

Let us celebrate, not sneer at, US's contribution to better world

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Recent tragic events have highlighted the importance of leadership. Leaders sense when difficult decisions must be taken and that is a rare quality in an age too often defined by narcissism.

No leader will fight for values, for principles, if their government is a value-free vacuum. Moral relativism is morally wrong.

For a US Secretary of State to suggest Islamic terrorists had a "rationale" in slaughtering journalists is one of the low points of recent Western diplomacy and indicative of a serious malaise.

For America to be embarrassed by its exceptionalism is itself exceptional and absolutely unacceptable.

For America to have a sense of direction, two conditions are essential: a US leader must understand, be proud of, and assert the American personality. Around America, there is a restless desire for revival.

We see it in the primary process, which, apart from an interesting cast of characters, has articulated a deep distaste for the slow descent of the country. And, importantly, there is a yearning outside the country for American assertiveness and engagement.

As we have seen in Syria and in Ukraine and in the streets of Paris, without America's self-confident championing of what Henry Kissinger has called the "human quest for freedom and humane values", global affairs collapse into nightmare — the policy wasteland becomes fertile territory for terror.

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice," said Martin Luther King — but, as shown through his own life, unless you engage on crucial issues, unless you are a powerful advocate, and activist, justice will not be done.

I was born in Australia, and am proud of my Australian provenance, but I am now an American. Like so many naturalised citizens, I felt I was an American before I formally became one.

F. Scott Fitzgerald summed it up succinctly: "America is a willingness of the heart." There is a similar, essential truth in the anthem's simple refrain, "land of the free; home of the brave".

We are all often struck by the exceptional qualities of America and by the exceptional and selfless influence America has exercised on the world. We can idly and mildly joke, but if it were not for US intervention in the Pacific, we Australians would not speak with our distinctive drawl, but in the rather polite verb endings of Japanese.

Let us not be PC but frank: there is no way that Australia alone could have defended itself during World War II, heroic as Australian troops were. In the 1950s, America saved South Korea from the barbarity of Kim Il-sung. And that sacrifice and intervention provided the buffer Japan needed to rise from the postwar ashes to be a great economy and a reliable ally.

One country, North Korea, is a heartless, ruthless personality cult that runs at the expense of its people; the other country, South Korea, is a thriving democracy that has created companies that have improved lives around the world.

In the 60s and 70s, America intervened in Vietnam, an intervention that has been caricatured and distorted in the days since.

And in the 1980s, thanks to Ronald Reagan, America stood firm against the Soviet Union, and that very resolve led to reform. It led to one Germany, not two. It allowed the Polish and the Hungarians and the Czechs and Slovaks to be themselves, not political proxies. It recast Europe and emancipated millions.

And in that very same era, the US provided a stable background for the rise of China, which went from the impoverishment of mindless ideology to the magic of market forces, allowing hundreds of millions of people to escape from poverty through their own efforts. That emancipation of the most populous nation on earth is a modern miracle. Yet this fundamental, irrefutable truth must be denied by those who despise America and detest economic freedom. The Chinese understand, and they appreciate the undoubted efficacy of American influence. Yet the soft Left cannot countenance that remarkable human success.

We should not apologise for America but celebrate it. Most importantly, we should reflect upon the world as it might have been without America: a much, much lesser world.

This is an edited extract from a speech to Washington's Hudson Institute on Monday.