

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

by MELVIN GOODMAN
14.06.2019

The Twin Dangers of Exceptionalism and Mindless Bi-Partisanship



Photograph by Joshua Frank

The United States is the most powerful nation on earth. There is no nation nor even a group of nations that can match the combined political, economic, and military power of the United States. Nevertheless, the United States faces an international arena that has become increasingly resistant and opposed to U.S. initiatives. The blundering of Donald Trump and his mediocre national security team is largely responsible for the setbacks over the past two years. But U.S. exceptionalism and even political bipartisanship carry a heavy responsibility as well.

The problem of U.S. exceptionalism is conventional wisdom in many circles. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is well known for her arrogant description of an exceptional United States that “stands taller and sees further than other nations. If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation.” In his State of the Union address in January 2012, President Barack Obama echoed Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush in labeling the United States the only “indispensable” nation. The misuse of American force over the past five decades in Vietnam, Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan speaks to the tragedy of our self-proclaimed status of exceptionalism.

Unlike exceptionalism, which bears particular responsibility for U.S. militarism, we are told that greater bipartisanship is needed in U.S. foreign policy to avoid the blunders of the recent past. But bipartisanship has become part of the problem, and not a key to a solution. There is a tendency to view bipartisanship as nonpartisanship, enabling the forces of cooperation, compromise, and agreement to reach favorable political outcomes. Sadly, bipartisanship has contributed significantly to the current bankruptcy in American national security policy.

In the area of national security, congressional bipartisanship over the past two years has fostered bloated defense spending; the outsourcing of U.S. policy in the Middle East to Israel and Saudi Arabia; and Russian and Chinese efforts to forge their best bilateral relations since the 1950s. There appears to be universal agreement among politicians and pundits that Moscow and Beijing are a threat to the “liberal world order” and that the policy of containment is required to limit the geopolitical pursuits of both Russia and China.

As a result, Russian-American relations are beginning to resemble the worst aspects of Soviet-American relations during the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, blame the Russians for the current state of relations and demonize Russian President Vladimir Putin specifically. We persist in the mythology that Russian leaders walked away from an opportunity after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 to become a “Western-oriented, liberalizing state” in order to challenge liberal democracies the world over.

There is little awareness of the U.S. responsibility for the current confrontation that involved air and sea power in distant waters in recent days. Soon after the Soviet collapse, U.S. presidents moved to exploit Russia’s weakness and thus alienated the

Russian leadership. President Clinton started it by advancing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization into former states of the Warsaw Pact. President Bush added former republics of the Soviet Union to the NATO military alliance, and abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the cornerstone of strategic deterrence. Bush and President Obama pursued the deployment of a sophisticated missile defense in Poland and Romania, which serves no strategic purpose other than to antagonize Russia. President Trump's contribution to this campaign has been the abrogation of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, one of history's most successful disarmament treaties. The arms control dialogue between the United States and the Soviet Union was the major reason for the end of the Cold War; it will be difficult to arrange a Russian-American rapprochement without a disarmament dialogue.

In the wake of the United States taking too much credit for the success of containment against the Soviet Union, U.S. leaders are now endorsing containment as the appropriate policy toward China. President Obama started down this road in 2011, when he described the (needed) withdrawal from Iraq as part of an (unneeded) "pivot" toward the Asia-Pacific. The so-called "pivot" was designed to include the transfer of military assets from the Middle East and the Persian Gulf toward the Asian-Pacific region. Chinese leaders rightfully assumed the "pivot" would replicate the U.S. policy of containment toward the Soviet Union in the wake of the Second World War. When the Chinese tried to open a dialogue with the United States over Washington's concerns regarding the South China Sea, they were rebuffed. Economic relations have been the key to stabilizing Chinese-American relations over the past several decades; Trump's tariff war against Beijing will make it difficult to improve Chinese-American relations.

The Pentagon has now picked up the baton of dual containment toward Russia and China by reorienting U.S. defense strategy toward the possibility of confrontation with Moscow and Beijing. Little thought is given to the mindlessness of this strategic approach, which the United States cannot afford in any event. The Congress has not challenged the Pentagon's emphasis on modernizing its nuclear forces, which have no utilitarian value in defending U.S. interests. Meanwhile, there have been a series of setbacks that include an expanded trade war with China that shows no sign of abating; the abrogation of important arms control agreements with Russia that will soon include the expiration of the New START agreement in 2021; and the self-fulfilling prophecy of geopolitical conflict.

There is no sign of a role for diplomacy in the Trump administration's national security policy, and no strategist within the administration who is able to reverse the hostile course we are on with both Moscow and Beijing. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton have taken advantage of every opportunity to make a bad situation worse. With a nod to Winston Churchill's description of former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Pompeo and Bolton are perfect examples of bulls who carry around their own china shops.

Meanwhile, there is continued bipartisan ignorance of Trump's mishandling of genuine differences with Iran and North Korea that has deepened the bankruptcy of American foreign policy. Moreover, no one in the political and pundit universe seems to care.

JUNE 13, 2019