

TIME TO UNPLUG THE AMERICAN CENTURY AND RESTART THE MACHINE

Mr. EW and I are closing on our 25th wedding anniversary in a few months.

Yeah, us!

I raise that not because I'm expecting you all to start shopping silver (that's what I'm supposed to buy anyway, right? Mr. EW insists it's power tool anniversary again anyway).

I say that as a way of conveying that, in a literal sense, I have been married to Europe for (effectively) the entirety of this century.

Sure, I had an affinity before that. In a Czech class in Prague in 1997 , for example, on a day when the *other* American was absent, the entire class told me I seemed like a European and why didn't I just move. Without a beat, one of them said, "But you stay there and fix it for the rest of us." I can't tell you how deeply I felt (and feel) an obligation to fulfill that order.

And so I think of where we go from here, both in the larger effort to defeat Trumpism, but more specifically in a week when Europe contemplates what to do about the Greenland crisis, I'm cognizant what a shitty hegemon the US has been in this century.

Three of the four things that gave Trump a foothold, in my opinion, were failures in this century (the fourth is the legacy of slavery and the organized political violence that replaced it).

The other three, though, are the War on Terror, the financial crisis, and social media. (COVID was the final catalyst, I think; having moved during the height of COVID, I can't express how much worse the US dealt with it than much of the

EU, and now Trump is using the aftermath of his own jerry-rigged system – COVID fraud – as his excuse to invade Minnesota.)

I had been thinking this anyway. As we optimistically imagine things we would need to do recover from Trump, I think the US should simply reset the computer to 2000 (preferably before Bush v. Gore), and start over again. Don't spend 20 years creating new terrorists in response to a terrorist attack. Don't expand emergency and executive power beyond all recognition, in the process foreswearing America's rickety Cold War claim to be an exceptional nation. Don't bail out bankers who destroyed the global economy and, especially, wiped out the wealth of broad swaths of the population. And sure as hell don't demand austerity in response, a betrayal of the post-war consensus that staved off the kind of malaise we're seeing drive extremism. And whatever you do, do not grant the banksters' counterpart, the techbros, their own chance to remake the world, mainstreaming far right extremists in the process. I feel like the coming AI collapse may be social media's crisis point, and sadly, the techbros have prepared for it by implanting David Sacks in the White House.

Thinking in these terms does not provide immediate solutions. Reminding EU ministers how much of today's economic malaise and immigration scapegoating arose from American failures doesn't provide a solution. But it does provide one possible frame, one that can exploit increasing global animosity towards Trump, as a scapegoat.

Mark Carney got elected on a wave of animosity to Trump and he is not the only one.

There was a Defense One report on the National Security Strategy – not matched by any other outlet and therefore of uncertain provenance – that nevertheless haunts me. It disavows the inexpensive power projection of hegemony by imagining American hegemony as nothing more than American domination.

The full NSS also spends some time discussing the “failure” of American hegemony, a term that isn’t mentioned in the publicly released version.

“Hegemony is the wrong thing to want and it wasn’t achievable,” according to the document.

In this context, hegemony refers to the leadership by one country of the world, using soft power to encourage other countries to consent to being led.

“After the end of the Cold War, American foreign policy elites convinced themselves that permanent American domination of the entire world was in the best interests of our country,” the NSS states. “Yet the affairs of other countries are our concern only if their activities directly threaten our interests.”

I don’t think that’s right at all. Whoever wrote this, for example, seems to misunderstand how fragile an invasion of Venezuela without regime change can be – and importantly, how much worse Venezuela will be if, instead of attempting to reign in Maduro’s mafia state, instead blesses it. (In reality, America’s failures started before my designated reset date, when the US believed Shock Doctrine was a good way to cure communism rather than foster mafia states.) I don’t think the person who wrote that “Hegemony is the wrong thing to want” has considered how many advantages the dollar exchange has given the US. I don’t think the person who wrote, “Hegemony is the wrong thing to want” has thought through all the ways that coercion is more likely to backfire.

America was a piss poor global policeman, but the alternative we’re facing down now is worse for the US and worse for much of the world.

And if Donald Trump wants to embody those failures, providing a ready political response,

well then, he asked for it.

Donald Trump has abdicated America's role as a hegemon.

Well, okay then.

However else the rest of the world responds, they (we) should keep in mind that we can reject the underlying choices that created Trump as a symptom.