

# HARD LINE

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY SINCE WORLD WAR II



COLIN DUECK

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HARD LINE



## *Introduction*

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### CONSERVATIVE TRADITIONS IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

WHERE IS THE REPUBLICAN PARTY headed politically and ideologically? Should it become more strictly conservative or less so? These questions have interested observers and animated conservatives in particular since the Republican electoral defeats of 2006 and 2008. Heated debates continue as to how far the Republican Party should adjust and adapt, in terms of either style or substance, to recover national political success. Reformers such as David Brooks and David Frum urge Republicans to modernize, strike a new tone, and directly address middle-class economic anxieties.<sup>1</sup> Rock-ribbed conservatives respond by saying that the basic principles of limited government embodied in the American founding need no updating.<sup>2</sup> Yet amid these conflicting recommendations, surprisingly little popular attention is paid to foreign policy. Where will issues of diplomacy and national security fit into a new Republican appeal?

One way to help answer that question is to start with a better grasp of the true history of Republican foreign policy alternatives. This should come naturally to conservatives, who point out that only by understanding our own past can we move forward to good effect. In 2002, responding to the terrorist attacks of the previous autumn, the administration of President George W. Bush embraced a new national security strategy based on concepts of regime change, rogue state rollback, counterproliferation, preventive warfare, and assertive democratization, a strategy that became known as the Bush doctrine and that led directly to the subsequent U.S. invasion of Iraq. As of 2009–10, there were essentially three leading interpretations, whether explicit or implicit, of the Bush

doctrine's place in the history of American conservatism and the Republican Party. The first interpretation is that the story of right-wing foreign policy approaches in postwar America is one of radically aggressive, militaristic, and unilateralist ideas, thankfully ignored by moderate presidents such as Dwight Eisenhower but fully embraced by George W. Bush, to the combined detriment of the United States, the international community, and the Republican Party itself.<sup>3</sup> Call this the "radical right" thesis. The second interpretation is that a small group of neoconservatives took control of the Bush administration and drove it to war against Iraq, in contradiction to traditional Republican internationalism.<sup>4</sup> Call this the "neoconservative hijacking" thesis. The third interpretation is that both the Bush doctrine and the Iraq War were soundly conceived, despite certain failures of implementation, and need not be revisited or reexamined as bases for a new conservative foreign policy approach, especially since Iraq did no lasting damage to Republicans politically.<sup>5</sup> Call this the "tactical errors" thesis. All three of these arguments are made by sincere and intelligent people, but the more one looks at each interpretation, the less satisfying any of them are. The tactical errors thesis underestimates the seriousness of George W. Bush's early mistakes in Iraq. The neoconservative hijacking thesis overstates the policy impact of public intellectuals, as well as the philosophical break between Bush and earlier Republicans. The radical right thesis is correct in noticing some of the fundamental continuities in conservative foreign policy approaches since World War II, but exaggerates their deleterious effects.

The following pages tell a different story. First, I argue that despite apparent oscillations between internationalism and isolationism, there has in fact been one overarching constant in conservative and Republican foreign policies for several decades now, namely, a hawkish and intense American nationalism. By this I mean that since at least the 1950s, Republicans and conservatives have generally been comfortable with the use of force by the United States in world affairs, committed to building strong national defenses, determined to maintain a free hand for the United States internationally, and relatively unyielding toward potential foreign adversaries. The typical conservative Republican foreign policy approach for over half a century has been, in a word, hard-line—a long-term trend with considerable domestic political as well as international

significance, especially since a majority of liberal Democrats began to abandon hard-line foreign policy views following America's war in Vietnam. Second, I demonstrate that certain particular conservative and Republican foreign policy tendencies have still been possible within the above framework, and that contrary to popular arguments centering on the importance of public intellectuals or economic interests, the crucial factor in shaping these specific foreign policy tendencies has been presidential leadership. Presidents have acted as focal points for their party, and Republican presidents have been given remarkable leeway to redefine not only conservative foreign policies but what it means to be a conservative in the United States.

These two observations, taken together, delineate both the past and the future of the Republican Party on American foreign policy. Republicans will continue to be relatively hard-line on international and military issues, as the party of a hawkish American nationalism, but the particular policy choices they make and the tendencies they reveal once back in control of the White House will depend heavily on presidential leadership. Among other things, this means that the recent obsession with "neoconservatives" is mistaken. Neoconservative ideas have been important over the past few years, but foreign policy is made by presidents, not intellectuals, and the Bush doctrine had deep roots in Republican and American foreign policy perspectives long before the word neoconservative was invented. Conservative foreign policy views and traditions are too strongly ingrained in the United States to fade away now, regardless of past furor over the neoconservatives and Iraq. The crucial consideration, therefore, is not so much the influence of neoconservative ideas but whether Republican presidents in practice have shown the prudence, pragmatism, and care to implement hawkish foreign policies skillfully and successfully. As I suggest in subsequent chapters, most Republican presidents since 1945 have done just that; in mismanaging the initial occupation of Iraq, George W. Bush was the great exception. Conservatives therefore have a history of foreign policy success to which they can turn, if they are willing to recall the examples set by previous Republican presidents.

This book tells the story of the relationship among presidential leadership, party politics, conservative ideas, and U.S. foreign policy since

World War II. As such, it can be seen as part of a current trend in scholarly political and intellectual histories that takes American conservatism seriously.<sup>6</sup> This is the first such work to focus on the long-term evolution of Republican foreign policy approaches. The book itself is written from a conservative point of view, although, as the reader will discover, one that emphasizes the traditional conservative virtues of prudence, balance, and tenacity. When it seems to me that conservatives or Republicans have gone wrong on specific foreign policy issues, I say so. One observation, however, that I hope readers will take to heart is that conservative foreign policy positions grow from authentic convictions regarding the nature of international politics. American conservatives generally view themselves as watchdogs of their country's security. As much as this self-image infuriates liberal critics, it is genuinely held, and flows from an intense love of country. Observers who assume that conservative foreign policy stands are simply the result of narrow economic interest or partisan calculation really say more about themselves than they do about conservatives.



