The American Nation-Building Creed

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The same advantage which a republic has over a democracy, in controlling the effects of faction, is enjoyed by a large over a small republic--is enjoyed by the *Union* over the States composing it.

James Madison[1]

No legislative act, therefore, contrary to the Constitution, can be valid. To deny this, would be to affirm, that the deputy is greater than his principal; that the servant is above his master; that the representatives of the people are superior to the *people themselves.*

Alexander Hamilton[2]

American society has never lacked ambition. During the last two centuries the global reach of the United States has spread like rushing water, moving with ever-greater speed across the landscape, around barriers, and into the nooks and crannies of what were once distant locales. This dynamic dispersion of U.S. influence shows no sign of stopping in the twenty-first century, as the nation's counterinsurgency forces and social media expand their activities in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and other places Shakespeare described as "this most desolate isle:"

>Oh, it is monstrous, monstrous!
>Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it,
>The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder.[3]

Shakespeare never visited the exotic lands of his plays, but Americans have prodigiously trod in what the playwright called the "mudded" terrains.[4] The growing presence of the United States in these regions transformed the applications of the country's power beyond the dreams of the Founding Fathers. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and their many contemporaries could never have imagined that their new nation would one day dominate all the oceans of the globe, with permanent military bases in more than one hundred countries. Compared to its most powerful predecessors in Europe and Asia since the Middle Ages, the United States became a much larger and heavier global presence. "Soft" cultural power was both a product and a producer of America's unprecedented

"hard" economic and military might.[5]

The Ever-Lasting Revolution

Despite the nation's extraordinary growth, the early assumptions of American power remained fundamentally unchanged over more than two centuries. Basic ideas about politics transferred with consistency from generation-to-generation, and from territory-to-territory. The image of the American Revolution, and the founding of a new nation and a new government at the time, framed all future discussions in the United States about how to live with other societies. The Revolution was an experience, a myth, and also a paradigm for defining political mission.[6]

Nothing could exemplify this point more than the American reaction to the horrible terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Amidst the smoking remains of New York's World Trade Center, President George W. Bush memorably announced that "America today is on bended knee in prayer" for its people and its principles. In a two minute pep talk to tired rescue workers he used the word "nation" four times, along with a flag that he proudly waved, to affirm American unity and power in the intrepid defense of individual liberty. Appearing before Congress less than a week later, the president spoke in revolutionary terms: "this country will define our times, not be defined by them. As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror. This will be an age of liberty here and across the world."[7]

In the most powerful pamphlet written to defend the war against Great Britain in late 1776, Thomas Paine had proclaimed the same militant American purpose in defending individual liberty against frightening enemies: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet, we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph…Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated."[8]

From Thomas Paine to George W. Bush, Americans have reaffirmed their sense of purpose as defined in their Revolution. When threatened, Americans have mobilized around the global expansion of freedom--protecting their rights by ensuring that foreign peoples accept them. Americans have consistently empha-sized their common identity as a single people, and they have militantly fought to destroy evil enemies who would deny their rights and their unity. Most significant, Americans have done all of these things by working to build new nations with constitutional governments, like their own. That is the history of the late eighteenth century that the United States has replayed from the Constitutional Convention through Southern Reconstruction after the Civil War, and all the wars

of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Crises consistently produce war and constitution-writing in American history. Scholars have, in fact, contributed to this process as they have re-told the story of the Revolution during each of these moments to remind citizens of their inherited purpose, born of political ambition.[9]

For some observers, the constant reinforcement of American ideals is a source of strength; it makes the United States a global force for progressive change. Robert Kagan writes: "Americans believed the world would be a better and safer place if republican institutions flourished and if tyranny and monarchy disappeared. Americans believed a world reformed along with the liberal and republican lines would be a safer world for their liberal republic, and that a freer and multiplying commerce would make them a more prosperous nation. They were arguably right on both counts."[10]

President Bush obviously agreed. His Second Inaugural Address captured the most radical American revolutionary urges in the face of foreign threats: "From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth." "Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation," Bush reminded listeners. "[I]t is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."[11]

Bush's ambition to shine the light of American democracy on the entire world struck some observers as a dark nightmare. The problem for most critics was not the revolutionary principles articulated by the president, but their applicability to hostile circumstances in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other distant societies. Could the United States really overcome the Shakespearian difficulties of managing "desolate isles"? Was the image of the American Revolution really an accurate map for international change? Shouldn't Americans more wisely focus on fulfilling the ideals of the Revolution in their own society?

