

**A Pox On Both Our Houses**

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**Abstract:**

***The central argument of this paper is that it is not the image of the United States that is tarnished, but the reality that a fragmented post Cold War American political culture brings to its dealings with a much more highly politicized world that is causing the loss of international standing. A transformation of American political culture, triggered by the forces of globalization, has resulted in the collapse of the political dimension of American foreign policy causing a decline in American legitimacy abroad. At the same time, globalization dynamics also intensify international politics and make global leadership a political question. To begin the long march to reestablish credibility the United States will need to find its national voice and carry its democratic culture of argument into the community of nations to engage vigorously at the level of ideas, not images. In this new global context, public diplomacy is best conceived, not as an element of soft power, but as the way in which the nation engages in international politics.***

**Biographical Note:**

I was Counselor of USIA in the first three years of the Clinton Administration (1993-1996). In these three years as the ranking career Foreign Service officer, I witnessed and defended the Agency against the initial series of thrusts that ultimately led to the Agency's demise in 1999. This paper is informed by my personal experience.

***"Only what is human can truly be foreign  
The rest is mixed vegetation, subversive moles,  
and wind." Wislawa Szymborska<sup>1</sup>***

### **Squeezing Shut America's Eyes, Ears, Voice**

Not a single Democratic senator was in the room when Karen Hughes, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, testified in her confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 22, 2005. Other than Chairman Richard Lugar (R-Indiana), only George V. Voinovich (R-Ohio) took the opportunity to discuss a national strategy for reversing the deterioration of America's credibility and reputation abroad.

Perhaps the absent senators were unaware that the Pew Global Attitudes Project had reported only a month earlier that "the United States remains broadly disliked in most countries surveyed, and the opinion of the American people is not as positive as it once was."<sup>2</sup> Or perhaps, while not ignorant of the fact that America's global standing has plummeted, the senators don't agree with Senator Lugar who worried that this hostility matters and therefore "public diplomacy is a national security function of the highest magnitude."<sup>3</sup>

Plausibly, the missing senators were taking their cue about the importance of the occasion from Ms. Hughes herself. Nominated in March and not planning on getting to work until late August, she seemed by her leisurely pace to belie her words about the "urgent need to foster greater

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<sup>1</sup> Wislawa Szymborska, "Psalm," in *View With A Grain of Sand: Selected Poem* (New York: Harcourt, 1995), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project <<http://Pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=247>> (July 27, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Lugar, "Opening Statement for Nominations Hearing for Hughes, Shiner, Silverberg, Frazer," July 22, 2005, <<http://lugar.senate.gov/pressapp/record.cfm?id=241318>> (July 27, 2005).

understanding, more respect and a sense of common ideals among Americans and people of different countries, cultures and faiths around the world."<sup>4</sup> Well schooled in the distance between the talk and the walk, the senators might have sensed that America's long march toward reestablishing credibility abroad would not be led by Ms. Hughes from the position, characterized recently in the *Washington Post* as, the "least noticed, least respected, and most important job in the State Department."<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the specific reason for their absence that Friday morning, American politicians have been demonstrating their bipartisan antipathy toward the political dimension of American power abroad for more than a dozen years. Both congressional republicans and democrats slashed funding for public diplomacy throughout last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eventually, in 1999, they eliminated USIA and folded the function of engaging the world's publics into a diminished State Department. State's budget had itself been repeatedly cut during this same period because the political dimension of American foreign policy was expected to shrink in a world that no longer challenged American supremacy.

Most foreign policy analysts attributed the declining domestic political interest in engaging foreign publics to the widely shared American belief that the fall of the Berlin Wall ended the global ideological struggle and there was no longer any challenge to the Western democratic capitalistic model epitomized and led by the United States. Neo-conservative Francis Fukuyama captured this triumphal American confidence in "the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution" in his now famous *End of History?* essay in

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Hughes, "Opening Statement Nominee for Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Senate Foreign Relations Committee," July 22, 2005, <<http://usinfo.state.gov/special/Archive/2005/Jul/22-908773.html>> (July 27, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Anne Applebaum, "Think Again Karen Hughes," *Washington Post*, July 27, 2005, A21.

