

**History 282 US Diplomatic
Discussion Transcript for November 17, 2020
Interventionist Diplomacy**

Main Reading: Chapter 20 (first half) Herring and Schauffler profile of Albright

The Clinton years marked a period of post-war globalization, when the prospects of a US-dominated era of growth and prosperity always seemed possible and yet never quite a reality –at least not for most nations or peoples. Clinton and his national security team, including Madeleine Albright, the first female secretary of state, tried diligently to strike the right balance in asserting US leadership, with both diplomacy and occasional use of force, but few actions seemed to produce results that transcended the rising partisanship of that divisive era.

Here is a selection of student comments:

POST-COLD WAR

STUDENT COMMENT: “George H W Bush, while not a bad president *per se*, was perhaps sworn in during the wrong time period in American history. Following the end of the Cold War, the United States culture, as mentioned in the chapter, was the closest thing to a global lingua franca. The United States was on top of the world culturally, economically, militarily... virtually any aspect. Americans expected rapid growth and a continuation of the success that the end of the Cold War brought. By 1992, George H W Bush, while not bringing the economy down, had not done much to improve the country. Furthermore, he had no clear vision of the nation’s future in international affairs since the containment policy was no longer necessary. He simply did not let the nation crash but did not do enough to provide growth to the nation, either. He had become complacent in his role.”

STUDENT COMMENT: “In the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War, Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton struggled to guide US foreign policy between the currents of “pragmatic neo-Wilsonianism” (p. 927) and a “[yearning] for what Warren Harding had called ‘normalcy’ and relief from the burdens of world leadership” (p. 921). Both leaders had to balance between US military, economic, and cultural predominance (p. 921) and a pushback against using that power by Congress, which “slashed expenditures” on foreign policy, a military that “opposed the use of force in the Balkans” and elsewhere (p. 924), a blowback from abroad (p. 919), and major domestic concerns. Ultimately, this proved too difficult for both presidents, resulting in a “halting” (p. 922) foreign policy that failed to take full advantage of the situation. Despite optimism about the power of democracy and America (p. 918), H. W. Bush failed to take major action in defense of either. His only successes occurred in the Middle East, where he oversaw victory in the defense of Kuwait (p. 922) and “kept Middle East peace hopes alive” through a new round of Arab-Israeli negotiations in Madrid (p. 923). It rejected military intervention in Haiti (p. 923) and in Yugoslavia (p. 924), allowing humanitarian crises and undemocratic leaders to continue. Particularly in the latter case, the military actively rejected the prospect of intervention, and the State Department questioned the US’s hegemonic position as a way to shirk duty (p. 924). The elder Bush offered little

better in Somalia, where troops deployed on a “mission of mercy” only “seemed to work” (p. 925).”

STUDENT COMMENT: “After the Cold War ended with the victory of democracy and capitalism in 1991, the United States began to exercise unprecedented power in the world as “hyperpower.” (p. 917) Without any imminent external threat to the security after the collapse of the USSR, it questioned itself, ‘what would be the proper way of using such power?’ As the world experienced more technological and scientific advances, new types of international issues and threats like terrorism and genocide arose. Using America’s unprecedented power and freedom of action, the Clinton administration was committed to taking a more active role in promoting human rights around the world. Ironically, during the Clinton years, the most horrifying and atrocious genocide, the Rwandan genocide in 1994, happened.”

STUDENT COMMENT: “During his Presidential campaign in 1992 against incumbent, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton criticized Bush for his lack of involvement in the Balkans, yet he continued the trend of pacifism in his dealings with Rwanda. The Clinton Administration focused much of its attention on domestic issues and foreign trade, while establishing a policy of “humanitarian intervention” which, according to Herring, stated that the US “would intervene only where international security was gravely threatened, a natural disaster required urgent relief, or egregious violations of human rights occurred” (928). Herring states that the administration looking the other way at the Rwandan genocide was not surprising, but considering its policy of humanitarian intervention, this action by the administration caught me off guard. However, considering the trend of non-intervention of these two administrations, I can see how the administration would have turned a blind eye to the situation though Herring says that Clinton later admitted that he “blew it,” calling it “his administration’s worst foreign policy mistake” (929).”

ON INTERVENTIONISM

STUDENT COMMENT: “The post-cold war world was more complex than it had ever been before. The series of failed U.S. interventions and the “bitter memories” (Herring, 921) of the Vietnam war reduced the probability of intervention by the United States. After years of being criticized for its over extension, the world then put the U.S. in the spotlight when countries in other continents became anarchic. The U.S. could not and would not be able to solve the problems of the world. Those problems were perpetuated by the local populations who would not attempt to work towards a common goal. The people would then turn violent and begin murdering their opponents in mass killings. Two examples of this are the Serbian “ethnic cleansing” (Herring, 924) of the Croatian and Muslim populations in 1991 and the “acts of genocide” (Herring, 928) against Tutsis by Hutus that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. The European nations that resided in closer proximity than the U.S. to these hotspots did not attempt to truly solve or mitigate the bloodshed of many innocent civilians. The “ineffectual” peace efforts by the Europeans should have been criticized more than inaction by the United States (Herring, 924).

