

Is the US the World's Policeman?
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The question comes up in public discussions all the time: Why should we be the world's policemen? Of course we are not the world's policemen, but we do play an enormous role in serving as a de facto government in a world that, without us, would have no governance at all. The opposite of governance is anarchy, a non-system that makes life like that of the European Dark Ages after the fall of Rome. Rome, like the United States, did far more good than harm to the world it governed.

Our very flawed nation has the admirable quality of being able to evolve, to fix horrors even as terrible as slavery. We are constantly soul-searching and through our three-part governance (President, Congress, and Supreme Court), we have become a model and a power in the world that has made an enormous difference to global quality of life. Without us, the world would be a much more awful place than it is.

We are the world's sole superpower and these are some of the things that we do:

- o Our Pacific Fleet keeps order in a region that, without us, would host naval arms races among countries with historic animosities. Imagine what would happen if China's expansionism were not checked? A world war could begin there. Instead, the Asian countries have been freed to develop their economies with growing middle classes, modeled on our own form of government.

- o Europe enjoyed 60 years under America's protective umbrella, freeing them from more internal wars and ineffectual self defense. Without us, they would be speaking German or Russian, with unhappy consequences.

- o Even in the Muslim world, which is viscerally hostile to the United States, the worst and most authoritarian leaders send their families to the United States and their children to our schools. Their words are one thing---their actions quite another.

- o Global Economy. Overseeing the global economy is one of our most important functions, with involvement in enforcement, oil, money, trade, and consumption.

- o International Legitimacy. There would not be any valid international legitimacy without the umbrella of the US. We face resentment and criticism, yet we continue to provide leadership and bear the costs of having a world in which there is the appearance of legitimacy.

- o International Security. We are indispensable in international security-providing reassurance, our role in nuclear nonproliferation, terrorism and preventive war, humanitarian intervention, and state-building (one of our less successful, but well-intentioned endeavors).

A World Without America. There is no doubt that were we not today's hegemon, the world would be a much more dangerous place. It is obvious that institutions such as the UN and the European Union cannot---or do not---have force to fall back on when talk no longer has an effect. However, because we do not provide security everywhere, we can see the consequences when our power is absent. Nobody intervened in the genocide in Rwanda and no one is willing to step up to forcibly stop the genocide in Darfur, Sudan. Nobody would have intervened in the genocide in Yugoslavia---a situation in Europe's very back yard---until the US ended it and contributed to the rebuilding of those countries, which are once more flourishing.

The world may resent us, but without us, most of the gains enjoyed by the developed world would not have been possible. As for the lesser developed world, there has been a surprising reduction in global poverty, to which we have contributed.

Gratitude is not an emotion that most nation-states cherish. However, let us end the pretense that the power of the United States is an obnoxious thing. There is no model in world history in which an imperial power did as much good and took as little in return. For a resolutely anti-aristocratic country, the United States shows laudable noblesse oblige. We do what we do because it is right---and because we can.

For a more extensive summary than can be provided here, read *The Case for Goliath: How America Acts as the World's Government in the 21st Century*, Michael Mandelbaum, Public Affairs (Perseus), New York 2005.

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