1989.<sup>6</sup> Neo-liberals bought into this idea as well as evidenced by scholar Michael Mandelbaum who insisted that, "At the dawn of the 21st century, three ideas dominate the world: peace as the preferred basis for relations between countries, democracy as the optimal way to organize political life, and free markets as the indispensable vehicle for the creation of wealth."<sup>7</sup>

The implications for public diplomacy were obvious. "If history was over," Walter Russell Mead asks, "why maintain libraries, study centers and speakers' programs around the world to explain American society and American foreign policy?"<sup>8</sup> Clearly, American preeminence could be maintained with scant effort since all the "others" in the world would inevitably shed their erstwhile cultural skins to reveal American/universal hearts and minds sharing a single global market. If there were no other viable ideologies, there was no longer a war of ideas and no longer a need to explain, argue or persuade anyone abroad of the value of an American perspective. This hubris on the part of both American conservatives and liberals failed, in the words of political theorist John Dunn, "to recognize either the prodigious range of human energies and ingenuities which go into carving out the direction of History, or where that direction is in the end coming from."<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, American politicians from the left and the right saw the end of the cold war as an opportunity to garner a peace dividend. For conservatives like Senator Helms, then the powerful Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a reduced national presence abroad meant a

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<sup>6</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest*, summer 1989, as quoted in Robert W. Merry, *Sands of Empire* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 40.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace and War* (New York: Knopf, 2004) 148.

<sup>9</sup> John Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason: Making Sense of Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 362.

smaller federal government at home and a lighter tax burden on the American people. Rebalancing the federal –v- state power structure also mandated rebalancing the national –v- international relationship. Conservative thinking in the post cold-war era required a rollback in international agreements and organizations that might impinge on American freedom to act in pursuit of the national interest. These conservative Americans viewed multilateral arrangements as limiting rather than securing American power. Cutting American UN dues and reducing the political dimension of American foreign policy through significant reduction in the international affairs budgets were logical steps in a world where the only serious challenges to American security were thought to be limitations on the sovereign right to act. In their eyes, these limitations were entered into voluntarily through international negotiation and political compromise. For Senator Helms, an institution, like USIA, that strove for mutual understanding was as undesirable as an international agreement.

For neo-liberals in the Clinton administration, spending less abroad meant the opportunity to both balance budgets and address social inequalities at home through economic growth keyed to globalization. The emphasis on social justice extended to the developing world with a conviction that economic prosperity would spread by means of technology transfer and removing barriers to trade. Since the “Washington Consensus” was assumed to be the only viable approach to global economics, the administration employed deliberative bureaucrats in policy chambers without submitting their ideas to the indignities of democratic scrutiny.<sup>10</sup> Neo-liberals assumed that in an increasingly rational, capitalistic world all would benefit from global market integration and that, therefore, politics would be transcended. Without the endless disagreement and struggle of politics at the global level,

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<sup>10</sup> “Washington Consensus” is a term used by Joe Stiglitz, Dani Rodrik and other globalization scholars to refer to neo-liberal economic policies.

liberals felt little need to educate, influence, and mobilize more hearts and minds than the other side. Public diplomacy was expendable because it was unnecessary.

Some elements in the Clinton administration foreign policy team believed that the “power shift” from nations to individuals associating voluntarily in transnational NGOs working in concert with international institutions and legal regimes had already created a global civil society capable of transcending nationalism to deliberate on the great issues of the day.<sup>11</sup> Vice President Al Gore and his reinventing government staff focused on the elimination of USIA as well as a functional realignment of the State Department as a consequence of this line of thinking. Their proposed restructuring of the State department on an issue rather than a regional geographic basis was resisted by the State bureaucracy and ultimately rejected by Secretary Christopher. USIA -- seen by progressives as the home of archaic national agitprop abroad -- was, however, eliminated in 1999. By idealizing global civil society and the possibilities of democratic deliberation at the global level, neo-liberals were tone-deaf to nationalism and the political-cultural-spiritual voices of complaint rising around the world.

Over the course of five years, this pincer movement of unlikely ideological bedfellows from the right and the left of the American political spectrum succeeded in shutting down the single American institution whose sole mission was to “understand, inform and influence foreign publics in pursuit of the national interest and broaden the dialog between Americans, their institutions and counterparts abroad.” Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the United

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<sup>11</sup> See Jessica Mathews, “Power Shift: The Rise of Global Civil Society,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1997.

States is dealing with the consequences of that decision on a vastly transformed global stage.

