantee of the establishment of a World order under their rule. Peace is also a necessary condition for free-trade.

-It also created the notion of Crime against peace thus establishing the first ever international law.

I.2. The Interbellum: a real return to isolationism ?

The new President Warren Harding was elected in 1920, [promising a return to "normalcy"](#), that is isolationism.

During [the "Roaring Twenties"](#), Americans turned their energy to what they did best: making money! During the next 10 years, US knew an economic boom !!!

- The Allied (UK and France) paid their debts with difficulties because this payment was linked to the reparation payments by Germany to France, UK...). US negotiated the Dawes plan (1923) and the Young plan (1928) to spread out the reparations payment of Germany.
- And, in 1928, the US signed the Kellogg-Briand pact, the general treaty for renunciation of war.

Is it really isolationism ?

- At the same time, [The Johnson-Reed Act on immigration](#) was passed in 1924 and was aimed at restricting immigration of Southern Europeans, Eastern Europeans, and Jews, in addition to prohibiting the immigration of Arabs, East Asians, and Indians.

After the crisis that started with the October 1929 Wall Street Crash, America was too busy solving its domestic problems to worry about the rest of the world. [The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act](#) of 1930 increased import tariffs on over 20,000 imported goods. This protectionism by the USA meant that trade with the rest of the world slowed considerably.

Between 1936 and 1937, U.S. Congress passed the [Neutrality Acts](#) to ensure that the US would not become entangled in foreign conflicts.

I.3. The USA during the WWII

Roosevelt did not want war, but he began to fear that it was inevitable, while the public opinion was isolationist! So, he began to prepare the American.

Several events created the shift in the opinion :

- The fall of France in 1940 and the battle of England (UK was the only country fighting the Axis powers)

- The “Arsenal of Democracy”

The USA was supplying arms and material to the Allied nations via [the Lend-Lease program](#) (March 1941).

The course of WWII was changed because of the U.S.A. capacity to produce massive amounts of arms (it was the “great arsenal of democracy”) for example Liberty Ships;

In August 1941, the USA had justified its potential involvement in the fighting in [the Atlantic Charter](#) (text drafted by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt).

- A “Day of Infamy” (Dec. 1941)

It was essentially because of the surprise bombing by the Japanese of Pearl Harbor (7th December 1941, 2,400 servicemen killed) that the USA decided to get involved in WWII.

Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S. on 11 December 1941, and the U.S. responded with a declaration of war.

The U.S. government ordered the internment in "War Relocation Camps" of over 110,000 people of Japanese heritage who lived on the U.S. Pacific coast.

- From Midway to Tokyo (1942-45)

- In early June 1942, the Americans, achieved a decisive victory at [Midway](#) with their aircraft carriers over the Imperial Japanese Navy and defeated the Japanese army at Guadalcanal (1942-43).

- On 6 June 1944 (known [as D-Day](#)), the Western Allies invaded Normandy.

- On 12 April 1945, U.S. President Roosevelt died and was succeeded by Harry Truman.

- German Reich total and unconditional surrender was effective by the end of 8 May 1945.

- American forces moved towards Japan, taking Iwo Jima [map] by March 1945, and Okinawa by the end of June 1945 : in the Pacific ocean, it was a naval warfare.

- At this moment, Truman was confident of winning the war, but he forecasted a year more of fights and massive casualties thus American troops beat back the Japanese island by island, and maybe they had to invade Japan.

There was an alternative. [The Manhattan Project](#) had just perfected the first nuclear bomb.

