

Antonio S. Thompson, Christos Frentzos, eds.. *The Routledge Handbook of American Military and Diplomatic History: 1865 to the Present*. New York: Routledge, 2013. xiv + 400 pp. \$225.00, e-book, ISBN 978-1-135-07099-1.

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Compared to many other countries and nations, the United States has a short history. Even if one were to begin a discussion on US history from as early as the English settlers in Virginia (1607), it still adds up to merely four hundred years as opposed to thousands in other cultures. Yet these have been four centuries filled with important and formative events, not only for the United States but also the world as a whole. This period turned the United States from a collection of agrarian colonies to a political, economic, and military superpower, essentially setting it as a civilization of its own.

This multifaceted process has been affected by many factors, such as immigration and emigration, urbanization, and industrialization. But above all, it was the fact that the United States had copious, rich, cultivable lands to the west of the old East Coast settlement. Conquering the West took three main forms. The first was via wars, such as the Mexican-American War and ongoing battles against native tribes. The second was via the purchase of miles and miles of land, as was the case with the Louisiana Purchase (1803) from French hands and the purchase of Florida from the Spanish (1819). Such actions were the work of the central government. The third took the form of hundreds of thousands of initiatives and enter-

prises of individuals and groups who left their homes far behind and forged onward to the unknown frontier.

The United States enjoyed several geopolitical components that had an irrefutable impact on the formation of its international status. Unlike European countries, the United States had access to numerous natural resources spread over a mass of land with safe borders, landing the impression of a giant island nation. The great distance between the United States and Europe allowed the United States to remain neutral during the majority of the nineteenth century; there was no direct American involvement in European military confrontations, such as the Napoleonic Wars; no American stance on the Eastern Question regarding the declining Ottoman Empire; and no American participation in the European imperialist race in Africa. The last two issues would eventually lead to World War I. Its neutrality allowed the United States to invest few resources in ground forces, leaving most economic investments to the development of civil infrastructures and the expansion of its industrial base.

Throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century, the United States focused on annihilating a foreign presence in North America, and, as dictated by the Monroe Doctrine (1823), avoided par-

taking in European political issues. This dynamic allowed it to reinforce its internal structures, recover from the Civil War, and become a financial superpower. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, in time with its growing interest in the Pacific Ocean, the United States began forming a naval force. This would prove to have a long-term influence for Americans, mainly due to the fact that Japan was also on its way to becoming a regional superpower. Political and economic interests of the two nations would, to put it in the simplest of terms, lead to a ferocious military clash between the United States and Japan.

One of the primary figures who advocated a departure from isolation and the forming of an American Empire outside the mainland was naval officer and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose essays describe the influences of naval strength on history. Mahan may be considered a military thinker, but his writings revolve around geopolitical concepts that are the result of the political stance of a nation with increasing international interests. He opined that global dominance can be achieved by conquering geostrategic key holds, specifically natural and man-made straits. Mahan viewed the Pacific Ocean as *Mare Nostrum* or *Mare Internum*, following the Roman perception, that is, a sphere where the United States should stand dominant politically, militaristically, and economically. He was an adamant supporter of the annexation of Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines as advanced bases for the United States. He also endorsed American hegemony in the Caribbean, as it would secure the eastern end of the channel connecting the two oceans. He viewed this channel as a strategic key for global dominance.

Mahan had notable influence on decision makers in Presidents William McKinley's (1897-1901) and Theodore Roosevelt's (1901-1909) regimes. This, along with his writings, was the gateway to end the American isolationism dating back to the days of the Monroe Doctrine. Some

key events that can be traced back to Mahan are the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands and Guam (1895) and the Spanish-American War (1898), by the end of which the United States achieved hegemony in the Caribbean and an important foothold in Southeast Asia (the Philippines). Mahan influenced the purchasing rights for digging the Panama Canal from France, American work that began in 1904.

Its military involvement and participation in wars increased as the US foreign policy changed during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The isolationist approach of steering clear of any and all European issues finally ended with the American declaration of war on Germany (April 1917). One must remember that World War I was mostly European, and of a grand scale. Thus President Woodrow Wilson, with congressional agreement, in fact dispersed the guiding principles dictated by President James Monroe some one hundred years prior.

