CONSERVATIVE INTERNATIONALISM IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY:
THE FOREIGN POLICY RHETORIC OF THE REPUBLICAN ASCENDANCY,
1920-1930

A thesis submitted
To Kent State University in partial
Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Masters of the Arts

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August, 2015

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INTRODUCTION

“We were challenged with a peace-time choice between the American system of rugged individualism and a European philosophy of diametrically opposed doctrines—doctrines of paternalism and state socialism.”\(^1\) Herbert Hoover’s declaration on the campaign trail in 1928 epitomized the Republican perspective on foreign policy during the 1920s. In the aftermath of Woodrow Wilson’s expansive foreign policy rhetoric supporting American participation in a strong international organization, Republicans developed their own foreign policy argument for the postwar world that both protected American interests but ensured American involvement in the debates about the new international order. In the study of foreign policy, the Republican Ascendancy of the 1920s has been ignored in favor of the foreign policy failures and success of the bookending Democratic administrations.\(^2\) This thesis explores how the administrations of Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover constructed their foreign policy arguments for the American people and the world at large to balance America’s new role on the world stage in the aftermath of World War I with respect for traditional assumptions about its limited role in international affairs.

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In terms of methodology, this thesis will analyze the rhetoric used by key officials during the Republican Ascendancy when constructing their argument for American involvement in the postwar international community. Rhetorical analysis provides scholars with tools to decipher how politicians or other figures use public speech. Through their rhetoric is a means for them presidents “convey their thoughts, propose their own programs, communicate with the public, and set the stage for [future].”\(^3\) This form of analysis can be used on presidential speeches and other documents to determine how a speaker uses rhetoric in an “articulation of his ideas” in either spoken or written word because language has power by giving abstract concepts meaning and form, which for this thesis refers to Republican foreign policy.\(^4\) This construction is significant for tracking the development of coherent foreign policy arguments throughout the 1920s because Republican leaders aimed to present a framework for American participation in the new postwar order that appealed to both domestic and international audiences.

This thesis will analyze the three Republican presidencies through rhetoric with special focus on the use of speech as power, the moral and religious components of argument construction, and the role of national identity in the construction of rhetoric. The first is the notion that “speech is a form of power.”\(^5\) This definition is important for the thesis because the positions of president, secretary of state, and secretary of commerce carry with them authority to speak on behalf of the United States in issues that fall under the broad criteria of national interest, diplomacy, and economics. Rhetoric also has the potential to highlight the


moral and religious dimensions of presidential leadership through public speech, an important function of the office. This is important for this study because of the religious influence on several members of the Republican administrations in the 1920s, including Vice President and eventual President Calvin Coolidge. Another aspect of public speech is the president’s ability to articulate values through addresses that underlie the policy assessments of the administration.  

For the Republican Ascendancy, the framework of rhetoric was important because officials based their political legitimacy in foreign policy on adherence to a limited foreign policy. These are the primary elements that influenced how the Republican administrations of the 1920s constructed their foreign policy arguments for both American and international audiences.

This study will fill a gap in the literature because despite the detailed analysis of the speeches and documents of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt there have been no recent studies of how the Republican administrations constructed their foreign policy rhetoric. Wilson and Roosevelt are important in the field of rhetoric and presidential analysis for several reasons. The main reason for their prominence is that several scholarly groups consider one or the other to be the transitional figure that leads to the modern rhetorical presidency. Many scholars see Wilson’s resumption of delivering the State of the Union address orally to Congress as the important transition between the traditional and modern rhetorical presidency. This change in delivery is important to the study of rhetoric because of the persuasive potential of spoken addresses by the president. Wilson represented the first president to take advantage of the influential position of the presidency both in domestic and

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international context with varying levels of success. This hypothesis came from the change documented by Ryan Teten in the increased usage of inclusive words *we* and *our* in presidential addresses as Chad Murphy reviewed in his critique of the theory.\(^8\) Wilson is also important because his ideas in foreign policy rhetoric had a long term impact. They formed the basis of America’s postwar policy and remain central to the nation’s public foreign policy discourse with a majority of presidents self-describing their foreign policy as “Wilsonian” since the 1940s.\(^9\)

The use of rhetoric for presidential speeches and other works often addresses the way language is used in the construction of policy ideas and frameworks. One recent example is Jason Flanagan’s analysis of Wilson’s changing rhetoric in relation to Germany before American entry into World War I.\(^10\) Flanagan, like other rhetoric scholars, used Wilson’s public addresses to chart his understanding of the American “self” in relation to Germany and justify the expanded American role in world affairs.\(^11\) In the historiography there are works that address the important role of Wilson in the transition of the United States from an isolated, rising great power to the primary power in international affairs in military and economic power, but they will not be discussed in detail here.\(^12\) Wilson does represent an important transition in how American presidents conceptualized foreign policy, but the failure of the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles dashed his dream of an American-led international community for at least a generation, leaving his Republican successors to

formulate a middle ground in foreign policy between direct participation and complete isolation.

Franklin Roosevelt is also held up as an important rhetorical president in part because scholars have ample evidence in his massive record of public addresses across numerous forms of media. Murphy argued that Roosevelt deserves credit for the shift in State of Union addresses compared to Wilson in how the president addresses the nation because Roosevelt incorporated inclusive word usage and significantly lengthened the word count of the address to reflect its persuasive potential. In the study of presidential rhetoric, Roosevelt is important because of his longevity in the office and use of multiple media to construct his framework and convey his ideas to the American people. His importance is that he followed the Republican administrations and relied on their foreign policy rhetorical strategy in arguing for American independence in international affairs up until the late 1930s when the clouds of war emerged over Asia and Europe. The Republican Ascendancy existed in this transition period between the traditional rhetorical construction of the presidency and its modern incarnation but has only drawn sparse scholarly attention. The three Republican administrations relied on both written and spoken rhetoric in their construction of foreign policy ideas for presentation to the American people.

This study will analyze the rhetoric of public documents and speeches of the president, secretary of state, and secretary of commerce because of their importance in creating the decade’s foreign policy. The presidential speeches of the presidents selected for the study directly relate to foreign policy concerns or invoke foreign policy in non-related speeches. The majority of speeches were selected because of ease in access, meaning that there are limits

to this work’s understanding of Republican foreign policy rhetoric. The main body of speeches was yearly addresses to Congress and campaign speeches. In addition to this evidence, this study also utilized the Foreign Relations of the United States document collection because it charted the secretary of state’s correspondence on foreign policy matters with the president and numerous other figures involved in American diplomacy. The evidence also includes several separate addresses by the presidents and secretaries of state to display the expansive nature of their rhetoric.

The dominant Republican foreign policy ideology was conservative internationalism. Thomas Knock defined its basic tenets in his To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order as support for the primacy of international law in settling disputes between nations with criteria to distinguish between justiciable (questions relating to international law and treaty obligations) and nonjusticiable (questions of national honor or vital national interest) matters.14 Conservative internationalists thus focused on soft power in international relations because it represented a commitment to retaining power in individual nation-states instead of ceding it to a broad international body.15 These conservative beliefs came from the opinion that individual states themselves were capable of creating a peaceful international order through the slow process of behavioral change while international organizations would only impede peace by regimenting international relations and ultimately undermining constructive discourse between nations. This process would be the only way to effectively implement a new framework for international politics, because like individuals, nations needed to be weaned off of the instinct to put their desires before those of others. The

only way to do so was through the power of law, in this case international law. The presidential administrations of the 1920s relied on these notions in foreign policy to guide their rhetorical construction and presentation.

Scholars have previously focused on 1920s American foreign policy through the lens of policy formulation rather than creating a comprehensive picture of foreign policy by including rhetoric in their analysis. The literature on the decade’s foreign policy has centered on general developments such as the League of Nations and the Permanent Court of International Justice/World Court or presented general overviews of foreign policy without any new argument beyond the traditionalist isolationist or revisionist Marxist theses on how the United States used the period to transition into a global economic power.\(^\text{16}\) This thesis seeks to expand the understanding of foreign policy during the Republican Ascendancy by addressing the role of rhetoric in foreign policy arguments in this pivotal moment for the United States in international affairs. The creation of foreign policy arguments through rhetoric is important because it has the potential to influence future conceptions of America’s position in the world. The foreign policy debate of the early 1920s has had a lasting influence on American perceptions of responsible foreign policies. The best example would be the use of the term “isolationism.” Several traditionalist historians critiqued the inaction of the three Republican presidencies in part by arguing that the foreign policy crises of the 1930s and world war during the 1940s could have been stopped through more concerted effort by the

United States.\textsuperscript{17} The term is became a political slur in foreign policy discussions to attack or undermine proponents of reorienting American foreign policy away from its activist role in the world rather than encouraging constructive dialogue. The opposition to such policies is based in the belief that it implies the rejection of assertive American power that is perceived as necessary for stability in international relations. The American desire for international stability has not changed since the 1920s, only the conception of how to achieve stability and the language used by politicians and pundits in the construction of arguments for and against current policy.

Each Republican administration adhered to conservative internationalist ideas in its rhetoric but with different emphasis on how to use the rhetoric effectively to present American interests for the national public and the international community. The common themes present in their discussion of American foreign policy were disarmament and peace diplomacy. These themes represent the main division of evidence in the thesis because they allowed the Republican administrations to construct rhetoric arguing for limited international involvement based on conservative soft power principles that appealed to liberals and conservatives. Disarmament often referred to reducing the size of national armaments as a way to decrease the potential for war when disputes between nations occurred rather than the complete elimination of such armaments, which would prevent national self-defense.\textsuperscript{18} The term peace diplomacy refers to the efforts of conservatives to establish an alternative peacekeeping

\textsuperscript{17} George Kennan, \textit{American Diplomacy} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 78-79; Adler, \textit{The Uncertain Giant}, 20; Ellis, \textit{Republican Foreign Policy 1921-1933}, 62.

structure in the form of international law. Conservatives perceived this kind of international system as more flexible and responsive to the concerns of nations by relying on informal force primarily through public opinion rather than a bureaucratic organization like the League of Nations. The Permanent Court of International Justice/World Court represented the main institutional goal of this line of thought but will not be discussed in depth. Republican foreign policy rhetoric often combined these two themes because the methods of achieving each were the same, relying on specific international agreements between willing partners to influence the international system. This thesis argues that they represent the best method to categorize conservative foreign policy objectives in the decade.

Each chapter will discuss a specific Republican administration’s use of conservative internationalist foreign policy rhetoric through the identified discourses. The chronological structure also allows for the analysis of any potential changes or similarities in the construction of foreign policy rhetoric between individuals and administrations. The first chapter covers the presidency of Warren Harding and the early years of Charles Evans Hughes’s term as secretary of state. The administration’s rhetoric on foreign policy blended pragmatism and idealism in its approach to American involvement with the rest of the world, resulting in the Washington Naval Conference, the most successful American initiative of the decade. Harding’s and Hughes’s successors tried to copy or modify the conservative internationalist rhetoric for how they intended to construct American foreign policy discourse.

The second chapter spans the presidency of Calvin Coolidge, the end of Hughes’s tenure, and Frank Kellogg’s appointment as secretary of state. The New Englander brought a moral undertone to the Republican conservative internationalist rhetoric with his ascension to

the White House. This did not directly relate to any foreign policy initiatives until the end of his elected term because he did not express any interest in foreign affairs. Coolidge’s moral construction of foreign policy did not diverge from his predecessor’s pragmatic vision for American participation. The maintenance of the status quo aligned with his disinterest in foreign affairs. Coolidge’s long term in office worked to his disadvantage in maintaining a limited foreign policy status quo. The consistency and longevity of his moral rhetoric eventually weakened its effectiveness, which forced him into rash action in foreign policy. He experienced no clear foreign policy success before his final year in office.

The third and final chapter will focus on Herbert Hoover’s early foreign policy in conjunction with his secretary of state, Henry L. Stimson. Hoover focused on revitalizing American foreign policy after the failures of Coolidge and Kellogg to effectively convey conservative principles. His rhetoric focused on pragmatism but included some moral components. This came from his belief in the importance of economic factors in foreign policy, which represented his main contribution to conservative internationalist rhetoric throughout the decade. Stimson often echoed similar conservative points in his rhetoric. With the onset of the Great Depression, Hoover’s rhetoric moved away from foreign policy discourse to protecting the American economy, signaling the end of the conservative internationalist project.

Although the period of the Republican Ascendancy failed to convert its foreign policy intentions for the 1920s into reality beyond a few short term agreements, the way the Republicans constructed their argument provides an important insight into how the United States viewed itself in relation to the world. Most scholars only focus on Wilson’s contribution to American foreign policy and conceptualize the present framework of active
involvement in foreign affairs as “Wilsonian.” The Republican administrations did not object to American participation in the international order but attached several caveats to that participation. The use of rhetoric to analyze their construction of a new American foreign policy to align with domestic concerns about international participation addresses an important role for the president and the secretary of state with the American public. Their main challenge as public officials was to convey their ideas about how the United States should act in international affairs in a persuasive manner to gain popular support without alienating other nations. The successes and failures of the Republican administrations in crafting a balanced foreign policy approach during the 1920s are important because they address the complex construction of rhetoric with the purpose of gaining domestic and international support for their argument.

The continuous debate in American foreign policy between the Democratic President Barack Obama and Republican senators provides part of the significance for this study by highlighting competing narratives about what is “true” American foreign policy. The president has the ability to actively use foreign policy rhetoric to project his vision for the role of the nation and its power in the international system, which has only expanded since the beginning of the Cold War and the creation of the National Security Agency in 1952 required more proactive policy. The Senate, meanwhile, attempts to maintain its procedural constitutional war powers role, such as declaring war, by passing legislation like the 1973 War Powers Resolution to check the all-embracing reach of the Oval Office. These competing foreign policy narratives place the president in a similar situation to Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. The Republican Ascendancy’s argument for limited American foreign policy mirrors the desire

of Obama and Republican Senator Rand Paul to balance American assertiveness and military might with moral power. The lasting impact of the Obama administration’s attempted reprioritization of American foreign policy is impossible to determine at present but the 1920s Republican presidencies do present a similar arc in their rhetorical maneuvering between isolationism and internationalism.
CHAPTER 1
CREATING AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY: CONSERVATIVE INTERNATIONALIST RHETORIC IN THE HARDING ADMINISTRATION

Introduction

The United States declaration of war on Germany on April 17, 1917, appeared to signal the end of debates between conservatives and progressives about how to effectively utilize American power on the global stage. President Woodrow Wilson’s proclamation to make the world “safe for democracy” showed his transition away from the liberal pacifism that got him reelected not six months earlier to a more active and engaged effort to change the world. For progressive internationalists, the declaration of war and Wilson’s aim to defend democracy against authoritarianism represented the symbiotic relationship of domestic and international politics, as the only way to preserve peace would be to change how the enemy states like Germany understood politics so as to change their view of world affairs.¹ The triumph of progressive internationalism in the lead up to Versailles encouraged the creation of a supranational organization like the League of Nations to provide a forum for nation-states to keep the peace through debate and discussion with force as a deterrent to punish rebellious members. For conservatives, American involvement in winning World War I weakened their short term position within the American political discourse.

By 1919 the situation had drastically changed. The nation’s brief participation in World War I left a strong mark on the public consciousness. The idealism behind Wilson’s

¹ Thomas Knock, To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 50.
pledge to fight for democracy and showcase American moral power originally rallied public support behind American involvement in the war, but the death and destruction reported at home and experienced by the men who fought sowed doubt about whether the United States should try to change the world directly. The negotiations at Versailles further fanned the flames of division when Wilson failed to include any significant Republicans in his delegation. Republicans then mobilized in opposition to Wilson’s broad foreign policy goals and looked for a coherent framework to react to it, through conservative internationalism.

This chapter addresses the beginnings of the Republican conception of the proper role for the United States in world affairs after the troubled experience of Wilsonian internationalism. To recreate this viewpoint, documents and speeches from the period will be examined in order to understand the political language used by Republican policymakers, primarily the president, secretary of state, and secretary of commerce, to define their conceptions of American strategic interests for the postwar world. The overarching framework for this analysis will be “conservative internationalism,” previously defined in the introduction, which proposed the creation of limited legal structures to address international concerns through moral action based on soft power cooperation rather than on mandatory participation in hard power structures like the League of Nations. This framework provides the basis for how Republicans in the Harding administration specifically used their language in domestic debates and internal discussions of foreign policy to advance support for international law and enforcement through soft power methods rather than hard power use of force.

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The consistency of the Republican officials’ rhetoric reveals a high level of coherence within the administration on foreign policy. Warren Harding, as the professional politician, distilled the broad concepts behind conservative internationalism into easily understood bites for public consumption on the issues of disarmament and peace diplomacy that dominated his short presidency. The two primary figures in developing Harding’s conservative internationalist foreign policy rhetoric were Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes and Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover. The two were very much alike in their temperament for government office and building a viable international framework on conservative internationalist principles. As a former lawyer, Hughes supported adherence to international law as a means to support order. Herbert Hoover, a former executive and former head of the Food Administration, focused on how to use economic power as a tool of soft power to enforce international law. The significance of conservative internationalism in Republican foreign policy rhetoric developed over time during the brief Harding administration from a reaction to Wilsonianism into the dominant foreign policy framework of the decade. Harding, Hoover, and Hughes were central to how the conservative internationalist ideas became part of Republican rhetoric in the 1920s.

**Pre-1920 Foreign Policy Rhetoric**

American involvement in World War I forced conservatives to address ideas of how to sustain international order, and this concept became an important part of their rhetoric in the immediate postwar political climate. One of the conservative leaders on foreign policy was Senator Warren Harding of Ohio. As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee during World War I, Harding was aware of the issues involved in American participation in the postwar order and conveyed his developing stance of the main foreign policy issues like the League of Nations in his rhetoric. He recognized the issue of balancing American priorities
within an international framework like the League of Nations and addressed it through his rhetoric on several fronts. In his September 1919 Safeguarding America speech, he highlighted the weakness of the current organization on disarmament by addressing the flaws of the League Covenant: “The member states decide for themselves the necessary size of their armed forces . . . but any two powers in concerted action may reject the entire program.”

This was the main point of his argument. To conservatives like Harding, the ability of only two nations to defy the combined might of the world represented the height of insanity given the implied power of international law through treaty. The ineffectiveness of the League could then result in the repetition of the pre-World War I arms buildup that much of the public viewed as the cause of the war. While not directly signaling support for a disarmament program, this speech does show that Harding was aware of the public mood before the 1920 presidential election.

