

Walter Lippmann

U. S. FOREIGN POLICY and U. S. WAR AIMS



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34-789

U. S. Foreign Policy
and
U. S. War Aims

WALTER HIPP MANN

OVERSEAS EDITIONS, Inc.

New York

1944

28464.

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INTRODUCTION TO "U. S. FOREIGN POLICY"

FOR A very special reason a few words of explanation are needed by way of introduction to this book. My main thesis is that the foreign policy which had served the United States, on the whole so well, during most of the nineteenth century became dangerously inadequate after 1900. Then the United States expanded its commitments into Asiatic waters by the occupation of the Philippines, and then Germany, by deciding to build a great navy, emerged from continental Europe as a challenger for world power. I shall be arguing in this book that because of American failure to readjust the foreign policy of the United States to this revolutionary change in the situation, the nation has for over forty years been unprepared to wage war or to make peace, and has remained divided within itself on the conduct of American foreign relations.

The argument, as the reader will see, becomes a severe criticism of American policy during this period. Since I have lived through this period, and have for thirty years been writing books and articles about current events, I have been troubled because, with the advantages of hindsight, I am criticizing others for holding views which at the time I may myself have shared, or for a lack of foresight of which I was also guilty. Therefore, I should like to make it as plain as possible at the outset that nothing could be further from my intention than to say to anyone that I told him so. For the conclusions which I have set down in this book are drawn from experience. I was not born with them. I have come to them slowly over thirty years, and as a result of many false starts, mistaken judgments, and serious disappointments. They represent what I now think I have learned, not at all what I always knew.

Yet in writing the book during the summer of 1942 and the winter of 1943 I could not stop to confess as I went along how on this point or that I had at some earlier time thought differently. Confession may be good for the soul. But when our urgent business is to make up our minds on what is for the best interests of the

country, it would have been as conceited as it was boring to annotate the argument with a running history of my own previous opinions.

Now that the book is done I am much better aware than I was before writing it how wide has been the gap between my own insight and my own hindsight. Thus I cannot remember taking any interest whatsoever in foreign affairs until after the outbreak of the first World War. As a boy I had, to be sure, been greatly excited by the sinking of the battleship *Maine* and by Dewey's victory in Manila Bay and by the battle of Santiago, and from my grandfather who hated Prussia I had acquired the conviction that wherever the American flag was planted, there tyranny must disappear. But years afterwards, in spite of college and much reading about public affairs, I remained quite innocent of any understanding of the revolutionary consequences of the Spanish-American War.

In fact I came out of college thinking that Theodore Roosevelt, whom I admired profoundly, was in this respect eccentric, that he kept harping on the Panama Canal and the navy. For in my youth we all assumed that the money spent on battleships would better be spent on schoolhouses, and that war was an affair that "militarists" talked about and not something that seriously minded progressive democrats paid any attention to. So when my teacher, Graham Wallas, warned me, as I was leaving Harvard in 1910, that a great war might soon break out and that if it did, it would probably smoulder on for thirty years, I had no notion that it would ever touch me or jeopardize the interests of the country.

It was possible for an American in those days to be totally unconscious of the world he lived in. Thus I took ship and sailed for England a few days after the Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated at Sarajevo in June 1914, and I spent a delightful month of July in London and then in the English Lake country where I attended a summer school presided over by the Webbs and by Bernard Shaw. I do not remember hearing any discussion of the Serbian crisis, and so little concern did I have with it that in the last week of July I crossed over to Belgium, loitered at Ostend and Bruges and Ghent, went on to Brussels and then bought a ticket for a journey through

Published originally by
Little, Brown and Company
Boston, Mass.

An Atlantic Monthly Press Book

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Printed in the United States of America

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. . . When we may choose peace or war, as our
interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.

—GEORGE WASHINGTON

The Farewell Address, September 17, 1796

U. S. FOREIGN POLICY

Part One

CHAPTER I

THE SUBJECT OF THIS BOOK

AS THE climax of the war finds the people of the United States approaching a national election, we must face the fact that for nearly fifty years the nation has not had a settled and generally accepted foreign policy. This is a danger to the Republic. For when a people is divided within itself about the conduct of its foreign relations, it is unable to agree on the determination of its true interest. It is unable to prepare adequately for war or to safeguard successfully its peace. Thus its course in foreign affairs depends, in Hamilton's words, not on reflection and choice but on accident and force.

The country, as I shall try to demonstrate, had a secure foreign policy toward the great powers from the decade after the end of the War of 1812 to the end of the war with Spain in 1898. In that long period it was true that politics stopped at the water's edge, and that the people were not seriously divided on our relations with the Old World. But in the election of 1906 the nation became divided over the consequences of the war with Spain, and never since then has it been possible for any President of the United States to rely upon the united support of the nation in the conduct of foreign affairs.

The consequences have been grave. The war with Spain left the United States with commitments in the Pacific 7000 miles west of California. The lack of a settled foreign policy made it impossible for the United States to liquidate the commitment by withdrawing from the Far Pacific or to fulfill the commitment by assuring the defense of the Philippines. The outbreak of the first World War in Europe precipitated an internal controversy in the