Conservatives and Republicans in the United States are not entirely synonymous. Still, the Republican or “Grand Old Party” (GOP) has tended to be the more conservative of the two major American political parties on economic issues, certainly since the 1930s, and arguably since the election of 1896. Beginning in the 1960s, partisan disagreement over economic issues was gradually supplemented—although not displaced—by a new and further division between Democrats and Republicans along social and cultural lines.<sup>7</sup> The new social or cultural dimension of partisan disagreement was manifest in a wide range of issues, such as civil rights, criminal justice, and the implementation of traditional moral norms. Voter preferences on these matters often cut across existing alignments on economics: some voters, for example, supported increased government spending while maintaining a conservative stance on social issues. This led to an influx of social conservatives to the Republican Party and a corresponding outflow of social liberals from the GOP to the Democratic Party. As a result, today the Democratic Party is clearly the more liberal of the two major parties on social as well as economic

issues, just as the Republican Party is clearly the more conservative on both dimensions. The interesting question for our purposes, then, is what exactly it means to be a conservative in the United States when it comes to foreign policy.

The traditional conservative attitude toward transformational and perfectionist political visions, whether in the domestic or the international arena, is one of skepticism. Traditional or classical conservatives like Edmund Burke point to the unintended consequences of well-intentioned political reforms and tend to be anti-utopian in their basic outlook. Yet there are central elements of the American experience that are not exactly conservative in the traditional sense. The United States was born out of a revolution based at least partly on classical liberal ideas. The leaders of that revolution held that a certain amount of progress was possible in human affairs. They believed, and indeed American citizens of all parties have commonly believed, that the United States has a special role to play in promoting popular self-government internationally—a belief that forms part of a cluster of ideas known as American exceptionalism. The prior, domestic component to this belief in democracy promotion overseas is a strong attachment to individual freedom, rule of law, enterprise, love of country, and republican self-government inside the United States as central to American national identity.<sup>8</sup> The founders of the United States, however pragmatic in promoting their nation's interests, certainly believed in American exceptionalism and took it for granted that the United States represented a new form of government that would have broad implications for the cause of popular self-rule worldwide. They trusted that the spread of democratic (or as they would say, republican) governments, trading with one another peacefully, would lead to the creation of a more friendly, just, and pacific international system. This is not a classically conservative but a classically liberal belief, and it has been hard-wired into the American mind-set from the very beginning.

All attempts to formulate a distinctly conservative U.S. foreign policy alternative thus face an inherent tension. Any foreign policy approach that completely rejects classical conservative insights can hardly be called conservative; any foreign policy approach that completely rejects classical liberal assumptions cannot be called American. The problem is



not insoluble, but it would be wrong to suggest that American conservatives have hit on only one lasting solution. In fact, if we look beyond the overarching continuities since the 1950s, there have been a variety of specific conservative foreign policy traditions or tendencies within the United States.

For the sake of simplicity, conservative U.S. foreign policy alternatives past and present can be categorized into four broad tendencies or schools of thought: realists, hawks, nationalists, and anti-interventionists. Conservative realists emphasize a balance of power, the careful coordination of force and diplomacy, and the international rather than domestic behavior of other states. Conservative hawks emphasize the need for accumulating military power and argue for armed intervention overseas, whether on pragmatic or idealistic grounds. Conservative nationalists emphasize the preservation of national sovereignty and an unyielding approach to foreign adversaries. Conservative anti-interventionists emphasize the avoidance or dismantling of strategic commitments overseas. Since each of these four categories is a pure type, few practical politicians fall neatly into only one school of thought, but even real-world conservative foreign policy leaders and advocates usually reveal a tendency toward certain archetypes over others. The overarching prevalence of a hawkish American nationalism in Republican foreign policy since the 1950s has not prevented fine-tuned adjustments, variations, and corrections between tendencies: more or less interventionist, more or less realistic, and so on. The question then becomes, why does one particular tendency win out over another at a given point in time?

A central argument and finding of this book is that the answer to that question is to be found in the possibilities of presidential leadership. Both popular and academic interpretations of U.S. foreign policy tend to fixate on external forces pushing presidents toward certain decisions over others. Economic interests, international pressures, domestic political concerns, and public intellectuals are variously said to determine presidential behavior on foreign policy matters. All of these factors are important, and considerably more will be said about them in the following chapters. But it is worth remembering that foreign policy is not made in exactly the same way as domestic policy in the United States. In

comparison with domestic policy, presidents are given a greater degree of latitude by their own party, the American public, and Congress to make foreign policy decisions. That degree of latitude means that their particular beliefs, personalities, and choices make a real difference when it comes to precise foreign policy outcomes. This is not to suggest that presidents are all-powerful on foreign affairs; far from it. But even after economic, political, ideological, and international pressures are all taken into account, the triumph of one foreign policy tendency over another is crucially shaped by the president's own choices. If they are sufficiently skilled, determined, and fortunate, presidents can even reshape political constraints and use international issues to help cement and expand their party's domestic coalition. In sum, to a remarkable extent, when one party controls the White House, that party's foreign policy is what the president says it is. Consider the following examples, each the subject of a separate chapter in this book:

- Dwight Eisenhower sought to contain the Soviet Union and its allies without bankrupting the United States. He won over the bulk of Republicans to a stance of cold war internationalism while balancing that stance with diplomatic sensitivity and a keen desire for peace.
- Richard Nixon initiated multiple innovations in American diplomacy, reorienting it toward a primary emphasis on geopolitics and great power relations. In an era of collapsed foreign policy consensus, he tried to build a new center-right majority by reaching out to national security hawks and conservatives across party lines.
- Ronald Reagan pursued a bold strategy of aggressive anticommunism and indirect rollback, with the goal of weakening the USSR and reducing cold war tensions on U.S. terms. At home, he consolidated a winning coalition of Sun Belt conservatives, foreign policy hawks, evangelicals, and traditional Republicans, and by refusing to overreach either domestically or internationally, he left this coalition the most dynamic force in American politics.
- George H. W. Bush followed a temperamentally conservative foreign policy approach that emphasized caution, stability, and prudence. He locked in international changes of lasting benefit to the

United States in relation to Germany, Eastern Europe, the collapsing Soviet Union, Latin America, arms control, democracy promotion, and international trade.

