



Will Christmas 2022 Be Any Different From This Year?

Doug Bandow

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Christmas 2021 looked a lot like Christmas last year and the year before. Wars and rumors of war circling the planet. With America amid most of them. Washington's War Party naturally wanted the US to confront China and Russia, threaten Iran, disarm North Korea, protect worthless yet contested rocks throughout the Pacific, kill terrorists the world over, and ensure that none of its allies need inconvenience themselves by doing anything for themselves. Such was Uncle Sam's gift to the world, courtesy Americans' lives and wealth.

Unsurprisingly, Washington's supposed friends helpfully pushed the US into their fights. The United Kingdom is perhaps America's worst BFF in this regard.

Early in America's history few analysts would have predicted that result. US-UK relations were difficult throughout the 19th century, with threatening confrontations involving the Canadian border, recognition of the Confederacy, and British activities in South America. The relationship didn't turn around until the 19th century, and even then Irish-Americans and German-Americans held no love for the British.

London was at its manipulative best during World War I, an enormously stupid imperial contest in which America did not belong. The UK also looked hopefully for US intervention in World War II – a tragic consequence of the first conflict and its destabilizing, unsatisfactory end, made possible Washington's needless intervention.

In succeeding years British officials also cheerfully urged the US into war. For instance, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously told President George H.W. Bush: "Remember, George, this is no time to go wobbly," after Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded Kuwait. That turned out to be perhaps the one US war which turned out much better than expected, at least for America, the "cakewalk" that the second Iraq war most certainly was not.

Now London is working to get the US deeply entangled against Russia over Ukraine. It seems the UK's Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, wasn't convinced of Biden administration resolve. According to The Times of London: "The Foreign Office hired a tribute act to the Fab Four called the Cheatles in an effort to woo Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, and

stiffen the resolve of Britain's partners against aggression from Moscow at the G7 summit of foreign ministers in Liverpool this weekend. Truss and Blinken discovered a shared love of Lennon and McCartney when they dined together at the Cop26 climate summit in Glasgow last month. Truss would like America to take as tough a line as possible to deter Putin from ordering more than 90,000 troops into Ukraine."

She would like the US to keep defending Europe. So would UK Secretary of State for Defense Ben Wallace. Indeed, he admitted that he was upset that the US quit Afghanistan: "I think it was strategically wrong because the world is more interconnected than it has ever been." Which, he naturally believes, means defending a lot more than Afghanistan and Ukraine. Added Wallace: "America does need to be the world policeman, for us, for our values, for our way of life. I worry what happens if America were to become isolationist in this global world."

Would London be willing to help, at least as a patrolman on the beat, if not deputy? Not so fast! Wallace prefers to supervise everyone else's efforts.

Earlier in the month he indicated that there were a "range of measures," unnamed, for NATO to take to assist Ukraine, including use of "defense capabilities," also unnamed. He appeared bullish on Kyiv, asserting: "Ukraine matters because other nations are watching. It's about resolve."

That commitment proved transitory, however. He soon stepped back from offering the UK's help, even within NATO. He made the obvious point that Kyiv "is not a member of NATO so it is highly unlikely that anyone is going to send troops into Ukraine to challenge Russia. We shouldn't kid people we would. The Ukrainians are aware of that." Kyiv obviously was on its own, though he refused to admit that: "We can all help with capability but to some extent Ukraine is not in NATO and that is why we are doing the best diplomatically to say to Putin don't do this."

So who's the "isolationist" now, Ben?

In fact, Wallace's position is understandable. It's easy to be irritated with the cheap-riders on America's security guarantees and force deployments, but they are merely taking advantage of an opportunity provided by credulous US policymakers. It would be nice for Americans to have another country – especially if like the US, democratic, with common interests and values, and very easily manipulated – take over America's security. As it is, Washington doesn't have to do much to keep the country safe, with oceans east and west, and weak/friendly neighbors north and south.

But still, the Brits could work with the French and patrol the Atlantic Ocean. The Germans could pick up the tab for America's missile defense. Since the Italians and Spanish must deal with Mediterranean migrants, they could guard America's southern border. The rest of NATO could take up a collection to contribute to the US west coast defense. Japan, South Korea, and Australia could be responsible for building a mid-Pacific naval barrier to shield Hawaii from Chinese depredations. After seven-plus decades of protecting everyone else, turnabout seems only fair!

Still, I won't hold my breath. Maybe if I start now and ask for greater allied efforts for my 2022 Christmas gift, America's defense dependents will decide to reciprocate.

