

Restoring American Influence and Security Through Service, Education, and Exchange

AUTHOR

David Heyman

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**Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)**  
**Homeland Security Program**  
1800 K Street, N.W.,  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
Telephone: (202) 887-0200  
Program Director: David Heyman

# Restoring American Influence and Security Through Service, Education, and Exchange

by David Heyman<sup>1</sup>

Standing before a special joint session of the United States Congress on September 20<sup>th</sup> shortly after the 2001 terrorist attacks on America, President George W. Bush posed the following seminal question of America's post 9-11 experience: "*Why do they hate us?*"<sup>2</sup> Why do terrorists, inspired by a perversion of Islam, seek to kill Americans on a massive scale? Why is America the principal target of radical Islamic vitriol? It was a wake-up call for most Americans—a moment of shock and a question: how could this be? And while debate on these questions persists, unfortunately in focusing on why *terrorists* hate us, we have missed a far larger and perhaps consequential question: why more and more *people* around the world hate—or at least look less and less favorably on—America? Because they do.

Anti-Americanism is on the rise. Just as communism, in the world of ideas, was the pre-eminent threat of the twentieth-century, the rise of a new organizing principle—*anti-Americanism*—has the potential to take communism's place as a rallying cry in the twenty-first century, presenting a serious, though largely neglected, national security concern that could undermine all other strategic concerns that the next President will face. It is a concern, however, that can and should be addressed beginning in a new administration's first 100 days.

## *Anti-Americanism*

After an outpouring of support immediately following September 11 – including demonstrations of solidarity in Tehran – America's standing in the world has plummeted.

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<sup>1</sup> David Heyman is the founding director of the Homeland Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., and an adjunct professor in Security Studies at Georgetown University. He previously served at the White House and at the Department of Energy as a senior advisor in the Clinton Administration.

<sup>2</sup> See the President's full remarks, accessed online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

Favorable opinion in countries surveyed in Asia, the Middle East, and most notably in Europe, has declined to all-time lows. In Western Europe, the United States has never been as unpopular as it is today. Even in the United Kingdom, a country with a special relationship with the U.S., positive feelings towards the United States have fallen from 83% to just over 50% in the past seven years. A 2006 study by the Pew Global Attitudes Project showed that in most nations, less than 50 percent of the population holds a favorable opinion of the U.S.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, people in most of the countries polled viewed China more favorably than the United States and saw the United States as a greater threat to world peace than Iran.<sup>4</sup> While the more recent 2008 Pew survey showed marginal improvement in these numbers, majorities in 18 of the 24 countries surveyed now describe economic conditions in their country as bad and blame the U.S. for these circumstances.

The reality is that people around the world are lining up against America. They do so for various reasons. Some have reacted against globalization—against western economic hegemony, and western cultural imperialism. Others have been angered by U.S. policies—failure to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, rejection of the International Criminal Court, walking away from the Kyoto Treaty and climate stewardship, or adopting and executing a policy of preemptive war. Some are offended by U.S. actions—Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Haditha, renditions, torture, and relinquishing the historic role as an honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians. And still others have lost heart because of America's widening credibility gap with the world—most glaring, the lack of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The combination of these policies, actions and rhetoric have

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<sup>3</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Survey 2006, accessed online at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

left an impression to many around the world of an America that is arrogant, unreliable, and even lawless – an America with contempt for any constraints whatsoever on its freedom of action.

### *The Power of People*

In a global community, the consequences of anti-Americanism—of average citizens around the world turning away from America—have serious national security implications—and the power of disgruntled populations worldwide should not be ignored. To begin with, there are economic consequences. Despite the weak and falling U.S. dollar, America has failed to see its share of a recent boom in international travel around the world. In fact, to the contrary, the U.S. share of international tourism dollars has fallen from 16% in 2000 to below 12% in 2006.<sup>5</sup>

More though, we see clearly that in countries where U.S. favorable ratings have dropped, so too has popular support for the “war on terror.”<sup>6</sup> Where populations go, legislatures and nations may soon follow. The 9-11 attacks showed us that terrorist networks transcend political boundaries: terrorists seek sanctuary in one country, train in a second, and solicit support in third and fourth countries. Consequently, thwarting their ambitions requires international partnerships in intelligence, law enforcement, military, financial transactions, border controls, and transportation security. These relationships are essential to denying terrorist networks the space they need to operate. If U.S. influence abroad erodes, however, so too does its ability to seek out and gain partners to advance its interests.