### **Eyes Wide Shut As the World Runs Away**

The isolationist impulse is deeply ingrained in American political culture. Its reemergence in the post cold war era among both progressives and conservatives was not surprising given the collapse of communism and any apparent existential threat to the United States. But traditional American isolationism is not the full or best explanation for transformation of American political culture in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The forces of globalization, unleashed by information technology, profoundly changed politics in the United States as well as the global context in which it operates. While collectively, Americans turned inward and lived in a media climate increasingly devoid of international news, many individual Americans went global. Businessmen, including those in the large American popular culture industry, sought global opportunity to advance their firms' fortunes; and, anti-capitalist activists networked abroad in resistance to the emerging global marketplace. Liberal Americans, often focused intently on a single issue - environment, human rights, or a land mine ban among others - intensified transnational networking to advance their cause through a change in international regimes that would compel or limit national action.<sup>12</sup> More conservative Americans expanded their international missionary activities making the growth of evangelical Christianity in the developing world one of the "four faces of global culture" as conceptualized by sociologist Peter Berger.<sup>13</sup> Globalization scholar Anthony Giddens calls the world created by these dynamic forces the "runaway world" because while

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<sup>12</sup> James N. Rosenau is particularly good in explaining the emergence of new collectives in his *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Berger, "Four Faces of Global Culture," *The National Interest*, fall 1997.



initially the processes of globalization bear the strong imprint of American economic and political power, eventually the world slips the leash and is out of our control.<sup>14</sup> Tom Friedman expands on this point in his new book *The World is Flat*.<sup>15</sup>

Oddly, while the threads of American economic, political and social life were being woven more tightly into a global fabric, most Americans were unaware of this profound transformation. It was only with mass street protests and the shutting down of the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference, November 29 - December 3, 1999, that the term "globalization" even entered mainstream media. Although they had greater technological capacity to cover the world, American television networks eliminated many of their international bureaus and newspapers shifted their priorities from foreign affairs to life-style issues. American troops abroad -- Panama, Gulf War, Somalia, Haiti -- drew citizen interest and media attention but as media studies showed throughout the decade a foreign story that didn't involve bombs, natural disasters or financial calamity had little chance of entering the collective American consciousness.

As individuals however, Claude Moisy found that an attentive public of four to five million Americans continued their interest in international issues by reading the handful of internationally oriented national newspapers and increasingly going on-line.<sup>16</sup> The information technology that enabled individuals to pull in international news also rendered that behavior invisible to foreign observers of the American scene. Instead, thanks to largely American technology, observers looking in on American culture through the

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<sup>14</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 22.

<sup>15</sup> See Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Claude Moisy, "Foreign News Flow in the Information Age," Discussion Paper D-23, (The Joan Shorenstein Center, Harvard University, 1996), 15.

window of the new cable and broadcast media during the 90s, saw an America wrapped up in comfortable insularity.

Singaporean diplomat Kishore Mahbubani contends, "It would be no exaggeration to say that for the rest of the world, Americans have become like goldfish in a bowl, absorbed and self-contained in their little universe with apparently, little or no awareness of the eyes watching them from the outside."<sup>17</sup> This was particularly galling to elites in developing countries who were painfully aware that the global economic matrix advanced by the United States, even if welcomed, involved an infinite series of imponderable and bitterly contentious choices that rocked their traditional worlds. In particular, American response to the Asian financial crisis beginning in 1997 left a strong sense of betrayal on the part of many cosmopolitans in Asia who had expected more of the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Even when Americans were transfixed by satellite broadcasts of the first Gulf War, their insularity was apparent. The "America at War" frame of all the American television news coverage created resentment and confusion in capitals around the world because many of their own troops were risking their lives in the international coalition. Those of us working abroad to advance the policy that this was a UN sanctioned international effort were undercut by broadcasts designed for the American market newly spilling over borders and influencing opinions in the foreign countries of our assignment. That other nations' participation in the war or the war's effect on other than American interests were invisible to the United States created international resentment. To work the problem abroad, we needed State Public Affairs at home to try, without success, to influence American media coverage of the war. The implications for continuing long standing firewalls

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<sup>17</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, *Beyond the Age of Innocence* (Public Affairs, 2005), 166.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

between public affairs and public diplomacy given newly porous media space should have been apparent.<sup>19</sup>

