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# Tyler Morning Telegraph

## Declaration of Independence changed the world

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On Monday we'll celebrate the 240th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The Cato Institute's Jim Powell has a fascinating essay about how the rest of the world viewed this truly revolutionary document at the time. Most other countries realized the nature of the Declaration, and many sought to emulate it.

"Since the time of the American Declaration of Independence, dozens of societies - including some communist regimes like Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam (1945) - have issued declarations of independence," Powell writes.

But a simple, even heartfelt declaration of independence isn't enough. To be transformational, any such declaration must set out the elements of freedom.

"Among the many essential elements are popular support for the doctrine of natural rights, secure private property, freedom of association, freedom of contract, freedom of trade, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, representative assemblies, term limits, a separation of church and state, a separation of powers with checks and balances, and other measures to limit government power," Powell explains. "The more of these a society has, the more likely it will be free."

The American declaration became an important document in France.

"Many French people were eager to see the Declaration, but until 1778, when the French government announced its alliance with the rebels, producing a translation was a dangerous thing to do in France," Powell writes. "Alleged translations were anonymous. The earliest-known French translation was published in the Netherlands. The Declaration had the greatest impact on debates leading up to the French Revolution (1789). The French referred frequently not only to the Declaration but also to the Virginia Bill of Rights, state constitutions and bills of rights and (later) the U.S. Constitution. These documents, scholars Elise Marienstras and Naomi Wulf wrote, 'acted as an indispensable guide or foil in the conception of their own principles.'"

The Russians were extremely interested in the Declaration.

"Russian newspapers published much information from America, but the actual text of the Declaration was suppressed there for eight decades," he says. "Not until 1863, after czar

Alexander II implemented some important reforms - notably the abolition of serfdom - was it safe to publish a translation of the American Declaration of Independence in Russia.”

Spain supported the American Revolution with some much-needed cash, but its rulers weren't interested in the guiding principles.

“The first Spanish translation of the Declaration doesn't seem to have been published until about 1868, more than nine decades after the Declaration, when Spain had its own Glorious Revolution,” Wilson explains.

A Japanese translation also came long after the original was published. According to one Japanese scholar, that's because “there were no readily available Japanese words for such key Western concepts as freedom, equality and right.”

Eventually, appropriate words were adapted from Chinese or even invented, says scholar Tadashi Aruga.

What Powell's essay shows is just how world-changing the Declaration of Independence truly was. It was revolutionary yes, but it was even more than that.

It changed the way entire cultures view their world, and themselves.