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Behind Closed Doors: The Iran-Contra Affair, American Exceptionalism, and the Reagan Administration

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Abstract

Traditionally, narratives of American exceptionalists stem from Puritanism of the Pilgrims in the seventeenth century, the American Revolution (1776), Manifest Destiny of the eighteenth century, New Imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Wilsonianism, the anticommunism of the Cold War, and finally the Bush Doctrine (2002). Robert Vitalis, a practicing political scientist through his work in US-Saudi relations, argues that American exceptionalism is the erroneous belief that America's past is distinct and superior to all other nations despite allegedly trekking similar courses.

Instead, it will be argued that American exceptionalism is fluid with each manifestation adopting a distinct character rooted in its environment. Under the influence of a romanticized idealism, it is the ruling class of historically white men that have created an illusory past, legitimizing their authority and perpetuating America's empire. Exceptionalists are content with the illusion. Therefore, they act as protectorates of this myth and believe that acting on behalf of America's national interests makes them immune to wrongdoing.

This paper outlines a particular manifestation of American exceptionalism in the Reagan administration: militarized conservatism. The character of militarized conservatism was based upon several factors, including the arms accumulation of the 1960s and 1970s, Vietnam War Syndrome, and Orientalism. As a result, the militarized conservatism in the Reagan administration facilitated the *mise-en-scène* of the Iran-Contra Affair.

Keywords: American exceptionalism, Cold War, Iran, Iran-Contra Affair, Ronald Reagan, Vietnam War

Ronald Reagan's Inaugural Address 1981

“The economic ills we suffer have come upon us over several decades. They will not go away in days, weeks, or months, but they will go away. They will go away because we as Americans have the capacity now, as we've had in the past, to do whatever needs to be done to preserve this last and greatest bastion of freedom.

In this present crisis, the government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem. From time to time we've been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule and that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. Well, if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else? All of us together, in and out of government, must bear the burden. The solutions we seek must be equitable, with no one group singled out to pay a higher price. [...]

It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the Federal Government and those reserved to the States or to the people. All of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government. [...]

If we look to the answer as to why for so many years we achieved so much and prospered as no other people on Earth, it was because here in this land we unleashed the energy and individual genius of man to a greater extent than has ever been done before. Freedom and the dignity of the individual have been more available and assured here than in any other place on Earth. The price for this freedom at times has been high, but we have never been unwilling to pay that price.

It is no coincidence that our present troubles parallel and are proportionate to the intervention and intrusion in our lives that result from unnecessary and excessive growth of government. It is time for us to realize that we're too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams. We're not, as some would have us believe, doomed to an inevitable decline. I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. I do believe in a fate that will fall on us if we do nothing. So, with all the creative energy at our command, let us begin an era of national renewal. Let us renew our determination, our courage, and our strength. And let us renew our faith and our hope.”

Introduction

Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as the 40th President of the US on 20 January 1981. Over the course of the previous decade, the US had suffered several public defeats. In the latter half of his first term, Nixon's reelection campaign depended upon temporary economic growth. Due to his ill-informed and self-interested scheming, with the help of his colleague Arthur Burns, the Federal Reserve Chairman, the US abandoned the gold standard, essentially declaring bankruptcy. Shortly after his reelection, *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncovered Nixon's Watergate Scandal, a plot hatched by the Nixon administration to spy on the Democratic National Convention's offices ahead of the 1972 presidential election, leading to Nixon's impeachment and eventual resignation. Additionally, after a prolonged and highly controversial war in Vietnam, the US signed a peace agreement with communist North Vietnam and withdrew from the region, effectively declaring defeat.

During the war, an estimated 58,220 Americans died and cost the US the equivalent of 2.3% of 1968's GDP or \$843.63 billion in 2019. So, not only was the US in an economic recession – the dollar a “(mostly) freely floating currency” – but it also grew corrupt in its democratic processes, foundational to the American ethos, and the US military had been defeated for the second time in thirty years (Forsyth, 2021).

