



NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

# The Lost Generation in American Foreign Policy

*How American Influence Has Declined, and What Can Be Done About it*

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# Key Questions

- How can we measure the extent of the decline in America's international influence?
- Why has American influence declined?
- What can be done to restore American influence?

# Diminished Global Regard

TABLE 1  
Percentage of Citizens in Selected Publics with a Favorable View of the United States

| Country        | 1999/2000 | 2007 | 2015 | 2019 | Overall Change<br>1999–2019 |
|----------------|-----------|------|------|------|-----------------------------|
| Germany        | 78        | 30   | 50   | 39   | -39                         |
| United Kingdom | 83        | 51   | 65   | 48   | -35                         |
| Italy          | 76        | 53   | 83   | 62   | -14                         |
| France         | 62        | 39   | 73   | 48   | -14                         |
| Poland         | 66        | 61   | 74   | 79   | +13                         |
| Russia         | 37        | 41   | 15   | 29   | -8                          |
| Turkey         | 52        | 9    | 29   | 20   | -32                         |
| Japan          | 77        | 61   | 68   | 68   | -9                          |
| South Korea    | 58        | 58   | 84   | 77   | +19                         |
| Indonesia      | 75        | 29   | 62   | 42   | -33                         |
| Canada         | 71        | 55   | 68   | 51   | -20                         |
| Mexico         | 68        | 56   | 66   | 36   | -32                         |

TABLE 2  
Percentage of Publics with Confidence in the U.S. President to Do the Right Thing

| Country        | April–May<br>2003 | 2008 | 2016 | 2019 | Overall Change<br>2003–2019 |
|----------------|-------------------|------|------|------|-----------------------------|
| Germany        | 33                | 14   | 86   | 13   | -20                         |
| United Kingdom | 51                | 16   | 79   | 32   | -29                         |
| France         | 20                | 13   | 84   | 20   | 0                           |
| Spain          | 26                | 8    | 75   | 21   | -5                          |
| Australia      | 59                | 23   | 84   | 35   | -24                         |
| Argentina      | 50                | 16   | 43   | 41   | -9                          |
| Kenya          | 94                | 87   | 84   | 60   | -34                         |

# Foreign Policy Accomplishment (1/3)

## Enduring Foreign Policy Achievements and Failures from Truman to Trump



### HARRY S. TRUMAN 1945–1953

11/1

|                |   |     |
|----------------|---|-----|
| June 1945      | Founding of the United Nations  | +   |
| December 1945  | Creation of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade | +   |
| March 1947     | Military aid to Turkey and Greece   | +   |
| May 1947       | Recognition of the state of Israel  | +   |
| June 1947      | Marshall Plan   | +   |
| June 1948      | Berlin airlift  | +   |
| April 1949     | Creation of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)   | +   |
| May 1949       | Creation of West Germany  | +   |
| October 1949   | Loss of China   | -   |
| June 1950      | United States enters Korean War   | +/- |
| June 1950      | Neutralization of Taiwan Strait   | +   |
| September 1951 | Japan Peace Treaty/U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty  | +   |

### DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER 1953–1961

7/3

|             |                               |     |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-----|
| July 1953   | Armistice ends the Korean War | +   |
| August 1953 | CIA-backed coup in Iran       | +/- |

|                |                                 |     |
|----------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| July 1954      | Creation of South Vietnam       | +/- |
| September 1954 | First Taiwan Strait crisis      | +   |
| May 1955       | NATO enlargement (West Germany) | +   |
| October 1956   | The Suez Crisis                 | +   |
| March 1957     | Treaty of Rome                  | +   |
| July 1958      | Marines to Lebanon              | +   |
| August 1958    | Second Taiwan Strait crisis     | +   |
| May 1960       | U-2 Incident                    | -   |

### JOHN F. KENNEDY 1961–1963

5/3

|              |   |   |
|--------------|---|---|
| April 1961   | Bay of Pigs   | - |
| May 1961     | Increased advisers and Special Forces to Vietnam  | - |
| June 1961    | Vienna Summit   | - |
| October 1961 | Berlin confrontation  | + |
| October 1962 | Cuban Missile Crisis  | + |
| 1961–1962    | Creation of U.S. Agency for International Development, Peace Corps, Alliance for Progress, Food for Peace | + |
| June 1963    | "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech   | + |
| August 1963  | Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty   | + |