Skeptical voices have a long lineage in American history, with as much claim on the nation's past as the revolutionary zealotry exhibited by President Bush and so many of his predecessors. Advocates of a more limited American global mission--like John Jay, Robert LaFollette, and George McGovern--traditionally gained popular appeal as ambitious foreign adventures, predictably, failed to live up to their promise. Since the eighteenth century, strong assertions of American revolutionary principles have accompanied every war and smaller foreign intervention. Angry dissent against the application of those principles to the conflict at hand has also accompanied every war, with the notable exception of the Second World War. Americans continually re-play not only the rhetoric of their Revolution, but also the early debates about the meaning and the application of the Revolution to contemporary society.

The clear pattern, however, is that in moments of crisis the images, claims, and ambitions of the Revolution win out over more cautious voices. This is true

in the history of the United States, almost without exception. "At times of heightened threat perception," Melvyn Leffler explains, "the assertion of values mounts and subsumes careful calculation of interests. Values and ideals are asserted to help evoke public support for the mobilization of power; power, then, tempts the government to overreach far beyond what careful calculations of interest might dictate."[12] The goals of the United States in spreading a particular conception of national and governmental legitimacy are remarkably resilient, especially in the face of a fast-changing world. The willingness to use force for Revolutionary purposes remains pervasive in the American experience.[13]

Making the "American Nation"

Despite its wide, repeated, and controversial applications, the enduring sense of American mission remains firmly rooted in unique historical circumstances. The constitutional innovations of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton reflect these roots and their continuing influence in the United States and abroad. Madison, Hamilton, and their many literate counterparts in late eighteenth century British North America invented a new kind of a government, fusing many complex ideas about republics, democracies, and empires. Their creation drew its legitimacy not primarily from tradition, from religion, or from the existing administrative units in the thirteen states. The Constitution challenged all of these inherited anchors of authority.[14]

Madison, Hamilton, and their fellow framers built not only a new edifice of government, but also a new foundation for that edifice. In this sense, they were at least as radical as the Thomas Paines who provoked the Revolution in the first place. The Constitution for the United States, jointly written, widely debated, and ultimately ratified in 1789 asserted that the power of American government rested on the definition of a new people--an "American nation." Free men, living in diverse geographic, economic, and religious circumstances across an already vast territorial expanse, provided the wellspring for shared rule. No king would enforce authority, as was traditionally the case. No religious deity would promise eternal salvation from collective sacrifice. The citizens, defined as a single collective, would constitute the sovereign basis for political authority that would supersede all other bodies, institutions, and claims. The government would come from a common people. This was a very surprising idea, especially since no one really knew who these common people were.[15]

Popular sovereignty made the American Revolution a permanent part of nationhood and governance. It framed much more than a philosophy or a constitution. The creative work of designing democratic institutions continued because the figures assembled in eighteenth century at Philadelphia, and subsequent meetings around the country, developed a new language to transform the appearance, the feel, and ultimately the function of politics. Madison, Hamilton, and others designed a new reality from scattered materials--

"Americans"--that did not yet exist as a coherent whole. The act of making the institutions for government created the people, just as the people made the government.[16]

This is what Hamilton meant, in the debates surrounding the ratification of the Constitution, when he called for the citizens of the states to approve this foundational document both to build a national government and to affirm the primacy of their collective will. You could not have a national government or a collective will without the other. The Constitution empowered the "people themselves," just as the "people themselves" made the Constitution. The relationship between nation and state--Americans and their public institutions-- was symbiotic in the late eighteenth century. It has remained so ever since.[17]

Most residents of North America, of course, were excluded from Madison and Hamilton's definitions of the people and the nation. The institutions created by the Constitution remained extremely limited in their early influence within society. Perhaps most significant, the Constitution affirmed the continuation of slavery within the new nation, with guaranteed protection from the national government, despite the widespread recognition of its evil and the worldwide efforts to eliminate it. The popular consensus behind the new American national government was neither as popular nor as consensual as the rhetoric, then and now, has claimed.[18]