Following the CIA-backed coup of Iran, the US maintained close political and economic relations with the Shah. However, the US misjudged the hold Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi had on Iran, and he was deposed in 1979. Because of the US' role in the Shah's government, the Iranian Revolution adopted an anti-Western character and sentiment. Holding sympathy for the Shah, President Carter granted him admission to the US for his cancer treatments. Consequently, the Iranian hostage crisis broke out. In response, Carter immediately froze all Iranian assets in the US (\$10 billion worth), cut off ties with Tehran, and ousted Iranian citizens from the US. It was not until Reagan's inauguration that the US hostages were exchanged for the unfreezing of Iranian funds.

In the following paper, it is argued that the perceived declinism of the US, promulgated by the events of the previous decade, engendered particular expressions of American exceptionalism in the Reagan administration that manifested as *militarized conservatism*. Moreover, the established dynamic under Truman between the CIA and the executive branch was as follows: the President executed his foreign affairs policies covertly via the CIA in order to exploit the unenumerated authority of the Office of the President. In other words, “the fanfare [was] in the light but the execution [was] in the dark, the purpose [always being] to mislead.” (Yu, 2019). It was this Janus-faced environment that sanctioned the Iran-Contra scandal.

American Exceptionalism

American exceptionalism was bred and guided along the path of Puritanism, the American Revolution, Manifest Destiny, New Imperialism, Wilsonianism, the Cold War's anticommunism, and the Bush Doctrine (Ceaser, 2012, 3-28). Robert Vitalis believes American exceptionalism is the erroneous belief that America's past is distinct and superior to all other nations, assuming all other nations trekked similar courses. However, this idea treats American exceptionalism as ahistorical, existing above history, and does not account for changes over time. Malcolm Byrne explores US-Iranian relations to argue countries' understanding of *self* and their perception of the *other* which is critical to conflict development (Byrne & Byrne, 2021). This thesis interrogates changes in American exceptionalism over time by investigating US foreign policy in Iran from 1950-1989.

This paper asserts that American exceptionalism is fluid with each manifestation adopting a distinct character rooted in its environment. Guided by a romanticized idealism, the American ruling class, traditionally white men, have doctored an ahistorical past that bolsters their authority and perpetuates America's empire. Exceptionalists act as protectorates of the myth and believe that when representing America's national interests, they are exempt from wrongdoing.

The 1960 Presidential Election and the Origins of Modern Conservatism

During the 1960-1980, the US struggled to rectify competing realities. Modern conservatism emerged to conciliate growing frustrations in and out of the South by white middle-class Americans. Moreover, to fuel the notion of American exceptionalism, there must be a cyclical continuation of wars fought and won. Consequently, a distinct construction of American exceptionalism materialized by vessel of *militarized conservatism*.

Due to the failures that plagued the latter half of his presidency, Nixon's role in constructing the modern Right is often overlooked (Reagan, 2020). Instead, Nixon's Republican successor, Reagan, is credited with defining modern conservatism, the Grand Old Party (GOP), and the Republican Party. To realize the emergence of American exceptionalism in the Reagan Administration, one must first appreciate conservatism as established by Richard Nixon and the Republican Party in the 1960s and 1970s.

Because it represented white supremacy and states' rights, the Democratic Party had been favored by the South since the 19th century. The South's indomitable and uniform loyalty to the Democratic Party in lieu of their history of upholding slavery led the region to adopt the moniker *the solid South*. Conversely, the Republican Party was detested in the South because it was associated with Abraham Lincoln, the Union, and Reconstruction (1865-1877). Nixon refused to write off the South as a win for JFK and thus devoted exorbitant amounts of campaign resources to secure the region. On the trail, Nixon argued that the South's conservatism was misaligned with the contemporary Democratic Party's "big government liberalism," and despite their Democratic status, Jefferson, Jackson, and Wilson's politics were inherent in the contemporary Republican Party (Galsworthy, 2022, 260-289).

With organizations such as the Daughters of the Confederacy, romanticizing the Confederacy with great fanfare, the anniversary of the Southern secession (1861) necessitated an interpretation of the Civil War that looked kindly upon the Confederacy. Nixon won the loyalty of *the solid South* by positioning himself as the more racially conservative candidate and perpetuating the Lost Cause narrative. For instance, at the Republican National Convention (1960) in Chicago, Nixon characterized the Civil War as a tragic war between states.