The other noteworthy aspect of Wallace's comments was his riff on "isolationist." Of course, he doesn't mean "isolation" in any normal sense of the word. If it is "isolationist" not to fight for two decades in Afghanistan, then about the only country that isn't isolationist is the UK, which at one time couldn't stay away from Central Asia. However, Wallace did not offer to have his country step forward again. Apparently, London prefers America to pay most of the cost. The Brits don't want to take over as global policeman. So he deployed the standard interventionist slur for use against any American who believes in being even slightly cautious, measured, and humble before wandering about the globe bombing, invading, and occupying other nations.

Maybe a better 2022 Christmas wish would be for American policymakers to recognize that the US government's principal duty is to protect *Americans*, not the rest of the world. Running foreign crusades with other people's lives and money isn't appropriate. Washington also should use war only as a last resort. It is a unique tool, not just another policy option. It should be reserved for the most important interests, truly vital if war is contemplated.

Moreover, policymakers should understand that military action is not a panacea for resolving every human problem. The military is good at national destruction, less so at social construction. Molding souls and building nations require far more than an abundance of bombs.

Certainly, threats to Ukraine do not justify the US going to war with Russia. Ukrainians deserve to set their own course and have been badly treated by Moscow. However, Washington and its European allies treated Russia's security interests cavalierly, which has greatly contributed to Russian threats. Doing so was at best stupid and, given current circumstances, probably criminal. Despite fevered claims from Bernard Henri-Levy, a wannabe philosopher-king always ready to send *others* off to war, that Kyiv is an "ally" and a "rampart" for the West, Ukraine never has mattered for US security. Nothing about Ukraine warrants America going to war against a nuclear power.

Moreover, Russia does not threaten America in any fundamental sense. Most differences are over peripheral issues, such as Syria, and improving the overall relationship would make cooperation elsewhere much more likely. A Russian attack on Europe would be both extraordinarily costly and essentially purposeless, since nothing gained would be worth the resulting economic isolation and destructive combat. The best way to ensure Europe's defense is for Europe to do more.

That includes the UK, which at least meets NATO's two percent of GDP standard, and the many European countries which do not. And that requires Europeans work together in their mutual defense. Stunning are the results of [a recent Pew Research Center](#) poll:

"When asked if their country should defend a fellow NATO ally against a potential attack from Russia, a median of 50% across 16 NATO member states say their country should not defend an ally, compared with 38% who say their country should defend an ally against a Russian attack. Publics are more convinced that the U.S. would use military force to defend a NATO ally from

Russia. A median of 60% say the US would defend an ally against Russia, while just 29% say the US would not do so. And in most NATO member countries surveyed, publics are more likely to say the US would defend a NATO ally from a Russian attack than say their own country should do the same."

Give the UK credit – it is one of four countries where at least a majority of respondents favored fulfilling their nation's collective defense obligation. Ten others fell short, some far short. Greece and Italy were at the bottom with 25 percent; Slovakia and Turkey came next with 32 percent, then Hungary with 33 percent. Only 34 percent of Germans wanted to help defend their neighbors, though other countries defended their nation throughout the Cold War. Why should Europeans expect American aid when they won't help each other? Indeed, the expectation that the US would come to their rescue allows them to be irresponsible about their security.

The best response to Russia would be a negotiated settlement based on mutual accommodations. While Putin's list of demands might be too much for Western leaders to grant, the essential issue is NATO membership. The US and Europeans should pledge not to expand the alliance. Doing so, moving ever closer to Russia, is not in their interest. It would be especially irresponsible to include countries involved in ongoing conflicts with Moscow. Ukraine would still be free to request membership, but the US and its European allies, not Kyiv, get to decide their security interests, for which NATO was created. And that does not include confronting Moscow over Ukraine.

And Washington should rethink the transatlantic alliance more generally. Concern over European cheap-riding is not new. President Dwight Eisenhower hoped to forestall the possibility. He wanted to help "these people regain their confidence and get on their own military feet." Which meant no permanent garrison, which would leave the US as "a modern Rome guarding the far frontiers with our legions." Succeeding presidents did not listen to him, however, which was a huge mistake. And Washington continues to play patsy to the Europeans even though the US is effectively bankrupt, ill-prepared for the fiscal tsunami coming with America's aging population. The Congressional Budget Office warned that by mid-century Washington's debt to GDP will be over 200 percent, a level certainly unaffordable and most likely debilitating.

If the UK's Ben Wallace comes up with more wars for America to fight, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin should offer to put Wallace and his government colleagues in the frontline of any new war. Let them lead from the front! Or, better yet, Washington should tell London to use the UK's military in any nostalgic replay of Britain's time as global policeman of an empire upon which the sun never set. And next Christmas Americans could finally enjoy living in a nation at peace.

Doug Bandow is a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute. A former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is author of Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire.