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With Britain Voting On Brexit, Is It Time For An American Exit, Or Amexit, From The Union?

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The British will soon vote on leaving the European Union. There are many reasons people want to quit. Perhaps the most important is self-government. Britons are tired of being bossed around by nameless and faceless bureaucrats in Brussels. Americans should follow the British in reconsidering the wisdom of living under a centralized Leviathan in a distant capital, that is, Washington.

The vote on “Brexit” looks to be close. The two sides disagree vehemently over the economic impact of leaving. The United Kingdom probably would take a small hit in the short-term. But it likely would make up lost ground if it could forge free trade agreements with the smaller EU and America, as well as cut regulatory impediments to growth with the end of control from Brussels.

Opponents of Brexit have argued that leaving would hurt British security, but the EU has virtually nothing to do with military policy and London would remain a member of NATO. Nor is it obvious who would threaten Britain in or out of Europe.

There’s also a lively debate over the impact of EU membership on social policy. The European Court of Human Rights as well as European Commission and European Parliament oversee laws passed by the British parliament—the fount of democratic governance around the world. Some folks, generally more leftish in orientation, like being able to appeal to Europe to override the stodgy British parliament at home. But the majority of Britons are not so happy.

After all, there’s an inchoate sense of sovereignty and self-government. It doesn’t matter who people are. Most everyone prefers to control their own lives. The British don’t care if someone else, whether in Brussels or elsewhere, is theoretically more qualified to govern Britain. (Not likely, but that was the theory of British colonialism for others.) Most Britons want to do the job themselves. Yet the UK government figures about half of economically significant laws originate in EU legislation.

That’s a major transfer of authority and sovereignty to a body which suffers from a “democratic deficit.” The EU has a top-heavy but fragmented—and unelected—executive, with three different “presidents.” The European Parliament is elected, but only rarely do voters choose representatives based on European issues. People usually use their EP votes to punish or reward

national parties based on national issues. Moreover, the Brussels elite, a gaggle of bureaucrats, politicians, journalists, academics, businessmen, and more, is determined to impose its views irrespective of the opinions of normal folks. Indeed, the Eurocrats routinely avoid public input and block votes on EU issues. So it's not surprising that many Britons, as well as citizens of most other European countries, feel alienated from Brussels.

The vote on June 23 is expected to be close. If the British choose Brexit, other European governments likely will feel popular pressure to schedule similar referenda. Polls indicate that those contests would be close. The EU could splinter.

The issue shouldn't matter much to America. Whether London is in or out, the U.S. will retain its close relationship. A free trade agreement would expand commercial ties. Nevertheless, on his recent visit to the UK President Barack Obama, a devout centralist, told the British that they should vote to stay. His advice was appreciated by the leaders of the "remain" campaign, but no one else. Most Britons wondered why he was mucking about in their business. They certainly didn't ask for his opinion.

But Americans should ponder the principles at stake. Washington, a city filled with government buildings and housing a distinct ruling class, looks an awful lot like Brussels. Washington also operates much the same way, an overbearing Leviathan more interested in regulating and dictating than liberating and empowering. If the United Kingdom would do better outside of the European Union, might not individual and groups of states do better outside of the American union?

Of course, the question was asked and answered 150 years ago. But the attempt to leave was sadly stained by slavery. And the answer was corrupted by a willingness to kill countrymen for wanting to depart. Today proposals for disunion could be debated on their merits. And even the most avid American centralist probably would not advocate shooting down those who chose to leave, ravaging their homes and occupying their states.

Admittedly, there are important differences between the USA and EU. The American colonies had more in common with each other than did the European nation states. The U.S. states had not spent centuries at war with one another, as had the European countries. And the American Civil War imposed a much tighter federal straight-jacket on the states than did any EU treaty.

Nevertheless, the American nation is large and diverse. At least some of the differences within are as great as differences within Europe. On a wide range of issues there's no reason to impose a national standard. Rather, both social customs and legal rules should reflect differences in outlook, culture, background, history, and people. The denizens of Washington, D.C. seem almost uniquely unqualified to decide how people in Oregon, California, Texas, Florida, and elsewhere across the nation should live.

Yet over the last century, in particular, power and authority have inexorably flowed into Washington. Rather than maintain the constitutional balance, as originally intended, the judiciary aided and abetted the growth of Leviathan. Neither major party consistently defended traditional federalism. As a result, people's liberties and states' responsibilities have shrunk dramatically. Still, regulations on all aspects of life continue to pour forth from Washington just like from Brussels—so much for the fabled Land of Liberty. At the same time, a small, insular, bipartisan

ruling party has protected its own, profiting mightily irrespective of who formally governs. Abraham Lincoln's famed "mystic chords of memory" have been strained—and appear ready to snap.

But Washington is more like ancient Rome than Brussels in one important, tragic way. Today America's capital acts like the old imperial city. The national government maintains hundreds of foreign bases, deploys hundreds of thousands of troops overseas, fights endless wars to impose its authority on distant lands, claims even the smallest overseas event to be of vital interest to America, turns prosperous, populous states into military dependents, and attempts to micro-manage events and life in virtually every nation around the globe. There is no sense of limits, no hint of humility, no belief in restraint. America's great wealth and productivity have been twisted into an effort to make the U.S. the dictatress of the globe, irrespective of financial, human, and constitutional cost. Support for this brutal colossus is bipartisan. This election cycle Hillary Clinton may be more neocon than the neocons.

At the same time, Washington has developed its own democratic deficit. The president is elected, to be sure, but most chief executives are reelected almost irrespective of performance, and claim extraordinary authority in between electoral contests. The imperial presidency resists all attempts to impose accountability. Citing their war powers recent chief executives have claimed the unreviewable right to imprison and even kill on their authority alone. President Barack Obama cares little more about popular consent than do the EU's multiple presidents.

Congress also is elected, but most House members have guaranteed themselves near-certain reelection through manipulation of the reapportionment process. Every election cycle typically has just a couple dozen seats out of 435 truly in play. The Senate reelection rate is only slightly lower. Seniority still usually delivers committee chairmanships. There is a veneer of democratic accountability, but it is almost completely lacking in practice.

Indeed, the ability of the bipartisan ruling class to insulate itself from popular sentiment has led to the rise of sometimes ugly populism in both Europe and America. When the mainstream parties refuse to consider public concerns, voters turn to alternative voices. In the U.S. it is Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. In Britain it is the United Kingdom Independence Party. On the continent it is a plethora of right-wing and left-wing parties campaigning against immigration, the EU, liberalism, globalization, centralization, capitalism, and more. This wave is approaching the gates of Brussels. Unfortunately, America seems likely to continue on its current course until a similar wrecking crew enters the Beltway around Washington.

Americans like to think of themselves as trend-setters. They might want to learn from the British. If the United Kingdom can break free from continental rule, then U.S. states could do likewise. Washington, D.C. has come to represent itself, not the rest of us. The cost in prosperity, security, and liberty has been extraordinary. Americans would be better off if they slew Leviathan and started over. It's time for a vote on Amexit.

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