Nixon's strategy, while ostensibly unsuccessful, was not ineffective. Kennedy won the electoral college by 84 votes (The National Archives, 2021), but Nixon only lost the popular vote by .2% (The National Archives, n.d.). In hindsight, the election of 1960 was foundational in establishing the modern Republican Party, laying the groundwork for Nixon's presidency (1969-1974), and reimagining *conservatism* to adhere to contemporary notions of American exceptionalism.

American exceptionalism sieves history, forgoing disadvantageous truths to perpetuate a gilded history. Oftentimes, the US' potentiality was juxtaposed with its history, or better yet, the lack thereof. Accordingly, American pathos such as pride and patriotism were excessively forced in establishing a succinct history that was unifying, even if said history and sense of unity were entirely inauthentic. Ultimately, the goal was to secure the US' position in the world order and reputation on the world stage. In his inaugural address, JFK famously stated:

"[T]o those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction. We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only

when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed. [...] And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man. Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.”

In 1961, the US was fractured, for the Civil Rights movement was contemporaneous with the Vietnam and Cold Wars. Notably, Kennedy’s speech relied upon legible and conventional themes in the American pneuma that would incite unity while simultaneously tasking citizens with defending the American Dream that was, according to him, under threat. By crediting the US’ allusive adversary as responsible for all the evils of the world, including war and poverty, Kennedy defined the US in contrast to the *other* by means of overgeneralization. As a practicing Catholic, JFK’s words are strikingly similar to those of Jesus when talking to Peter in the Gospel of Matthew:

“Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’”¹ (English Standard Version, 1993, Matthew 16:17).

The invocation of the divine is commonplace in presidential speeches. George Bush averaged six references to God per major address and Reagan and Roosevelt averaged 4.75 and 1.69 times, respectively. David Domke, a communications professor at the University of Washington who researches political communications and rhetoric, argues religious language has become a part of America’s identity, establishing the country as a divinely created place in the world (Goldsmith, 2005). Under the pretense that democracy and development were the US’ God-ordained responsibility to defend, the executive branch was able to proliferate the military-industrial complex.

The US Military Industrial Complex (1919-1968)

The US weapons industry during the interwar period (1919-1940) was wrought with tension. Due to the circumstances that brought the US into WWI, Americans blamed the domestic weapons industry for the devastating consequences of the war.

¹ This passage in Matthew, according to Catholic theology, is the definitive moment that Peter is proclaimed the first Pope, or head of the Church, by Jesus, son of God, and tasked with spreading the Gospels following Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

In 1934, the US Senate munitions committee led by General Nye sought to uncover the role “greedy munitions interests” played in coercing the US to get involved with WWI. According to Nye, “When the Senate investigation is over, we shall see that war and preparation for war is not a matter of national honor and national defense, but a matter of profit for the few.” Nye and his fellow liberals presumed the committee’s findings would support their initiatives to nationalize the domestic weapons industry (The Senate Historical Office, n.d.).

The establishment and forthcoming findings of the Nye Committee were not only relevant to US policy but had far-reaching impacts on global politics. For example, in Sweden and France, the disarmament question posed by the US converged with their own internal investigations. According to the New York Times, “In Europe, the findings of the Nye Committee in Washington are evoking wide comment as revealing the public’s need for more enlightenment regarding private profits from arm’s manufacturers.” (Olsen, 1934). The following year, France nationalized their weapons industry (“Arms Nationalization Approved,” 1936).

After an 18-month investigation in the US, the committee was abruptly defunded due to Nye accusing former President Wilson of withholding information from Congress essential to the decision to declare war or not. In response, Democratic Senator of Virginia, Carter Glass, declared Nye was “dirt-daubing the sepulcher of Woodrow Wilson.” During his protestations, Glass wrapped his knuckles so violently onto the table that by the end of his remarks they were marred with bruises and dripping blood. Thus, Glass’ speech was met with a congressional standing ovation. Concurrently, Nye and his fellow liberals’ initiative to nationalize the arms industry was snubbed out (The Senate Historical Office, n.d.).