- George W. Bush embraced “compassionate” or “big government” conservatism at home, and preventive warfare together with attempted democratization in the Middle East. The resulting U.S. occupation of Iraq was conducted with a serious lack of preparation on Bush’s part—an error corrected by him only in the winter of 2006–7.

As is evident from each of these cases, presidents play a central role in determining their party’s specific foreign policy tendencies from year to year. Yet the history of major political parties in the United States also reveals certain broad continuities that transcend short-term changes. The Republicans have been the party of a hawkish American nationalism for several decades now and are unlikely anytime soon to become the more dovish or accommodationist of America’s two major parties on international and military issues. Whatever the internal integrity of their views, strict anti-interventionists such as Representative Ron Paul (R-TX) are therefore probably not going to win many internal debates over Republican foreign policy stands during the next few years. Still, this does not mean that future GOP presidential candidates need replicate exactly the foreign policy approach of George W. Bush. Indeed, if the central findings of this book are correct, then any future Republican president will have considerable leeway to shape the exact content of his or her foreign policies—good reason, as I argue in the conclusion, to learn from the mistakes as well as the successes of the past, and to devise a foreign policy approach that is more realistic, and consequently more rather than less genuinely conservative.

The book ends with a survey of current Republican foreign policy alternatives, together with a recommendation for greater conservative realism in international affairs. Conservatives are still coming to grips with the fact that George W. Bush showed insufficient such realism in planning for the invasion and initial occupation of Iraq. The reason why this matters going forward is that in truth, President Barack Obama is no more of a foreign policy realist than was Bush. Obama made great gains in 2008 by criticizing Republicans on Iraq and by touting the vir-

tues of foreign policy pragmatism. Yet his administration has adopted an international approach that in important respects cannot be described as realistic. Obama and his most enthusiastic supporters appear to view the president as somehow capable of transcending international differences, partly through Obama's very existence and partly through what might be called the transformational power of unilateral diplomatic outreach. The president's assumption seems to be that if only the United States reaches out and makes preliminary concessions to international competitors, they will necessarily reciprocate. True realists make no such assumption. Nor do true foreign policy realists place much weight, as Obama appears to, on the possibility that an American president's personal style, autobiography, and conciliatory language might actually alter other countries' perceptions of their own vital interests. The current president's core foreign policy instincts are therefore not so much realist as accommodationist, informed in turn by an exaggerated sense of what personality can accomplish in world affairs. All the more reason for Republicans and conservatives to develop a cogent critique of Obama's foreign policy approach—not one based on a reflexive defense of every past feature of the Bush doctrine but one based on a greater dose of classical conservative skepticism and tough-mindedness regarding international relations. In other words, Republicans need to reclaim their own history, and then they will be able to reclaim mastery of American foreign policy.



## *Chapter One*

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### REPUBLICANS, CONSERVATIVES, AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

REPUBLICANS ENTERED THE twentieth century, somewhat to their own surprise, as the party of American expansionism overseas. For most of the late nineteenth century, there had been no fundamental differences between Democrats and Republicans on issues of international expansion or military intervention. On the contrary, both parties embraced the Monroe Doctrine, strategic nonentanglement, economic opportunities abroad, and consensual ideas of American exceptionalism while arguing over trade and protection. Indeed, the presidential election of 1896 was fought primarily not over foreign policy but over issues of silver and gold currency, and over domestic economic affairs more generally. Ohio governor and Republican presidential nominee William McKinley campaigned on a platform of high tariffs and sound money, with a promise to restore prosperity in the midst of economic depression. The Democratic nominee, prairie populist William Jennings Bryan, called for a sweeping struggle against moneyed interests and an end to the gold standard, while combining this fire-breathing stance with a culturally traditional Protestant evangelicalism. In this way, Bryan won over western populists and agrarian radicals to the Democrats but lost support among northern urbanites, immigrants, Catholics, and organized labor. The result was a consolidation of Republican dominance in the Northeast and Midwest, and McKinley won the White House. In terms of foreign policy, both parties at the time stood for measured support for Cuban independence from Spain, leaving little difference between them on an issue of secondary interest to most voters. As reports leaked out to the American press of Spanish atrocities against Cuban

civilians, and particularly after the February 1898 explosion in Havana Harbor on board the U.S.S. *Maine*, prominent Democrats, populists, and silver Republicans demanded military action. Conservative Republicans in Congress, alarmed by the possibility of being outmaneuvered and defeated on this issue, responded by calling on the president to declare war. McKinley handled the entire crisis with considerable care and political skill, ensuring that the exact timing and nature of hostilities corresponded with his own goals, but in the final analysis he launched the United States on a war he had hardly sought when running for president two years earlier.

Once Spain was defeated militarily, both Democrats and Republicans called for U.S. gains in the Caribbean, specifically in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Only when the question of the Philippines was raised did the war's outcome become a truly controversial and partisan issue. The acquisition of Spain's colony in the Philippines was almost an afterthought for McKinley; he had no initial intention of annexing it. But with the Spanish role in the Philippines destroyed, the president decided it would be unwise to give that colony its independence. The Filipinos, he believed, were unready for independence and subject to intervention on the part of the other great powers. If the United States took control of the Philippines, it could forestall such intervention, while securing a valuable base on the way to China and its vast potential markets. McKinley did not expect the annexation of the Philippines to be especially popular with the American public, and for this reason he went on the campaign trail in the fall of 1898 to make his case. A nasty guerrilla war between insurgent Filipinos and U.S. troops erupted a few months later. The question of the Philippines' fate triggered a significant anti-imperialist political and intellectual movement in the United States, allowing Democrats an opportunity to criticize the president on foreign policy. In the end, the treaty annexing the Philippines to American control was passed by the U.S. Senate in 1899 by just one vote over the necessary two-thirds. Believing anti-imperialism to be a winning political stance, the Democrats, with William Jennings Bryan again as their presidential nominee, decided to make it a leading issue in the election of 1900.

