

US FOREIGN POLICY AND GLOBAL PEACE AND SECURITY

The case for a new foreign policy

Jeffrey D. Sachs

Historical overview and introduction

The American Century was proclaimed by *Life* Magazine Editor Henry R. Luce in 1941 (Luce 1941). It is ending now. While the US remains the world's military giant and an economic powerhouse, it no longer dominates the world economy or geopolitics. The key task of American foreign policy should be to work with other nations to foster a multi-polar world that is prosperous, peaceful, fair, and sustainable. It is a tall order that requires a fundamental rethinking of American foreign policy that has been based on American *primacy* and *exceptionalism*. Primacy is the doctrine that America must pursue a preponderance of power (military, technological, economic, diplomatic) over other nations (Nye 2015). Exceptionalism is the doctrine that America must maintain the freedom to act independent of strictures of international law (Pease 2018).

A far more sensible grand strategy for the US would be to use its vast resources to foster global cooperation and the rapid global uptake of sustainable technologies (such as renewable energy and the peaceful application of the new digital technologies). Such an approach would enable the US, and the rest of the world to benefit from a prosperous, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable world economy. The result would be shared prosperity and a shared stake in a rule-based international order, thereby promoting peace, security, and (sustainable) development for all. To achieve such an outcome, the US should support regional counterparts such as the European Union, African Union, ASEAN, and others. Roughly eight to ten regional groupings covering almost all of the world's nations and population would interact cooperatively under the framework of the UN Charter and a reformed UN Security Council.¹

Since the late 1970s, the US has been embroiled in wars and political upheavals in the Middle East. It was not always that way. The US was far more embroiled in Latin American affairs in the first half of the 20th century, and then especially in Southeast Asia during the 1950s to 1970s. And just as in those other regions, it would be both wise and timely for the US to pack its bags and withdraw

from Middle Eastern wars. These have been wars of choice, not wars of necessity, and they have been chronically poor choices. They have followed the illogic of primacy and exceptionalism, notably the idea that the US must dominate the politics of these various regions, rebuff competition, and reject the constraints of the UN Security Council.

The current nationalist wave in the US, Europe, Brazil, and elsewhere, much of it stoked and supported by US nationalists, makes even less sense than in the past, now that the entire world faces the common challenges of severe environmental threats, rising inequality, emerging diseases, and mass migration. These challenges require global cooperation and international law, not nationalism and dreams of primacy. The world more than ever needs a UN configured for the twenty-first century, and a commitment to shared objectives of sustainable development. At the core, America's foreign policy needs to shift from military might and warmaking to technological dynamism and global cooperation.

State of the literature: American exceptionalism as the civic religion

As American historians have long noted, American exceptionalism is deeply intertwined in America's history, or at least in one telling of it. When the first pilgrims arrived, they were not merely looking to establish a colony in the New World (as they saw it, leaving the indigenous peoples out of view). They were establishing a City on the Hill, in the momentous words of Puritan leader John Winthrop (1630), picked up three centuries later by Ronald Reagan (1989). America would be the New Israel, the new Promised Land.

American messianism revealed itself in the formative moments of the United States. It gave the fuel for the original settlements; for the revolution against the mother country; and for two centuries of largely genocidal war against native populations who gave the lie to the settler claims on the land and its natural wealth. It fuelled the righteous efforts of the North to vanquish the South in the US Civil War, partly to end slavery and partly to preserve "the last best hope of earth" in Abraham Lincoln's words (1862). It was epitomized by the idea of America's Manifest Destiny to the lands between the oceans, notwithstanding the claims of other countries (such as Mexico) or the rights of the indigenous populations. It fuelled the hubristic, yet wildly successful, Monroe Doctrine, by which a start-up nation warned the great European powers to desist from meddling in the Americas.

Historians have noted that every war, every major foreign policy initiative of the United States, has been cloaked in the language of America's divine mission in delivering not only success for itself but nothing short of global salvation. At the end of the nineteenth century, just after America had fulfilled its "destiny" of ruling North America from ocean to ocean, America turned to overseas empire building. In 1898, it went to war on Spain, not to grab Spain's colonies but to liberate them

(or so it said). One hundred and twenty years onward, the conquered lands—Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines—continue to bear the scars of America's intervention. Few residents of those countries would subscribe to the American view that they had been truly liberated by the United States.

