American prisoner of war policy and practice from the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror

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Abstract
American prisoner of war (POW) policy consists of repeated improvisational efforts during wartime followed by few efforts to incorporate lessons learned. As such, in every war, the United States has improvised its system of POW maintenance and utilization. At no time prior to World War II was the United States military prepared to capture and maintain the prisoners taken in any American conflict. The United States has depended upon reciprocal treatment of enemy prisoners and threatened retaliation for mistreatment of American captives in every war. It has also adhered to accepted customs and international law regarding prisoners, providing housing, food, and medical care to POWs at least the equal of that given to American prisoners. However, the U.S. military has often sought the most expedient methods of maintaining prisoners, a practice that has led to accusations of neglect. In the nineteenth century, American wars were typically fought upon the North American continent and were limited in scope, which facilitated the maintenance of enemy prisoners and eased the improvisation of policy and practice. In the twentieth century, the United States participated in conflicts in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, complicating POW issues. World War II and subsequent conflicts show a radical departure from earlier wars, as the army planned for the capture of enemy troops and was better prepared to maintain them. However, the War on Terror represents a return to improvisation, as a lack of planning and a failure to follow established policies contributed to allegations of mistreatment in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay.

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War on terrorism, term used to describe the American-led global counterterrorism campaign launched in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In its scope, expenditure, and impact on international relations, the war on terrorism was comparable to the Cold War; it was intended to represent a new phase in global political relations and has had important consequences for security, human rights, international law, cooperation, and governance. The war on terrorism was a multidimensional campaign of almost limitless scope. Its military dimension involved major wars in Afghanistan and fought between 1775 and 1783, the American Revolutionary War / American War of Independence was primarily a conflict between the British Empire and some of its American colonists, who triumphed and created a new nation: the United States of America. France played a vital role in aiding the colonists, but accrued great debt in doing so, partly causing the French Revolution. A combined Franco-American army under Washington and Rochambeau decided to shift their troops down from the north with the hope of cutting Cornwallis off before he moved. French naval power then fought a draw at the Battle of Chesapeake - arguably the key battle of the war - pushing the British navy and vital supplies away from Cornwallis, ending any hope of immediate relief. During the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) the management and treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) was very different from the standards of modern warfare. Modern standards, as outlined in the Geneva Conventions of later centuries, expect captives to be held and cared for by their captors. One primary difference in the 18th century was that care and supplies for captives were expected to be provided by their own [combatants] or private citizens.