Summary Article: Root, Elihu
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1845–1937, American cabinet member and diplomat, b. Clinton, N.Y. Admitted to the bar in 1867, he practiced law in New York City, became prominent in Republican politics, and was appointed (1883) U.S. attorney of the southern district of New York. He soon returned (1885) to his private practice, in which he gained distinction as a corporation lawyer. As U.S. Secretary of War (1899–1904) under Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, Root improved the efficiency of the War Dept., made drastic reforms in the organization of the army, introduced the principle of the general staff, and established the Army War College. He helped direct U.S. policy in the areas acquired as a result of the Spanish-American War and was largely responsible for the Platt Amendment (see under Platt, Orville Hitchcock) regarding Cuba. He also fostered the establishment of civilian governments in Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Root became Secretary of State under Roosevelt in 1905, serving until 1909. He improved relations with Latin America somewhat, after much criticism had been leveled at U.S. activities in Panama, and he concluded (1908) the Root-Takahira agreement with Japan, by which both nations agreed to maintain the status quo in the Pacific and to uphold the Open Door Policy in China. He also negotiated a series of arbitration treaties. Although reluctant to run for public office—partly because his opponents made much of his having been defense attorney for William M. Tweed in 1873—he accepted appointment in 1909 as U.S. Senator from New York and served until 1915. In 1912 he was chairman of the Republican national convention, and in the break between Roosevelt and William Howard Taft he adhered to the conservative Taft faction. He was a member of the Hague Tribunal (Permanent Court of Arbitration) and was prominent (1910) in the North Atlantic Coast Fisheries Arbitration. Root received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1912 in recognition of his efforts toward international peace. He advocated U.S. entry into the League of Nations and helped to bring the World Court (Permanent Court of International Justice) into existence.


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