
The U.S. Versus The World? How American Power Seems to the Rest of Us

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In international relations, as in human relations, to see ourselves as others see us requires rather more clarity of vision than most of us can manage most of the time. For no country in the world, however, as much as the United States is it more important that this effort be made. The responsibility comes with the territory: it is overwhelmingly the dominant power in the world today, and its actions have an extraordinary impact on everyone else. But Americans don't know nearly as much about us as we know about them.

Americans can pick up their newspapers or turn on their television for months on end without seeing any significant reference to Australia, for weeks on end without seeing any significant reference to Indonesia, India, Nigeria, or Brazil, and even days on end without seeing any such reference to Britain, France, Germany, or Russia.

But none of us anywhere in the world can sit through a single news bulletin, or read a single page of a newspaper, without being bombarded with words and images about what the U.S. is doing and saying, its political culture, its consumer culture, and its entertainment culture. Americans are there all the time, and they affect our lives in the way that we don't even begin to affect Americans'.

When it comes to foreign and security policy, as with economic and trade policy, just about everything the U.S. does—or chooses not to do—makes an enormous difference to everyone else:

- U.S. military decisions mean life or death for whole countries. When the U.S. decided to intervene in Kosovo, knowing that the UN Security Council wouldn't, it saved tens of thousands of lives. But when the U.S.

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campaigned to stop the Security Council from intervening in Rwanda, it bore a share of the responsibility—painful as it is to confront this—for the loss of some 800,000 lives.

- When the U.S. chooses to initiate or throw itself heart and soul into supporting a peace process in a case like Sudan, it gives new hope to millions that decades of carnage can be ended. But when it declines to play that role in a case like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it denies that hope and does much to ensure that decades of carnage will continue.
- When the U.S. uses all its diplomatic influence to bring India and Pakistan back from the brink of nuclear war, it earns the gratitude of the entire planet. But when it doesn't ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, doesn't make any kind of credible commitment to the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons as it is obliged to do under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and in fact makes clear in its Nuclear Posture Review that it favors the development of a new generation of battlefield nuclear weapons, it helps bring about the shift to nuclear weapon status of those two countries in the first place.
- When it throws itself into supporting multilateral treaty negotiations and trying to find common ground, those negotiations are more likely than not to take off (as I remember well from the Chemical Weapons Convention negotiations in which Australia played a leading role). But when it chooses to walk away from those negotiations, it either destroys them completely (as with the proposed new Biological Weapons Convention protocol) or ensures that their product will be much less effective than it would otherwise be (as with the Landmines and International Criminal Court treaties).
- How much the U.S. chooses to spend on the military capability to fight wars, and how much by contrast on diplomatic efforts to avoid them, or on aid expenditure to address some of the underlying causes of conflict, will continue to have a potentially decisive impact not only on how those wars are fought, but also whether they have to be fought at all.
- How much effort and how many resources the U.S. puts into staying the course of peace-building after a war has been fought—as in Afghanistan a decade ago and again now—will have an enormous impact on whether the whole dreadful cycle of conflict will end or start all over again.

All this influence and impact upon the rest of the world means that Americans have to expect that those of us in the rest of the world will have views—probably quite strong views—about how well or badly they are doing their job.

But why should Americans have to listen to those views? Who in the United States gives a tinker's damn, or should give a tinker's damn, about what

Australia—or for that matter Canada or Japan or even the whole European Union, let alone others in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, or Latin America—thinks about anything?

The answer is that Americans should do so as a matter of their own raw self-interest. It's not just a matter of doing better by others. It's a matter of doing better for themselves. In a globalized, interdependent world, there are a great many problems that no country in the world, not even the richest and most powerful, can solve for itself without the cooperation and commitment of others, and a great many interests that it needs the cooperation of others to maximize.

That's true of economic and trade policy, where exports of goods and services depend upon the willingness of other countries to open their markets. It's true of cross-border environmental problems, most obviously issues to do with the climate and global warming; of health pandemics; of refugee flows and other unregulated population flows; of international criminal behavior, in particular narcotics trafficking; of non-proliferation and international arms control generally; and, above all, it is true of the War on Terrorism.

