Project for a New American Century, Open Letter to President Clinton, 1998

The Project for a New American Century (PNAC) was a neoconservative think tank founded in 1997 to promote American global leadership and “a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity.” In particular, the PNAC called for regime change in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. The signers of this 1998 letter to President Bill Clinton included Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz (all of whom would hold important positions in the second Bush White House), and Francis Fukuyama (author of “The End of History”). The PNAC disbanded in 2006.

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing you because we are convinced that current American policy toward Iraq is not succeeding, and that we may soon face a threat in the Middle East more serious than any we have known since the end of the Cold War. … You have an opportunity to chart a clear and determined course for meeting this threat. We urge you to seize that opportunity, and to enunciate a new strategy that would secure the interests of the U.S. and our friends and allies around the world. That strategy should aim, above all, at the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime from power. We stand ready to offer our full support in this difficult but necessary endeavor.

The policy of “containment” of Saddam Hussein has been steadily eroding over the past several months. As recent events have demonstrated, we can no longer depend on our partners in the Gulf War coalition to continue to uphold the sanctions or to punish Saddam when he blocks or evades UN inspections. Our ability to ensure that Saddam Hussein is not producing weapons of mass destruction has substantially diminished. Even if full inspections were eventually to resume, which now seems highly unlikely, experience has shown that it is difficult if not impossible to monitor Iraq’s chemical and biological weapons production. The lengthy period during which the inspectors will have been unable to enter many Iraqi facilities has made it even less likely that they will be able to uncover all of Saddam’s secrets. As a result, in the not-too-distant future we will be unable to determine with any reasonable level of confidence whether Iraq does or does not possess such weapons.

Such uncertainty will, by itself, have a seriously destabilizing effect on the entire Middle East. It hardly needs to be added that if Saddam does acquire the capability to deliver weapons of mass destruction, as he is almost certain to do if we continue along the present course, the safety of American troops in the region, of our friends and allies like Israel and the moderate Arab states, and a significant portion of the world’s supply of oil will all be put at hazard. As you have rightly declared, Mr. President, the security of the world in the first part of the 21st century will be determined largely by how we handle this threat.

Given the magnitude of the threat, the current policy, which depends for its success upon the steadfastness of our coalition partners and upon the cooperation of Saddam Hussein, is dangerously inadequate. The only acceptable strategy is one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. In the near term, this means a willingness to undertake military action as diplomacy is clearly failing. In the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power. That now needs to become the aim of American foreign policy.

We urge you to articulate this aim, and to turn your Administration’s attention to implementing a strategy for removing Saddam’s regime from power. … Although we are fully aware of the dangers and difficulties in implementing this policy, we believe the dangers of failing to do so are far greater. We believe the U.S. has the authority under existing UN resolutions to take the necessary steps, including military steps, to protect our vital interests in the Gulf. In any case, American policy cannot continue to be crippled by a misguided insistence on unanimity in the UN Security Council.

We urge you to act decisively. If you act now to end the threat of weapons of mass destruction against the U.S. or its allies, you will be acting in the most fundamental national security interests of the country. If we accept a course of weakness and drift, we put our interests and our future at risk.
Osama bin Laden,  
“Fatwah Urging Jihad Against Americans,” 1998

Osama bin Laden was the seventeenth son of a wealthy Saudi Arabian construction magnate with close ties to the Saudi royal family. As a young man, he joined and helped fund the mujahideen, Muslim guerrillas fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. By the late 1980s, bin Laden established an international alliance of militant Sunni groups known as Al-Qaeda (“the base”). During the 1991 Gulf War, bin Laden denounced the arrival of American troops in his country. U.S. troops were originally to be withdrawn from Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War, but stayed on to support the Saudi royal family. The U.S. began a gradual withdrawal of troops from Saudi Arabia in 2003.

Praise be to God, who revealed the Book, controls the clouds, defeats factionalism, and says in His Book, “But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem” … The Arabian Peninsula has never, since God made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas, been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies now spreading in it like locusts, consuming its riches and destroying its plantations. All this is happening at a time when nations are attacking Muslims like people fighting over a plate of food. In the light of the grave situation and the lack of support, we and you are obliged to discuss current events, and we should all agree on how to settle the matter.

No one argues today about three facts that are known to everyone; we will list them, in order to remind everyone:

First, for over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples. …

Second, despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader-Zionist alliance, and despite the huge number of those killed, in excess of 1 million … despite all this, the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war or the fragmentation and devastation. So now they come to annihilate what is left of this people and to humiliate their Muslim neighbors.

Third, if the Americans’ aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jews’ petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there.

The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel’s survival and the continuation of the brutal crusade occupation of the Peninsula.

All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims. … On that basis, and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqṣa Mosque and the holy mosque from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, “and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,” and “fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God.” …

We—with God’s help—call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulama, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan’s U.S. troops and the devil’s supporters alloying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.
9-11: A Few Immediate Reactions

“What we saw on Tuesday, terrible as it is, could be minuscule if, in fact, God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve. … The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this, because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy forty million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, the abortionists, the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the A.C.L.U., People for the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America, I point the finger in their face and say, ‘You helped this happen.’”


“No innocent civilians were killed on September 11. There is simply no argument to be made that the Pentagon personnel killed on September 11 fill that bill. The building and those inside comprised military targets, pure and simple. As for those in the World Trade Center… Well, really, let’s get a grip here, shall we? True enough, they were civilians of a sort. But innocent? Gimme a break. They formed a technocratic corps at the very heart of America’s global financial empire—the mighty engine of profit to which the military dimension of U.S. policy has always been enslaved—and they did so both willingly and knowingly. … To the extent that any of them were unaware of the costs and consequences to others of what they were involved in—and in many cases excelling at—it was because of their absolute refusal to see. More likely, it was because they were too busy braying, incessantly and self-importantly, into their cell phones, arranging power lunches and stock transactions, each of which translated, conveniently out of sight, mind and smelling distance, into the starved and rotting flesh of infants. If there was a better way of visiting some penalty befitting their participation upon the little Eichmanns inhabiting the sterile sanctuary of the twin towers, I’d really be interested in hearing about it.”


“In this tragic moment, when words seem so inadequate to express the shock people feel, the first thing that comes to mind is this: We are all Americans! We are all New Yorkers, just as surely as John F. Kennedy declared himself to be a Berliner in 1962 when he visited Berlin. Indeed, just as in the gravest moments of our own history, how can we not feel profound solidarity with those people, that country, the United States, to whom we are so close and to whom we owe our freedom?”


“Americans are asking, ‘Why do they hate us?’ They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. … These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us because we stand in their way. … Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”

President George W. Bush, September 20 2001
We're at war," President George W. Bush said in Sarasota, Florida, on the morning of September 11, 2001. He said the words aloud, but he was speaking, in effect, to himself, as he first watched the television replay of the World Trade Center towers being hit by jet airliners. A primal response. Instant. And shaping. After watching the replay, the president began to move. His handlers told him he was himself a prime target of that war, and so Bush allowed himself to be shuttled from Florida to an air force base in Louisiana, and then to the supersecure headquarters of the Strategic Air Command in Nebraska. Soon enough, the president's main emotion on this day would turn to shame, when he realized how this rush to a safe hole contrasted with the ordinary heroism of thousands in New York, Washington, and in the skies over Pennsylvania. When Bush finally emerged to address the American public, transforming his humiliation into rage, he formally defined the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as "acts of war." To other nations he said, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." At the wounded Pentagon, the president told a somber gathering of military officials that he wanted Osama bin Laden "dead or alive."

On September 14, the president started the day at a prayer service at the National Cathedral in Washington. The ritual was defined
as ecumenical, with a Muslim presence, but the overwhelmingly Christian iconography of the cathedral—television cameras lingered on an especially literal rendition of the crucifixion—conveyed another impression entirely. The service was an expression of national grief, but it seemed equally an epiphany of martial will. As simply as that, images of Christian religion were starkly joined to America’s new purpose.

From the cathedral, Bush went straight to the World Trade Center site in New York. Standing atop the rubble, before a spread of American flags, the president declared, “The people who knocked these buildings down will hear from all of us soon.” On that same day, the U.S. Senate voted 98–0 and the House of Representatives voted 420–1 (with California’s Barbara Lee the lone dissenter) to give President Bush unlimited authority to use force against America’s enemies as he saw fit. National polls put the percentage of Americans in favor of “a major military campaign” at 90 percent. No one said whom the campaign should be waged against. In three days, the Bush war was begun, blessed by religion, affirmed by pundits, and authorized by Congress, although the war was yet to be defined.

Our nation’s sudden vulnerability makes us shrug off, just as suddenly, the habit of taking for granted its nobility. We see it in the throat-choking empty place of the New York skyline, and in the gaping wound of the building beside Arlington Cemetery. We see it in the grimy faces of the resolute rescue workers, and in the implication that doomed airline passengers fought back against hijackers. We see it in the splendid diversity of our features, our accents, our beliefs, our responses even. Never has the national motto seemed more true: out of many, one.

But so far our main expression of this intense patriotism has been oddly in tension with its inner meaning, for the thing we treasure above all about America at this moment is the way it measures its hope by principles of democracy, tolerance, law, respect for the other, and even social compassion. Our supreme patriotic gesture in this crisis has been a nearly universal call for war, and indeed the growing sentiment for war, fueled by the rhetoric of our highest leaders, may soon be embodied in a formal congressional declaration of war. Before we go much farther, we should think carefully about why we are heading down this path, and where it is likely to lead. Do the rhetoric of war and the actions it already sets in motion really serve the urgent purpose of stopping terrorism? And is the launching of war really the only way to demonstrate our love for America?