These are important points, but they often receive too much emphasis in a twenty-first century context that embraces, at least rhetorically, strong presumptions about inclusiveness. The creation of the American nation and government in the late eighteenth century unleashed an outpouring of participation on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean that forever changed the fabric of modern politics. "The Revolution," one historian writes, "resembled the breaking of a dam, releasing thousands upon thousands of pent-up pressures… suddenly it was as if the whole traditional structure, enfeebled and brittle to begin with, broke apart, and people and their energies were set loose in an unprecedented outburst."[19]

The energies of citizens found collective voice in the constitutional institutions created to mange them. As "Americans," literate individuals were now part of a national debate about a common government. "Public opinion"-- measured more in tone and attitude, rather than surveys or elections--shaped a national identity, government policies, and much more. The United States emerged as a new kind of broad and yet ordered democracy in action. "The Revolution," Gordon Wood writes, "rapidly expanded this 'public' and democra- tized its opinion. Every conceivable form of printed matter--books, pamphlets, handbills, posters, broadsides, and especially newspapers--multiplied and were now written and read by many more ordinary people than ever before in history…By the early nineteenth century this newly enlarged and democratized public opinion had become the 'vital principle' underlying American government, society, and culture."[20]

People felt they mattered as they had not before. Government now had to serve the people. Farmers and merchants, not kings and aristocrats, made the government. For these revolutionary circumstances to endure and prosper, nation and government had to remain closely tied together. The alternative was a reversion to separation and despotism. The alternative was a return of European empire on the ashes of the revolutionary experiment. American-style nation-building looked to many participants like the only viable alternative--then and now.

For the new nation to survive, the world had to be made safe for it not through war or imposition, but instead through a gradual nurturing of similar experiments far and wide. Thomas Jefferson, for example, hoped that the contagion of liberty would spread both to Indian "savages" and to French aristocrats. His *Notes on the State of Virginia* is filled with references to the "manners" and "moral sense of right and wrong" among Indians. Jefferson believed that a more organized government could transform Indian "aborigines" into modern citizens, enjoying what he envisioned as a peaceful and prosperous way of life--including Indians and whites being side-by-side. Jefferson similarly wrote to James Madison, from France, of the goodness that could come from destroying European "degeneracy" and building new nations: "I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical…An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors so mild in their punishments of rebellions, as not to discourage them too much. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government."[21]

The spread of the American Revolution was the best security for the American Revolution in a hostile world. If Americans looked only within, they quite reasonably feared that powerful foreign actors would exploit and ultimately destroy them. They were probably correct in this judgment. The country's alleged ocean "isolation" was far narrower than many historians have admitted. British military forces occupied fortifications on the Northern and some Western borders of the new nation, while Spanish and French forces maintained a strong presence on the Southern rim of the North American continent. European military, economic, and cultural influences surrounded the United States well into the nineteenth century.[22]

The American Revolution made a foreign policy of cautious nation-building, or what later advocates would call "democratic development," imperative. Early strategists did not plan for American international leadership in years, or even decades, but they firmly believed that, out of self-interest, the United States had to promote long-term changes beyond the nation's borders. Even George Washington's famous farewell warning that his countrymen should avoid the temptation to "entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition," closed with support for "diffusing and diversifying by gentle means the streams of commerce." Washington captured the inherent internationalism of the American

Revolution, committed to separation from "permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world," but also the expansion of global influence through trade, "impartial" relations, and political example. Although the United States had to live with global diversity, it sought to shape that diversity in cautious but significant ways.[23]

The Sacred Union of Nation and State

Nation-building through democratic development allowed the United States to increase its territory, its population, its wealth, and, ultimately, its worldwide reach. This process of continuing expansion, with all its positive and negative implications for different groups, rested on the strong shoulders of an enduring American identity. Despite the many challenges to a common collectivity, especially during the Civil War, more and more residents of North America began to call themselves "Americans." This certainly did not imply consensus on major political issues of the day--including tariffs, banking, or slavery, of course--but it did mean that when threatened by external or internal adversaries, people consistently demanded that a national government serves their rightful interests as Americans. Urban merchants, rural farmers, frontier settlers, and others invoked a common identity to justify broad government action on their behalf to regulate commerce, remove Indians, and create "free" and "slave" states in new territories. Active government, in turn, affirmed the power and legitimacy of the expanding American nation.[24]