Harding recognized that the popular will for peace extended beyond party lines and sought to capitalize on it. “In the popular thought was the wish to abolish war and promote peace and make justice supreme, and it was believed that the world, war wearied and drenched with the blood of millions of devoted nationalists, would be ready for the committal.” In the aftermath of World War I and the bitter debate in the Senate about America’s commitment to the Wilsonian ideal of collective security, Americans recognized that their nation could no longer remain on the fringes of international politics, but they were unsure about what level of commitment would be appropriate for the nation that traditionally remained neutral in world affairs.

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4 Harding, Safeguarding America, 2.
Harding introduced conservative internationalist concepts into the larger American political discourse through his role as a Republican senator. Presenting his argument from the perspective of “an American who is jealous of the Republic’s nationality and fears the paralysis in that internationality that is the League’s loftiest aim,” Harding began his use of the idea of a larger role for international law by arguing, “If one believes in surrendering nationality, if one prefers world citizenship to American citizenship, which I delight to boast, the covenant is ideal. But it ends democracy instead of promoting it.” Harding presented the distinction between state sovereignty and League membership in stark terms, especially by implying that any future league endeavors would result in “paralysis” rather than definitive political results. In Harding’s conservative rhetoric, membership inhibited American action in all ways rather than facilitating it. With such statements Harding tapped into the primary conservative fear, that the United States would lose its hard won independence to the bureaucratic nightmare of an international organization because there would be no checks on its power. With such rationale this statement provides implicit support for the primacy of international law in foreign relations that conservatives supported because it could be checked through agreements and future court decisions rather than being inflexible, like a charter.

As a senator, Harding’s argument for the supremacy of international law did not contradict his opposition to the League of Nations. He admitted that “The establishment of an agency for the revelation of the moral judgment of the world can never be amiss . . . But it does not require a supergovernment to effect them, nor the surrender of nationality and independence of action to sanction them.” The League, he went on, “means international

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5 Harding, Safeguarding America, 2, 14-15.
6 Harding, Safeguarding America, 15.
autocracy for all who accept it without specific reservations.” Conservatives like Harding argued instead for increased use of international law because they believed moral power could only come from the law while progressives viewed morality from more abstract notions based on the perception of America as God’s chosen nation; in the struggle between good and evil, they argued, the United States had to be on the side of righteousness. Harding’s statement of opposition signified that he approved of alternative ways to ensure the international stability of the postwar era, but to the uneducated it would appear that he at least supported the League concept in broad terms. This speech should be seen as the moment when Harding rose to presidential aspiration because his rhetoric gave the perception of being both for and against the League of Nations, while hinting at a true conservative basis in ideology.

The reservoir of conservative internationalist ideas stretched beyond the official Republican Party and benefited the resulting foreign policy rhetoric by giving it a complex view of how the United States could profitably engage with the international community. Another public figure arguing for international disarmament with similar conservative rhetorical points at the time was Herbert Hoover, head of Wilson’s Food Administration. He provided an element of economic rationale to soft power discussions of American policy by arguing that the “expenditure of American capital, whether represented by goods or gold in the maintenance of unbalanced budgets or the support of armies, is destructive use of capital.” In his memoirs he recalled his opinions in the League debate, with an October 1919 address having the overall argument of the League as “an experiment in the concept of collective action against aggressions which should be tried out” despite his admission that the

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7 Harding, Safeguarding America, 6.
organization was “far indeed from perfect.” Like Harding, Hoover showed the ability to craft conservative ideas to obtain broad public appeal because conservative internationalist ideas mimicked the language of pro-League supporters with only a hint at its opposition to the principles behind the organization.

Hoover’s conservatism developed before his time in government and his approach to conservative internationalism relied primarily on integrating the use of economic power into the discussion of how to influence world events. His experiences as a mining executive and head of a government relief organization allowed him to create a more middle road in pursuing American interests. He presented the main conservative argument against the League within their internationalist framework in a letter to Wilson dated April 11, 1919, claiming that the organization would only be a restatement of traditional power politics with the potential to undermine the nation-state itself. He and other conservatives feared that American membership would result in a loss of national initiative in foreign affairs. Rather than leave the point alone, Hoover expanded upon it saying that “If we continue to sit in enforcement of this peace, we will be, in effect, participating in an armed alliance in Europe, where every change in the political wind will affect the actions of these commissions.” The danger of the League for conservatives like Hoover was that it “will become simply a few neutrals gyrating around the armed alliance” rather than an organization for peace without any level of cooperation required. Such a course was anathema for conservatives, who insisted that the United States must be able to act in support of its own interests in international affairs.

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10 Hoover, Memoirs, 10-11.
13 Hoover letter April 11, 1919.
rather than being constrained and potentially following policy counter to those interests.\textsuperscript{14} Full membership in the League, they worried, would put United States national policy under the control of the organization.

Hoover also addressed another important conservative argument against American dominance in a League-based system: that the nation did not have the experience to lead the international community. This point was a counter to the progressive argument that the United States had the power to dictate to the world its course of action with the decline and discredited notion of great power politics through the devastation of World War I. Hoover stated, “I have no doubt that if we could undertake to police the world and had the wisdom of statesmanship to see its gradual social evolution we would be making a great contribution to civilization; but I am certain that the American people are not prepared for any such measure and I am also sure that if we remain in Europe . . . we should be forced into this storm of repression . . . with other people that would make our independence of action wholly impossible.”\textsuperscript{15} Conservatives like Hoover worried that if the United States committed itself to the League and its strict view of peace without consistent broad popular support the organization would force “us into violations of our every instinct and into situations that our own people will never stand” because “the American people are not prepared for any such a measure.”\textsuperscript{16} The “measure” Hoover referred to was the increased involvement in world affairs that would come with League membership. The fear was that the League would fail as a concept and then lead the American people to oppose any future involvement because of this bad experience.

\textsuperscript{14} Knock, To End All Wars, 58.
\textsuperscript{15} Hoover letter April 11, 1919.
\textsuperscript{16} Hoover letter April 11, 1919.
Charles Evans Hughes, a lawyer by trade, had previously been involved in New York politics as a member of the Republican Party. He served as the governor of New York and an associate justice of the Supreme Court, highlighting his knowledge of law and effort to implement it in legislation. He also served as the Republican nominee for the presidency in 1916 against Wilson in a losing effort in part because of his inconsistent statements and a poor media campaign. A strong assertion of this position can be seen in his June 1920 address to the Harvard Law School Association, in which he asserted that:

Autocracy may not need lawyers; democracy cannot live without them, for the life-breath of democracy is law, the will of the people expressed in those understandings and adjustments which a free people may arrive at in order to secure individual opportunity and common welfare, implying the right of the individual at all times to invoke principle and precedent as against arbitrariness an uncontrollable discretion.

This rationale encapsulated the conservative internationalist perspective on the use of international law. The law was “the will of the people,” as Hughes said, because it adapted and changed with the times, rather than becoming stagnant as the result of traditional power politics. The general foreign policy failure in resolving the 1914 July Crisis, for conservatives like Hughes, stemmed from the great powers’ inability to adapt existing institutions to the political reality. The only way to ensure consistent gains for peace in the international system was to develop a flexible response, through international law, to any disturbances that emerged because of the competition between nations.

1920 Presidential Election Campaign Rhetoric

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Harding’s conservative internationalist framework on foreign policy rhetoric gave him an advantage in the open 1920 Republican presidential primary. Republican chances of taking the White House were high with Wilson’s fall from the grace in American public opinion after his bitter debate with the Senate over the Treaty of Versailles and economic fluctuations from military demobilization efforts.\textsuperscript{20} The party needed to take advantage of this political moment but lacked a clear standard bearer with the death of Theodore Roosevelt on January 6, 1919. There were several strong candidates for the nomination, General Leonard Wood, Illinois Governor Frank Lowden, and California Senator Hiram Johnson in addition to Harding and many minor figures including Calvin Coolidge.\textsuperscript{21} Even Herbert Hoover, despite being perceived as having uncertain political loyalties given his service under Wilson in the Food Administration, debated the merits of a campaign in the California primary.\textsuperscript{22} At the Republican convention in Chicago, Harding did not have the most direct support, but he had generated an “enormous reservoir of goodwill among the delegates . . . in the preceding months” that allowed him to gain the party’s nomination.\textsuperscript{23}

Before selecting Harding as their candidate, Republicans issued the party’s platform, which included strong conservative internationalist language. In an attempt to reorient American foreign policy away from direct engagement in international crises, the party lamented that as a result of Wilson’s failed initiatives and policies, “our motives are suspected, our moral influence impaired, and our Government stands discredited and friendless among

\textsuperscript{21} Trani and Wilson, \textit{The Presidency of Warren Harding}, 21.
\textsuperscript{23} Trani and Wilson, \textit{The Presidency of Warren Harding}, 22.
the nations of the world” when the United States should be the moral example for the world.\(^{24}\)

The overall desire presented with this basis for Republican opposition to Wilsonianism centered on the perception that because of its involvement in World War I, the United States had lost its moral position in the world and that this standing had to be restored to ensure a peaceful future.

Further discussion about Republican foreign policy plans centered on conservative internationalist ideas of international law. The Republican intent was to present “a clear understanding of and a firm adherence to our own rights and unfailing respect for the rights of others” in international affairs.\(^{25}\) The foreign policy program focused on the concepts of respect, rights, and justice as crucial for American involvement in the new international order. The platform included language stressing the “scrupulous observance of our international engagements” as important elements “to our own honor and self-respect.”\(^{26}\) The nation’s ability “to develop its civilization along lines most conductive to the happiness and welfare of its people” was presented as the main factor in how it would approach international events under a Republican presidency.\(^{27}\) This viewpoint is significant because it allowed Republicans to present a clear alternative in foreign policy to the Democrats based in traditional American policy language accessible to the general public. The language of the platform centered on traditional American rhetoric arguing for “protection to the life, liberty, property and all international rights of every American citizen” rather than the expansive rights and responsibility of Wilsonianism represented as membership in the League of Nations.\(^{28}\)

Conservative internationalism presents the best expression of Republican policy objectives to

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\(^{25}\) 1920 Republican Party Platform.

\(^{26}\) 1920 Republican Party Platform.

\(^{27}\) 1920 Republican Party Platform.

\(^{28}\) 1920 Republican Party Platform.
fit within the traditional limits espoused by Republicans for American foreign policy. The principles of international law and voluntary cooperation in international agreements were the basic outline presented for their ideal for an international organization around “the rule of public right by development of law and the decision of impartial courts.” The proposed policy, while vague, presented a clear choice to counter the argument that the existence of the League of Nation alone was reason to support it. Republicans believed they could create a better international organization without the concerns of overreach the League represented for government power by applying their version of American values to international politics.

Harding’s acceptance speech at the Republican convention built on these platform concepts and explained how conservative internationalism represented the best hope for American involvement in the new international order. The early point he made in support of opposition to the League of Nations concept focused on being “conscious of our solemn oaths and mindful of our constitutional obligations” because the organization represented a threat that only stopped by government involvement. For conservatives like Harding, the national government held specific foreign policy responsibilities legally defined within the Constitution. The League concept represented an expansion of unchecked government power because it lacked any mechanisms on equal level with its authority in international politics, though a world court could be one. As a conservative alternative to the collective security of the League, Harding proposed a “committal for an association of nations, co-operating in sublime accord, to attain and preserve peace through justice rather than force, determined to add to security through international law” to prevent the “surrender of rights to a world council

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29 1920 Republican Party Platform.
Harding also presented other conservative arguments against the League. The main argument for this kind of looser international organization derived from the support of the nation-state as the central unit in international politics. Wilson’s League threatened to remove the importance of the nation-state and with it undermine the principles of national sovereignty important to international law. Conservative internationalists supported the nation-state for its importance in independence for people and allowing the system to change in a gradual or incremental manner. The adaptation of the international system to a more equal footing through international law for all states in diplomacy represented a main goal for conservative internationalists.

After Harding became the Republican presidential nominee, his rhetoric on conservative internationalism highlighted the significance of cooperation and international law in the American effort to maintain order in the postwar world. One of the main issues to confront was military armaments. Harding focused on disarmament because he considered it the easiest way to approach efforts at international cooperation. The issue held the best opportunity for the United States to take the lead in international negotiations through combining a moral component to it as he sought to bridge conservative intellectual pragmatism with the traditional view of the United States as an example to the world. His acceptance speech signaled this change by referring to the increased support for disarmament as “an insistent voice for the largely reduced armaments throughout the world, with attending reduction of burdens peace-loving humanity.” Harding restated this point later in his inaugural address, arguing that the United States was ready, among other things, “to recommend a way to approximate disarmament and relieve the collective burden of military

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32 Harding, 1920 Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech, 23.
and naval establishments” for the world. The hope of such agreements would be to move international politics away from military force to soft power mechanisms like international law.

Conservative internationalism also had a moral component for Harding. Governments, in his reasoning, were to serve the will of their people and if the people wanted disarmament, their government should give it to them, regardless of political division, because it would create a more peaceful world. Whether Harding subscribed to this framework for American politics is hard to tell. Later in the speech, when he outlined the plan for his administration, he emphasized ideas of businesslike management of the government, increasing the protective tariff, and a strong merchant marine with “a navy ample to protect it, and able to assure us dependable defense” in addition to a small army “with a mindfulness for preparedness which will avoid the unutterable cost of our previous neglect.” It could be a call for disarmament by mentioning a strong merchant marine beforehand and recognizing that the United States did not have to have a large military because of its separation from the other great powers by two oceans or that the nation should step up in military power to its standing in international politics. In this statement Harding showcased understanding of conservative internationalist thought by balancing the necessity of military power with intent to reduce it as a means of fostering international cooperation through soft power methods.

During the Republican primary campaign Harding relied upon conservative internationalist rhetoric to position himself as a compromise candidate on foreign policy to the American public. During the campaign he said, “No nations are isolated any longer” in the

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34 Harding, 1920 Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech, 33.
post-World War I era.\textsuperscript{35} The Republican recognition that American involvement in international affairs was necessary to maintain the new status quo represented part of the reasoning why conservative internationalism gained strength within their party. Conservative internationalists wanted America involved in international politics because they believed the nation could shape international institutions toward codification of international law and other means of soft power enforcement. They also continued to fear “entangling alliances” and to respect American tradition. These contradictory impulses led Republicans to support limited participation in great power negotiations under the banner of conservative internationalism because it provided a framework to reconcile involvement with neutrality.

Harding stressed respect for American traditions in his candidacy. His acceptance speech reflected the argument by declaring that the will of the United States was one of “We want to help; we mean to help; but we hold to our own interpretation of American conscience as the very soul of our nationality.”\textsuperscript{36} This is presented in contrast to the concept of “internationality” used to refer to the loss of national independence. In reference to his concerns about the League of Nations during a speech to a Wayne County, Ohio, delegation, Harding warned that “when nationality is surrendered to internationality, little else matters, and all appeal is vain.”\textsuperscript{37} The idea of “nationality” was a common point in Harding’s rhetoric during the presidential campaign and important for conservative internationalism. He provided no solid definition for the term, but “nationality” in his context referred to ideas of national sovereignty and independence. In a speech delivered on August 28, Harding stressed the importance of a “‘guaranty of nationality’” for the United States to involve itself in any

\textsuperscript{36} Harding, Speech of Acceptance of the Republican Party’s Nomination, 24.
\textsuperscript{37} Warren Harding, A Speech by Senator Harding to Delegation from Wayne County, Ohio delivered at Marion, OH August 4, 1920 (New York: Republican National Committee, 1920), 45.
international organization. This point reaffirmed the centrality of the nation-state in international politics within conservative internationalist thought because of its role in international law.

Harding’s true opinion on disarmament in his rhetoric related to the contrast between the use of hard and soft power by the federal government. When addressing a delegation from Wyandotte County, Ohio, Harding criticized the increase in national defense expenses, “totaled at $1,748,358,604.80,” as necessitating a “cut in two, despite the unyielding attitude of the secretaries of war and navy.” When seen in context with his previous point that the nation was “burdened to the breaking point with public dues” because of its involvement in the war, a more complete picture came into focus. For Harding, American economic power was the nation’s true equalizing force in international affairs, and a reduction of military projects would increase the power America could wield on the international stage.

One of Harding’s pre-election speeches included a brief statement expressing support for expanding the use of international law. The best institution to defend international peace would be an international court that utilized “definite principles of law administered without passion or prejudice” for all nations within an international community “animated by considerations of right and justice, instead of might and self-interest” to maintain peace and stability. The main principle of international law for conservative internationalists was that “the decision of such a court or the recommendations of such a conference [to create an international court] could be accepted without sacrificing on our part or asking any other

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40 Harding, Speech to Wyandotte Co., Ohio Delegation, 72.
41 Harding, Speech to Delegation of Indiana Citizens, 92-93.
power to sacrifice one iota of its nationality.” In part of his argument against the League of Nations, he referred to “simple but profound” differences between his proposed court system and the reality of the League. These uses of conservative internationalist ideas combined divergent threads of traditional independence in policy and responsibility in promoting international order.

Harding’s election in 1920 represented the largest victory in a presidential contest in the nation’s history at that time. He defeated fellow Ohioan Governor James Cox, carrying thirty-seven states and 60.2 percent of the total popular vote. The overwhelming Republican victory showed a strong popular shift away from the progressive ideals Wilson and the Democrats represented on domestic and foreign affairs. Some scholars have viewed it as a referendum on American participation in the League, but that ignores the attention Harding gave to foreign policy in his campaign. With a new administration, the United States set off on a course of independent foreign policy based on international law and soft power.

1921-1923 The Harding Administration’s Foreign Policy

In his inaugural address, Harding repeated many of his campaign ideas. He did not reject a new role of the United States on the world stage but sought to quantify it, which meant that the nation was “ready to associate [itself] with the nations of the world, great and small for counsel; to seek expressed views of world opinion” rather than remain separate. His overall plan continued to stress American independence of action in foreign affairs with a desire for cooperation with other nations in drafting agreements, both central to conservative

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42 Harding, Speech to Delegation of Indiana Citizens, 93-94.
43 Harding, Speech to Delegation of Indiana Citizens, 92.
45 L. Ethan Ellis, Republican Foreign Policy, 1921-1933 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1968), 35.
46 Harding, Inaugural Address March 4, 1921.
internationalist principles of international law and soft power as tools in international politics. With the election won, Harding set to the task of filling his cabinet and selecting men who shared his vision of a cooperative world order that retained the United States as a key influence.

For government appointments, Harding sought to surround himself with men of talent, especially in foreign relations. The choices of Herbert Hoover and Charles Evans Hughes stand out among the mass of appointments because of their strong conservative backgrounds and their importance to future American foreign policy. Both of these choices were instrumental in implementing Harding’s middle way of conservative internationalism for American foreign policy. These selections helped balance the goals of non-entanglement with the pragmatic requirements of being a great power that Harding recognized as essential in retaining American influence in the decade after World War I. Within a conservative internationalist framework, the decisions made by each appointee fit together to form a clear picture of how the Republicans sought to implement their foreign policy in several avenues of influence.