If we know anything about the War on Terrorism, it is that it can't be won just by homeland security measures, combined with unilateral military or police efforts to capture and punish known perpetrators. The central strategy must be to win the active cooperation of those frontline states which are the countries of origin of the terrorists themselves. We need their intelligence support, and we need them to take action to identify and deal with those in their midst, and that in turn means generating in them both the will and the capacity to so act.

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That will and that capacity can't always be pressured or bought: it's much more readily achieved when it's earned. And that means in turn the U.S. (and other Western target countries) being prepared to address the underlying political grievances, and economic, social, and cultural grievances, that so often make that will hard to mobilize, or inhibit (because of the feeling in the street) the capacity of even the most cooperatively motivated government to act.

Against that background, how does the rest of the world feel about the way the U.S. has been conducting its international relations in recent times? As an Australian living in Europe and spending a large amount of time traveling just about everywhere else and talking constantly to senior officials around the world in my capacity as president of the International Crisis Group, I think I'm probably in as good a position as anyone else to judge.

And, I'm afraid, the answer is not one that an American audience is going to especially like hearing. I know well enough from regular and often extended

visits to this country over more than 30 years that this is a culture which prefers that each drop of vinegar be accompanied by at least two buckets of honey, but in the interests of space and clarity let me tell it to you as straight as I can.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, there was around the world an outpouring of absolutely genuine sympathy and empathy for the U.S. of the kind and on a scale that I can never before remember, summarized in the immortal *Le Monde* headline, "We Are All Americans Now." But a year later there was more genuine hostility than I can ever before remember—not just in the Arab and Islamic world, but across Europe, and among America's other closest friends as well, including Australia, Canada, and Japan.

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What happened? Were there any remotely rational reasons? I think there were three sets of substantive factors that came together and reinforced each other:

- The Bush administration's approach to a series of multilateral treaties, combined with the dismissive—sometimes almost contemptuous—way in which international concerns about that approach were dismissed.
- The extraordinary increase in already extraordinarily large U.S. defense expenditure and the perception of U.S. priorities that went with that.
- The handling of the threat constituted by Iraq, raising the specter of unilateral military action in circumstances where the threat, while certainly real, was neither self-evidently immediate nor self-evidently uncontainable by other means.

All this was combined with the publication by the White House in September 2002 of a new National Security Strategy that not only outlined and defended a new doctrine of preemptive military action against non-imminent security threats which has made even Henry Kissinger alarmed, and that's saying something, but also made clear that it was a central tenet of U.S. security policy to ensure that, for the indefinitely foreseeable future, no rival ever surpassed, or even matched, American military power.

MULTILATERAL TREATIES

Right from the outset, the Bush administration's approach to the negotiation of multilateral treaties involved a rather breathtaking retreat from even the Clinton administration's brand of multilateralism, which was by no means adventurous or comprehensive.

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- In relation to the environment, the U.S. rejected outright the Kyoto Protocol on climate control.
 - In the area of humanitarian law, it refused to ratify the Rome Statute constituting the International Criminal Court, while at the same time pressuring everybody to sign bilateral treaties favoring U.S. personnel—and in that context also acted contrary to Article 18 of the Vienna Convention which obliges signatories to refrain from undermining treaties they decline to ratify.
 - In relation to human rights, it continued to refuse—along only with Somalia in the entire UN system—to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

But it is in the area of new or continuing arms control agreements that the U.S. has been leading by example in the worst possible way. After playing an important leadership role a decade ago in securing a tough international inspection regime for chemical weapons, the most recent contributions of the U.S. have been:

- To scuttle a draft protocol seeking a similar enforcement mechanism for biological weapons.
- To assert, in the Nuclear Posture Review, the U.S. right to develop a new generation of nuclear weapons—which, along with the total unwillingness to subscribe to any kind of ultimate elimination objective (coming on top of the Senate's rejection of CTBT ratification in 1999), has made the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty more fragile than it has ever been.
- To withdraw unilaterally from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty (which has, however relaxed Russia may be, huge implications for strategic stability in North East Asia).
- To dilute almost to the point of meaninglessness the UN plan for dealing with illegal trafficking in small arms.