This historical trajectory of the American nation and state was not preordained. If anything, it ran against the history of European and Asian territories that guided the expectations of foreign observers. The people of those continents had not embraced a common identity or a common government, at least since the fifteenth century, even when powerful military figures tried to impose such a phenomenon. Colonial rivalries in North America appeared to promise the export of a similar experience to the New World. In the absence of American nation and state formation after the late eighteen century, informed thinkers expected the region to suffer much more violence, suffering, and despair. North American history could have easily resembled the fracturing and foreign imposition of Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and North Africa--occurring at precisely the same moment.[25]

Madison was among many who feared that exact outcome in North America. During the first years after the Revolution, he described the "evil" of narrow self-interests in the former British colonies, and the emerging prospect of "public calamities" because of "trespasses of the states on the rights of each other." Madison warned in 1787 that although the "foreign powers have not yet been rigorous" in pursuing their aims in North America, their "moderation cannot be mistaken for a permanent partiality to our faults." Prosperity, security, and independence in North America required a new form of political order.[26]

Madison's most enduring ideas about constitutions and nation-building emerged in this context. "The great desideratum in Government," he wrote, "is such a modification of the Sovereignty as will render it sufficiently neutral between the different interests and factions, to control one part of the Society from invading the rights of another, and at the same time sufficiently controlled itself, from setting up an interest adverse to that of the whole Society. In absolute Monarchies, the prince is sufficiently neutral towards his subjects, but frequently sacrifices their happiness to his ambition or his avarice. In small Republics, the sovereign will is sufficiently controlled from such a Sacrifice of the entire Society, but is not sufficiently neutral towards the parts composing it." The United States, according to Madison, needed to build a government that was strong and unified, but also restrained and pluralist.[27]

The debates about the Constitution were debates about a new model of nation and state that would serve this purpose. Madison, Hamilton, and their colleagues across the states devised a form of government that was neither monarchical nor wholly democratic. Through new representative institutions this government would create a necessary alternative to the despotisms, anarchies, and wars of "normal" eighteenth century politics around the globe. Instead of enforced uniformity or chaotic individualism, the United States would build a basis for unprecedented "concert in matters where common interest requires it." Europeans at the time experimented with a similar idea, but their inherited differences in self-definition prohibited the same "Union" on the other side of the Atlantic that Madison and others imagined for the new Americans.[28]

"Union" in the American context meant much more than cooperation, or shared territory, or even common law. For Madison and his followers across two centuries, it came to embody a single people in a single government. American nation-building was the construction of a single Union from the free, diverse, and disparate elements of the land. It had a religious quality associated with a calling to something above "normal" politics. It was to be a Godly community of souls, united in spirit if not by daily behavior, to produce mutual peace and prosperity. On the backs of a new American identity and a new government, the Union promised, in George Washington's words, to "control the usual current of the passions" and "prevent our Nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the Destiny of Nations." Echoing Madison and Hamilton, Washington reminded Americans that: "To the efficacy and permanency of your Union, a government for the whole is indispensable."

> [I]t is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as if the *palladium of your political safety and prosperity*; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning

of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the *sacred ties* which now link together the various parts.[29]

The Union was a reality based in faith. It was a touchstone for ordering the present and the future. Defense and promotion of the Union formed a creed that would define not only the interests of Americans, but also their behavior at home and abroad. This is what Washington meant when he described the Union as a "palladium" of security and wealth. It was an architecture that the first president called on Americans to reinforce and replicate for their permanence and growth. The alternative was the chaos and despotism of the Old World. The Union faith made the unique fusion of the new American nation and state something more than the sum of its constituent elements. The Union became, in Washington's words, a set of "sacred ties which now link together the various parts."[30]

Despite Washington's magisterial claims, the Union remained comparatively small and weak in its early decades. That was not the point. What the Union offered was the fusion of republicanism and empire--the active political participation of the citizenry and the creation of centralized power over a large and growing territory. This was a formidable combination, even at its birth. Republics filled with yeoman farmers were generally too small for the challenges and opportunities of the North American continent. Vast empires, on the model of Europe, China, and the Ottoman world were too large for the literate and free citizens who wanted to control their own destiny.

