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The End of Globalism

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Progress is slow. That's what I've learned – and come to expect – after twenty-plus years at this post, commenting on world events and swimming against the tide. However, after all this time, it looks to me as if the tide is turning – slowly, unevenly, yet surely – against the War Party.

Oh yes, the times they are a changin', as Bob Dylan once put it, and here's the evidence:

“Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has ordered his department to redefine its mission and issue a new statement of purpose to the world. The draft statements under review right now are similar to the old mission statement, except for one thing – any mention of promoting democracy is being eliminated.”

All the usual suspects are in a tizzy. Elliott Abrams, he of Contra-gate fame, and one of the purest of the neoconservative ideologues, is cited in the *Washington Post* piece as being quite unhappy: “The only significant difference is the deletion of justice and democracy. We used to want a just and democratic word, and now apparently we don't.”

Abrams' contribution to a just and democratic world is well-known: supporting a military dictatorship in El Salvador during the 1980s that slaughtered thousands, and then testifying before Congress that massive human rights violations by the US-supported regime were

Communist “propaganda.” US policy, of which he was one of the principal architects, led to the lawlessness that now plagues that country, which has a higher murder rate than Iraq: in Abrams’ view, the Reagan policy of supporting a military dictatorship was “a fabulous achievement.” The same murderous policy was pursued in Nicaragua while Abrams was Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, as the US tried to overthrow a democratically elected government and provoked a civil war that led to the death of many thousands. In Honduras and Guatemala, Abrams was instrumental in covering up heinous atrocities committed by US-supported regimes.

And it was all done in the name of “promoting democracy.” This has been the ideological rubric under which the neoconservatives have been marketing their agenda of perpetual war since the days of the cold war, but the left-wing of the War Party has now adopted a similar mantra – or, rather, revived it. After all, their progenitor, Woodrow Wilson, launched a crusade to “make the world safe for democracy.” And so the *Post* gives them equal time in the person of one Tom Malinowski, whose position under the Obama administration – Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor – was nearly identical to Abrams’ title, with the addition of “labor” signifying the taxonomic differentiation between neoconservative and liberal internationalist versions of warmongering.

“Tom Malinowski, who served as assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor for the Obama administration, said the new proposed mission statement brings U.S. foreign policy into closer alignment with that of some of America’s chief adversaries, including Russia.

“It’s a worldview similar to that of Putin, who also thinks that great powers should focus exclusively on self protection and enrichment, rather than promoting democracy,’ he said. “By removing all reference to universal values and the common good it removes any reason for people outside the United States to support our foreign-policy.”

It’s also a worldview similar to that of the Founding Fathers, those Putinists of yesteryear who admonished us not to go abroad in search of monsters to destroy, and who gave us wise advice which has lately gone unheeded:

“The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.

“Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course.... Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?”

While Malinowski might disdain John Quincy Adams and George Washington, those two well-known tools of the Kremlin, many of the rest of us find their arguments against sallying forth into the world with a sword in one hand and the banner of capital-“D” Democracy in the other quite persuasive, especially given the history of the past decade.

Ah, but ideologues such as Malinowski and Abrams are immune to the lessons of history and the wisdom of the Founders: they seek to make the world anew, and to heck with the consequences. They are “idealists” – the most dangerous sub-species of *Homo politicus*, with more victims to their credit than all the predators of the animal kingdom combined.

Let’s look at what’s being revised and what’s replacing it. The old State Department purpose and mission statement reads as follows:

“The Department’s mission is to shape and sustain a peaceful, prosperous, just, and democratic world and foster conditions for stability and progress for the benefit of the American people and people everywhere.”

The draft of the new statement of the State Department’s purpose is:

“We promote the security, prosperity and interests of the American people globally” and its mission is defined as to “Lead America’s foreign policy through global advocacy, action and assistance to shape a safer, more prosperous world.”

Gone is the globalist nonsense about benefiting “people everywhere”: the focus now is on benefiting *the American people*, whose protection and welfare is the purpose of having a State Department (and a government) in the first place. We are back to the vision of the Founders – in theory, at least. But what about in practice?

I won’t even bother to itemize the transgressions of the Trump administration in the foreign policy realm: even listing the many ways in which the “America first” theory is contradicted in practice by Trump and his appointees would take many more thousands of words. And yet there are indications, none of them minor, that the policy is at least in some respects coming into line with the rhetoric.

