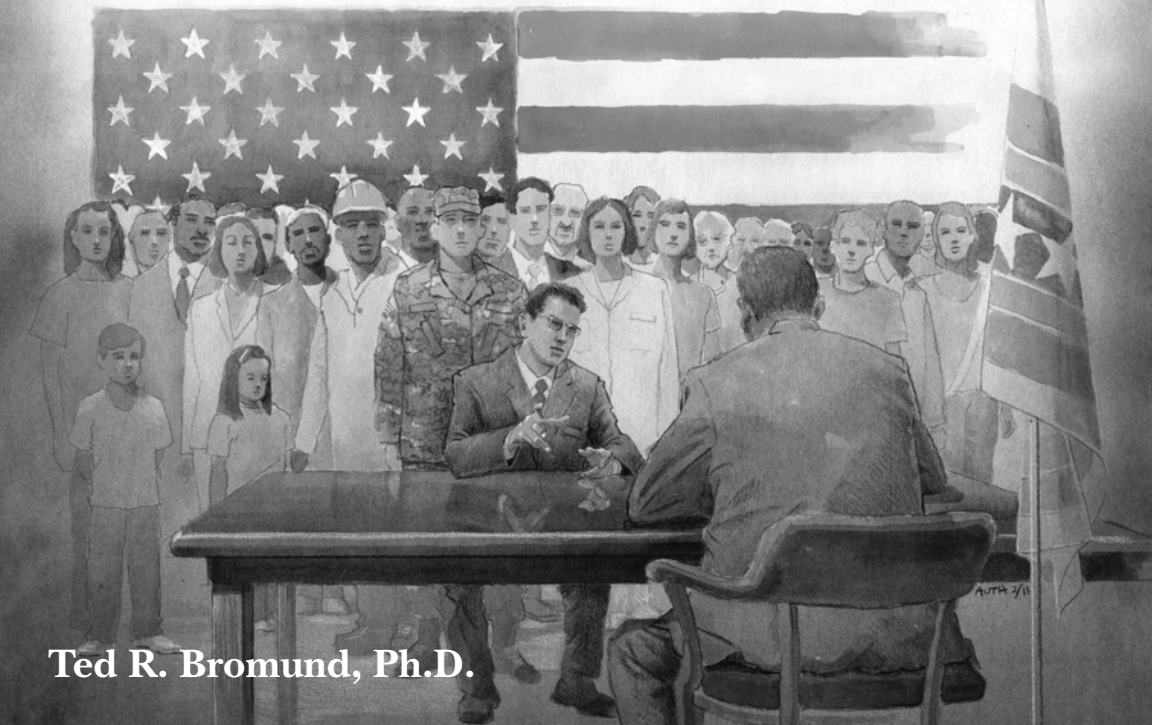
UNDERSTANDING AMERICA

How Must America Practice Diplomacy?



Ted R. Bromund, Ph.D.

The *Understanding America* series is founded on the belief that **America is an exceptional nation.** America is exceptional, not for what it has achieved or accomplished, but because, unlike any other nation, it is dedicated to the principles of human liberty, grounded on the truths expressed in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal and endowed with equal rights. As Abraham Lincoln once said, these permanent truths are "applicable to all men and all times." The series explores these principles and explains how they must govern America's policies, at home and abroad.

About This Cover

The illustration represents the purpose of American diplomacy: to secure the national interests of the United States. That is why the American people are depicted standing behind, and watching the work of, the diplomat who is negotiating on their behalf.

How Must America Practice Diplomacy?

The United States, founded on the universal principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence, is an exceptional nation. The Constitution of the United States secured these principles by creating a government of the people under the rule of law. While the United States is exceptional, it has never been alone. From the beginning, the United States has had to deal with the other nations of the world. How must America's principles guide its practice of diplomacy?

In 1987, the Soviets accepted a treaty that removed both U.S. and Soviet missiles from Europe. President Reagan had deployed the U.S. missiles to pressure the Soviets into negotiation. Successful diplomacy must be backed by strength.

