The United States as World Savior: Costs and Consequences

On December 4, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson sailed to the Paris Peace Conference aboard the U.S.S. *George Washington,* a passenger liner seized from Germany at the start of the war. Having promised to "make the world itself at last free" and having waged "the culminating and final war for human liberty,"[1] Wilson strode ashore to redraw the map of Europe, enshrine self-determination and democracy, end balance-of-power politics, and build an edifice of permanent peace through the League of Nations. Crowds in Brest cheered him as the "Champion of the Rights of Man" and the "Founder of the Society of Nations." Similar greetings awaited him in Paris and London. Rome hailed him as the "God of Peace" and Milan as "The Savior of Humanity" and as "The Moses from Across the Atlantic."[2] Back in Paris, Wilson settled down to months of protracted negotiations with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French Premier Georges Clemenceau, and other Allied victors as they refined the peace treaty. Lloyd George recalled Wilson "soaring in clouds of serene rhetoric" which soon sank, however, into the threadbare platitudes of the "timorous" doctrinaire. "I really think that at first the idealistic President regarded himself as a missionary whose function it was to rescue the poor European heathen from their age-long worship of false and fiery gods," Lloyd George wrote.[3] The bemused prime minister remembered Clemenceau's reaction to Wilson's assessment of "the failure of Christianity to achieve its highest goals":

> "Why," [Wilson] said, "has Jesus Christ so far not succeeded in inducing the world to follow His teachings in these matters? It

> is because He taught the ideal without devising any practical means of attaining it. That is the reason why I am proposing a practical scheme to carry out His aims." Clemenceau slowly opened his eyes to their widest dimensions and swept them round the Assembly to see how the Christians gathered around the table enjoyed this exposure of the futility of their Master.[4]

Comments like these must have been what prompted poet Robinson Jeffers to marvel at Wilson's "huge delusion" in thinking "that the God of the stars needed your help."[5]

These are impressions from unsympathetic observers, but they accurately reflect a clear tendency in Wilson's character. The discontinuity here between the expansiveness of Wilson's vision and the self-restrained foreign policy of the Founders could hardly be more striking. Wilson was self-consciously a revolutionary figure who accepted and advanced America's messianic role, and his demeanor in postwar Europe represented America's messianic consciousness at its fullest development to date. The American identity is a complicated accumulation of ideas and experiences and of expectations projected onto the United States by outsiders, such as Wilson encountered in Europe. Wilson and the Progressives managed a virtuoso performance of the messianic theme and all its variations, harmonizing the Puritan errand, Enlightenment optimism, Hegelian dialectic, abolitionist crusading, Darwinian racism, and Social Gospel millennialism. Domestically, they rebuilt the nation's cultural and constitutional foundations according to a new blueprint of democratism, egalitarianism, universalism, efficiency, and consolidation of power. Internationally, they crafted a foreign policy based on the global application of the gospel of service.[6]

Governed by the old constitutional morality, the Founders drafted a Constitution and foreign policy anchored in a particular set of historical, theological, philosophical, and political presuppositions about man and society. Together, these habits of mind and conduct comprised part of what George Carey calls the "old constitutional morality"—an "older morality wrought by the Framers

and articulated in *The Federalist*." This morality defended "the four fundamental principles of the American political system: republicanism, the separation of powers, federalism, and limited government."[7] The Framers believed that power is dangerous, tending naturally toward concentration and abuse and therefore needing to be divided, checked, decentralized, and localized. They also believed in the fixity and fallenness of human nature but simultaneously and optimistically in man's rational capacity for a high degree of self-government. Man is prone to passion and imbalance, but through self-restraint and institutional checks and balances he can actively participate in political decisions. From among this citizenry, good leaders can be cultivated, but character alone is not sufficient for good government; it must be matched by wisely contrived systems that divide power and help keep it distributed. The Founders also feared frequent and radical innovations and "simplicity" in government that destabilized politics and made change too easy and tempting. Complexity and slowness, therefore, are sometimes good and necessary; they encourage deliberation, "coolness," and "attention," and discourage impulse, haste, and carelessness. For similar reasons, fixed limits are necessary and binding. The Founders valued collective experience and history; they were rooted in the classical and Christian traditions, in hundreds of years of English constitutional history, and in the subsequent personal experience of colonial self-government and constitution-making.

