**Interpretations of American Diplomacy**

When historians write about American foreign policy, they can be most usefully classified by their interpretations of the intentions and behaviors of foreign policy figures. These figures include most often presidents and their advisors, but also secretaries of state, military officers, prominent congressmen, and other citizen voices active in foreign policy discussions. The historians, then, are identified broadly by the following three terms: imperialist, realist, and nationalist. These terms describe not the *personal opinions* of the historians themselves, but rather *the way* the historians explain the country’s foreign policy and the individuals who determine it.

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|  | **Imperialist** | **Realist** | **Nationalist** |
| **Attitude of historical figures** | greedy | calculating | patriotic |
| **Motives recognized** | economic expansion, demands of capitalist institutions within the US | to increase power and security, safeguard interests, maintain balance of power among nations | spread US values abroad, become a leader of the world order |
| **Behavior observed** | aggression, exploitation | cautious, calculating, cold-blooded, maybe amoral | defensive, protective, generous |
| **Means used** | domination by military force, use of investment, trade and culture | shrewd diplomacy and muscle-flexing via politics, military, or economics | benevolent use of aid and trade; military assistance; sacrifice for the common good |
| **Results identified** | oppression, enriching of the U.S., resentment among less-developed countries, support of dictators abroad | *successes*: peace and enhanced power  *failures*: overstretch, imperialism, and misguided moral crusades | peace, security, prosperity; spread of US influence around the world |
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Which of the three interpretations above best explains the following individuals and events?:

* the Spanish-American War
* Theodore Roosevelt
* Woodrow Wilson
* World Wars One and Two
* Vietnam
* the Cold War
* the war on terrorism
* current and recent presidents