

The National Interest

Rather than prepare a separate essay on this item, the reader is referred to a passage written by Sebastian Roberts in his book, *Dragonfly*. It is clear and simple, as it should be.

In the passage, Chance Inman (Sec Def) and Ben Pratt (Sec State) present the conclusions of their study of the topic to President Madison Thompson and Wendy Elliot (Press Sec).

Chance picked up the story. "Once we got past the nomenclature, things were much easier to understand. We care about defense, commerce, and people: period. With that accomplished, we started to unravel the question of *national interest*."

"We always hear that one thing or another is in our national interest," Ben said. "It's used as an excuse for damn near anything that no one can find a real excuse for. But what actually is our national interest? Applying the Levindusky principle of extreme simplicity to resolve complex questions, we arrived at one thing. The national interest is in promoting American principles of freedom around the world. We are an exceptional nation because we have an exceptional form of government."

Madison's eyebrow shot up. "Wendy, write that down and flag it for me for later. Sorry. Go on, please."

"That's it," Ben said. "Our national interest does not lie in oil or polar expeditions or interstellar space travel. Our national interest is our brand of freedom."

"Don't leave him hanging too long, Ben," Chance said. "We also identified something that we call the *interest of the nation*. It is within the interest of the nation to have good commerce and friendly relations with foreign governments, but these interests are quite different from the supreme interest in American freedom. The interest of the nation revolves around commerce: Trade, travel, markets, and economics. Finally, we have the human element. *Human interest* is reflected not in the *national interest* or the *interest of the nation* but in the interest of the *people of the nation*. This encompasses everything from the Peace Corps to the AIDS or Ebola programs in Africa. It's feeding the hungry and providing medical help after a volcano or tsunami."

Ben summarized. "Foreign relations comes down to three sets of paired ideas; Defense and the National Interest, Commerce and the Interest of the Nation, and Human Interest and the Interest of the American people. When someone claims that sending food to Syrian refugees is in our national interest, they corrupt the simplicity and purity of the ideal. Eventually, things are so muddled that people in power just do whatever they want or whatever is politically

favorable, put a label on it and bask in the glory. By simplifying, we can keep our focus and our priorities straight. Our national interest must be superior to the interest of the nation.”

~ From *Dragonfly*, by Sebastian Roberts.

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