Historical Overview of US FP: Treaty

of Versailles to

the Origins of the Cold War

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Woodrow Wilson and the Treaty of Versailles

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How did the Treaty of Versailles contribute to World War II?

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Was US foreign policy isolationist the 1920’s?

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How did American policy contribute to the Great Depression?

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How did the Great Depression contribute to World War II?

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US isolationism in the 1930’s and World War II

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The collapse of wartime collaboration and the origins of the Cold War

Treaty of Versailles (1919) took 6 months

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Wilson makes concessions to Allies to preserve League (harsh on germany, recognition of empires)

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Many trace WWII origins here

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Harsh peace on Germany

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Loses navy, merchant marine, colonies, territory in the west (Alsace Lorraine) and east (Poland, Czechoslovakia), democracy very weak

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Allies occupy Rhineland (industrial center of Europe)

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Allies (Wilson) demands democracy Treaty of Versailles (1919): Reparations

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Reparations: German payments to France, Great Britain, and Belgium for costs of war for 60 years

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Device to ensure German compliance, limit economic growth and redirect any surplus revenues away from army and toward Allies

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Huge fiscal implications: politically difficult for German government to impose new taxes on citizens (who just suffered defeat and costs of war) to fund transfers to foreigners

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Stable reparations system does not emerge until 1924 but only lasts until 1928, dependent on **American** loans to Germany

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Cycle of credit: Reparations linked to British and French war debts to US

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Importance of US to settlement

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US loans propping up reparations system

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Wilson acquiesces in harsh peace on Germany, particularly with respect to territorial acquisitions that did not confirm to principle of self-determination to protect League of Nations

**How Versailles help cause World War II?**

Destabilizing new (Weimar) democracy in Germany (died in 1930) - no way to make reparations

Activates conservatives in Germany to pursue revisionist foreign policy: retake lost territory

Failure of treaty ratification in US begins withdrawal (twice) – politics were their among parties – Wilson does not want to negotiate on article 10 – legally bonded obligation for US

Long term stability relies on long term American commitments/support

**US FP in the 1920’s: Was it isolationist?**

Perhaps...

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Wilson leadership failure: Senate rejection of Versailles critical piece of evidence that US withdrawing again from the world stage

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Republicans push tariffs up, segmenting American economy (problem for Germany: made difficult to generate export revenues to repay loans)

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Failure to grant war debt relief to Brits and French, cycled with above

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Tight monetary policy in 1928 halts credit to Europe (Germany) – failure of the fed to lead the global economy

**US FP in the 1920’s: Was it isolationist?**

But...

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Heavy involvement in Dawes Plan that stabilized reparations and European economy (1925, JP morgan)

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Preference for relying on economic (private/financial means) rather than military

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Dramatic success of Washington Naval Conference (1922) – success – not isolationist, saved money on military spending

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Tooze (2014), The Deluge: Republicans as “Triumphant nationalists,” unilateralists and exceptionalists, not withdrawing from world

**RECAP: US FP in 1920’s as isolationist?**

Conventional wisdom: probably yes

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Most recent wave of historical research: No

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Isolationists relative to 1796? Definitely not. Isolationists relative to what WORLD NEEDED in 1920, maybe a little.

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Larger implication: Mismatch between how far Wilson had taken country since 1914 relative to new internationalist responsibilities and what US public willing to support in 1920

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This mismatch would have serious negative consequences for international political stability (Tooze 2014)

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Failure of American leadership/hegemony, Americans were not ready to lead the world

**The Great Depression**

Great Depression dramatic, global economic downturn from 1928-1934 (or so)

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Elements

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Collapsing industrial production, falling agricultural prices (75% drop from 1925-1932), rising unemployment (over 30% in some place), international trade contracts significantly (50% drop for some countries), like oil industry now

**The Great Depression I: how did US contribute?**

Tight monetary policy (pushes interest rates up) by Federal Reserve in 1928 halts loans to Germany (big

implications for reparations)

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Smoot-Hawley (1929): low crop prices, also other goods -> high tariffs provoke reciprocal measures in world and global trade collapses

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FDR (1933): takes US off gold standard to offset deflation (foster inflation by devaluing dollar)

**The Great Depression II: international political consequences?**

FDR and US withdrawal from Europe (isolationist from 1933 to 1938)

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Congress passes series of Neutrality Acts (1935 – arms embargo on all belligerents, 1936 – banned loans on warring states, 1937 – no trading with warring groups)

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German government makes collapse worse by pursuing austerity (dramatic spending cuts, tax hikes, high interest rates) and creates political space for Hitler’s Nazi Party to seize government through legal, constitutional means

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Hitler then uses rearmament to generate economic recovery (because end of unemployment insurance ending), which leads directly to WWII -> supporters were small business and farmers hence imperialism

**The U.S. in World War II**

War breaks out in Europe over Poland in September 1939

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Hitler steady program of territorial expansion in 1930’s eventually challenged

1933 rearming

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US enters war in December 1941 following attack on Pearl Harbor

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Two theaters connected by strong US-UK ties and Triparite Pact among Germany, Italy, and Japan (Sep. 1940)

**How does domestic politics shape American entry into World War II?**

Isolationist sentiment in US still strong following outbreak of war in Europe in 1939

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80% still opposed to entering war in Autumn 1941, but strong majority wanted Axis defeated

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FDR wants to support Great Britain and confront Hitler but constrained by Neutrality acts (economic aid), also wanted to end Europe war before japan

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Designed to limit executive authority and preserve nonintervention (neutrality acts)

**How does domestic politics shape American entry into World War II?**

FDR delicate game of expanding US support for British war effort while not publicly committing US to fight the war

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Sep 1939: gets Congress to repeal arms embargo of Neutrality Acts

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US Navy patrolling Atlantic (skirmishes with German navy in fall of 1941)

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Destroyers for naval bases deal with British by executive order (Sep 1940)

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Lend Lease (March 1941): US as arsenal for democracy, 50 billion $

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Domestic constraints fall away with Pearl Harbor -> destroyed isolationism

**Why did allied wartime cooperation so quickly collapse into the Cold War?**

Competing Goals: U.S. Goals: Universal and Ambiguous

a. Maintain U.S. International Engagement

b. Promote democracy, free and fair elections

c. Promote free and open markets

d. United Nations and Collective Security Competing Goals:

Soviet Goals: Concrete and Territorial

a. Buffer zone (saw everyone as a threat, fear of individual)

b. Sphere of influence

Joseph Stalin:

"This war in not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise."

**Why did allied wartime cooperation so quickly collapse into the Cold War?**

Mutual suspicions:

Philosophical underpinning:

World Revolution

U.S. mistrust of the Soviet Union

1.Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

2.Negotiations over Eastern Europe

3.Soviet Army occupied Eastern Europe

Mutual suspicions:

Philosophical underpinning:

Capitalist imperialism

Soviet mistrust of the U.S.

1.History of Western Invasion

2.Western Intervention during Russian Revolution

3.Second Front Issue during WWII, delay was intentional

**Why did allied wartime cooperation so quickly collapse into the Cold War?**

Individual level: Stalin’s paranoia

Maxim Litvinov, former

Soviet foreign minister,

said in 1945:

"If the West acceded to the current Soviet demands, it would be faced after a more or less short time with the next series of demands."

Individual level: Truman’s anti-communism

Harry S. Truman on the second front

issue: “If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible, although I don't want to see Hitler victorious under any circumstances. Neither of them thinks anything of their pledged word.”