Before going any farther, let me state the obvious. The nearly worldwide consensus that the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington must be met with force is entirely correct. The network of suicidal mass murderers, however large and wherever hidden, must be eliminated. But force can be exercised decisively and overwhelmingly in another context than that of “war.” One of the great advances in civilization occurred when human beings found a way to channel necessary violence away from “war” and toward a new, counterbalancing context embodied in the idea of “law.” The distinction may seem too fine to be relevant in the aftermath of this catastrophe, but it is after catastrophe that the distinction matters most. The difference between “war” and “law” is not the use of force. The United States of America, with its world allies, should be

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Law Not War

September 15, 2001

How we love our country! For days now, we Americans, while mourning and shuddering, have felt the accumulating weight of our patriotic devotion. We are joined in the shocking recognition of what a rare and precious treasure is the United States of America.
embarked not on a war but on an unprecedented, swift, sure, and massive campaign of law enforcement. As the term law enforcement implies, the proper use of force would be of the essence of this campaign.

Why does this distinction matter? Four reasons:

- War, by definition, is an activity undertaken against a political or social entity, while the terrorist network responsible for this catastrophe, from all reports, is a coalition of individuals, perhaps a large one. Law enforcement, by definition, is an activity undertaken against just such individuals or networks. By clothing our response to the terrorist acts in the rhetoric of war, we make it far more likely that members of groups associated by extrinsic factors with the perpetrators (Arabs, Muslims, Afghans, Pakistanis, etc.) will suffer terrible consequences, from being bombed in Kabul to being discriminated against in Boston. Furthermore, the rhetoric of war, as it falls on the ears of such people (a billion Muslims), makes it all the more likely that they will only see America as their enemy.

- War, by definition, is relatively imprecise. Steps can be taken to limit “collateral damage,” but the method of war, in fact, is to bring pressure to bear against a hostile power structure by inflicting suffering on the society of which it is part. History shows that once wars begin, violence becomes general. As President Bush threatened, no distinctions are made. In law enforcement, by contrast, distinctions remain of the essence. Law enforcement submits to disciplines that are jettisoned in war. Do we really have the right to jettison such disciplines now?

- War, similarly, is less concerned with procedure than with result; or, more plainly, in war the ends justify the means. In law enforcement, the end remains embodied in the means, which is why procedures are so scrupulously observed in criminal justice activity. To respond to a terrorist’s grievous violation of the social order with further violations of that order means the terrorist has won.

- War inevitably generates its own momentum, which has a way of inhumanely overwhelming the humane purposes for which the war is begun in the first place. In the death-ground of combat violence, self-criticism can seem like fatal self-doubt, and so the savage momentum of war is rarely recognized as such until too late. The rule of unintended consequences universally applies in war. Law enforcement, on the other hand, with its system of checks and balances between police and courts, is inevitably self-critical. The moral link between act and consequence is far more likely to be protected.

What does “winning” a war against terrorism mean? How has hatred of America become a source of meaning for vast numbers whose poverty already amounts to a state of war? Must a massive campaign of unleashed violence become America’s new source of meaning, too? The World Trade Center was a symbol of the social, economic, and political hope Americans treasure, a hope embodied above all in law. To win the struggle against terrorism means inspiring that same hope in the hearts of all who do not have it. How we respond to this catastrophe will define our patriotism, shape the century, and memorialize our beloved dead.
Lawrence Wilkerson, top aide and later chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell: We had this confluence of characters—and I use that term very carefully—that included people like Powell, Dick Cheney, Condi Rice, and so forth, which allowed one perception to be “the dream team.” It allowed everybody to believe that this Sarah Palin–like president—because, let’s face it, that’s what he was—was going to be protected by this national-security elite, tested in the cauldrons of fire. What in effect happened was that a very astute, probably the most astute, bureaucratic entrepreneur I’ve ever run into in my life became the vice president of the United States.

He became vice president well before George Bush picked him. And he began to manipulate things from that point on, knowing that he was going to be able to convince this guy to pick him, knowing that he was then going to be able to wade into the vacuums that existed around George Bush—personality vacuum, character vacuum, details vacuum, experience vacuum.

Joschka Fischer, German foreign minister and vice-chancellor: We thought we were going back to the old days of Bush 41. And ironically enough Rumsfeld, but even more Cheney, together with Powell, were seen as indications that the young president, who was not used to the outside world, who didn’t travel very much, who didn’t seem to be very experienced, would be embedded into these Bush 41 guys. Their foreign-policy skills were extremely good and strongly admired. So we were not very concerned. Of course, there was this strange thing with these “neocons,” but every party has its fringes. It was not very alarming.

Richard Clarke, chief White House counterterrorism adviser: We went into a period in June [2001] where the tempo of intelligence about an impending large-scale attack went up a lot ... And we told
Condi that. She didn’t do anything. … By August, I was saying to Condi and to the agencies that the intelligence isn’t coming in at such a rapid rate anymore as it was in the June-July time frame. But that doesn’t mean the attack isn’t going to happen. It just means that they may be in place. …

**September 11, 2001** Terrorists crash two commercial airliners into New York’s World Trade Center, bringing both buildings down with a loss of some 3,000 lives. A third aircraft crashes into the Pentagon, killing 184. A fourth aircraft, its likely destination the U.S. Capitol, is brought down by the passengers in a field in Pennsylvania. It is known quickly that the perpetrators are members of bin Laden’s al-Qaeda organization, based in Afghanistan, but the search for a connection to Saddam Hussein and Iraq begins immediately.

**Richard Clarke:** That night, on 9/11, Rumsfeld came over … and the president finally got back, and we had a meeting. And Rumsfeld said, You know, we’ve got to do Iraq, and everyone looked at him—at least I looked at him and Powell looked at him—like, What the hell are you talking about? And he said—I’ll never forget this—There just aren’t enough targets in Afghanistan. We need to bomb something else to prove that we’re, you know, big and strong and not going to be pushed around by these kind of attacks. And I made the point certainly that night, and I think Powell acknowledged it, that Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11. That didn’t seem to faze Rumsfeld in the least. It shouldn’t have come as a surprise. It really didn’t, because from the first weeks of the administration they were talking about Iraq. I just found it a little disgusting that they were talking about it while the bodies were still burning in the Pentagon and at the World Trade Center.

**September 27, 2001** At O’Hare International Airport, Bush advises Americans on what they can do to respond to the trauma of September 11: “Get on board. Do your business around the country. Fly and enjoy America’s great destination spots. Get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed.”

**Matthew Dowd,** Bush’s pollster and chief strategist for the 2004 presidential campaign: He was given a great, great window of opportunity where everybody wanted to be called to some shared sense of purpose and sacrifice and all that, and Bush never did it. And not for lack of people suggesting various things from bonds to, you know, some sort of national service. Bush decided to say that the best thing is: Everybody go about their life, I’ll handle it.

Karl [Rove] wasn’t receptive to ideas that would’ve called the country to certain things and brought them to a common purpose and a sense of shared sacrifice. Karl came from a perspective of: you defeat people in politics by calling one side bad and one side good.

**December 17, 2001** Kellogg, Brown & Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, where Dick Cheney had been C.E.O., is awarded a 10-year omnibus contract to provide the Pentagon with support services for everything from fighting oil-well fires to building military bases to serving meals. As defense secretary under George H. W. Bush, Cheney had pushed strenuously to outsource a variety of military functions to private contractors—part of a broader effort to transfer government functions of all kinds to the private sector.

**Lawrence Wilkerson,** top aide and later chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell: Cheney brings this accumulation of power and ability to influence the bureaucracy to a fine art. He surpasses Kissinger even. This is all the more ironic because Cheney was the antithesis of this when he was chief of staff of the White House under Gerald Ford and when he was secretary of defense. He was very deferential. He was not trying to insinuate himself. But he turns everything on its head and he becomes the power. And he does it through his network. This is a guy who’s an absolute genius at bureaucracy and an absolute genius at not displaying his genius at bureaucracy. He’s always quiet.

**January 11, 2002** A new detention-and-interrogation center at Guantánamo Bay receives the first of an eventual 550 “unlawful combatants” from the war in Afghanistan and the broader war on terror. Guantánamo is chosen because it is not officially U.S. soil and thus provides a rationale for denying
Michael Brown, director of FEMA, which becomes part of the Department of Homeland Security: Bush’s strength was—he would say to everybody in the room, Tell me what the problem is and I’ll make a decision. The detrimental aspect of that is the president would make a decision and in his mind it was over with. There was no changing course. The blinders are on. You had to work incredibly hard to get back in front of that line of sight to say, We need to take a different tack here.

June 1, 2002 In a graduation speech at West Point, Bush advances a new strategic doctrine of pre-emption, stating that the United States reserves the right to use force to deal with threats before they “fully materialize.” Preparations for war with Iraq are not yet publicly acknowledged, but earlier in the spring, as Condoleezza Rice discusses diplomatic initiatives involving Iraq with several senators, Bush pokes his head into the room and says, “Fuck Saddam. We’re taking him out.”

Bob Graham, Democratic senator from Florida and chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee: I asked George [Tenet, the C.I.A. director], What did the national intelligence estimate [N.I.E.] that we had done on Iraq tell us about what would be the conditions during the period of combat, what would be the conditions post-combat, and what was the basis of our information on the weapons of mass destruction? Tenet said, We’ve never done an N.I.E.

Paul Pillar, national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia at the C.I.A.: The makers of the war had no appetite for and did not request any such assessments [about the aftermath of war]. Anybody who wanted an intelligence-community assessment on any of this stuff would’ve come through me, and I got no requests at all.