In the twentieth century, the interventions abroad would be far larger and far more consequential for global history. On dozens of occasions, the US sent its military into action in the Americas to overthrow governments, install pliant ones, grab territories (such as Panama Canal zone), secure investments in mines, oil, and farmlands, or suppress rebellions deemed to be hostile to American public or private interests. Historians have documented dozens of occasions of "regime change" in the Americas, a pattern that would eventually be carried over to Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia (Coatsworth 2006).

World War I was another messianic adventure with startling consequences for the world. When an unprecedented mass industrial-scale bloodletting exploded in Europe in August 1914, the American public and its leaders generally urged that the US should stay clear of the carnage. President Woodrow Wilson ran for reelection in 1916 on a platform to keep the US out of war. Yet by 1917, Wilson decided that America's great economic and military power could be used not only to end the war but to end all wars.

Before the US intervention, the European combatants were locked in a grinding stalemate, one that might have ended in a truce without victor or vanquished. Yet America tilted the outcome to an outright victory by Britain and France over Germany and Austria. The idea of a peace without victors, an ostensible objective of the US intervention, turned into the very opposite, a decisive defeat of the German (Hohenzollern) and Austro-Hungarian empires by the French, the UK, and US, that would subsequently result in a failed peace, economic chaos, the rise of Hitler, and a second world war one generation later.

While the British empire constituted the largest economic bloc in the world until the early twentieth century, the US overtook the United Kingdom in total GDP by around 1870, and Germany overtook Britain by around 1908. Still, the dominance of Britain's navy and the centrality of Britain's financial markets meant that Britain would continue to be seen as the leader of the world economy at least until World War I. Then events overtook Britain. World War I bled Britain of financial wealth and left a young generation dead on Europe's killing fields. The interwar period, 1918–1939, was marked by a decade of instability (1918–1929) followed by a decade of worldwide Great Depression (1929–1939). World War II again utterly devastated Britain, physically, financially, and psychologically. By 1945, global leadership had decisively passed from Britain to the United States, which was eager to play its new role.

It's worth mentioning a key insight of the late economic historian Charles Kindleberger. Kindleberger observed that the 1930s was an interregnum between British global economic leadership to the 1920s and American leadership from the early 1940s onward (Kindleberger 1986). In Kindleberger's interpretation, the

Great Depression occurred with its ferocity, depth, and persistence because there was no single leader to stop the crisis. Britain was too weak to contain the depression, while the US was too inexperienced to take the mantle of global leadership. Indeed, the US insisted on facing the Great Depression on strictly national terms, without an orchestrated global recovery effort.

Months after the start of World War II, with France's quick capitulation to Nazi Germany and Britain's near defeat soon afterwards, the US and Russia became the last redoubts against German domination of Europe. Churchill famously declared that Britain would fight on, from Canada if necessary, until the new world came to the rescue of the old (1940). By 1941, America's pre-eminence in war, peace, and the global economy was evident. US industry became the arsenal of democracy, and Washington financed the war, but on terms that would ensure US global economic dominance after the war.

In 1941, Luce declared the American Century, the moniker under which America would exercise global leadership. America's dominance by 1945 is hard to overstate. Alone among the great powers, America had come through the war unscathed on home territory (aside from the one-day attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941). American industry had expanded to unprecedented dimensions, with the GDP in 1945 almost double that of 1939.

World War II was the progenitor of breath-taking American innovations in science and technology, propelled by the demands of war: radar, sonar, ballistics, aeronautics, computers, semiconductors, cybernetics (human-machine interactions), applied mathematics, nuclear physics, chemistry, pharmaceuticals, metallurgy, and more. The development of the atomic bomb was certainly the most visible symbol of the new cutting-edge physics harnessed for national power. But there were countless other crucial breakthroughs in science-based technology, as well as the realization that science-led development would be the key to economic advancement and to national security in the decades ahead.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the US constituted perhaps 35 percent of the global economy (27 percent in 1950) and a far higher proportion of the world's leading technological capacity. The Cold War pitted the US against the Soviet Union, and although after 1949 both had nuclear arms to threaten the other, America's economic and technological pre-eminence in the civilian economy was unassailable. According to one estimate by historian Angus Maddison, America's per capita GDP was 3.4 times that of the Soviet Union as of 1950 (2018).