This is the world that Wilson and the Progressives rejected in their political philosophy and rhetoric and in their domestic and foreign policy. From one point of view, however, the case for radical discontinuity between the Founders and the Progressives is hard to make. From a certain vantage point the gulf between Washington and Wilson is not great, especially given the persistence and continuity of America's messianic hope, whether Puritan, Enlightenment, or Romantic, sacred or secular. Robert Nisbet notes the Revolutionary generation's faith in inevitable human progress. Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, and Paine seemed to breathe the rarified atmosphere of Turgot, Condorcet, and Price.[8] Even the most sober and restrained of America's Founders were tempted by the *hubris* of their remark-

able moment in history. An otherwise buttoned-up John Adams wrote in 1765 that "I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth."[9] Forrest McDonald notes a similar susceptibility in Madison and Hamilton: "It was 'more than probable,' Madison said in the convention, that the delegates 'were now digesting a plan which in its operation wd. decide forever the fate of Republican Govt.' Hamilton agreed, adding that 'if we did not give to [the republican] form due stability and wisdom, it would be disgraced & lost among ourselves, disgraced & lost to mankind forever.'"[10] Eric Voegelin, moreover, cites a comment by George Washington to Lafayette as an example of America's "revolutionary pathos": "We have sown a seed of Liberty and Union that will germinate by and by over the whole earth. Some day the United States of Europe will be constituted, modeled after the United States of America. The United States will be the legislator of all nations."[11]

On balance, however, the Founders did not yield to the revolutionary impulse, much to the disappointment of Enlightenment true believers in Europe who had expected so much from an emancipated America in the 1780s. The Founders certainly did not wield an "armed doctrine" as Edmund Burke soon accused the French Jacobins of doing. James Madison may have thought the delegates in Philadelphia were helping to "decide for ever the fate of Republican Gov[ernment]t," but Hamilton's assent was carefully tempered. Indeed, he added to the remarks quoted by Forrest McDonald a less-than-enthusiastic qualification that he did not "think favorably of Republican Government."[12] This caution places Hamilton a world away from outward-directed, Jacobin, messianic ideology. Overall, the Founders attached a sense of urgency and of global, epochal significance to what they were achieving without falling into messianic delusions. In the Convention debate on immigration and office-holding, Gouverneur Morris objected, "As to those philosophical gentlemen, those Citizens of the World as they call themselves, He owned he did not wish to see any of them in our public Councils. He would not trust them."[13]

The Framers' temperament was indebted far more to the inherited culture of the "old constitutional morality" than to Enlightenment fads for remaking the world. While many did indeed believe that their success or failure would affect other nations and future generations, their enthusiasm was constrained by the enduring classical and Christian tradition. In *Federalist* No. 6, Hamilton ridiculed "Utopian speculations" and defended the rootedness of experience, "the least fallible guide of human opinions," over against the schemes of "visionary, designing men" and "projectors in politics."[14] In *Federalist* No. 15, Hamilton heeded history's "lesson to mankind" that nations will inevitably act according to interests and passion. The "dictates of reason and justice" apart from "constraint" are insufficient to control man's passions, he argued. Political institutions must account for "the constitution of man."[15] Interests can be managed, counterbalanced, and impeded, but never eliminated. Hamilton had little patience "with men who hope to see the halcyon scenes of the poetic or fabulous age realized in America," and sided with "those who believe we are likely to experience a common portion of the vicissitudes and calamities which have fallen to the lot of other nations. . . ."[16]

