

Nov 04, 2016 by [Cari E. Guittard](#)

We Are The World ^[1]

As recording artists gather today to re-create 'We Are the World,' to benefit Haiti, one cannot help but be moved by America's continued commitment to sending relief and embracing the world in a time of crisis. Americans from every walk of life, and every level of the economic spectrum, are finding ways to contribute to the relief efforts in Haiti.

The current attitude towards global engagement and oneness here locally, however, was a theme strikingly absent from the President's State of the Union speech last week. The lack of emphasis on America's role and ongoing efforts globally did not go unnoticed, Secretary Clinton's absence notwithstanding. In reading through foreign media reaction to the speech this weekend, the disappointment in America from every region was palpable. Many media outlets cautioned the U.S. from becoming too inward-looking at a time when globally we are all feeling fragile, uncertain, insecure, and evermore intertwined. The President's Cairo speech, the U.S. role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the closing of Guantanamo were mentioned in several Arab media outlets as examples where American deeds failed to live up to the rhetoric. The American government being admonished for its hypocrisy is hardly a new concept, and as a result we've all become immune to global criticisms to the point where few Americans choose to tune in and really listen to what the world is saying about us.

However, if there were ever a time for self-reflection and assessment it is now. Part of this self-reflection must include listening to the world and taking stock of what's actually happening on the ground in the various countries around the world where we are engaged. We cannot know ourselves fully and act appropriately on the world stage until we listen and understand the views of others. Listening to the world has also never been easier with resources like WatchingAmerica.com where daily translations of global press coverage of the U.S. is available 24/7, organized by region and for free. If we really are to live up to the promise and premise of 'We Are the World,' we should all make a commitment to becoming global citizens: learning, listening and working to understand the world.

For an Administration that came to power with such hope and promise, resolutely focused on global engagement as a key pillar of our foreign policy, it is concerning that such themes would not be addressed and underscored in a speech as important as the State of the Union. The global coverage of the State of the Union was in many cases paired with U.S. relief efforts in Haiti. As the Venezuelan media outlet, *Ultimas Noticias*, noted:

"If we were not speaking about the president of a country that has just sent 30,000 more soldiers to Afghanistan and has Haiti kidnapped with a passive invasion of more than 10,000 Marines, I would say that Obama is putting himself in the list of revolutionary leaders of the continent."

Haiti is the current prism through which the entire world is closely watching American efforts. Some heralded our President's quick response and decisive action; others deride him for

going in “too fast” and accused the U.S. of seeking another occupation there. Whether we are doing too little or too much in Haiti remains to be seen. It saddens me as an American to see all the goodwill here at home for finding ways to help in Haiti and then to hear the global press say we are only doing what is in our immediate self-interest. One thing, though, is for certain -- the global collective memory of U.S.-Haitian relations runs deep and their greatest concern on the ground is that we won’t be there for the long haul. Americans are known for being great in a crisis. Where the world sees us falling short is when it comes to providing long-term aid and support, and people’s memories run deep. History matters. Listening to the global street matters. As the *Lebanon Daily Star* noted in an editorial last week in response to the State of the Union speech,

“Until the US formulates a vision for its role in the region based on an objective assessment of realities on the ground, rather than the ideological ramblings of “experts” from the left and the right, and until it develops a real multi-track strategy that seeks to simultaneously address each of the challenges highlighted earlier, American involvement in the region will continue to be disastrous, no matter who is in charge in the White House.”

The same could be said for our efforts in Haiti and really anywhere else we are engaged in the world. My hope is that at every level America is listening to the world, really listening this time, and then we can start singing a new tune.