America, by 1950, had achieved unrivalled global leadership. It towered perhaps as the most powerful nation in world history (aside from the unpleasant reality that the Soviet Union, too, possessed devastating power with nuclear arms). The American Century was just getting started. How, then, could anyone doubt that Providence was on the side of the Americans, a country that had started as a tiny settlement hugging the Atlantic coast, spread across a continent, then across the oceans, and then across the world?

The US assumed post-war leadership in three fundamental ways. First, it built a

massive, indeed unprecedented, national security state, with a massive nuclear arsenal, military bases around the world, powerful intelligence agencies including the CIA and others, and an alliance network to rival and contain the Soviet Union and its allies. Second, it led the design and launch of the new United Nations bodies, including the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund), the UN agencies (such as the World Health Organization), and other regional institutions. Third, it utterly dominated global finance, providing large-scale development aid, official loans, and private capital investments for economic development. American companies, in the lead in new technologies, invested around the world. The American dollar decisively replaced the Pound sterling at the centre of international finance and payments.

The US security state had three faces. The public face was NATO and other military alliances: inter-governmental structures ostensibly to keep the peace and to defend against Soviet aggression. A second, more shrouded face, was in the contested post-colonial world. Would the newly independent countries swing towards the US or the Soviet Union? Open warfare, secret CIA operations including regime changes and assassinations of foreign leaders, and bribes and other inducements would aim to keep countries in the US camp.

The third face was the most cynical of the three. Even when Soviet influence was nowhere to be seen, American interests might be at stake, as when a reform-minded government in Guatemala in the early 1950s decided on land reform to benefit the landless peasants. That was quite enough for the American company United Fruit International, which called its US law firm Sullivan and Cromwell in 1954 to mobilize its former associates John Foster Dulles (US Secretary of State) and Allen Dulles (Director of the CIA). Soon enough, Guatemala's reform-minded leader, Arbenz, was overthrown. And Guatemala was hardly alone. With God on its side, the US would overthrow dozens of leaders over the coming decades, many by outright assassination.

America's core military alliances with NATO, Japan, Korea, and others mostly kept the peace, but with the near-miracle of dodging several close calls that almost triggered nuclear war. With the US and the Soviet Union armed to the gills with weapons that could have destroyed all human life on the planet many times over, blunders, sabre-rattling, misunderstandings, bluffs, false alarms, and sheer dumb mistakes led to instances where nuclear war was avoided only by extraordinary good luck, and by a few people with more sense than the 'sophisticated' security systems in which they were embedded.

The proxy wars worked out far worse. The Pax Americana, so called, was no more peaceful than the Pax Britannica. America has been in almost non-stop war since 1945. When facing the Soviet Union, every local fluctuation of power, every war of national liberation, every civil war, was viewed by the US security state through the Cold War lens. Would a victory by side A or side B be better for the US or the Soviet Union? Suddenly, America decided it had vital stakes in every local conflict, whether in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the 1950s–1970s, Central

America in the 1980s, Africa in the 1980s and 1990s, the Balkans in the 1990s, or the Middle East almost continuously from the 1970s onward.

There is one grim overriding lesson from all these proxy wars. No superpower wins, but the locals inevitably lose, and lose badly. Millions have died at US hands, with very little recognition by Americans of the carnage they are creating. Most recently, America's hand in the Syrian war, assigned to the CIA, has contributed to a massive bloodletting and has been disastrous for Syria. Ten million Syrians have been displaced and hundreds of thousands have died, with no single benefit for Syria's long-term governance. And yet, despite America's devastating role in Syria, most Americans would likely answer that the US hasn't even been at war in Syria, since American newspapers did not cover the covert CIA activities.

The third face—the secretive, self-serving actions by the US to defend US commercial interests—has had a very bad yet predictable habit of returning to bite the US. Think of America's darkly cynical overthrow of Iran's Prime Minister Mohamad Mossedeqh in 1953, in order to defend British and US claims to Iran's oil. The US installed the Shah of Iran, who ruled with his secret police until 1979. After that, the US predictably and understandably became the Great Satan for the Iranian Revolution that followed. Or think of America's backing of the corrupt despot Batista in Cuba, followed by the Cuban Revolution. The list of such blowbacks (or boomerang effects) is long indeed.