Although Operation Desert Storm (1991) indicated a renewed American willingness to use military force abroad, it did not indicate a deeper commitment to international political engagement. Criticizing the new American militarism in his new book by the same name, Professor Andrew Bacevich contends that in the post cold war era, George Bush and Bill Clinton were able to use military force more frequently than any other commander in chief since Roosevelt because the same information technology that was creating global transparency also created a revolution in military affairs. "The essence of the RMA was to move war out of the industrial age and into the information age."<sup>20</sup> Smart technology had reduced risks to American personnel in conflict and created the illusion that technological superiority would enable Americans to intervene abroad militarily without risk of collateral damage or casualty.<sup>21</sup> This fed the idea that military action was an easy alternative to demanding, frustrating, never ending political engagement. Which, in combination with America's self-image, according to Anatol Lieven, "also reduced still further any perceived need to take the opinions of the rest of the world into account."<sup>22</sup>

The revival of the American military as a means to project power abroad, celebrated by conservatives as a welcome return of national strength and will power lost in Vietnam, was ironically embraced by liberals as well. For

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<sup>19</sup> The firewall referred to here is Smith-Mundt. Passed as the 1948 U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act (Public Law 402), it is known as Smith-Mundt after its sponsors, Senator H. Alexander Smith (R-NJ) and Representative Karl E. Mundt (R-SD). The law prohibits the cross-flow of products and services from public diplomacy and public affairs.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Ignatieff does an excellent job of describing this concept in *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Anatol Lieven, *America Right Or Wrong* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 68.

liberal internationalists who thought national sovereignty was waning, the American military was now seen as an essential instrument for international humanitarian intervention. "American military preponderance," Tony Judt claims, "fueled all manner of liberal dreams for global improvement."<sup>23</sup> Liberals assumed that the end of the cold war had ushered in a new era in which, to be legitimate, the use of force required internationally sanctioned humanitarian intervention and protection of human rights.

Liberal orthodoxy came to treat international rule of law as an accomplished fact. The test of international legitimacy became legality rather than political viability. John Gray, Professor of European Thought at LSE, writing in *Two Faces of Liberalism* contends, "by passing over the political conditions that make the rule of law possible, the legalist liberalism that has prevailed over the past generation has been able to represent the law as a free standing institution. It has contrived to disregard the fact that the institution of law always depends on the power of the state."<sup>24</sup> And, the power of any state in international affairs is sustained by political effectiveness at home and abroad. This is particularly true of democratic societies whose electorate has the capacity to constrain the parameters within which they permit their governments to act.

Essential American disinterest in the world outside its borders during the 90s did constrain the assertive multilateral impulses of the Clinton Administration. From Somalia to Kosovo -- with Haiti, Bosnia, and a failure to intervene in Rwanda in between, the Clinton administration was willing to muscle problems abroad as long as there were no costs to American combatants. "By declaring itself to be the indispensable nation," realist Stephen Walt writes, "the United States ended up taking responsibility for a

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<sup>23</sup> Tony Judt, "The New World Order," (*The New York Review of Books*, July 14, 2005,) 15.

<sup>24</sup> John Gray, *The Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 132.

vast array of global problems. Attempting to deal with all of them was too difficult and expensive, but failing to do so cast doubt on American credibility and leadership."<sup>25</sup> Whether or not UN authorization for American military intervention was forthcoming, the democratic left's "do something" chorus accepted the use of the military instrument of American power if the United States did not, in the words of former Secretary of State Jim Baker, "have a dog in the fight."<sup>26</sup> Since the Clinton administration argued it was advancing universal humanitarian values and not American interests, the domestic political reality permitted the scandal-weakened president to order something be done by force only if there were no real cost in American blood. Consequently, working with NATO, the United States waged the Kosovo campaign that closed out the 20th century entirely in the air without a ground component and without American casualty.

The European allies, who initiated western intervention in Yugoslav and did have peacekeepers on the ground, became increasingly concerned with their American partner's reliance on air power. Michael Ignatieff sees the final Kosovo campaign as confirmation of the suspicions, held by American allies and enemies alike, that American technological superiority hid a crucial weakness: a refusal to risk American lives.<sup>27</sup> It also brought Europeans uneasy recognition that American military force dwarfed anything they could muster. For foreign publics looking in on Americans watching war in their real world "as spectacle" there was an undercurrent of resentment of

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "In the National Interest," *Boston Review* February-March 2005, <<http://bostonreview.net/BR30.1/walt.html>> (February 16, 2005), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Former U.S. Ambassador Lawrence Eagleberger responded to "do something" chorus in his defense of American inaction in Yugoslavia by asking "do what exactly?" Earlier Secretary of State James Baker had declined American intervention in Yugoslavia following Serbian attacks against Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia in 1991 by saying, "the United States does not have a dog in this fight."