The Constitutional Convention and subsequent ratification debates amply testify to the Founders' restraint, sobriety, and regard for concrete and lengthy experience rather than abstract speculation. The Framers' design for the Presidency and their vision for American foreign policy emerged out of these determinative presuppositions about history, man, society, and especially the nature of power. On June 1, 1787, the Convention debated the Presidency. Several delegates voiced their fear of giving the executive branch power over war and peace. Charles Pinckney of South Carolina claimed that such a power "would render the Executive a monarchy, of the worst kind, to wit an elective one."[17] This troubling likelihood alarmed the delegates, and they withheld powers of war and peace from the President, distributing this kingly authority to the House and Senate. South Carolinian John Rutledge and Pennsylvania's James Wilson echoed this concern, with Wilson adding that he did not consider the British monarchy an appropriate model for the ex-

ecutive. A few days later, Pierce Butler of South Carolina offered a more general warning that some delegates "seemed to think that we had nothing to apprehend from an abuse of the Executive power. But why might not a Catiline or a Cromwell arise in this Country as well as in others[?]"[18] By convention's end, the delegates reaffirmed that the President would not have the power to declare war and would share in peace-making powers only in a limited capacity. At the eleventh hour, Madison tried to fence in the President's likely opportunism further by moving that peace treaties not require executive approval, believing that the executive "would necessarily derive so much power and importance from a state of war that he might be tempted, if authorized, to impede a treaty of peace." Butler favored Madison's proposal "as a necessary security against ambitious & corrupt Presidents."[19]

Despite these fears, the delegates had no intention of incapacitating the executive branch in its conduct of foreign policy. The President needed wide, adequate powers to fulfill his constitutionally-mandated role and to meet foreseen and unforeseen contingencies. Hamilton, in *Federalist* No. 23, is clear on this point: "The circumstances that endanger the safety of nations are infinite; and for this reason, no constitutional shackles can wisely be imposed on the power to which the care of it is committed. This power ought to be co-extensive with all the possible combinations of such circumstances; and ought to be under the direction of the same councils which are appointed to preside over the common defense." This same sort of meditation on means and ends later led to wrangling with Jeffersonians over the right interpretation and application of the Necessary and Proper Clause, but Hamilton's point in this regard is well taken. Once the federal government is granted power over the common defense, "there can be no limitation to that authority . . . in any matter essential to its efficacy; that is, in any matter essential to the *formation, direction,* or *support* of the NATIONAL FORCES."[20] Defining the common defense would prove difficult and controversial in some circumstances, especially in the crisis of the 1860s, but even acting within his constitutionally prescribed role the President had sufficient latitude to fulfill his oath of office.

The first president to exercise these powers and to set precedents for the future was, of course, George Washington. While exhibiting a degree of fashionable Enlightenment optimism regarding peace, progress, and prosperity,[21] Washington's overriding concerns for America seemed quite practical: a concern for national character and reputation among the nations, commercial interests, the health of the union, effective distribution of powers in the machinery of the Constitution, and relieving the burden of debt. Washington embodied what Claes Ryn identifies as the "older conception of leadership" recognized by its "self-control, wisdom, and high experience." Washington's speeches and conduct exemplified gratitude, humility, and a recognition of man's fallenness.[22] He maintained a sober view of limited, fallen human nature, believing that "human prudence" could not arm itself against all "contingencies," that "checks and barriers" to tyranny were necessary, and, most tellingly, that "we are not to expect perfection in this world."[23] Washington also recognized that America would not and could not escape history: "The United States ought not to indulge a persuasion, that, contrary to the order of human events, they will forever keep at a distance those painful appeals to arms [with] which the history of every other nation abounds."[24]

Much more striking, however, especially in contrast to the Progressives' new morality a century later, is Washington's advice in his Farewell Address. He saw interests as more powerful than sentiment in maintaining the union, and valued experience as a guide superior to "mere speculation." Breathing the wisdom of centuries of English constitutionalism, he asked his countrymen to "resist with care the spirit of innovation upon [the Constitution's] principles." Furthermore, he had no hesitation about a foreign policy based on "our interests guided by our justice." Why ought America, he asked, "by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European Ambition, Rivalship, Interest, Humor or Caprice?" Walter McDougall argues that the Farewell Address, drafted in the context of a world war, "established for generations the Great Rule of American Unilateralism"—a rule that enjoyed a broad consensus among the