The termination of US aid to the Syrian rebels is the clearest indication yet that the regime change orientation of US foreign policy is being turned around. This has been, perhaps, the single most destructive US foreign policy initiative since the invasion of Iraq, and that it has been ended – despite howls of protest from some of the most powerful lobbies in Washington – is solid evidence that we are slowly but surely changing direction.

Another signal that the ship of state is doing a U-turn is President Trump’s extreme reluctance to send more troops to Afghanistan, despite the insistence of some of his generals. He’s even contemplating getting out entirely. As the *Wall Street Journal* reports:

“President Donald Trump’s reservations about sending more troops to Afghanistan have triggered a new exploration of an option long considered unlikely: withdrawal.”

“Unable to agree on a plan to send up to 3,900 more American forces to help turn back Taliban advances in Afghanistan, the White House is taking a new look at what would happen if the US decided to scale back its military presence instead, according to current and former Trump administration officials.”

The *Journal* goes on to report that “the idea is anathema to American military leaders” – no surprise there – but what’s interesting is what Trump had to say recently during a White House luncheon: “I want to find out why we’ve been there for 17 years.”

Trump might want to ask our British allies about this: after all, they spent decades trying to subdue the Afghans, without success. Or he might ask the Russians, although no American is now allowed to talk to them: they exhausted themselves trying to conquer and Sovietize that intractable land, an effort that arguably led to their ultimate downfall. For more examples of the death of imperial hubris in the mountains of the Hindu Kush, a look at the history books might prove enlightening: even Alexander the Great failed to take that mountainous redoubt of born warriors, and almost lost his life in what proved to be a futile effort.

This is not to say that the Trump administration is embracing non-interventionism – far from it – or that we are on the way out of the quagmires we’ve been stuck in since the reign of George W. Bush. What’s happening is that the domestic political conditions for a foreign policy of perpetual war are no longer existent: indeed, Trump’s victory in 2016 was arguably due to his relatively anti-interventionist rhetoric. I believe this made the crucial difference in Trump eking out a razor-thin margin of victory.

In short, the American people are sick and tired of constant warfare, whether it be in the name of “promoting democracy” or “fighting terrorism.” When Trump raised the banner of “America first,” they responded favorably, and people in the White House like Steve Bannon – the populist ideologue who engineered Trump’s electoral triumph, and who is cited by the *Journal* as pushing for withdrawal from Afghanistan – are well aware of this.

These recent lunges in the direction of rationality on the part of the Trump administration are explained by my theory of “libertarian realism,” which is based on the proposition that there is no such thing as “foreign policy” – all policy is about domestic politics. As the country sours on foreign intervention, and the distance between the political class and ordinary people widens – with the former pushing for more wars and the latter embracing “isolationism,” i.e. minding our own business – the ship of state is *forced* into making a U-turn.

Yes, there are many factors militating against this: and no, it won’t happen overnight, or even beyond what seems like a snail’s pace. The American ship of state is a mighty and unwieldy vessel, which coasts along largely on the power of its own momentum. It isn’t turned around quite so easily. Yet, given the massive pressure from below – and the political utility of going with the flow – our policymakers must, in the end, bow to the strong currents that are pushing us away from the course of empire.

It’s hard to see amid the hurly-burly of daily events: the underlying reality is obscured by the political back-and-forth, the sudden reversals, the stop-and-go nature of social and political

change. It's especially hard with a transitional phenomenon such as the Trump administration, which is caught between two eras: the fulsomely internationalist "American Century" and the more constrained twenty-first century, in which we'll have to confront the problems – financial and social – created by our globalist elites. Yet there it is, plain as day, if you take the trouble to look beyond the immediate and see the overall pattern.

No, I'm not positing some teleological vision of inevitability. There is no such thing as being "on the right side of history." History has no direction, only ups and downs. And yet, if we step back from the daily give-and-take, we can see that, from the perspective of someone who opposes our foreign policy of "democratic" imperialism and international do-goodism, the winds of change are blowing in our favor. Not always, not consistently, and not nearly hard enough – but just hard enough for us to note that change for the better is in the air.

So take heart, and take up the fight with renewed vigor and confidence. The War Party, for all its resources and influence, is on the defensive. The people are with us. Our task is to mobilize them against a political class that is increasingly distanced from – and hostile to – the interests of ordinary Americans.