Anti-Americanism and Responses to American Power

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Few nations spend as much time worrying about how the world perceives them as America does. In the history of superpowers, great powers, or imperial powers, the American concern with likeability is unmatched. Did the Romans, the Ottoman Turks, or the Soviets worry about popularity ratings? Does it bother the Chinese that their system of government is widely regarded as repressive? Certainly not to the extent that it really bothers Americans to be unpopular in the world.

Americans are highly vulnerable when it comes to public perceptions in other countries, in part because they like their foreign policy to have a moral dimension. Perhaps it is also one of the consequences of a democracy, founded by men with "decent respect for the opinions of mankind."

Clearly, the Bush Administration has woken up to the fact that anti-Americanism represents a problem. This awakening took place during the last years of President George W. Bush's first term. Unfortunately, the Administration seemed somewhat unconcerned about the wider effects of anti-Americanism in the first stages of the global war on terrorism.

However, in the course of her January confirmation hearings, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated, "This is the time for diplomacy." Her first international trip, which took her throughout Europe, suggests a determination to put that sentiment into practice. As the chief diplomat of the United States, she did exactly what diplomacy requires, reaching out, consulting, and explaining to European

Talking Points

- To craft effective U.S. government responses to anti-Americanism, we need to consider three factors relating to anti-Americanism abroad: root causes, lethality, and public policy tools.

- What we need today are ways of engaging the Arab world, and by extension the Muslim world, whence the most imminent terrorist threats have emerged.

- This does not mean that we are facing a "clash of civilizations" in Samuel Huntington's sense of the term, but a virulent strain of Islam that has a strong totalitarian flavor and that disdains not just Westerners, but also other Muslims.

- A major strategic effort by the U.S. government is needed to counter anti-Americanism in the Muslim world, on par with that directed against the Soviet bloc during the Cold War.

media and government leaders. In that, she set a new tone for the second Bush Administration.

The demands of international diplomacy and the imperative of countering anti-Americanism in the world are related—but not identical—issues. The question becomes how the U.S. government can effectively fight anti-American attitudes in the world.

Lessons from the Cold War

The lessons of the Cold War suggest that ideological warfare can be highly successful. For 46 years, the United States Information Agency (USIA) and other government instruments focused on this battle. In particular, U.S. international broadcasters, the Voice of America, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty developed a faithful audience behind the Iron Curtain. Dissidents in the Soviet Union and in the Warsaw Pact countries were inspired by the knowledge that others cared.

The lessons of the Cold War show that a battle against a repressive ideology can be won through a determined, bipartisan, long-term effort. The U.S. government played a huge role in this victory. Government policy still has a crucial role to play in combating anti-Americanism abroad.

Regrettably, the instruments that served us so well during the Cold War became part of the peace dividend during the decade of the 1990s. In 1999, the U.S. Information Agency disappeared as an independent agency, and its functions were folded into the State Department. Public diplomacy officers were merged into the Department of State bureaucracy. Their fieldwork, as well as their reporting channels back to Washington, became part of the slow review process in the embassies.

As President Bush said in his Inaugural speech, "The nation took a sabbatical." Unfortunately, the terrorists did not.

We must focus our resources on anti-Americanism where it matters most—where the threat to the United States is greatest. If the U.S. government attempts to fight every manifestation of global anti-Americanism indiscriminately, wherever it is found, our efforts will be diffuse and ineffective.

It should also be emphasized that the U.S. government only possesses a fraction of the resources

represented by the United States as a free-market society. Other segments of society—business, media, and educational institutions—also hold powerful tools for addressing different types of anti-Americanism.

Types of Anti-Americanism

In order to determine where best to invest our energy, we will need to distinguish between various causes and types of anti-Americanism. It may be that we have to concede that some are merely a problem, as opposed to a lethal threat to the body politic.

For instance, anti-Americanism in France can indeed be a heavy inconvenience for traveling Americans, who may find themselves on the defensive regarding whether or not they support the Bush Administration's policies. Anti-Americanism can be—and is—exploited by unscrupulous French politicians.

The French have recently found how unpleasant anti-French bias in the United States can be, and they still smart bitterly over the designation "freedom fries" for "French fries." However, dislike of the United States will not cause France to declare war on the United States, or vice versa. The two countries are democracies and remain allies. We will be able to continue to work together when it is in the interest of both governments.