Founders despite deep differences on other matters.[25] Washington's foreign policy was practical, not naïve, sentimental, or ideological. It was principled, yet flexible, recognizing the exigencies of the moment and paying due regard to "the circumstances of the case." Perhaps most tellingly of all, Washington did not expect to be able to prevent America's inevitable decline along the path traveled by "the Destiny of Nations."[26] Taken together, these are hardly the doctrines of messianic nationalism or evidence of "revolutionary pathos."

From the wisdom and experience of the Founders, the young United States inherited a carefully balanced view of the presidency and foreign policy, one consistent with and indebted to the old constitutional morality. The executive branch was entrusted with great power, and because of the magnitude of that power it was subjected to limitations and checks. Washington and others established the common defense on non-ideological principles of national interests, commerce, and unilateralism. But as the old constitutional morality eroded in the nineteenth century, the old foreign policy eroded with it. The temptation to become a crusading nation was there in the 1800s, but it was consciously restrained and suppressed. Romantic enthusiasts might call for military intervention in foreign wars of national liberation, but by and large the United States avoided such adventurism. John Quincy Adams' oft-quoted advice explicitly rejected America's role as knight-errant: "America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion only of her own." Becoming the guarantor of freedom, "she might become the dictatress of the world. She would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit."[27] For the first half of its history, the United States conceptualized and responded to rivalry among nations still within the classic interpretive framework Thucydides offered more than two millennia before: interests, fear, and honor.

Ultimately, this tradition was shattered. Manifest Destiny, messianic zeal, and Social Gospel humanitarianism burst the bounds of the old morality. The North's construction of consolidated American nationalism in the 1840s and 1850s,[28] its war of national uni-

fication in the 1860s, and its crusade to "Americanize" the South opened the gates to imperial adventures. Shortly after the war, Robert E. Lee wrote to Lord Acton concerning the continuing primacy of reserved powers to authentic, restrained constitutionalism, regarding their preservation "as the chief source of stability to our political system, whereas the consolidation of the states into one vast republic, sure to be aggressive abroad and despotic at home, will be the certain precursor of that ruin which has overwhelmed all those that have preceded it."[29] The Battle Hymn of the Republic called Americans to "die to make men free" in imitation of Christ's atonement and never called retreat. Thirty years later, the Spanish-American War marked the first time the United States waged an overseas war that it explained to itself and to the world primarily as a humanitarian crusade. By the time of Wilson's War Message, Progressive foreign policy had transformed America into an imaginary nation unmotivated by interests or fear or even the need to defend its honor, the Servant Nation laying down its life for its friends.[30]

The Progressives broke with the Founding tradition and replaced it with a "new constitutional morality." For republicanism they substituted majoritarian democracy. For separation of powers, they promoted consensus and cooperation around an abstraction called "public opinion" and then "world opinion." For federalism, they offered national consolidation. For limited government, they exchanged the modern, bureaucratic leviathan state. The Progressive Era witnessed an obvious loss of the fear of the concentration and abuse of political power as the greatest and most likely threat to American life, liberty, and property. Progressives argued that the government had to be brought back in to rescue people from the predatory power of corporate monopolies. The new fear of the concentration and abuse of *economic* power gradually replaced the old fear of *political* power that had once defined the Republic. Industrial capitalists were portrayed as the new arbitrary, tyrannical despots that had to be reined in, regulated, checked, and counterbalanced. Aside from the merits of this analysis of the economic problems of the day—and without denying or minimizing the actual and potential threats of concentrated wealth—the Progressives' ea-

gerness to expand and strengthen the central government unmistakably reveals the decline of the old constitutional morality. Power was no longer to be feared, limited, slowed, and divided. Rather, it was to be concentrated in the hands of the wise and benevolent for redemptive domestic and international purposes. Radical innovation, frequent experimentation, and rapid change became virtues. Checks were relabeled "impediments," the slate was wiped clean. Man and his environment became malleable, making possible the elimination of poverty, disease, crime, vice, and ignorance.