Herbert Hoover did not have the credentials of a typical Republican appointee. A businessman, he served the Wilson administration as head of the Food Administration and spent most of 1919 in Europe as head of the American Relief Administration working to end the food shortages caused by the war. He received the nomination for secretary of commerce instead of secretary of state as Harding intended because his views on the League were seen as too far out of step with dominant Republican opinion, though both he and Hughes, the eventual secretary of state, both supported American membership in the organization with

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reservations. Hoover’s work in the improving the efficiency of the Commerce Department gave him an avenue to influence American foreign policy through economic channels, attempting to control foreign loans by American companies while clashing on occasion with Hughes and the State Department. Hoover also believed that “the real cure for all depression is courage and applied intelligence and the return to primary virtues of hard, conscientious toil, and economy in living” with international law as one way to implement those changes. He supported trade-based solutions to reestablish political relations with Europe on a more sound footing.

The main element of conservative internationalism that Hoover utilized was the idea of soft power in international affairs. The United States represented only one of many great powers in the international economy and should use its newfound economic power to influence other nations. He recognized that the United States “shifted from a debtor nation to a creditor nation” with a strong growth in economic capacity. This idea was consistent with Harding’s argument to the European nations that the Republicans were only proposing a new form of internationalism not a repudiation of it. Europe was still an economic threat to American business because the destruction of World War I led to United States farmers subsidizing European food production. In Hoover’s conservative view, European economic recovery was bound to be positive by reducing production costs through “better organized industry” from wartime controls and “lower standards of living” because of American food

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52 Hoover, “Problems of Trade Readjustment,” 294.
supplementing their production. The economic argument of conservative internationalism provided the main support for the rhetoric that contrary to progressive views the United States was not the dominant hegemonic power, despite its new international economic position. Without addressing American economic concerns, conservatives feared the United States would be swamped by foreign exports and lose the economic leverage in foreign markets it had cultivated during the war.

Harding and Hoover were in agreement that American economic power should be the basis for exerting influence in foreign policy for conservative internationalist objectives. Both saw American money as key to stabilizing Europe and the postwar international economy and the dangers of reopening trade with Europe. Hoover viewed European stability as the important challenge for soft power elements of American foreign policy because “No tariffs, no embargoes, no navies, no armies, can ever defend us from these invasions” from foreign economic power because the American “standard of living greatly depends upon our imports, and . . . our exports are the great balance wheel of our production.” Hoover also voiced the conservative fear that if America were to lose its positive balance of trade, the nation would lose its independence, but also the important international market to continue the domestic prosperity that helped Harding get elected.

The increased use of soft power through economics in international relations was important for conservative internationalism because as an ideology it supported limited international engagement. The action recommended by Hoover to address the potential imbalance relied upon the increased government power developed during the war to “remove as quickly as possible those unnecessary domestic burdens upon commerce,” something most

53 Hoover, “Problems of Trade Readjustment,” 295.
54 Hoover, “Problems of Trade Readjustment,” 294.
conservatives opposed as dangerous.\textsuperscript{55} Hoover’s practical experiences as a government department leader and business executive helped to explain his minor deviation from true conservatism. His experiences imbued him with the values of altruism, social responsibility, and self-interest, which tied into the conservative viewpoint of how to lead the United States to success through “ordered liberty” in compromise between the individual and society.\textsuperscript{56} His focus on stimulating business and worker welfare to provide equal economic opportunity is a classic conservative ideal because it tied everyone to the capitalist system.\textsuperscript{57}

Hoover wanted the United States to be able to achieve economic self-sufficiency and become an example for the world of how capitalism and democracy should work in international politics through conservative internationalism. This was one of Harding’s goals as well.\textsuperscript{58} The main challenge for the American economy in Hoover’s mind was to adjust in its shift from “a debtor nation to a creditor nation” while supplementing the European economy, which became “our serious competitor in the marketing of our manufactured goods.”\textsuperscript{59} The primary argument for the United States not being the dominant power of the postwar period was based on the economic power of Europe being subsidized by American farmers. In this case, European stability threatened America’s economic gains made during World War I in the international market and thus its ability to use soft power to influence other nation-states.

The issue of what defined stability through conservative internationalism varied within the Harding administration, and how support for international law and soft power reflected on international events. Hughes expressed “deep concern upon the maintenance of large military

\textsuperscript{55} Hoover, “Problems of Trade Readjustment,” 296.
\textsuperscript{56} Hoff Wilson, \textit{Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive}, 7, 37.
\textsuperscript{57} Brandes, \textit{Herbert Hoover and Economic Diplomacy}, xi.
\textsuperscript{58} Murray, \textit{The Harding Era}, 327.
\textsuperscript{59} Hoover, “Problems of Trade Readjustment,” 294.
establishments by people already impoverished by the Great War.” He highlighted the American experience with demobilization as an example for how the world could achieve postwar economic prosperity, ignoring the physical devastation the belligerent nations experienced that supported the use of soft power Hoover advocated despite their rivalry within the cabinet.

The main role for Charles Evans Hughes as secretary of state was to support the conception of international law in American policy as another means for the United States to retain its new position among the great powers. Conservative internationalism provided a template in foreign policy to construct programs around the preservation of national interest while supporting the development of international law to resolve issues in international politics.

The traditional argument behind Harding’s selection of Hughes to serve as secretary of state is that the president chose him because of his intelligence, integrity, and political availability. The rationale for his selection in reality came more from ideological similarities on how the United States should use its new position in the world. This explains why, despite Harding’s rhetoric on foreign policy and the precedent of extensive presidential involvement in the workings of foreign policy, Hughes received little oversight in his management of the State Department during his term in office. Why would Harding, who as a nominee stressed the importance of foreign policy to him and his future administration, decide to chose a lawyer

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62 Perkins, Charles Evans Hughes, 95.
like Hughes who brought a narrow, factual, and legalistic view of diplomacy.\textsuperscript{63} On the general principle of how to construct the new American paradigm in foreign policy, the two men shared the ideology of conservative internationalism, primarily in their support of international law over collective security.

Charles Evans Hughes also considered morality important, believing that, based on his experience, “international relations proceed upon the postulates of international morality” rather than raw power or politics.\textsuperscript{64} As secretary of state, Hughes argued that the only way to change this perception was through “trust in common agreement behind force” because trust was only possible with agreement.\textsuperscript{65} Without that belief, American commitments meant nothing to Hughes. He applied this principle in his execution of duties as secretary of state.

He also brought a unique blend of conservative ideology, focused on improving behavior and changing human nature, to the position. He believed that war represented not only “the expression of the insistent human will, inflexible in its purpose” but also “self-help, and the right to make war has been recognized as the corollary of independence.”\textsuperscript{66} His work as a lawyer led him to support the codification of international law to resolve disputes between nations. In part because of his work, Hughes viewed the role of lawyers in the international system with extreme importance. He believed that “peace and order and stability and recognition of honest rights” were the basis of international law, which the United States created in Latin America through the Pan-American Union, and any successful international

\textsuperscript{63} Chalmers, An Uncertain Tradition, 132.
\textsuperscript{64} Charles Evans Hughes, “Some Aspects of the Work of the State Department,” The American Journal of International Law Vol. 16 No. 3 (July 1922): 356.
\textsuperscript{65} Charles Evans Hughes, “The Pathway of Peace: Address delivered before the Canadian Bar Association at Montreal September 4, 1923,” in The Pathway of Peace: Representative Addresses Delivered during his term as Secretary of State (1921-1925) (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925), 7.
\textsuperscript{66} Hughes, “The Pathway of Peace,” in The Pathway of Peace, 4-5.
He personally “advocated the judicial settlement of all international disputes . . . and favored the development of institutions for that purpose” before and during his time as secretary of state because the “alternative to friendly settlement is resort to coercion.” These statements revealed how conservative internationalism was central to Hughes’s work on American foreign policy.

The United States convened the 1921-22 Washington Conference to address some of the economic issues Britain experienced in its slide from leading great power and to stabilize the role of the nation in the postwar international order following the Senate’s rejection of the Treaty of Versailles. It also represented the first major international policy initiative of the Harding administration and the nation. At the time, Britain also considered its own international conference to address Far East political questions. As secretary of state, Hughes made sure to address each concern in the invitation to the other powers in addition to America’s promotion of economic settlements to restore normal trade activity in the Pacific region. This represents an attempt to combine the use of soft power and international law through “effective recognition of [the] open-door policy of equal commercial opportunity” being used to find “expression in a practical effort to remove the cause of misunderstanding” in international politics. The primary goal of the conference for Hughes centered on naval limitation to show the effectiveness of the conservative internationalist foreign policy agenda in practice. The Washington Conference achieved this goal but only in the short term. The

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conference appeared to be the basis of a new international order centered on compromise but future attempts to expand the agreement to other aspects of military spending failed to generate the level of compromise achieved at Washington.

The Washington Conference represented Hughes’s first large-scale effort as secretary of state to show the viability of conservative internationalist ideology in creating working policy for an independent role in international affairs. The expansion of the League of Nations to four-fifths of the world’s nations undermined the Republican argument that the organization would not be a bastion of international cooperation but rather “resort to coercion,” in Hughes’s terms, to enforce peace.\textsuperscript{72} Without a solid foreign policy achievement, conservative internationalists could not argue that the League was more ineffective than American isolation. Hughes strongly supported the conference method of diplomacy as a means to achieve success through “cogent appeal to the practical judgment of our people” because the United States under Harding “wish[ed] to sit with you (European nations) at the table of international understanding and goodwill.”\textsuperscript{73} Without defined cooperative efforts a conservative internationalist order based on international law could not exist as it relied on broad support for legal institutions.

Disarmament represented the issue that Hughes believed could salvage the support of an American middle way in international affairs. He viewed disarmament as representing a “desire to end a ruinous competitive struggle in arms,” whereby nations “voluntarily agreed to reduce their fighting ships to agreed proportions” despite appearing to contradict the

\textsuperscript{73} Hughes, “Some Aspects of Our Foreign Policy,” \textit{The Pathway to Peace}, 33-34.
conservative ethos of national sovereignty.\textsuperscript{74} How did these two points coexist? In Hughes’s belief, the “only real progress to abiding peace is found in the friendly disposition of peoples and . . . facilities for maintaining peace are useful only to the extent that this friendly disposition exists and finds expression.”\textsuperscript{75} Thus, for Hughes and other conservatives, the only way to truly provide for national defense was to create a system of cooperation and settling grievances between nations based on ensuring friendly contact on a consistent basis rather than forced participation in an all-encompassing organization. This point argued for the importance of international law in international agreements because it allowed nations to connect on issues important to them in ways that ensured that their interests were heard and that they could come together to address any problems in the future.

Conservative internationalism provided the main strings of thought behind the rationale for the Washington Conference. The United States aimed to utilize non-military means to create agreements between major powers intended to preserve postwar order and encourage negotiation rather than war between nation-states when crises emerged. In the opening address, Hughes reflected this optimistic viewpoint by declaring that “The opportunity to limit armament lies within [the attendees] grasp” relying on the power of interstate cooperation to enforce agreements not based on hard power.\textsuperscript{76} The presence of the three major naval powers of Britain, Japan, and the United States along with the minor naval powers of France and Italy together under one roof presented the best chance for creating an effective agreement on disarmament that would have significant impact in international politics. Hughes later restated

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{74} Hughes, “The Pathway of Peace,” in The Pathway of Peace, 16.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{75} Hughes, “The Pathway to Peace,” in The Pathway to Peace, 17.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{76} Charles Evans Hughes, “Limitation of Naval Armament: Address delivered November 12, 1921 when Hughes assumed the duties of presiding officer at the Conference on Limitation of Armament at Washington,” in The Pathway of Peace: Representative Addresses Delivered during his terms as Secretary of State (1921-1925) (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925), 20.}
this point by saying that the conference has “the power to deal with the exigency [that] now rests with a small group of nations, represented here, who have every reason to desire peace and to promote amity,” which to him was the main purpose of the assembly.  

The overall plan for disarmament and conservative internationalism recognized different national priorities and needs at the onset rather than trying to create an agreement that would bind all parties to the same level, which was another point for voluntarism in these international agreements. The other main point of any accord was to end competition because “One program inevitably leads to another, and if competition continues, regulation becomes impossible,” resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies about the purpose of weapon stockpiles. The only way to successfully resolve the tension that led to such programs would come from direct contact between nations, which conservative internationalists believed provided a better foundation for peace than forced representation. With the League of Nations apparently reaching “the conclusion that nothing can be accomplished in this direction until the governments primarily concerned agree” on general plans for disarmament, conservatives believed that American initiative allowed the nation to engage in a productive foreign policy and achieve a symbolic victory.

The Washington Conference succeeded in its short-terms goals of drafting agreements to settle disputes in the Far East between China and Japan over the Shandong Peninsula and began the process of international armament limitation including soft power and legal mechanisms to ensure cooperation for the signatory nations. Other successes, from the American perspective, were the creation of a status quo in Pacific island fortifications between Britain, Japan, and the United States, the replacement of the Anglo-Japanese alliance with a

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four-power agreement between Britain, France, Japan, and the United States to avoid interfering in each other’s interests in the region, and enshrining the “Open Door” policy into international treaty.\textsuperscript{80} From the conservative internationalist perspective, the conference succeeded in translating their rhetoric into practice, primarily the argument that international law and other soft power mechanisms could be used to create a functioning international order. It also served as a statement to the international community that “the United States wanted to retain its freedom of action” while at the same time contributing to positive international developments.\textsuperscript{81} These successes were primarily in the short term but held the possibility of further achievements and agreements in the coming decade. No one at the time could understand that the Washington Conference would be unique because of its successes compared to the rest of the decade.

The World Court had strong American influences in its development that encouraged participation. The political division in the United States over the World Court came from conservatives support for ‘strict legal justice’ and the liberal focus on “diplomatic adjustment” understanding in international law.\textsuperscript{82} Elihu Root, the conservative elder statesman who served in the Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft administrations, participated in the 1920 Advisory Committee of Jurists that created the proposal for the court, which is significant in the historiography because it is seen as the starting point for Americans to argue the importance of membership.\textsuperscript{83} Republican politicians such as Harding and Hughes used Root’s involvement in the Court’s creation to argue that support for American membership was different from opposition to the United States joining the League of Nations, an organization

\textsuperscript{80} Buckley, \textit{The United States and the Washington Conference}, 102, 143-44, 155.  
\textsuperscript{81} Buckley, \textit{The United States and the Washington Conference}, 188.  
\textsuperscript{83} Dunne, \textit{The United States and the World Court}, 29.
viewed to be at odds with the founding principles of the nation. The World Court allowed the United States to respect its principles and those of other nations by cooperating in good faith.

Conservatives based their argument for participation in the organization on American foreign policy tradition. Hughes, being a lawyer, had the knowledge to understand the technical aspects of international law and craft the timeline of American development efforts. A full section of his address on the Permanent Court of International Justice was devoted to the question of the necessity of American membership. He argued that the “establishment of a permanent court has been American policy because we have desired this essential improvement in judicial process in international relations.”

To conservative internationalists like Hughes, the World Court represented the culmination of American efforts to institutionalize the process of arbitration in international affairs; to remain outside it would harm both American prestige and the pursuit of lasting peace.

As secretary of commerce, Hoover’s involvement in foreign affairs increased compared to previous office holders on non-economic issues even on issues like the World Court and how it related to his own goals for American foreign policy. In an address to the National League of Women Voters he reiterated the consistency argument describing it as “the handiwork of American thought and American hands” through the efforts of Root and other American figures to develop international law.

Hughes and Hoover supported the World Court because it connected their views of international law and how to institute gradual change in nation-state behavior without undermining national independence.

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Despite the League’s role in creating the Court, conservative internationalists were able to sidestep this point by arguing that the organization was minimally involved in the Court’s operation as a neutral third party with international disputes as their main concern not directly settling League disputes. Hughes viewed both the creation of the Court and the election of its judges as processes outside the League, “having a distinct legal status created by an independent organic act” outside of the organization because the measure “became effective by virtue of the signature and ratification by the signatory powers.” This rhetorical separation allowed conservative internationalists to view the Court as a way to achieve their foreign policy objective in structuring a new international order based on voluntary arbitration under international law without being tainted by the coercive force of the League. The explicit argument that the new membership of the Court would be decided by the signatory nations rather than the League represented a technical argument because almost all of the signatory nations were member states of the League as well. Despite the weak logic of separation, the creation of the World Court allowed Hughes to stress the conservative internationalist argument of the importance of international law in the tradition of American foreign policy because of its history of “promoting judicial settlement of international disputes,” including fifty-seven arbitrations since 1899.

The strength of the World Court to conservatives came from the framework centered on voluntary participation of members in its cases and rulings. This would then generate a more cooperative atmosphere among member states and result in the development of international agreements outside the bounds of the organization. The League’s failing for conservatives came

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from its forced participation of every member in pursuit of a majority agreement, regardless of national interest. To conservatives, this would only create a climate of distrust among members because it necessitated political bargaining and did not produce organic change to the international system. The Court represented the best hope for organically creating an international norm based around the principles of communal justice and voluntarism.

**Conclusion**

The overall importance of the period of 1919 to 1923 for American foreign policy is that it provided the basis for the Republican conservative internationalist ideology to develop a positive list of foreign policy objectives and achievements rather than limiting itself to a critique of Wilson’s failed efforts. The conservative internationalist ideology of Harding, Hoover, and Hughes developed from an outlier political philosophy at the start of the decade into the dominant force of American foreign policy by the time of Harding’s death.