Major debates: America from world leader to rogue nation

The economic basis of American exceptionalism—America's dominance of global production and technology—has come to an end. The foreign policy theory behind American exceptionalism, that the US has the geopolitical instruments, will, and reason to lead the world, is largely passé, although the US security state hasn't yet noticed or adjusted appropriately.

The single most important point is that the US has gone from producing more than 30 percent of world output at the end of World War II to just 15 percent currently, while China has gone from producing 2 percent of world output in 1980 to 19 percent as of 2019 (IMF 2019). China is now the world's largest economy when measured at international prices, and its size relative to the US economy will continue to grow in the coming years. Moreover, while the US was once the indisputable technological leader of the world, there are now three enormous centres of innovation: the US (on both coasts), the European Union, and northeast Asia (China, Japan, and Korea). The US remains a technological powerhouse, to be sure, but lacks a decisive advantage over the other two regions, where world-class science and engineering also abound.

From World War II through the 1960s, America promoted its interests mainly by cooperating with other nations. Americans supported the Marshall Plan during 1948–52 to help rebuild war-torn Europe. The US opened its markets to the exports of Europe, Japan, and Korea, and shared American know-how with the

least developed countries (for example, by promoting the Green Revolution in India in the 1960s). America developed the blueprints for the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, the forerunner of the World Trade Organization), the World Health Organization, the regional development banks, and countless other international efforts aimed at spreading economic prosperity. The US disproportionately funded NATO's defence of Western Europe during the Cold War.

The point is not that these actions were purely altruistic, imposing costs on the US that only helped other countries. The point rather is that the US invested in global public goods—in win-win activities—knowing that by paying its part, even a disproportionate part as the world's leading economy and military power, it would reap a significant long-term benefit along with the other nations. Leadership does not mean squeezing other nations to enrich one's own country. Leadership is finding opportunities for mutual gain, and creatively pursuing them, even funding projects entirely at times when all countries can end up ahead.

America's effort in funding global public goods is indicated by their foreign assistance as a share of GDP. During the Marshall Plan, aid levels were about 1 percent of GDP. During the 1950s and 1960s, the aid levels trended downward, but were still on the order of 0.6 percent of GDP. This fell further to around 0.2 percent of GDP in the 1980s, and then plummeted to 0.1 percent of GDP in 1999 during the Clinton Administration. The aid levels increased under George W. Bush, who made a notable effort to fight AIDS, TB, and malaria, with ODA/GNI rising to around 0.2. Under Obama the aid effort fell back again to around 0.18, and it has fallen further under Trump (OECD 2018).

This downtrend broadly tracks America's declining readiness to invest in global public goods generally. In the heyday of the American Century, America was ready to lead in deeds as well as words. Representing around 30 percent of world GDP and more than half of the income of the US, Europe, and Japan combined, the US was not only keen to promote the new US-led internationalism, but knew that positive results depended on America footing much of the bill, admittedly to America's advantage together with the other countries receiving the aid.

The US will to lead globally probably had its final moment of glory in the post-communist revolutions of 1989. After all, the emergence of post-communist governments in Eastern Europe was the triumph, or so it seemed, of decades of America's Cold War efforts. While America's generosity to the newly democratic nations of Eastern Europe can easily be exaggerated, the fact remains that the US saw that investing in Eastern Europe's transformation, democratization, and renewed growth would add to US exports, geopolitical leadership, and returns to overseas investments.

I would include several reasons for America's shrinking interest in global economic, financial, and diplomatic leadership. One was the end of the Cold War. The US had won, the Soviet Union had lost. There was no longer any case for

competing with the Soviet Union for the hearts and minds of the developing world. A second was arrogance. Why lead with inducements (carrots) when military power (sticks) will do just fine? America turned from 'soft' power to 'hard' power after 1991, especially since the Soviet Union was no longer present as a military counterweight (or so the US thought until Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015).

Third, and most fundamental of all, was America's relative decline in economic power. The American economy did not fail; rather, much of the world caught up with the US, or at least narrowed the economic gap. Europe and Japan rebuilt after the war. Developing countries invested in education and job skills. China experienced the most rapid, sustained economic growth of any large region in the world after market reforms began in 1978. As America's share declined, America's readiness to supply global public goods fell even faster.