DEFENSE

The nearly \$40 billion increase in the U.S. defense budget just passed for fiscal 2003 is—give or take arguments about exchange rates—more than the total defense expenditure of any other single country. And overall defense expenditure next year, at nearly \$400 billion, will be over 40 percent of the world's total: higher than the combined total of the seven “rogue states” identified by the Pentagon as its most likely adversaries (Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya, Sudan, Syria, and Cuba), plus China, Russia, and its eighteen NATO allies as well!

It is not difficult to portray this as erring just a little on the side of overkill, even by the standards of the new National Security Strategy, which—despite some Wilsonian boilerplating about freedom and democracy and the virtues of

multilateral decency—makes it clear that what U.S. security policy is about is power, pure and simple, and ensuring that no one ever seeks to match it: “Our forces,” the key language says, “will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”

The last time language of this kind has been seen was a decade ago when Paul Wolfowitz, then number three in the Pentagon, wrote it into a planning document. But, as we were reminded by Max Boot writing recently in the *Washington Post*, that language saw only about two minutes of public daylight before it was retracted by an embarrassed Bush Senior administration, it having been ridiculed by, among many others, the late Senator Alan Cranston, who said that it was all about making the U.S. “the only main honcho on the world block, the global Big Enchilada.” With the 2002 Strategy, it seems that the “Big Enchilada” is back with a vengeance, and this time with no Alan Cranston in sight and no evident embarrassment from anyone in the administration—even Colin Powell.

One way of putting the sheer scale of U.S. defense spending in context is to contrast it with expenditure on overseas development assistance. The U.S. is the second largest aid donor in dollar terms, after Japan, but the least generous of all donors when assistance is measured as a proportion of GNP. (Even when the additional 50 percent—or \$5 billion—increase announced by the Bush administration cuts in, bringing the U.S. percentage to around 0.15, that will still be at or close to the bottom of the donors list.) But what makes the argument particularly telling is the hugely disproportionate U.S. spending on defense. Whereas

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the average industrial country spends \$7 on its military for every \$1 devoted to aid, for the U.S. the ratio is closer to 38 to 1.

Total official development assistance from the industrialized countries currently totals around \$56 billion, and this needs to double if internationally agreed policy goals in health and education and development

generally are to be met. It is worth noting in this context that the amount the U.S. is preparing to spend in going to war against Iraq is of the order of \$100 billion, nearly twice what is needed to bridge the global aid gap next year, 10 times Washington’s own current annual aid expenditure, and 100 times the \$1 billion the U.S. is offering each year to fight the global scourge of AIDS—which is causing deaths on the scale of two-and-a-half 9/11s every day.

There is another way of putting in perspective the kind of money that the U.S. is prepared to spend on fighting wars, as compared to addressing underlying causes of conflict and engaging in the diplomacy which can prevent a great many of them getting started. The U.S. will be spending more next year on its

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One of the further characteristics of U.S. defense expenditure that has been most noticed in the rest of the world is how little of it, both proportionately and absolutely, goes on peacekeeping and peace-building tasks as distinct from preparation for, and conduct of, peace enforcement or war fighting. It has been a constant battle to keep U.S. personnel engaged after the initial military assault phase in the Balkans and now Afghanistan, and it has proved extraordinarily difficult to mobilize U.S. engagement—even at the level of logistic support—in critical UN peacekeeping operations like MONUC in the Congo.

There is a legitimate U.S. concern, better understood now than it used to be, that American troops do tend to be much more targeted than others and are therefore particularly vulnerable in community policing-type situations. But it doesn't help when

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Americans so often say, to quote for example the columnist Charles Krauthammer, "No one can fight wars like us: anyone can peace keep"—or, as I often hear it around Europe, "We do the cooking, you do the washing up."

IRAQ¹

In relation to the handling of Iraq, international anxiety has for the moment been put on hold by the very welcome U.S. decision to go down the UN Security Council path—with the focus on disarmament rather than regime change, an (appropriately) extremely tough inspection regime, and a willingness to return to the Security Council before taking enforcement action.