The evidence presented shows that there is strong presence of conservative internationalist rhetoric within the Harding administration and that helped organize a successful international conference at the time. Harding actively shaped the use of conservative internationalist rhetoric from the Senate chamber to the Oval Office. Though he was not active in the creation of foreign policy, his rhetoric both on the campaign trail and in office showed a commitment to conservative ideals, as did his selection of Hughes and Hoover for key foreign policymaking positions. Both men understood that the United States could not remain isolated in world affairs and sought to control how the nation interacted with the wider world to ensure that it could prosper and remain true to its foreign policy traditions rather than trying to control situations it could not understand. Despite the perceived and documented failings of the Harding administration, its rhetoric presented a clear picture of
conservative internationalist foreign policy and led to several important disarmament initiatives throughout the decade rooted in the model that led to the Washington Conference without recognizing the context or effort behind it. Harding’s term also provided a template on how to approach foreign policy for Coolidge when he assumed the presidency for his own term in 1925.
CHAPTER 2
FOREIGN POLICY STAGNATION: COOLIDGE AND CONSERVATIVE INTERNATIONALISM

Introduction

The unexpected death of President Warren Harding in August 1923 threatened to upset broad U.S. support for conservative internationalist goals of increased participation in the international order with limited obligations within a strong legal framework. Calvin Coolidge’s ascension to the presidency limited foreign policy action but kept a firm commitment to the conservative internationalism of Harding. Traditionalist historians often characterize Coolidge’s foreign policy as “dull and unimaginative,” but it reflected the desire that the United States could maintain its independence in foreign affairs while retaining the soft power influence developed during World War I.¹ The lack of a visible grand agenda only showcased Coolidge’s willingness to follow the conservative internationalist policy Harding established to ensure the new status quo of European stability with limited American enforcement. This benefited the United States by playing to its strength in soft power influence and international law. The reality is that Coolidge’s deference in foreign policy proved problematic for the conservative internationalist framework established by Harding because it restricted the vision to what had been successful, disarmament conferences and collaboration with the Senate.

As a politician, Coolidge had a more provincial background than Harding. He previously served as a town mayor and in the state house of Massachusetts where he became the Republican Party leader before being elected lieutenant governor in 1915 and then governor in 1918. He displayed support for the rule of law through his strong response to the 1919 Boston Police Strike where he refused to back down, arguing “There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time,” even though he feared it would cost him the governorship. Very little about Coolidge was controversial, a trait that served him well after the scandals of the Harding administration came to light. His personality came in part from his belief that government was to serve the people in any capacity they required. In a January 1921 speech to the Women’s Roosevelt Memorial Association, Coolidge laid out his beliefs about the American system of government. He stated that the “underlying theory of the American form of government is the rule of the people through their representatives” and that government works best when “all [its] functions . . . are to be executed by chosen representatives, acting under constitutional restraints dictated by reason alone.” In foreign relations, he advocated for the adoption of the Golden Rule principle, asserting that the use of power must “increasingly conform to the sanctions of moral law . . . [as] the purpose directing the use of great power.” He also supported the promotion of human brotherhood, “peace with independence,” and preferred a reactive approach in foreign policy compared to the active

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conservative internationalist efforts of Harding and Hughes.\(^6\) Coolidge only supported this framework because he saw as the means to impart moral values into international relations.

As president, he preferred to focus on domestic concerns, stressing the country’s economic prosperity, and encouraged the maintenance of Harding’s conservative internationalist foreign policy. The objectives of soft power influence and a framework of international law to settle nation-state disputes were pursued nominally because most of the need to act evaporated with increased popularity. Traditionalist historians and some political scientists have viewed this as a result of Coolidge’s acceptance of the “modified isolationism” of Harding and Hughes as politically useful, creating the illusion of American participation without any commitments.\(^7\) This stance should be understood within the context of the period. During the Coolidge presidency, events in Europe supported limited action. Specifically, the 1924 Dawes Plan worked out among Europeans without official American participation and the 1925 Locarno Pact reincorporating Germany into the postwar order gave the administration hope that it could pick and choose its level of involvement with the rest of the international community on issues it viewed as important. Such plans represented the best hope for peace to conservative internationalists because they developed through dialogue between nations rather than edicts from an all-powerful international organization in a bottom up approach to foreign relations.

The evidence of Coolidge’s conversion to conservative internationalism on foreign policy can be seen in his conduct within the Harding administration. One of his early public


addresses on foreign policy came on February 22, 1922, to mark the birthday of George Washington. He started off by proclaiming that “This is a day which Destiny has dedicated to a larger freedom” and a followed up with a discussion of the Puritan roots of American society that displayed his personal belief that the United States succeeded in its endeavors at least in part because of God’s will for both the nation and the world.\(^8\) This statement was only part of his conservative viewpoint of the role the United States should take in the world. For Coolidge, the driving force for America came from “a missionary spirit carrying out the promise of general enlightenment” because the American experiment could show the world the correct way to balance the difficulties of state power and private liberty.\(^9\) He held religious motivation as a central theme in most of his rhetoric as president, even when discussing American foreign policy, possibly because of his New England upbringing, that helped him connect with conservative internationalism’s soft power ideals.

As vice president, Coolidge was a hidden figure in the Harding administration. He played no role in the cabinet debates over policy but always listened and learned about the basic issues the nation faced. He gave a speech on Memorial Day 1923 in Northampton, Massachusetts that addressed the role of moral power in American foreign policy. For the world to be truly free and safe in his mind, “the establishment of the supremacy of the forces of good” represented the highest criteria.\(^10\) Creating such an international system could only be achieved through cooperative international efforts, like the Washington Conference. Without any mutual agreement, it would be harder to prosecute actors in international politics because there would be no incentive to enforce the agreement or ruling.

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\(^8\) Calvin Coolidge, “The Purpose of America at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, February 22, 1922,” in *The Price of Freedom: Speeches and Addresses by Calvin Coolidge* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1924), 135.


1923-1924 Coolidge-Hughes’s Foreign Policy

Harding’s conservative internationalist effort to create a new international order based around law and soft power through great power treaties like the Nine Power Treaty and include the United States in the Permanent International Court of Justice appeared to impress Coolidge and showed that conservative internationalist policy in foreign affairs would work with the necessary will supporting it. Coolidge also recognized the importance of public opinion on foreign affairs, in light of Woodrow Wilson’s failure in 1919 and 1920 to gain popular support for the League of Nations Covenant when he faced Senate opposition. In his mind, the American public supported conservative internationalist proposals because “our people are so thoroughly law-abiding and our foreign relations are so happy” and desired the same for the world at large through international agreements.\(^1\) The hope was that increased adherence to international law and similar treaties would create an informal system to prevent international disputes before they became conflict.

Coolidge’s ascension to the presidency came at time of heightened tension between the executive and legislative branches over control of foreign policy. The Senate, viewing itself as weakened by Wilson during World War I, worked to reassert its role in foreign affairs under Harding. The defeat of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and 1920 showed the ability of the Senate to undermine any foreign policy agenda that required ratified agreements between nations. In the 1920s, the main Senate opposition came from a bloc of midwestern senators who sought to keep the United States at peace in foreign affairs.\(^2\) Harding and Hughes worked with the Senate in their pursuit of disarmament at the Washington Conference by including three high ranking senators in the American delegation and eliminating language

\(^1\) Coolidge, The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge, 181.
within the main treaties that constituted binding clauses for the signatory nations. While primarily building on the conservative principle of soft power in international agreements, these tactics allowed the United States to bypass the Senate’s concern with entangling alliances and achieve a relatively quick ratification process for the treaties.

On the promotion of international law, by 1923 Harding and Hughes had begun to clash with the Senate. In the text of an undelivered speech, Harding called for the Senate to accept the proposed resolution for the United States to join the Permanent Court of International Justice, also known as the World Court. He argued that the United States needed to be a member of the Court because it would result in “the creation of an international situation, so far as the United States might contribute thereto, which would give the best assurances of peace for the future.” Harding believed that American participation in the World Court could only benefit the nation because it reflected the establishment of conservative internationalist legal principles into a formal international organization that presented an alternative to the perceived coercive model of the League of Nations. Hughes presented a similar argument in his speeches and correspondence. The first point he argued was that support for the World Court aligned with traditional American foreign policy because “From its foundations this Government has taken a leading part in promoting the judicial settlement of international disputes.” How could the United States argue that its political traditions supported separation from Europe but ignore this central tenet? Hughes found it

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preposterous. American membership in the Court served the conservative internationalist objective of creating an international law-oriented system in world politics and “promot[ing] world peace and stabilization” to create a way to redress grievances for the United States and other nations without relying on military force.\textsuperscript{15}

Coolidge’s first address to Congress in December 1923 outlined what his time in office would mean for American policy in general and included a brief overview of what would constitute his foreign policy. He had the option to reverse any and all of Harding’s initiatives, or create a separate understanding of foreign policy based on his experience. Instead, he chose to follow the path Harding had set out for limited American participation in international issues, except when “national interests” were involved. In his autobiography, Coolidge praised Harding’s term, saying “It would be difficult to find two years of peacetime history in all the record of our republic that were marked with more important or far-reaching accomplishments.”\textsuperscript{16} Harding’s management style of acting as a facilitator, compromiser, adjudicator, and political counselor with a cabinet comprised of the best minds so that the president would be able to make informed decisions influenced how Coolidge developed his own administration. He kept Harding’s cabinet intact until after the 1924 presidential election with a few minor changes afterwards.\textsuperscript{17}

Coolidge’s rhetoric on how soft power mechanisms related to disarmament showed further continuity with his predecessor. He believed that disarmament benefited him in domestic politics, and it worked within the conservative internationalist framework

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emphasizing the use of soft power and international law rather than force to settle disputes. But he also believed that, for the United States, “Further reductions should not be made,” primarily because of the already small United States Army and the perception of the Navy as the primary means for American defense.\textsuperscript{18} He also believed that the United States Navy served a higher purpose than the fleets of the nation’s rivals, as it severed as a means to protect trade and thus its soft power influence.

Coolidge affirmed Harding’s position on World Court membership as well. In his first address before Congress, he reiterated his support for a conservative internationalist foreign policy. He began by discussing foreign affairs and arguing that the United States had “one cardinal principle . . . to attend to our own affairs, conserve our own strength, and protect the interest of our own citizens.”\textsuperscript{19} This statement stressed the importance and necessity for American unilateral action in foreign affairs and Coolidge’s determination to reaffirm the strength of American foreign policy. It also included support for the World Court. Coolidge consistently displayed his own rhetorical lens of New England religion in his rhetoric on foreign policy. In his December 1923 address to Congress, Coolidge stated that the United States had a necessary role in world affairs to the “common bond of humanity” and the “inescapable law of service.”\textsuperscript{20} This is the addition of religious reasoning to the soft power argument of conservative internationalism as presented by Harding and Hughes in their pursuit of expanded international law. Coolidge agreed with both men but added another component, explaining why the risk of international involvement was necessary. International law represented a “more practical use of moral power, and more reliance upon the principle that


right makes its own might.”

This represented the main argument for conservative internationalists in desiring American membership in the World Court to influence the development of international institutions.

Coolidge also heavily correlated religious meaning with conservative internationalist use of moral power. His first address to Congress ended with the declaration that the nation should “make sacrifices for our faith. The spiritual forces of the world make all its final determinations [and] it is with these voices that America should speak.”

Support for and action in line with conservative internationalist principles would help ensure America’s standing among other nations. Coolidge’s advocacy of American power was the one consistent point throughout his time in federal office.

In foreign policy, Coolidge remained for the most part inactive on policy initiatives but strong in rhetoric as a result of the new status quo developed by Harding and Hughes. He expressed support for international disarmament efforts while finishing Harding’s term in line with soft power support of conservative internationalism. He argued that the nation “earnestly sought to compose differences and restore peace . . . not by force, but by reason” in Europe.

This statement signaled his support for a conservative internationalist strategy on the use of soft over hard power, primarily to prevent resentment that could renew tensions between nations upset over the aftermath of World War I. The only way agreements between rival nations like France and Germany could succeed to conservatives was if they were made in good faith rather than imposed by an outside group or organization. The success of the Washington Conference provided the hope that conservative internationalism could establish an effective international system based on its principles of soft power and international law.

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Coolidge moved to address the World Court issue through conservative internationalist rhetoric. First, he described the principal foreign policy priorities of the United States as the “avoidance of permanent political alliances which would sacrifice our proper independence . . . [and] the peaceful settlement of controversies between nations.” These ideas stretched back to Washington’s Farewell Address in 1796 and the traditional view of American foreign policy based on its isolation from Europe. Conservative internationalists attempted to bridge the gap between political neutrality while recognizing America’s new economic power to create a new form of international participation. He rhetorically slammed Congress for delaying the vote on adherence to the protocol and tried to convince its members of the necessity of American adherence to the World Court ideal. In an attempt to appeal to them, Coolidge, like Harding, framed the Court as an extension of American ideals, arguing for a “judicial method, without pressure and without prejudice” to settle international disputes on minor matters. Coolidge, in a further attempt to shame the senators and affirm presidential control of the conduct of American foreign relations, said, “Partisanship has no place in our foreign relations.” Coolidge argued that the Senate’s opposition to Harding’s, and his foreign policy was political rather than based on reasoned arguments for how the United States should conduct its business with the world. He delegitimized the progressive opposition to conservative internationalist foreign policy by forcing his opponents to rethink their distinctions in foreign policy. In the end, the vote on the World Court only occurred in 1926 but shows that Coolidge understood the use of rhetoric as persuasive speech and attempted to influence Congress to promote a solidly conservative internationalist foreign policy.

Coolidge also addressed the importance of soft power through America’s economic foreign policy. His primary concern for the nation was maintaining a stable international economy because “We [the United States] can not escape the effect of world conditions. We can not avoid the inevitable results of the economic disorders which have reached all nations.” The main issue at the start of his time in office was the war debt burden on European economies and its relation to German reparations payments. Throughout the 1920s the United States denied any connection between the two economic issues, preferring to view them as the results of separate processes relating to the end of World War I. Although opposed to complete cancellation out of concern for the reaction of the American public, he had “no objection to adjusting [debt repayment]” to fit the circumstances of the debtor nation. The reasoning behind readjustment over cancellation related to the conservative focus on building trust and cooperation between nations, an important element of conservative foreign policy needed for soft power and international law to be effective. The flexibility on war debt repayment represented the soft power understanding of economic power as a means rather than an end to continued American prosperity and European stability.

Debt repayment represented another consistent element in presidential rhetoric for conservative internationalists and provided another measurement to judge Coolidge’s commitment. A year into his presidency, Coolidge referred to the debt as “a moral obligation which our country can not ignore and no other country can evade” and personally believed that “the principle that each country should meet its obligation admits of no differences and is of universal application.” He connected the debt to the only successful conservative

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internationalist foreign policy initiative by asking Congress to “maintain the policy of constantly working toward the full treaty [Washington Treaty] strength of the Navy” despite also praising the overall effort of the Washington Conference as generating “a large saving in outlay and a considerable decrease in maintenance of the Navy.”\textsuperscript{30} He implied that America’s European counterparts would have a similar budget development and further reduce the burden on their economies, eventually ending their obligations to the United States. The nation would then take its position as an impartial power in international relations. On this point, Coolidge’s views coincided with the work of Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, a holdover from the Harding administration.

In the execution of American economic foreign policy as a tool of soft power influence, Hoover received near autonomy under both Harding and Coolidge because of his skill and experience working in business for both the private and public sectors. Hoover had several goals as secretary of commerce to ensure continued domestic economic prosperity. His main idea was to create a new kind of economic space for the federal government called associationalism. In this framework, government involvement in the economy would be to provide information and support for business ventures outside of the domestic market. In Hoover’s mindset, this represented the main responsibility of the federal government because it ensured continued domestic prosperity for its citizens.\textsuperscript{31} According to Hoover, the main threat to American economic success was Europe. The continent experienced the horrors of war, especially France, but in economic terms that meant the necessity of employing more workers to rebuild what was lost either in manufacturing or infrastructure.

\textsuperscript{31} William J. Barber, From New Era to New Deal: Herbert Hoover, the economists, and American economic policy, 1921-33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 31-33.
The main foreign economic threat for Hoover came from perceived European monopolies on raw materials. The American economy prospered because of its export of manufactured products, which necessitated some dependency on the importation of foreign raw materials, ranging from coffee to nitrates. This view of the interconnected global economy of the 1920s colored Hoover’s perception of European cartels while trying to develop American counterparts through associationalism. Hoover used this idea as a starting point to build off his efforts under Harding. He pointed out that “The value of our total imports . . . in 1923 exceeded $25,000,000” and feared it would increase in coming years.\textsuperscript{32} This reliance on European-controlled materials was the conservative counterargument to the war debt issue. The money lent to Europe after World War I, to men like Hoover, should be used to fulfill European debt obligations to the United States and other creditors. Before World War I, the United States faced intense competition in the international market from European nations. Even with the acquisition of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, the United States only had a fraction of the economic clout wielded by the more established European colonial empires. The impression of limited economic stability remained dominant despite America’s new role as the global creditor as there were some options for the nation’s new economic power because it appeared temporary.

Coolidge agreed, at least in principle, with Hoover about the importance of America’s balance of trade in maintaining its economic prosperity and how it related to soft power in foreign policy. In his first address to Congress, Coolidge called for merchant marine fleet upgrades to ensure “adequate means for national defense” and “adequate service to American

\textsuperscript{32} Herbert Hoover, “Mr. Hoover and Foreign Monopolies” in \textit{Advocate for Peace through Justice} Vol. 86 No. 4 (April 1924), 243.
The use of trade as international influence represented more of a business conservative approach to maintaining domestic prosperity and a more traditional understanding of America’s position on the world stage through international law and economic power to enhance soft power to influence foreign affairs.

Coolidge and Kellogg supported disarmament as a means to expand the use of soft power and international law in addition to American influence. In a statement before the Associated Press in April 1924, Coolidge expressed a willingness to call a Washington-style conference “to achieve such limitations of armaments and initiate plans for a codification of international law” at some time in the future should he be elected. A caveat he gave in his promotion of a future disarmament conference was that it was “necessary to have European questions settled, so far as they can be, and a more composed state of mind there than there apparently exists at the present time.” After his election, Coolidge’s responses about the issue of disarmament took on a give and take approach for negotiations with other great powers.

Coolidge appeared to contradict the principle of soft power in praising disarmament while calling for increased shipbuilding efforts later in his administration. He described the perceived difference in an address to the National Republican Club, asserting that “every government must necessarily maintain some military establishment for national defence and the policing of its own domain” but adding that the United States would “not look with sympathy upon the manufacture or sale of arms and munitions by which one country might

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34 C. Bascom Slemp ed., April 22, 1924 Address at annual luncheon of Associated Press New York City, The Mind of the President As Revealed by Himself in His Own Words: President Coolidge’s views on public questions, selected and arranged by subjects (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1926), 50.
make war upon another county.” In the context of the 1920s, disarmament and naval construction were seen as complementary rather than competing policy options. For the United States, each served to create incentives for soft power mechanisms between the great powers to discuss policy issues before they became part of a local conflict.

