



Uncle Sam Should Make Some New Year's Resolutions

Doug Bandow

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Truth be told, many of us have someone like Uncle Sam in our family. It could be an uncle or grandmother. Perhaps a brother- or sister-in-law. A second cousin thrice removed or even more distant relation. Someone who everyone gossips about but who can't be barred from annual family gatherings.

In most cases they are an embarrassment, but not particularly dangerous. You can't deny that you are related, but most everyone knows that you aren't responsible for their actions – especially their debts and crimes.

Not so Uncle Sam, unfortunately.

He insists on representing us even if he turns out to be bad at his job. He doesn't care what we think, but takes our money and sometimes our labor, through conscription, to impose his will on the rest of the world. While finding fault with everyone, he never imagines that he could make a mistake, even the slightest error. His toxic mix of hubris, sanctimony, and incompetence is extraordinarily dangerous, resulting in mass death and destruction around the globe. Of course, he never takes responsibility for his actions. Everything, always, is someone else's fault. He's certified exceptional, so how could it be otherwise, he asks?

Unfortunately, his drinking – or whatever is responsible for his increasingly bad judgment and failing performance – has been getting worse. Hundreds of thousands of civilians killed in the GWOT wars. Millions displaced. And now he's calling Russia, China, and Iran out to fight, at the same time. His friends, who've been living off him for ages, are afraid to try to rein him in. If things go bad, really bad, we're all going to be stuck with the bill and more.

So how about some New Year's resolutions? He won't fulfill them. At least, he never has in the past. But we can dream! Uncle Sam should promise to:

1. Sober up and live within his means. He's broke. He owes as much as he earns in an entire year yet he keeps borrowing more. So far he's lucked out with a low interest rate, because his neighbors are even greater wastrels, but as soon as the banks doubt his ability to repay, the cost of borrowing is going to skyrocket. Everyone will call in his debts and his financial house of cards will collapse atop the rest of us.

2. Stop threatening his neighbors. Yes, he's the biggest guy on the block, but even his friends tire of his endless and outrageous demands. It's not that his complaints are always wrong. Some people treat their family badly; others are deadbeats or cheats. However, challenging one to fisticuffs, getting another fired, ruining the reputation of a third, threatening to trash the credit rating of someone else, and tearing down another's fence made enemies, lots of them.
3. Stop treating everyone else's problem as his own. Yeah, the dude down the street is a cad who is cheating on his wife. But no one asked Uncle Sam to get involved. A couple lawns down the street are unkempt. Let the neighbors of those people deal with the problem. It would be nice if the family across the street went to church. However, it isn't his duty to make them go.
4. Set priorities in dealing with his problems. Uncle Sam takes every affront, rejection, and insult badly. Most don't matter much, certainly compared to his kid being threatened on the playground. Getting fired is worse than being reprimanded. The overdue mortgage payment is a big deal, but not the snide comment about his yard. And being insulted by the Gen Xer next door should be considered a badge of honor. Taking everything personally has alienated most of his friends.
5. Pull out his gun only when his safety is seriously threatened. Threatening to shoot the neighbor walking her dog on his front lawn scared half the neighborhood. Waving a gun outside while threatening to blast the squirrel scampering across the lawn triggered a visit from the police. People might welcome his claim that he could help guard the community were it not for so many over-the-top incidents.
6. Stop reliving heroic fights from the past. Sure, he did good defending a friend from a threatened assault. Since then, however, his record is pretty awful. Such as slugging the little leaguer who insulted the umpire last week. And he's always trying to force his buddies to jump in alongside him. He calls their reluctance for almost daily yet arbitrary bouts of fisticuffs "appeasement."
7. Try to see the world from other people's perspectives. His hypocrisy is on the high side, but that is sadly common. It is his sumptuous sanctimony that sets him apart. He sees everyone he meets as requiring a helpful review by his finely tuned judgment. Indeed, he always seemed happiest telling other people how they should live their lives, no matter how disorganized and unsettled his own.
8. Make his own decisions for the benefit of his family and friends, instead of faux buds attempting to use him to make a buck. So many people want him to fight their battles and pay their debts: they claim poverty and extoll his virtues. Flattery isn't enough for many of them – they take him dancing, claim religious solidarity, and lobby his family. If he was broke they wouldn't be seen anywhere near him, but as long as they can leech off him, they will hang around begging for favors. He should remember those who really care about him and put them first.
9. Return to the traditional virtues of humility and honesty. Dealing with others can be tough, especially some of the street toughs who often come along. Yet Uncle Sam ended up in a good neighborhood, generally safe with friendly neighbors. However tempting it

is to aspire to higher leadership – being strong and ruthless enough to run everyone else’s life – getting there requires sacrificing those values which he long held dear and said he wants to protect.

Uncle Sam entered 2021 with a new attitude. It was almost as if he had a brain transplant and was beginning anew. But then not much changed. There was confrontation with Russia and China. Threats against Iran. War plans against North Korea. Continued presence in the Mideast. More sucking up to the Saudi royals and support for their murderous war against Yemen. And ceding undue influence over US policy to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Israel. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

However, a new year has dawned. Maybe things will change. Uncle Sam may promise to do better and actually change his behavior. And transform our lives in the process. At least we can begin 2022 dreaming that it will be so.

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.