Nor can we expect to win the hearts and minds of people who might turn to terrorism. To those individuals who have been radicalized and are on the path towards violence, it is likely too late. We must pursue them with all the military, law enforcement, and intelligence means at our

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<sup>5</sup> See Oskar Garcia, “Travel experts: US share of foreign tourists slips,” Associated Press, July 4, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Survey 2006.



disposal. But for those who may be receptive to radical ideas, to a violent ideology, but who have yet to be radicalized, the fight we are in, at its core, is a battle of ideas. And we must engage them to deter them from the path of violence. Unfortunately, however, if people are predisposed against us, they won't listen, and we can do little to win over hearts and minds.

On a broader level, without the support of others—of partners and allies—there can be no “coalition of the willing”; there would be no “with us, or against us;” there would be only an “against us.” If peoples across the globe are against America, al Qaeda—or perhaps other adversaries—will have an easier time growing and operating, particularly among susceptible populations. An environment hostile to America may help drive vulnerable individuals to al Qaeda and to their ideology. Finally, anti-Americanism is not just damaging to America's efforts to marginalize, isolate and ultimately thwart the terrorist threat, but it also seriously undermines our ability to build political pressure or seek sanctions against other major security threats, to include, for example, Iran.

### *Building the Foundation for 100 Years of Diplomacy*

The upcoming change in the U.S. presidency offers a unique opportunity to restore America's image, and the esteem with which peoples across the world hold it. While America's economic and military powers must continue to underpin US interests, countering anti-Americanism and preserving America's ability to lead requires that we also rebuild relations and rekindle the idea and example of America.

To do this, we must first close the chapter on American arrogance. Most Americans now recognize that the U.S. made significant errors in prosecuting the Iraq war and the “war on terror.” Leadership requires more than bold action or taking credit for success; it also requires

taking responsibility for failure. The first steps to regaining American credibility and seeking reconciliation are to admit fault and alight a path forward. As such, we must give serious consideration to those elements of policy, action, and rhetoric that have facilitated anti-Americanism and correct wrong-doing where we can and should. Steps to consider include:

- Renounce the Bush Administration's policy of preemptive war;
- Close Guantanamo;
- Embrace the Geneva Conventions and pursue an international dialogue on non-state actors;
- Invigorate new generations of Palestinian and Israeli Leaders to a dialogue in the United States on peace and reconciliation (e.g., in the model of *Seeds of Peace* programs, invite several groups of leaders and future leaders on a monthly basis for 4-6 weeks, in perpetuity);
- Welcome, support, and reclaim the lead on global efforts to reduce global warming; and
- Further expand U.S. international development programs.

### *Expand People-to-People Relations*

Second, we must inspire and invest in an extraordinary expansion of people-to-people relations. The fight against violent radical Islamists will be a long struggle. If we are to fight a war of ideas, we must do so with the full commitment of a nation at war. When a nation mobilizes to fight a war, all elements of society are mobilized and you have *total war*. Similarly, when you mobilize a society to fight a war of ideas, you must engage in *total diplomacy*. I define Total Diplomacy as a combination of government-based *public* diplomacy<sup>7</sup> and citizen-

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<sup>7</sup> See United States Information Agency, *Strategic Plan*, 1997- 2002. According to the plan, public diplomacy is “the action of engaging foreign audiences and opinion makers, through information and exchange programs, to advance U.S. national interests

based person-to-person *private* diplomacy. To date, the U.S. has focused almost exclusively, and with little degree of success, on the former. In addition to resuscitating our public diplomacy efforts (and because public diplomacy may sometimes be viewed as propaganda), we must promote and invest in earnest in the power of the American people and personal relationships towards transforming world opinion and relationships. That means recognizing that every member of society – not just professional diplomats and government officials, but private citizens and businessmen and women – serve as U.S. ambassadors to the world. Each of us can contribute to and engage the peoples of other nations.

Steps to unleash the power of the American people and build the foundation for 100 years of diplomacy would include:

- **Designate America as a Multilingual Nation.** Require high school language proficiency in two languages, of which one must be English.
- **Institute Universal Student Exchanges.** We should make study abroad the norm, not the exception, for undergraduate students, just as we should invite reciprocal exchanges with students from abroad. In 2005, over 565,000 foreign students were enrolled in U.S. academic institutions. They spent over \$13B in US economy. By comparison, in 2006 only 205,983 of all American college students studied abroad. This translates to somewhere less than 10% of students who graduate from college having studied abroad. Our national security and domestic prosperity depend upon a citizenry that is knowledgeable and comfortable engaging in an increasingly interconnected world. It also depends on foreigners having a positive understanding of and experience with

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and strategic goals.” Available online at: <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/abtusia/stratplan/pland.htm>.