Coolidge held a similar opinion on the London Conference. He hoped it would positively impact international affairs without American involvement given its lack of direct interest in European problems. He suggested in more general language that the effort “holds some promise” and that any agreement “would be of doubtful success without American participation” given the economic importance of each region to the other.37 Such a statement presented the impression that Coolidge recognized the United States’ economic power relative to the rest of the world and that it could be used to support the nation’s interest wherever required. This position does not address the subtle conservative understanding of the American economic position for soft power influence. Coolidge later said that American aid should be given but only because it can “be profitably done” and result in “the enlargement of our trade, and the discharge of the moral obligation of bearing our share of the burdens of the world” not out of a magnanimous sense of duty, but out of economic practicality.38 American involvement, to Coolidge, should bring tangible economic benefits that aligned with the conservative internationalist strategy relying on soft power. This framework was why he supported the final deal, not out of any desire to relieve the economic burden of Europe but to ensure domestic prosperity. With European nations developing their own political system and

36 C. Bascom Slemp ed., February 12, 1924 “Address before National Republican Club at Waldof-Astoria Hotel” in *The Mind of the President As Revealed by Himself in His Own Words: President Coolidge’s views on public questions, selected and arranged by subjects* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1926), 49.
responses to regional crises, it provided more rationale for selective American international participation.

1924 Presidential Election Campaign Rhetoric

The 1924 presidential election represented the chance for the American people to rebuke the Republican agenda in domestic and foreign affairs. Coolidge secured the nomination with little effort while the Democrats struggled to find a nominee before settling on John W. Davis, a Wall Street lawyer with no party affiliation, after 103 votes.\textsuperscript{39} The division within the Democrats left Coolidge in a commanding position in the general election, even with the defection of Republican progressives to support Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette in his bid to reestablish progressivism in American politics. His nomination reflected Republican commitment to the conservative internationalist framework established by Harding.

The Republican platform drew heavily on the failures of Wilson to boost the record of the Harding administration, especially in foreign policy. The foreign policy plank asserted that in 1921 because of Wilson’s failure to force the League of Nations on the United States, “Peace was delayed” and that “misunderstanding and friction characterized our relations abroad.”\textsuperscript{40} The platform shifted to economic issues, starting with war debts. The language might not have been directly influenced by Coolidge, who did not attend the convention, but it reflected the conservative internationalist argument that peace was based on soft power concerns of religious “moral obligation” and the idea that “Great nations cannot recognize or admit the principle of repudiation. To do so would undermine the integrity essential for

\textsuperscript{39} Ferrell, \textit{The Presidency of Calvin Coolidge}, 40, 56-58.
international trade, commerce, and credit.” The mix of conservative internationalist rhetoric and religious language delivered a multifaceted argument for American insistence on repayment by focusing on the necessity of stability in international politics.

In the foreign policy section, conservative internationalist language was clearly present given the limited successes achieved through the efforts of Harding and Hughes. The main argument for the continuation of the narrow Republican foreign policy arrangement was that Americans “cherish their independence, but their sense of duty to all mankind will ever prompt them to give their support service, and leadership” whenever the need arose through soft power and legal mechanisms. Most conservatives understood that the United States could not remain isolated in foreign affairs and instead focused on creating a niche for the nation to preserve its ability for independent action while remaining active in the concerns of the international community. This idea was bolstered in 1924 by the success of the 1921-22 Washington Conference and the progress made toward World Court membership before Harding’s death.

The main policy objectives of conservative internationalism were membership in the World Court and disarmament to support soft power and international law, respectively. On the issue of the World Court, Republicans reaffirmed Harding’s stance by stating their opposition to “political commitments that would involve us in the politics of Europe” but also a willingness to aid “humanitarian efforts in accordance with our cherished traditions.” Conservatives agreed with the overall goal of the World Court but wished to avoid being seen as supporting the League of Nations, which they viewed as a coercive power in world affairs and detrimental to American power. Thus, the rhetoric of the platform separated the aim of the

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41 1924 Republican Party Platform.
42 1924 Republican Party Platform.
43 1924 Republican Party Platform.
Court from its creation by the League of Nations and opened a legal loophole for American membership to strengthen the commitment to the conservative principle of international law rather than force as a framework to settle international disputes.

The Republican foreign policy platform also advocated developing soft power mechanisms to resolve international crises in conjunction with the World Court. The Republicans trumpeted the success of the Washington Conference, arguing that it paved “the way to avert the danger of renewed hostilities in Europe” and worked to “restore the necessary economic stability” by reducing military spending for all signatory nations. The Washington Conference supported the Republican position that the United States could occupy a middle ground in international relations between introversion and submission to bureaucratic organizations like the League of Nations. This success was only a limited political victory for most Republicans because later on the platform called for “no further weakening of our regular army” and the end of this policy option as a means of conservative internationalism. This plank reflected the belief of most Americans that the reductions undertaken at the Washington Conference were low enough for the United States to provide adequate national defense without being overly threatening to the other great powers. The status quo became Coolidge’s unofficial program on foreign policy despite the conservative internationalist rhetoric.

The 1924 presidential election showed the continued dominance of the Republican Party on the national level. Coolidge’s rhetoric remained consistent with Harding’s, helped propel him to victory, and delivered the message of hope in foreign relations that the American people wanted after World War I. It was a rout for Coolidge, who won 382 electoral and 15.7 million popular votes, compared to Davis’s 136 electoral and 8.3 million popular votes, with

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44 1924 Republican Party Platform.
45 1924 Republican Party Platform.
La Follette’s Progressive Party coming in a distant third with 13 electoral and 4.9 million popular votes. The victory showed public approval of Republican efforts in domestic and foreign policy along with cementing the party’s control of the White House for the rest of the decade.

1925-1929 Coolidge-Kellogg Era of Foreign Policy

Coolidge began his elected term as president with the hope of continuing American domestic prosperity and international stability that Harding had initiated. In his inaugural address, the new president stressed the importance of conservative internationalist foreign policy to both realms. He argued that America’s model should be used by all the other nations because it allowed its citizens to “serve our own country and most successfully discharge our obligations to humanity.” The main source of this soft power model came from the “conscientious and religious life” that Americans pursued, referring to the religious foundation of its society. Religion also provided the foundation for his understanding of how international peace could be achieved. He believed that “Peace will come . . . only under a reign of law, based on righteousness” because “Parchment will fail, the sword will fail, [because] it is only the spiritual nature of man that can be triumphant” in the face of adversity. This idea represents the blending of conservative internationalism and religious conviction by viewing law as a moral force in domestic and international affairs, an explicit religious force, for change in the world. Coolidge also held the long term view of change that conservatives supported to ensure a stable transition from the current, imperfect order to the perfect form that international law would achieve in the future.

46 Ferrell, The Presidency of Calvin Coolidge, 60.
49 Coolidge, “Inaugural Address,” in Calvin Coolidge 1872-1933, 63.
Coolidge’s inaugural address showed how he viewed the role of conservative internationalist rhetoric in American foreign policy and served as a framework for the nation’s international agenda. He stressed the importance of action in addition to rhetoric by stating that “If we expect others to rely on our fairness and justice we must show that we rely on their fairness and justice.” Coolidge stressed the principle of soft power mechanisms as the basis of American participation in the international community. There were limits to their effectiveness in international negotiations because even though the United States had “peaceful intentions toward all the earth, . . . it ought not fail to maintain such a military force as comports with the dignity and security of a great people,” reflecting the limits mentioned in the platform. These were the values Coolidge strove to uphold as president, and for him they meant that the United States should not participate in any conference or forum that did not concern its interests. This stance correlated with the foreign policy of Harding and Hughes but overlooked the main reason for their foreign policy success: the necessity of American action and its role in creating an atmosphere of international cooperation.

The only significant change in Coolidge’s foreign policy after 1924 came from his decision to replace Charles Evans Hughes with Frank Kellogg, a former ambassador to Britain and member of the Committee on Foreign Relations. After the success of the Washington Conference, Hughes focused on expanding international law through several arbitration and conciliation agreements. Hughes submitted his resignation after Coolidge’s victory in the 1924 election and the president accepted, though historians have argued about whether the resignation was genuine or a done as a formality with the intent of retaining in the position.

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52 Dexter Perkins, Charles Evans Hughes and American Democratic Statesmanship (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1956), 141; Margot Louria, Triumph and Downfall: America’s Pursuit of Peace and Prosperity 1921-33 (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 86-87; Benjamin D. Rhodes, United States Foreign Policy in the
In becoming secretary of state, Frank B. Kellogg represented a shift toward experience rather than political skill in the office. He had more direct foreign policy knowledge and experience than his predecessor from his time in the Senate and in London. His policies aligned with conservative internationalism, intending to keep the U.S. role in international affairs as that of a benign, aloof arbiter while retaining its freedom of action. His main concerns while holding the office were to keep in line with Coolidge’s foreign policy vision, more or less the maintenance of the post-Washington Conference status quo. Kellogg represented a return to the traditional role of the position compared to Hughes’s extraordinary breadth of authority under Harding. Kellogg’s relationship with the Senate diverged from his predecessor because he had previously served in the body and had some insight into its view of foreign policy. He often met with William Borah, the head of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, to address his concerns over American foreign policy. Kellogg’s openness to the Senate allowed the two to work amiably to maintain the relative calm in domestic debates on international affairs even though the president and Senate clashed on policy throughout Coolidge’s term.

Coolidge remained consistent with conservative internationalist rhetoric based on comments about the World Court. The principal tenet of American foreign policy remained “casting aside any suggestion of force, [and] rest[ing] solely on the foundation of peace, good


33 Louria, Triumph and Downfall, 91.


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will, and good works.” Coolidge described the practices as a “well-established line of precedents mark[ing] America’s effort to effect the establishment of a court of this nature” when addressing Congress in 1925. The World Court served the conservative internationalist goal of increased international law as a framework in international relations with the decline of disarmament as a policy option.

Throughout his presidency Coolidge expounded on America’s increased economic power. In his 1926 address to Congress, he claimed that the protective tariff benefited the American economy because “there does not seem to be a very large field within the area of our imports in which probable reductions would be advantageous for foreign goods,” taking an economic nationalist stance. He also argued that it provided steady revenue for the government with the previous year’s receipts being “$615,000,000, the largest [amount] ever secured from that source.” The increased economic revenue served as a useful tool for soft power influence for the Coolidge administration.

Coolidge held up the 1924 Dawes Plan and the 1925 Locarno Pact as the direct result of informal American influence through its limited participation in international politics. These two agreements provided economic and political stability for Western Europe, previously in flux because of the United States’ refusal to join the League of Nations. Each great power had a separate vision for how the region would recover: The French feared a revitalized Germany even with the burdens imposed on the country in the Treaty of Versailles and pursued security in foreign affairs above all else while Great Britain hoped for a smooth

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transition to the concert system of great powers that existed before the war. The efforts at debt reduction stemmed from the economic chaos unleashed by the French occupation of the Ruhr industrial center, begun in an attempt to force German payments and enforce French dominance on the European continent. The United States did not send an official delegation to help resolve the Ruhr occupation or address concerns of the war debt-reparation cycle. American support represented the necessary counterbalance to French demands for more stringent security protections in exchange for ending their occupation. There was a delicate balance between dealing with European stability from the French perspective and maintaining independence of action for the United States that limited action from both sides before London and Locarno.

Neither of these plans at the beginning of the decade aligned with the American desire for a conservative international order based on the slow transition away from unchecked great power politics toward a system based on soft power and international law. At the time, the Dawes Plan and Locarno Pact signified the shift in international relations away from the use of force that conservatives hoped to supplant with the rule of law. Coolidge echoed these feelings, arguing that international harmony could be attained by “casting aside any suggestion of force,” and “rest[ing] solely on the foundation of peace, good will, and good works,” again merging foreign policy and religious rhetoric. The use of moral rhetoric reinforced the important role of soft power in conservative internationalist efforts to create a stable international order.

The United States supported European efforts to address the region’s postwar economic and political issues through its adherence to international law and soft power.

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Republican administrations deemed it necessary to be aware of the concerns in European capitals and Geneva, home of the League of Nations. In conservative thought, regional agreements involved fewer powers and recognized the complexities that global efforts would push for the lowest common denominator, which made them more effective.

Throughout 1925 and 1926, the Coolidge administration focused on domestic issues with little concern for the larger workings of foreign policy beyond maintaining the order established by Harding and Hughes. The flexible framework gave Kellogg the ability to develop his own vision and implementation of conservative internationalism. But unlike Hughes, he lacked the will of personality to be an active force within the State Department and instead presented reactive leadership in responding to international crises despite his strong work ethic. Consequently, he often allowed policy to develop in the field rather than Washington, further weakening his opportunity to control American foreign policy. He represented the era with his reluctance to move away from the understanding of the United States as a competing great power, opposition to committed international participation, but with willingness depending on the issue and its political benefit. In this manner he epitomized Republicans at that time, primarily because of the centrality of conservative internationalism in Republican foreign policy thought. As secretary of state, Kellogg considered his “primary duty” after conveying the will of the president “to maintain peace and harmonious relations between the United States and other countries.” He lauded the conservative internationalist efforts of his predecessor with glowing language, calling Hughes’s achievements “milestones in the orderly development of the established policies of

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65 Ellis, Frank B. Kellogg and American Foreign Relations, 21-22; Ellis, An Uncertain Tradition, 149, 156.
66 Ellis, An Uncertain Tradition, 151.
Kellogg’s praise translated into little action for the first two years of his tenure. The lack of a pressing crisis or popular support for foreign policy solutions that motivated Hughes during his term allowed Kellogg to remain passive in international politics and reactive to foreign policy developments.

The majority of Coolidge’s term represented the calm and optimistic outlook for the decade from a conservative internationalist perspective in foreign affairs. The United States did not have to exert diplomatic pressure to project its will because of Harding and Hughes’s efforts to develop an active and distinct conservative internationalist foreign policy based around international law and soft power for stabilizing elements. With Coolidge as president, many hoped that he would build off of the policies of his predecessor in disarmament and peace diplomacy efforts like the World Court. In that respect, Coolidge failed. He preferred the comfortable status quo created by his predecessor to any effort to improve the new order, and it was reflected in his foreign policy. Coolidge retained the conservative internationalist rhetoric, which left the option for participation open for when the need arose. From this perspective, Coolidge kept the commitment to conservative internationalism even though there were not as many notable achievements from his time as president.

The main expression of soft power influence outside of economic power came from the limited efforts at disarmament. With its limited focus on battleships among the great naval powers, the Washington Conference established the pattern for future negotiations to address specific classes of ships. It succeeded because of its focus on the economic and political gains each participant would achieve if it supported the new system. Peace groups attempted to jumpstart the process after the 1921-22 treaties remained the solitary successful disarmament

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69 Fanning, Peace and Disarmament, 7.
effort. The first attempt came from the League of Nations in the form of the Preparatory Commission on Disarmament, started in 1925 and intended to set the stage for a general League of Nations Conference at Geneva in March 1932. Coolidge sent a delegation to Geneva with the intent of showing American commitment to the issue with a plan that stressed limiting usable armaments without an international agreement on inspection and enforcement because such a scheme “impugned national honor and dignity.” The United States attended the conference because it wanted to deliver its own policy initiatives if any developments in Europe were moving in a direction incompatible with American interests. The intended enforcement plan would rely on soft power and international law, which were established in other treaties, and need not be rehashed here. Without a soft power enforcement mechanism, Republicans believed any disarmament agreement would worsen relations between the signatory nations because some would inevitably violate their pledge in the absence of any compliance mechanism.

The soft power-moral power connection was the significant rhetorical point for Coolidge’s conservative internationalism. Dipping into his religious rhetoric in addressing the 1925 graduating class at Annapolis, Coolidge stated that he did “not believe the American Navy can succeed if [the Navy] represents mere naked force” and that to be successful the nation “must make it an instrument of righteousness.” With it, the United States would be able to “call into action the spiritual forces of mankind” in its foreign policy. The limited use of military force remained connected to the conservative internationalist strategy of soft power in international affairs. The use of force was relegated to secondary importance behind

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71 C. Bascom Slemp ed., June 3, 1925 Address before graduating class, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md., *The Mind of the President As Revealed by Himself in His Own Words: President Coolidge’s views on public questions, selected and arranged by subjects* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1926), 52.
the overall strategic goals of American policy but still remained a significant aspect of official calculations.

There were limits to soft power in the application of conservative internationalist policy. Most Republicans believed that too much reduction in military force would weaken American influence in foreign affairs, and Coolidge wanted to project American power in international relations through protecting the nation’s economic growth. Progressive senators also viewed the disarmament effort with suspicion, with some dismissing the efforts and instead focusing on preparedness efforts in relation to the economic and moral components of war. Disarmament only described efforts to reduce national armed forces rather than the complete elimination of offensive weaponry from warfare, which led some at the time to call these efforts a reduction of armaments rather than disarmament given the role of national defense in conservative internationalist rhetoric. The goal of these efforts was to increase soft power elements of international security without reducing national defense.

Coolidge relied on this conception throughout his administration. In March 1925, he told the press that he supported only “harmony and peaceful intercourse” in international diplomacy because, based on conservative understanding of foreign relations and human behavior, that “attempting to coerce any of the nations that might have considerable land armaments into a reduction against their will . . . would not be helpful . . . [or] would not be productive” to the end of decreasing tension by reducing weapon stockpiles. Conservative internationalist ideology provided the guidelines for Coolidge in how to approach disarmament. For most of his term, this kind of rhetoric placated the American public and

Congress, especially the remaining liberal internationalists who clamored for increased American activity in foreign affairs.

Kellogg supported disarmament as well, but without the rhetorical flourish of his president. In a statement to the American delegation at the 1925 Geneva Convention for the supervision of the International Trade in Arms and Ammunition and in Implements of War, Kellogg expressed his willingness to support only proposals that have a purpose of “reducing to a minimum the traffic in arms which is calculated to foment disorder, encourage militarism or render more difficult the realization of this Government’s desire that further progress should be made toward an era of continuing peace.” Kellogg’s involvement stemmed from concerns that American arms manufacturers could not legally export weapons under the agreement and the fear that the U.S. government would be barred from providing aid to friendly governments that faced domestic unrest. Though this treaty represented an international attempt to create a standard of soft power enforcement, it clashed with conservative views on the role of state sovereignty. The main goal was the protection of America’s most influential soft power tool in economic leverage by increasing its effectiveness in foreign policy.

For Kellogg, the agreement represented a challenge to conservative internationalism by attempting to limit how the United States used its influence in the new order. The ban would restrict the U.S. ability to respond to international crises in ways that benefited its interests. It would undermine American foreign policy efforts in Latin America, where the nation’s leadership viewed American interests as necessary for the region’s economic and physical security within the conservative internationalist framework. Later in his statement, Kellogg

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supported two separate agreements to replace the convention. The first would address “publicity and the control of the general export trade in arms” to ensure adequate pressure for popular opinion in future scenarios and the second would allow “the special supervision of the trade in the so-called prohibited zones” of Africa, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia, coincidentally where Europeans held colonial empires. The intent of these agreements for Kellogg was to provide loopholes for American policymakers to intervene in certain situations should it be deemed necessary for American interests, primarily with a focus on Latin America.