The exchange between Nye and Glass on the Senate Floor increasingly foreshadowed the growing tensions between liberals and conservatives that culminated in the party exchange of the 1960 presidential election and the concurrent reimagination of conservatism as a facet of the Republican Party. Glass’ vehement rejection of any criticism towards the late Wilson, forestalling any further inquiry by the Nye committee, was a consequential demonstration of American exceptionalism. Contemporarily, the cost of war and capitalism was coming into question. By asserting that Nye was defaming Wilson, a deceased wartime president, Glass framed Nye’s inquiry and coupled nationalization efforts as an anti-American witch hunt. Even though the Committee inspired three congressional neutrality acts in the 1930s, WWII would revitalize and solidify the US arms industry as a permanent fixture in the political-economic schema.

WWII transformed the US into the largest arms maker in the world, established a discernible military-industrial complex, and restored the reputation of arms manufacturers. Military Keynesianism was a policy in which the government raised military spending to boost the domestic economy and privatization which in turn encouraged free enterprise. The sizable defense budget sustained the military-industrial complex in the proceeding decades, going so far as to bail the industry out (Ng, 2021, 8-56). Moreover, firms funded political campaigns with the knowledge that once elected, politicians would grant them government defense contracts. The proceeding Cold War legitimized continued investment in the defense sector. Because of this, in the post-WWII era, the public sector became unethically entrenched in the private sector. For instance, in 1965, when Lockheed Martin went nearly bankrupt, Congress accepted

their bid despite it being the least favorable. Concerning this bid, Congress dubbed it “The Lockheed Relief Bill.”

With the US involved in the Korean (1950-1953) and Vietnam (1955-1975) Wars, the military-industrial complex continued its rapid ascent. As illustrated by Ng, the burgeoning US military-industrial complex underpinned US foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1960s, presidents used arms exports to maintain the integrity of the dollar, offset the growing cost of US interventionism and outsourced imperialism. Gargantuan spending on behalf of the US defense sector, as prompted by military Keynesianism, thereby led to a crisis of accumulation. Accordingly, Kennedy established the International Logistics Negotiations (1961) to sell arms surpluses on the international market. From 1946-1967, the Pentagon sold \$16 billion in arms and gifted nearly double that. The accumulation crisis in the 1960s and the economic downturn in the 1970s led to a massive increase of exports in the following decade (Ng, 2021, 8-56).

Due to US involvement in Vietnam, the growing economic instability of the 1970s, and an overaccumulation of weapons over the last several decades, arms deals were the “US main diplomatic currency” as presidents continued to explore unenumerated powers via foreign policy (Ng, 2021, 53-56). According to Ng, “arms were essential diplomatic currency, luring countries into regional security pacts, securing base rights, and integrating clients into a *global* military-industrial complex.” (Ng, 2021, 53-56). During this period, the continued export of arms perpetuated the US empire, empowered conservatives to overcome Vietnam Syndrome, and legitimized Neoliberalism. *Figure 1* illustrates US arms exports from 1960-1989, notably the sharp uptick in exports during the 1970s due to the high number of purchases made by the Shah of Iran.



Figure 1. US Arms Exports (1960-1989); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Trend Indicator Values

Vietnam Syndrome and the Iranian Revolution (1969-1979)

The US from 1969-1979 was in disarray. The 1960s were characterized by racial unrest, political assassinations, and war. Secondly, the malfeasance of Nixon ended in an economic recession and the first presidential resignation in 1974. Lastly, the undeniable failure in Vietnam precipitated the Vietnam Syndrome. Vietnam Syndrome coined by Richard Nixon presumes America's failure in Vietnam greatly diminished its image and standing in the world order, jolting a change in US foreign policy away from direct military intervention. Nonetheless, the Nixon Doctrine (1969) accommodated the change in US foreign policy while perpetuating the US empire. It also empowered US allies to maintain their own regional security by providing economic and military aid (Herring, 1981, 594-612).

