



Independence Day 2021: Needed, a Foreign Policy for a Republic

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In the US July 4th is all about America's independence. The creation of the new republic on the North American continent – and even more so its survival in an imperial world and transformation into the globe's most powerful nation – is an extraordinary, and some would say miraculous, story.

Looking back through the mists of time reveals a people who would have been shocked by what their often fractious, disunited colonies became. After all, they were defending themselves, not assaulting others. As they sought to explain "to a candid world" in the Declaration of Independence, the king was "at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation."

Moreover, even the British empire from which they sought to separate was highly constrained in how it exercised global power. London's international reach was not unique. It dominated the seas but had to exercise care when its adversaries, most notably the French and Spanish, combined against it. On land Britain relied on its financial strength, which allowed it to subsidize allies and hire the mercenaries of which the colonists complained. Alone London would have had trouble defending against the major European powers. The English Channel acted as a moat and kept the imperial core safe.

When the distant American colonies revolted, Great Britain had to supplement the traditional Redcoats with "Hessians," hirelings from Grand Duchy of Hesse and elsewhere. The Americans triumphed more because of their weakness than strength. After France and Spain entered the war,

London had to concentrate on these, its most important enemies, and defend the territory which they most directly threatened. Holding America no longer was worth the price.

What was once a makeweight in global affairs, which George Washington warned against creating "entangling alliances" with others, grew into a weltmacht. Unfortunately, once certain of its power the U.S. illustrated that Lord Acton's aphorism about the tendency of power to corrupt applied even to countries born with a commitment to liberty which professed a desire to act as a model for the world.

Native peoples were ruthlessly displaced or annihilated in service of destiny supposedly both sacred and manifest. War with Mexico allowed a massive land grab. The Polk administration, in 1846-style fake news, disguised its aggressive designs, enticed Mexico to attack, and seized half of that country. In the Civil War the North cared more about mystical nationalism in overspreading the continent than the lives of its people, leaving some 750,000 dead amid a ruined landscape painted red with their blood.

Later that century Washington "liberated" the Filipino people by killing upwards of 200,000 of them to force them to submit to the much touted blessings of American liberty. How dare they believe that they deserved the same independence that Americans claimed and enjoyed! In its own hemisphere the US demonstrated that the Monroe Doctrine was all about this country's dominance, not its neighbors' independence.

A people once committed to using their relative isolation to safeguard their unique republic decided to intervene in the Old World murderfest known as World War I, helping one set of brutal imperial powers defeat another, for no good reason and to ultimately devastating effect. A generation later the unbalanced European order that America helped impose broke down, yielding another, even worse global conflagration, into which the US eventually plunged. The conclusion of that conflict led to the Cold War, with an advanced and militarized Soviet Union, during which America became the "leader of the free world."

When communism disappeared as a global movement Washington decided to establish a new, unilateral imperial era. Unlike the British Empire from which America emerged, the US imagined itself to be unconstrained. Alas, the result was disastrous "endless wars" in Afghanistan and Iraq. As Washington finally made its humiliating exit from the former, America's bipartisan war party pushed for confrontation with China, presented as the next global menace requiring US military intervention.

Alas, America won independence from its colonial master only to become a slave to its global ambitions. Today the US fills the world with imperial outposts, across Asia and Europe, as well as the Middle East and Africa, irrespective of the human and economic cost.

Americans need another revolution to free themselves from the insistence that they have an obligation to act like their British forebears and forcibly establish a new empire. The colonists understood when they declared their independence 245 years ago that their chief duty was to govern themselves. They should act as an example for others, not wander the globe forcing

others to comply. They certainly should not become the oppressors they defeated, like the infamous pigs in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

This understanding desperately needs to be reestablished and reaffirmed today.

Most Americans are well-intentioned, desiring their leaders to do good in the world around them. Yet the US has often helped kill or enslave populations in the name of promoting liberty. Washington has started, supported, and/or extended unjustified wars in which hundreds of thousands or millions of people died, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen being the most recent examples. The US also has backed some of the most odious dictatorships on the planet – Pakistan, Iran, Zaire, a potpourri of Latin American military regimes, and many more during the Cold War, and Bahrain, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, to name just a few today, with only minimal thought about treating entire populations as collateral damage.

America also has gone to war by other means, most notably economic sanctions, effectively targeting the most vulnerable in poor societies. Today people are impoverished and hungry in Syria, Venezuela, Iran, North Korea, and elsewhere because of US policy – which has made (already awful) governments only more brutal to their citizens and dangerous to their neighbors. Yet when challenged, Washington's uniform response was articulated by Madeleine Albright: "We think the price is worth it." America has the mandate of heaven to run the world, irrespective of the cost to others. Apparently the children of the world are supposed to die happy, knowing that the US believed their sacrifice to be "worth it."

Would any of those who pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to American independence in the cause that we celebrated yesterday so breezily endorse killing hundreds of thousands of noncombatants halfway around the world in a country which had never threatened the US? Would a person making such judgment have been promoted, lauded, even venerated, and consulted years and decades later as an elder statesman? What has America become?

Far-sighted Americans tried to warn us. A few decades after the US revolution some activists wanted to take up the independence cause of Greeks against the Ottoman Empire. The cause was just – and would eventually succeed, with an independent Greece established in 1830, after many bloody travails.

Nevertheless, on Independence Day 1821 Secretary of State John Quincy Adams eloquently warned America against joining that fight: "she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from *liberty* to *force*.... She might become the dictatress of the world. She would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit."

The US desperately needs a new beginning. Americans should reassert their independence, this time from the warmongering interests and nostrums that currently dominate Washington, D.C. And from the Sirens that urge the sacrifice of the very principles upon which America was born.

The US and its people should be involved in the world. There are even times war will become necessary. Rarely, however, far more rarely than suggested by recent US history. America's ultimate objective always should be peace for its people. Not going abroad to impose order, remake societies, enforce democracy, engage in social engineering, or claim to do good, no matter how worthy the cause might seem at the time. Washington's principal duty is to protect the American people. That is best done by pursuing peace.

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