

MODERN HISTORY

National Study – US Foreign Policy

The formulation of American Foreign Policy 1919-1941 was based on the paradoxical doctrines of Isolationism and Interventionism. In its' global affairs, America's attempts to negotiate world peace is evident with the Washington Naval Conference 1921-22, The Kellogg-Briand Pact 1928 and the later Neutrality Acts of 1935-1937. It's ultimate failures however stem from the uncertainties of its' doctrine, within an atmosphere of hostile attitudes in a Post-War World rendering American Foreign Policy an ambitious, yet ineffective attempt to locate world peace.

An evaluation is offered by Professor Bear F Braumoeller in his essay [The Myth of American Isolationism](#), Henry J Sage on his online site www.sagehistory.net/ and UK historian, Peter Clements, in his book [Prosperity, Depression and The New Deal: The USA 1819-1954](#).

The Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 serves as an illustration of the attempts to redress the translucent situation of European and Asiatic affairs, states Braumoeller. Its "key intention" rested in the maintenance of "the balance of power in the pacific" adds Clements. In his assessment, Braumoeller praises with continued positivity on the commendable creation of the Five Power Naval Treaty as "the first agreement in modern history by which major powers undertook disarmament of any kind." Indeed, the Five power Naval Treaty reduced armaments to a 10:10:5 ratio between the US, Britain, Japan, Italy & France. In contrast to Braumoeller's glorified account, Clements brandishes "the treaties...were toothless". He illuminates the exiguous effects "no penalties", and quoting Harding's harsh comment "no commitment to armed force, no alliance, no written or moral obligations to join in on defence..." He further accuses America's "naval limitations" as another source of the Treaty's deficiencies. Yet taking a more objective stance, Sage iterates an implicit endorsement of the Conference by quoting a British journalist who claimed that Secretary Hughes in 15 minutes "had sunk more ships that any other admiral would have sunk over the centuries". Yet he balances Braumoeller's glorification by pinpointing "...it did not affect smaller vessels..." This loophole led to the emerging race to build cruisers in 1922, leading the powers to re-negotiate the terms in 1927-1930, exemplifying the certain deficiencies of the treaty's regulations. He elucidates that the Conference had inspired various others, all attempting to "...control the forces that tended to lead to war" yet disappointingly "ultimately none of the agreements ever prevented anything significant". Despite this, Sage optimistically positions the Washington Naval Conference as "a landmark event" in its' encouragement of other attempts and measures for a warrant of international peace.

"The most well known accomplishment of the decade" Braumoeller exerts with his continuing glorification, was the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928. The pact "famously 'outlawed' war by renouncing war as a means of settling international grievances" Clements affirms. Sage takes a bluntly critical view of the Pact, stating "its' goals were illusory". Here, even Braumoeller reverts uncharacteristically, refuting his colourful stance on the Washington Naval Conference by confirming Sage, labelling the outlawry movements and the Pact as "naïve". Clements espousing these deriding comments claims "it had little substance." In fact, the Pact is highly lacking, it had no enforcement mechanism for changing the behaviour of signatories, no expiration date, neither did it have provisions for amendments, and most notably, it was understood by the dozens of signatories to permit defensive war. This enforces how the Pact had failed to prevent expansionist nations from stirring aggression. The joint agreement of all three historians on the pathetic nature of the Kellogg-Briand Pact 1928 provides a definite confirmation of this factor as a robust example of the overall ineffectiveness of American Foreign Policy 1919-1941.

The introduction of the Neutrality laws marks the preclusion of American Interventionist sentiments. In conjunction, all three Neutrality laws of 1935, 1936 and 1937, relocated American involvement through a prohibition on the shipment of arms to belligerents, further extended to loans and credit and finally to states involved in civil wars. Despite his claims of “*subtle yet ambitious and effective*” American Foreign Policy, Braumoeller delineates the sense of incongruities in the Acts, as quoted “*The neutrality laws were not as clear-cut as subsequent analyses have assumed...*” His recognition of the divisive factors within its’ genesis insinuates the effects of such contestations on its’ ultimate failures. Furthermore, the result of these discretely Isolationist laws were to “hand-cuff” America, despite any “*legitimate desire to assist...victims of international aggression.*” Here, Sage’s revelation of the limitations and dissatisfied sentiments brought about by the Neutrality Acts endorse the confliction between ideologies Braumoeller informed. This theme of division is paralleled by Clements “*Roosevelt began shifting his policies...But most of the country still wanted to avoid...involvement*”, thus purporting, tantamount to Braumoeller and Sage’s execution of the inner confliction between policy makers and the domestic divisions stirred by the Neutrality Acts. The implication rests with consequentially frangible policies which were shaped by discordant political pressures, veering American Foreign Policies between Isolationism and Interventionism. This ambiguous position reflects the inherent deficiency in the effectiveness of American Foreign Policy.

In précis, despite its’ minor achievements to cantilever the international communities’ militaristic features, American Foreign Policy’s strives for an idyllic world evidential in the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922, the Kellogg-Briand Pact 1922 and the Neutrality Laws locates its’ inherent failures. Its’ weaknesses stem from the fragile terms, the deficiency in addressing all matters and its’ incongruent terms. Unable to prevent the outbreak of world war, American Foreign Policy 1919-1941 was conclusively ineffective.