As to why this was the case, I would give two general answers. Number one was just extreme hubris and self-confidence. If you truly believe in the power of free economics and free politics, and their attractiveness to all populations of the world, and their ability to sweep away all manner of ills, then you tend not to worry about these things so much.

Jack Goldsmith, legal adviser at the Department of Defense and later head of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel: After 9/11 the administration faced two sharply conflicting imperatives. The first was fear of another attack. This permeated the administration. Everyone felt it. And it led to the doctrine of pre-emption, which has many guises, but basically means that you can’t wait for the usual amounts of information before acting on a threat because it may be too late. They were really scared. They were afraid of what they didn’t know. They were very afraid they didn’t have the tools to meet the threat. And they had this extraordinary sense of responsibility—that they would be responsible for the next attack. They really thought of it as having blood on their hands, and that they’d be forgiven once but not twice.

On the other hand, there was a countervailing imperative, and that was the law, because there had grown up since the 70s—for a lot of good reasons—some extraordinary restrictions on presidential power and presidential war power, many of them embodied in criminal laws, many of them vague or uncertain, never having been applied before, certainly none of them ever applied in this new context. And there was enormous legal uncertainty about how far we could go.

John Bellinger III, legal adviser to the National Security Council and later to the secretary of state: One of the great tragedies for this administration has been the damage caused by its detainee policies—the decision to set up Guantánamo without the involvement of the international community, the issuance of the president’s executive order creating military commissions, aspects of the C.I.A. interrogation program, the conduct of certain renditions [sending detainees to other countries for interrogation], and the decision about the inapplicability of the Geneva Conventions. The most serious error is not any of these decisions individually or even collectively, but the administration’s inability to change course as the magnitude of the problems caused by these decisions became apparent.

detainees protections under American and international law, creating a “legal black hole.”
The other major reason is that, given the difficulty of mustering public support for something as extreme as an offensive war, any serious discussion inside the government about the messy consequences, the things that could go wrong, would complicate even further the job of selling the war.

**March 19, 2003** The Iraq war begins. Two weeks of “shock and awe” bombardment herald the invasion by ground forces. U.S. and British troops make up 90 percent of the “international coalition,” which includes modest support from other countries. The defeat of Iraqi forces is a foregone conclusion, but within days of the occupation Baghdad is beset by looting that coalition forces do nothing to stop. Rumsfeld dismisses the breakdown of civil order with the explanation “Stuff happens.” Kenneth Adelman, a Rumsfeld-appointed member of a Pentagon advisory board, and initially a supporter of the war, later confronts the defense secretary.

Kenneth Adelman, a member of Donald Rumsfeld’s advisory Defense Policy Board: So he says, … you’re very negative. I said, I am negative, Don. You’re absolutely right. I’m not negative about our friendship. But I think your decisions have been abysmal when it really counted. Start out with, you know, when you stood up there and said things—“Stuff happens.” I said, That’s your entry in Bartlett’s. The only thing people will remember about you is “Stuff happens.” I mean, how could you say that? “This is what free people do.” This is not what free people do. This is what barbarians do. And I said, Do you realize what the looting did to us? It legitimized the idea that liberation comes with chaos rather than with freedom and a better life. And it demystified the potency of American forces. Plus, destroying, what, 30 percent of the infrastructure.

I said, You have 140,000 troops there, and they didn’t do jack shit. I said, There was no order to stop the looting. And he says, There was an order. I said, Well, did you give the order? He says, I didn’t give the order, but someone around here gave the order. I said, Who gave the order? So he takes out his yellow pad of paper and he writes down—he says, I’m going to tell you. I’ll get back to you and tell you. And I said, I’d like to know who gave the order, and write down the second question on your yellow pad there. Tell me why 140,000 U.S. troops in Iraq disobeyed the order. Write that down, too.

And so that was not a successful conversation.

**May 1, 2003** Aboard the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, under a banner reading “Mission Accomplished,” Bush proclaims that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended.”

Sir Jeremy Greenstock, British ambassador to the United Nations and later the British special representative in Iraq: The administration of Iraq never recovered. It was a vacuum in security that became irredeemable, at least until the surge of 2007. And to that extent, four years were not only wasted but allowed to take on the most terrible cost because of that lack of planning, lack of resources put in on the ground. And I see that lack of planning as residing in the responsibility of the Pentagon, which had taken charge, the office of the secretary of defense, with the authority of the vice president and the president, obviously, standing over that department of government.

**April 28, 2004** A televised report on 60 Minutes II reveals widespread abuse and humiliation of detainees by U.S. military personnel and private contractors at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, dating back to October 2003 and known to the Defense Department since January.

Bill Graham, Canada’s foreign minister and later defense minister: We were there in Washington for a G-8 meeting, and Colin [Powell] suddenly phoned us all up and said, We’re going to the White House this morning. Now, this is curious, because normally the heads of government don’t give a damn about foreign ministers. We all popped in a bus and went over and were cordially received by Colin and President Bush. The president sat down to explain that, you know, this terrible news had come out about Abu Ghraib and how disgusting it was. The thrust of his presentation was that this was a terrible aberration; it was un-American conduct. This was not American.
Joschka Fischer [the German foreign minister] was one of the people that said, Mr. President, if the atmosphere at the top is such that it encourages or allows people to believe that they can behave this way, this is going to be a consequence. The president’s reaction was: This is un-American. Americans don’t do this. People will realize Americans don’t do this.

The problem for the United States, and indeed for the free world, is that because of this—Guantánamo, and the “torture memos” from the White House, which we were unaware of at that time—people around the world don’t believe that anymore. They say, No, Americans are capable of doing such things and have done them, all the while hypocritically criticizing the human-rights records of others.

**Alberto Mora, navy general counsel:** I will tell you this: I will tell you that General Anthony Taguba, who investigated Abu Ghrain, feels now that the proximate cause of Abu Ghrain were the O.L.C. memoranda that authorized abusive treatment. And I will also tell you that there are general-rank officers who’ve had senior responsibility within the Joint Staff or counterterrorism operations who believe that the number-one and number-two leading causes of U.S. combat deaths in Iraq have been, number one, Abu Ghrain, number two, Guantánamo, because of the effectiveness of these symbols in helping recruit jihadists into the field and combat against American soldiers.

**November 2, 2004 Election Day. Bush defeats Kerry by a margin of three million popular votes and 35 electoral votes. In a press conference two days later Bush says, “I earned capital in the campaign, political capital, and I now intend to spend it. It is my style.”**

**Mark McKinnon, chief campaign media adviser to George W. Bush:** The interesting thing about both Bush campaigns is that they strategically defied conventional wisdom and turned it on its head. In 1999, on the old “right track, wrong track” question, which we ask on every poll—the reason we ask it is because it determines whether or not it’s a change environment or a status-quo environment—in 1999, the “right track” was 65 percent or 70 percent, which under conventional wisdom would indicate that it was a great environment for the Democrats and for Al Gore. The strategic challenge we had was—we were in the position of trying to argue everything’s great, so it’s time for a change, right?

Flash forward to 2004. It’s just the opposite. This time, the “wrong track” is like 65 or 70 percent. We’re in a very difficult war, uncertain economy, and so now we’re in the strategic position of saying, you know, everything’s all screwed up. Stay the course. We’re all f’d up. Stay the course.

**November 15, 2004 Colin Powell announces his resignation as secretary of state. He is succeeded by Condoleezza Rice, who will in time have limited success charting a new direction on issues such as Iran and North Korea.**

**Lawrence Wilkerson, top aide and later chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell:** I’m not sure even to this day that he [Colin Powell] is willing to admit to himself that he was rolled to the extent that he was. And he’s got plenty of defense to marshal because … well, let me tell you, you wouldn’t have wanted to have seen the first Bush administration without Colin Powell. I wrote Powell a memo about six months before we were leaving, and I said, This is your legacy, Mr. Secretary: damage control. He didn’t like it much.

But I knew he understood what I was saying. [He] saved the China relationship, [He] saved the transatlantic relationship and each component thereof—France, Germany. I mean, he held Joschka Fischer’s hand under the table on occasions when Joschka would say something like, You know, your president called my boss a fucking asshole. His task became essentially cleaning the dogshit off the carpet in the Oval Office. And he did that rather well. But it became all-consuming.

**December 26, 2004 An undersea earthquake off the western coast of Sumatra—the second-largest earthquake ever recorded—unleashes a wave of tsunamis throughout the Indian Ocean, killing more than 200,000 people. Bush orders the U.S. Navy to spearhead emergency relief efforts, which are widely praised. There is one clear beneficiary.**
Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore’s former ambassador to the United Nations: The Chinese never said so, because they are the best geopolitical strategists in the world, but it was immediately obvious that with 9/11 the U.S.-China relationship improved. The Chinese were smart. They didn’t put any real obstacles in the way of action in Afghanistan, and even if they strongly opposed the war in Iraq, they did so in a way that minimized the difficulties for the U.S. ... That 2003 resolution was a double win for the Chinese leaders: they obtained valuable political goodwill from the Bush administration, which translated into gains on the Taiwan issues, and they helped to ensure that American troops would remain bogged down in Iraq for a long time.

The Chinese have been brilliant in playing the Bush years. Asia is one part of the world where many will see George Bush in a positive light, although not necessarily for the reasons he may have wished.

August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina, one of the most powerful hurricanes ever recorded, strikes the Gulf Coast. The storm surge breaches the levees in New Orleans; the city is flooded and eventually evacuated amid a complete breakdown of civil order. Bush flies over the city on his way back from a fund-raiser out West. Days later, visiting the destruction as relief efforts falter, the president praises the FEMA director, Michael Brown: “Brownie, you’re doing a heckuva job.” Bush vows to rebuild New Orleans, and Brown, whose performance is widely criticized, is effectively fired; the president’s approval rating sinks to 39 percent. Three years after Katrina the population of New Orleans will have dropped by one-third. The city’s defenses against storms and floods will remain a vulnerable patchwork.

