

# WORLDS in COLLISION

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## Part One: US Strategic Blunder in Iran confronts Commonwealth Diplomacy



### ***US reverts back to 19th century Machiavellian Realpolitik after years of collaborative alliance building.***

I'm was an International Relations major in college, later spending my career building alliances, getting people to work together creating a synergistic world.

This last year, the Trump Administration has regressed Foreign Policy into the dark ages of 19th century Realpolitik Imperialism that ultimately resulted in 2 world wars.

Talk of annexing Canada, occupying Greenland, starting wars in the Middle East without our ally's engagement, weaponization of government, vindictive tariffs, and failure to use leverage to end the war in Ukraine are all examples of a dramatic shift from isolationistic naivety to imperialistic manipulation of power. In the long-run it breaches the mutual security of America & the world itself.

What we're experiencing is a myopic view of power that originated with Machiavelli's advice to "the Prince:"

- Primacy of the State: a ruler's primary responsibility is the security of the state, regardless of its impact on neighbors.
- Separation of Ethics from Politics: National interest outweighs any moral code -- "the ends justify the means." A state must be willing to use deception, manipulation, or force if it ensures the ultimate good: the preservation of the nation.
- Role of Fear: It is "safer to be feared than loved" because fear is the most reliable tool for maintaining order. (Note: Machiavelli never considered the larger reality: "it is far better to be trusted than either feared or loved!")

This short-sighted Realpolitik often secures an immediate strategic gain, but short-circuits long-term fundamental issues of mutual security, or interconnected economies, climate change or pandemics, which require collective action.

Fear-based Realpolitik propels the Cycle of Mistrust. With no ethical guardrails, competition between rivals is unbridled, leading to cut-throat tactics, corruption, and ultimately leading to arms races and increased conflict as states become fiefdoms and neighbors are viewed as potential threats. This egocentric view means not only win-lose tactics, but worse: zero-sum games where all parties end up as losers, each blaming the other for their distress.

By prioritizing power over moral governance, nations support and empower brutal dictatorships, rationalizing its service to strategic interests, thus legitimizing authoritarianism.

As alliance professionals have learned, the Law of Unintended Consequences is a double-edged sword. In adversarial realms, each player opts to protect their interests and retaliate against their perceived aggressor. Subterfuge reigns.

But in the collaborative world of trust, the Law of Unintended Consequences has positive, serendipitous results. Unpredictable, positive impacts ensue

### Part Two: The Role of the “Enlightened Realist”

Often I’m asked if I’m a *Realist* or an *Idealist*. Neither fits.

The Realist opts for a Machiavellian World where the ends justifies the means, might makes right, deception is always a legitimate ploy, the golden rule means “he who has the gold rules,” trust is trumped by fear, and the winner is always he who can manipulate better.

I must reject this world – yet daily we experience adverse Machiavellian impacts on our lives.

But the other option, the admirable Idealist, beckons. It is the essence of noble Christianity – an ideal to which, if everyone aspired, would be the road to Eutopia. Sadly, history is littered with such noble idealists who were slaughtered on their wafer-thin shields of naivety. Too often the idealist’s road ends in depression, consumed with disappointment and even disaster. Why?

Studies have shown that, while the large majority of people are inherently kind, considerate, and trustworthy, two critical factors intercede:

First, culture, not personality, is the major determinant of human behavior. Leaders who recklessly reframe our culture with messages of anger, retribution, and vengeance will poison the attitudes that cause people to react malevolently.

Second, evil does exist in this world. The Dark Triad – leaders who are Megalomaniacal Narcissists, Machiavellian Manipulators, and Psychopaths without Conscience – have taken over countries for ages. They were responsible for over 150 million deaths in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and continue their evil ways today.

Enlightened Realism protects against evil actors, while inspiring people to work synergistically to build a better world. It comes from an ancient Greek saying:

“The Wisdom of the Multitudes is the Commonwealth of the World.”

Great wisdom is understanding how Knowledge, coupled with Ethics, Truth, and Compassion for the well-being of community can be put into words and actions that create inspirational results.

This is no easy task (I guess if it were easy, everyone would be doing it).

In today’s world, we have too many leaders who substitute anger for love, revenge for joy, barking for listening, vindictiveness for progress, recklessness for courage, and propaganda for wisdom.

The Enlightened Leader is courageous – a term from the old French that means “to have heart.”

In American politics today, we are seeing a terrible lack of wisdom and lack of courage.