Part of this new morality was a new vision of the Presidency and foreign policy consistent with the Progressives' social reform agenda. The Progressives were first and foremost interventionists, domestically and internationally. Walter McDougall corrects the misrepresentation of the Progressives' temperamental imperialism. "For at bottom," he writes, "the belief that American power, guided by a secular and religious spirit of service, could remake foreign societies came as easily to the Progressives as trust-busting, prohibition of child labor, and regulation of interstate commerce, meatpacking, and drugs."[31] Progressive internationalists fashioned an abstract, totalizing, idealist foreign policy, culminating under Wilson's leadership in the First World War. Restraint, humility, and self-doubt were replaced by an expansive, often sanctimonious humanitarianism. In a speech to the League to Enforce Peace in May 1916, Wilson repudiated Washington's Farewell Address and the tradition of non-entanglement. Appealing to inevitability, he observed that "we are participants, whether we would or not, in the life of the world. The interests of all nations are our own also. We are partners with the rest." "So sincerely do I believe in these things," he continued, "that I am sure I speak the mind and wish of the people of America when I say that the United States is willing to become a partner in any feasible association of nations formed in order to realize these objects and make them safe against violation. . . . God grant that the dawn of that day of frank dealing and of settled peace, concord, and cooperation may be near at hand."[32] In his War Message a year later, he announced that "neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved

and the freedom of its peoples."[33] Wilson imagined that the United States could and ought to transcend its own interests, combine its interests with those of "humanity," and, as the special nation—the exceptional nation, free from the burden of history—enter into a harmony of world interest and world opinion.

Wilson envisioned these sentiments not truly as a repudiation of Washington, however, but rather as a fulfillment and globalization. In a speech on July 4, 1918, delivered in the symbolic setting of Washington's tomb at Mt. Vernon, he announced the universalization of the American Revolution. He portrayed the circle of leaders around George Washington as men whose foresight embraced the whole world and its future, scanning the world "with modern eyes that turned away from a past which men of liberated spirits could no longer endure." He asked his audience to look with those same eyes and "conceive anew the purposes that must set men free." The Founders planned "for all mankind," and American entry into the First World War was "only the fruitage of what they planted." Presented with greater opportunities than the Founders, the current generation of Americans is "permitted to do what they would have done had they been in our place." These imaginary Founders, whose minds Wilson read, endorsed his interventionism and plan for world redemption. He enlisted them in his Manichean battle: "The Past and the Present are in deadly grapple and the peoples of the world are being done to death between them."[34] The only option was for the Past to die.

As a revelation of the Progressive mind at work and as a measure of its distance from the Founders, the rest of Wilson's speech is even more significant. Gone is any trace of limits, fallibility, humility, contingency, and the spirit of compromise. Wilson's crusade had "one issue," he announced: "The settlement must be final. There can be no compromise. No halfway decision would be tolerable. No halfway decision is conceivable." He then restated his familiar agenda for remaking the world: self-determination, consent of the governed, international law, a league for the maintenance of peace, and an end to balance-of-power politics. But his first objective, as preparatory to these ends, was "the destruction of every arbitrary

power anywhere that can separately, and of its single choice, disturb the peace of the world; or, if it cannot be presently destroyed, at least its reduction to virtual impotence."[35] Totalizing words like "destruction" and "every" and "anywhere" come not from the vocabulary of the old morality but from the new. And by the end of this speech, Wilson preached world revolution. America wielded an armed doctrine. The revolution that liberated the American colonies from Britain now reached out from Washington's tomb to encircle the globe:

