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### 1 – RECOVERING FROM OBAMA

J.R. Dunn writes at [americanthinker.com](http://americanthinker.com):

There's no sector of American foreign relations that is undamaged. We face open aggression from Russia and China. Our allies have uniformly put the US at arm's length. America is universally distrusted, dismissed, and held in contempt. But the worst part of this bleak picture involves the Middle East.

Obama inherited a Middle East in which, after considerable effort and cost, the US had won a hard but honest victory. Our worst enemies were defeated or cowed, the Jihadi threat was well in hand, and the next steps were clear: maintain the newly established status quo and continue pressure on the remaining problem areas.

In short order, Obama transformed this benign situation into utter chaos at the cost of tens of thousands of lives. Libya, Yemen, and Syria have collapsed. Iraq stands on the verge. Egypt was yanked back from the brink only by precipitate action by its military. Turkey, an American ally for generations, now stands almost openly as a sponsor of the Jihadis. Iran is months from fielding atomic weapons.

American allies in the region have lost all respect for this country, and act with no regard for US interests. Behind this stands a renewed and even more vicious terrorist threat. It's no longer a question of whether things will get worse, but when, and how much.

Obama loathed the Bush administration's strategy in the War on Terror, the sole foreign war in which the established political opposition (of which he is a part) worked openly for America's defeat. ...

The chief new reality is the de facto coalition among Israel, Egypt, and the Sunni Gulf states. This comprises a potential new source of stability in the region, a stability that has been lacking since the collapse of the Ottoman imperium. ...

[This source of stability must be provided] because we require order. The United States has, through Obama, turned its back on this role. The Europeans are simply too decadent to take it up. This leaves the current coalition of Israel, Egypt, and the Gulf states.

Fortunately, their enemies are our enemies. Iran and the Jihadis are even more of a threat to them than they are to us. In fact, it's this very threat that has brought these disparate and often hostile states together. ... The two major goals in the Mideast are the defeat of the Jihadis and the denial of Iranian hegemony. The coalition can encompass both, with support from interested Western powers. ...

What would the US role be? Basically, everybody's benign uncle. To act as an honest broker, mentor, and guide for both sides, to ease the natural conflicts between Jewish and Arab interests, to work out strategies and policies, and nudge either side in the right direction.

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## 2 – AN ANTI-AMERICAN WHITE HOUSE

Matthew Continetti writes at [nationalreview.com](http://nationalreview.com):

Subjectively, the president may be trying to peacefully integrate rogue regimes into the liberal international order. Objectively, however, the result of Obama's foreign policy is to empower America's adversaries. This has been, in its conduct and consequences, an anti-American White House. ...

I am not saying that the president or the Democratic party is anti-American in ideology or rhetoric or intent. What I am saying is that the net effect of President Obama's actions has been to legitimize, strengthen, and embolden nations whose anti-Americanism is public and vicious and all too serious. Iran is an obvious example. The anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism of the regime is inescapable. ...

Cuba is not as important a world power as Iran, but it, too, was forged in anti-American upheaval, its ideology is anti-American, anti-capitalist, and anti-liberal, and its elite bears long-held grievances against the United States. The US trade embargo may not have driven the Castros from power, but it nonetheless expresses American opposition to the nature of Cuba's government, and to the aims and practices of its rulers. President Obama's thawing of relations with Cuba repudi-

ates this traditional, bipartisan, moral stand in return for ... what exactly? The truth is we receive less from the opening of Cuba than we do from our détente with Iran. ...

[T]he size of territory held or claimed by anti-American forces has increased considerably since President Obama took office. Not only has Russia slowly digested a once-independent nation. China has also built a series of islands to assert its claims in the South China Sea, the Islamic State governs the western provinces of what was once Iraq, Libya has fallen to Islamic militias, and the Taliban have reclaimed the south of Afghanistan. Each enlargement of the anti-American sphere brings new recruits to the various hostile causes, strengthens our adversaries' convictions that they are on the winning side of history, fuels their desire to project power even further, and heightens the risk of instability and terror. ...

However one understands Obama, whatever one thinks he has been doing, the results of his "short-term" retrenchment have energized and amplified the global cause of anti-Americanism. ...

Experience has taught Obama nothing. The next administration won't be "building" on his foundation. It will be attempting to reclaim the ground that this anti-American White House has lost.

## 3 – AMERICA IN RETREAT

In [\*America in Retreat: The New Isolationism and Coming Global Disorder\*](#), author Bret Stephens refutes the oft-made assertion that the United States cannot and should not be the world's policeman.

America is in retreat, writes Stephens. This is not decline, surrender or cowardice – mostly, it's fatigue. Nevertheless, America's retreat – or what the Obama administration prefers to call "retrenchment" – is the central fact of this decade,

just as the war on terror was the central fact of the last decade.

We're also in retreat at home, he notes – dismantling the domestic security architecture and returning the Army, Navy and nuclear forces to their smallest sizes in decades. A growing number of Americans no longer want the United States to shape the world according to its interests and values, or out of a sense of global stewardship, or

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even from a concept of enlightened self-interest. Nowadays, Americans mainly want to be left alone.

