

In Our Image

By [Myron Gananian](#) (March 2023)



Marching Men, Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson, 1916

Since the end of the 19th century US foreign policy has had a distorted infatuation with our constitution, its offspring democracy, and our indelible Judeo-Christian heritage. Prior to that time our approach to foreign dealings was realistic, pragmatic, less emotional, and most critically, farsighted, as appropriately determined by the same principals. These profound historical forces have blended and colored the influence of our federal government and nation on every aspect of our foreign and domestic policies. The resulting attitude has determined the posture of our foreign affairs while having the unwavering support of our populace. The US now has altered these ideals and expressed them as ideology rather than as

foundational capstones as intended.

Why are we a nation so unified in some aspects of our societal psychology? It is undeniable that we are magnanimous, which entails generosity and forgiveness. How did we treat Germany, Japan, and Italy after WWII? What is the reason we feel so special and superior? These are not idle questions, for if correct, they lie in stark contrast to the inability of the US in translating these benevolent forces into equally admirable results in our efforts, domestic and foreign. One would assume that a nation imbued with such lofty sentiments would have no obstacle to not only domestic tranquility but inevitable success abroad. Clearly, this is not the case. Turmoil, chaos, and discord seem the national anthem.

It appears that at heart the US is, in fact, a selfish nation if one is willing to accept that word in its dictionary definition: excessive concern with oneself. It is difficult to believe otherwise when virtually every international effort has as its clear goal the duplication of our form of democracy irrespective of the reluctance and resistance of those we hope to elevate to our level of political and social accomplishment.

Our current domestic turmoil is a work in progress, as always, so let us put that aside and focus on our foreign adventures and misadventures, no less in flux. These can provide a clue for the mismatch between how we regard ourselves and the less than esteemed judgment of the rest of the world. This goes far beyond jealousy. Save for our involvement in the two world wars almost every one of our overseas policy implementations since the end of the 19th century has been either a failure or at least engendered the enmity of most of the world. This even from nations regarded as friendly. It is not enough to take satisfaction and pride in the falsely long list of successes touted by our State, Defense, and Intelligence agencies. Even former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim that we will

never know of all the CIA successes should be open to question since the "successes" about which we do know as well as those that are kept secret are no assurance that the fallout either in the near or long term by any measure may be deemed in our nation's best interest. Preventing terrorist attacks is not sufficient for crowing.

Three stark examples should suffice for they are perfect examples of the senseless, thoughtless, and reflexive approach to foreign entanglement, a phrase left to us by George Washington. These examples are undisputedly successful when measured by the intent of their origin. The immediate result in each case was exactly what our government intended, but history served up a totally different verdict in their wake. They each seem to be the result of a "Shoot from the hip" attitude.

The consequences of the first example are being felt worldwide 70 years after its occurrence. Kermit Roosevelt, CIA Station Chief and the grandson of the President, with Eisenhower's permission, removed Mohammed Mossadegh as Iran's duly elected Prime Minister in 1953, replacing him with the Shah whose despotic rule, with the continued support by the US, was the proximate cause for the theocracy now bedeviling the majority of the world and muddying our foreign policy with no solution on the horizon. The price the world and we paid for this is beyond estimation. An unquestionably successful CIA mission with interminable consequences of immeasurable cost, whatever the coin.

The second example is a mirror image of the above and serves to prove that experience does not serve as education when ideology is the motivating force. In 1960, the Congo experienced its first election of Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. Facing a revolt, his appeal to the US and the UN for help being refused, he fatally turned to the Soviets with the same request. His horrific assassination, again approved by Eisenhower, by Belgian forces with the unhidden connivance of

the CIA, led to the perpetually unstable Congo we see today. It should be kept in mind that this instability is not limited to the Congolese border just as we are suffering that of Iran's. The lost irony is that Eisenhower's approvals came soon after he took office and again on the eve of his departure.

The third example is the unwavering US support (as in Ukraine) of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan in expelling the Soviet Union. It is difficult to believe that a near-psychotic Texas Congressman, Charlie Wilson, almost single-handedly dictated our policy there. His supplying Stinger missiles likely turned the tide causing the Soviets to leave. It is not idle speculation to wonder how different things would have been had the Soviets been allowed to remain in control. Possibly no 9-11 and certainly no tail-between-the-legs withdrawal therefrom. This thoughtless, emotional foray into Afghanistan is being duplicated in Ukraine with the blessing of our entire government and without resistance from the populace. The Bay of Pigs fiasco embellishes this list. Again and again, no clear acknowledgment of how America's best interest is served. Only nearsightedness, in contrast with the judgments of our founders.

The first example was a result of the US agreeing with Great Britain that Persian oil belonged to us rather than the owners, while the second was motivated by the assumption that a dead Lumumba and a chaotic Congo were preferable to the communist domino falling toward Africa. The third example ended up supporting a Moslem nation against a nominally Christian one, as against Serbia, on the assumption that hatred of Communism trumped any consideration of consequences.

