The Pros of Non-Interventionism

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History exists to forewarn the present, but humans are stubborn in nature and often disregard lessons of the past. This failure to learn from past mistakes can be detrimental, exemplified by the parallelism in Napoleon and Hitler’s botched wintertime Russian invasions. However, one of the most fundamentally ignored pieces of history (ironically) comes from one of the most famous historical figures: George Washington. In his famous 1796 Farewell Address, Washington stated that “It must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her [Europe’s] friendships or enmities,” disavowing future entanglements in foreign affairs not directly beneficial or necessary for the United States. As with everything, each ticking second erases a smidge of truth from past events until the average person rarely thinks about the French Revolution or the Middle Ages or Washington’s Farewell Address. Yet, non-interventionism is gaining support again due to exhaustion from countless decades of foreign affairs and war, most recently combatting terrorism and groups such as ISIS.

Conflict and war are inevitable; there will never be a century without a major conflict or bloodshed, but it is still wise to avoid war as much as possible. World War I waged for about three years before the United States became physically involved; neutrality was maintained until the Zimmerman telegram was intercepted, inciting public support for entering the war. When national security is threatened, resolving issues may not be as simple as pen and paper. During the “in-between” years of the two World Wars, non-interventionist policies and ideas were prevalent in Congress, who signed the Neutrality Acts in the late 1930s. This split Americans into interventionists and non-interventionists, the former fueled by fear of German-Italian invasion and victory over democracy and American life. However, the Fourth Neutrality Act and the Lend-Lease Acts allowed the lending and selling military supplies to Allied nations while physically refraining from war. Eventually, the United States entered the war and helped the Allies win and subsequently left the U.S. as a global superpower, a position that is arguably a blessing and a curse.

Post WWII, much of Europe was broke and in shambles, but United States soil was virtually untouched (save Pearl Harbor). American culture thrived as consumerism grew exponentially, and the U.S. also gained a sense of being the “policeman of the world,” intervening in the Korean War and most controversially, the long and bloody Vietnam War. In the past two decades, U.S. involvement in Middle Eastern crises has been a hot topic in foreign policy; is it worth exerting hundreds of thousands of soldiers and billions of dollars into the Syrian Civil war and ground combat against ISIS? Will there eventually be a victory for us? The answer relies on protecting our nation’s self-interest and allowing countries to choose a non-cruel form of leadership. A less direct approach to combatting ISIS is to supply weapons instead of people to nations in that area that also want to defeat ISIS. This would form stronger alliances and possibly appease conflict without exhausting our military.

In short, there is no easy and direct way to solve foreign affairs, but peace and focus on domestic policy would help our people more in the long run. Intervention should be a last resort to uphold our nation’s safety and self-interest; we should instead participate in free trade and scientific research to boost our nation’s economic and technological prosperity.