Madison defined the new synthesis of republicanism and empire in a Union that turned territorial expanse into a republican strength by preventing any faction or set of factions from dominating government power. A plurality of American opinions would assure freedom from imperial tyranny. At the same time republicanism would tame empire by assuring attention to the will of the people. The American nation would hold the central government accountable, and therefore assure that it served the citizens and not vice-versa. This Unionist vision promised cooperation rather than conflict among the small states and territories that comprised the United States. Union also provided assurance of a collective capability for national defense, what later Americans would call, more expansively, "national security."[31]

The "Unionist Paradigm" was the unique and enduring American contribution to modern politics. It was what the symbiosis of a new American people and a new national government became in practice. A common identity, although still exclusive, allowed for relatively easy mobilization of people and resources for collective purpose. Presidential elections, where Americans across territories voted for the same single office--unprecedented on this scale in the eighteenth century--embodied this common identity. National institutions with perceived legitimacy, despite frequent incompetence and corruption, brought relatively a stable rule and adjustment to new threats and opportunities. The continuity of government after the electoral defeat in 1800 of the Federalists, and their peaceful

replacement by the Jeffersonian Republicans, displayed the resilience of national institutions, even so early after their initial formation. Through the end of the eighteenth century what started as an eccentric and largely imagined Union became a powerful "magnet" that attracted, encouraged, and sometimes enforced consensus across region, religion, race, and gender. "From the springs of ardor and enthusiasm issued a powerful myth about America that," one historian explains, "transformed ordinary labor into extraordinary acts of nation building."[32] Recent historians have shown that even slaves, denied all public political voice, embraced the elements of the Union before the Civil War, in an effort to end their inhumane bondage. The Union was a high-minded aspiration that re-made parts of a low and dirty reality.[33]

If there is a "genius" behind American successes, it is both the aspiration and the experience of nation-building as a single Union. For the United States, this has always come back to the twin birth of nation and state, and their inextricable connection through proceeding decades and centuries. The expansion of the American Union has been a continual process of simultaneous national identity formation and national government building across an ever-wider terrain. Everywhere Americans have gone since the Revolution they have tried to make nations with accompanying representative governments. Everywhere Americans have gone they have imagined "founding moments" for national identity formation and modern state construction, even where nation and state seem alien to local populations. Along with guns and dollars, Americans have deployed their exceptional history in universalistic ways. Every war, since the Revolution, has been a "war to end all wars," a crusade to end "tyranny in our world," a struggle to protect and promote a more perfect Union.[34]

Society of States

Reliving their past, Americans imagine a global future that reflects their own national history. Instead of the empires, confederations, and various sub-state structures that have dominated the history of international relations, the American vision presumes discrete geographic units of power, deriving their legitimacy from popular consent, embodied in representative governing institutions. Each state, according to the American experience, should have a single coherent people; each people should have a single, united, and effective state. Americans imagine the governments of foreign societies resembling their own, with state-wide institutions led by elected figures, protections for individual rights and private property, and strong constitutions.

The latter are crucially important because they serve, like the U.S. Constitution, to embody a deep expression of public opinion that transcends faction, fear, and short-term self-interest. Constitutions organize foreign nations and states in the image of a single American-style union. They also provide a Madisonian check on tyrannical dictators and unruly masses. Drawing on their

own experiences, Americans perceive states as legitimate when they appear to unite a people around a consensual identity and a stable government that represents something more sustained than the temporary trade-offs of different groups, or the enforced authority of a powerful figure. This is the modern image of the sovereign nation-state.

This is also the well-spring for American assumptions about a peaceful "society of states." Americans have traditionally distrusted powerful international bodies designed to control the interests of diverse societies. Distant global regulators can easily become global imperialists, playing a role similar to that of European colonial officials, denying national and local autonomy. Americans have condemned a laissez-faire world of anarchical states too. Competition without control breeds frequent wars and destruction, as the very violent history of the eighteenth century readily displayed to observers at the time. The American vision of a society of states posits an alternative to global regulation and global anarchy. It presumes that societies organized internally as constitutional nation-states will naturally preserve their independence and seek cooperation with likeminded countries. The society of states anchors peace to the ideological and institutional compatibility of states. Compatibility breeds familiarity, and it serves the national interests of diverse peoples, according to this vision.[35]