There has to be a "Why" to all this self-destructive involvement. It is too facile to call it clumsiness or stupidity. Since the litany of failures spans well over a century and continues unabated the answer must come from something in our ethos, our view of ourselves, and our sense

of the relationship with folks who are not like we. This speaks to the essence of our morality, *i.e.*, our sense of right and wrong, our righteousness, our decency, and some other qualities that serve to define our self-image. Why have these commendable qualities not kept us from folly? Is it these very national characteristics that hinder us from dealing with nations who are not our friends? We forget that not dealing with foes does not make them disappear. Demonizing even a friend will create a foe.

This takes us back to the opening: Our constitution, its resultant democracy, and our Judeo-Christian heritage. These indeed lead to a justifiable sense of uniqueness for no other country can lay claim to such a birthright. In addition, a very peaceful northern border and a southern border whose status is almost completely ours to decide are further support for our sense of being special, with over two centuries of relative domestic peace. Since we feel we are at the very top of the pantheon of democracies and have a long history of protecting others in their quest for the same we are further bolstered in our conviction of holding special status.

We acquired the Philippines and Guam, invaded Russia after WWI, fought North Korea, North Vietnam, protected Kuwait, became embroiled in Syria, and remained in Afghanistan for 20 years for the same reason we took down Mossadegh and assassinated Lumumba: the world would be better off the way the US ordered it. It is that simple. The Filipinos were not qualified to manage the Philippines, the North Koreans and North Vietnamese not fit to control the South, Bashar al Assad unacceptable to rule Syria, and Saddam not worthy of controlling Kuwaiti land and oil. Disastrous as those outcomes were, our thwarting them resulted in no better outcome for a long-lasting stable world. What the US would achieve wherever we were involved would be far preferable to any other alternative. American Colonialism cloaked in humanitarianism. The Afghanistan folly speaks for itself. It is not nobler than

ego and gall to think that what history deems to be the "Graveyard of Empires" would be remade in our image, even as a 51st State. The list of affronts to our sense of decency does not begin with the CIA's protection of a thousand Nazis to be used in our service and does not end with recent secret assassination programs kept secret even from Congress.

All this is description, not explanation. If it is agreed that there is a pattern here, a certain road to historical condemnation, then we need to look deeper. Is it just policy, motives of the moment, nationalism, misguided fervor, or something in our essence from which we are unable to free ourselves?

What is it about our natal forces that have led us on a journey in which we have failed to achieve the pinnacle from which we view ourselves and which history fails to confirm? The very fact of our special, unique national character leads to conflict with a world not ordered in the same way. Our exceptional status in the world order combined with the three aforementioned forces has combined to create a feeling of exclusiveness, one fraught with very pernicious consequences. Exclusiveness leads to excluding any who do not mimic us. The sense of exclusiveness is at the heart and soul of our irresistible claim to possess the mantle of world domination if not in the sense of occupying other nations but rather in determining the form of their government and society. If one seeks exclusiveness then a country club is where to find it.

What further bolsters this sense of exclusiveness is what mankind has done with monotheism, the bedrock of Christianity, Judaism, and Mohammedanism, with the US no exception. Mankind has not been able to resist the temptation of turning a propensity for control, power, and subjugation in the pursuit of nefarious ends by turning the benevolent heart of monotheism into a tool or weapon. This weapon, exploiting the qualities of monotheism of charity and compassion, has used

proselytizing to further political and not religious ends. Unfortunately, the political has not been free of religious fervor. This distortion involves yet other malignant qualities; a haughtiness whose essence is superiority, an intolerance of criticism, punishment and vindictiveness if opposed, and finally, what has led to the majority of misdeeds, the ideology that those unlike we would be better off like we are. A guarantee for failure, whether dealing with foe or friend. As examples, the Philippines more like upper Manhattan, North Korea more like Koreatown in Los Angeles, the Vietnamese community in East San Jose, California, and more. There is little daylight between US Foreign Entanglements and the Crusades. It is just this attitude that causes us to call Putin a thug, terrorist, madman, murderer, and more. These have no forensic significance and do not contribute to either our military or diplomatic posture. Their result is only to confirm us in our righteousness, never a display of true strength, and a guarantee of the death of diplomacy.

There are only three examples of regime change with, so far, consequences favorable not only to the US which brought about the changes but to the entire world. Germany, Japan, and to a lesser extent Italy. The reason these were so successful is that not only were their old orders destroyed but were wiped off the surface of the earth. A complete elimination of the old order and most critically, not resulting in a power vacuum in their place, aided by the absence of any nation able to step into that vacuum. East Germany and the other Soviet satellites the exception proving the rule. Every other overseas initiative by the US has been intrusive, distortive, and destructive, and with little, if any, regard for future fallout. Regrettably so too as in our domestic life. That is, no permanent improvement in the world order. Only more chaos and uncertainty. Leaving a vacuum has occurred so often that one wonders if that is a US policy intention. The consequences of US efforts at regime change in Central and South America have been duplicated elsewhere. Where is the benefit to anyone

from these latter follies? It is difficult to not conclude that the US policy, not stated but in consequence, is to make enemies of any who oppose us. Unfortunately, the world being the way it is there is no shortage of candidates.

