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American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays

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As the world's only superpower, America's foreign policy inevitably has a major impact Ð be it positive or negative - on contemporary international affairs. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, George W. Bush's decision to move away from multilateral decision-making toward a more aggressive, pre-emptive style of foreign policy attracted widespread debate, and criticism, throughout the world. Reversing direction, the Barack Obama presidency is placing greater emphasis on constructive or peaceful engagement within multilateral frameworks, relying on special envoys to deal with some of the thorniest problems.

In this book, Paul Viotti explores American foreign policy from the founding of the republic in the late 18th Century to the present day. Part 1 examines the broad policy options available to the US government: namely, peaceful engagement, containment through deterrence or coercive diplomacy, and armed intervention. Part 2 looks at the American experience in foreign policy. By exploring early precedents and elite practices, the moralism of American exceptionalism as well as the roots of an expansionist American foreign policy, the discussion draws out the continuities running from the 18th century to the present. Part 3 concludes with an analysis of the politics of interest on the Potomac with analysis of the interplay of contending policy elites, factions and parties influencing foreign policy making today.

Assessing alternatives, the author concludes that even though containment and armed intervention will remain part of the way the United States conducts its foreign policy, diplomatic engagement options are the most promising course of action for the coming decades.

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