Not only has the US turned its back on development assistance; it has turned its back on global diplomacy as well. The United Nations was America's creation, the remarkable vision of Franklin D. Roosevelt as the best hope to keep the peace after World War II. So too was the web of new international institutions within and alongside the United Nations. American diplomats seemed to be everywhere for the first quarter century after the war, helping to launch development programs, instill environmentalism, and share the fruits of science. But then, for the same reasons that America cut back on global development financing, it began to cut back on global diplomacy as well. The bipartisan foreign policy of the Roosevelt-Truman-Eisenhower era increasingly gave way to dissension. Hardliners decided that American military dominance, rather than diplomatic persuasion and development financing, was the real key to securing America's interests.

From the late 1970s onward, international treaties became increasingly suspect to the American right wing. Since 1994, the US Senate has not ratified a single UN treaty, the last being the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993. Ratification requires a two-thirds majority, implying bipartisan support, and generally the Republican Party has stood nearly united against ratification. Here are some of the important UN treaties pending Senate ratification, with few if any prospects for adoption:

- 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, signed but not ratified
- 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed but not ratified
- 1989 Basel Convention on Transboundary Hazardous Wastes, signed but not ratified
- 1991 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, not signed
- 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, signed but not ratified
- 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, signed but not ratified
- 1997 Kyoto Protocol, signed with no intention to ratify
- 1997 Ottawa Treaty (Mine Ban Treaty), not signed
- 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, not signed

- 1999 Criminal Law Convention on Corruption, signed but not ratified
- 1999 Civil Law Convention on Corruption, not signed
- 2002 Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, not signed
- 2006 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, not signed
- 2007 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed but not ratified
- 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, signed but declared intention to withdraw in 2020

In many of these cases, the US stands alone or almost alone against the rest of the world. Only four countries have failed to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the US plus Somalia, Sudan, and Iran. Only the United States is not a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Only the United States is not a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Almost all countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The US stands with Uzbekistan, Libya, Chad, Belarus, and a few others in not ratifying that treaty.

As American primacy draws to an end, the tone of American foreign policy has become bleaker. Consider the National Defense Strategy (January 2018):

Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.

China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbours while militarizing features in the South China Sea. Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbours. As well, North Korea's outlaw actions and reckless rhetoric continue despite United Nations' censure and sanctions. Iran continues to sow violence and remains the most significant challenge to Middle East stability. Despite the defeat of ISIS's physical caliphate, threats to stability remain as terrorist groups with long reach continue to murder the innocent and threaten peace more broadly.

US Department of Defense, 2018

According to the National Security Strategy (President of the United States 2017), China and Russia are not just powerful counterparts, they are adversaries (in the National Defense Strategy, the term is "strategic competitor"). The NSS says of them the following:

China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence.

One of the reasons why the National Security Strategy regards cooperation so bleakly is that it largely rejects the need for cooperation. Instead of looking for global cooperation to decarbonize the world's energy system in order to achieve the globally agreed climate goals, the document instead declares that "US leadership is indispensable to countering an anti-growth energy agenda that is detrimental to US economic and energy security interests." There is not even lip service paid to other environmental challenges such as deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and water scarcity. There is a passing mention, just one sentence, about disease control.

To sustain its military dominance, the US maintains a costly network of military bases around the world, in more than 70 countries. China, by contrast, has one small base, in Djibouti. Beyond the countries with overseas bases, US military personnel are present in perhaps 100 more countries. The imperatives of 'dominance' compel the US military to keep expanding its geographic presence. NATO expanded eastward even after the Soviet threat disappeared. And when the US ostensibly ended its combat mission in Afghanistan and Iraq, US military bases and personnel remained behind.

The US is hastening its day of reckoning by expanding military spending while cutting taxes at the same time, thus expanding a large and chronic budget deficit, estimated to be 4–5 percent of GDP per year in the coming decade. All told, US military spending currently amounts to around 5 percent of GDP (adding together the Pentagon, homeland security, nuclear weapons, the CIA and other intelligence agencies, and the costs of veterans' medical care and other benefits). Yet with tax revenues running to only around 17 percent of GDP, the budget cannot cover the sum of military spending, interest on the debt, and big-ticket programs such as Social Security and healthcare, much less the civilian discretionary programs such as job training, education, community development, environmental protection, and civilian research and development. These discretionary programs have already been squeezed to the bone, thereby weakening the economic foundations of American power. The downward economic spiral of imperial overreach is well underway.