The end of the 19th century saw the US violate its very own Monroe Doctrine. While we said to the rest of the world under its tenets, "Foreign powers stay out of the Western Hemisphere", there was no hesitation in stationing any amount of military force on the Russian border but reacting with outrage at having Soviet missiles in Cuba.

This brings us to Ukraine and Russia. There are three likely outcomes of the present conflict. One, an attritive stalemate, both sides depleted, no clear winner. Russia may or may not hold onto territorial gains, but this is of no long-term consequence. Two, Ukraine achieves a clear-cut victory, and three, Russia achieves a clear-cut victory. However, if one is to take a truly long-term view of these possibilities, are these outcomes really of the greatest significance? If we look ahead, truly ahead, for the next 20 or 50 years, what will be the consequence of all three scenarios? With greater certainty than any plausible outcome of the conflict will be a perpetually threatened and weakened Russia, brought to its knees. This appears to be the US strategy It is just that calculus that our leaders should be using in determining the security interest of the US. Not the survival or demise of Ukraine, not whether the integrity of NATO is sustained, not whether we fulfill our role as Defenders of Democracy, not whether we would be embarrassed in not doing so, not because we cannot allow Russia to encroach one kilometer further westward, and not because we believe that being strong in this situation will more likely lead to a peaceful world. None of these should be regarded as justification for our support of Ukraine, given that goading the Russian bear is antithetical to long-lasting peace. That is the only certainty. Again, military bellicosity is a killer of successful diplomacy. We

need to ask ourselves why the derisive laughter when President Trump said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we got along with Russia?". It must be that being in conflict with Russia, even war, is preferable to amicable relations.

As proof of the hysteria engendered by the unrestrained US support of Ukraine, we now have the Secretary General of NATO asking *South Korea* to join in its aid. NATO for the entire world.

How many American lives are we willing to give up to produce a Russia which will forever be forced to validate its eternal history of paranoia regarding the West? It is a gross miscalculation to think that creating a Russia as a permanent third-world county is in *anyone's* self-interest. Russia covers half of the world's time zones. More critically Russia is bordered by 16 countries with a restive Moslem Southern border. How this is in America's national self-interest is a long stretch indeed. After over a century will we ever forgive Russia for turning Communist?

The holiday celebrations commemorating our military victories and honoring the dead ring hollow if viewed from this vantage point. One hundred thousand Americans died in combat since WWII. Every single one, it is certain, would have preferred survival rather than give a precious life to a dubious future never like the one predicted, even promised. How easy it has become to oblige someone to give his life for the fantasies of others.

What happened to the trajectory of our history? For the first century the survival of our nation superseded all other considerations. Because the Founding Fathers were so well-versed in world history they strengthened and expanded our borders, Manifest Destiny, and wisely avoided dissipating our endowment in foreign involvements. Then, in the 1880s, partly due to the Civil War's destruction of the clarity and certainty of a society based on religious authoritativeness,

began the era in which we find ourselves, one of uncertainty, relativism, slippery slopes, doubt, apprehension, and anxiety. Undergirded by Einstein and Quantum Theory. Nothing is as you see or think about it. Therefore, we are open to having others tell us what we are seeing and what to think. The vacuum of our uncertainty is filled by any passing unfiltered influence. Self-determination ceded to others, most malignantly, the government, whose wisdom, worldwide, is, as always, open to question. Ideology is history's preferred weapon in filling vacuums. The Soviet revolution taking over the emptiness of the fall of the Romanovs, the Nazis exploiting the hollowness of the Weimar Republic, Chinese Communism filling in the void of a spent China, and in the US, Progressivism adorned with the mantle of benevolence for the entire world. Criticizing kindness and goodness is a losing proposition.

A far wiser course than the temptation to tame the world would be to deal with the world from our clearest philosophical footing, the one admired by the majority of the rest of the world, that stands us apart, our constitution, our democracy, and our Judeo-Christian heritage. The forces we have neglected and distorted should be our example and strength. These forces are our true power, stronger than any military we are capable of creating. By allowing these genetic elements of our country to weaken we have become weaker in the eyes of the world. While there is little disagreement that Reagan outgunned Russia, what is overlooked is that Gorbachev responded to the obvious, that the US in its essence was far superior to the Soviet system. No number of F-16s and Abrams tanks can ever achieve the status for which our country was destined. Our destiny is our strength.

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