Following the CIA-backed 1953 Coup of Iran, the Shah and the US sustained advantageous relations. According to Donald Rumsfeld in 1975, the US maintained a "fundamental interest in uninterrupted access to Middle East oil." (cited by Bacevich, 2017). Edward Luttwak, a scholar and national security consultant for the Pentagon documented under the pseudonym Miles Ignotus, published his essay in Harper's Magazine which summarizes conservatives' opinions of the OPEC-imposed oil embargo (1973) and successive oil crisis (1973). Namely, Luttwak's article portrays the US as the "victim" of the "military dictators and megalomaniac kings of OPEC." He also criticizes the government for its "passivity" in addressing the OPEC "cartel" disrupting the market. Luttwak justifies this by explaining how the US is *entitled* to Middle Eastern oil because Americans being forced to "buy smaller cars because sheikhs want bigger jets" is criminal (Ignotus, 1975, 45). In sum, Luttwak's essay illustrates that US foreign policy is fueled by lofty American exceptionalism, refined by the hesitancy of Vietnam syndrome, and reinforced by Orientalism.

Given the conditions of his ascension, the Shah was increasingly paranoid about being overthrown. Consequently and in accordance with the Nixon Doctrine, the Shah secured his rule by obtaining copious amounts of US-produced arms. From 1950-1972, the US gave Iran \$1.5 billion in arms. Due to the accumulation crisis and economic downturn of the 1970s, the Shah began purchasing US arms with his first order totaling \$2 billion (Bacevich, 2017). Down the line as his regime grew unstable, the Shah's appetite for American arms grew insatiable. In fact, from 1969-1980, the Shah purchased nearly \$30 billion in military hardware, including nuclear reactors (Ng, 2021, 193).

Unbeknownst to the US, the Shah's regime was volatile, and no amount of US arms could preserve his reign. Iranians from religious zealots to secular liberals united to oust the West's lackey. In January of 1979, the Shah fled, and the next month Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a *Shiite* cleric known for his anti-Western stance, returned to Iran from a Shah-imposed exile. Following a brief power struggle, a nationwide referendum established the Islamic Republic of Iran and the newly minted *Imam* as its Supreme Leader.

Militarized Conservatism: The Iran-Iraq War and Reagan (1980-1989)

Despite his best efforts, Carter's presidency (1977-1981) was chaotic. The US intelligence community had grossly misjudged the Shah's regime and was blindsided by the Islamic Revolution (1979). In the previous decade, the US had "imbricated [Iran into] an increasingly *global* military-industrial complex" by way of oil-for-arms deals. Ostensibly, oil-for-arms deals ensured energy security during the 1970s energy crisis, recycled petrodollars, and

bolstered the waning military-industrial complex. So, hefty weapons purchases forced importers such as Iran to increase oil prices to remain afloat. Since government bureaucrats were deeply invested in the wiles of the private sector, the US provided Iran with nuclear capabilities and worsened the ongoing energy crisis.

Any chance of mitigating the anti-American character of the Iranian Revolution was destroyed when Carter foolishly permitted the Shah's admission to the US for cancer treatment in October of 1979. Less than a month after the US embassy in Tehran received word from the CIA of Carter's intentions, a group of Iranian college students seized control of the embassy and took the 52 US citizens hostage in retribution. The Iranian Hostage Crisis incited a nationwide firestorm. In the 1980 presidential election, former California governor Ronald Reagan defeated the incumbent, Jimmy Carter, in a landslide victory. To spite Carter, Khomeini held the hostages until after Reagan's inauguration in 1981— a total of 444 days.

Ronald Reagan was a former actor turned "citizen politician," and his administration was characterized by a distinct manifestation of American exceptionalism by way of militarized conservatism. Militarized conservatism was a patriarchal construct born out of Orientalism, Trumanism, Vietnam syndrome, and neoliberalism. Reagan's Vice President, George H.W. Bush, had previously worked as president of an offshore subsidiary of Zapata Petroleum, a US ambassador to the UN, head of the Republican National Convention, and most recently the director of the CIA (1975-1976). The Reagan-Bush winning campaign slogan was "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" Together, Reagan and Bush sought to reestablish the US position in the world order. They ran on the promise of reinstating *traditional values* upset by the previous decade, and his greatest economic objective was to reduce the marginal income tax rate which he felt personally slighted by while a successful actor going through a divorce in his mid-30s (Brownlee, 2009). In 1981, the marginal income tax rate was 70%, but when Reagan left office in 1989 it was down to 28% (Cannon, n.d.).