But I'm sure no one here will have been oblivious to the way the issue was earlier playing. The rest of the world was rather working on the no doubt wimpish premise that war is an ugly, awful business, and that if we are about preventing deadly conflicts, it is quite a good idea not to start new ones—unless the case for doing so is overwhelming, and the means chosen are absolutely responsible.

In the U.S., by contrast, it looked for a long time like all the abstractions of the National Security Strategy were being made real, with the emphasis being on the U.S. right to make its own judgment about the degree of threat it faced; to take unilateral military action if it so chose irrespective of whether it could establish that any such threat, to the U.S. or the world at large or Iraq's own people, was imminent; and to take such action whatever the potentially destabilizing consequences elsewhere.

While deep breaths have now been drawn all around, there is still a lingering concern outside the U.S. that the embrace of a multilateralist strategy by the Bush administration had less to do with the quality of Colin Powell's and Tony Blair's arguments and diplomacy than with Karl Rove's wet finger—testing the breezes of U.S. public opinion. That opinion (showing, as so often, a more internationalist cast of mind than its congressional and executive branch leaders) was clearly not persuaded by the arguments for going it alone against Iraq without UN support.

And while there is a good understanding internationally that the unanimous Security Council vote was very much helped by having an 800 pound U.S. gorilla out there, visibly prepared to go it alone if the wider international community didn't get its act together fast, there is also a very real concern that the gorilla was not just a theatrical costume, but is out there alive and well in the corridors of the Pentagon and White House, pawing and snorting and chest thumping—and just dying for the first excuse to charge.

As someone said on this subject at a conference I attended a few days ago, as a matter of general negotiating principles and practice, it's normally not a bad idea at all to have an "outlier" out there—taking manifestly extreme positions—to make the more moderate option more attractive than it might otherwise look by itself. But in international relations this so-called "madman" approach to negotiation is fraught with enormous problems when it is the hegemon itself who becomes the outlier.

I've ended up giving you a pretty long litany of the world's current anxieties about the U.S., and the way its power is seen. Let me move on from that and make a few, hopefully constructive, suggestions as to what can be done to improve this state of affairs, first from those of us in the rest of the world and then on the part of the U.S. itself.

UNDERSTANDING FROM THE REST OF US

On the part of the rest of the world, particularly America's traditional allies, what I think is first required is a little bit more empathy, a little better understanding and appreciation of what makes the U.S. tick, and what is driving some of the current behavior, and language, that upsets the rest of us so much.

The first dimension that is critical here is simply fear: raw, genuine, and realistic. For all our sympathy after 9/11, we sometimes forget that more people were killed in that single attack than in all the terrorist incidents in Israel and Ireland combined for the last 50 years, and that there is every reason to believe that that or worse could happen again, with—for all the vulnerability the rest of us are feeling, not least after Bali—the U.S. and its citizens still being overwhelmingly the most likely targets.

Chris Patten, the European Commissioner for External Relations, has recently made the point well:

The extent of the U.S. trauma was not, perhaps, fully appreciated in Europe: the sense of violation felt by a people who had believed themselves to be invulnerable. The subsequent 'war on terrorism' has been understood in Europe as a metaphor: a phrase to describe the myriad responses required of the civilised world to address problems that do not allow of definitive solutions, let alone of military ones. America, by contrast, has really felt itself to be at war, and it is a war that has ratcheted up patriotic sentiment to unparalleled heights.²

The second thing we in the rest of the world need to remind ourselves of are just some basic cultural differences that we need to take into account in responding to the U.S., just as we like to have them taken into account in dealing with us. A lot of the things that we, elsewhere, take to be over the top, and reflective of hubris, or arrogance or worse, or claiming a closer relationship with the Almighty than most of the rest of us can manage, and which do generate a little bit of reflexive anti-Americanism at least elsewhere in the West, are simply a matter of confusing the substance with trappings.

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U.S. public language is far more routinely and emotively "patriotic" than one finds elsewhere, certainly in Australia and Britain; it also draws, routinely, far more on religious concepts and metaphors—including Manichaeic language of good versus evil—than most of the rest of us find comfortable. We have to understand that and live with it.