In the wake of the Great War, the United States declared its retreat back to isolationism. But this was only a façade—directed mainly toward Europe. The United States continued promoting its interests, namely, in South Asia, in the face of Japan's increasing power. At the same time, its involvement in different South American countries increased. During the second half of the 1930s, the United States reignited its interest in European matters in light of the growing international animosity and the fear of a World War II. (In October 1931, an American representative joined the League of Nations.) Although American criticism of isolationism increased, the anti-isolationist steps taken by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt—such as mandatory recruitment during peacetime and military assistance to the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union—barely passed congressional approval. The American public and many of its representatives still refused the nation's participation in another European war.

Only the Japanese surprise attack (August 7, 1941) and the German and Italian declarations of war on the United States several days later drove the Americans to enter, cannons blazing, into World War II. By the end of the war, the United States did not resume its isolationist stance, despite public opinions calling for the opposite. The Truman Doctrine (March 1947) set the final nail in that coffin. One can surmise that increased American military involvement worldwide was a direct result of dramatic changes in US foreign policy; in other words, a gradual process of change, from isolation to intervention.

This compilation of essays, edited by Antonio S. Thompson and Christos Frentzos, clearly demonstrates how the changes in American foreign policy increased military involvement. This compilation can be seen as a historical collection exploring American foreign policy and its wars, but the combination of both topics allows for a clearer, wider scope of understanding of the trends and processes that influenced the change in said policy over time, trends and processes that earned the United States its superpower status. The political and military history of the United States is relayed via forty short essays, ranging from the final third of the nineteenth century to the first decade of the twenty-first. This compilation is made up of eleven parts, each containing three to five essays and an introduction with a short survey of the relevant period and its association to the wider historical context. The introductory essays also present relevant literature and other historiographical debates on the topic in question.

The compilation opens with a survey of the post-Civil War era (1865), leading up to the 1890s. During this time, the United States was rapidly expanding westward and beyond its borders, with the purchase of Alaska from Russia (1867) and the annexation of several Pacific Ocean islands. This process nearly brought about a war with Germany, and the growing fascination in the Carib-

bean sphere eventually ignited a war with Spain and the formation of an American Empire outside the boundaries of the North American continent.

The second and third parts of the book explore the war between Spain and American imperialism, American departure of traditional isolationism and entry into World War I, and its post-war policy. It was a critical time in American history, for it evoked a drastic paradigm shift in American foreign policy, from isolation to intervention. The fourth part deals with military and political preparation for World War II, whereas the fifth explores different issues surrounding World War II, including a historiographical discussion of the atomic bomb debate and another essay on the conflict between the allies on the subject of opening a second front in Western Europe. Although such matters belong to the study of World War II, they can be viewed as a direct bridge to the postwar period and the start of deterioration in the relationship between the two superpowers. Thus we can view the fifth part of this book as a prelude to the Cold War, with the military and political history of this important era discussed in parts 6-9.

The Cold War sections follow the two American military involvements in that period: the Korean War (part 7) and the Vietnam War (part 8). The tenth part, much like the one dealing with American policy after World War I, also examines how the United States reformed its policies in light of the great local and international changes that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. While these parts emphasize American military involvement, the essays point out the development of a historical process that kept the United States in a superpower position. The final part ventures into American policy following the large-scale terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, specifically the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of the Global War on Terrorism.

The forty essays come together to create a multifaceted vista that describes and analyzes the political and military history of the United States. The different sections contain some essays that diverge from the core focus of American military and political history studies, such as essays on the African American Buffalo Soldiers in the frontier, the roles of Native Americans in World War I, or women in World War II. Though such essays belong to the sphere of social history, their incorporation in this compilation of American military-political history allows for a more complete view and in fact demonstrates how social processes and events cannot be separated from the wider historical frame. In other words, those who study the social history of the United States must look at the wider historical context in which these events took place. Moreover, by blending military history into the wider scope of diplomatic history, Carl von Clausewitz's claim of war being the continuation of policy by other means is proven to be true.

Before us is a compilation of essays, written by leading researchers in their fields, that should be used as an elementary book for understanding American diplomatic and military history. The historiographical reviews at the beginning of each part provide the necessary frame of reference to the vast secondary literature written on the various topics and therefore serve, alongside the main essays, as an important and efficient methodological tool and an introduction to those wishing to expand their knowledge of one subject or another in the fascinating international history of the United States.

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