America. Supporting legislation like the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act (H.R. 1469 and S. 991) would be a major step in the right direction.

- **Strengthen and Broaden People-to-People Ties**—commercial, social, cultural, and scientific—among peoples and nations, recognizing that relationships that join *any* of us help enhance security for *all* of us.
- **Encourage National Service for All.** Whether its three months or three years, every citizen can contribute to thwarting terrorism and protecting Americans at home in some fashion. Right now, the bulk of our fight against terrorism falls on the backs of the military, meaning that a small fraction of our youth – and an even smaller fraction of our population – bears a vastly disproportionate share of our collective security. At the same time, we have struggled to recruit and retain sufficient strength in the military and National Guard; border security is porous at best; we lack resources for catastrophic response; among others. Recognizing that military service is but one way to protect and defend this country and its values, and that American power is broader than it's military might, we should require national service for all, so as to help (1) build-up the Medical Surge Corps and Disaster Response Teams that can be deployed at home and abroad; (2) supplement our desperate need for foreign language translators; (3) staff volunteer organizations serving disadvantaged populations, the elderly, the homebound, and others in need (4) reduce class sizes in schools in the U.S. and expand education opportunities by sending teachers abroad; (5) facilitate a renaissance of the Peace Corps and other international volunteer opportunities for thousands of new citizen-ambassadors to help in

development around the world<sup>8</sup>; while also helping (6) to enlarge and sustain active military; and (7) expand the National Guard.

- **Facilitate Secure Open Doors to America.** Modernize and secure U.S. ports of entry. Create a 21st century secure traveler program to facilitate secure international travel and welcome visitors to America.

### *Conclusion*

Anti-Americanism poses a serious national security threat. Much like communism, it is an idea. Like communism, it has the potential of becoming embodied in a potent adversary or adversaries and proliferated around the globe, threatening American peace and security. But unlike threats such as nuclear proliferation, or state aggression, it is an intangible threat—one that does not readily exhibit technology to control or specific adversaries to deter. Rather, it lives in the world of ideas, expanding and contracting primarily in the communications and relationships between people.

Of the great security aspirations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—defeating fascism, containing the spread of Communism, curtailing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, fighting poverty, reducing the spread of AIDS and other infectious diseases—none were accomplished by America on its own, though they were in America’s interest. Facing the security challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> century required strategic partnerships, friends, allies, compacts, coalitions, and cooperation. The institutions built following World War II to maintain the peace and expand free-market democratic societies around the world—the UN, NATO, the World Bank, the World

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<sup>8</sup> The recommendation for national service goes beyond the narrow interest of building a foundation for 100 years of diplomacy. It is nonetheless included here because of the specific relevance of national service contributing to international volunteer opportunities and engagement.

Trade Organization, the IMF, for example—have succeeded only where, and because, countries seek out and are willing to work together.

The U.S. has pursued and advanced her national interests through application of its national power—a combination of military strength, diplomatic skill, and economic vitality. And it has led the world through its narrative—through the idea of America—and the example it sets for others.

The story of America, since its founding, has been one of a nation of liberty that offers a beacon of hope for much of the world. It is a story of a place both for economic opportunity, but also for social freedom, for escaping persecution. It is a shining light on the hill to the tired, the poor and huddled masses. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been the savior to a war-torn Europe twice. It has led the world in innovation, in exploration, and has taken humankind to the moon. It is a place to dream of, where people all over the world could aspire to make a better life, no matter their means, race, or religion. America has been able to build alliances and inspire the international cooperation required to take on the great challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through an application of power and leadership. And through its example, America has led, not by virtue of its power, but by the power of its virtue. When others aspire to, respect and admire American ideals, they are more likely to follow.

Terrorism is but one among many national security challenges that America will face in the years ahead. Nuclear proliferation, military threats against key U.S. allies, the looming climate crises, biological threats like pandemic flu, and those threats yet unknown will also demand the attention of future leaders. And with each of these security concerns, like those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. will require friends, allies, and partnerships across the world to prevail. Anti-Americanism presents a major risk to achieving our interests today, but by returning to the

story of America, to the ideals that have been an inspiration throughout history, and re-engaging the peoples of the world in a positive way, anti-Americanism can not only be thwarted, it can be overcome.