And the third thing we need to remind ourselves of, in the rest of the world, is that a good deal of what we are minded to describe as American behavior is simply party political or individual behavior, the luck for the moment of the political draw. Though Democratic administrations have not been immune in the past from many of the charges now being directed to this Republican one, it is reasonable to assume that if those handful of ballot papers had been called differently in Florida, the debate about the use of American power—at the very least its style, if not its substance—would have taken a rather different course over the last two years.

The truth of the matter is that there is always tension in this country between elements of isolationism, imperialism, internationalism, multilateralism, and unilateralism; between what Tom Friedman calls "America OnDuty" versus

“America OnLine”; or between what George Soros refers to as “the pursuit of hegemony” versus “the vision of global open society.” The wheels have turned often enough in the past, and they are bound to turn again. We should resist the temptation to over-dramatize what may be just a transient phase.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that every new administration climbs a learning curve, and it may be that we should see the embrace by the Bush administration of a multilateralist route on Iraq, at least for now, and maybe also its very realistically muted response to the recent challenge from North Korea, as the beginning of a more fundamental and far-reaching change of general approach.

ENGAGEMENT FROM THE REST OF US

There's another dimension necessary in the response of the rest of the world: it's not just understanding that's required, but engagement. If we in the rest of the world really do want to come out from down underneath, and have a less overborne and unequal relationship with the Big Enchilada, we have to recognize that it's up to us to approach our relationships with the U.S. in a mature and constructive way—pulling our own weight in world affairs to the extent of our capacity, helping out on the tough and necessary military tasks to the extent of our capacity, supporting and not retreating from hard calls in the UN when they become necessary, and generally, when we confront the omnipresent reality of American power, being neither petulant whiners about the iniquity of it all, nor pathetic acolytes, happy to lie on our backs like puppy dogs with four paws waving and pink tummies exposed.

I say all this from the perspective of someone who did live and breathe all these issues in a very practical way for nearly eight years, from 1988 to 1996, as the foreign minister of Australia—a country with not very much military or economic power, which was and will certainly remain an absolutely steadfast ally of the U.S. (fighting alongside the U.S. in every war it fought last century and the beginning of this, a record shared by no one else), but which nonetheless had (at least when my party was in government!) a mind of its own on a great many issues and a certain unwillingness to play the role of poodle.

We deliberately didn't rely upon the language of “special relationship.” Special relationships suggest free rides, and free rides, like free lunches, do not exist. Far more important than a “special” relationship is one embodying genuinely mutual interests, one with some real breadth and depth and complexity to it, and which fully recognizes that alliance membership and sovereign independence, whatever the relative size and clout of the alliance partnership, are not incompatible.

We took the position that our alliance relationship did not absolve us of the responsibility of defending ourselves, of pulling our own weight in our own

protection, or of seeking to make our own contribution to multilateral efforts to resolve particular regional security concerns—as we did with our Cambodia peace initiative and our contribution to the resolution of the 1990 Gulf crisis.

And we demonstrated a spectacular lack of obeisance when it came to policy issues like—although it all seems ancient history now—the Strategic Defense Initiative, sanctions against South Africa, aspects of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, the urgency of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the banning of mining and oil drilling in the Antarctic, and the linkage between China’s human rights performance and renewal of its MFN trade status.

But because we were seen as active, independent, and having some diplomatic capacity of our own that didn’t simply reflect the light coming from above, we were actually able to carry some quite heavy water for the U.S. from time to time, on matters where we had identical goals but the U.S. needed someone to make the running carrying a bit less baggage than it did itself. The role Australia played in the late 1980s and early 1990s in energizing the global chemical industry and bringing to a conclusion the negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention was probably the clearest example.

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I think there is a message in all of this for the Europeans, and Canadians, and Japanese, and others, like Australians, who are anxious about a world in which it does seem like it’s the U.S. versus The Rest. While there are quite a few things the U.S. can do to improve the situation—I’ll come to those below—it is also up to the rest of us to manage our relationship in a thoughtful and intelligent and constructive way: being critically engaged, not just retreating in grumbling righteousness, but taking on and persevering with the hard issues on which there are differences.