Matthew Dowd, Bush’s pollster and chief strategist for the 2004 presidential campaign: Katrina to me was the tipping point. The president broke his bond with the public. Once that bond was broken, he no longer had the capacity to talk to the American public. State of the Union addresses? It didn’t matter. Legislative initiatives? It didn’t matter. P.R.? It didn’t matter. Travel? It didn’t matter. I knew when Katrina—I was like, man, you know, this is it, man. We’re done.

Michael Brown, director of FEMA, which becomes part of the Department of Homeland Security: There were two things that went wrong with Katrina. One is personal on my part. I failed after having briefed the president about how bad things were in New Orleans and telling him that I needed the Cabinet to stand up and pay attention. When that didn’t happen, I should’ve leveled with the American public instead of sticking to those typical political talking points about—how we’re working as a team and we’re doing everything we can. I should’ve said this thing is just not working. Probably would’ve been fired anyway, but at least it would’ve caused the federal government to stand up and get off their butts.

The second thing that happened was this. [Homeland Security Secretary Michael] Chertoff inserted himself into the response, and suddenly I had this massive bureaucracy on top of me. I should have basically told Chertoff to kiss off, that I would continue to deal directly with the president. But he’s the new kid on the block and the White House deferred to him, and it gave me no choice but to work through him, which then scoped things down and caused it to just completely implode on itself.

December 30, 2005 Bush signs into law the Detainee Treatment Act. The legislation was passed by Congress in order to prohibit the inhumane treatment of prisoners, but Bush appends a “signing statement” laying out his own interpretation and indicating that he is not otherwise bound by the law in any meaningful way. This is one of more than 800 instances in which Bush deploys signing statements to finesse congressional intent.

Jack Goldsmith, legal adviser at the Department of Defense and later head of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel: Every president in war time and in crisis—Lincoln, Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, just to name three—exercised extraordinarily broad powers. They pushed the law and stretched the law and bent the law, and many people think they broke the law. And we’ve largely forgiven them for doing so because we think that they acted prudently in crisis. So Lincoln—he did all sorts of things after Fort Sumter. He spent unappropriated moneys. He suspended the writ of habeas corpus.
Now, there’s a way of looking at the Cheney-Addington position on executive power which is not unlike some of the most extreme assertions of Lincoln and Roosevelt. But there are important differences. One is that both Lincoln and Roosevelt coupled this sense of a powerful executive in times of crisis with a powerful sense of a need to legitimate and justify the power through education, through legislation, through getting Congress on board, through paying attention to what one might call the “soft” values of constitutionalism. That was an attitude that Addington and I suppose Cheney just did not have. The second difference, and what made their assertion of executive power extraordinary, is: it was almost as if they were interested in expanding executive power for its own sake.

January 10, 2007 Bush announces a surge in American troop strength in Iraq, from 130,000 to more than 150,000. The aim is to suppress the level of violence and overt sectarian strife and thus to provide a breathing spell in which the Iraqi government can make progress toward a set of stated political benchmarks. By fall the level of violence has indeed subsided—observers disagree on why—though many of the political benchmarks remain unmet.

Anthony Cordesman, national-security analyst and former official at the Defense and State Departments: We can all argue over the semantics of the word “surge,” and it is fair to say that some goals were not met. We didn’t come close to providing additional civilian-aid workers that were called for in the original plan. And often it took much longer to achieve the effects than people had planned. But the fact was that this was a broad political, military, and economic strategy, which was executed on many different levels. And credit has to go to General Petraeus, General Odierno, and Ambassador Crocker for taking what often were ideas, very loosely defined, and policies which were very broadly stated, and transforming them into a remarkably effective real-world effort.

November 4, 2008 Barack Obama is elected president in an electoral-college landslide. The Republicans lose at least seven seats in the Senate and a score in the House, dashing Karl Rove’s hopes of a permanent Republican majority. As the administration prepares to leave office, it promulgates a raft of “midnight” orders to weaken environmental, health-care, and product-safety regulations. The unemployment rate is nearly 7 percent and rising. Income inequality is at the highest level since the 1920s. As of a week before the election, the stock market had lost a third of its value over a period of six months.

Dan Bartlett, White House communications director and later counselor to the president: At the end of the day I think the divisiveness of this presidency will fundamentally come down to one issue: Iraq. And Iraq only because, in my opinion, there weren’t weapons of mass destruction. I think the public’s tolerance for the difficulties we face would’ve been far different had it felt like the original threat had been proved true. That’s the fulcrum. Fundamentally, when the president gets to an approval rating of 27 percent, it’s this issue.

Lawrence Wilkerson, top aide and later chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell: As my boss [Colin Powell] once said, Bush had a lot of .45-caliber instincts, cowboy instincts. Cheney knew exactly how to polish him and rub him. He knew exactly when to give him a memo or when to do this or when to do that and exactly the word choice to use to get him really excited.

Bob Graham, Democratic senator from Florida and chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee: One of our difficulties now is getting the rest of the world to accept our assessment of the seriousness of an issue, because they say, You screwed it up so badly with Iraq, why would we believe that you’re any better today? And it’s a damn hard question to answer. Meanwhile, the Taliban and al-Qaeda have relocated, have strengthened, have become a more nimble and a much more international organization. The threat is greater today than it was on September the 11th.

David Kuo, deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives: It’s kind of like the Tower of Babel. At a certain point in time, God smites hubris. You knew that right around the time people started saying there’s going to be a permanent Republican majority—that God kinda goes, No, I really don’t think so.
A New Master Narrative?
Reflections on Contemporary Anti-Americanism

Tony Judt

"Anti-Americanism" is the master narrative of the age. Until quite recently, political argument—first in the West, latterly everywhere—rested firmly, and, for most people, quite comfortably, upon the twin pillars of "progress" and "reaction." The idea of progress encapsulated both the moral confidence of the Enlightenment and the various and ultimately conflicting political projects to which it gave rise: liberalism, democracy, socialism, and, in the twentieth century, communism. Each of these heirs to the Enlightenment project had a confident story to tell of its own origins, its desirability, its necessity, and ultimately its grounds for confidence in impending victory. Each, in short, was not merely a narrative of human progress but a master narrative, aspiring to contain within itself and, where necessary, explain away all other accounts of modernity.

Reaction—beginning, quite literally, with the reaction of certain early-nineteenth-century thinkers to the Revolution in France—was thus in this sense a counter-narrative: a denial, sometimes epistemological, often ethical, always political, of the projects and programs born of the optimistic eighteenth century. The political forms of reactionary politics were almost as protean and diverse as those of its nemesis: Catholic, paternalist, nostalgic, pastoral, pessimistic, authoritarian, and, ultimately, Fascist. But reactionary accounts of the human condition shared one common evaluative conclusion with progressivism: they tended, in every case, to the view that the modern world was, or would soon be, divided into two opposed and irreconcilable camps. The end of the Cold War appeared to close this centuries-long cycle of
Manichean political and intellectual opposition. Not only had capitalism and communism, the West and the East, democracy and authoritarianism, apparently become reconciled—largely through the unambiguous victory of the former in each case—but the very intellectual premises on which the distinctions rested, broadly associated with Marxism and its various heirs, seemed to have crumbled. If “capitalism” was no longer a passing and regrettable stage on the historical high road from backwardness to socialism (a core article of radical faith since the 1840s), but rather the default condition of well-regulated societies, as free-market liberals had long asserted and even social democrats now conceded, then even the distinction between “Left” and “Right” was unclear. “History,” as some pundits unwisely announced, had come to an “End.”

A mere 15 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is clear that such pronouncements were a little premature. The wretched of the earth and their better-heeled sympathizers and spokesmen in the rich world have once again found common cause. Capitalism, to be sure, is no longer the avowed target of opprobrium, though it is worth noting that it is much less universally admired or desired than many fondly suppose—or than was the case two decades ago. And outside of unconstructed Trotskyist groupuscules, the prospects for a radical transition from present discontents to future idylls—the dream of revolution and socialism—are not widely discussed. And yet, there is, once again, an international rhetoric of rejection that binds politics, economics, and ethics into a common story about how the world works and why it doesn’t. And those who invoke this language, even if they have yet to find a common sense of purpose or even a common strategy, have chanced upon something much more important, at least in the medium term—a common target. That target is the United States of America.

It is tempting to dismiss out of hand the new politics of anti-Americanism. For what, after all, can this “America”—a huge and differentiated society, as ethnically and culturally diverse as any other and whose constituent peoples have diasporic ties to most of the rest of the world—stand for? Capitalism? Sweden, Spain, New Zealand, Nigeria, and Brazil, along with dozens of others, are all “capitalist” countries. Imperialism? The United States of America is without doubt the only empire of our times. But “anti-imperialism,” albeit a well-established radical politics in its own right, is hardly a self-sufficient account of the world—a “master” narrative. It is beholden to other narratives—theories of race and anti-racism, socialist explanations for capitalism’s voracious search for foreign markets, and so on.

If anti-Americanism were indeed just the latest anti-imperialism, appropriately adjusted to the latest empire itself—in the manner, say, of the 1960s—it would hardly be so interesting, or so appealing to so many. America today is the object of suspicion and fear—mixed as ever with an element of fascination and seduction—because its global reach goes well beyond political or economic power, though it rests on these. Stretched to a planetary scale, the American way of modernity—globalization, to acknowledge the shorthand account if it—threatens local interests and identities in ways that no past empire could ever have imagined.