### LYNDON B. JOHNSON 1963–1969

3/1

|             |  |   |
|-------------|--|---|
| August 1964 | Gulf of Tonkin incident and deployment of U.S. troops to Vietnam | - |
| April 1965  | Marines to the Dominican Republic                                | / |



# Foreign Policy Accomplishment (2/3)

|                                   |   |     |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----|
| June 1967                         | Conclusion of Kennedy Round   | +   |
| October 1967                      | Outer Space Treaty  | +   |
| July 1968                         | Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty   | +   |
| <b>RICHARD M. NIXON 1969–1974</b> |   |     |
| <b>4/3</b>                        |   |     |
| March 1969                        | Invasion of Cambodia  | -   |
| February 1972                     | Opening to China  | +   |
| April 1972                        | Biological Weapons Convention   | +   |
| May 1972                          | Strategic Arms Limitation Talks I and Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty           | +   |
| January 1973                      | Vietnam peace agreement   | +/- |
| September 1973                    | U.S. support for counter-Allende coup in Chile                                | +/- |
| October 1973                      | Yom Kippur War and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy     | +   |
| <b>GERALD R. FORD 1974–1977</b>   |   |     |
| <b>2/1</b>                        |   |     |
| April 1975                        | Fall of South Vietnam   | -   |
| August 1975                       | Helsinki Final Act  | +   |
| November 1975                     | First annual G6 (later G7 and G8) Summit at Rambouillet                       | +   |
| <b>JIMMY CARTER 1977–1981</b>     |   |     |
| <b>6/1</b>                        |   |     |
| August 1977                       | Panama Canal Treaties   | +   |
| January 1979                      | Diplomatic recognition of People's Republic of China and Taiwan Relations Act | +   |
| March 1979                        | Camp David Accords  | +   |

|                                    |  |   |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| June 1979                          | Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II                      | + |
| July 1979                          | Aid to Afghan mujahidin                                  | + |
| December 1979                      | NATO Double-Track Decision                               | + |
| January 1979–January 1981          | Fall of the Shah and the Iranian hostage crisis          | - |
| <b>RONALD W. REAGAN 1981–1989</b>  |  |   |
| <b>7/2</b>                         |  |   |
| May 1982                           | NATO enlargement (Spain)                                 | + |
| August 1982                        | Marine barracks bombing and U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon | - |
| October 1983                       | Invasion of Grenada                                      | + |
| September 1985                     | Plaza Accord   | + |
| April 1986                         | Bombing of Libya   | + |
| August 1985–March 1987             | Iran-Contra Affair                                       | - |
| June 1987                          | "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall" speech              | + |
| December 1987                      | Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty                 | + |
| 1982–1987                          | Military buildup and arms control negotiation            | + |
| <b>GEORGE H. W. BUSH 1989–1993</b> |  |   |
| <b>8/0</b>                         |  |   |
| December 1989                      | Panama intervention (Operation Just Cause)               | + |
| June 1990                          | Chemical Weapons Convention                              | + |
| September 1990                     | Reunification of Germany                                 | + |
| November 1990                      | Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty         | + |
| January 1991                       | First Gulf War   | + |
| July 1991                          | Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty                          | + |