Under the impression that Iran was vulnerable following the Islamic Revolution, Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, sought to capture the oil-rich Khuzestan Province and gain complete control over the Shatt al-Arab waterway. On 22 September 1980, Hussein invaded Iran. Subsequently, American diplomacy during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1989) was purportedly paradoxical. Under Carter, the US maintained neutrality, but once Reagan took office, the State Department removed Iraq from its terrorism watchlist and prioritized assisting Iraq.

Throughout the 1980s, US foreign policy was geared towards assisting Iraq. In 1982, the CIA established a covert channel with Baghdad to provide Hussein with US-procured intelligence. Reagan approved loans and the purchase of nonmilitary equipment with military applications: computers, heavy trucks, helicopters, and aircraft. America's assistance therefore included turning a blind eye to Hussein deploying chemical weapons against civilians and bombing Iranian cities at random. Andrew Bacevich, an American military historian, contends Reagan's inconsistent and immoral policies regarding Iran-Iraq can be chalked up to "shortsighted opportunism." (Bacevich, 2017, 87-108) However, Bacevich's assertion only accounts for a piece of the whole. Instead, US diplomacy during the Iran-Iraq War was constructed by the Reagan Administration's militarized conservatism, best illustrated by the Iran-Contra Affair.

The Iran-Contra Affair (1985) was a covert operation conducted by high-level government officials with direct ties to the CIA and the Reagan Administration. The Reagan

Administration illegally supplied Iran with weapons with Israel acting as a courier. In exchange, Iran deposited payment in an offshore account accessible by the Contras. The Contras were remnants of *La Guardia* – the mercenaries behind Anastasio Somoza’s dictatorship. Following the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Sandinista National Liberation Front, a socialist political party, took control of the nation. Then, Reagan sought to empower the Contras who were, according to him, “the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers.” Once the Affair was revealed, National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane and Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North acted as the scapegoats, and Reagan narrowly escaped impeachment. In retaliation, Hussein fired Exocet missiles at the USS Stark, killing 37 American soldiers. Despite the Iraqi government admitting fault, the Reagan administration concluded that the incident was a “basic Iranian threat to the free flow of oil and to the principle of freedom of navigation.” (Bacevich, 2017, 87-108).

Militarized conservatism accounts for the “shortsighted opportunism” on the part of the Reagan Administration who are operating under the belief that America is in every sense greater than all other nations and has been since time immemorial. Because of this, the Reagan Administration feels justified in its actions and does not feel limited by ethics or morals. For example, in 1988, Iran Air Flight 655 was shot down by the US Navy as it flew over the Strait of Hormuz. 290 civilians were instantly killed. Bush responded callously, “I will never apologize for the United States — I don't care what the facts are... I'm not an apologize-for-America kind of guy.” (Bacevich, 2017, 87-108). Shortly thereafter, Iran and Iraq agreed to a ceasefire. To no surprise, the US government declared it a clear victory.

Conclusion

Twenty-five years after the Vietnam War, Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State and disciple of American exceptionalism, wrote:

“For one of the most important casualties of the Vietnam tragedy was the tradition of American “exceptionalism.” The once near-universal faith in the uniqueness of our values--and their relevance around the world--gave way to intense divisions over the very validity of those values and the lengths we should go to promote and defend them. And those schisms have had a profound impact on the conduct of U.S. foreign policy ever since.” (Kissinger, 2000).

American exceptionalism was an indisposition that thrived in Washington in the post-WWII era that promulgated paradoxical happenings within the US government. Accordingly, the Reagan Administration’s foreign policy during the Iran-Iraq War is illegible without perceiving it through the lens of exceptionalism. Due to the tempestuous nature of the US in the 1960s and 1970s defined by a perceived declinism, a distinct manifestation of American exceptionalism emerged in the Reagan Administration— *militarized conservatism*.

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