A world apparently busy remaking itself in what Americans all too readily claim is their own image stands challenged in many intersecting spheres: the decline of indigenous language; the dilution of high culture; the internationalization of popular culture; the uncontained risks to environmental health; the virtual disappearance of economic autonomy; the etiolation of public policy, and the apparent diminution of national sovereignty. Local commentators can hardly hope any longer to explain or address such concerns within their own borders. They are obliged to look beyond; and what they see there has become material in many people’s eyes for a new, all-embracing explanation of our current woes. If America is the fons et origo malorum, the source and origin of all miseries, then it is America—whatever that is—that is the problem. If you want to understand how America appears to the world today, consider the sport-utility vehicle (SUV). Oversized and overweight, the SUV disdains negotiated agreements to restrict atmospheric pollution. It consumes inordinate quantities of scarce resources to furnish its privileged inhabitants with supererogatory services. It exposes outsiders to a deadly risk in order to provide for the illusory security of its occupants. In a crowded world, the SUV appears as a dangerous anachronism. Like U.S. foreign policy, the SUV comes packaged in sonorous mission statements; but underneath, it is just an oversized pickup truck with too much power.

In short, America is everywhere. Americans—just 5 percent of the world’s population—generate 30 percent of the World’s Gross Product, consume nearly 30 percent of global oil production, and are responsible for almost half a share of the world’s output of greenhouse gases. Our world is divided in many ways: rich/poor, North/South, Western/non-Western. But more and more, the division that counts is the one separating America from everyone else.

The United States, by virtue of its unique standing, is exposed to the world’s critical gaze in everything it does or fails to do. Some of the antipathy the United States arouses is a function of what it is: long before
America rose to global dominion, foreign visitors were criticizing its brash self-assurance, the narcissistic confidence of Americans in the superiority of American values and practices, and their rootless instativeness to history and tradition—their own and other people’s. The charge sheet has grown since the United States took the world stage, but it has not changed much. This “cultural” anti-Americanism is shared by Europeans, Latin Americans, and Asians, secular and religious alike. It is not about antipathy to the West, or capitalism, or freedom, or the Enlightenment, or any other abstraction exemplified by the United States. It is about America.

To foreign critics, these contradictions in American behavior suggest hypocrisy—perhaps, the most familiar of the accusations leveled at the United States. They are all the more galling because, hypocritical or not, America is indispensable. Without American participation, most international agreements are dead letters. American leadership seems to be required even in cases—such as Bosnia between 1992 and 1995—where the British and their fellow Europeans had the means to resolve the crisis unaided. The United States is cruelly unsuited to play the world’s policeman—Washington’s attention span is famously short, even in chronically troubled regions like Kashmir, the Balkans, the Middle East, or Korea—but it seems to have no choice. Meanwhile, everyone else, but the Europeans especially, resent the United States when it fails to lead, but also when it leads too assertively.

The position of the European Union is, on the face of it, a paradox. Fifty-five percent of the world’s development aid and two thirds of all grants-in-aid to the poor and vulnerable nations of the globe come from the European Union. As a share of GNP, U.S. foreign aid is barely one third the European average. If you combine European spending on defense, foreign aid, intelligence gathering, and policing—all of them vital to any sustained war against international crime—it easily matches the current American defense budget. “Europe” is not inherently weak.

But decades of American nuclear reassurance induced unprecedented military dystrophy. The Franco-German condominium of domination was sooner or later bound to provoke a backlash among Europe’s smaller nations. The inability of the European Union to build a consensus on foreign policy, much less a force with which to implement it, has handed Washington a monopoly in the definition and resolution of international crises. No one should be surprised if America’s present leaders have chosen to exercise it. What began some years ago as American frustration at the Europeans’ failure to organize and spend in their own defense has now become a source of satisfaction for U.S. hawks. The Europeans don’t agree with us? So what! We don’t need them, and anyway what can they do? They’re feeling hurt and resentful in Brussels, or Paris, or Berlin? Well, they’ve only themselves to blame. Remember Bosnia.

Moreover, in the shadow of the recent invasion of Iraq, the present and future member states of Europe fell to internecine squabbling, unable to agree on a common response to America’s martial activism. Some, like Britain, Spain, and Italy, chose to line up with their long-standing American protector. Others, like France, Germany, and Belgium, asserted a “European” difference that certainly reflects public opinion across the continent, but may lead them into a strategic cul-de-sac. The East Europeans buckled under unprecedented American diplomatic pressure and bribery, for those in Brussels, Paris, and elsewhere who didn’t want them in the Union anyway, that will not be forgotten soon. If this squabbling, uncoordinated “Union” is indeed the only geostrategic challenger America now faces, Washington ought to be able to rest easy. America, it would seem, is not just the sole surviving superpower, but the only sure source of international initiative and well being.

And yet, in little more than two years since 9/11, President George W. Bush and his advisers managed to make America seem to the overwhelming majority of humankind as the greatest threat to global stability. By staking a monopoly claim on Western values and their defense, the United States has prompted other Westerners to reflect on what divides them from America. By enthusiastically asserting its right to reconfigure the Muslim world, Washington has reminded Europeans, in particular, of the growing Muslim presence in their own cultures and its political implications. In short, the United States has given a lot of people occasion to rethink their relationship with it.

Resented for what it is, America thus stokes further antipathy by what it does. Here, things have indeed changed for the worse. The United States is often a delinquent international citizen: it is reluctant to join international initiatives or agreements, whether on climate warming, biological warfare, criminal justice, or women’s rights; it is one of only two states (the other being Somalia) that have failed to ratify the 1989 Convention on Children’s Rights. The present U.S. administration has “unsigned” the Rome Treaty establishing an International Criminal Court and has declared itself no longer bound by the Vienna Convention on Law of Treaties, which sets out the obligations of states to abide by treaties they have yet to ratify. The American attitude toward the United Nations and its agencies is cool, to say the least.
Washington’s stance toward the International Criminal Court, in particular, is especially embarrassing. It makes a mockery of the U.S. insistence on international pursuit and prosecution of terrorists and other political criminals; and it provides a cover for these countries and politicians who have real cause to fear the new Court. All of Washington’s friends and allies on the UN Security Council voted against the United States when this matter was discussed in 2002; meanwhile, Washington’s opposition to the International Criminal Court is shared by an unholy alliance of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Indonesia, Israel, and Egypt.

Indeed, the United States has more than once found itself in questionable company. When the Bush Administration vetoed a protocol designed to put teeth into the 30-year-old Biological Weapons Convention and effectively destroyed a generation of efforts to halt the spread of these deadly arms, only a handful of the 145 signatories to the Convention took Washington’s side: among these were China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Cuba, and Iran. All too often, Washington’s position now pits it against the Western Europeans, Canadians, Australians, and a majority of Latin American states, while American “unilateralism” is supported (for their own reasons) by an unseemly rogues’ gallery of dictators and regional troublemakers. The impact of this on America’s overseas image and influence is incalculable. Even the mere appearance of taking the world seriously would enhance American influence immeasurably—from European intellectuals to Islamic fundamentalists, anti-Americanism feeds voraciously off the claim that the United States is callously indifferent to the views and needs of others.

America’s apparent “indifference” has distinctive roots. Just as modern American leaders typically believe that in domestic public life, citizens are best left to their own devices, with limited government intervention, so they project this view onto international affairs as well. Seen from Washington, the world is a series of discrete challenges or threats, calibrated according to their implications for America. Since the United States is a global power, almost anything that happens in the world is of concern to it; but the American instinct is to address and resolve any given problem in isolation. Of course, this reflects, in part, a refreshingly American confidence that problems may indeed be resolved—at which point, the United States can return home. This emphasis upon an “exit strategy,” upon being in the world but not quite of it, always at liberty to retire from the fray, has its domestic analogue in modern American life. Like many of its citizens, especially since 9/11, the United States feels most comfortable when retreating to its “gated community.”

This long-standing American sense of being both engaged in the world and somehow apart from it has been further complicated by the confrontational rhetoric of the newest generation of advisers and rulers in Washington. The foreign strategy of the United States, in the words of two influential neo-conservative writers, must be “unapologetic, idealistic, assertive and well funded. America must not only be the world’s policeman or its sheriff, it must be its beacon and guide.” By confidently equating the United States’ own interests with those of every right-thinking person on the planet, such a strategy is doomed to arouse the very antagonism and enmity that provoke American overseas intervention in the first place. In American governing circles today, it is widely held that America can do as it wishes without listening to others, and that in so doing, it will unerringly echo the true interests and unspoken desires of friends and foes alike.

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The anti-Americanism now preoccupying commentators should thus come as no surprise. But, in America especially, it is much misunderstood. Thus, in the prelude to the Iraq war, it was widely asserted in Washington that “pro-American” Europeans could be conveniently distinguished from their “anti-American” neighbors. But this is not the case. In a poll by the Pew Research Center, Europeans were asked whether they thought “the world would be more dangerous if another country matched America militarily.” The “Old European” French and Germans—like the British—tended to agree. The “New European” Czechs and Poles were less worried at the prospect. The same poll asked respondents whether they thought that “when differences occur with America, it is because of [my country’s] different values” (a key indicator of cultural anti-Americanism): only 33 percent of French respondents and 37 percent of Germans answered “yes.” But the figures for Britain were 41 percent, for Italy 44 percent, and for the Czech Republic 62 percent (almost as high as the 66 percent of Indonesians who feel the same way).