The lack of any substantive soft power or international law agreements throughout Coolidge’s administration gradually irritated internationalists across the United States. With new naval ship construction planned in 1927, some feared that the arms race would resume without a check and called upon the president to act. The influence of public opinion pushed Coolidge more than any of his own ideas in foreign policy. The push for an international conference between the great powers came in February 1927. Secretary of State Kellogg sent the American ambassador in France a brief summation of the president’s proposal to continue limited engagement through conservative internationalism. In it, he stressed the focus on further naval limitation, potentially expanding the Washington Conference ratios to other classes of ships, mainly in opposition to “competitive armaments” rather than any solid economic or political gains. The short time frame Coolidge gave for the response to the conference invitation, later that year, led to quick rejections from France and Italy, leaving only Britain and Japan as willing participants in the conference.

78 Fanning, Peace and Disarmament, 35-8.
The conference itself took place in Geneva, Switzerland, while work on the preparatory commission of disarmament continued. To the other great powers, this represented some competing interests. It highlighted the different views of soft power in international affairs, one relying on international organizations and the other based on state initiatives like those of the United States. The American defense for the location was that there were already national experts present and that any possible agreements “would be of great service to that body [the League of Nations] in an advance towards the solution of a difficult problem.”\textsuperscript{80} The basic rationale is sound but reflected the haphazard nature of the conference. The United States had not discussed the policy agenda before sending the invitation to the other countries. Kellogg’s letter to President Coolidge is telling in this regard. The secretary of state wanted to avoid the appearance of “overloading the delegation” with department heads such as himself or the suggestion that the United States was “overanxious to have an agreement.”\textsuperscript{81} The rationale behind these actions rested on the notion of preserving American prestige should the negotiations fail rather than a commitment to other issues. Coolidge and Kellogg did not take into account the perceptions of Britain and Japan, which viewed Kellogg’s absence as a sign of limited American commitment to the proceedings. Kellogg’s failure to attend gave the impression of a lack in confidence that the conference could accomplish something definitive because the United States was the only nation not to send a ranking official.

The divergent goals of each delegation further hampered any efforts at compromise from the Geneva Conference. Each nation came to the conference with competing nationalistic agendas. The United States desired naval parity with Britain and agreements


centered around heavy cruisers; Britain wanted to expand its cruiser fleet to maintain its imperial holdings; Japan also wanted to expand its naval program in the Pacific and use it to secure regional dominance. The conference plan also lacked a clear distinction between offensive and defensive weapons, such as submarines, which further muddied efforts at compromise and negotiation.\textsuperscript{82} Compared to the Washington Conference, it was a disastrous failure. These technical issues were impossible to resolve at Geneva, and the failure left everyone upset with the status quo of disarmament. Coolidge and Kellogg’s effort to restart disarmament for purely domestic political gains backfired and nearly scuttled the system put in place by Hughes to reduce an important variable in international relations because the context of the talks shifted away from the postwar urgency that spurred the Harding administration.\textsuperscript{83} The failed Geneva Conference pushed the Coolidge administration to act more forcefully in another element of conservative internationalist foreign policy.

Coolidge and Kellogg tried to work with Congress to achieve any foreign policy success. Their significant achievements came from expanding soft power mechanisms through initiatives based around issues like the World Court and the Kellogg-Briand Pact. The Senate officially ratified the protocol with reservations that allowed the United States to join the organization with the same rights and privileges as the current members. The Senate resolution also included reservations that gave the nation the ability “to withdraw its adherence to the said protocol” and the right to refuse requests for decisions regarding Court cases that affect its interests.\textsuperscript{84} The bill passed without much ceremony on January 27, 1926. The resolution represented a bitter pill for American internationalists who wanted a firmer
commitment to the World Court, but Coolidge viewed it as necessary for continuing conservative internationalist support for international law.

Like Harding, Coolidge consistently advocated for American membership on the basis of American political tradition. During the debate on the resolution, Coolidge made several statements for American membership based on conservative principles. After being reelected in 1925, he argued “the suggestion that the United States should adhere to [The World Court] has been gaining strength” due to increased intercontinental acceptance for international law as a means to resolve international disputes as shown by the increased membership of the Court.  

Coolidge appeared willing to let the issue remain in the realm of public opinion because there was little he could do to push the matter with Congress unless he wanted a larger fight with the legislative branch. Personally, Coolidge did agree that the Court would “be very helpful” and in the international community be seen as part of a helpful attitude, and an expression of the sentiment of desiring cooperation, and a desire to put America on the side of having differences settled by orderly procedure and as near as they can be in accordance with international law, friendly conferences and settled rules, rather than to resort to force and have the question settled because one country or the other has a larger army or navy.

He understood the value of the Court for conservative and progressive internationalists. For conservatives, it represented a commitment to the continuing process of standardizing international law while progressives viewed membership as a concrete step toward full American participation in the international community. Coolidge understood the rationale for the last resolution and viewed it as harmless, stating that it “is merely for the purpose of

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putting the United States in the same position as other countries” rather than a poison pill designed to ruin American acceptance of the protocol.\textsuperscript{87}

The Kellogg-Briand Pact represented the other significant conservative internationalist development of the Coolidge administration and its only significant foreign policy achievement. Its origins relate to the context of competing designs for Europe’s political future during the middle years of the decade. The original draft of the pact came from France as one way to obtain its goal of a security agreement or alliance with the United States or Britain to provide some tangible protection from a resurgent Germany. The French drive to contain Germany represented the common theme of European affairs for the Coolidge administration’s foreign policy and went back almost to the beginning of Coolidge’s time in office. The 1924 French occupation of the Ruhr and the Anglo-American reaction to the crisis stemmed from the effort to balance French security with German reintegration into European politics.\textsuperscript{88} Britain and the United States each tried to ease French insecurity about German resurgence in Europe through limited measures on economic and political security. The United States acted more forcefully because the Republican administrations believed in the soft power of economics to bridge policy gaps between nations. For them, a revitalized Germany would jump start the European economy, a problem for some but also a chance for more peaceful coexistence between the two rivals.\textsuperscript{89}

In the context of the failed Geneva disarmament conference and no other foreign policy accomplishments, the Kellogg-Briand Pact represented a positive outcome by creating a commitment of conservative internationalist principles in international disputes. Kellogg had

\textsuperscript{87} Quint and Ferrell, eds., September 3, 1926, \textit{The Talkative President: The Off-the-Record Press Conferences of Calvin Coolidge} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964), 211.

\textsuperscript{88} Cohrs, \textit{The Unfinished Peace}, 136.

no incentive to respond to Briand’s original proposal in March 1927 because the future Geneva Conference held the possibility of success. The draft treaty called for the United States and France to “condemn recourse to war, renounce it as an instrument of their national policy towards each other, and agree that a settlement of disputes arising between them, of whatever nature or origin they may be, shall never be sought by either party except through pacific means.”90 For conservative internationalists, this agreement was intended to further integrate law into international relations. Kellogg saw the proposal as significant if only because it allowed the United States to address its arbitration agreements with Britain and Japan to “dispel any idea that we were willing to negotiate any special agreement with France.”91 Kellogg feared that such an agreement would give the perception of an official U.S. commitment that might impede future policy initiatives and push for more general language in the final draft.

The idea to outlaw war through an international agreement represented the success of conservative internationalists to have their foreign policy ideas incorporated around the world. The French proposal revolved around the importance of negotiation in the resolution of nation-state disputes, indicative of the expanding use of international law. Kellogg replied to the French ambassador that the United States supported the proposal because it fit within the nation’s desire for limited involvement in international affairs but maximum effort to attain peace. He also believed the proposal could “make a more signal contribution to world peace by joining in an effort to obtain the adherence of all of the Principle [sic] Powers of the world

Coolidge expressed more limited optimism for the idea, concerned that it would be “somewhat difficult under the Constitution . . . because our Constitution places the authority for a declaration of war in the Congress” but agreed in principle with the proposal. In a later letter, Kellogg argued, “a multilateral treaty would be [a] far more effective instrument for the promotion of pacific relations” because it allowed for more adherence to international law and soft power as expressed through conservative internationalism. This proposed change reflected the conservative desire for the use of international law and soft power mechanisms for enforcement in international disputes with the respective publics rather than nations adhering to the proposed standard.

The increased American involvement in international negotiations remained within the conservative internationalist tradition. Kellogg thus proposed an addendum to the pact that “the breach of one party . . . would release the other parties from their obligations thereunder.” Paradoxically, this also reflected the principle of international law, the idea being that if a nation chose to repudiate its obligations under the treaty, the nations committed to the agreement would then have their responsibilities to the delinquent state voided as well. In this instance, rejection would reopen the possibility of war between the nation and signatories of the Pact. Conservatives viewed this option as necessary because without public support for the agreement any nation could leave without consequence and not fundamentally

92 Secretary of State to French Ambassador (Claudel) December 28, 1927, Foreign Relations of the United States, 627.
95 Memorandum by Mr. Spencer Pheniz, Assistant to the Under Secretary of State, of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and the French Ambassador (Claudel) February 27, 1928 Foreign Relations of the United States 1928 Vol. I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 11.
change the international order as it hoped to. While not going as far as collective security, which would bar exit from a ratified treaty, the international law framework allowed other nations a variety of options from legal recourse to use of force in response to regional crises, including leaving the pact. Coolidge articulated this position after the Senate ratified it, claiming that “if the treaty were violated it would leave the United States in the same position that it would be without the treaty, and Congress would determine as usual what action would be taken.”

International law advocacy remained a significant policy goal for the United States and was expanded through the Kellogg-Briand Pact.

Kellogg had several other considerations about the pact relating to the rights of signatory powers. The only concerns raised with the final language relate to conservative internationalist foreign policy and how it would be implemented by the participating nations: self-defense, League membership, relations with treaty-breaking states, and the agreement’s universality. For conservative internationalists like Coolidge and Kellogg, these ideas were central to the nation-state in making independent foreign policy decisions. The final language of the Kellogg-Briand Pact reflected American concerns about international law, primarily to ensure U.S. participation, but that left the degree of commitment vague. The treaty consisted of only three articles, with the last referring to the ratification process. The first article called for nations to “condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it as an instrument of national policy.” The second stated that “the settlement of all disputes or conflicts . . . shall never be sought except by pacific means.” These articles

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reflect conservative internationalist rhetoric on the importance of international law for international politics. The fact that over sixty countries ultimately signed this limited statement is significant for conservatives of the period because it showed that their method of internationalism was gaining support around the world. The towering amount of international support showed that even with the failure of the 1927 Geneva Conference, conservative internationalist policies were still important in international relations.

The Kellogg-Briand Pact was Coolidge’s main contribution to conservative internationalist foreign policy. In his final address to Congress, the president called it “One of the most important treaties ever laid before the Senate.” He also reaffirmed the limited nature of the treaty under conservative internationalist thought. He defended the broad scope of the vague language by saying, “It does not supersede our inalienable sovereign right and duty of national defense or undertake to commit us before the event to any mode of action which the Congress might decide to be wise if ever the treaty should be broken.” The president straddled the rhetorical line between executive branch and Senate responsibilities in American foreign policy to ensure the pact passed the Senate. His effort was successful as Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Borah outmaneuvered any opposition and ensured a smooth approval in the closing weeks of the Coolidge administration by a vote of 85 to 1.

Conclusion

In terms of rhetoric, the Coolidge administration continued and expanded upon Harding’s use of conservative internationalist concepts in developing American foreign policy after World War I. Coolidge’s main addition to conservative internationalism came from his

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102 Rhodes, United States Foreign Policy, 70.
use of religious and moral language to support the use of soft power and international law. He believed that the nation’s religious founding made it unique among world nations and set it on course for an important destiny in expanding democratic values through moral means advocated by conservative internationalism. Coolidge and Kellogg preferred soft power enforcement mechanisms because they suited their wait-and-see approach to foreign policy. Kellogg also had this attitude and preferred to focus on limited agreements with smaller nations rather than proposing a great power policy initiative.

Most of the events in Coolidge’s term proved the faith in conservative internationalism valid but unstable in the changing international politics of the 1920s. The 1924 Dawes Plan and 1925 Locarno Pact appeared to validate this course of action as Europe proceeded without direct American intervention in creating a new status quo for the continent. The potential for the kind of system conservative internationalism tried to achieve existed but required more involvement than the Coolidge administration was willing to give. Public pressure forced Coolidge to call a haphazard disarmament conference in 1927 that failed to expand the Washington regime and embittered the other great powers. Despite this failure, the Kellogg-Briand Pact obscured the weakness of the conservative internationalist foreign policy by focusing on international law and soft power arguments against war as a policy tool.

Coolidge’s efforts led to limited success compared to Harding and Hughes. The restoration of forceful conservative foreign policy would come with the election of Herbert Hoover, who emulated Hughes in his vigorous pursuit of foreign policy after entering into the White House.
CHAPTER 3

RESTORING CONFIDENCE: PRESIDENT HOOVER’S CONSERVATIVE INTERNATIONALISM

Introduction

Respect for America’s foreign policy tradition in rhetoric represented the main element that Herbert Hoover shared with his Republican Ascendancy predecessors. All agreed to respect America’s unique position in the world and ensure a stable transition to an international system based on law and soft power. The main difference came from Hoover’s more engaged leadership style compared to the impartial mediator method utilized by Harding and Coolidge, partially from his experience in the system as a department head and his personal beliefs about how the nation should function. His personal approach to foreign policy through a conservative internationalist lens based on soft power worked during the first two years of his presidency. The American economy was strong enough to weather any regional instabilities before the October 1929 Stock Crash and fallout because of its role as the leading creditor nation.

Hoover distinguished himself from Coolidge’s passive attempts to continue the Harding-Hughes conservative internationalist model by taking an active role in American foreign policy. His experience as secretary of commerce conditioned this response to government action. Hoover came into office determined to continue the restoration of America’s role as neutral arbiter in the international order that Harding and Hughes had started with the 1921-22 Washington Naval Conference. To properly address the influence of conservative internationalism in Hoover’s foreign policy, this chapter is limited to 1929 and
1930 to focus on what happened before the Great Depression. After the economic crisis began, it took priority over all other matters, causing the nation to focus on domestic prosperity and constraining Hoover’s ability to act on foreign affairs even though the crisis was connected to international relations. Conservative internationalist ideals appeared to lack strength without a stable economy but did increase international awareness of soft power and international law as mechanisms in foreign relations.

Hoover’s increased involvement in American foreign policy irked Stimson at times and led to a complex relationship between the two men in charge of American foreign policy. Despite the tension and division that emerged later in Hoover’s term, at the start the two men got along well. For the early years of their partnership Hoover and Stimson agreed on the overall direction of American foreign policy, pushing for conservative internationalist goals of increased use of international law and soft power influence. They had disagreements about the method of advancing conservative internationalism but remained in agreement on the framework, which made them successful in international negotiations.

1928 Presidential Campaign Rhetoric

The Republican Party’s choice of Herbert Hoover for president marked a shift in the personal politics of the candidate rather than a change in the party since the beginning of the decade. His wartime experience helped transition him into a pragmatic idealist with a focus on voluntary associationalism through peaceful economic competition in addition to foreign policy opinions in line with conservative internationalism. “A new era and new forces have come into our economic life and our setting among the nations of the world. These forces

2 Joan Hoff Wilson, Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1975), 63-64.
demand of us constant study and effort if prosperity, peace, and contentment shall be maintained.”

This quote effectively summarized Herbert Hoover’s view of the necessary role for the United States in international affairs after World War I. The nation needed to use its economic power sparingly in pursuit of peace and the defense of national interests, the goal of conservative internationalist foreign policy.

The outcome of the 1928 presidential election was never in doubt. The Republican Party held itself up as the party of prosperity, and with the decade’s unprecedented growth, seen in hindsight as superficial because of the European reparations-war debt triangle, its candidate would have won handily no matter the name on the ballot. The selection of Secretary of Commerce Hoover as the Republican nominee can be seen as an aberration in the otherwise conservative party leadership of the decade. Political biographies sometimes refer to Hoover as a different kind of Republican because of his engagement in politics at the time compared to contemporaries. The reality of his politics is more complex. While in the Commerce Department, Hoover campaigned for and received increased power in economic foreign policy despite championing the idea of associationalism, which called for reducing direct government involvement in the economy while increasing government support for business through information services. The limited leadership styles of Harding and Coolidge allowed Hoover to rise from secretary of a relatively weak department to an important figure in Washington politics, dubbed the “secretary of commerce and undersecretary of everything else,” again clashing with the idea of disinterested conservatism by seeking the best way to help the nation. Hoover held dynamic vision of conservative internationalism based on his personal experiences as an engineer, stressing the importance of economic opportunity in

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stabilizing international relations for the United States as a way to maintain its mediatory position in the post-World War I order.

The general Republican stance on foreign policy remained unchanged throughout the 1920s when the 1928 campaign began. It remained entrenched in conservative internationalism in practice and method. The main goal of foreign policy to the Republican Party was to “express the will of the American people in working actively [to] build up cordial international understanding that will make world peace a permanent reality,” which was strongly reflected in support for soft power and international law as enforcement mechanisms. These ideas were popular in the United States because of previous international agreements negotiated by the Harding and Coolidge administrations with them as the cornerstone. Without the American people to support any foreign policy initiative, it would fall by the wayside through the election of candidates opposed to it. Another important point of soft power influence in international relations came later when the party endorsed the Kellogg-Briand Pact. In the platform, the Republicans stated that their belief and effort at international law “stirred the conscience of mankind and gained widespread approval” in reference to the nearly sixty nations that signed the Pact when it was proposed in Paris earlier that year. There was no mention of World Court membership or continuing efforts at disarmament in the platform, partially because of Coolidge’s bungling in 1927 at Geneva when only Great Britain and Japan answered the call to further the Washington system, which failed to produce any concrete agreement. The platform also reiterated Republican opposition to the League of Nations, arguing that America’s “traditional policy of non-interference in the

6 1928 Republican Party Presidential Platform.
political affairs of other nations” represented the correct course of action. It also signaled conservative support for soft power in international affairs, another constant throughout the decade with the party’s advocacy of international law to settle disputes between nations rather than relying on a coercive organization like the League.

