

The Liberal World Order.  
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Since the end of World War II, something never before seen was happening to the world: a spread of the "liberal world order." Liberal in this case means freedom, not left-wing. Although some might think that it was inevitable, the expected trajectory of the world, because we are older and wiser now, it was not at all inevitable. It would not have happened without the United States not only pushing this, but protecting it with military force and money. Most Americans understood this, and recognized that such expenditure was necessary if we were to have a world not under the constant threat of conflict.

In the past century or more, the economic successes of Germany and Japan led them to make war in the hope of getting room to grow and a ready source of slave labor. Being conquered by the US during World War II was not only a gift to their respective neighbors, but to both Germany and Japan themselves. They are better countries today with more freedom and prosperity to all their citizens, and far better neighbors.

There were always conservative Americans who complained then, and complain now, that we should not be "the policemen of the world." They have failed to understand that paying for our navy patrolling the world and ensuring global world trade is good for everybody. We opened the seas to all peaceful countries and opened our markets to their trade, as well as our own, going everywhere except to the two holdouts against the liberal world order, The USSR and China. So much warfare formerly created by competing nation-states (Germany, Britain, France, and Russia) was ended by our action.

The international institutions that we created (UN, World Bank, World Monetary Fund, and the European Union) were not just supporters of global order, but were also there to give a hand to the less fortunate countries and to those with famines, floods, earthquakes, and potential plagues. We made a better world, and it would not have happened without us.

No, we are not perfect, and sometimes we make bad choices (Vietnam, Iraq) and unlike our normal short attention span, we held stupid grudges against Cuba and China, which brave presidents eventually addressed, to the betterment of the world. But one of our rare long-term considerations, the product of a brilliant State Department analyst, George Kennan, was to use our power to prevent the USSR from expanding: the policy of containment rather than war. We did outlast them. The Soviet system crashed of its own weight.

Many countries around the world resented our pushiness and envied our success, but even the most authoritarian among them all send their elite children to American universities, not to Russian or Chinese ones. Our universities and the experience of living here for a time planted subversive ideas among many of these students, who returned home and wanted more open societies. But these students, along with too many of our own, shout about "freedom," but that freedom does not include responsibility, and in authoritarian societies, it does not include freedom for women or minorities living among them.

The few but nasty wars that we have fought in the 20th century ended with us removing dictators and pushing elections, but we did not consider all the other institutions needed to sustain a liberal democracy. Our cost in blood and treasure did not buy modern democracies at all, but replaced dictators with anarchy and tribalism.

Tribalism is a bad thing, no matter where it is. We are suffering a plague of that ourselves today in the bitter divisions between those who want a "strong man" to "drain the swamp" (the government institutions served by civil servants), and those who want to replace our liberal democracy with a push-button one, in which everybody votes, intelligently or not, without the interference of representatives, who are at least exposed to discussion and information.

Those of us in the middle know that our task must be to restore our own liberal order, for us and for the world. We must reverse the attack on the liberal world order in the next election.

687 words

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