In Britain, the Daily Mirror, a mass-market tabloid daily that had hitherto supported Tony Blair’s New Labour Party, ran a full-page front cover on January 6, 2003, mocking Blair’s position; in case you haven’t noticed, it informed him, Bush’s drive to war with Iraq is about oil for America. Half the British electorate opposed war with Saddam Hussein under any circumstances. In the Czech Republic, just 13 percent of the population endorsed an American attack on Iraq without a UN mandate; the figure in Spain was identical.
In traditionally pro-American Poland, there was even less enthusiasm: just 4 percent of Poles would back a unilateralist war.

In Spain, voters from José María Aznar’s own Popular Party overwhelmingly rejected his support for President Bush; his allies in Catalonia joined Spain’s opposition parties in condemning “an unprovoked unilateral attack” by the United States on Iraq; and most Spaniards remained adamantly opposed to a war with Iraq even with a second UN resolution. If America is to depend on what Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called its “New European friends,” then, it had better lower its expectations. Among the pro-U.S. signatories singled out for praise by Mr. Rumsfeld, Denmark spends just 1.6 percent of its GNP on defense, Italy 1.5 percent, Spain a mere 1.4 percent—less than half the defense commitment of Old Europe.

As for East Europeans: yes, they like America and will do its bidding if they can. The United States will always be able to bully a vulnerable country like Romania into backing it against the International Criminal Court. But in the words of one Central European foreign minister opposed to U.S. intervention at the time of the 1999 Kosovo action: “We didn’t join NATO to fight wars.” In a recent survey, 69 percent of Poles (and 63 percent of Italians) oppose any increased expenditure on defense to enhance Europe’s standing as a world power. It is one thing to like America, quite another to make sacrifices on her behalf.

And what of Germany? American commentators were so offended at Germany’s willingness to “appease” Saddam, so infuriated by Chancellor Schröder’s lack of bellicose fervor and his “ingratitude” toward America that few have stopped to ask why so many Germans share Günter Grass’s view that “the President of the United States embodies the danger that faces us all.” The sources of German ambivalence toward American policy are distinctive. Germany today is different. It has a distinctively pacifist culture (quite unlike, say, France). If there is to be war, many Germans feel, let it be ohne mich (without me). If America stands for “war,” however justified, many Germans will be anti-American on that ground alone.

However, the German stance is not representative. Pace Robert Kagan, the world is not divided into a pacificist, post-Kantian Europe and a courageous, martial America. It was only very recently that European infantrymen were dying on peacekeeping missions in Asia, Africa, and Europe while American generals foreswore foreign ground wars lest U.S. soldiers get killed. If Americans are from Mars, as Kagan puts it, they rediscovered the martial virtues only recently. Indeed, when asked in 2002 whether they approved of the use of military power to protect their interests, British, French, Italian, and Polish respondents all showed more support for military action than did American respondents. Only the Germans were less enthusiastic. Europeans may not like wars—in which respect they are indeed at odds with the current U.S. administration, though in tune with many Americans—but they are not pacifists, either. contemporary suspicion of America—its leaders, its motives, its way of life—is part of an old story everywhere. America has been an object of foreign suspicion for even longer than it has been a beacon and haven for the world’s poor and downtrodden. Eighteenth-century commentators—on the basis of very little direct observation—believed America’s flora and fauna to be stunted, and of limited interest or use. The country could never be civilized, they insisted, and much the same was true of its unsophisticated new citizens. From the perspective of a cosmopolitan European conservative like Joseph de Maistre, writing in the early years of the nineteenth century, the United States was a regrettable aberration—and too crude to endure for long. Charles Dickens, like Alexis de Tocqueville, was struck by the conformism of American public life. Stendhal commented upon the country’s “egoism”; Baudelaire sniffly compared it to Belgium (!) in its bourgeois mediocrity; everyone remarked upon the jejune patriotic pomp of the United States back in the nineteenth century, just as they do today. But in the course of the twentieth century, European commentary shifted perceptibly from the dismissive to the resentful. By the 1930s, the United States’ economic power was giving a threatening twist to its crude immaturity. For a new generation of antidemocratic critics, the destabilizing symptoms of modern life—mass production, mass society, and mass politics—could all be traced to America.

Like anti-Semitism, to which it was often linked, anti-Americanism was a convenient shorthand for expressing cultural insecurity. In the words of the Frenchman Robert Aron, writing in 1935, Henry Ford, F.W. Taylor (the prophet of work rhythms and manufacturing efficiency), and Adolf Hitler were, like it or not, the “guides of our age.” America was “industrialism.” It threatened the survival of individuality, quality, and national specificity. “America is multiplying its territory, where the values of the West risk finding their grave,” wrote Emmanuel Berl in 1929. Europeans owed it to their heritage to resist their own Americanization at every turn, urged Georges Duhamel in...
1930: “We Westerners must each firmly denounce whatever is American in his house, his clothes, his soul.”

World War II did not alleviate this irritation. Left-wing anti-Americanism in the early-Cold War years echoed to the letter the sentiments of right-wing anti-Americanism 20 years earlier. When Simone de Beauvoir charged that America was “becoming Fascist,” Jean-Paul Sartre claimed that McCarthyite America “had gone mad,” and Le Monde declared that “Coca-Cola is the Danzig of European Culture,” they were denouncing the same American “enemy” that had so alarmed their political opponents a generation before. American behavior at home and abroad fed this prejudice but did not create it. In their anger at the United States, European intellectuals had, for many decades, been expressing their anxieties about changes closer to home.8

The examples I have quoted are from France, but English ambivalence toward America is also an old story. The present author grew up in post-war Britain where the United States was envied by many, dismissed by some (often the same people)—and terra incognita to almost everyone. The German generation of the 1960s blamed America above all for the crass consumerism and political amnesia of their parents’ post-war Federal Republic; and even in Donald Rumsfeld’s new Europe—the Czech republic, for example, or Hungary—the United States, representing “Western” technology and progress, is increasingly held responsible on all sides of the political spectrum for the ethical vacuum and cultural impoverishment that global capitalism brings in its train.9 Nevertheless, anti-Americanism in Europe, at least, has always had a distinctively French tinge. As some recent publications suggest, it is in Paris that European ambivalence about America takes a most acute polemical form.

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In his recent history of French anti-Americanism, a learned and witty “genealogy” of the “semiotic bloc” of French anti-American writings, Philippe Roger demonstrates not only that the core of French anti-Americanism is very old indeed, but also that it was always fanciful, and loosely, if at all, attached to American reality. Anti-Americanism is a récit, a tale (or fable), with certain recurring themes, fears, and hopes. Starting out as an aesthetic distaste for the New World, French anti-Americanism has since moved through the cultural to the political; but the sedimentary evidence of earlier versions is never quite lost to sight.10

Roger’s book is strongest on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His coverage of the twentieth century stops with the generation of Sartre—the moment, as he reminds us, when it became conventional for French anti-American texts to begin by denouncing that they were. That seems reasonable—there are a number of satisfactory accounts of the anti-Americanism of our own times and Roger is interested in tracing origins, not outcomes.11 And by ending short of the present, he can permit himself a sardonic, upbeat conclusion: “What if anti-Americanism today were no more than a mental slavery that the French impose on themselves, a masochist lethargy, a humdrum resentment, a passionless Pavlovian reaction? That would offer grounds for hope. There are few vices, even intellectual ones, that can long withstand the boredom they elicit.” Unfortunately, there is a fresh twist in the story. Anti-Americanism today is fueled by a new consideration. Most Europeans and other foreigners today are untroubled by American products, many of which are, in any case, manufactured and marketed overseas. Most of them don’t despise America, and they certainly don’t hate Americans. What upsets them, as noted above, is the U.S. foreign policy; and they don’t trust America’s current president. This is new. Even during the Cold War, many of America’s political foes actually quite liked and trusted its leaders. Today, even America’s friends don’t like President Bush: in part for the policy he pursues, in part for the manner in which he pursues it.

This is the background to a recent burst of anti-American publications; in Germany, in England, but above all in Paris. The most bizarre of these was a book by one Thierry Meyssan, purporting to show that the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon never happened. No airliner ever crashed into the building, he writes: the whole thing is a hoax perpetrated by the American defense establishment to advance its own interests. Meyssan’s approach echoes that of Holocaust deniers. He begins by assuming the nonexistence of a well-accredit event, and then reminds us that no amount of evidence—especially from firsthand witnesses—can prove the contrary. The method is well summarized in his dismissal of the substantial body of eyewitness testimony running counter to his claim: “Far from warranting their evidence, the quality of these witnesses just shows how far the US Army will go to distort the truth” (Loin de créditer leurs dépositions, la qualité de ces témoins ne fait que souligner l’importance des moyens déployés par l’armée des États-Unis pour travestir la vérité).12

The most depressing thing about Meyssan’s book is that it was a best seller. There is an audience in France for the farther reaches of paranoid suspicion of America, and 9/11 seems to have aroused it.
More typical, though, is the shopping list of complaints in books with titles like Pourquoi le monde déteste-t-il l’Amérique?, Le Livre noir des États-Unis, and Dangereuse Amérique. The first two are by British and Canadian authors, respectively, though they have sold best in their French editions; the third is coauthored by a prominent French Green politician and former presidential candidate.13