Early American ideas about a society of states were not unique. Writing in the East Prussian city of Konigsberg (now Kaliningrad) at the end of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant described how creating a world of modern nation-states could insure a "perpetual peace." "The republican constitution," Kant explained, "gives a favorable prospect for the desired consequence, i.e., perpetual peace. The reason is this: if the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide that war should be declared (and in this constitution it cannot but be the case), nothing is more natural than that they would be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war." Kant spoke of a "league of peace" among "free states," committed to cooperation based on the mutual trust derived from their representative and stable institutions. Kant's scheme, written near the end of his life, was designed, in part, as a testament to how reasoning citizens--like the American revolutionaries--could reorder the world by remaking their national governments.[36]

Thomas Jefferson echoed Kant in his Second Inaugural Address, written as the warring British and French empires attacked American ships at sea: "We are firmly convinced, and we act on that conviction, that with nations, as with individuals, our interests soundly calculated, will ever be found inseparable from our moral duties." "[H]istory," Jefferson continued, "bears witness to the fact, that a just nation is taken on its word, when recourse is had to armaments and wars to bridle others." For Jefferson, as for many Americans in coming centuries, a peaceful society of states required morally acceptable nations and governments.[37]

Encouraging American-style states abroad preoccupied Jefferson and his

successors. U.S. foreign policy largely rejected the traditional *Realpolitik* focus on military and economic power, separate from moral judgments about local politics. This is where the American vision of a society of states, and the hold of Kant's "perpetual peace," are exceptional. More than any of their counterparts, Americans have consistently defined the world in terms of good and evil actors, deserving of inclusion or ostracism from the society of states. More than any of their counterparts, Americans have consistently deployed their power, often in extreme forms, to eliminate perceived threats to the society of states. All of these actions have, of course, served U.S. interests, but they have constituted something much more profound. American foreign policy positions have displayed an urge to Kantian perfection, a desire to convert selfish international actors into a free and ordered community.

Advocates of *Realpolitik,* like George Kennan and Henry Kissinger, have condemned this American moralism as a Quixotic vision--a futile chasing of false windmills for global democracy and constitutionalism. International politics, Kennan and Kissinger argue, is filled with too much violence and hierarchy for such American-centered presumptions. This is a powerful, but unfair criticism. The American pursuit of a society of states serves the deepest interests of a people forged in revolution. The spread of American-style nation-states, and the destruction of their challengers, matches the realistic interests of citizens in the United States. Alternative forms of foreign government limit the American influence, access, and long-term trust. American-inspired forms of government promise, at least in American eyes, to benefit everyone--those living in foreign societies, as well as those residing in the United States. Contrary to Kennan and Kissinger, nation-building is a form of what we might call "realistic idealism."[38]

Almost without exception, the United States has defined political ideologies that challenge its vision of the modern nation-state--Jacobinism, socialism, communism, fascism, and Islamic fundamentalism--as existential threats. Instead of negotiating, Americans have refused to recognize antithetical regimes and they have worked, where possible, to undermine governments they abhor. Appealing to the interests of "peoples," rather than inherited sources of local authority, means that established borders around territories do not necessarily place legitimate restrictions on American influence, especially if those borders enclose nation-less and state-less violence. Appealing to the peaceful promise of governments made from the people, the United States has often encouraged revolutionary changes in far away places.

The central paradox, missed by many observers, is that ardent commitment to a society of states has justified internal interference in those countries that posed "criminal" threats to the greater society. Within years of the American Revolution, citizens spoke of "police" actions to protect order and prosperity from gangs of wrongdoers along the Western frontier, on the Canadian border, and even in the pirated waters of North Africa. The American policing force would grow and its writ to protect the society of states would expand by the mid-twentieth

century to include most of the globe. This was precisely Kennan and Kissinger's nightmare as they criticized the American international commitment to moral compatibility, rather than narrow self-interest. Asserting leadership over a society of states was, in many ways, more ambitious than running an empire.[39]