## Part Three: The COMMONWEALTH STRATEGY: How the Enlightened Realist leads in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Iranian War is now a month old – the Straits of Hormuz are still blocked. What went wrong? What have we learned?

Clobber vs Collaborate: The US strategy is terribly flawed when it has only one gimmick in its realm of tactics: Clobber everyone who doesn't fall in line with authoritarian dictates. Never compromise, never join & align with allies. Just Polarize, Divide & Conquer enemies as well as friends. Sadly this strategy is used both inside and outside the United States, resulting in never-ending stalemates in Congress.

Lack of Wisdom: The Realpolitik Machiavellian makes 10 mistakes:



- anger, without restraint
- change, without progress
- speaking, without listening
- voicing opinion, without insight
- condemnation, without justice
- acting, without considering consequences
- possessing knowledge, without wisdom
- using force, without heart
- using fear to gain loyalty, without trust
- mistaking foes for friends and vice versa

This is why Authoritarians & Dictators are obsolete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They cannot fathom and navigate the complexities of our modern world. They are doomed to make massive mistakes that torpedo their own people.

These are the things the Enlightened Realist knows not to do. Instead, they:

- Recognize that stomping on someone's foot today, may be connected to the hand you need to shake tomorrow.
- Trust does determine the course of history, the destiny of nations, and the fate of people.
- Embrace the ideals of "mutual benefit"
- Understand there are "BAD Actors" on the world stage; and *solely for them, Realpolitik does work*, because it gives strategic flexibility to deal with Evil.

This is the nature of COMMONWEALTH DIPLOMACY. It is inspired, evoking the literal "common wealth," cultivating a shared ecosystem of well-being for prosperity of a group. A Commonwealth operates on trust and mutual benefit, but can only exist if it is defended against those who view cooperation as a weakness to be exploited.



"The wisdom of the multitudes is the commonwealth of the world"

## Part Four: DEFENDING the COMMONWEALTH: How the Enlightened Realist contains BAD ACTORS while Strengthening Global Freedom.

When the Founding Fathers chose a seal to represent the United States, they chose a symbol of strength – the American Bald Eagle. In one of the eagle’s talons was a set of 13 arrows, representing the unity of strength of the original 13 states to defend themselves against aggression. In the other talon was an olive branch to represent the importance of peace and working together to achieve great goals. Importantly, they insisted the eagle’s face was pointing toward the talon with the peace symbol, not toward the talon with the arrows.

The olive branch and the arrows are more than just symbols, they represent strategic leverage – the fundamental choice on how a nation regards its very culture. Is the United States primarily a peaceful democracy seeking to work collaboratively with commonwealth of other democracies, or am aggressive warrior country intent on taking over territory in its own narrow interest?



For "Bad Actors" who operate outside the Circle of Trust of the Commonwealth’s norms, the Enlightened Realist employs Contingent Realpolitik: sanctions, deterrence, and a tough, firm stand against the virtue of ideals. This provides "strategic flexibility" but certainly doesn't mean being immoral; it means being transactional – you will get back measure for measure, dung for dung, good for good. It is based on:

- **Containment:** Using hard power to ensure that authoritarian incursion doesn't breach the Commonwealth perimeter.
- **Calculated Leverage:** Dealing with dictators not as partners, but as variables to be managed; using Realpolitik to prevent "the worst," while the inspired leadership and delicate diplomacy potentially builds "the best possible outcome."

In diplomacy against Bad Actors, we function to engage the "The Art of the Possible" – prevention of systemic collapse, "bad actor" dominance, all the while reinforcing the collapse of bad actors through promulgation of commonwealth values and value creation.

For the “Good Actors” who operate within the realm of the Commonwealth, the strategy is different: Peace, Prosperity, and Synergy is the objective. We must engage in actions that support working together, experiencing serendipitous outcomes, creating synergies in open markets, sharing R&D, collective defense, all aimed at compounded prosperity and innovation.

This is the dualism of the Enlightened Realist; it is the way America has navigated our way in the past, and is the best way out of our current continuous cycle of conflict, chaos, and confusion. The Collaborative Commonwealth yields far greater mutual benefit than the tumultuous conflagrations of Realpolitik.

*A democracy is made up of a multitude of ideas and ideals.*

*We need to hear the perspective of many sides, and act in honorable ways.*

*The Enlightened Realist enables democracy to thrive by knowing the difference between loving one’s neighbors and defending against evils.*

*Deep Wisdom, when possessed by the Multitudes, is the Commonwealth of a Nation.*