We’re often quick to find in America evidence of what William Fulbright called the “arrogance of power,” but what we in the rest of the world also have to recognize in ourselves, and constantly guard against, is what great Australian international relations scholar, Hedley Bull, called the “arrogance of impotence.”

RETHINKING THE U.S. NATIONAL INTEREST

Just as the rest of us have some work to do to improve the international climate, so too is it up to the U.S. to manage its relations in a thoughtful and intelligent way, not least so as to maximize its own long term interests. Bill Clinton

had a splendid line about China back in 1996—that what mattered in the twenty-first century would be “how will the Chinese define their greatness”—which I think has some real resonance now for Americans.

Not a bad place to start would be rethinking the very notion of what is involved in the national interest. Most countries are gradually coming to appreciate, and the U.S. should be no different,

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that these days this involves more than just the traditional notions of security and strategic interest, and economic and trade interest: the national interest also extends to every country's interest in being, and being seen to be, a good international citizen. The reason is that which I spelled out at the outset: in this globalized, interdependent

world of ours there are a great many problems, not least that of terrorism, which can only be solved by a cooperative, give-and-take internationalist approach.

In this context, the U.S. would be well advised to take another look at the way in which its new National Security Strategy is formulated. At the moment it lends itself all too easily to the interpretation that the U.S. national interest lies in maintaining a unipolar world; claiming an unconstrained right to eliminate and not merely deter new security threats; treating as outdated established international rules limiting the scope of self-defense; downplaying the relevance and utility of treaties and international institutions; and placing little value on international stability for its own sake.

The trouble with this view of the national interest can be simply enough stated. It is unworkable, unsustainable, incomplete, and counterproductive:

Unworkable, because other countries are simply not likely to accept the discipline of treaty constraints, and the need to prove demonstrable imminent risk before strike, if the U.S. will not. And the world is going to become a very much more dangerous place as a result.

Unsustainable, because of the burdens and commitments that will pile up after every major military action to the point eventually of overstretch—something that seems almost inconceivable for the U.S. at the moment but which is a logical corollary of an extreme unilateralist approach.

Incomplete, because the strategy simply does not acknowledge the necessity of international cooperation if national interests in relation to terrorism, international crime, environmental protection, trade, and so on are to be realized: as I've said now several times, in a globalized, interdependent world there are many problems that even the biggest Enchiladas can't solve for themselves.

Counterproductive, because, as John Ikenberry put it recently in *Foreign Affairs*, “When the most powerful state in the world throws its weight around

unconstrained by rules or norms of legitimacy, it risks a backlash.” If there is one way the hegemon is likely to ultimately find itself encircled, it is when every other significant power has been systematically alienated by its throwing its weight around.

As one example of what is required, no single change of policy could possibly be more helpful in this respect than a change of approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is not only continuing to generate harrowing casualty levels, but poisoning and complicating so many U.S. efforts elsewhere, not least the ongoing struggle against terrorism. Quite a strong consensus has emerged now in the rest of the world—certainly among the Europeans and moderate Arab states—as to how to move forward, but U.S. reluctance to move has meant that nothing continues to happen. The starting point needs to be frank acknowledgement of what we really do all now know:

We know by now that the incremental approach at the heart of the Oslo process is irretrievably dead—the intended process by which a secure environment is first established, trust is gradually built layer by layer, and the difficult final status political issues (including borders, Jerusalem, and refugee return) are saved up to be dealt with last.

We know that the mistrust and hatred between the present Palestinian and Israeli leaderships is such that it is almost impossible to ever contemplate them being able to reach agreement, and that there needs to be a fundamental change in the political dynamic operating on both sides.

We know that, intellectually, there is now—unlike a decade ago—a very widespread agreement among moderates on both sides and in the wider international community about what a final settlement on all the hard political issues would actually look like.

And we know that while public opinion polls on both sides tell us that while around 70 percent of each supports the most extreme measures being taken against the other, similar majorities support a two-state solution being negotiated and implemented as soon as possible.