The annexation of the Philippines was indeed unpopular in parts of the country, especially the Northeast, and triggered intense opposition

from aging GOP mugwumps along with some important economic conservatives in both parties. On balance, however, McKinley was able to make foreign policy a winning issue for himself and the Republicans in 1900. For one thing, Pacific expansionism appealed to westerners, including many populist Democrats. U.S. military victories against Spain still carried a certain luster in 1900. McKinley's Open Door policy, declaring support for the independence and integrity of China amid conditions of equal commercial opportunity for outside powers, was also quite popular at home. Moreover, the GOP was able to persuasively make the case that with the acquisition of the Philippines a fait accompli, the issue was not so much the expansion as the contraction or surrender of American power—a contraction or surrender that Republicans opposed. McKinley promised to give the Philippines independence eventually, but not prematurely. Indeed, for all the passion surrounding questions of a new American empire abroad, the practical foreign policy differences between the two presidential candidates in 1900 were quite narrow, centering on the exact timeline for Filipino self-government. Bryan, for example, had no special objection to U.S. acquisitions or dominance in the Caribbean. Voters were therefore not really presented with an unmistakable choice between one party for “empire” and another against it. Nor did Bryan stick to a consistent theme throughout the campaign. Above all, with the return of domestic economic prosperity, voters were inclined to reward the incumbent while avoiding proposals for radical change. McKinley therefore sailed to reelection, giving the appearance of a popular mandate for empire and war in the Philippines, when in fact that particular outcome was quite controversial even among many staunch conservatives inside the United States.<sup>1</sup>

McKinley's successor in the White House, Theodore Roosevelt, pursued a skillful, realistic, and adept foreign policy that belied his image as a bombastic cowboy. As a younger man, Roosevelt had often called for American military action, but as president he showed no interest in launching the United States on any costly wars. Roosevelt believed that the United States, along with other major powers, had a moral obligation to extend orderly and humane government abroad. He also believed that in an age of intense great power competition, the United States would be outmaneuvered internationally unless it acquired a



stronger navy, control over maritime trade routes, and new naval bases overseas. Roosevelt's most famous saying with regard to foreign affairs, "Speak softly and carry a big stick," was not an admonition to strut and swagger but rather the opposite. The phrase captured many of his central ideas and practices regarding effective statecraft, namely, avoiding commitments that could not be kept, being firm, tactful, and patient in negotiations, and not expecting diplomacy to be effective unless backed by sufficient military power. Roosevelt operated under conditions of general popular indifference to international affairs and intense skepticism from Congress regarding new foreign commitments. Any enthusiasm for empire had long since dissipated. Specific business interests associated with the Republican Party sometimes had clear preferences on certain foreign policy issues, such as the construction of a trans-isthmian canal in Central America, but generally had little interest in costly or risky imperial adventures. In any case, Roosevelt was contemptuous of the notion that American diplomacy should be dictated by narrow or private economic concerns, and there is no evidence that he made important foreign policy decisions primarily to satisfy the pecuniary interests of particular banks or corporations. Roosevelt's time in office saw the expansion of a significant progressive faction within the Republican Party that was suspicious of moneyed interests. The president tried to straddle the conservative-progressive divide, gradually moving toward a more interventionist stance on issues of domestic political economy—a move that brought him into increasing conflict with his own party's dominant congressional and conservative wing. These intraparty tensions had little impact on American diplomacy at the time, however. GOP conservatives appreciated Roosevelt's foreign policies; GOP progressives such as Senator Robert LaFollette (R-WI) liked Roosevelt's domestic policies, deferred to him on foreign affairs, and had not yet embraced anti-imperialist ideas. Indeed, some GOP progressives, such as Senator Albert Beveridge (R-IN), were avid American expansionists. Consequently, Republicans were generally united behind Roosevelt on foreign policy matters, and party loyalty remained effective.

The United States in Roosevelt's time was an immensely wealthy country that had not yet converted its potential into a major diplomatic role or usable military power with regard to the European and Asian

mainland. Even in much of Latin America, the economic and political influence of European powers was often still greater than that of the United States. Roosevelt's special concern—and it was not an unrealistic one—was that major outside powers, such as Germany, would take advantage of political and financial disorder in states in and around the Caribbean to intervene and establish new military bases there. This overarching geopolitical concern motivated him to engage in some reluctant and small-scale but generally effective military and diplomatic interventions in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Venezuela. It was also the strategic context for his autumn 1903 support of Panama's rebellion against Colombian rule, a rebellion that allowed the United States to secure a permanent lease as well as titular sovereignty over a canal zone ten miles wide. In East Asia, Roosevelt supported a regional balance of power by first welcoming Japanese resistance to Russian expansion, then mediating a peace agreement between Russia and Japan in 1905. He refused to issue toothless declarations against Japan's subsequent expansion into Manchuria because he knew the United States had little military ability to back up such declarations or defend the Philippines from Japanese attack. Instead, he signed a sphere-of-influence agreement with Tokyo that recognized American influence over the Philippines and Japanese influence over Manchuria. In Europe, Roosevelt's ability to check German power was very limited, but he interceded at the Algeiras Conference in 1906 to side with Britain and France against Germany on the issue of Morocco, while somehow maintaining cordial relations with Berlin. Even this very limited and successful diplomatic intercession was viewed by the U.S. Senate as implying dangerous foreign entanglements. Between 1904 and 1907, Roosevelt helped organize a second Hague Conference on international peace and disarmament, and he was open to arbitration efforts on matters of secondary importance. Fundamentally, however, he believed that the best guarantee of peace was military strength, and he had modest expectations for what disarmament talks could accomplish. Indeed, when it came to America's own navy, Roosevelt's focus was not on disarmament but on building up U.S. naval power to support a more active role from the Pacific to the Caribbean—a buildup that finally ran into congressional resistance from fiscal conservatives during his last years in office.

