



*Mr. Jefferson*  
**MONTICELLO**

**DIPLOMACY & REVOLUTION**  
*an Arthur Ross Discussion of American Diplomacy*  
March 19, 2012  
8:00 AM – 1:00 PM  
Smith Center at Mont Alto

**Gordon Wood keynote**

We became a revolutionary nation for a good part of our history. We thought our revolution was a world historical event. The founding fathers thought they were causing a democratic movement that would spread and end monarchy in the known western world.

The Napoleonic dictatorship made many Americans feel that France was failing at democratic government and that might endanger the US democracy. Because of that, Jefferson became an ardent supporter of the French Revolution.

The Monroe Doctrine was excoriated by many in Europe. Despite promising not to intervene in European affairs, the US remained preoccupied with it.

In all revolutionary movements, starting with the Greek revolt in 1821 and beyond, the US was the first state to recognize new governments formed by those revolutions. The only exception was the Haitian Revolution.

Americans believed in their own exceptionalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prominent American leaders believed “we cannot be indifferent to the spread of American ideas in France”, as if France had no history of democracy.

Between 1820-1920 35million people came to the US from Europe. This gave the US a perception that it was the chosen place.

Leading the world toward liberty helps to explain the US reaction to the Russian Revolution of 1917. The US recognized the new republic seven days after the Tsar abdicated. US enthusiasm dissolved after the Bolsheviks took over and it would be sixteen years before the US recognized the new government. This demonstrates US resistance to certain types of revolution. The Russian Revolution was seen as an ideological threat to the US.

Truman Doctrine was first policy to explicitly support free people.

The wars in the Middle East has left the US a bit disillusioned about democracy being successful everywhere. We seem to be an all or nothing people unable to accept a real politik view of the world.

The Bill of Rights is sometimes forgotten by Americans because we take individual rights for granted.

### **Exploring Revolutions**

Four cases were discussed as examples of the problems revolutions posed for. The four were Iran 1979, Nicaragua 1979, Yugoslavia 1991, and the more recent cases of Egypt and Libya. A joint panel followed by separate breakout groups held extensive discussions. There were many issues peculiar to each situation but also a number of common refrains very briefly sketched here:

### **Key themes**

1. Founding fathers valued patience and forbearance in understanding revolutions
2. Need to appreciate the power of the ghosts of history: Americans are poor at paying attention to the history of contending parties, competing priorities in a struggle may put some differences aside but historical demands, needs and grievances return to the politics and frequently catch our policies by surprise.
3. Pursuing conflicting policies with regard to one revolution is dicey yet the multiplicity of our interests often requires it;.
4. Failure to predict revolution leads to inadequate policy response.
5. Personalities of leaders matter and shouldn't be underestimated.
6. Understanding the successor generation and including them in decisions is important.
7. Emphasis on elections in US policies is often ahead of building the democratic process, understanding, toleration and, in some cases security, to support to sustain the electoral process.
8. Multilateral aid has advantages of political acceptability.
9. Treating the losing party as normal opposition may be important to stabilizing a post-revolutionary situation.
10. US power and influence stored up is more effective than power expended.
11. Know your relevancy to the country you are trying to influence
12. Be wary of being sucked into being a partisan in a revolution
13. Foreign policy must be based on an informed public at home.
14. In trying to bring influence to bear think comprehensively about sources of power (DIME—diplomacy, intelligence, military, economic).
15. Expect great problems in getting Washington to focus on sophisticated embassy reporting about the situation or the consequences of different courses of action.
16. There is always pressure for policy goals to move and it won't always be well considered.

### **Gary Hart closing statement**

We live in a revolutionary era of profound change, occurring on four levels. Each is continuing and we can neither see nor comprehend the long term effects of this revolutions on the world of foreign politics or international relations.

1. Globalization  
Every decision we make matters more to others than ever before. Globalization has changed our approach to foreign policy in some ways.
2. Information  
We are seeing a shift away from manufacturing base to information base. This has major

implications for our economy and for the involvement of people in foreign and domestic politics. It is a central feature of individual revolutions as well as of the larger revolution in international affairs.

3. Rise of non-state actors

An erosion of national sovereignty is taking place. The Westphalian era is ending as the centrality of the state is eroding. The September 11 attacks showed us that the most powerful nation, USA, can't protect its own citizens. Yet there is not yet any replacement for the state.

4. Rise of irregular warfare

Conduct of war is changing. Wars between states are declining but wars with groups, with non-state actors are expanding. We need to approach future strategy from this perspective

Because of the above four issues, we should question our foundational beliefs about the nature of international relations. We must be wary of an uneducated public that fears these changes and reacts emotionally to them.