**Learning Objective:**

Explain the similarities and differences in attitudes about the nation’s proper role in the world.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military interactions between empires, nations, and peoples shape the development of America and America’s increasingly important role in the world.*

1. World War I and its aftermath intensified ongoing debates about the nation’s role in the world and how best to achieve national security and pursue American interests.
2. In the years following World War I, the United States pursued a unilateral foreign policy that used international investment, peace treaties, and select military intervention to promote a vision of international order, even while maintaining U.S. isolationism.
   1. Despite its isolationist position in the 1920s, the U.S. government actively participated in decisions regarding international finance and the payment of war reparations.
   2. The Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 was called to restrain the naval arms race among the United States, Britain, Japan, Italy, and France. The signatory nations agreed to specific limitations on the number of battleships each nation could build.
   3. The Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 was an international agreement in which 62 nations pledged to foreswear war as an instrument of policy. It outlawed only aggression, not self-defense, but had no enforcement provisions.
   4. The Fordney-McCumber Tariff of 1922 set a high rate on imported goods, encouraging Americans to purchase domestic goods. The tariff triggered reciprocal tariffs from other nations that decreased world trade.
   5. The United States responded to the economic crisis in Germany during the 1920s by adopting the Dawes Plan. The plan rescheduled German reparation payments and opened the way for American private loans to Germany.
3. In the 1930s, while many Americans were concerned about the rise of fascism and totalitarianism, most opposed taking military action against the aggression of Nazi Germany and Japan until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor drew the United States into World War II.
   1. FDR’s Foreign Policy
      1. Hoover actively pursued friendly relations with the countries of Latin America. He ended the interventionist policies of previous administrations by arranging for U.S. troops to leave countries such as Nicaragua and Haiti.
      2. Roosevelt continued the policies of his predecessors in endeavoring to improve relations with Latin American nations. He formalized his position by calling it the Good Neighbor Policy. In 1933, the United States renounced the right of intervention in the internal affairs of Latin American countries. The United States did not intervene in a Cuban revolution in 1933 and removed its Platt Amendment rights in 1934 except for control of the Guantanamo Bay naval base. All Marines were removed from Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic by 1934. In 1936, the United States agreed to submit all American disputes to arbitration.
   2. Fascism Abroad
      1. In 1922, Benito Mussolini, leader of the Italian Fascists, took power.
      2. In September 1931, the Japanese attacked China and conquered the province of Manchuria. Proclaimed in 1932, the Stimson Doctrine declared that the United States would not recognize any territorial acquisitions achieved by force. Although the United States did not recognize the Japanese occupation, the Hoover administration refrained from taking any military action.
      3. In 1933, Adolf Hitler took power in Germany and also embarked on a militaristic program to address economic problems. Hitler and his Nazi Party made vicious attacks on Catholics and Jews and suppressed all who did not agree with his policies.
      4. The League of Nations and the WWI allies did not join together to stop any of these aggressive moves.
      5. The three empires of Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact and became known as the Axis Powers.
   3. Isolationism
      1. During the 1930s, isolationists drew support for their position from Washington’s farewell address and the fears of getting drawn in to another costly war in Europe.
      2. The Neutrality Acts of the 1930s were expressions of a commitment to isolationism. The Neutrality Act of 1936 gave the president authority to determine when a state of war existed, and prohibited any loans or credits to belligerents. The Neutrality Act of 1937 prohibited all arm sales to belligerents, but allowed the cash-and-carry sale of non-military goods to belligerents.
      3. The America First Committee was formed to oppose any involvement in WWII.
   4. Prelude to War
      1. Pursuing a militaristic policy as a solution to Italy’s economic problems, Mussolini attacked Ethiopia in 1935. The League of Nations failed to intervene and Italy annexed Ethiopia and later Albania.
      2. In defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler sent the German army into the de-militarized Rhineland between France and Germany in March 1936.
