

## Independence and other thoughts

Note: Today is the weekend after. Typos and other miscreants don't show up until a few days after. This weekend is probably the weekend of the slide of the stock market, or some other media event. I'm used to being behind; the West Coast is three hours ahead of us, the East Coast six hours, Europe twelve hours. And we are a whole day behind China. The nearest anywhere else is 2500 miles away. Gives a different perspective.

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Independence Day, and a long weekend of talk about Independence. On radio (NPR) heard many pages read from historic documents reminding me how, what is now the United States of America, then was a group of provinces ruled by Great Britain across the sea. Hard to imagine what politics must have been like two hundred plus years ago. Endless meetings, probably. Compromises and vague wording to arrive at some kind of unity among the United. But they had the advantage of not having instant communication, so the few people who wrote the Constitution could meet in private, without battalions of Secret Service and paparazzi. And no Media that chewed every word ten times, in a hundred different contexts.

In school I learned that "only the kingdoms of Thailand (Siam) and Tonga, have never been colonies." But even they were not always kingdoms, of course. Even they, as most countries, must have had some kind of declaration of independence. No longer dependent on a larger state that "owned" them. Or some no longer dependent on war lords who ate each other and in the end declared independence from folks across the river. Some fought for independence; some were given independence, *Fom now on you are on your own*. Isn't that what we gave to Iraq, their sovereignty? Was that ours to give? I looked up sovereignty in the dictionary.

### sovereignty

noun

**1** *their sovereignty over the islands* jurisdiction, rule, supremacy, dominion, power, ascendancy, suzerainty, hegemony, domination, authority, control, influence. .

**2** *the colony demanded full sovereignty* autonomy, independence, self-government, self-rule, home rule, self-determination, freedom.

Makes me think it was not really ours to give. And now it is obvious that they were words only anyway. We still hold the reins. Who, then, reigns?

All ex-colonial countries discovered that colonies get expensive -- as we are learning, again (and again, and again), now that we are "possessing" two countries many thousands of miles away. (Just in time remembered the difference between possession and ownership). At least a trillion, a million-million dollars, the wars and occupations have cost us already, and the current powers declare that we shall be there forever. Might as well make them states of our United States. Hawai'i is 5000 miles from

Washington, DC. Baghdad perhaps 6000 miles. Afghanistan a bit more. Not much difference these days.

How can we celebrate our independence from a far owner because we objected to pay taxes, when we are now trying to reach our hands six thousand miles away on something better than taxes, namely oil. We, who pride ourselves on our independence from a king who got a slice of our wealth, are now ducking and weaving to possess two countries and working hard on the third in the middle, in order to their wealth..

There have been a dozen stories about why we had to wage wars, and why we cannot leave -- *not yet*. The latest story is that the countries are so unstable that, of course, we must stay to make them safe for true democracy. Under our tutelage, of course. We believe, with a powerful belief, that, of course, no question, we know best what is good for them. We never asked whether what we call democracy is what they want. We never asked whether they want to be modeled after our kind of society -- in fact, they are making it very clear every day how they feel about us, by what we name suicide bombers, who they call Martyrs.

Every colonial power has said that "Of course we intend to give them their independence, but they are not quite ready yet." The excuses differed. There are not enough trained bureaucrats, or not enough lawyers, or doctors, or not the right political parties, or... Our excuse is that the country is still too unstable (true for both countries). We never ask who made them unstable. And, strangely, few Americans question that we must stay to provide the security these foreign people, of whom we know virtually nothing, are assumed to need. In all the debates and endless discussions in the Media we ignore polls taken in Iraq, for instance, that show that up to 90% of Iraqi wants us out, and 70% of them expect less, rather than more, internal conflict if we left.

The kingdom that owned us, when we slipped out from under, learned that it is much cheaper to trade than occupy a country whose wealth is coveted. We haven't learned that, although it is no secret. Consider all the post-colonial countries, England, France, Holland, Belgium, Spain, Portugal -- now they buy what they need from their ex-colonies without the burden of having to own them. No need to spend lots of money to occupy the place, too complicated -- who can understand the culture, religion, the different ways of living of those quaint people? Much cheaper to just let them be. If they want to fight among themselves, well, that is really not our business, is it?

But no doubt they would sell us their oil, regardless of how we thought of them or they of us.

For the trillions we have spent on wars to control Iraq and Afghanistan we could have given free medical care to every man, woman and child in America, rebuilt all our bridges, restored the twin towers if we wanted, and make all education, even universities, free. And gas probably would still be around two dollars a gallon, everybody who wanted had a job, and we could afford to drive across the country to see aunt Emma this four day-long Independence Day weekend.

True, wars make an awful lot of money for a few. The money we spent on wars did not go to the foreign countries we now possess but to corporations and individuals, who happened to be mostly American. Yet another way of wealth re-distribution. Not to the masses who would just spend it, but to those who support war, shareholders of bomb factories, fighter planes makers. The more we "use" them, the more need to replenish them -- more profit for share holders..

The idea of money seems so simple, but we have learned to do magic with it. People who have money -- that means money they don't need to pay the bills -- "invest." And investing has become a game of roulette. You spin the wheel, and, voilà, you are a billionaire. We don't talk millions any more. Budgets and profits are recorded in billions. Small quantities are k (for a thousand). Less than a thousand are not worth paying attention to.

There was a time when we were urged to be consumers, supporting a manufacturing country. We made things, other people bought those things. Money went sideways and spread thin. But we outsourced manufacturing, and now we are -- what are we, actually/ What do we do, now that we are no longer making things? We are a nation with a service economy. As the economy of Hawai'i is designed to be a tourist industry, the country's economy is based on providing services. But, more important is our religion: capitalism. We are a capitalist country. That means money must flow up -- it only trickles down. Half a century ago, money was supposed to flow, move sideways and spread all over. No more. Legal services are for making lawyers rich. Health services are for making insurance companies rich, and then money for doctors, and then for other health workers, and so on down. Not much left, when you get way down. And, of course, services are organized to make them convenient to the providers, not for us who need services. We never even question those assumptions.

I don't understand that Americans cannot see that the kind of brutal capitalism we have now cannot work. A community with 10 very rich men (okay, and one very rich woman) and a million poor people, cannot be. A pyramid with a golden top resting on a thin stalk in the middle, which rest on an ever growing mass of soft servants. It makes life at the bottom difficult, to simplify, but none of this is ever talked about. Our leaders talk way up in the stratosphere, grand schemes, telling us that it is all really about terror. Or democracy, freedom, liberty. We have to be afraid, very afraid of terrorists -- all the while seeing to it that the world does not run out of terrorists. We prick and prod foreign populations, train them, then shoot them down. The next batch is just about done.

How do capitalists see this ending? Not ever ending, of course. More, always more. More money in the hands of the few who have clawed themselves to the top, and those wizards who juggle imaginary values into money, billions a year. And the rest of us can barely stay at the level where you sit in a chair instead of on the ground? Our rulers say, or suggest (and think) that there is something wrong with us down here. (I do have a chair to sit in; just barely).

Looking from the sidelines I cannot help noticing that we are so busy talking about money, oil, democracy, liberty, and of course religion, that we have lost track of what is going on in the real world of earth and sunshine. We got ourselves wound tightly in a ball of misleading leads, waffled words, empty concepts, and all of that would be laughable if the 24/7 propaganda had not droned us into such a deep sleep that we dream happy, happy.... the orchestra bravely playing its martial marches while the water is rising until the ship of state tilts and silently slips into the deep.