What just about everyone internationally is prepared to conclude from all this (and, I think, it is fair to say that ICG has been a leading voice in developing this consensus) is that the only constructive way forward out of the present mess in these circumstances (with no guaranteed chance of success but a far better one than any other strategy now in place) is for the international community, led by the U.S., to put on the table right now—not waiting for security or institutional reform or other conditions to be satisfied—a very detailed “endgame” blueprint, setting out the kind of terms of a final polit-

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ical settlement that are considered fair and reasonable, and on which negotiations should commence immediately, in parallel with the security and other tracks.

U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair has made several recent major speeches on this issue, arguing for a major peace conference to be held as soon as possible, at which such a plan would be put on the table. His voice on this issue, unlike Iraq, has simply not been heard on this side of the Atlantic. It should be.

EMPATHY AND LANGUAGE

I spoke before about the need for the rest of us to work hard at understanding and empathizing with the U.S. in the stresses and challenges it faces. But that's a two-way street too. Hard as it is, it is crucial that U.S. decision makers try to put themselves in the other guy's shoes. Paul Kennedy put the issue very well recently, writing in *The Wall Street Journal*:

How do we appear to *them*, and what would it be like were our places in the world reversed?...Suppose that there existed today a powerful, unified Arab-Muslim state that stretched from Algeria to Turkey and Arabia—as there was 400 years ago, the Ottoman Empire. Suppose that this unified Arab-Muslim state had the biggest economy in the world, and the most effective military. Suppose that by contrast this United States of ours had split into 12 or 15 countries, with different regimes, some conservative and corrupt. Suppose that the great Arab-Muslim power had its aircraft carriers cruising off our shores, its aircraft flying over our lands, and paid the corrupt, conservative governments big royalties for that. Suppose that it dominated all international institutions like the Security Council and the IMF.

Suppose that there was a special state set up in North America 50 years ago, of a different religion and language to ours, and the giant Arab-Muslim power always gave it support. Suppose the colossus state was bombarding us with cultural messages, about the status of women, about sexuality, that we found offensive. Suppose it was always urging us to change, to modernize, to go global, to follow its example. Hmm... in those conditions, would not many Americans steadily grow to loath that colossus, wish it harm? And perhaps try to harm it? I think so."³

Part of the process of putting yourself in the other guy's shoes is to use language that you know won't cause gratuitous offence, or be counterproductive. It's not a matter of overdoing the syrup—and in fact there may be a bit more syrup than the market can already stand in some of the proselytizing done by the U.S. on behalf of freedom and democracy, particularly when it comes across as the

U.S. bestowing its own values upon the benighted, rather than sharing in and advocating a common set of universal values.

Above all, what is to be avoided, if at all possible, is any sense of either exceptionalism or triumphalism in the language that American leaders employ, simply because it is so counterproductive.

Heavy-handedness by the U.S. makes it much more politically difficult for leaders abroad to side with Washington on issues like terrorism or containing Iraq. Whether it is German anger over Kyoto, or a Yemeni public backlash against a military campaign in Iraq, or Indonesian concerns with perceived one-sidedness in dealing with Israeli-Palestinian issues, the U.S. needs to know that needless triumphalism carries a direct cost.

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other guy's shoes.*

SOFT POWER

Let my very last word be on the subject of soft power, a concept given much attention recently in the writing of Joseph Nye in particular. I don't think it is even now appreciated how much of the positive influence and reputation and respect enjoyed by the U.S. in the rest of the world flows from the belief out there that America really does stand for a better world and is the best hope of those who want to achieve it. As Tony Judt has recently put it, "What gives the U.S. its formidable influence is not its unequalled capacity for war, but the trust of others in its good intentions."⁴

If the final outcome of this whole difficult period we have been through in the last couple of years is to make U.S. leaders and policy makers better understand that, and act accordingly, then for all the anguish it has caused, the experience will have been worthwhile. ■

NOTES

1 Note that this article is based on a speech given months before the war in Iraq.

2 The Right Honorable Chris Patten, "America and Europe: An Essential Partnership", speech to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Chicago, October 3, 2002, <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/patten/sp02_452.htm> (accessed April 2, 2003).

3 Paul Kennedy, "Letters to the Editor," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2001.

4 Tony Judt, "Its Own Worst Enemy," *The New York Review of Books*, August 15, 2002.