American efforts to build institutions for cooperation among the states in "good standing" were the other side of a compatibility agenda. As Kant suggested, a perpetual peace required freedom and common practice among politically prepared actors, not false unity or shallow assumptions about laissez-faire. Americans played a crucial role in designing the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the World Trade Organization, among others, for precisely this reason. These organizations were intended to build peaceful and prosperous relations among free and independent states. They have pursued this goal by seeding an American-inspired fusion of nation and state--through aid, knowledge transfer, trade, and security assistance--across the globe. In their own internal functioning, and in their external activities, these organizations have written constitutions and constructed representative institutions that encourage stable rulers, cohesive peoples, and open societies. What Akira Iriye identifies as the growth of "global community" since the nineteenth century has really been the promotion of a more explicit society of states, with organized mechanisms for cooperation on American terms. The United States does not rule or govern, as much as it leads from the power of its model.[40]

The society of states is really a "society," rather than an empire, because the powerful actors recognize certain basic rules more often than not--including the defense of territorial security, the fair treatment of foreign visitors, and the protection of foreign property. Most international actors prefer peace to war, they acknowledge their interdependence, and they encourage external trade and other interactions, mediated by both national and international institutions. Power and wealth are unevenly distributed in the society of states (as they are within all societies), but all states have widely recognized claims on some of both, as they did not in empires that traditionally denied statehood in the first place. At its root, the society of states extends Madison's pioneering union of nation and state in North America to an even more extensive and diverse global landscape.[41]

Madison and Hamilton created an American nation by constructing a government that derived from that nation. Similarly, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt helped create a society of states by designing international institutions that derived from that society of states. The building blocks of local political order became more legible in the construction of the global political order. Some systems theorists call this "self-similarity across scale." For Americans it is a way of reconciling independence and unity with new organizing mechanisms. American internationalism has promoted the fusion of nationalism and statehood across a historically nation-less and state-less globe.[42]

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Notes

1 . James Madison, Federalist 10, originally published 22 November 1787, reprinted at http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm (accessed 3 January 2010). My emphasis.

2 . Alexander Hamilton, Federalist 78, originally published 14 June 1788, reprinted at http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa78.htm (accessed 3 January 2010). My emphasis.

3 . William Shakespeare, "The Tempest," Act 3, Scene 3, lines 80, 95-97.

4 . Ibid., line 102.

5 . In his erudite examination of empires since 1400, historian John Darwin writes: "This is not to say that no limits exist to America's power. But, on almost any criterion, this now transcends the limits of empire that we have observed in force since the early fifteenth century. Those writers who have likened America's 'hegemonic' status to that of Victorian Britain betray a staggering ignorance of the history of both. Whether this power will be used to make the world safer, or to sharpen its conflicts by ill-managed interventions, is a different question entirely. No prediction is safe." John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 485.

6 . See, among many others, Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000); Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997); Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967); idem., *The Origins of American Politics* (New York: Random House, 1967); Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1961).

7 . See the video recording of President George W. Bush's "Bullhorn Address to Ground Zero Rescue Workers," 14 September 2001, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911groundzerobullhorn.htm (accessed 8 January 2010); President Bush's speech to a Joint Session of Congress, 20 September 2001, http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript (accessed 8 January 2010).

8 . Thomas Paine, "The Crisis," 23 December 1776, http://www.ushistory.org/PAINE/crisis/c-01.htm (accessed 8 January 2010). For an excellent discussion of Thomas Paine's enduring influence on American politics, see Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

9 . Two influential works of history that pointed to an eighteenth and nineteenth century analogue for the American-led "War on Terror" after 2001 are: Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006); John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

10. Kagan *Dangerous Nation,* 64.

11. President George W. Bush's Second Inaugural Address, 20 January 2005,

http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres67.html (accessed 8 January 2010).

12. Melvyn P. Leffler, "9/11 and American Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History 29* (Summer 2005), 396.

13. See Jeremi Suri, "American Attitudes Toward Revolution," in Alexander DeConde, Richard Dean Burns, and Fredrik Logevall, eds., *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy,* second edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002), 425-42.

14. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991), esp. 229-369; Rakove, *Original Meanings,* esp. 339-65.

15. The seminal book on the creation of popular sovereignty as political practice in Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary America remains Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988). See also J.S. Maloy, *The Colonial American Origins of Modern Democratic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution,* esp. 169-89; Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), esp. 1-79.

16. Edmund Morgan puts this very well: "even before the [Constitutional] convention met, Madison recognized that it could achieve the objectives he had in mind for it only by appealing to a popular sovereignty not hitherto fully recognized, to the people of the United States as a whole…To that end, he envisioned a genuine national government, resting for its authority, not on the state governments and not even on the peoples of the several states considered separately, but on an American people, a people who constituted a separate and superior entity, capable of conveying to a national government an authority that would necessarily impinge on the authority of the state governments." Morgan, *Inventing and American People,* 267.