> I stand here now to speak,—speak proudly and with confident hope,—of the spread of this revolt, this liberation, to the great stage of the world itself! The blinded rulers of Prussia have roused forces they knew little of,—forces which, once roused, can never be crushed to earth again; for they have at their heart an inspiration and a purpose which are deathless and of the very stuff of triumph![36]

Through the agency of total war, Wilson and the Progressive internationalists set out to repeal the nineteenth century. They waged war against America's and Europe's past, attempting to save the world from historical structures and traditions different from America's own. Summarizing the achievement of the American soldiers, Wilson claimed that "they fought to do away with an old order and to establish a new one."[37] Wilson called for an end to checks and balances internationally and the creation of a more organic, cooperative system. Balance of power had to be replaced by a concert of power in the form of the covenanted League of Nations. In this enlightened, benevolent new age, nations no longer needed to be balanced against each other. Multi-ethnic, multi-national empires like Austria-Hungary had to be dismantled and replaced by self-determination for all peoples. From speeches in 1914 through his elaboration of this principle in the Fourteen Points and the League of Nations, Wilson consistently called for autonomy. As a policy it was ahistorical and impractical and indicated little familiarity on Wilson's part with the ancient complexity

of Europe's political geography. Rather than a key to future peace, its application seemed to guarantee endless ethnic rivalry, border disputes, and perpetual war.[38]

Wilson operated in a constructed world of his own imagining. He inhabited what Eric Voegelin later called a "second reality."[39] In this second reality, not grounded in human experience, anything is possible. Like other ideologues of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Wilson rebelled against reality and tried to remake the world according to a pattern derived not from concrete experience but from abstract propositions grounded in nothing other than his own imagination and rhetoric. Contrary to the wisdom of the Founders, contrary to the insistent testimony of the ages, Wilson believed that the world could leave behind its ambition, rivalry, interests, impulse, passion, and capriciousness, to embrace an abstract, global brotherhood lying just over the horizon. Where Washington had once based foreign policy on personal and national *character,* Wilson re-established it on personal and national *sentiment.* Where Washington, in his state papers and especially in his Farewell Address, had emphasized virtue, integrity, honesty, fidelity, and concrete justice, Wilson called for "service," sentimental humanitarianism, and abstract rights. Where Washington had feared breaking the trust of the American people, Wilson feared breaking the heart of the world.[40]

The burden would seem to lie with policymakers who advocate a continuing world-redemptive role for the United States to prove that a posture such as Wilson advocated best preserves our constitutional republic and most effectively secures the lives, liberty, and property of the American people. They ought to be able to demonstrate just how and to what degree Messianic nationalism makes America safer. Many ordinary citizens might well wonder what harm there is in universalizing American values, in claiming that the ideals enshrined in the Declaration and Constitution belong to all peoples in all cultures, as President George W. Bush insisted in a speech at the National Archives.[41] What is the harm in believing that one's nation has a divine mandate to spread freedom, the rule of law, self-government, prosperity, and peace? Is this aspi-

ration any different from imperial Rome's mission to shut the gates of war, to beat down the proud, and to bring the world under the dominion of law and justice as Virgil described it? These are good things. Who in good conscience could speak against universalizing these blessings, especially if a nation has the capacity to do so, and especially if national *ability* means national *responsibility*?

But universalization is exactly the problem. Good things are not good in every context, or carried to any degree, or arranged in any priority. Love of neighbor and even love of one's enemy are enjoined by the gospel, but expanded into principles of foreign policy, these ideals lose all meaning. Universalization of the Golden Rule as if it were the only rule of right conduct and applicable in every circumstance shows little understanding of the rule itself and its proper relationship to other rules. The nation is not the individual writ large; the world is not the community writ large. The American system of justice and form of government may not be right for the world. Universalism only makes sense in an indefinitely malleable world populated by abstractions and uncomplicated by stubborn complexity and fixity. Sound judgment and sound leadership always require due recognition of context, degree, and hierarchy.