      3. The Japanese launched a full-scale invasion of China in July 1937. When Japanese planes sank the American gunboat *Panay* and three Standard Oil tankers on the Yangtze River in December 1937, the United States accepted a Japanese apology and damage payments while the American public called for the withdrawal of all American forces from China.
      4. Hitler brought about a union of Germany and Austria in March 1938, took the German-speaking Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia in September 1938, and occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939.
      5. The failure of the United States and other powers to take any concrete action marked the failure of collective security.
   5. U.S. Neutrality
      1. Roosevelt recognized the dangers of Fascist aggression but was limited by the isolationist feelings of the majority of Americans. When Japan invaded China in 1937, FDR tested public opinion by proposing the democracies of the world act together to “quarantine” the aggressor. Public reaction to the speech was overwhelming negative and Roosevelt dropped the quarantine idea as politically unwise.
      2. Roosevelt argued for neutrality and an arms buildup at the same time. Military budgets were increased by 60% in 1938. Isolationists accepted the increased defense spending as a protective measure for American national security.
      3. In August of 1939, Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the USSR which contained a secret provision to divide Poland between them. German forces then invaded Poland on September 1, 1939.
      4. Britain and France declared war on Germany because of their treaties with Poland. By the end of September, Poland had been dismembered by Germany and the Soviet Union, but the war continued in the west along the French-German border.
      5. Hitler’s armies invaded and quickly conquered Denmark and Norway in April 1940. In May, German forces swept through the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. The British were driven from the continent and France surrendered on June 22.
   6. Arsenal of Democracy
      1. The Neutrality Act of 1939 allowed the cash-and-carry sale of arms and short-term loans to belligerents, but forbade American ships to trade with belligerents or Americans to travel on belligerent ships. The new law was helpful to the Allies because they controlled the Atlantic.
      2. In May 1940, President Roosevelt appointed a Council of National Defense which directed the production of military supplies, including 50,000 planes. Congress approved the nation’s first peacetime draft, the Selective Service Act, in September 1940. Men ages 21-35 were registered, and many were called for one year of military training.
      3. Roosevelt had determined that to aid Britain in every way possible was the best way to avoid war with Germany. He ordered the army and navy to turn over all available weapons and munitions to private dealers for resale to Britain.
      4. In September 1940 Roosevelt signed an agreement known as Destroyers for Bases to give Britain 50 American destroyers in return for a 99-year lease on air and naval bases in British territories in Newfoundland, Bermuda, and the Caribbean.
      5. The British were rapidly exhausting their cash reserves with which to buy American goods. Under the ***Lend-Lease*** program, passed in January 1941, President Roosevelt authorized the sale of surplus military equipment to the Allies. This allowed the Allies to be provided supplies to be paid for in goods and services after the war. The Lend-Lease program was used primarily to help Great Britain and the Soviet Union resist Nazi Germany. In effect, the law changed the United States from a neutral to a non-belligerent on the Allied side.
   7. Bombing of Pearl Harbor
      1. The Japanese war machine was dependent on shipments of oil, aviation gasoline, steel, and scrap iron from the United States. In late 1940, the Roosevelt administration imposed the first of a series of embargoes on Japan-bound supplies. In mid-1941, President Roosevelt froze Japanese assets in the United States and halted all shipments of gasoline. Roosevelt hoped that Japan would give in to American demands that they withdraw from Manchuria.
      2. The bombing of Pearl Harbor occurred after diplomatic negotiations with the United States had reached a stalemate. The Japanese attempted to thwart the embargo by attacking the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor and then seizing the oil supplies and other raw materials in Southeast Asia.
      3. The day after the Pearl Harbor bombing, Congress declared war on Japan. Three days later the Axis powers, Germany and Italy, declared war on the United States. Americans viewed the war as a fight for the survival of freedom and democracy against the fascist and militarist ideologies. This perspective was later reinforced by revelations about Japanese wartime atrocities, Nazi concentration camps, and the Holocaust.