17. Hamilton, Federalist 78; Rakove, *Original Meanings,* esp. 105-07.

18. J.S. Maloy's recent book is particularly insightful on the more inclusive, representative, and accountable alternatives to the U.S. Constitution available at the time: *The Colonial Origins of Modern Democratic Thought,* esp. 1-23. See also the classic: Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social-Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774-1781* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940).

19. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution,* 232.

20. Ibid., 363-64.

21. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia,* originally written in 1781-82, published by Jefferson in 1787, reprinted in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), esp. 218-32; Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 30 January 1787, in Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson Writings,* 882. See also Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Jefferson and France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

22. On this often neglected point, see George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 56-133; Bradford Perkins, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations,* Volume 1: "The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); idem., *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

23. George Washington's Farewell Address, 1796, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp (accessed 11 January 2010). See

the classic analysis of Washington's Farewell Address, and its fundamental internationalism, in Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address,* esp. 3-18, 115-36. Among other things, Gilbert shows the influence of Madison and especially Hamilton on the writing of Washington's Farewell Address.

24. See the accounts of Western filibusterers in the nineteenth century who moved into territories outside the control of the United States, and then demanded protection from the federal government as "Americans." Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, eds., *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997). The classic work on the subject remains Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963).

25. Napoleon counted on the fracturing and further European colonization of North America when he sold the Louisiana territories to the United States. Napoleon planned to re-take these territories and others in the Western hemisphere, after he had completed his conquest of the European continent. See Alexander DeConde, *The Affair of Louisiana* (New York: Scribner, 1976); James E. Lewis, Jr., *The Louisiana Purchase: Jefferson's Noble Bargain?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

26. James Madison, "Vices of the Political System of the United States," April 1787, http://www.constitution.org/jm/17870400_vices.htm (accessed 11 January 2010).

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid. Perhaps the emergence of the European Union in the late twentieth century is an example of a successful Union in Europe as well, influenced by the earlier experience of the United States. See Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Geir Lundestad, *"Empire" by Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945-1997* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); William I. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945-2002* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

29. Washington's Farewell Address, 1796. My italics.

30. Ibid.

31. Historians have, curiously, given minimal attention to the meaning of "Union" for the early thinkers about American politics and foreign policy. For some notable and valuable exceptions, see David Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), esp. 14-23, 211-60; idem., *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), esp. 6-12; Peter S. Onuf, *The Origins of the Federal Republic: Jurisdictional Controversies in the United States, 1775-1787* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), esp. 149-72; Daniel Deudney, "The Philadelphian System: Sovereignty, Arms Control, and Balance of Power in the American States-Union, Circa 1787-1861," *International Organization* 49 (Spring 1995), 191-228. On the modern definition of "national security" and its twentieth century echoes of late eighteenth century thought, see Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

32. Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution,* 263, 266. For the phrase "Unionist Paradigm," see Hendrickson, *Peace Pact,* 14-23.

33. See Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. 62-115; Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

34. See Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); Robert A. Divine, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

35. See Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire,* 6-12.

36. Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," (1795), available at: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/kant1.htm (accessed 15 January 2010). For an excellent   discussion of Kant's essay and its deeper vision, see James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachman, eds., *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997). For an excellent discussion of the role that Kant and other thinkers played in imagining a new framework for international peace and cooperation at the end of the eighteenth century, see Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), esp. 33-60.

37. Thomas Jefferson, Second Inaugural Address (4 March 1805), in Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson Writings,* 518.

38. This argument draws on Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire.* This argument also echoes many of the claims from G. John Ikenberry and other liberal internationalists in the early twenty-first century. See Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Tony Smith, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). For a sampling of Kennan and Kissinger's critiques, see George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

39. See Anders Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); David Mayers, *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), esp. 138-96.

40. Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

41. For the seminal theoretical work on international society and the society of states, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics,* Second edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, originally published in 1977), esp. 3-50. See also Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

42. Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire,* 6-12. On "self-similarity across scale" and many other related concepts from complexity theory, see, among others, John H. Holland, *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity* (New York: Perseus Books,

1995); Melanie Mitchell, *Complexity: A Guided Tour* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).