Regardless of real or imagined benefits, messianic nationalism's costs are evident and affect more than political rhetoric (which is rarely "mere" as it expands the realm of the possible—or the impossible—in the public imagination). Messianic nationalism imposes serious costs on America's institutions. It confuses the things of God and the things of Caesar, misleading the Church about the proper identity, boundaries, and mission of the State. This blasphemous confusion by itself is reason enough to correct the problem, but consequences also reach to the state and society. Messianic nationalism carries with it what William Graham Sumner on the eve of the Spanish-American War called the penalty of greatness[42]—burdens of increased taxes, increased likelihood of war brought by constant intervention overseas, greater jeopardy to American soldiers, the vulgarization of political discourse, the corruption of politics, and the fanning of national vanity. An imperial policy may destabilize regions and put the safety of foreign peoples at greater risk

by imposing unsustainable systems of government based not on efficacy but on ideology. It denies legitimacy to any regime that does not embrace democracy. It seeks to overthrow other governments not primarily because of the likely or overt threat they pose but because of their heretical political ideologies.

There are costs as well to a vulnerable Constitution that was never designed to govern an empire. Sumner's opinion from 1896 is still relevant today, and his recognition of the benefits of limits is instructive:

> This confederated state of ours was never planned for indefinite expansion or for an imperial policy. We boast of it a great deal, but we must know that its advantages are won at the cost of limitations, as is the case with most things in this world. The fathers of the Republic planned a confederation of free and peaceful industrial commonwealths, shielded by their geographical position from the jealousies, rivalries, and traditional policies of the Old World and bringing all the resources of civilization to bear for the domestic happiness of the population alone. They meant to have no grand statecraft or "high politics," no "balance of power" or "reasons of state," which had cost the human race so much. They meant to offer no field for what Benjamin Franklin called the "pest of glory." It is the limitation of this scheme of the state that the state created under it must forego a great number of the grand functions of European states; especially that it contains no method and apparatus of conquest, extension, domination, and imperialism. The plan of the fathers would have no controlling authority for us if it had been proved by experience that that plan was narrow, inadequate, and mistaken.[43]

The "plan of the fathers" retained its "controlling authority" for a hundred years, and under its limitations the republic flourished. The Constitution, by definition a system of limitations, was designed to be incompatible with "conquest, extension, domination, and imperialism."

The "armed doctrine" of global democracy becomes restless under these constitutional limitations. Ideology becomes impatient with institutional constraints on ambition. Moreover, ideology simplifies international conflicts, either reducing or magnifying them into unrecognizable contests of ideas. It hinders sound judgment by distorting reality through its own prism. It mistakes part of reality for the whole. It misjudges proportion, the proper scale of values, and the limits of the possible. It favors slogans over careful judgment, precipitous action over slow deliberation. It promises permanent, universal solutions to intractable, perennial problems. A foreign policy driven by ideology is more likely to misperceive and misconstrue national interests, to overlook good options in its myopic pursuit of the best, to choose quixotic goals, to become intolerant and aggressive, and to earn ill will in a world crowded with would-be messiahs. C. S. Lewis pointed out in *The Abolition of Man* that ideology abstracts one piece of total reality and treats that fragment as if it were the whole truth.[44] As heirs of the revolutionary ideologies of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, American policy makers assume that they are smart enough and virtuous enough to solve most international problems. They place their faith in the capacity of rational calculation and benevolence to remake the world, forgetting Dostoevsky's counsel to ideologues everywhere that sometimes in this fallen world two times two equals five and wicked humanity acts perversely out of spite.