The purpose of American diplomacy never changes: It is to secure the national interests of the United States. The fundamental American interest is to ensure that America remains independent and governed by the American people. But because America is a land of liberty founded on universal principles, American diplomats also have the responsibility to speak for freedom around the world. American diplomats are, constitutionally and morally, representatives of the American nation and of its principles.

America's material interests flow from these principles: The Constitution protects America's economic freedoms as well as its political ones. Making use of these freedoms, and the security of property under law, Americans trade across the nation and around the world. Indeed, Americans have been traders for longer than the United States has been an independent nation.

Advancing trade is in the American interest because the freedom to trade does not merely promote prosperity. It is one of the liberties protected by the Constitution. The Founding Fathers recognized the moral and material value of trade, and knew that to advance it abroad, America needed diplomats to negotiate

with other nations. As George Washington wrote in his Farewell Address in 1796, "our Commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand … establishing [relations] with Powers so disposed; in order to give trade a stable course."[1]

The Founders also understood that trade, and the freedoms from which it springs, could not prosper under the mere protection of law. In the world as it is, law without strength is impotent. While Washington believed that "Harmony … with all Nations [is] recommended by policy, humanity and interest," he also recognized that, to give force to the words of its diplomats, the nation needed a professional military.[2] America could not rely on any other country to provide that military, because no other country had America's interests fully at heart.

But when it served America's interests, the U.S. could form alliances with other nations. Washington's life taught him the value of such alliances. The United States gained its independence, in part, because of the support it received from France under the terms

“I regard the … attitude of trusting to fantastic peace treaties, to impossible promises, to all kinds of scraps of paper without any backing in efficient force, as abhorrent.”

—Theodore Roosevelt
October 3, 1914

In 1778, Benjamin Franklin concluded negotiations with France for a Treaty of Alliance that helped the United States win the War of Independence.

of the 1778 Treaty of Alliance. This treaty was negotiated by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, the nation's first diplomats. Like the other Founders who served abroad, they believed in diplomacy not as an abstract good, but as one way to defend the freedoms of the American people. Thus, in 1798, after the French Revolution, Congress annulled the Treaty of Alliance when it no longer served American interests.

As Washington wrote to Patrick Henry in 1795, "My ardent desire is … to comply strictly with *all* our engagements, foreign and domestic, but to keep the [United] States free from political connexions with *every* other country."[3] Washington rejected alliances that threatened America's political independence, as the 1778 treaty with France by then appeared to do, but he accepted "engagements" that served America's interests. Indeed, as America's first President, he appointed America's first representatives to the capitals of the European powers.

The Founders did not disdain diplomacy. They practiced it. Indeed, they thought it was so central to the conduct of American foreign policy that, in the Constitution, they removed the conduct of diplomacy from the states of the Union and placed its practice under the President of the United States.

The United States was founded as an exceptional nation. But it was also founded in a world of other nations. The Founders wanted the United States to be, and to remain, an example of liberty for the world. But they also wanted it to create the institutions of civilization, the institutions that would allow the United States to advance its interests and ideals in an uncertain world. For the Founders, diplomacy, like a domestic legal system or an elected legislature, was a civilized institution.

When Washington resigned his commission as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army on December 23, 1783, he stated he was "happy in the confirmation of our Independence and Sovereignty, and pleased with the opportunity afforded the United States of becoming a respectable Nation."[4] For Washington, as for the other Founders, part of being respectable, independent, and sovereign was entering into the world of diplomacy.

The Founders recognized that the practice of diplomacy is older than the United States. Diplomacy was practiced by the envoys of classical Greece, a world the Founders knew well. In its modern form, it came into being centuries before the United States was

founded. Traditionally, diplomacy is how independent nations interact with each other.

The United States therefore has a great stake in preserving—and practicing—responsible diplomacy precisely because the U.S. values its own independence. If diplomacy is degraded, so is independence. Any particular treaty may be good or bad for the U.S. But no nation has more to lose than the United States if the world turns away from responsible diplomacy and replaces it with irresponsible posturing that subverts America's independence and threatens its freedoms.