On the campaign trail, Hoover gave fewer speeches than his predecessors because of the advent of radio as a tool of mass communication in politics, which made transmission of campaign ideas to the general public easier. Hoover’s first major campaign address came on August 11, 1928, in response to his nomination over two months prior. Early in it, he summarized the recent record of the party in glowing terms, claiming that “The record of these seven and one-half years constitutes a period of rare courage in leadership and constructive action.” In the context of the 1920s, Hoover’s argument for conservative internationalism makes sense given the changes in the United States’ position relative to the rest of the world, even with the lackluster presidencies of Harding and Coolidge. He quickly followed up the claim with solid policy and fact: “Peace has been made. . . . We have advanced the ideals of law and of peace in substitution for force. . . . Federal expenses have been reduced by two billions per annum. The national debt has been reduced by six and a half billions” and “our exports, even if we allow for the depreciated dollar, are fifty-eight percent greater than before the war.” He drew attention to these facts because of his role as secretary of commerce under the Republican presidents in part to gain credit for the economic conditions of the country, which were an important element of its soft power influence. He further argued for his relevance in the discussion on the state of the American economy by addressing the dollar

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7 1928 Republican Party Presidential Platform.
increase in exports. He noted that in 1922 in prewar dollars American export totals were $2,730,000 ($3,750,000 in postwar dollars) and increased to $3,840,000 ($4,750,000) in 1927, the last year of data available, showing the new role for the nation’s economic power in international relations. Whether or not one agrees with Republican policies, the results could not be disputed in terms of economic growth and international standing, though the latter lagged after Coolidge’s blunder in 1927.

Hoover imbued his foreign policy rhetoric with a personal approach, arguing that he would continue the projects started by his predecessors in international law and soft power. He had “a deep passion for peace” that dated back to his time in the Food Administration after World War I and experience with the aftermath of war for the people. His view of the role of the United States centered on its constructive potential through conservative internationalism because “We have no hates; we wish no further possessions; we harbor no military threats.” In this line of thought, he was no different than any other Republican. The importance of the United States came from its ability to act without the biases of Europe in the belief that its vision for international relations would prevail because of its moral power rather than relying on force. These elements were necessary for Hoover and his fellow Republicans because they represented “the building up of good-will by wise and sympathetic handling of international relations, and the adequate preparedness for defense” that American foreign policy viewed as appropriate for the nation. Expanding the use of soft power and international law dominated conservative internationalist foreign policy because they were compatible with the Republican

vision of reducing American international participation back to levels that protected the nation from being dragged into future wars.

Hoover often referred to the Wilson administration as an example of what failure to uphold American foreign policy traditions would mean for domestic and international affairs. On October 22, 1928, Hoover argued again for American independence in foreign policy by recalling the negatives of Wilson’s system, claiming that “We were challenged with a peacetime choice between the American system of rugged individualism and a European philosophy of diametrically opposed doctrines—doctrines of paternalism and state socialism.”

For Republicans, the United States needed to be an active player in international affairs by balancing conservative internationalist policies with American principles of “ordered liberty, freedom, and equal opportunity” at the center of its foreign policy. The only way the nation could achieve this goal was by creating a system based around its strengths in law and soft power.

During the campaign Hoover approached disarmament policy as part of a soft power strategy for implementing the conservative internationalist framework in international relations. He stressed their importance in international agreements because of his experience in the Harding and Coolidge administrations in observing the outcomes of the 1921-1922 Washington and the 1927 Geneva Conferences. Hoover, like other Republicans, firmly believed in the use of soft power to resolve international disputes but also stressed the importance of preparedness for national security, showing the political limits of disarmament and soft power. In his acceptance speech, Hoover stated that though “we are particularly desirous of furthering the limitation of armaments . . . we know that in an armed world there is

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only one certain guarantee of freedom—and that is preparedness for defense.”

This was not a contradiction in rhetoric but recognition of the importance of pragmatism in international relations, the basis of conservative internationalism. It represented an attempt to balance idealism and pragmatism in foreign relations. This did not represent repudiation of soft power and international law but the recognition that hard power was sometimes necessary as the last resort to resolve crises.

Hoover also addressed the role of economic issues like war debts and reparations payments, which were an important aspect of American soft power influence in the 1920s, during his campaign for the presidency. He opposed the policy that linked the two debt payment systems together because they were separate to ensure the necessary repayment, an element important to maintaining international trust. Hoover strongly argued this perspective on October 15, 1928, in Boston, claiming that the debts were not “wrung from the blood of other countries” or part of a profit made by the nation but a necessity to deal with the impact of the war on America’s domestic life in the form of “the loss of life of our sons, with the depleted health of others, with a huge debt, increased taxes, inflated currency, inflated agriculture, useless factories, with a shortage of housing and other facilities” among the problems caused by the devastation and dislocation of war on the American economy, highlighting national suffering from the war. Hoover, like his predecessors, believed that the war debts were a matter of international trust and repudiating them would undermine the basis of the global international community. The repayment policy fit within the conservative internationalist mindset because the only successful way to influence the underlying structure

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of the international system was through enforcing correct behavior from nations in international agreements.

The economic component of foreign policy was crucial to Hoover because it represented the main avenue of American power in international relations. Several times during his presidential campaign he called for “equality of opportunity” as the standard by which “we should test every act of government, every proposal, whether it be economic or political,” to ensure its usefulness.\(^\text{18}\) In this kind of rhetoric Hoover insinuated that economic impact would become another criterion for foreign policy considerations in his administration. In his mind, “Prosperity, security, happiness, and peace rest on sound economic life” with the latter viewed as the primary engine for improving international relations.\(^\text{19}\) Though this statement referred to American family life, it is easy to infer that Hoover viewed economic strength as the basis for a successful nation and its foreign policy. For conservative internationalism, the economic power of the United States gave weight to its proposals based on soft power and international law as responses to crises.

The policies and failures of Hoover’s predecessors were not easily undone and shaped his response to international crises despite his dominant victory. Coolidge’s call for increased naval construction in the United States after the failure at Geneva only spurred the other great naval powers to act, resulting in the 1928 Anglo-French Naval Compromise.\(^\text{20}\) The groundwork for rapprochement between the great powers came from the 1928 Kellogg-Briand

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\(^{19}\) Hoover, “St. Louis,” in *The New Day*, 206.

The American commitment in Paris to international law prevented the nation from becoming an international pariah. The election of Herbert Hoover gave people on both sides of the Atlantic hope for a new effort at Anglo-American international cooperation.

1929-1930 Hoover-Stimson Foreign Policy

Hoover’s continued use of conservative internationalist rhetoric upon assuming the presidency supported the impression that he would lead the United States to a more active role in world affairs based on those principles. In his inaugural address, the president referred to the integrated state of the global community multiple times as rationale for creating a new framework for American action. He called the integration a “profound truth” of international relations and asserted that American “progress, prosperity, and peace are interlocked with the progress, prosperity, and peace of all humanity,” all important elements of soft power.\footnote{Herbert Hoover, “Inaugural Address. Delivered at the Capitol, Washington, D.C., March 4, 1929” in The State Papers and Other Public Writings of Herbert Hoover Vol. I (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1970), ed. William Starr, 8.} Hoover viewed disarmament as a method through which soft power could be effectively used to promote international stability and peace. He did not call for a conference directly but addressed the role of disarmament in the peace process as one of the many “instrumentalities for peaceful settlement of controversies” in addition to international law.\footnote{Hoover, “Inaugural Address” in The State Papers Vol, 1 ed. Starr, 10.} This argument reflected commitment to conservative internationalist principles and an effort to include them in broader policy discussions between nations, something important to cement the framework in practice.

As president, Hoover remained engaged with the details of policy, and often took particular interest in foreign policy matters. He consulted with Ambassador Hugh Gibson on the address intended for the Arms Parley held by the League of Nations on April 22, 1929. It

\footnote{Patrick O. Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain, and the Stabilization of Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 475-76.}
represented Hoover’s first statement on conservative internationalist foreign policy as president, even if he did not deliver the address. Gibson argued for the “simplest, fairest and most practical method” in disarmament by convening a conference between the great powers because it “has the advantage of simplicity and of affording to each power the freedom to utilize its tonnage . . . according to its special needs.”

The proposed plan expanded and reinforced the Washington Conference on several levels. It expanded the soft power reach by calling for open dialogue on all classes of navy ships, stressing the idea that “there can be no complete and effective limitation of armaments” without it.

With this language, Hoover pushed conservative internationalism to the maximum extent and effectiveness on disarmament by utilizing international law and soft power as the primary treaty structure. The rationale of conservative internationalism was that no nation would sign a treaty that restricted its rights without the other signatories making similar commitments. Hoover’s expansion of soft power mechanisms through disarmament policy to all naval classes was applying conservative internationalism to the “theory of relative needs” because “naval needs are relative” and “depends chiefly on the size of the navies maintained by others.”

Hoover’s logical position was that if the great powers knew how many ships their rivals possessed, they would be less likely to engage in costly arms races because their military forces would be enough for their maritime concerns rather than a drain on national resources with the intent of replacing hard power with soft power for settling international disputes.

Hoover supported this conservative internationalist rhetoric with action. He began by trying to implement soft power mechanisms primarily through disarmament efforts. On July


24, 1929, he ordered a suspension of the cruiser construction program instituted by Coolidge after the failed 1927 Geneva Conference. He carried out this declaration in conjunction with the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in preparation for the London Naval Conference. This statement represented the personal effort of both leaders to maintain “goodwill and positive intention” in their diplomatic relationship. For conservative internationalists, political goodwill was the basis for successful international agreements. The intention of cultivating good will was to gain public support for the foreign policy of the government because it reflected the will of people, an important component in foreign policy. Stable public opinion, for conservative internationalists, allowed government officials to act with certainty and purpose in treaty negotiations and establish lasting foreign policy frameworks based on cooperation over competition.

Hoover’s involved approach to conservative internationalist foreign policy separated him from his predecessors. It also created headaches for Henry L. Stimson as secretary of state. He had several conservative connections from being a member of Elihu Root’s New York law firm. Beyond his connection to Republican elites, Stimson’s main foreign policy credentials were his experience as secretary of war under William Howard Taft and time as a mediator in Nicaragua in 1927 when the country was on the brink of civil war. His eventual recommendation to end the conflict before it became reality rested on conservative internationalist principles of soft power. He called for “peace and a general amnesty,” along with “complete disarmament . . . of the entire population” and “a new impartial police force”

as prerequisites of the nation’s general election. The main reason for Stimson’s participation was his belief that the state system of international politics could only be preserved through limited intervention in domestic issues, somewhat of a contradiction for an internationalist Republican. Thus, the areas where Stimson’s views of foreign policy coincided with Hoover’s were easily identified and highlighted the goal of their partnership: to restore American prestige abroad after Coolidge’s failure at Geneva.

The relationship between president and secretary differed from the norm of the 1920s that Harding and Coolidge followed, an uninterested executive with the secretary free to act on policies or initiatives at his discretion. The main difference was Hoover’s desire to be actively involved in the minutia of policy, to maintain the role of an involved executive as he had at the Commerce Department. Hughes utilized Harding’s trust in him to the fullest, leading to the successful Washington Naval Conference and nearly successful effort to have the Senate ratify the Permanent Court of International Justice protocol, each advancing the conservative internationalist tools of soft power and international law. Kellogg preferred a more reflexive style as secretary, only acting on the wishes of President Coolidge when deemed appropriate or necessary. This led to the failed 1927 Geneva Disarmament Conference and the broad Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928 which showed the positives and negatives of the conservative internationalist approach. The inactive model was inconsistent in creating long term foreign policy initiatives, especially to Hoover who served in both cabinets. For Hoover, these failures necessitated a strong guiding hand by the executive in addition to the standard conservative internationalist rhetoric.

30 Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, 175.
Their partnership began amicably after Hoover’s election. After Stimson’s inauguration as the secretary of state he wrote that “Mr. Hoover had kindly invited me to stay at the White House on my arrival,” which “gave me a very good opportunity to get acquainted with my new chief.” In their discussions about foreign policy, Stimson praised Hoover’s knowledge, describing him as “very thoroughly acquainted with foreign affairs, with a knowledge of Europe, also of the Far East from his early mining experience.” The only difference between the two was over how the United States should approach war debts, with Stimson a cancellationist and Hoover a staunch supporter of repayment. Stimson thus respected Hoover and tried to incorporate his opinion into consideration on American foreign policy decisions.

Hoover presented no unique policy initiatives under the banner of international law during his presidency, building on disarmament with the London Conference and continuing. The president did support the World Court, personally viewing the organization as the “minimum possible step in eliminating the cause of war.” He viewed the organization’s existence as “a declaration that springs from the aspirations and hearts of men and women throughout the world,” adhering to the conservative ideal of public opinion enforcing foreign policy agreements. Stimson held a similar opinion of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, calling it “evidence of a deep seated yearning for peace and disarmament,” connecting the two main planks of Republican foreign policy. For conservative internationalists, the Pact represented the first time that soft power mechanisms were an integral part of a multinational treaty

36 Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, 164.
accepted by dozens of states. The Washington Conference treaties were important as well in introducing the concept of soft power to international relations but it was limited to the great powers. Their acceptance showed that soft power became influential in international relations by dictating the conduct of the most important players. It did remain limited in scope, while the conservative internationalist goal stressed broad usage of soft power and international law. The pursuit of law over force remained central in conservative internationalist rhetoric throughout the decade.

The Kellogg-Briand Pact worked as a tool of international law and soft power in foreign affairs, at least in December 1929. In response to an incident between Russia and China, Stimson invoked Article 2 of the Kellogg-Briand Pact to “call attention to the provisions of the treaty for the renunciation of war” and “express its earnest hope that China and Russia . . . will find it possible in the near future to come to an agreement between themselves” to resolve the dispute.37 The two nations did avoid open conflict over the skirmish, which upset the general understanding of the ineffectiveness of the Pact to stop any meaningful act of aggression. This example showed conservative internationalists that the Pact, though seen as weak, held a position in international law that could stop a military crisis from escalating into full scale war, which they hoped would become the norm in international relations.

As in previous administrations, Stimson constantly pushed the Senate to vote on accepting the Permanent Court of International Justice Protocol in domestic politics. Using conservative internationalist rhetoric, he reiterated his predecessors’ rhetoric on American participation in the World Court. To him, it worked within traditional American foreign

37 Henry L. Stimson, Russian-Chinese Situation Secretary Stimson’s Statement of December 2, 1929 The Stimson Diaries Vol. 11, 38.
policy because of the argument that “the United States has taken a leading part in promoting the judicial settlement of international disputes” with both individual citizens and government officials “advocating such settlement as a substitute for war.”\textsuperscript{38} The Court represented “but a step in the direction proposed by the American delegation” at the 1899 Hague Conference, not a threat to American rights or sovereignty as advocated by some members of the Committee on Foreign Relations.\textsuperscript{39} American membership would also allow the nation to “resume its time-honored place of leadership in the great movement for the judicial settlement of international controversies.”\textsuperscript{40} Stimson viewed American leadership as necessary because “the World Court is destined to perform a most fruitful and important part” in “the great future work of transforming the civilization of this world from a basis of war and force to one of peace founded upon justice.”\textsuperscript{41} Without American participation, the concept of international law could be perverted and undermine the very basis of the nation’s foreign policy. Membership in the Court represented the inevitable conclusion of America’s efforts to establish the force of international law as supreme arbiter through conservative internationalism.

There remained opposition to increased American involvement in international affairs in Congress. In a move to preempt the inevitable counterargument that Court membership begat League membership, Stimson responded that “the Court took its existence and became effective not by the action of the League, but under a statute and protocol signed by over fifty states, not all of whom are League members.”\textsuperscript{42} This argument represented a technical

\textsuperscript{38} Henry L. Stimson, Correspondence between Secretary Stimson and President Hoover regarding Protocol of Adherence to the Statue of the World Court November 18, 1929, \textit{The Stimson Diaries} Vol. 11, 14.
\textsuperscript{39} Henry L. Stimson, November 18, 1929, \textit{The Stimson Diaries} Vol. 11, 14.
\textsuperscript{40} Henry L. Stimson, November 18, 1929, \textit{The Stimson Diaries} Vol. 11, 18.
\textsuperscript{41} Henry L. Stimson, November 18, 1929, \textit{The Stimson Diaries} Vol. 11, 31.
\textsuperscript{42} Henry L. Stimson, November 18, 1929, \textit{The Stimson Diaries} Vol. 11, 16.
position necessary for conservatives to reconcile their opposition to broad international institutions with a framework of international law to settle disputes between nations. Stimson further expanded his argument for the Court by stating its limitations within conservative internationalism. The most important restraint within the language of the Protocol was that “the Court can take jurisdiction only over cases which the parties themselves refer to it,” meaning that members controlled its docket rather than the Court itself. Stimson also addressed the point that the Protocol restricted the power of the Court to only delivering judgments and that “It has no power to draw an unwilling suitor before it.” This line appeared disastrous for conservative internationalists because it admitted the weakness of the World Court as an institution when it did not have widespread support. From a conservative internationalist perspective, this served as an additional benefit because it forced the states to bring cases for prosecution to the Court to ensure its existence. Republicans believed that any decision rendered in those cases would receive more support because the decision came from a willing participant rather than a forced response to a treaty mechanism. The timing of Stimson’s speech was important because the report by the Committee of Jurists on September 13, 1929, advocated for an additional article to the Protocol that reinforced the conservative view of the Court as an advising power in policing state behavior. Stimson knew that his speech might not influence any members of Congress to change their vote on the Protocol, but his belief in international law and the necessity of American support for the law framework in international affairs drove him to try.

The only significant foreign policy initiative of the Hoover administration was to call a disarmament conference to address the expiring Washington Conference decade-long

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prohibition on battleship construction. Hoover previously participated in the Washington Conference in 1921 as a member of the Advisory Committee and understood from his experience at Versailles that “simple, broad, direct principles of ultimate action should be agreed upon before the first meeting and announcement of the first meeting.” Hoover took a similar approach with his plan for the London Conference and how he expected Stimson to act as the head of the American delegation.

For conservative internationalists, the only way to ensure the effective application of soft power came from multi-nation agreements. The goal of the London Conference was to restart the process after the failure at Geneva in 1927. Disarmament, which in Republican foreign policy referred to limiting the size of national arsenals, was about establishing trust between nations rather than completely eliminating offensive weapons. Hoover believed “that genuine disarmament will follow only from a change of attitude toward the use of force in the settlement of international disputes.” His rhetoric here represented an example of the long term focus held by conservative internationalists in foreign policy. Their argument came from the conservative opinion that human nature should be changed before international peace would come from human reasoning, which could only be built up over time. The only way it could change was by incremental efforts like these international conferences because any sudden shift would force a reaction back to the old order.

