20

THE DIPLOMACY OF ISOLATION

Many Americans found great glory in World War I. After all, the doughboys, as the American infantrymen were called, had turned the tide against Germany, and John ("Black Jack") Pershing, commander of the U.S. forces, emerged from the conflict a national hero. But the human price had been stiff: 100,000 Americans dead and 200,000 wounded. American casualties in World War I were low compared with European casualties (almost 2 million Germans and 1 million British died) or with U.S. losses in the Civil War (600,000) or in World War II (400,000). But the American losses were hardly insignificant, particularly since the country was in the war for only eighteen months and mobilized only about 4 million men. Much of the dying occurred in the appalling conditions of the Argonne Forest, where years of trenching and shelling had created a veritable wasteland of death.

Justifying such remarkable carnage would have taken remarkable results—something similar to the new international order that Woodrow Wilson had promised. But the physically weakened president was not able to deliver on this. So the skepticism that had attended U.S. entry into the war persisted, engendering a somber, even cynical mood beneath the boisterous patriotic surface. Extended into the 1930s, this mood would make it difficult for the country to strengthen itself for the looming conflict with the Axis powers. Some historians argue that it actually played a role in the unraveling of European collective security measures, since the absence of an American commitment made Great Britain reluctant to ally itself formally with France, thereby weakening the common front against a resurgent Germany.

A major reason for the failure of the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, and therefore U.S. membership in the League of Nations, was the opposition of Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Wealthy, elderly, conservative, and nationalistic, Lodge opposed virtually every reform of the era, including women's suffrage, the direct election of senators, prohibition, and compulsory international arbitration. A "strong navy" man who had endorsed the imperialist policies of William McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt, he was vituperatively critical

of Wilson for not entering the war on the side of England right away, and once threw (and landed) a punch at a young American of Swiss-German descent who came to his office to agitate for peace; Lodge's staff then jumped the hapless man and beat him badly. When the war ended Lodge urged harsh peace terms. When Wilson submitted the treaty for Senate confirmation, Lodge's committee reported it out with so many amendments to safeguard U.S. sovereignty that Wilson urged even Senate Democrats to oppose it, thus dooming the measure, and with it the hopes of Wilsonian internationalists. Lodge's victory in the struggle over ratification increased his popularity, which he used to defeat a proposal by President Warren G. Harding to have the United States join the World Court. Lodge remained a senator until his death in Boston in 1924, but his influence endured, as may be seen in the charter of the United Nations, founded in 1945, which gave the Great Powers veto authority over measures they disapproved.

Questions to Consider. On what main grounds did Lodge rest his arguments for opposing the Treaty of Versailles as submitted? What two groups did Lodge characterize as the chief "internationalists" of his time? Was this a fair way to deal with the Wilsonians? What was Lodge's attitude toward Europe? Did he want the United States to become part of a broader transatlantic community? What role did Lodge wish to see America play in world affairs? Do you find his arguments for American distinctiveness and exceptionalism compelling? Would they carry the day in the early twentieth-first century as they did in 1919?

Speech to the Senate (1919)

HENRY CABOT LODGE

I am anxious as any human being can be to have the United States render every possible service to the civilization and peace of mankind, but I am certain we can do it best by not putting ourselves in leading strings or subjecting our policies and our sovereignty to other nations. The independence of the United States is not only more precious to ourselves but to the world than any single possession.

Look at the United States today. We have made mistakes in the past. We have had shortcomings. We shall make mistakes in the future and fall short of our own best hopes. But nonetheless is there any country today on the face of the earth which can compare with this in ordered liberty, in peace, and in

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the largest freedom? I feel that I can say this without being accused of undue boastfulness, for it is the simple fact, and in making this treaty and taking on these obligations all that we do is in a spirit of unselfishness and in a desire for the good of mankind. But it is well to remember that we are dealing with nations every one of which has a direct individual interest to serve, and there is grave danger in an unshared idealism.

Contrast the United States with any country on the face of the earth today and ask yourself whether the situation of the United States is not the best to be found. I will go as far as anyone in world service, but the first step to world service is the maintenance of the United States. You may call me selfish if you will, conservative or reactionary, or use any other harsh adjective you see fit to apply, but an American I was born, an American I have remained all my life. I can never be anything else but an American, and I must think of the United States first, and when I think of the United States first in an arrangement like this I am thinking of what is best for the world, for if the United States fails, the best hopes of mankind fail with it. I have never had but one allegiance—I cannot divide it now. I have loved but one flag and I cannot share that devotion and give affection to the mongrel banner invented for a league.

Internationalism, illustrated by the Bolshevik and by the men to whom all countries are alike provided they can make money out of them, is to me repulsive. National I must remain, and in that way I like all other Americans can render the amplest service to the world. The United States is the world's best hope, but if you fetter her in the interests and quarrels of other nations, if you tangle her in the intrigues of Europe, you will destroy her power for good and endanger her very existence. Leave her to march freely through the centuries to come as in the years that have gone. Strong, generous, and confident, she has nobly served mankind. Beware how you trifle with your marvelous inheritance, this great land of ordered liberty, for if we stumble and fall freedom and civilization everywhere will go down in ruin.

We are told that we shall "break the heart of the world" if we do not take this league just as it stands. I fear that the hearts of the vast majority of mankind would beat on strongly and steadily and without any quickening if the league were to perish altogether. If it should be effectively and beneficently changed the people who would lie awake in sorrow for a single night could be easily gathered in one not very large room but those who would draw a long breath of relief would reach to millions.

We hear much of visions and I trust we shall continue to have visions and dream dreams of a fairer future for the race. But visions are one thing and visionaries are another, and the mechanical appliances of the rhetorician designed to give a picture of a present which does not exist and of a future which no man can predict are as unreal and shortlived as the steam or canvas clouds, the angels suspended on wires and the artificial lights of the stage. They pass with the moment of effect and are shabby and tawdry in the daylight. Let us at least be real. Washington's entire honesty of mind and his

fearless look into the face of all facts are qualities which can never go out of fashion and which we should all do well to imitate.

Ideals have been thrust upon us as an argument for the league until the healthy mind which rejects cant revolts from them. Are ideals confined to this deformed experiment upon a noble purpose, tainted, as it is, with bargains and tied to a peace treaty which might have been disposed of long ago to the great benefit of the world if it had not been compelled to carry this rider on its back? . . . No doubt many excellent and patriotic people see a coming fulfillment of nobler ideals in the words "league for peace." We all respect and share these aspirations and desires, but some of us see no hope, but rather defeat, for them in this murky covenant. For we, too, have our ideals, even if we differ from those who have tried to establish a monopoly of idealism. Our first ideal is our country, and we see her in the future, as in the past, giving service to all her people and to the world. Our ideal of the future is that she should continue to render that service of her own free will. She has great problems of her own to solve, very grim and perilous problems, and a right solution, if we can attain to it, would largely benefit mankind. We would have our country strong to resist a peril from the West, as she has flung back the German menace from the East. We would not have our politics distracted and embittered by the dissensions of other lands. We would not have our country's vigor exhausted or her moral force abated, by everlasting meddling and muddling in every quarrel, great and small, which afflicts the world. Our ideal is to make her ever stronger and better and finer, because in that way alone, as we believe, can she be of the greatest service to the world's peace and to the welfare of mankind.