

What's New?

An evaluation of American history will point to three concepts that are repeated to the point of becoming a well-worn mantra. They are as follows: Fear (of a Vietnam-like situation), Budget, and Authoritarianism. These three items may be manifested in a variety of different ways throughout our historical narrative, even if we do not always recognize it as such. Sometimes, for example, the fear factor or budgetary considerations are reflected in an isolationist sentiment suggesting that we can wall off the United States from the world's troubles.

When the new nation was founded under the current Constitution in 1789, The Founders did their best to stay out of the frequent disputes between England and France. While the United States fought in revolution against the British Empire, the Colonists had a lot in common with the Monarchy from a trade and a social perspective. After all, most of the citizens of the former colonies were British subjects previously. They were comfortable with the nature of British society, even if they were critical of the stratifications socially and the crude taxation policies of the British monarchs. More than anything else, however, the new nation wanted to steer clear of entanglements in European wars. The enormous naval confrontations between the British Empire and France, threatened to become the era's Vietnam, as more and more American sailors were impressed into foreign navies.

Even in that early era, presidents and many in the legislature showed admiration for authoritarian rule. Jefferson was an undisguised fan of the French Revolution, which was one of the bloodiest uprisings up until that time. Likewise, the Federalists wanted to model the new American capitalism after the British market structure. Both parties, Federalists and anti-Federalists, realized that America did not have the budgetary ability to play in the big leagues. That reality also kept them out of the European wars. It was almost inevitable that the War of 1812 would occur, given the pressures on the new American nation to put its future fortunes either with its former allies, the French, or its immediate ancestors, the British.

Many historians look at World War I as a "just" war based upon the argument that Woodrow Wilson, was dedicated to principles of world peace and an eventual League of Nations. The truth is somewhat different, however. The English Empire, which we helped to bail out of that bloody World War, was the greatest colonialist structure that the world had ever known. Millions of people around the globe lived under the thumb of British bureaucrats, who at the end of World War I remade the Middle East in their own image, thus creating many of the problems that we are saddled with today. The Prussian empire sought to impose its militaristic nationalism on Europe and to some extent the World War was a dispute between cousins. Some of the royalty in England were related to some of the royalty within the nascent German Empire. Likewise, royalty in Austria and Hungary had connections throughout the world. Teddy Roosevelt, who had served as president just before World War I, had a family that was related to

the European Aristocrats, the same royalty who turned a small squabble into a terribly messy family feud.

In World War II, the United States, without hesitation, forged an undeniably relationship with Stalin, a mass-murderer and dictator of enormous proportions. He was “better” than the European monster, Adolf Hitler, and was more acceptable to the authoritarian nature of both Roosevelt and Churchill. No doubt America made the right decision as to who to throw its heft behind in World War II.

The United States showed its own blemishes in World War II by attempting to have the freed North African continent ruled by its former Nazi overlords. Fortunately, the British opposed that, or another million Jews would have died in concentration camps.

In the Korean War, the United States, fearing the threat of a world Communist takeover, aligned itself with what was essentially an authoritarian regime in South Korea. Likewise, South Vietnam was no model democracy but was rather an authoritarian Government thought to represent America’s interests in Southeast Asia.

Donald Trump’s current policy in the Middle East, though confused, erratic and apparently without an overriding clear cut plan, still reflects all three historical perspectives. Trump’s opponents do not seem to have any different view of the world. In fact, to some extent the Trump policy is a continuation of the Obama approach. Both presidents have a great fear of the Vietnamization of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. They are correct to believe that Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran can become a fatal pit of military confrontation uncontrollable by even the most brilliant military minds. Just as generations of Americans feared becoming involved in European conflict, generations later we worried about a land war in Southeast Asia. Now, and for some years, politicians have demonstrated a great reluctance to become involved in the historically bloody Middle East.

America’s first military intervention, interestingly, was not in Mexico or Canada. We did try to invade Canada four times, according to some scholars. Our first real international venture was when President Washington, Adams and finally Jefferson became so disgusted with the Barbary Pirates that they sent the American navy in the Mediterranean to put an end to Islamic terrorism in that region. The United States used its considerable skill gained on the battlefields of our large continent and the seas of our great coastline to eliminate forever a threat to American and European commerce. Hence the song of the Marines, From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli. Tripoli in Libya was the center, as it has been in recent years, of terrorist activity.

It is a mistake for the United States to cede control over the Middle East to Russia and Iran, as the last two administrations have done. That does not mean that the United States must fight a land war in the Middle East. It takes relatively little in the way of boots on the ground to assure strength and integrity for the United States in that region of the world and safety for its allies. Forcing the Kurds into the arms of Syria and

attempting to buy off Turkey as a bulwark against Russia and Iran is a dangerous proposition which may turn out to be brilliant or gutless, depending upon what our intelligence really knows about the direction of those conflicts. To the extent that President Trump is relying upon solid data and a thought-out process favoring American interests, he may be on the right track. However, if the current Middle East policy is merely a reflection of what personalities President Trump likes or dislikes then the end result is sure to be bad for the United States.

There is no question, however, that the concept of Budget, Authoritarianism and Vietnam will continue to be a major influence in American foreign policy into the next administration, unless some thoughtful clarity and appropriate forcefulness is brought to bear on strategic American thinking.

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