U.S. foreign policy needs to be put back into a constitutional framework, even at a time of grave threats to national security and to American lives and property. The Founders' framework always recognized that the executive powers would require flexibility, latitude, and responsiveness. These criteria are compatible with constitutional boundaries; Washington's rule of unilateralism, after all, was articulated and implemented during a world war. No one would deny that twenty-first-century America has grown into something unrecognizable to the eighteenth-century America. But we ought not to make more of this truism than the passage of time and the evolution of context and circumstances requires. There is nothing about the condition of the modern world that prevents the United

States from pursuing a foreign policy characterized by what Claes Ryn calls "responsible nationhood."[45] "Corruption never has been compulsory," Robinson Jeffers said as he watched America "thickening to empire" during the 1920s.[46] Humility and self-restraint are always possible. The "old constitutional morality" and the foreign policy based upon it are still available to us if we are willing to return to limits and abandon our bid to remake the world.

The terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 was an opportunity to reestablish the nation's foreign policy on the time-tested, non-ideological grounds of interests, security, and honor. But the crisis became a missed opportunity. Instead, George W. Bush adopted the rhetoric of Wilsonian, messianic nationalism, carrying forward America's revolution for world freedom and democracy.[47] The restoration of America's constitutional order and a foreign policy compatible with that order depends in part on recovering the lost language of constitutionalism. Picking up the thread and tracing it back through the labyrinth of American history to find the corners at which we took wrong turns will require great skill. Identifying those wrong turns is the work of painstaking scholarship. Plotting a new course through the labyrinth is the work of authentic leaders. A nation of America's magnitude in population, geography, productivity, wealth, and prestige will inevitably be engaged in the world. But that engagement must preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution.

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6 See the introduction to Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003).
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15 Ibid., 71–2, 74.
16 Ibid., 149.
17 Ibid., 45–6.
18 Ibid., 63.
19 Ibid., 599.
20 Ibid., 113 (emphasis in original).
21 See especially his letter to Lafayette, 15 August 1786, in *George Washington: A Collection*, ed. W. B. Allen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), 326.
22 Claes G. Ryn, *America the Virtuous: The Crisis of Democracy and the Quest for Empire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003), 6, 60–3.
23 Washington to Lafayette, 7 February 1788, in *George Washington*, 383.

24 "Fifth Annual Message," 3 December 1793, in ibid., 488.
25 Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 44–9.
26 "Farewell Address," 19 September 1796, in *George Washington*, 515, 517, 519, 524–6.
27 Quoted in McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 36.
28 See Susan-Mary Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000).
29 Lee to Acton, 15 December 1866, in *Selected Writings of Lord Acton, Vol. I: Essays in the History of Liberty*, ed. Rufus. J. Fears (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1986), 365.
30 For a detailed account of Wilson's redemptive impulse, see Richard M. Gamble, "Savior Nation: Woodrow Wilson and the Gospel of Service," *Humanitas* XIV, no. 1 (2001), 4–22.
31 McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 120.
32 Quoted in ibid., 122–3.
33 *PWW*, 41: 523.
34 Ibid., 48: 514–6.
35 Ibid., 516–7.
36 Ibid., 517.
37 Quoted in Thomas Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory: America in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 320.
38 Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York: Basic Books), 439–41.
39 Michael P. Federici, *Eric Voegelin: The Restoration of Order* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002), 37, 233. In Voegelin's analysis, writes Federici, "a second reality is akin to an 'imaginary reality' that serves the purpose of screening 'the first reality of common experience' from human perception. The creation of a second reality is an act of imagination that deceives the self into perceiving life in a way that creates friction between the self and first reality. This friction is the impetus for the revolt against reality that characterizes modern ideological movements," 233. Wilson fits this profile in every way.
40 "Address to the Senate," 10 July 1919, *PWW*, 61: 434.
41 "Remarks by the President at the Rededication of the National Archives," 17 September 2003 (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030917-2.html).
42 William Graham Sumner, "The Fallacy of Territorial Extension," in *On Liberty, Society, and Politics: The Essential Essays of William*

Graham Sumner, ed. Robert C. Bannister (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 271.

43 Ibid., 269–70.

44 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 56.

45 Ryn, *America the Virtuous*, 177–88.

46 Jeffers, "Shine, Perishing Republic," in *Selected Poems*, 9.

47 George W. Bush, "Remarks at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy," 6 November 2003 (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html).