Secretary of State Stimson took an active role in the London Conference. He led the American delegation and recognized the importance of his presence at the negotiations. Before travelling to Britain, he gave a forceful speech about why the United States involved

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itself in international naval disarmament. He began by referencing the Washington Naval Conference, the premier American conservative internationalist foreign policy triumph of the 1920s. The main result of the conference was to continue the ban on battleship construction for the rest of the decade, extending the longevity of the Washington Conference. Stimson argued that “a far greater sense of security has prevailed than existed immediately before the treaty” which resulted in “a marked reduction in those international irritations which inevitably accompany competitive naval building” and helped Republicans create a new foundation for international peace. With this speech, Stimson presented evidence for the effectiveness of the conservative internationalist foreign policy framework that both he and Hoover utilized. He suggested that without previous American intervention in the form of the Washington Conference the continuation of the naval arms race would have weakened all of the great powers by diverting resources away from postwar recovery. The soft power point of this economic argument was implicit and used only to support the vision of limited American unilateralism in foreign affairs, but remained a central assumption about the success of the Washington Naval treaties.

As for the timing of the conference, Stimson again referenced the Washington Conference, stressing its importance to the conservative internationalist framework the Republican Ascendancy sought to establish. The selection of 1930 did not relate to the change in American political leadership but the closing of the voluntary time frame on the construction of battleships. It also represented the “most opportune time for the United States to meet with these same powers to see if we can not still further delay or decrease expenses of

48 Henry L. Stimson, “Message of Secretary of State Stimson upon the occasion of his departure for the London Naval Conference delivered through the Sound News Reels on January 7, 1930” The Stimson Diaries Vol. 11, 44.
the battleship fleets” for Hoover and his secretary of state. Again, Stimson conveyed the conservative internationalist perspective by describing American participation not as compulsory but as both voluntary and necessary to preserve previous gains. In portraying American involvement not as part of a pattern but done on a selective basis, Stimson showcased the blending of internationalism and neutrality of American interests in the international context. The United States did not involve itself in international conferences for trivial reasons but for continuity with Hoover’s main political objective: the maintenance of domestic economic prosperity and international political stability through conservative internationalist foreign policy.

While in London, Stimson’s rhetoric consistently used conservative internationalist terms but also focused on developing public opinion in support of foreign policy as an alternative to official government support should the negotiations fail. At a British-sponsored luncheon Stimson further explained the rationale for American participation in the London Naval Conference. He did not start as he had with the American people in describing the consistency behind the government’s action. He argued instead that “The people of the United States recognize this as one of those rare occasions of history” that can result in “a long and permanent step forward on the road towards peace . . . for all the nations of the earth.” For conservative internationalists, the purpose of international institutions was to defend the law. This concept rested on the belief that successful great power negotiations relied on “mutual good will and an honest effort” as Stimson said and that they were only present when government action aligned with the will of the people and law. The rejection of the Treaty of

50 Henry L. Stimson “Speech by the Secretary of State and Chairman of the American Delegation, Henry L. Stimson, at the banquet given by the British government, London, January 30, 1930” The Stimson Diaries Vol. 11, 46.
Versailles in 1919 and 1920 provided an American example of this negative application of this concept while the elections of Coolidge and Hoover to the presidency can be viewed as public support for Harding’s policies in domestic and international affairs. This turn of phrase also served to lessen European anxiety over how American participation in the conference would unfold, given the failure in Geneva three years prior. In such a light, Stimson argued strongly for conservative internationalism as the means to ease these tensions in time.

Stimson followed up his justification of American participation with his vision of how the conference would succeed. For conservative internationalists, international conferences represented the best chance to create treaties and agreements for the relevant nations on issues like disarmament. They also provided a stage for domestic audiences, mainly to showcase the foreign policy efforts of the administration. The publicity aspect did make any conference potentially harmful for the American image abroad should the conference fail to reach any agreement but also provided reasonable assumptions of progress toward the goal of a new international order. Stimson eloquently presented this rationale in his speech before the same British-sponsored banquet, calling the upcoming conference a means “to remove the secrecy, the rivalry, the mutual irritation . . . and to leave each nation free to have an adequate national defense which will yet not be a source of worry and suspicion to its neighbors.”

Such a statement came from his belief that the conference would mark “a great and notable landmark in humanity’s progress” toward peace by encouraging all the nations of the world to settle conflicts “by the methods of justice and friendship and never by the arbitrament of force.” In the conservative internationalist framework, broad international conferences represent a more democratic forum for negotiations than secret conferences like Versailles because of public

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52 Henry L. Stimson “Speech January 20, 1930” The Stimson Diaries Vol. 11, 49.
awareness. Stimson presented such a view in his statements before and after the conference because such a format worked rhetorically for him. Conservative internationalist rhetoric in this instance allowed Stimson to claim both aspects of internationalism and protection of American tradition as conservative internationalists did throughout the decade. Thus, the nation was presented as working toward the goal of peace in the international context and defending national interests, which allowed the administration to reap popular support rather than remaining stagnant in pursuing neutrality as a defense of national interests.

The positive outcome of the London Naval Conference is that the final agreement reflected the concerted support for conservative internationalism from the other great powers. It extended the naval holiday on battleship construction to 1936 and placed restrictions on aircraft carriers, submarines, and other types of naval craft to ensure stable building programs without arousing any suspicion of ill intent. On the last day of the conference, Stimson took to the floor to address its numerous successes by returning to conservative internationalist rhetoric about the importance of limited international conferences. He referred to the American objective of “the promotion of good relationship between the nations of the earth” through diplomacy. This showcased the continued American effort to create an international political framework around law.

Such a system would encourage the kind of discretionary international participation to which Republicans hoped to guide the United States. Stimson redoubled the use of conservative internationalist rhetoric by arguing that “limitation increases the ability of every

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54 Henry L. Stimson “Address by the Chairman of the American Delegation, Henry L. Stimson, at the final plenary session of the conference, London, April 22, 1930” *The Stimson Diaries* Vol. 11, 64.
nation to carry out its own pacific intentions.” Such an international system would allow separate nations to develop independent foreign policy responses tailored to their preferences and knowledge of regional issues rather than to be forced into a rigid framework that deprived nations of their ability to act, a deep rooted fear for conservative internationalists. After the conclusion of negotiations in London, Stimson sought to connect the negotiations to American foreign policy traditions dating back to George Washington, which conservative internationalists aimed to preserve. He referred to the first president’s vision for negotiations that required “caution and for success must often depend on secrecy” rather than supporting full disclosure. His effort combined the internationalist and neutrality strands of thought within the American public. The London Naval Conference represented the culmination of conservative internationalist efforts to bridge the gap between domestic isolationists and internationalists, as had the Washington Conference before it.

The conservative internationalist defense of soft power and international law were reflected in the final agreement. It intended to set the stage for future treaties based on principle rather than necessity. For Stimson, the outcome of the conference was in line with the American goal to “help in the promotion of good relationship[s] between the nations of the world” and increase “the ability of every nation to carry out its own pacific intentions.” The hope for international relations in 1930 was reminiscent of the post-Washington Conference mood. The economic collapse that spiraled out of control dashed any potential political will

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57 Henry L. Stimson “Address by the Chairman of the American Delegation, April 22, 1930” *The Stimson Diaries* Vol. 11, 64.
for altering the international order around conservative internationalist principles and forced nations to prioritize domestic stability over international order of any kind.

Praise for the London Naval Conference should be understood in the context of the 1920s. The other foreign policy achievement took a similar approach to the previous disarmament agreement signed in Washington, D.C. in February 1922. The Hoover administration’s attempt to signal the start of new American efforts to remain engaged with international affairs that began at Washington. Stimson himself later called the 1930 Naval Treaty “a monument to the constructive and co-operative statesmanship” and “the culmination of a ten-year movement towards peace between the various naval powers of the world.”

Like the Kellogg-Briand Pact, it legitimized the conservative internationalist methods in international foreign policy discourse. The importance of conservative internationalism for the London Naval Treaty cannot be overstated because of the view in the 1920s and early 1930s that public pressure could dramatically influence governments away from war as it had pushed them toward it in the summer of 1914. Without that pressure in favor of war, many conservatives believed that peace could be sustained without large international organizations like the League of Nations, which threatened state sovereignty through broad but binding treaties.

In addition to his speeches before Congress, Stimson tried to gain favor with influential senators for American membership in the World Court through interpersonal meetings. He held several impromptu and official talks with various senators beginning with Senator Claude Swanson (D-VA) over the contested meaning of “interest” as it pertained to the World Court. Stimson held concerns over how the Court defined “interest,” but believed that the new Article

addressed American concerns adequately. His meeting on October 29, 1930, with Swanson held little substance but served as a goodwill gesture intended to muster Senate support for the measure. Stimson agreed with Swanson “that the Office of Secretary of State was rather inconsistent with a partisan attitude owing to his relations with the Senate,” which served no one, least of all the American public, in the conduct of American foreign policy.

There was no evidence to prove any change in his relationship with the Senate when Stimson pressed its members to vote on the Protocol in early November 1930, though it was not a clear decision. Both he and Undersecretary of State Joseph Cotton believed that “it would be a mistake to postpone it [the vote]” from a public opinion standpoint “it would lose the momentum of our followers and discourage them and would give the impression of vacillation and weakness on the part of the president” even though the economic effects of the October 1929 stock market crash were growing across the nation. He conveyed this opinion to Senator William Borah (R-ID) in a personal meeting but the senator agreed with the president in this instance. Borah argued, “the only question was whether or not the President would be willing to take a hounding from the Hearst papers which would begin as soon as the World Court was submitted and which would last a year” because of William Randolph Hearst’s personal agenda against increased American entanglement with Europe. The divide on what was considered appropriate for the nation between engagement and neutrality hurt Stimson’s effort for the United States to officially join the World Court and fulfill the

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conservative internationalist vision of supporting and expanding the framework of international law in foreign relations.

The senator’s concerns about international law did not faze Stimson. The next day he talked about the political scuffle as if it were a battle. He tapped into military rhetoric arguing that “When you once had engaged your infantry with the enemy, the only thing you could do was to go ahead and support them as best you could with your artillery,” in this case the infantry being “the very day when two years ago Kellogg and Mr. Coolidge had written the letter which sent Mr. Root over to Geneva and caused fifty other nations to modify the protocol.”63 The United States committed a fair amount of its prestige on the amendment issue and to persist in opposition to the organization was madness to Stimson. He meet with Senator Borah again on November 25, 1930, to discuss general American foreign policy and gauge the senator’s reaction to the administration’s objectives for the coming year. When Stimson mentioned his plan to bring the World Court Protocol before the Senate for a vote, the two talked briefly over the importance of advisory opinions.64 The Senate and the secretary of state were unable to reach an agreement on the extent of American participation in an international law framework despite it being a consistent goal of the Republican Ascendancy.

The last push for an international law based order failed, forecasting the future of conservative internationalism. Stimson’s later efforts to rally support for the World Court failed to secure any solid commitment. The secretary of state’s effort to form a Senate bloc around the World Court through Senator Swanson was ineffective. President Hoover did not believe the organization had any support within the Senate. He told Stimson that he believed “Borah was trying to kill him politically by the use of the word ‘World Court submission,’”

rather than develop instructive political discourse.\textsuperscript{65} He suspected “that the Committee wished to have him [the president] committed to this plan before the Committee acts” despite Stimson working to gain support for the Protocol vote since the previous November.\textsuperscript{66} The administration demonstrated sufficient commitment to the Protocol but the leadership of the Committee on Foreign Relations successfully blocked every attempt to bring the measure before the full body. The White House and the Senate had kicked around the issue of the World Court for most of the decade. This exchange became significant because it highlighted the open frustration on the part of the president and secretary of state in their failure to control the domestic foreign policy debate, which Harding and Coolidge accepted as incomplete and worked within to an extent. The more engaged Hoover presidency did not lead to any more foreign policy successes than its predecessors.

Conclusion

Herbert Hoover’s foreign policy rhetoric has been overshadowed by his comments on the Great Depression, which was a crisis no president could have successfully navigated given the immense impact on the American and international economy. The great power system of international relations conditioned responses that were ineffective in easing public suffering that eclipsed any previous economic downturn. The American-designed international treaties during the 1920s were only secure when the nation could use its economic power as a stabilizing agent whenever diplomacy failed to resolve an international crisis. The post-World War II order would seek to combine hard military power with the soft power of popular opinion in the United Nations, with limited success as well.

\textsuperscript{65} Henry L. Stimson, December 3, 1930, \textit{The Stimson Diaries} Vol. 10, 193.
\textsuperscript{66} Henry L. Stimson, December 5, 1930, \textit{The Stimson Diaries} Vol. 10, 199.
Hoover’s foreign policy initiatives as president reflected the conservative internationalist values of his predecessors but took more after Harding in pragmatism by recognizing the importance of serious American participation in international conferences than Coolidge to ensure American ideas were discussed seriously. The 1930 London Naval Conference represented a first and unintentional final step in the American attempt to gain international trust. The only problem for Hoover’s foreign policy success came in the form of a domestic economic collapse and the decline of public will to support foreign policy endeavors designed around self-enforcing mechanisms. The only substantial falling out between the Hoover and Stimson occurred over the response to Japan’s occupation of Manchuria, which has been analyzed by several scholars of both the traditional and revisionist school in foreign policy history. The rationale for inaction in Manchuria in 1931 then consists of expectations of political backlash in addition to the economic impact of the Great Depression on the American economy.

The ineffective response to the economic turmoil scarred Hoover’s reputation beyond measure. The public perception of him became one of a heartless reactionary unwilling to help his own people, not the “Great Humanitarian and Super Businessman” he had been in the previous decade. As the only living president from the decade after Coolidge’s death in 1933, Hoover remained the main advocate of the Republican Ascendancy’s foreign policy and a critic of Franklin Roosevelt’s programs. In the 1950s, Hoover used his rhetoric to reframe the narrative of the 1920s. For foreign policy, he challenged the opinion that the “Republican Party is incompetent to preserve peace” because of the international order’s collapse due to the

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Great Depression. In a televised address aimed at young voters, Hoover argued that the Republican Party actively pursued peace through engagement with other nations to challenge the isolationist label thrown about by Democrats. He referred to the Nine-Power Treaty, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and Republican efforts to bring the United States into the World Court as examples of their efforts to preserve peace. The inability of Hoover or Stimson to respond to the new foreign policy circumstances prompted by the economic collapse showed the inflexibility of conservative internationalism to the American public but did provide Roosevelt, and later Harry Truman, with a roadmap for navigating national interests in international relations.

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70 Hoover, Vital Speeches, 46.
CONCLUSION

The foreign policy rhetoric of the Republican Ascendancy did not survive the coming of the Great Depression. The conservative internationalist arguments made by the Republican administrations to balance the domestic and international implications of America’s new international role no longer held weight without the nation’s underlying economic dominance to support them. Presidential and administration rhetoric turned inward to combat the economic chaos and international initiatives were placed on the back burner. The primary exception was the 1931 Debt Moratorium President Hoover issued in an unsuccessful effort to halt the decline of the American economy.

American foreign policy had fallen far from the previous successes of the Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover administrations experienced in the 1920s. The pursuit of new avenues of national power after World War I dominated presidential rhetoric on foreign policy. With power in international relations based on its standing as the leading creditor nation, the nation had to come to terms with what this power meant and how it should be used. The Republican Party, starting with Senator Warren Harding, favored a position that retained the old assumptions and strategies of separation from European affairs while also taking advantage of the new economic power World War I afforded the nation to ensure domestic stability and prosperity.

The Harding administration’s rhetoric succeeded in setting the groundwork for a larger foreign policy program based around conservative internationalist principles of soft power and international law. With World War I casting a shadow over international affairs, President
Harding and his secretary of state, Charles Evans Hughes, pushed to consolidate the new American position through international agreements based around conservative internationalism like the 1921-1922 Washington Naval Conference, a successful first step for a new foreign policy system based around principles rather than pure power. The debate about American membership in the Permanent International Court of Justice stressed the importance of international law to the United States before Harding’s untimely death postponed it. Harding and Hughes were able to craft successful rhetoric and policy because they capitalized on the public mood in the aftermath of World War I. The main weakness was that their new system relied on great power participation to ensure the spread of these concepts into the general operation of international affairs.

After Harding’s death in August 1923, Vice President Calvin Coolidge inherited the presidency with a strong rhetorical focus on foreign policy. With the longest term of any of the Republican Ascendancy presidents (1923-1929), Coolidge had the most time to use rhetoric to ingrain conservative internationalism into American foreign policy. Instead, he remained content with the status quo created by Harding and Hughes. Coolidge’s complacency led to no new developments in conservative internationalist rhetoric on soft power and international law beyond the addition of Coolidge’s inclusion of moral and religious language instilled by his New England upbringing. His secretary of state, Frank Kellogg, kept the complacent attitude as well, preferring to stress Hughes’s rhetoric than branch out and find new ways to use conservative internationalism to create a new international system. Coolidge and Kellogg’s rhetoric only achieved one significant agreement, the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, and did little to resolve the debate about whether the United States actively developed soft power and international law as useable enforcement
models for international relations. The Coolidge administration failed to use its rhetoric effectively as Harding to ensure limited American participation in international crises and the continuation of conservative internationalist principles.

When Coolidge refused to take the Republican nomination in 1928, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover rose to take the reins of the party and conservative internationalism. From his experience within the Harding and Coolidge administrations as secretary of commerce, Hoover had enough understanding to devise ways to improve the nation and international community. His rhetoric worked to invigorate conservative internationalism after its period of stagnation under Coolidge and Kellogg. Hoover and his secretary of state, Henry Stimson, sought to restore prestige to American conduct in foreign relations and reestablish conservative internationalist rhetoric in international treaties between nations designed to maintain peace. He actively pushed for increased American involvement in foreign affairs during the brief time before the Depression to ensure that the new international system remained consistent with American interests, especially with the London Conference and talks with the Senate about the nation’s stance on the World Court. Hoover’s first two years in office had strong foreign policy rhetoric and kept the nation’s commitments, only for economic forces outside of his control to change the course of his presidency.

The 1920s are often viewed as a time of disinterested foreign policy because of the crises during the 1930s. At the time, it was impossible for anyone to foresee the horror that would result, but many judge the past from the present. The rhetoric of the Republican Ascendancy was thrown back at the party in the following decades to paint a picture of incompetence, rather than one that reflected a pessimistic opinion of human nature and its relationship with change. Democratic rhetoric has been praised for its farsighted view of foreign policy that is
only seen in hindsight. The progressive rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt
attracts more attention because it reflected the political reality that now exists, despite
Wilson’s physical collapse in an attempt to have the United States join the League of Nations
only to lose the Senate vote. The rhetoric of the Republican Ascendancy only worked well
within the context of decade given the nation’s inexperience and uncertainty with international
relations participation.
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