Overall, the Republican Party benefited politically from Roosevelt's image as a strong, successful leader in foreign affairs, a benefit of which he was well aware. Yet for the most part, domestic political pressures at the time ran against rather than toward the kind of foreign policy he would have liked: global, active, and engaged. Roosevelt understood these constraints and managed them quite skillfully, but ultimately he hit the limits of public and congressional tolerance on the question of America's international commitments. His response to these limits as president was to work as effectively as he could to promote U.S. national interests under the conditions of existing public opinion. In this sense, domestic political and partisan incentives acted for Roosevelt not as a stimulus to an ambitious foreign policy but as a constraint.<sup>2</sup>

The next Republican president of the era was William Howard Taft, a leader with a very different foreign policy approach from Theodore Roosevelt's. If Roosevelt was attuned to traditional patterns of great power politics, Taft believed in the creation of a more peaceful and prosperous world order through the promotion of international law, trade, and investment. The spread of economic interdependence, Taft suggested, would encourage stable governments in the developing world and give the various major powers a strong material incentive to keep the peace. International arbitration treaties could also be relied on to adjudicate differences between countries. Above all, finance and commerce, rather than armed force, would be the preferred instruments of international order and U.S. foreign policy, both for moral and for practical reasons. Taft's resultant "dollar diplomacy"—a term coined by the American press—was easily misinterpreted as nothing more than a crude attempt at profits for U.S. banks and corporations overseas. But while such profits were certainly sought with great vigor, the basic goals in Taft's mind were also much broader, transformational, and idealistic. Dollars were not so much the primary end as the primary means of a foreign policy based on the classical liberal assumption that the international system could be modernized and pacified through the benign effects of commerce and investment. Taft's dollar diplomacy played itself out in two main geographic venues, Latin America and East Asia. In Latin America, Taft tried to encourage U.S. investment, along with governments open to such investment, but the tactlessness of the effort

alienated its supposed beneficiaries. In the end, like Roosevelt, Taft felt bound to intervene militarily in the region several times—notably, in Nicaragua—in order to promote financial and political stability. In East Asia, Taft rejected any notion of a sphere-of-influence arrangement with Japan and instead focused on trying to win international support for a new U.S.-led financial consortium with the aim of developing new railways in the Chinese province of Manchuria. Since Manchuria was already the subject of intense great power rivalry, however, with Japan and Russia in the lead, those powers naturally viewed Taft's proposal as an attempt to muscle them out while muscling the United States in. Indeed, the proposal was so alarming to both Russia and Japan that it led them to reconcile many of their differences and draw together diplomatically. The Chinese, for their part, resented the American proposal as another foreign infringement on their national sovereignty and dignity. Nor were American bankers entirely convinced that the proposed railway project was creditworthy. The Taft administration's well-intentioned proposal therefore came to nothing, and succeeded only in alienating every other major power, as well as the Chinese themselves, who soon collapsed into violent nationalist revolution. Meanwhile, Taft deemphasized any U.S. naval buildup, one of the few practical mechanisms of American influence across the Pacific, since military power did not form an especially important part of his foreign policy philosophy.

The Taft years saw a growing and climactic split between the progressive and conservative wings of the Republican Party. Taft initially tried to straddle this divide but soon sided with the conservatives, encouraging rebellion on the part of GOP progressives. The intraparty divide was reinforced by the overshadowing figure of Theodore Roosevelt, who had moved further left on domestic issues while out of office and decided to run for the White House again in 1912. In the presidential election that fall, the Democrats put forward a timely and credible candidate in Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey, leaving Taft and Roosevelt to split the normally Republican electoral majority. Wilson consequently swept to victory, although GOP conservatives at least had the satisfaction of confirming their own control over the Republican Party. Foreign policy was not a primary concern either for rebellious progressives or for American voters in 1912. Nevertheless, GOP progressives had begun

to develop their own distinct foreign policy critiques during the Taft presidency, and for much of the next decade Republicans would struggle to develop a united stance.<sup>3</sup>

U.S. foreign policymakers during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson were preoccupied, initially by violent disorder in Mexico, and then by world war in Europe. The spectacle of such conflicts abroad left Republicans deeply divided as to how to respond. Many western GOP progressives, such as Robert LaFollette, had come to believe that U.S. military interventions in Latin America served only the interests of large eastern banks and corporations. They applied the same logic to the prospect of U.S. intervention in Europe, and therefore resisted it. Other progressives, such as Senator William Borah (R-ID), generally opposed intervention abroad but were intensely nationalistic, concerned to protect the nation's honor in foreign disputes and willing to spend on the military in order to safeguard U.S. interests. At the other end of the party, ideologically, Republican conservatives often had close ties to northeastern law firms and financial and business interests, but they also had foreign policy beliefs of their own, which sometimes varied. Numerous GOP conservatives, such as Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA), favored increased defense spending, strong action to defend U.S. interests in Mexico, and intervention in Europe, the latter out of a fear that German victory would represent a massive defeat for both America's ideals and its interests. Other establishment Republicans, such as former president Taft, sympathized with Great Britain against Germany, but were also wary of military intervention and powerfully drawn to visions of international law, arbitration, and mediation. Theodore Roosevelt, for his part, soon returned to the GOP fold as a progressive on domestic issues and a hawk on international affairs—so hawkish that he alarmed even those who shared his basic foreign policy views. There was consequently a very broad variety of domestic and foreign policy issue stands among Republicans during this period, a fact that did not initially work in their favor. Wilson was able to campaign in 1916 as an incumbent who had presided over a prosperous era, kept the peace, and initiated some popular domestic reforms. The combination was hard to beat, especially in the western states. Republicans tried to straddle the issues of both peace and reform by nominating the moderate, well-respected for-

mer governor of New York, Charles Evans Hughes, but his colorless campaign failed to break through in crucial states such as California and Ohio. So, while the election was close, and covered a range of issues, foreign policy worked against the Republicans in 1916.

By the spring of 1917, unrestricted submarine warfare on Germany's part finally convinced both Woodrow Wilson and a majority of the American people that war with Berlin was inevitable. Wilson chose to lead the nation into war on the most idealistic grounds, arguing that this titanic struggle was being fought not to establish a new balance of power but to overturn all such balances and institute a revised international order characterized by democracy, open markets, and international law. The keystone of this order would be Wilson's proposed League of Nations, a global association of countries dedicated to upholding the independence and integrity of one another through a universal commitment to collective security. While foreign leaders were skeptical of this transformational vision, the American public generally liked it. In fact, a majority of Republican senators were willing to entertain U.S. entry into a new League of Nations, so long as Wilson toned down what they viewed as an excessive and unrealistic commitment to universal collective security contained in Article X of the League Covenant. This Wilson would not do, whether out of principle, pique, ill health, or some combination of the three. The result was a sustained struggle in the U.S. Senate in 1919–20 over ratification. Henry Cabot Lodge, the sardonic chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by this time, actually wanted a firm American commitment to the postwar security of Britain and France—something like an early version of NATO—but just as much he wanted the defeat of Woodrow Wilson, whose personality, domestic agenda, and foreign policy he now held in contempt. Lodge therefore skillfully rallied opposition to Wilson's league from all quarters and succeeded in preventing the president from ever attaining sufficient support to pass the treaty through. Republican progressives like Borah were happy to see the league proposal defeated, committed as they were to a general policy of strategic nonentanglement. The Republican presidential nominee in 1920, Warren G. Harding, capitalized on popular fatigue with eight years of political experimentation, war, and upheaval by promising a return to normal times while opposing Wilson's version of