Characteristically presented with real or feigned regret (“We are not anti-American, but . . .”), these works are an inventory of commonly cited American shortcomings. The United States is a selfish, individualistic society devoted to commerce, profit, and the despoliation of the planet. It is as uncaring of its own poor and sick as it is indifferent to the rest of humankind. The United States rides roughshod over international laws and treaties and threatens the moral, environmental, and physical future of humanity. It is inconsistent and hypocritical in its foreign dealings and wields unparalleled military clout. It is, in short, a bull in the global china shop, wreaking havoc. Much of this is recycled from earlier criticisms of America. Peter Scowen’s complaints (his chapter headings include “Les atrocités de Hiroshima et de Nagasaki” and “Une culture vide”), like those of Sardar and Davies (“American Hamburger and Other Viruses”) or Mamère and Farbiaz (“L’américanisation du monde,” “Une croisade qui sent le pétrole” [A crusade smelling of oil]), blend traditional themes with new accusations. They are a mixture of conservative cultural distaste (America is ugly, rootless, and crass); anti-globalization rhetoric (America is polluting the world); and neo-Marxist reductionism (America is run by and for the oil companies). Some of the criticisms of American policy and practice are well founded; others are drivel. In their catalogue of claims against America, Sardar and Davies blame the United States for the Cold War imposed on a reluctant Western Europe: “Both France and Italy had major Communist Parties—and still do [sic]—but with their own very specific histories that owed little to Russia.” “International Communism,” in other words, was an American invention. This revisionist myth died many years ago. Its posthumous revival suggests that an older, political anti-Americanism is gaining new traction from the Bush administration’s foreign ambitions. Once a rogue state, always a rogue state.14

According to Emmanuel Todd, however, there is no need to worry. In his recent book, Après l’empire (also a best seller), he argues that the sun is setting on imperial America. We are entering a post-American age. America will continue to jeopardize international stability. But Europeans (and Asians) can take some comfort from the knowledge that the future is theirs. American military power is real, but redundant; meanwhile, its tottering economy is vulnerably dependent upon the rest of the world, and its social model holds no appeal. Between 1950 and 1990, the United States was a benevolent and necessary presence in the world, but not anymore. The challenge today is to manage America’s growing irrelevance.15

Todd is not at all a conventional “anti-American” and some of what he has to say is of interest—though English readers seeking to understand the case for American decline would do better to read Charles Kupchan.16 Todd is right to say that asymmetric globalization—in which the United States consumes what others produce, and economic inequalities grow apace—is bringing about a world unsympathetic to American ambition. Post-communist Russia, post-Saddam Iraq, and other modernizing societies may adopt capitalism (“the only reasonable economic organization”) and even become democratic, but they won’t mimic American “hyper-individualism” and they will share European preferences on many things. The United States, in Todd’s view, will cling desperately to the vestiges of its ambition and power; to maintain its waning influence, it will seek to sustain “a certain level of international tension, a condition of limited but endemic war.” This process has already begun, and 9/11 was its trigger.

The problem with Emmanuel Todd, and it will be immediately familiar to anyone who has read any of his previous books, is less his conclusions than his reasoning. There is something of the Ancient Mariner about this writer. He is an anthropological demographer by training, has a demographic tale to tell, and he recounts it in book after book, gripping the reader relentlessly as though to say “Don’t you get it? It’s all about fertility!” In 1976, he published La Chute finale: Essai sur la décomposition de la sphère soviétique, in which he prophesied the end of the USSR: “A slight increase in Russian infant mortality between 1970 and 1974 made me understand the rotting away of the Soviet Union back in 1976 and allowed me to predict the system’s collapse.” According to his account, the decline in the Soviet birthrate revealed to him “the likely emergence of normal Russians, perfectly capable of overthrowing communism.”

Emmanuel Todd was not the only person back in the 1970s predicting an unhealthy future for communism. Nevertheless, the link he claims to have uncovered between fertility and regime collapse has gone to his head. In his new book, world history is reduced to a series of unidirectional, mono-causal correlations linking birthrates, literacy rates, timeless family structures, and global politics. The Yugoslav
wars were the result of “fertility gaps” between Slavs and Muslims. The American Civil War can be traced to the low birthrates of the Anglo-Saxon settler class. And if “individualistic” America faces grim prospects today, this is because the “family structures” of the rest of the world favor very different political systems.

In Emmanuel Todd’s parallel universe, politics—like economic behavior—is inscribed in a society’s “genetic code.” The egalitarian family systems of Central Asia reveal an “anthropology of community” that made communism more acceptable there (elsewhere he has attributed regional variations in French, Italian, and Finnish voting patterns to similar differences in family life17). Today, the “universalist Russian temperament” based on the extended Russian family offers a nonindividualistic socioeconomic model that may be the democracy of the future. “A priori, there is no reason not to imagine a liberal and democratic Russia protecting the planet against American efforts to shore up their global imperial posture.”

Todd goes further. He absurdly exaggerates America’s current woes, real as they are. Extrapolating from the collapse of Enron (but what of Parmalat?), he concludes that all American economic data are as unreliable as that of the Soviets: the truly parlous state of the U.S. economy has been kept hidden; and he offers his own variant on the “clash of civilizations.” The coming conflict between Islam and the United States brings into opposition the “effectively feminist,” women-based civilization of America and the masculinized ethic of Central Asian and Arab warrior societies. Here, too, America will be isolated, for Europeans will feel just as threatened by the United States as their Arab neighbors do. Once again, it all comes down to family life, with a distinctive modern twist: “The status of the American woman, threatening and castrating [castratrice et menaçante], [is] as disturbing for European men as the all-powerful Arab male is for European women.”

The Atlantic gap begins in the bedroom . . .

To leave Emmanuel Todd for Jean-François Revel is to abandon the mad scientist for the self-confident patrician. Revel is an august immortal of the Académie Française. He is the author of many books (31 to date), as the reader of his latest essay is firmly reminded.18 Revel’s style suggests a man unfamiliar with self-doubt and unused to contradiction. He tends toward sweeping, unsupported generalizations—by his account, most of Europe’s political and cultural elite “never understood anything about communism”—and his version of French anti-Americanism, at times, approaches caricature. This is a pity, because some of what he writes makes good sense.

Thus, Revel is right to draw attention to the contradiction at the heart of much French criticism of America. If the United States is such a social disaster, a cultural pygmy, a political innocent, and an economic meltdown waiting to happen, why worry? Why devote so much resentful attention to it? Alternatively, if it is as powerful and successful as many fear, might it not be doing something right? As a Frenchman, Revel is well placed to remind his fellow citizens that France, too, has social problems—the much-vaunted French education system neither assimilates cultural and religious minorities nor does it support and nourish cultural difference. France, too, has slums, violence, and delinquency.

And Jean-Marie Le Pen’s score in the presidential elections of 2002 is a standing rebuke to all of France’s political class for its failure to address the problems of immigration and race. Revel makes legitimate fun of France’s cultural administrators, who can vandalize their own national heritage at least as recklessly as the barbaric Americans. No American booster could ever match Culture Minister Jack Lang’s 1984 “Projet Culturel Extérieur de la France,” in which France’s cultural ambitions are described by Lang himself as “probably unequalled in any other country.” And what does it say about the sophistication of the French press and television who devoted so much credulous space to the embellishments of M. Meyssan?

One could go on. Mocking the French for their pretensions (and their memory holes) is almost as easy as picking apart the hypocrisies of the U.S. foreign policy. And I agree with Revel that today’s antiglobalization activists came as a “divine surprise” for the European left, a heaven-sent cause at a post-ideological moment when Europe’s radicals were adrift. But Revel’s astute observations of what is wrong in France are devalued by his inability to find anything wrong with America. His entire book is a paean of blinkered praise for a country that, regrettably, does not exist. Like the anti-Americans he disdains, he has conjured up his American subject out of thin air.

In Revel’s America, the melting pot works “fort bien” and there is no mention of ghettos. According to him, Europeans misread and exaggerate U.S. crime statistics, whereas, in reality, crime in America is not a problem. Health coverage in America works well: most Americans are insured at work, the rest benefit from publicly funded Medicare and Medicaid. Anyway, the system’s shortcomings are no worse than those of France’s own provisions for health care. The American poor have the same per capita income as the average citizen of Portugal; so, they can’t be called poor (Revel has apparently never heard of
cost-of-living indices). There is no “underclass.” Meanwhile, the United States has had social democracy longer than Europe, and American television and news coverage is much better than you think.

As for American foreign policy: in Revel-land, the United States has stayed fully engaged in the Israel–Palestine conflict, is resolutely non-partisan, and its policy has been a success. The American missile defense program worries M. Revel a lot less than it does some American generals. Unlike 50 percent of the U.S. electorate, Académicien Revel saw nothing amiss in the conduct of the 2000 presidential election. As for evidence of growing American anti-French sentiment, stuff and nonsense: _pour ma part, je ne l’ai jamais constaté_ (“as for me, I’ve never seen it”). In short, whatever French critics and others say about the United States, Jean-François Revel maintains the opposite. Voltaire could not have done a better job satirizing traditional French prejudices. M. Revel is Pangloss in Wonderland.

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Somewhere between Emmanuel Todd and Jean-François Revel, there is emerging an interesting European perspective on George Bush’s America; for anti-Americanism, in Europe at least, draws on a genuine Atlantic gap. The two sides of the ocean really are different today, in many ways. To begin with, there is religion. America is a credulous and religious society: since the mid-1950s, Europeans have abandoned their churches in droves; but in the United States, there has been virtually no decline in churchgoing and synagogue attendance.

In 1998, a Harris poll found that 66 percent even of non-Christian Americans believed in miracles and 47 percent of them accredited the Virgin Birth; the figures for all Americans are 86 and 83 percent, respectively. Some 45 percent of Americans believe there is a Devil. In a recent _Newsweek_ poll, 79 percent of American respondents accepted that biblical miracles really happened. According to a 1999 _Newsweek_ poll, 40 percent of all Americans (71 percent of Evangelical Protestants) believe that the world will end in a battle at Armageddon between Jesus and the Antichrist. An American president who conducts Bible study in the White House and begins cabinet sessions with a prayer may seem a curious anachronism to his European allies, but he is in tune with his constituents.