# Foreign Policy Accomplishment (3/3)

|   |   |       |
|---|---|-------|
| October 1991  | Madrid Peace Conference   | +     |
| December 1991   | Cooperative Threat Reduction Program  | +     |
| <b>WILLIAM J. CLINTON 1993–2001</b>   |   |       |
| 8/2    |   |       |
| January 1994  | North American Free Trade Agreement   | +     |
| October 1993–March 1994   | Black Hawk Down and U.S. withdrawal from Somalia                                  | -     |
| April 1994  | Rwandan genocide  | -     |
| April 1994  | Conclusion of the Uruguay Round and establishment of the World Trade Organization | +     |
| October 1994  | Intervention in Haiti   | /     |
| October 1994  | North Korea Agreed Framework  | /     |
| September 1993–1995   | Oslo Peace Accords and Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty                                 | +     |
| December 1995   | Dayton Peace Agreement and end of Bosnian Civil War                               | +     |
| November 1998   | Kyoto Protocol on climate change  | /     |
| March 1999  | Kosovo air war and Serbian withdrawal   | +     |
| March 1999  | NATO enlargement (Poland, Hungary, Czechia)                                       | +     |
| December 1999   | Northern Ireland Good Friday Agreement  | +     |
| August 2000   | Plan Colombia   | +     |
| <b>GEORGE W. BUSH 2001–2009</b>   |   |       |
| 2/4  |   |       |
| March 2001  | U.S. withdrawal from Kyoto Protocol on climate change                             | -     |
| September 2001  | September 11 attacks and the Afghan invasion                                      | -/+/- |
| June 2002   | Abrogation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty                                       | /     |

|   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| March 2003  | Iraq War  | -   |
| May 2003  | President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief anti-human immunodeficiency virus initiative | +   |
| March 2006  | Civil nuclear cooperation agreement with India  | +   |
| December 2007   | Russia and then NATO suspend the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty             | -   |
| <b>BARACK H. OBAMA 2009–2017</b>  |   |     |
| 2/2  |   |     |
| February 2011   | New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty   | +   |
| March 2011  | NATO intervention in Libya  | +/- |
| August 2012   | Syrian civil war  | -   |
| May 2014  | Ottawa Treaty (Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention)                                      | /   |
| July 2015   | Iran Nuclear Agreement  | /   |
| July 2015   | Diplomatic normalization with Cuba  | /   |
| February 2016   | Trans-Pacific Partnership   | /   |
| November 2016   | Paris Climate Accord  | /   |
| August 2014–January 2017  | Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria campaign  | -/+ |
| <b>DONALD J. TRUMP 2017–</b>  |   |     |
| 1/5  |   |     |
| January 2017  | Trans-Pacific Partnership withdrawal  | -   |
| January 2017  | Paris Climate Accord withdrawal   | -   |
| October 2017  | Fall of Raqqa and end of Islamic State caliphate  | +   |
| May 2018  | Iran deal withdrawal  | ?   |
| July 2018   | Trade war with China  | ?   |
| June 2019   | New North American Free Trade Agreement   | /   |
| October 2019  | Pullback of U.S. troops from eastern Syria  | -   |
| December 2019   | Blocking of World Trade Organization dispute mechanism                                  | -   |
| January 2020  | Lifting of land mine ban  | -   |
| March 2020  | U.S.-Taliban Agreement  | ?   |
| March 2018–   | Nuclear diplomacy with Democratic People's Republic of Korea                            | ?   |

# Why Has American Influence Declined?

- Three Competing Explanations:
  - The Fault is in Ourselves
  - The Fault is in Our Policies
  - The Fault is in Our Stars
- Our Explanation:
  - Hubris Followed by Nemesis
    - Success, overconfidence, overstretch, failure, retreat

# A World Order in Question

- These factors do not fully account for the depth and duration of the decline
- Vietnam proved only a brief drag on U.S. global standing
  - In contrast, this century's setbacks have caused Americans to question the basic tenets of US foreign policy
- The development of a rules-based international system has slowed, even reversed
  - Trump's attitude towards U.S. stewardship of the global order reflects many Americans' resistance to globalization



# The Roots of American Anti-Globalism

- A significant number of Americans have come to feel that the liberal international order is not working for them:
  - Decades of wage stagnation
  - Increasing income disparity
  - Declining social mobility

More Inequality Associated with Low Intergenerational Mobility



# What Can be Done to Restore American Influence?

- To again regain the collaboration of international partners, U.S. leaders must integrate American interests with those of the rest of the world
- U.S. leaders will need to practice competent statecraft, adopt prudent policies, and pursue realistically achievable objectives

# Leadership Abroad Can Be Sustained Only if America Retains Public Support at Home

- Antiglobalization attitudes are most deeply represented in a minority of Americans
  - The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that 7 in 10 Americans want an active role for America abroad
  - But the Center for American Progress presents a more nuanced and less positive assessment