When the Cold War was raging the European powers sought to be independent of U.S. intervention. Some went as far as being open to the acquisition of nuclear weaponry. After the Cold War, the European nations were free of the vicious power struggle between the U.S.S.R and the United States and had the ability to act on their own. The U.S. was criticized for not acting promptly as “the military policeman of the world” (Herring, 924) towards the atrocities. The conflicts were based upon generations of deep seated hatred between different ethnicities. The U.S. still has not successfully fully fixed the bigotry that poisoned its citizenry since its inception. Therefore, why would the U.S. be criticized for not acting in a situation that it had no way of fixing? There was no way to actually fix the problems of a country, when its citizens were the problem. Though the U.S. should have acted earlier in defending the innocent, other nations also failed to effectively address the brutal killings.”

ASSESSING CLINTON

STUDENT COMMENT: “Both the first half of Herring's chapter and the Schauffler profile paper on Madeleine Albright cast the foreign policy of the mid-1990's in an interesting light, essentially arguing that President Clinton was forced into becoming a “foreign policy President” and engaging in interventionist diplomacy by prevailing trends, despite hoping to focus primarily on domestic issues during his time in office. Specifically, Herring cites intervention in an ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia as well as the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo as two major examples of the United States leveraging its newfound hyperpower status to alter the course of events in a foreign country, albeit reluctantly, as Herring notes that it took the administration being “Humiliated by Somalia and Haiti, three years of inaction in the Balkans, and the increasingly blatant defiance of Milosevic” (Herring, 930) for the United States to first intervene in Bosnia. Herring seemingly refers to Somalia, where 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in a joint mission with the UN, essentially as a catalyst for the United States to try to limit its involvement in other countries moving forward, stating that “the United States would intervene only where international security was gravely threatened, a natural disaster required urgent relief, or egregious violations of human rights occurred” (Herring, 928). In light of these stringent criteria and how committed the Clinton administration seemed to be to adhering to them, going so far as to more or less ignore the Rwandan genocide, it is something of a wonder that the United States engaged in as many interventions as it did under Clinton. Herring makes it clear that the reluctance characterized by failure to act in Rwanda, the delayed interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, and the strict guidelines for United States intervention was overcome not through the administration’s own volition, but through domestic political trends that came to affect foreign policy and ultimately define Clinton's presidency despite his domestic focus at the outset of his term.”

STUDENT COMMENT: “When Bill Clinton took office, he proclaimed his commitment to fostering human rights globally and he criticized Bush’s administration for tolerating foreign tyrants. He also however, had a commitment to expanding foreign trade, something he thought was vital to a successful economy. He realized these two principles may not be able to exist together when he tried to get China to adhere to

human rights principles by making the extension of a most-favored-nation trade agreement contingent upon their cooperation. When China continued their behavior, Clinton backed down from the human rights argument and conceded an extension of the trade agreement. Clinton also criticized the Bush administration for their military inaction, specifically in the Balkans conflict and Lake declared that going forward, the U.S. would be dedicated to expanding democracy around the world. But, similar to the Vietnam syndrome years prior, American bloodshed of 18 GIs in Somalia in 1993 seemed to dissuade the U.S. from intervening in another country's affairs. Specifically, American soldiers retreated their mission to overthrow a military government in Haiti for fear of another Somalia. During the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, despite numerous warnings from UN commander of the Rwanda peacekeeping mission, the Clinton administration refused to even convene a single meeting to discuss the conflict. Clinton acquiesced to his administration and intervened in the Kosovo conflict in 1997, but assured the public that he would not send troops and would only use air power. He ended up sending troops after all and declared "all options are on the table," (p. 933). When the war was over and Milosevic was defeated, Clinton relished in NATO's triumph even though he was initially reluctant to intervene and was cautious throughout. In all of these examples, U.S. demonstrated uncertainty and reluctance in their foreign policy decision making and embodied the paradox mentioned above. At the beginning of the semester, we discussed how Herring's title "From Colony to Superpower," was questionable because the more powerful a nation becomes, the more worried they become about maintaining their power and protecting themselves. I am wondering if this hesitance in foreign policy in the 1990's can also be related to worrying about protecting their power."

STUDENT COMMENT: "In my opinion, the 1990s were crucial years for the foreign policy of the U.S. The end of the bipolar world forced the U.S. to adapt to the new world geopolitical situation and it was a difficult endeavor. After only one year in office following the Cold War, the Bush administration did not establish any strategy for the role the U.S. should play on the new geopolitical scene that containment, which had guided policymakers during the Cold War, was no longer relevant. (Herring, 922) After taking the office, President Clinton shifted the U.S. influence to focus on the economy, promoting U.S. economic interests in the world, and at the same time, favoring democracy and freedom everywhere U.S. leadership considered it should be established and supported, or "enlargement of democracy" (Herring, 927). This doctrine fostered a more open and productive world economy, an important component of U.S. economic prosperity. Moreover, the Clinton administration tried to build a new world order compatible with basic American values by encouraging the growth of democracy and by using military force against major human rights abuses, including the 1995 Bosnian War and the Kosovo War. The Clinton administration enabled the U.S. to enter the new world geopolitics and permitted the U.S. to adapt its leadership to new realities and, in the end, to maintain it. However, it did not do enough to prevent the 1994 Rwanda Genocide, or to foster the deteriorated U.S. relationship with states in the Middle East dated back from the Cold War. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 made clear that even hyperpowers are vulnerable (Herring, 917)."