Sounding this American retreat is Barack Obama with his signature foreign policy theme: “nation building at home.” It’s a revealing phrase, writes Stephens: in academic parlance, “nation building” is an exercise reserved for failed states: Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan. It takes a remarkably dim view of the United States to suggest we fall into that category.

For Obama, an activist foreign policy isn’t a complement to a strong domestic agenda. It’s a distraction from it. His ideal foreign policy is to have less foreign policy, on the view that there’s a sharp limit on what the United States can hope to achieve. Happily for the president, he believes nation building at home is possible because global trends are benign and don’t demand our attention elsewhere. Hence the other line of which he is so fond: “The tide of war is receding.”

That’s nonsense, of course, Stephens shows. Since becoming president Obama has been engaged in a kind of conjurer’s trick, pretending to make the tide recede when he’s merely backing away from the waterline.

Obama’s failings as a world leader, write the author – his habits of indifference, illusion, and self-regard – have not gone unnoticed among our allies or our enemies. Allies who doubt the credibility of American security guarantees, of its strength of will, will pursue their interests irrespective of Washington’s wishes or commands. Enemies who think they have nothing to fear from the United States will do as they please.

To all this criticism, defenders of the administration insist that the United States is not retreating under Obama. Instead, they say, it is merely reducing its exposure, husbanding American energies. But again, this is nonsense. We are in retreat. An era of American internationalism is

giving way, with amazing swiftness, to a period of American indifference.

To what degree Obama’s approach to foreign policy has shaped these attitudes – and to what degree the attitudes have shaped the approach – is difficult to say. But it cannot be denied that Americans are fed up with foreign policy, owing to Iraq, the failure of “nation building” in the Muslim world, and to the great recession at home.

No wonder, writes Stephens, that we have entered a period in which Americans are generally turning their back on the rest of the world. It has a compelling superficial logic, and a potent political appeal. It’s why Obama polled well in his handling of foreign policy, at least in his first term, and why an increasing number of Tea Party and libertarian-leaning Republicans like Sen. Rand Paul are espousing their own version of George McGovern’s “Come Home, America” speech. If Barack Obama wants to retreat from America’s global commitments in order to build bigger government, many Republicans want to reduce those commitments for the sake of smaller government. The ends differ, but the means are the same.

But it will lead down dark roads, concludes Stephens:

No great power can treat foreign policy as a spectator sport and hope to remain a great power. A world in which the leading liberal-democratic nation does not assume its role as world policeman will become a world in which dictatorships contend, or unite, to fill the breach. Americans seeking a return to an isolationist garden of Eden – alone and undisturbed in the world, knowing neither good nor evil – will soon find themselves living within shooting range of global pandemonium. It would be a world very much like the 1930s, another decade in which economic turmoil, war weariness, Western self-doubt, American self-involvement, and

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the rise of ambitious dictatorships combined to produce the catastrophe of World War II. When Franklin Roosevelt asked Winston Churchill what that war should be called, the prime minister replied “the unnecessary war.” Why? Because, Churchill said, “never was a war more easy to stop than that which has just wrecked what was left of the world from the previous struggle.” That’s an error we should not wish to repeat.

To say America needs to be the world’s police-

man is not to say we need to be its priest, preaching the gospel of the American way. Priests are in the business of changing hearts and saving souls. Cops merely walk the beat, reassuring the good, deterring the tempted, punishing the wicked. Nor is it to say we should be the world’s martyr. Police work isn’t altruism. It is done from necessity and self-interest. It is done because it has to be and there’s no one else to do it, and because the benefits of doing it accrue not only to those we protect but also, indeed mainly, to ourselves.

## 4 – SUPERPOWER

Some say the time has come for the United States to mind its own business, let other countries solve their own problems, and focus instead on rebuilding America’s strength from within. Others insist that Washington can and should pursue an ambitious foreign policy, but one designed solely to make America more secure and more prosperous, not to foist our political and economic values on others. Still others say the world needs leadership and that only America can provide it.

America will remain the world’s only superpower for the foreseeable future. But what sort of superpower should it be? What role should America play in the world?

So asks Ia Bremmer in [Superpower: Three Choices for America’s Role in the World](#).

A superpower is a country that can exert enough military, political, and economic power to persuade nations in every region of the world to take important actions they wouldn’t otherwise take, writes Bremmer. He describes the foreign policy of the United States as increasingly directionless and prohibitively expensive, and outlines three options for how the United States could use its superpower status to forge a more coherent strategy in the world:

- **Independent America** asserts that it’s time for

the US to declare independence from international burdens. Instead, Americans should lead by example – in part, by improving the country from within and tapping into its own latent potential.

- **Moneyball America** acknowledges that Washington can’t meet every international challenge. The priority must be to focus on opportunities and to defend US interests where they’re threatened. Without imposing its values on anyone, the US should help its allies in ways that make America more secure and prosperous.
- **Indispensable America** argues that only America can defend the values on which global stability increasingly depends. In today’s interdependent, hyper-connected world, a turn inward would undermine America’s own security and prosperity. Indispensable America is the most costly option. However, failing to protect US values and basic freedoms across the world presents the greater risk.

Bremmer himself opts for “Independent” because, he explains, America needs a strategy that doesn’t just last for three months or a year, but for a generation. And the world is moving in a direction where the promises of an “indispensable” America are going to be increasingly hard to fulfill.