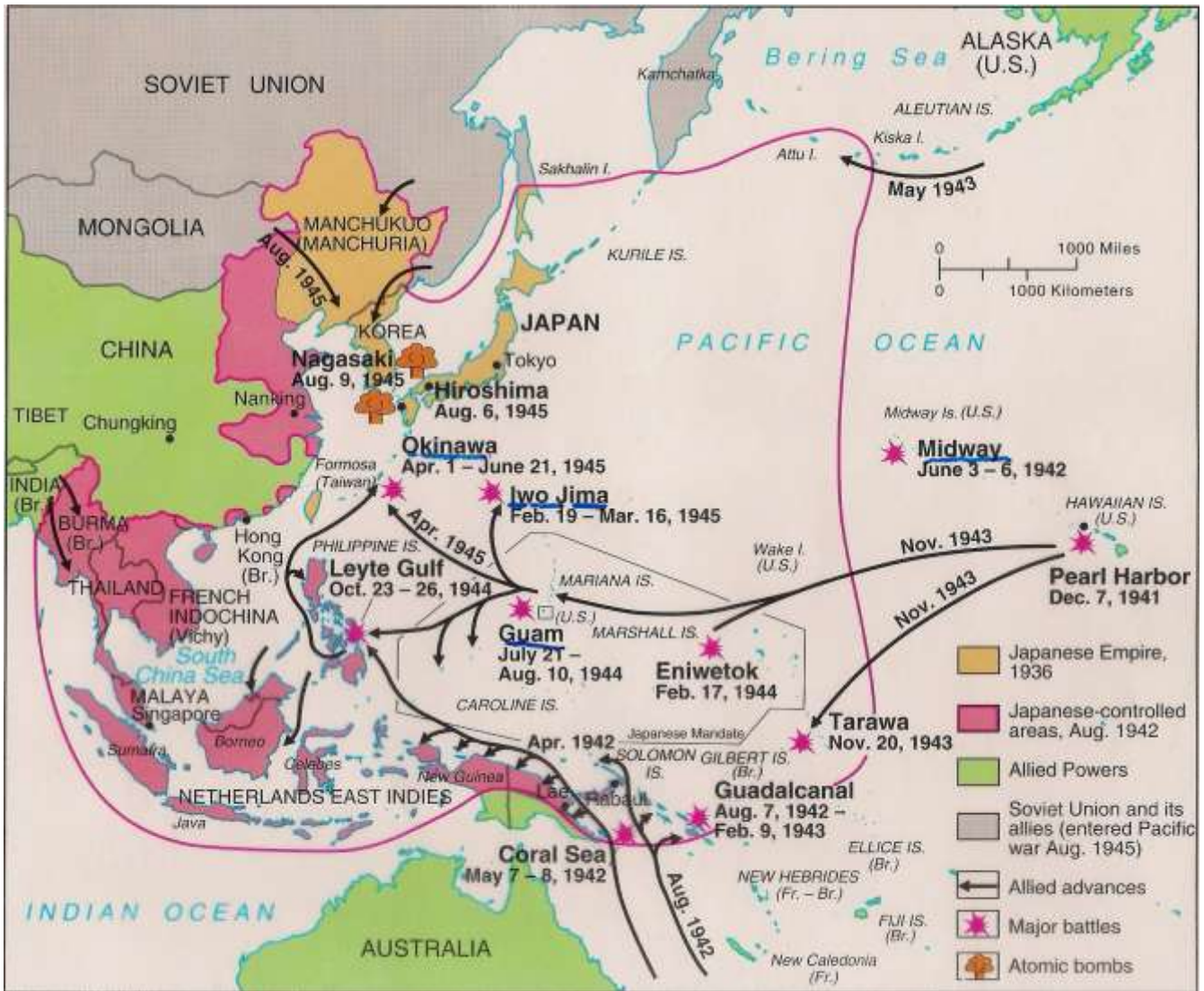
→ The USA dropped [atomic bombs](#) on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August 1945, causing horrific casualties.

Why is a right decision?

Some people think that Truman wanted to scare Stalin, and officers wanted to test the bomb in a real warfare.

Others argue that Truman wanted to save American lives... The debate continues.

⇒ On September 2, 1945, Japan surrendered, with the surrender documents signed aboard the deck of the American battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo bay, ending WWII.



II. 1947-1991 : The USA during the Cold war :

- They organized with the Allies, the **Yalta Conference** (February 1945) and the **Potsdam Conference** (July-August 1945). They determined what the post-war world would be like.
- In an effort to maintain peace, the Allies formed the **United Nations** (October 1945). The great powers that were the victors of the war—the United States, Soviet Union, China, United Kingdom, and France—formed the **permanent members** (with veto power) of the UN's **Security Council**.

By 1945, the USA had become **a superpower**:

- it manufactured around 50% of the world's industrial production
- they own two-thirds of the world's gold reserve
- until 1949, it was the only country with the **A- bomb**
- the U.S. dollar became the standard currency for the exchange rate (**Bretton Woods system , 1944**)
- the "American way of life" became a cultural model for the western countries.

Key-question : **a superpower in a bipolar world and the leader of the free world.**

II.1. The beginning of the Cold war : the Truman doctrine and the Marshall Aid (1947)

See sources :



"Spring seeding", John Collins, 1948

"The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The Government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation, in violation of the Yalta agreement, in Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria. I must also state that in a number of other countries there have been similar developments.

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

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."

Harry Truman, Speech to the Congress, 12th march 1947

Question : *Containment and Marshall Aid = How was the world divided in two sides ?*

- Introduce the source in a context

Context :

The US pretend to be THE democratic model from the very beginning of the Cold War. Having freed the world from the nazis, they believe that the time has come for them to fulfill the destiny they were created for (Manifest Destiny).

But, since 1945, despite of the Yalta and Postdam agreement, the western powers were alarmed by Stalin's take-over of Eastern Europe. Roosevelt and Churchill had agreed that eastern Europe would be a Soviet sphere of influence. However, they had not expected such complete Communist domination : in 1948, Greece and Czechoslovakia were the only eastern European countries not controlled by a communist government.

- Describe

Vocabulary

E.R.P = European recovery program = Marshall Aid

Western union = European organization of economic cooperation = 16 members who accepted the Marshall Aid.

Iron curtain

Sickle and hammer

Nasty, perfidious...

Uncle Sam

Caricature

- Explanations

During the first weeks of 1947, Greece was threatened.

→US helped the British troops to stay in Greece for the protection of the royalist government.

The 12th march, Truman explained his doctrine, called doctrine of "containment"

= a policy to stop Soviet expansion by protecting the countries weakened by the war.

⇒ The Marshall Plan (ERP) was voted in 1948, making 17 billion available for a period of 4 years.

In a first time, the Congress decided to vote against the aid. But the public opinion was convinced with the expansion of communism in Czechoslovakia.

And, on the other hand, it was also motivated by American self-interest : they wanted to create new markets for American goods.

Stalin viewed Marshall aid with suspicion : he refused it and forbade any of the European eastern states to apply for Marshall aid.

He proposed the Jdanov doctrine, the Kominform and the subversive war.

⇒ Arms race