Geopolitical and Economic Interests in the United States Foreign Policy

Name

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Date

In the 19th century, United States foreign policy was primarily influenced by geopolitical and economic interests. The US amassed power by conquering the frontier in the western hemisphere. The territorial expansion stemmed from the “Manifest Destiny” ideology that encouraged American settlers to conquer and control the land bordering Canada, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific and Atlantic oceans (Kinzer, 2006). Over time, the ambition shifted to exploring lands beyond North America as shaped by different foreign policies at various times in US history.

An example of a foreign policy fueled by economic and geopolitical interests was the Platt Amendment of 1901 that justified the US invasion of Cuba. It allowed Cuban self-rule while allowing the US to veto their decisions regarding treaties with other nations (Kinzer, 2006). The US presence in Cuba was due to several factors. On the economic front, business leaders in the US had invested heavily in Cuba, with agriculture holding upwards of $50 million investment in the nation (Kinzer, 2006). With the looming threat of Cuban independence that promised land reforms and redistribution, the American leaders wanted to control Cuba and protect their investment. Under the guise of protecting Cuba’s interests in its fight for independence, the US forcibly intervened with the promise that it would not control the island once the war ended, as outlined in the Teller Amendment (Kinzer, 2006). The Cubans welcomed this support and anticipated their freedom.

However, this was not the case as the US amended its foreign policy, replacing it with the Platt Amendment to support its geopolitical ambitions. The US maintained its presence in Cuba by alleging that Cubans could not govern themselves and needed help from the American leadership. However, the primary motivation was to win Cuba and claim it for the United States and use this position as a lookout post for other areas of Latin America that it could conquer and extend its territory, as evidenced by its military presence.

Another ideology that influenced the US foreign policy to expand into the Mexican territory was the Monroe Doctrine. This doctrine drafted by several leaders, including the secretary of state John Quincy Adams, came into effect in 1823 and outlined the nation’s interactions with other major powers. A notable point in the Monroe doctrine was the US’s non-interference with existing colonies in the western hemisphere (Ortiz, 2018). This stand also meant that the European powers would not intervene if the US showed interest in an independent nation in the region. The Monroe Doctrine influenced the United States’ foreign policy regarding Mexico’s invasion in 1846. Mexico was an independent nation, and the US did not infringe on any European power’s territory when it made this move. The motivation for this invasion was both geopolitical and economic. The US sought to control Mexico because its independence threatened slavery, which supported much of the US economy (Ortiz, 2018). Since Mexico supported an equal society and abolished slavery, many enslaved people in the US made their way south to secure their freedom, destabilizing the industries that depended on them, such as agriculture. The invasion of Mexico aimed to preserve slavery as it would force Mexico to adhere to American ideologies. Furthermore, as fueled by radical capitalism, the invasion would increase American territory and make slave ownership profitable by putting the enslaved people into use and getting more profit from the investment made from purchasing them.

These examples show that what the US people and the leadership believed in the nineteenth century and their geopolitical and economic ambitions influenced foreign policy. The impacts of the actions that followed are still evident today.

References

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