Second, the inequalities and insecurities of American life are still unthinkable across the Atlantic. Europeans remain wary of excessive disparities of income, and their institutions and political choices reflect this sentiment. Moreover, it is prudence, rather than the residue of “socialism,” that explains European hesitation over unregulated markets and the dismantling of the public sector and local resistance to the American “model.” This makes sense for most people in Europe—as elsewhere in the world—unrestricted competition is at least as much a threat as an opportunity. Europeans want a more interventionist state at home than Americans do, and they expect to pay for it. Even in post-Thatcher Britain, 62 percent of adults polled in December 2002 would favor higher taxes in return for improved public services. The figure for the United States was under 1 percent. This is less surprising when one considers that in America (where the disparities between rich and poor are greater than anywhere else in the developed world), fully 19 percent of the adult population claims to be in the richest 1 percent of the nation—and a further 20 percent believe they will enter that 1 percent in their lifetime

What Europeans find perturbing about America, then, is precisely what most Americans believe to be their nation’s strongest suit: its unique mix of moralistic religiosity, minimal provision for public welfare, and maximal market freedom—the “American way of life”—coupled with a missionary foreign policy ostensibly directed at exporting that same cluster of values and practices. Here, the United States is ill-served by globalization, which highlights for the world’s poorer countries the costs of exposure to economic competition and reminds West Europeans, after the long sleep of the Cold War, of the true fault lines bisecting the hitherto undifferentiated “West.” Indeed, a truth that is clearer now than even just a few years ago is that in many crucial respects, Europe and the United States are actually less alike than they were 50 years ago. This observation flies in the face of claims about “globalization” and “Americanization” advanced not just by enthusiastic proponents of the process, but also by its angry critics. Yet there is less to the promise of a new American century than meets the eye. In the first place, we have been there before. It is a cardinal tenet of the prophets of globalization that the logic of economic efficiency must sweep all before it (a characteristically nineteenth-century fallacy they share with Marxists). But that was also how it seemed at the peak of the last great era of globalization, on the eve of World War I, when many observers, likewise, foresaw the decline of the nation-state and a future age of international economic integration.

What happened, of course, was something rather different, and 1913 levels of international trade, communication, and mobility would not be reached again until the mid-1970s. The contingencies of domestic politics trumped the “laws” of international economic behavior, and they may do so again. Capitalism is indeed global in its
reach, but its local forms have always been richly variable and they still are. This is because economic practices shape national institutions and legal norms and are shaped by them in their turn; they are deeply embedded in very different national and moral cultures.

Partly for this reason, the American model is not obviously more appealing to people elsewhere and its triumph is far from assured. Europeans and Americans live quite different sorts of lives. More than one American in five is poor, whereas the figures for continental Western Europe hover around one in twelve. In their first year of life, 60 percent more babies die in the United States than in France or Germany. The disparity between rich and poor is vastly greater in the United States than anywhere in continental Europe (or than it was in the United States 20 years ago); but whereas fewer than one American in three supports significant redistribution of wealth, 63 percent of Britons favor it and the figures are higher still on the European continent.

Even before modern European welfare states were established, most employed Europeans had compulsory health insurance (since 1883 in the German case), and all Western Europeans now take for granted the interlocking mesh of guarantees, protections, and supports whose reduction or abolition they have consistently opposed at the polls. The social and occupational insecurity familiar to tens of millions of Americans has long been politically intolerable anywhere in the European Union. If fascism and communism were the European reactions to the last great wave of laissez-faire globalization, then "welfare capitalism" is Europe's insurance against a rerun. On prudential grounds, if for no other reason, the rest of the West is not about to take the American path.

But what of the claim that Europeans, like everyone else in the world, will have little choice? Much is said about the coming ineluctable triumph of American economic practice at the expense of the lumbering, unproductive, inflexible European variant. Yet handicapped as they are by all the supposed impediments of their statist past, the economies of Belgium, France, and the Netherlands last year were actually more productive for each hour worked than that of the United States, while the Irish, the Austrians, the Danes, and the Germans were very close behind.

Between 1991 and 1998, productivity on average actually grew faster in Europe than in the United States. The United States, nonetheless, outpaces Europe in gross terms. This is because more Americans work, the state takes less from their wages (and provides less in return), they work longer hours—28 percent more than Germans and 43 percent more than the French; and they take shorter vacations or none at all.

Whether Europe (or anywhere else) would look more like America if the American economic model were adopted there is a moot point. The modern American economy is not replicable elsewhere. The "war on terror" is not the only matter in which the United States is critically dependent upon foreigners. The American economic "miracle" of the past decade has been fueled by the $1.2 billion per day in foreign capital inflow that is needed to cover the country's foreign trade deficit, currently running at $450 billion per year. It is these huge inward investment flows that have kept share prices up, inflation and interest rates down, and domestic consumption booming. If a European, Asian, or Latin American country ran comparable trade deficits, it would long since be in the hands of the International Monetary Fund. The United States is uniquely placed to indulge such crippling dependence on foreign investors because the dollar has been the world's reserve currency since World War II. How long the American economy can operate thus before it is brought painfully to earth by a loss of overseas confidence is a much-debated topic; as is the related claim that it was these rivers of foreign cash, rather than the unprecedented productivity of the new high-tech sectors, that drove the prosperity of the 1990s. What is clear is that for all its recent allure, the American model is unique and not for export.

Far from universalizing its appeal, globalization has, if anything, diminished foreign enthusiasm for the American model: the reduction in public ownership of goods and services in Europe over the past 20 years has not been accompanied by any reduction in the state's social obligations—except in Britain where, tellingly, governments have had to backtrack in the face of public opposition. And it is because they inhabit such very different societies that Europeans and Americans see the world so differently, and value sharply contrasting international processes and outcomes.

But Europe, especially "old Europe," is much more in tune than the United States with the thinking of the rest of the world on everything from environmental threats to international law, and its social legislation and economic practices are more congenial to foreigners and more readily exportable than the American variants. U.S. domestic policy and politics are poorly adapted to the complexity of today's world. And it is the United States, not Europe that is increasingly dependent on foreign investment to feed its deficit-laden economy and sustain its vulnerable currency.
Thus when American leaders throw fits of pique at European dissent, and provoke and encourage internal European divisions, these might reasonably be interpreted as signs of incipient weakness, not strength. Real power is influence and example, backed up by understated reminders of military force. When a great power has to buy its allies, bribe its friends, and blackmail its critics, something is amiss. The energetic American response to 9/11 may thus be misleading. The bedrock reality is a world from which the United States will either retreat in frustration or with which it will have to engage on cooperative terms. Either way, the “American era” is passing.

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And yet America is still esteemed and even revered overseas, not because of globalization but in spite of it. America is not epitomized by MTV and McDonald’s, or by Enron or WorldCom. America is not even particularly admired abroad for its awesome military establishment, any more than it is respected for its unparalleled wealth. If American power and influence are actually very fragile, it is because they rest upon an idea, a unique and irreplaceable myth: that the United States really does stand for a better world and is still the best hope of all who seek it. Radical anti-Americans acknowledge the force of this myth, even as they disparage it.

What gives America its formidable international influence is not its unequalled capacity for war but the trust of others in its good intentions. That is why Washington’s opposition to the International Criminal Court does so much damage. It suggests that the United States does not trust the rest of the world to treat Americans fairly. But if America displays a lack of trust in others, the time may come when they will return the compliment. The greatest threat to America is that in the face of American neglect and indifference, the American image will fade and “large proportions of key societies [will] turn against the United States and the global values of free trade and free society.”

This process is already well under way. “Anti-globalizers,” environmentalists, advocates of a European (or French) “alternative model,” all share a common anti-Americanism that takes its cue from U.S. behavior and serves as a broad church within which the discontented of the world can now congregate. Whether this coalition of sentiments and interests will ever move beyond rhetorical unison is unclear and perhaps unlikely. Europeans may see themselves as increasingly at odds with the United States, but from the point of view of much of the rest of humanity, the wealthy West still looks like a single bloc with fundamentally similar interests.

But it may be that today’s transatlantic schisms and distinctions will come to matter more, not less, in years to come. Long-standing social and cultural contrasts are being highlighted and reinforced by irresolvable policy disagreements. Already the schism over the U.S. war on Iraq has revealed something new. In the early years of the Cold War, anti-American demonstrations in Europe took their cue from Soviet-financed “peace movements,” but the political and economic elites were firmly in the American camp. But today’s mass anti-war protests require no manipulation, and the widespread anger toward the United States is a new development.

This is not good news for America’s European allies—as Aznar, Blair, and their collaborators wrote in their controversial open letter of January 30, 2003, “Today more than ever, the transatlantic bond is a guarantee of our freedom.” But it augurs ill for America, too. If the world needs the United States, the converse is no less true. If anti-Americanism becomes the shared default sentiment of much of humanity, then America will be compelled increasingly to resort to force, or the threat of force, to achieve its own ends, having lost the means to persuade or convince friends and foes alike. The outcome would be further suspicion and dislike, very possibly triggering a new American retreat from international responsibility. It is an unappealing prospect.

NOTES

3. For Czech and Polish attitudes to war with Iraq, see The Economist, February 1, 2003. For Spanish opposition to Aznar, see El Pais, February 3, 2003.
4. See the survey of transatlantic attitudes in a poll conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the U.S. at www.worldviews.org. For NATO member-state defense expenditures, see La Republica, February 11, 2003. The critical views of a Central European diplomat were expressed in a private communication. Like many other politicians from former Communist Europe, he was reluctant to air his criticisms of American policy in public.