By contrast, other types of anti-Americanism are indeed deadly, as we saw on September 11, 2001. Those who hate Americans enough to kill them indiscriminately, and those who sympathize with the killers, are a far graver threat, and we need to be deeply concerned about countering it effectively and precisely. To borrow a quote from Osama bin Laden, as stated in a 1998 interview with ABC-TV:

> We believe the worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans. Nothing could stop you except perhaps retaliation in kind. We do not have to differentiate between military and civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets.

This is a far more dangerous proposition than whether the French approve of the style of Presi-

dent Bush. Accordingly, to craft effective U.S. government responses, we need to consider three factors relating to anti-Americanism abroad:

- Root causes,
- Lethality, and
- Public policy tools.

Root Causes

A certain generic anti-Americanism has resulted from the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union on Christmas Day in 1991 left the United States standing as the only superpower. This caused an international backlash, perhaps inevitably, as other nations began to resent this dominance. In Europe, a whole disparate host of issues were cast in the framework of anti-Americanism and the transatlantic rift: the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, environmental issues clustered around the Kyoto protocol, globalization, religion, the death penalty, and so on.

Thanks to the power and influence of the BBC and other influential European media, this intense dislike is often based on nothing that resembles reality. Those who read European papers regularly often find it hard to recognize the United States they know. French author Jean-Francois Revel has called this kind of anti-Americanism an "obsession." It is characterized by sweeping generalizations, stereotyping, prejudice, and general hostility.

The causes of these feelings are psychologically complex, but certainly include a kind of "superpower envy," a genuine difference in perceptions of the world as identified by Robert Kagan in *Of Paradise and Power*. It probably also derives from the need for the evolving European Union to establish an identity of its own distinct from that of the United States, Europe's protector and ally since World War II.

To some extent, this is a global structural phenomenon that can be ameliorated only so much. More adept diplomacy, better use of the European media, making American officials available, and exchange student programs are some of the ways to counteract this phenomenon. It may, however, be one that Americans have to live with at some level.

Clearly, the war in Iraq brought together a number of anti-American strains throughout the world and represented a low point as far as international public opinion was concerned. The war ran into a strong visceral European opposition to the use of military force under any circumstance, as well as fear of the unilateral application of American power throughout the world. (The charge of American unilateralism was never a substantial one, but lives on as a myth.)

With the war in Iraq behind us, and the success of Iraq's January 30th elections, a corner has been turned. According to a German Marshall Fund poll of post–presidential election French, German, and American attitudes, slight improvements have been registered in the feelings of the French and the Germans regarding the U.S. role in world affairs, trending up 8 percent and 3 percent in a positive direction. Yet 65 percent and 57 percent, respectively, still said that strong American leadership was undesirable.

Quite another kind of anti-Americanism is found in the Arab world. Salman Rushdie made this distinction in his essay "February 2002: Anti-Americanism":

> Anybody who has visited Britain and Europe, or followed the public conversation there during the past five months, will have been struck, even shocked, by the depth of anti-American feeling among large segments of the population, as well as the news media. Western anti-Americanism is an altogether more petulant phenomenon than its Islamic counterpart and, oddly, far more personalized. Muslim countries don't like American power, its "arrogance," its success; in the non-American West, the main objection seems to be to the American people.

Thus, opinion polls of Arabs and other Muslims tend to cite specific policies as part of their most important disagreement with the United States, primarily the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or Iraq. According to the Pew Study of Global Attitudes, as of autumn 2004, in the predominantly Muslim countries surveyed—Pakistan, Jordan, Morocco, and Tur-

key—anti-Americanism remains pervasive, but the level of hatred has eased somewhat, and support for the war on terrorism has increased somewhat.

Unfortunately, Osama bin Laden is viewed favorably by large percentages in Pakistan (65 percent), Jordan (55 percent), and Morocco (45 percent). Even in Turkey, where bin Laden is highly unpopular, as many as 31 percent of people say that suicide attacks against Americans and other Westerners in Iraq are justifiable.

"Majorities in all four Muslim nations surveyed doubt the sincerity of the war on terrorism. Instead, most say it is an effort to control Middle East oil and to dominate the world," writes Pew. As this anti-Americanism forms the support basis for more dangerous terrorist phenomena at this time, addressing it ought to be the primary purpose of American government efforts.

Lethality

While European anti-American carping can be an irritant in the transatlantic relationship, it is the threat from the anti-Americanism of terrorists motivated by al-Qaeda and other radical Islamic movements that is lethal. In terms of overall threat assessment, this is not anything like the threat of an American–Soviet Cold War confrontation. It is important to keep this in perspective.