Irresponsible diplomacy comes in many forms. Diplomacy without strength does not even merit the name of diplomacy. Treaties that fail to respect President Ronald Reagan's dictum of "trust, but verify" are reckless. Treaties that are negotiated merely to encourage foreigners to think better of the United States are unwise.

Worst of all is the belief that the very existence of independent nations is a problem that a world government of bureaucrats must overcome. This belief is founded on a rejection of diplomacy between the nations of the world. It is also undemocratic and inherently hostile to America's founding principles. Diplomacy does not simply protect America's interests. It is a way of

conducting international affairs that, if it is true to its traditions, respects America's sovereignty.

Diplomacy is therefore too important to be left only to diplomats. All Americans must play a role in it to ensure that it respects those traditions. Nor can American diplomacy be directed simply at the diplomats of other nations. Because the United States was founded on the belief that all people have the same inherent rights, Americans, their diplomats, and their leaders must speak to the peoples of the world. This is public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy is not new to America. The Declaration of Independence was not addressed to King George III. It was addressed to the world. America's charter was an act of public diplomacy, which, out of a "decent respect to the opinions of mankind … declare[d] the causes" of America's independence. From the time of the founding, Americans have served as ambassadors of liberty. As soldiers, merchants, and missionaries, they have shown the world, in word and deed, the value of America's founding principles. This, too, is public diplomacy.

By writing to "the working-men of Manchester, England" to thank them for their support, President Lincoln practiced public diplomacy and proclaimed his faith in "the foundation of human rights" on which America was built.

"We must guard against the suppression of dangers and the evasion of issues. … In our foreign policy there are altogether too many false harmonies and weak compromises which only obscure the permanent realities of our time."

–John F. Kennedy
November 1, 1957

Yet the practice of diplomacy has often been controversial in America. President Woodrow Wilson demanded "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at."[5] President Harry Truman criticized the "striped pants boys" in the State Department.[6] Both Presidents were suspicious of the secrecy inherent in diplomacy and believed that diplomatic bureaucracies thwarted the will of the people. Like many conservatives, they were concerned that diplomats were more interested in getting an agreement than in making sure that the agreement respected America's values and defended its interests.

The answer to this serious concern is not to reject diplomacy. It is to respect the wisdom of the Founders, and their intention that American diplomacy be subject to the consent of the governed. Under the Constitution, the Senate approves the appointment of ambassadors and, even more seriously, has the duty to offer its "advice and consent" on treaties negotiated by the President. Both the House, with its power of the purse, and the Senate also have a broader power to hold America's diplomats to account. The President, the Congress, and the American people must together control American diplomacy. Secrecy in the conduct of diplomacy is not wrong. What is wrong is any failure to obtain the fully informed consent of the Congress when that consent is required by the Constitution.

Diplomacy is not an end in itself. It is a tool to advance America's interests. It gives the United States some of the instruments it needs to lead like-minded nations, and it provides a means by which our government learns about, speaks to, and negotiates with other powers. As long as American diplomacy is guided by the universal principles on which America was founded, is dedicated to the best interests of the nation, and receives the consent of the American people and their elected representatives, it will be worthy of the respect the Founders had for it.

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Enduring Truths

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- **John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, Essay No. 64, "The Powers of the Senate"**

  Diplomacy requires secrecy, but it also requires the consent of the governed. In this essay, Jay explains how the Constitution recognizes that "the power of making treaties is an important one," and ensures that it will be used "in the manner most conducive to the public good."

- **Ronald Reagan, "The March of Freedom"**

  In this address to the British Parliament, President Reagan called on the West to speak and act in defense of freedom and to form "a plan and a hope for the long term" that would "leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history."

- **Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy***

  In this sweeping and readable work, Kissinger surveys the history of diplomacy in the Western world, with a focus on the 20th century. His interpretation is controversial, but worthy of careful consideration.