American exceptionalists are currently obsessed with China's rise. In 1980, China's total GDP was a tiny 2.3 percent of the world economy compared with America's share, at 21.9 percent. China's per capita GDP was a minuscule 2.4 percent of the US per capita GDP (IMF 2019). Fast forward 37 years. The IMF now calculates that China accounts for 19.3 percent of world output compared with 15.1 percent of the United States. China's output per person is now around 30

percent of America's output per person according to the same IMF measurements.

Rather than let China catch up, the primacists say, the United States should badger and harass China economically, engage the Chinese in a new arms race, and even undermine the one-China policy that has been the basis of US-China bilateral relations, so that China ends up in economic retreat, retracing the steps of the British Empire, the Soviet Union, and Japan. Such an approach toward China would be profoundly misguided and very dangerous. It is based on the false idea that global economics must be about winners versus losers, the United States versus China, rather than about mutual gains through trade and technological advance. Moreover, the idea of cornering China is not only unwise but unachievable.

If Trump tries to provoke China into a new arms race or trade war, the results will be a huge debacle for the United States and a potential threat for the world. America's well-being depends on the maturity of judgement to cooperate with China as a major global power that can and should share the responsibilities to promote global peace and sustainable development. Through the United Nations, China and the United States can and should work together and with other countries to prevent or end regional wars, stop terrorism, and confront common hazards such as global warming and newly emerging diseases.

The end result of America's foreign policy exceptionalism is that it has veered to lawlessness and recklessness. America refuses to cooperate even for mutual survival, whether in arms control, protection of the environment, or shared prosperity as an underpinning of peace and therefore of global security as well. A new cold war with China could quickly become a hot war, indeed the last war. The urgency of rethinking America's foreign policy approach grows by the day.

Future research trajectories: America's misguided 'wars of choice'

There is one foreign policy goal that should matter above all the others, and that is to keep the United States out of a new war, whether in Iran, Venezuela, North Korea, or elsewhere. We could easily find ourselves in a rapidly escalating war, one that could pit the United States directly against the nuclear-armed countries of China, North Korea, and Russia.

Sad to say, America's history of war is not encouraging. America's shining nobility in World War II and its positive, though flawed, role in the Korean War should not obscure America's many disastrous wars of choice, when America went to war for deeply flawed reasons, underpinned by the aim of primacy and the mantra of exceptionalism. In the end, these wars caused ongoing havoc at home and abroad.

There are three key points about the US wars of choice. First, in the Spanish-American War, the Vietnam War, and the recent Mideast wars, the United States attacked the other countries first, not in self-defence, as in World War II. Lyndon Johnson expanded the war in Vietnam on the pretext that North Vietnam had

attacked the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin, but Johnson knew that the claim was false. Nor had Saddam, Khadafy, or Assad attacked the United States. In the case of Iraq, the pretext was Saddam's non-existent weapons of mass destruction. As for Obama's interventions in Libya and Syria, these were allegedly for humanitarian purposes, to protect civilian populations against Khadafy and Assad. In both cases, however, the civilian populations ended up suffering far more horrific harms from the US interventions and the spiral into mass conflict.

Second, since the birth of the United Nations in 1945, such wars of choice are against international law. The UN Charter allows for wars of self-defence and military actions agreed upon by the UN Security Council. No country can go at it alone other than in self-defence.

Many Americans dismiss the UN Security Council on the grounds that Russia will veto every needed action. Yet this is absolutely not the case. Russia and China indeed agreed to a military intervention in Libya in 2011 in order to protect Libya's civilian population. But then NATO used that UN resolution as a pretext to actually topple Khadafy, not merely to protect the civilian population. Russia and China also recently teamed up with the United States to achieve the nuclear agreement with Iran, to adopt the Paris Climate Agreement, and to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals. Diplomacy is feasible. Getting one's way all the time is not.