However, we saw on 9/11 what al-Qaeda and its followers could do, and they have since killed hundreds of people in Bali, Madrid, Istanbul, and elsewhere. The prospect of terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction is a nightmare that governments other than the U.S. continue to struggle with. In Iraq, terrorists attempt day after day to derail the tentative democratic process.

In addition to al-Qaeda, there are groups like Hamas, which has been responsible for attacks against Israeli civilians for years, and Hezbollah, which, in the estimation of some experts, is a far more dangerous and competent organization than al-Qaeda. Terrorist groups represent a worldwide network, making them far more difficult to deal with than discrete identifiable nation-states with hostile intentions. Many consider the struggle we

are now engaged in one that is likely to last at least as long as the Cold War.

The National Security Strategy of 2002 produced a series of very reasonable recommendations about how to deal with these terrorist movements and those who support them. They include:

- **Working** with international allies to de-legitimize terrorism in any way, shape, or form so that it will be viewed in the same light as slavery or genocide;

- **Supporting** moderate and democratic governments, especially in the Muslim world;

- **Diminishing** underlying conditions that spawn terrorism in areas most at risk; and

- **Using** effective public diplomacy to facilitate the free flow of information and ideas in societies that are ruled by sponsors of terrorism.

Public Policy Tools

Unfortunately, on the last point, the U.S. government has fallen far short. As mentioned above, the U.S. allowed public diplomacy tools to deteriorate during the sabbatical decade of the 1990s. As it turned out, it was not "the end of history," but a vacation from history.

One school of thought, represented by Harvard historian Joseph Nye and Anne-Marie Slaughter of Princeton, among others, advocates the use of "soft power" to wrap American hegemony in an acceptable velvet glove. It focuses on the greater use of multilateral institutions for American foreign policy goals, more diplomacy, and less use of military force.

As long as multilateralism is considered a tool, it has some merit. However, multilateralism is not an end in itself. Will it convert those already suspicious of American motives? It seems unlikely.

What we need today are ways of engaging the Arab world, and by extension the Muslim world, whence the most imminent terrorist threats have emerged. This does not mean that we are facing a "clash of civilizations" in Samuel Huntington's sense of the term, but a virulent strain of Islam that has a strong totalitarian flavor and that disdains not just Westerners, but also other Muslims.

A major strategic effort by the U.S. government is needed to counter anti-Americanism in the Muslim world, on par with that directed against the Soviet bloc during the Cold War. Specifically, the U.S. government should:

- **Hold** foreign governments accountable for their support of anti-American propaganda, education, and terrorist activities as directed against American citizens or our allies. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are high on this list; but in some respects, so are European nations with large Muslim populations. In that sense, President Bush was right to demand to know who is with us and who is against us.

- **Restore** the public diplomacy framework within the U.S. government, or at least give it separate status within the State Department, including earmarked funding streams and lines of authority. If the USIA cannot be brought back, which would be ideal, at least its functions can be revived and revitalized.

- **Allow** public opinion research as conducted by American embassies to become available throughout the government for the purpose of formulating country-specific policies (i.e., repeal the Smith–Mundt Act).

- **Create** an alternative to the above proposal that would be a semi-independent organization for public opinion research in foreign countries to produce empirical data on causes and effects. The organization Terror Free Tomorrow will soon release the first nationwide opinion poll of attitudes toward the United States conducted in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world. Only specific knowledge can produce specific policy options.

- **Invest** far more money in free media support through the National Endowment for Democracy and in revitalizing the Voice of America, which is being decimated by the flowering of surrogates like Radio Sawa and al-Hurrah television. The United States still needs a strong identifiable voice in a world that offers a plethora of other media outlets.

- **Invest** far more in exchange student programs, especially with allies and Muslim countries, and open up the visa process as far as is compatible with the demands of national security. The group Business for Diplomatic Action has proposed the concept of "out recruiting Bin Laden"—which serves as a handy slogan for the efforts of both the U.S. government exchange student programs and private business internships.

- **Seize** opportunities. For instance, we should remain deeply engaged in the reconstruction efforts in the tsunami-stricken areas of South Asia. This tragedy can be, and has been, an opportunity for the United States to interact on a human level with the largest Muslim country in the world. No organization in the world is better suited to provide this kind of assistance than the U.S. military, and we have already made an amazing and impressive start. Long-term commitment, however, will be needed.

This list could be much longer. A host of government studies, think tank reports, and strategic documents have been produced in recent years for the purpose of "winning hearts and minds" throughout the Muslim world. What we need now from the second Bush Administration is action.

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