



## Are All the World's Problems Ours?

In 2003, George W. Bush took us to war to liberate Iraq from the despotism of Saddam Hussein and convert that nation into a beacon of freedom and prosperity in the Middle East.

Tuesday, Mike Pompeo flew clandestinely into Baghdad, met with the prime minister and flew out in four hours. The visit was kept secret, to prevent an attack on the Americans or the secretary of state.



Query: How successful was Operation Iraqi Freedom, which cost 4,500 U.S. lives, 40,000 wounded and \$1 trillion, if, 15 years after our victory, our secretary of state must, for his own security, sneak into the Iraqi capital?

Topic of discussion between Pompeo and the prime minister:

In the event of a U.S. war with Iran, Iraqis would ensure the protection of the 5,000 U.S. troops in the country, from the scores of thousands of Iranian-trained and Iranian-armed Shiite militia.

That prospect, of war between the U.S. and Iran, had been raised by Pompeo and John Bolton on Sunday, when the USS *Abraham Lincoln* carrier task force and a squadron of U.S. bombers were ordered into the Middle East after we received reports Iran was about to attack U.S. forces.

The attack did not happen. But on Thursday, Tehran gave 60 days' notice that if it does not get relief from severe U.S. sanctions, it may walk out of the nuclear deal it signed in 2015 and start enriching uranium again to a level closer to weapons grade.

The countdown to a June confrontation with Iran has begun.

Wednesday, North Korea's Kim Jong Un, for the second time in a week, test-fired two missiles, 260 miles, into the Sea of Japan. Purpose: To signal Washington that Kim's patience is running out.

Kim rejects the U.S. demand that he surrender all nuclear weapons and dismantle the facilities that produce them before any sanctions are lifted. He wants sanctions relief to go hand in hand with disposal of his arsenal. Few believe Kim will surrender all of his nukes or his ability to replicate them.

The clash with Kim comes days after the failed U.S.-backed coup in Caracas, which was followed by Pompeo-Bolton threats of military intervention in Venezuela, a country 100 times the size of Puerto Rico with 10 times the population and a large well-equipped army.

This week also, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Joe Dunford told Congress that the U.S. will have to keep counter-terrorism forces in Afghanistan "until there is no insurgency left in the country."

Which sounds like forever, as in "forever war."

Before flying to Baghdad, Pompeo was in Finland. There, he warned the eight-nation Arctic Council about Russian aggression in the region, suggested China's claim to be a "near-Arctic" nation was absurd, and told Canada its claim to the Northwest Passage was "illegitimate."

Our Canadian friends were stunned. "Those waterways are part of the internal waters of Canada," said



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the government in Ottawa.

After an exhausting two weeks, one is tempted to ask: How many quarrels, clashes and conflicts can even a superpower manage at one time? And is it not time for the United States, preoccupied with so many crises, to begin asking, “Why is this our problem?”

Perhaps the most serious issue is North Korea’s quest for nuclear-armed missiles that can reach the United States. But the reason Kim is developing missiles that can strike Seattle or LA is that 28,000 U.S. troops are in South Korea, committed to attack the North should war break out. That treaty commitment dates to a Korean War that ended in an armed truce 66 years ago.

If we cannot persuade Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons in return for a lifting of sanctions, perhaps we should pull U.S. forces off the peninsula and let China deal with the possible acquisition of nuclear weapons by Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Iran has no nukes or ICBMs. It wants no war with us. It does not threaten us. Why is Iran then our problem to solve rather than a problem for Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and the Sunni Arabs?

Nor does Russia’s annexation of Crimea threaten us. When Ronald Reagan strolled through Red Square with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988, all of Ukraine was ruled by Moscow.

The Venezuelan regime of Nicolás Maduro was established decades ago by his mentor, Hugo Chávez. When did that regime become so grave a threat that the U.S. should consider an invasion to remove it?

During the uprising in Caracas, Bolton cited the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. But according to President James Monroe, and Mike Pompeo’s predecessor John Quincy Adams, who wrote the message to Congress, under the Doctrine, while European powers were to keep their hands off our hemisphere — we would reciprocate and stay out of Europe’s quarrels and wars.

Wise folks, those Founding Fathers.

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