Third, as already emphasized, these wars of choice have been disasters, one after the next. In the Spanish-American war, the United States gained an empire and fertile farmland in Cuba, but also decades of political instability in that country and the Philippines that eventually resulted in Philippine independence and an anti-American revolution in Cuba. In World War I, the US intervention turned the tide toward the victory of France and the United Kingdom over Germany and the Ottoman Empire, only to be followed by a disastrous peace settlement, instability in Europe and the Middle East, and the rise of Hitler in the ensuing chaos 15 years later. In Vietnam, the war led to around 55,000 Americans dead, 1 million or more Vietnamese killed, genocide in next-door Cambodia, destabilization of the US economy, and, eventually, complete US withdrawal. In Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, the regimes were quickly defeated by US-led forces, but peace and stability proved to be elusive. All of these countries have been wracked by continuing war and terrorism and US military engagement. And in Syria, the United States was not even successful in toppling Assad, since Assad had powerful allies, Russia and Iran. America's intervention in 2011 and onward to topple Assad escalated into a full-fledged proxy war involving many countries and jihadist groups.

Towards a new foreign policy for American security and wellbeing

The purpose of US foreign policy should be to achieve national security in a manner that enables Americans to achieve wellbeing and security and to help the rest of the world to do the same. As I have described, we are far off course. I

conclude my recent book, *A New Foreign Policy: Beyond American Exceptionalism*, with ten priorities for a new approach:

- Obey the UN Charter, with the UN Security Council as the arbitrator of war and peace.
- Recommit the US to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement.
- Agree to an increase in the UN budget to fund urgently needed public goods.
- Ratify the pending UN treaties before the US Senate.
- Regain the momentum on nuclear disarmament.
- Cooperate globally on new sustainable technologies, especially renewable energy and decarbonization by mid-century.
- Promote regional solutions to Middle East violence by ending proxy wars and empowering the regional powers (Turkey, the GCC, and Iran) to find a peaceful *modus operandi* with UN support.
- End the CIA's covert military operations and refocus the CIA solely as an intelligence agency.
- Overhaul the US budget by shifting resources from military purposes to social investments and international development assistance.
- Celebrate America's true exceptionalism, its cultural and ethnic diversity.

For the international relations and peace communities, there is an enormous opportunity to pursue a directed research program towards building a robust, global peace and security system grounded on human rights and sustainable development. The UN Charter and the UN's 'moral charter', the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are the starting point. The growing efficacy of regional groupings, whether the EU, AU, ASEAN, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Mercosur, or others, are building blocks. Successful implementation of global economic, social, and environmental agreements, including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement, are urgent areas for global cooperation and crucial areas for academic research. The vital issues of war and peace, including reform of the UN Security Council, revisions of nuclear arms agreements, and the vital need to bring cybersecurity and cyberwarfare under global treaty arrangements are yet further areas of high-priority academic research.

Note

- 1 Major groups might entail North America (US, Canada, Mexico), Latin America, African Union, European Union, Commonwealth of Independent States, Arab Region, South Asia, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP, entailing China, Korea, Japan, ASEAN, Australia, and New Zealand).

References

- Coatsworth, John H. (2006) 'Liberalism and Big Sticks: The Politics of U.S. Interventions in Latin America, 1898–2004', Columbia University Academic Commons.
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2019) 'GDP Based on PPP, share of world', *IMF DataMapper* [Online]. Available at <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPPSH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOORLD>. (Accessed December 2, 2019).
- Kindleberger, Charles. (1986) *The World in Depression: 1929–1939*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lincoln, Abraham. (1862) Annual message to Congress—Concluding remarks. In Roy P. Basler et al. (eds.) 1953, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, New Brunswick, NJ. Rutgers University Press
- Luce, Henry R. (1941) 'The American Century', *Life*, vol.10, no.7, February 17, pp.61–65.
- Maddison, Angus. (2018) Maddison Project Database, version 2010. Jutta, B., Inklaar, R., de Jong, H. and van Zanden, J.L.
- Nye, Joseph S. (2015) 'American Hegemony or American Primacy?', *Azernews*, March 11, 2015.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018) 'Net ODA', *OECD Data* [Online]. Available at <https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm>. (Accessed December 2, 2019).
- Pease, Donald E. (2018) 'American Exceptionalism', *Oxford Bibliographies*, 27 June, [Online]. Available at <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-0176.xml>. (Accessed December 2, 2019).
- President of the United States. (2017) 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America' [Online]. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> (Accessed December 2, 2019).
- Reagan, Ronald. (1989) *Farewell address to the nation*. 11 January, Oval Office, Washington, D.C. [Online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKVsq2daR8Q>. (Accessed December 2, 2019).
- US Department of Defense. (2018) 'Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge' [Online]. Available at <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. (Accessed 2 December 2019).
- Winthrop, John. (1630) City upon a Hill.