- **Matthew Spalding, *We Still Hold These Truths*, chapter 9, "The Command of Our Fortunes"**
  Spalding demonstrates that the concept of independence "has profound implications for how we . . . justify and defend ourselves as an independent actor on the world stage." For the Founders, diplomacy was one of the institutions that should protect and serve an independent United States.

Current Issues

For links to these reports, go to heritage.org/UnderstandingAmerica.

- **LEADERSHIP. Kim R. Holmes, *Liberty's Best Hope*, The Heritage Foundation, 2008.**
  Holmes challenges America to reclaim its role as a global leader in the cause of freedom. He examines threats America confronts abroad and ideological battles at home, and he offers practical solutions for policymakers.

- **DIPLOMACY. Baker Spring, "Restoring the Role of the Nation-State System in Arms Control and Disarmament," September 21, 2010.**
  The United Nations is increasingly focused on constraining America's ability to defend liberty, particularly through its arms control and disarmament processes. Spring urges the U.S. to reform U.N. institutions and to focus on protecting American interests.

- **SOVEREIGNTY. Steven Groves and Ted R. Bromund, Ph.D., "The Ottawa Mine Ban Convention: Unacceptable on Substance and Process," December 13, 2010.**
  Irresponsible diplomacy threatens both American security and sovereignty. Groves and Bromund review the origins and course of the treaty banning land mines and conclude that it is a dangerous departure from the principles of responsible diplomacy.

- **HUMAN RIGHTS. Steven Groves and Brett Schaefer, "Durban II: Lessons for U.S. Engagement with the U.N. on Human Rights," June 10, 2009.**
  The 2009 Durban Review Conference was a U.N. conference that was supposed to combat racism. Instead, it provided a

global platform for undermining and constraining rights that are fundamental to freedom. Groves and Schaefer show that this failure is a testament to the broader difficulties inherent in seeking to advance human rights through the framework of multilateral diplomacy.

- **SECOND AMENDMENT. Ted R. Bromund, Ph.D., and Steven Groves, "The U.N.'s Arms Trade Treaty: A Dangerous Multilateral Mistake in the Making," August 21, 2009.**
  The U.N.'s Arms Trade Treaty, now under negotiation, would endanger U.S. arms export policy, clash with the Constitution, offer a dangerous justification for dictatorial rule, and make it illegal under international law for the U.S. to support freedom fighters abroad. Bromund and Groves demonstrate that this treaty will be a serious retreat from responsible diplomacy that respects America's independence and interests.

- **UNITED NATIONS. Kim R. Holmes, Ph.D., "Smart Multilateralism and the United Nations," September 21, 2010.**
  Multilateralism is not an end in itself. It is simply one of many

foreign policy tools—a very important one—in the diplomatic toolkit. Holmes argues persuasively that, if the United States is to advance its many interests in the world, it needs to pursue multilateral diplomacy in a smarter, more pragmatic manner. This is especially true when the U.S. is considering actions to be taken through the United Nations.

Endnotes

1 George Washington, "Farewell Address," May 15, 1796.

2 *Ibid.*

3 George Washington, letter to Patrick Henry, October 9, 1795.

4 George Washington, Address to Congress on Resigning His Commission, December 23, 1783.

5 Woodrow Wilson, "The Fourteen Points," January 8, 1918.

6 David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 747.

About *Understanding America*

AMERICANS HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED that this nation, founded on the idea of freedom, has a vital responsibility to the rest of the world. As George Washington first recognized, the "preservation of the sacred fire of liberty" depended on the American people. These words remain true today.

Understanding America explores how the United States' commitment to the universal truths of human equality and the right to self-government—as proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence—requires a vigilant defense of the cause of liberty, both at home and abroad.

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How Must America Practice Diplomacy?

"While the United States is exceptional, it has never been alone. From the beginning, the United States has had to deal with other nations of the world."

This volume in the *Understanding America* series examines how the principles of liberty that define America must also guide its practice of diplomacy.

The United States has practiced diplomacy since it was founded. The Founders rightly saw diplomacy as the proper way for independent nations to interact with each other, and an important means for America to secure its interests and protect the liberties of its people.

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