the league. It soon became clear, once Harding entered the White House, that he opposed new U.S. security commitments to Europe altogether. Ironically, the final result in 1921—complete rejection by an incoming Republican administration of any peacetime military alliance with France and Great Britain—was one that Lodge himself never sought, and hoped to avoid.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequent Republican foreign policy during the 1920s was strikingly modern, carrying as it did a strong emphasis on the pacifying effects of economic interdependence. No individual better embodied this approach than Herbert Hoover, secretary of commerce from 1921 and president of the United States from 1929 to 1933. Hoover and other leading Republicans—including private bankers and businessmen, as well as diplomats and politicians—sought to promote a peaceful, liberalized international system characterized by mutual arms reduction, nonaggression, open markets, political stability, and sustained economic growth. In this sense, the foreign policy of the 1920s was extremely ambitious and classically liberal in its goals. Simultaneously, however, Hoover and his colleagues put strict limits on the costs and obligations entailed on Americans in pursuit of these international goals. Specifically, Washington would not offer tariff reductions, war debt forgiveness, direct economic aid, or strategic guarantees to support U.S. aims in Europe and East Asia. On the contrary, it would avoid financial or military commitments of virtually any kind.

In later years, the weakness of this strictly anti-interventionist approach would become obvious, but it was extremely popular at the time. Indeed, it was one of the focal points on which Republicans were able to agree and win reelection, especially since Democrats offered no coherent alternative. Western progressives, small and import-competing businesses, peace groups, farmers, organized labor, and conservatives all agreed that the United States was best served by a foreign policy emphasizing arms control and economic opportunities but strategic nonentanglement overseas. This approach did seem to secure some impressive diplomatic victories in the early to mid-1920s. In 1921–22, a series of treaties signed at the Washington Conference instituted mutual limitations on naval construction by Japan, Britain, and the United States, as well as formalizing the commitment of the other great powers to the

principles of the Open Door policy in China. In 1924, European war debts and German reparations were renegotiated successfully under American mediation with the Dawes Plan. This in turn encouraged Berlin, London, and Paris to mutually guarantee the Franco-German border at the Locarno Conference of 1925. The feeling of most Americans with regard to both Europe and East Asia was that historic progress had been made toward peaceful forms of conflict resolution, a feeling that reached its giddy apogee with the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, a pompous and completely unenforceable but immensely popular document outlawing war as an instrument of national policy. In reality, U.S. foreign policymakers were leaning on a weak reed, and with the rise of profoundly illiberal forces in Germany and Japan, together with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, that weakness was revealed. As private American loans to Europe dried up and an increasingly militaristic Japan invaded Manchuria, Hoover was left with few policy instruments to revive international economic cooperation or halt authoritarian aggression. In the case of U.S. military power, at least, he did not even look for such instruments. Hoover believed that defense spending was wasteful and retrograde; he counted on the force of international law, economic interdependence, public opinion, and moral reprobation to stop aggression. He was, however, willing to let his secretary of state, Henry Stimson, condemn Japanese behavior in Manchuria as unacceptable. In effect, this put Washington on a long-term collision course with Tokyo over China without providing the United States with the military means to do anything about it. Only with regard to Latin America, where the United States already possessed undoubted supremacy over any other major power, did Hoover and the GOP's business-minded doves of the 1920s leave a truly positive legacy by scaling back excessive military interventions, improving relations, and introducing an early form of the Good Neighbor Policy.<sup>5</sup>

The party in which Senator Robert Taft became prominent during the 1930s was consequently building on an immediate legacy of business-minded and idealistic anti-interventionism with regard to foreign affairs. Still, there were significant differences of opinion among Republicans over international politics, and that was part of the GOP's legacy as well. Republican foreign policy between McKinley and Hoover was characterized



by considerable diversity, including everything from Theodore Roosevelt's hawkish realism to Herbert Hoover's anti-interventionism. The interesting thing is that either of these positions, Roosevelt's or Hoover's, could reasonably be described as conservative, and both positions were advocated by conservative Republicans at various times. Precise foreign policy stands sometimes reflected a kind of bargain between various party factions. At the same time, party constituents allowed presidents in particular a certain leeway regarding foreign affairs. Individual leaders therefore made a great difference in determining exactly what the party's foreign policy stance would be. William Howard Taft, for example, presided over a coalition similar to Theodore Roosevelt's but pursued a very different foreign policy, one that was legalistic and business-minded rather than geopolitical in its focus. McKinley was probably the best representative of the average GOP conservative mindset: not looking for glory in foreign adventures, and primarily interested in domestic matters, but willing to defend certain declared national interests abroad if it came to that. Perhaps the only unifying thread connecting all these Republican foreign policy variations was a belief in American exceptionalism, a belief so intense as to be taken for granted. The existence of an important progressive wing in the GOP, with its own distinct foreign policy approach from about 1910 on, further complicates the picture, as these progressives tended to resist almost any form of diplomatic, financial, or military commitment abroad. Yet Theodore Roosevelt, who embodied Republican progressivism, would have nothing to do with such views when it came to international politics. As Republicans entered the era of a younger Roosevelt in the 1930s and of looming global conflict, they would have to decide which particular foreign policy legacy was theirs.

### **Party Politics, Conservatism, and U.S. Foreign Policy**

The preceding historical sketch should help clarify Republican Party foreign policy legacies as of the 1930s. But what are the general connections between foreign policy, conservatism, and party politics in the United States? To answer that question, let us start by looking at the re-

relationship of party politics to conservatism in the United States. Then we can examine the relationship of both party politics and conservatism to U.S. foreign policy.

