

Chapter 28: Foreign Policy

1. The Pacific

Alaska

Claimed by Russia in 1741, Alaska was seen as a wasteland. Russia had few people living there and they depended upon Americans and Britons for much of their supplies. The cost of keeping Alaska became a problem, so Russia agreed to sell it to the United States.

Secretary of State William Seward negotiated the deal in 1867 where the U.S. would pay just over \$7 million for what many people believed to be worthless land. Years later, people referred to the deal as “Seward’s Folly,” that is, until gold and oil was discovered.

Hawaii

Americans began trading with the Hawaiians in the late 1700s. By the early 1800s, Americans began growing sugar cane and establishing plantations using imported cheap labor from around the Pacific. Americans came to dominate the Hawaiian Islands in business and politics.

In 1840, a constitution limited the power of the Hawaiian ruler, but in 1891, Queen Liliuokalani sought to increase her authority. Americans on the island overthrew the queen and established their own government. The United States hesitated to **annex** Hawaii but saw the military importance of the Pearl Harbor naval base. In 1898, the United States claimed Hawaii as a territory.

2. Spanish-American War

The Maine

The people of Cuba had been rebelling against Spanish rule for years. Thousands of Cubans died in the conflict. American newspapers such as Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* exaggerated many of the stories to attract readers. This biased reporting became known as **yellow journalism**.

The federal government sent the battleship *U.S.S. Maine* to Havana Harbor to protect American citizens. Unexpectedly, on February 15, 1898, the *Maine* exploded killing 260 sailors. Without proof, the United States blamed Spain.

War

On April 25, 1898, Congress declared war against Spain. From the beginning, Spain knew it was totally unprepared and unable to fight the United States. Beginning in May, the U.S. navy invaded the Philippine Islands destroying the Spanish navy in the process. Later that month, the U.S. army landed in Cuba and defeated the Spanish. Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders regiment became national heroes after taking San Juan Hill from the Spanish. It was a one-sided war that Spain knew it could not win.

Peace

Spain and the United States signed the Treaty of Paris in December 1898. The U.S. took control of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The United States had become a world power.

3. President Roosevelt

Panama Canal

President Theodore Roosevelt believed the United States needed to take a more active role in world affairs. In 1903, he helped Panama gain its independence from Columbia. In exchange, Panama gave the United States permanent possession of the future canal zone.

Building the canal began in 1904. Sanitary workers drained swamps and sprayed insecticide to kill disease bearing mosquitoes. Thousands of workers used steam shovels, blasted trenches, poured concrete, flooded valleys, and erected locks to complete the canal. Over 50,000 workers built the canal. Approximately 5,600 workers died from accidents and disease. The canal opened for traffic in 1914 connecting the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean.



President Theodore Roosevelt pushed the United States onto the world stage. He believed that America needed to take an active role in world events. Historians often cite Roosevelt as the first modern president. Source: Rogers, William Allen. *Theodore Roosevelt and his Big Stick in the Caribbean*. 1904. Cartoon.

Big Stick Policy

Roosevelt liked the African proverb: “Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.” For Roosevelt, this meant he would pursue peace but was willing to back up threats with overwhelming military power. He modernized the U.S. navy and sent it around the world to **intimidate** other countries.

Roosevelt invoked the Monroe Doctrine to warn Europe to stay out of North and South America or else. The United States would take care of any problems in the **Western Hemisphere**.

4. Mexico

Pancho Villa

Pancho Villa was a farmer in Mexico. He became a bandit in his teens when he killed a man for harassing his sister. In the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Villa joined revolutionaries and eventually became a leader fighting the corrupt Mexican government.

When the U.S. government refused to support Villa’s efforts, on March 9, 1916, Villa attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico, to get military supplies. Eighteen Americans and about 80 of Villa’s men died.

Mexican Expedition

President Woodrow Wilson ordered the army into Mexico to capture Pancho Villa. Although the Americans captured several of Villa’s generals, Villa managed to escape. The army gave up in February 1917 and pulled out of Mexico. Villa made peace with the Mexico government in 1920.