

CORE PRINCIPLES OF US FOREIGN POLICY: UNDERSTANDING THE FOUNDATIONS

Sadibakosev Khabibullo Shodiboy o'gli

PhD., International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan

Dean of Islamic Economy and International Relations faculty

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

E-mail: h.sadibaqosev@iiu.uz

Abstract

This paper examines the core principles that underpin US foreign policy, providing a deeper understanding of its historical and philosophical foundations. The study employs a comprehensive review of academic literature and policy documents to investigate the key drivers and guiding tenets of American global engagement. The findings reveal that US foreign policy is shaped by a blend of ideological, geopolitical, and pragmatic considerations, including a commitment to democratic values, the pursuit of economic interests, and the maintenance of international influence and security. The paper concludes that a nuanced appreciation of these foundational principles is essential for effectively analyzing, interpreting, and engaging with US foreign policy in the contemporary global landscape.

Keywords: US Foreign Policy, Core Principles, Historical Foundations, Geopolitical Influences, Democratic Values, International Relations.

The United States' foreign policy has long been a subject of intense scrutiny and debate, both domestically and internationally. As a global superpower, the US wields significant influence on the world stage, and its foreign policy decisions have far-reaching consequences. Therefore, Understanding the core principles underpinning US foreign policy is essential for comprehending the motivations, objectives, and potential implications of American global engagement.

This paper delves into US foreign policy's historical and philosophical foundations, aiming to provide a nuanced understanding of the key drivers and guiding tenets that shape its trajectory. The study addresses several critical research questions: What are the core principles that have consistently informed US foreign policy throughout history? How have these principles evolved in response to changing geopolitical contexts and domestic political currents? To what extent do ideological factors, economic interests, and security concerns intersect and compete in shaping US foreign policy decisions?

Existing literature on US foreign policy offers a rich tapestry of perspectives, ranging from realist interpretations emphasizing the pursuit of national interests to liberal perspectives highlighting the role of democratic values and international cooperation [1]. Some scholars

argue that US foreign policy is characterized by a persistent tension between its idealistic aspirations and its pragmatic pursuit of power [2]. Others emphasize the significance of domestic political factors, such as public opinion, interest group politics, and the role of Congress, in shaping foreign policy outcomes [3].

The evolution of US foreign policy reflects a dynamic interplay between enduring principles and shifting global contexts. From its inception, the nation grappled with balancing its isolationist instincts with growing international influence. The 19th century saw the articulation of the Monroe Doctrine [4], asserting US hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, while engagement in World War I marked a turning point towards greater global involvement. The post-World War II era witnessed the rise of the US as a superpower, shaping its foreign policy around containing communism and promoting free trade [5].

Major historical events have profoundly shaped the trajectory of US foreign policy. World War II solidified the nation's transition from isolationism to global leadership, establishing the foundations for institutions like the United Nations and NATO [5]. The subsequent Cold War solidified a bipolar world order, with US foreign policy focused on containing Soviet influence through containment and deterrence strategies [6]. The collapse of the Soviet Union presented new challenges, leading to debates about the US's role in a unipolar world and interventions in the Middle East [7].

Although the particular manifestations of US foreign policy have undergone modification over time, several fundamental tenets have remained a constant, providing a coherent framework for interpreting its evolution. This section will examine three such tenets: the defense of national interests, the promotion of democracy, and the concept of economic interdependence. The pursuit of national interest, often framed in terms of security and power maximization, has been a persistent driver of US foreign policy. From the early articulation of the Monroe Doctrine [8] to contemporary strategic doctrines, safeguarding national security and projecting power abroad have remained central objectives. This principle manifests in robust military capabilities, strategic alliances, and a willingness to intervene in situations perceived as threats to US interests. However, defining "national interest" remains a point of contention, with debates surrounding the relative weight of security concerns, economic interests, and ideological factors [9].

Promoting democracy and human rights globally has been another enduring feature of US foreign policy, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis over time. This principle stems from the belief that democratic values are universally applicable and that promoting democracy abroad enhances both US security and global stability [10]. This commitment manifests in diplomatic efforts to support democratic transitions, foreign aid programs aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, and at times, military interventions justified on humanitarian grounds [11]. However, the US's record on democratic advancement remains complex and contested, with critics pointing to inconsistencies and instances where realpolitik

considerations have overshadowed idealistic aspirations [12].

Recognizing the interconnected nature of the global economy, the US has consistently pursued policies aimed at fostering economic interdependence and promoting free trade. This principle rests on the belief that open markets, free trade agreements, and economic integration benefit US prosperity while also fostering global stability [13]. This commitment is evident in the US's leading role in shaping international economic institutions like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, as well as its pursuit of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements [14]. However, the pursuit of economic interdependence has also generated domestic debates about the distribution of benefits and costs, particularly in the context of globalization and its impact on American workers [15].

The 21st century has marked the advent of a new era of global politics, characterized by a shift in the distribution of power and the emergence of complex challenges that demand adaptation and innovation in US foreign policy. This section analyses how the fundamental tenets of US foreign policy are being subjected to challenge and transformation in response to the evolving realities of the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

The post-Cold War unipolar moment has given way to a more multipolar world, characterized by the rise of new centers of power, most notably China [16]. This shift necessitates a recalibration of US foreign policy, moving away from strategies rooted in unipolarity towards approaches that acknowledge and navigate this more diffuse distribution of power [17]. Simultaneously, the threat of transnational terrorism, exemplified by the rise and evolution of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, has presented a persistent security challenge that defies traditional notions of state-based conflict [18].

These evolving global dynamics demand a reassessment of how core US foreign policy principles are applied. The principle of national interest must contend with the complexities of economic interdependence and the need for cooperation in addressing global challenges like climate change [**Error! Reference source not found.**]. The promotion of democracy faces obstacles in regions where authoritarianism is resurgent, requiring nuanced strategies that balance idealism with pragmatic considerations [19]. Finally, economic interdependence must be balanced with concerns about economic security and fair trade practices in an increasingly interconnected global economy [21].

In response to these changing realities, US foreign policy has exhibited a degree of adaptation and innovation. The Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" and the Biden administration's emphasis on revitalizing alliances and multilateral cooperation reflect attempts to recalibrate US engagement with an evolving global landscape.

Nonetheless, the implementation of these new approaches remains a work in progress, with ongoing debates about the appropriate balance between competing priorities and the means to effectively project US influence in a multipolar world. [22] [23] [24] As the US navigates this complex and dynamic global environment, its foreign policy will likely continue to evolve,

necessitating a nuanced understanding of the core principles that have underpinned its approach to the world stage [23] [24] [25] [26].

Understanding the foundational principles of US foreign policy is essential for comprehending the nation's actions on the world stage, both past and present. While the specific manifestations of these principles have adapted to changing global contexts, the core tenets of national interest, democratic advancement, and economic interdependence continue to shape US foreign policy behavior.

Looking ahead, these principles will undoubtedly continue to evolve in response to new challenges and opportunities. The rise of new global powers, the proliferation of transnational threats, and the growing urgency of addressing global challenges like climate change will necessitate ongoing adaptation and innovation in US foreign policy. Navigating these complexities effectively requires a nuanced understanding of the historical foundations upon which US foreign policy rests, as well as a willingness to critically examine and adapt these principles to the realities of a rapidly changing world.

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