Americans claim to dislike partisan politics, but it is virtually impossible to imagine democracy in the United States without competition between political parties. Such parties serve several constructive functions in allowing a democratic form of government to work effectively. First, major political parties look to secure and maintain power through established peaceful, legal, electoral means. While sometimes derided as unprincipled, the competitive search for electoral success by each party is actually crucial to the preservation of democratic freedoms, in that each party acts as a check on the power of the other. Parties also play a central role in aggregating and representing individual and group interests within the political arena. They help structure and simplify the almost unlimited number of policy alternatives that might be placed before the voters at election time. Finally, parties tend to embody certain ideological traditions, however loosely or flexibly, and in this sense they are distinct from one another in terms of the core principles they represent.<sup>6</sup>

Since Franklin Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal, at least, the Republican Party has tended to be the more conservative of the two major American political parties on economic issues. Beginning in the 1960s, partisan disagreement over economic issues was gradually supplemented, although not displaced, by a new and further division between Democrats and Republicans along social and cultural lines. The new social or cultural field of partisan disagreement was reflected in a wide range of issues, such as civil rights, criminal justice, and the implementation of traditional moral norms. Voter preferences on these matters often cut across existing alignments on economics: some voters, for example, supported increased government spending while maintaining a conservative stance on social issues. This led to an influx of social conservatives into the Republican Party and a corresponding outflow of social liberals from the GOP to the Democratic Party. In formal terms, the axis of cleavage between the two parties rotated to include social as well as economic dimensions. The process by which the line of division between parties shifts and rotates to include new issue dimensions is known as realignment. In its more ambitious form, realignment theory has been

rightly criticized as overly complicated and deterministic. Yet if we define realignment simply as a durable shift in the line of cleavage between political parties, it is not only plausible but empirically true to say that America's two major parties have realigned themselves over the past fifty years. The Democratic Party is now clearly the more liberal of the two major parties on social as well as economic issues, just as the Republican Party is clearly the more conservative. The interesting question, then, is what exactly it means in the United States to be a conservative as opposed to a liberal.<sup>7</sup>

It is sometimes suggested that conservatism is not a coherent ideology at all but simply the articulated defense of established institutions in a particular time and place. Yet conservatives in different eras and in different countries tend to refer back predictably to several interrelated ideas. To begin with, conservatives believe there is such a thing as human nature, and that it is relatively fixed and imperfect. Whether they refer to religious concepts such as original sin or to recent insights from evolutionary psychology, conservatives believe that human self-interest renders perfectionist political visions not only unattainable but downright dangerous. Conservatives therefore begin with a skeptical, limited, or constrained vision of what government can accomplish. Conservatives are opposed to revolutionary political change. They point to the perverse, unintended consequences that typically follow efforts at major political or social reform. They vest considerable weight in the value of custom and tradition, arguing that the accumulated wisdom of generations is usually greater than the expressed rationality of individuals, however intelligent or well-intentioned those individuals. Conservatives believe that there can be no meaningful political justice or freedom in the absence of social and political order. They point to the central role of civil society and intermediary social institutions such as family and church in both supporting and buffering the individual in relation to the state. Conservatives may support democratic forms of government, but they do not believe that democracy should be unconstrained. They look for filters and balances on the power of popular majorities just as much as on the power of elites, because they mistrust unchecked power from any direction. Conservatives stress the necessity of the rule of law, and of abiding by traditional legal forms. They put particular emphasis on respect for private property. They may support equality of rights before

the law, but they have no interest in equality of socioeconomic condition, or any belief that such equality is even possible. Conservatives embrace patriotism or love of country as a healthy and ennobling passion. They are traditionalists with regard to culture and education. They look to the past for instruction and inspiration. They respect the social role of religion, whether or not they are themselves believers. And they do not conceive that a free society can function or endure as free in the complete absence of public and private virtue. Taken together, this cluster of ideas and beliefs can be referred to as classical conservatism. The single best expression of the classical conservative perspective is Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke wrote in defense of a particular eighteenth-century European social order that included monarchy, aristocracy, and established churches and against the spectacle of radical revolution. But the kinds of arguments he deployed against that revolution have been regularly used by conservatives against their opponents in other times and places. In this sense, we can say that there exists a set of typically classical conservative arguments, apart from the circumstance of each case. The real issue is not whether such a thing as classical conservatism exists, but what it has to do with the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Even a superficial glance at the above list of classical conservative beliefs reveals that several of them bear little relation to politically influential forms of conservatism in America. The United States was founded in a revolution that declared "all men are created equal." No revolution, and no such declaration, could be described as entirely conservative. To be sure, the American Revolution was as deeply influenced by a variety of premodern political ideas as by the belief that the colonists were fighting to preserve their traditional rights as Englishmen. In that sense, this particular revolution contained strongly conservative elements. Yet the national political creed that was already developing in America even before the Revolution was essentially a classical liberal one, characterized by an emphasis on liberty, popular sovereignty, individual rights, equality of opportunity, entrepreneurship, self-reliance, limited government, forward progress, and a deep suspicion of centralized authority.

Numerous observers have argued that the classical liberal roots of both the American founding and U.S. political culture leave serious doubt as to the possibility of any genuinely conservative tradition in the

United States. If America was founded on liberal principles, so the argument goes, and if the United States never experienced feudal aristocracy, then what role is there for conservatism in such a country? The stated paradox, while superficially perplexing, is less problematic than it might seem. For one thing, if classical conservatism constitutes a perennial critique of radical reform, as I have suggested, rather than simply an emission of lingering feudal or aristocratic mentalities, then the admitted absence of feudalism or aristocracy from the United States poses no especially great difficulties. One can adhere, for example, to the classical liberal principles of the American creed while also believing, as conservatives do, that new radical reforms are difficult and dangerous. Moreover, political permutations over the past century have often left conservatives the primary defenders of the classical liberal tradition, as self-described liberals have looked toward an ever-expanding role for the federal government in the country's social and economic life. In the United States, at least, it is precisely the nation's classically liberal founding order that conservatives seek to preserve against more recent liberal innovations. The powerful role of premodern influences in the American founding, including civic republican, biblical, and common law ideas, also leaves U.S. conservatives free to position themselves in defense of certain ancient Western concepts and traditions that were never rejected by America's founders. Any politically significant form of conservatism in the United States must at least nod in the direction of America's classical liberal political culture. To do otherwise confines conservatives in this country to the status of politically irrelevant malcontents. At the same time, any declared version of conservatism that completely rejects core notions of human imperfectability, limited government, tradition, or constraint can hardly be called conservative. There is consequently a healthy tension built into the very nature of conservative movements in America. As *National Review* editor Frank Meyer argued half a century ago, any such movements must skillfully fuse classical conservative with classical liberal assumptions or risk intellectual and political degeneration.<sup>9</sup>

