



"I have lived a long time, sir, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men."

—Benjamin Franklin

21-Jul-06

What's in It for Us?

While in college, I took a yearlong course in International Relations under Gene Hogberg, news editor of *The Plain Truth* magazine. One of the primary ideas he hammered into his students is that an observer of [the world](#) scene must always remember that nations act out of self-interest. In other words, nations only do what will benefit them. It is a rare - indeed, almost unknown - thing for a nation to sacrifice its own well-being to help another nation. On the surface, the American interventions in the first two World Wars seem to be exceptions to this rule, but in both cases, America's entry into those conflicts occurred after careful calculus. The United States sacrificed a great deal in men and materiel in those wars but gained so much in international power and prestige that these sacrifices were considered by its leaders to be well worth it.

If a person has a firm grasp on this principle of self-interest and what a nation considers to be good for it, he can forecast with a fair degree of accuracy what a nation will do. For instance, had the Soviets been more astute in this area, they might have been able to hold out longer against the U. S., and perhaps against Ronald Reagan in particular, during the Cold War.

Though the Kremlin may have had intelligence that Reagan was of a different stripe than his predecessors, it did not believe that he was *considerably* different. Specifically, he was different in that he was not satisfied with détente or containment but desired to defeat the U.S.S.R. so soundly that it could never recover. In short, America's national interests shifted once Reagan became President, and the Soviets missed it. Once they did, they had lost the Cold War.

In coming to understand the U.S. position in the latest Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, this principle of self-interest must hold a prominent position. Just what is America's interest in this war? What are its interests in the region? What does America hope to gain among its "peers" (Britain, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Russia, China, Japan, etc.) by its stance? These are not easy questions to answer, but considering them helps to clarify matters. Let us begin with a few corollary principles:

First, in determining national interests, *actions speak louder than words*. A raw, historical example of this is Adolf Hitler's 1938 "[Peace](#) in our time!" agreement with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. The agreement had come about as a result of Hitler's aggressive annexation of the Sudetenland, and any impartial observer should have seen that the German Chancellor would not be satisfied with just a small part of Czechoslovakia. It was well known - even on Downing Street and in Whitehall - that one of his chief aims for Germany was *lebensraum*: "living space." Nevertheless, Chamberlain believed Hitler's smooth promises, and Europe was plunged into World War II in 1939. Thus, smart observers of the world scene remember that diplomatic language is, frankly, 1) vague, polite speech designed to say nothing, or 2) bald-faced, but courteous deception.

Second, *follow the money*. National power cannot be maintained except by mass infusions of wealth. All wars - and probably just about all other national decisions - have economic justifications. Thomas Jefferson has a reputation, as the writer of the Declaration of Independence, as being a foremost defender of the U.S. Constitution and an advocate of limited federal government and states' rights. However, he was willing to throw his reputation to the winds to buy the territory of Louisiana from Napoleon for what was then a huge sum that the strained national treasury could not handle. His unilateral decision was made on almost purely economic

grounds, as the Louisiana Purchase doubled U.S. territory and increased its potential wealth exponentially. It was in America's interests, the Constitution be hanged. Today, oil plays a premier role in Middle Eastern geopolitics, as the whole world runs on the stuff.

Third, *a balance of powers provides more advantages than unequal powers*. As an interested geographically contiguous nation, Britain played this game in Europe for centuries. If the French became stronger than its neighbors, the British would ally themselves to the weaker nations to keep France in check. If the Spanish gained hegemony, Britain would align itself with Spain's enemies. If Germany ascended to greatness, Britain supported those opposed to the Germans. Though it appears complex diplomatically and militarily, this balancing act provided Europe with a fair amount of stability - at least enough to keep one power from becoming dominant and thus imposing its will on the others. For Britain, it opened marketplaces to its businessmen and helped it become a world-spanning empire. The U.S. is playing similar games today as the world's lone superpower. In this vein, remember the old axiom: War is just politics by other means.

So, then, what is America interested in vis-à-vis the current crisis in the Middle East?

My take is that the White House welcomes this war and supports Israel for several reasons: 1) It does not mind if Hezbollah, an arm of Iran, is mauled, as this is a way to strike back at the ayatollahs for their recent belligerence; 2) it wants Israel to be slightly dominant in the region to counter the nearby Arab nations, taking some of the weight off America's military; 3) it actually welcomes the instability this conflict causes because it takes pressure off its operations in Iraq and some of its domestic problems; and 4) it knows that because the region's turbulence continues, its presence will be necessary for many years, ensuring America's access to Middle Eastern oil. Internationally, it is willing to take some diplomatic heat for being slow to intervene in order to drive the point home that the Bush administration's methods of handling situations like these (methods that the Israelis also employ) work. Put negatively, the U.S. is sticking its finger in the international community's eye (specifically, the UN's).

This analysis may be all wet, but it is considered under these principles. What [God](#) may have in mind may be altogether different ([Psalm 2:4-5](#); [Isaiah 40:15-17](#), 22-23; 48:3).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Don't Take God for Granted](#)

by John O. Reid

Human nature has the dangerous trait of allowing familiarity or complacency to lure people into carelessly taking something for granted. It is particularly dangerous to take God and His purpose for us for granted. If we see God clearly, we will not. Contributing factors in not clearly seeing His purpose include 1) sloppy prayer and Bible study (I Timothy 4:14-16), 2) becoming entangled in the world's cares (Matthew 13:22), and 3) refusal to change or overcome. With a contrite heart, we need to love God zealously (Deuteronomy 6:5), never taking our eyes off the great purpose He has for us.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[A Stone Named Jerusalem](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Catholic Church did not forbid keeping the Passover until AD 325. The controversy over Passover or Easter boils down to either following Scripture or Roman tradition.

CGG Weekly: What's in It for Us? (21-Jul-06)

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