In the arena of foreign policy, we might expect conservatives to be realists, as against their more idealistic left-liberal domestic political opponents. Classical conservatism, at least, leads naturally to a number of

conclusions about international relations that align with realism. Such conservatives tend to take a pessimistic stance regarding the possibilities for transforming the international system. Their view of human nature leads them to skepticism regarding schemes for permanent peace through international organization, treaties, or political reform. They put great intrinsic value in their foreign policy approach on the protection of their own particular nation's interests and way of life, viewing it as entirely legitimate to do so. Indeed, conservatives believe that it is impossible to love humanity without first loving your own country. Classical conservatives look to protect the nation's freedom of action and independence against external threats or challenges. They tend to be very resistant to proposals that involve significant cessions of national sovereignty to international or transnational organizations. They hold that the use or threat of force will never be erased from the anarchic arena of international politics. They have no difficulty believing that the international political arena is a dangerous place, requiring vigilance. They consequently emphasize the importance of military strength and credibility in world politics, although they may be quite cautious in actually resorting to armed intervention. They are not inclined to use force to transform the domestic arrangements of other countries, viewing such efforts as costly and improbable. And while they are not necessarily militarists, classical conservatives have an inherent respect and admiration for the traditions and constraints of the soldier's profession.<sup>10</sup>

The complication regarding conservatism in the United States, of course, is that in foreign policy, just as in domestic politics, American thought and behavior are powerfully shaped by widely held classical liberal assumptions. U.S. citizens of all parties have long believed that the United States has a special role to play in promoting democratic freedoms worldwide—a belief that forms part of a cluster of ideas known as American exceptionalism. The prior domestic component to this is a strong and widespread belief in individual freedom, rule of law, popular self-government, enterprise, and love of country as central to U.S. national identity.<sup>11</sup> The founders of the United States, however pragmatic in promoting their nation's interests, certainly believed in American exceptionalism and took it for granted that the United States represented a new form of government that would have broad implications for the

cause of popular self-rule abroad. A common assumption or animating vision throughout the history of American diplomacy has been that the spread of democracy and trade overseas will create a more peaceful, transformed international system, friendlier to U.S. interests and to the democratic way of life. This vision is not classically conservative but classically liberal. For this reason, it might be said that classical liberalism is hard-wired into the American way of thinking when it comes to foreign policy. Even conservatives in the United States do not entirely reject classical liberal assumptions in world politics, and those conservatives who do soon find themselves marginalized from national influence. There is, however, a wide range of practical policy options that might follow from any acceptance of classical liberal assumptions. In particular, Americans have always debated whether to promote democracy overseas by force or by example. The first alternative has been to vindicate the democratic cause by riding to its defense or promotion abroad, even through the use of military intervention. The second alternative has been to affirm America's special role as an example for democratic freedoms but to reject the use of force in promoting that example abroad. This is only one way in which a classically liberal political culture still allows for multiple foreign policy options.<sup>12</sup>

The particular challenge for American conservatives with regard to foreign policy has been to fuse or integrate classical liberal and classical conservative foreign policy beliefs in a principled and viable way. This is essentially the same challenge that conservatives in the United States face with regard to domestic politics. Any foreign policy approach that completely rejects classical conservative insights cannot be called conservative. Any foreign policy approach that completely rejects classical liberal insights cannot be called American. To suggest that conservatives in America have hit upon a single solution to this challenge would simply be inaccurate. Indeed, the most striking thing about U.S. conservative foreign policy ideas and approaches, even if the discussion is limited to the period since the 1930s, has been their sheer variety, and since the Republican Party has been during this time the more conservative of America's two major parties, the political and conceptual foreign policy challenge facing Republicans has been very much the same one as the challenge facing conservatives. Republican and conservative foreign

policy traditions in the United States are therefore characterized by several recurring tensions or dichotomies that help structure our understanding of their variety, as well as our understanding of their typical distinction from left-liberal approaches. Four such leading and recurring tensions are realism versus idealism, hawk versus dove, nationalism versus accommodation, and intervention versus anti-intervention.

The realist versus idealist tension has already been introduced. Foreign policy *realists* believe in the prudent and coordinated use of force, diplomacy, and balances of power to pursue the national interest, narrowly conceived. They are skeptical of any transformational vision based on an assumption of historical progress, and they focus on the international rather than the domestic behavior of other states. Foreign policy *idealists*, drawing on classical liberal thought, believe that the spread of democracy, economic interdependence, and international organization will ultimately change the nature of world politics and render realist methods obsolete. Idealists are generally opposed to the use of force, for both moral and practical reasons, but are sometimes willing to support military intervention for humanitarian or moral ends. They are keenly interested in the domestic behavior of other states and define their foreign policy goals to include global as well as national interests.

Foreign policy *hawks* believe in the utility of force in world politics and the accumulation of national military power. They support defensive military measures and often the use of force overseas. The reasons given for the use of force by hawks may be either geopolitical or idealistic; this is one of the features that distinguish them from realists, who prefer geopolitical reasons to idealistic ones. Foreign policy *doves* believe that the use of force is almost always either wrong or irrelevant in the modern world. They favor neither armed intervention abroad nor the accumulation of military power, and indeed they view such power as inherently wasteful and provocative. Doves and idealists are often one and the same, but the existence of idealistic hawks necessitates a distinction between the two.

Foreign policy *nationalists* look to protect the country's independence and freedom of action. They oppose ceding the nation's sovereign authority to international or transnational arrangements and institutions. They prefer unilateralism to multilateralism in foreign affairs, and