<sup>27</sup> Michael Ignatieff, "The New American Way of War," *New York Review of Books* July 20, 2000.

American disdain for sharing in the risks of its actions abroad.<sup>28</sup> This antipathy spilled over into nationalist rage in China when American missiles struck the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade killing four Chinese. Americans and their media treated this incident as a regrettable accident and forgot about it in two days. Mahbubani contends most Chinese still believe, given the touted sophistication of American technology, that the bombing was a deliberate attempt to intimidate China.<sup>29</sup> Even when acknowledging American good intentions, the increasing global perception that the United States would not share responsibility for the “risk society” being created by the very impact of its technology and modernization on the world eroded American moral authority.

The concept of “risk society” advanced by German sociologist Ulrich Beck is important to an understanding of the reinvention of politics in an age of globalization: a politics with which the United States was increasingly out of step. A “risk society” comes about because institutions of industrial society unwittingly produce threats they cannot control. As a consequence, global politics shifts its focus to how “the risks accompanying goods production (...) can be distributed, prevented, controlled and legitimized.”<sup>30</sup> Some of the hazards humans have created include: nuclear, chemical and biotechnology, accelerated global warming, and genetic engineering. Also writing about risk, Giddens underscores that: in all of these cases, the risks are likely to be disputed; and in none of these cases, do the potential risks have anything to do with the borders of nations.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Mahbubani, 97.

<sup>30</sup> Ulrich Beck, “The Reinvention of Politics,” in Beck, Giddens, Lash eds., *Reflexive Modernization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Giddens, 38-53.

The erosion of American leadership over the last fifteen years has been exacerbated by American failure to deliver on a number of significant international co-operative agreements to address these and other risks to human security that are important to other nations. Most often, the Clinton administration entered into international agreements it did not have the domestic political will or skill to get ratified raising questions of moral hypocrisy. Since 2001, the Bush administration has simply rejected the idea of international agreements on their face. It is a mark of globalization that global publics, particularly in advanced industrial societies, are *aware* of both the potential shared risks and the American refusal to collaborate on taking precautionary measures against them.

Ironically, when seeking to convince skeptical allies and their publics of the need to intervene in Iraq to overthrow the regime and destroy weapons of mass destruction, Secretary Rumsfeld made the “unknown unknowns” argument inherent in arguing for the need to take precautionary measures even when we cannot know what the level of risk is. The most charitable thing that can be said about the United States government having been so wrong about the existence of WMD in Iraq is that “we cannot know beforehand when we are scare mongering and when we are not.”<sup>32</sup> At a minimum, the United States forfeits trust for its failure of competence.

Paradoxically, it was liberal American NGOs working globally that succeeded during the 90s in helping to create international agreements banning land mines, addressing global warming and creating an International Criminal Court. Yet, their success in creating new international treaty law was matched by their political failure at home. By acting globally and not locally, these liberal voluntary associations failed to generate national political

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<sup>32</sup> Giddens, 48.

support for the agreements. This is the risk run by cosmopolitans who, Martha Nussbaum insists, should give their “first allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up by the humanity of all human beings.”<sup>33</sup> At the end of the day, liberal American NGOs could not deliver ratification of the international provisions by the United States government – the government of their nation-state. This is politics poorly done.

For example, although a coalition of American NGOs initiated the international movement for banning land mines, the Clinton Administration rejected the Ottawa Convention in 1997. The Clinton Administration signed both the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Rome Statute on the ICC (2000), but the president did not submit either to the Senate knowing both would be dead on arrival. Clinton’s signing of the ICC on December 31, 2000, (the last day nations could sign the treaty without having ratified it) is indicative of the domestic American political impasse. His own Secretary of Defense and the incoming Bush administration were quick to condemn him. Senator Jesse Helms said, “I will make reversing this decision, and protecting America’s fighting men and women from the jurisdiction of this international kangaroo court, one of my highest priorities in the new congress.”<sup>34</sup> The attentive world public read these facts as American arrogance, hypocrisy or political weakness. Coming quickly on the heels of the impeachment of President Clinton and disputed presidential election of 2000, critics abroad, like Tom Nairn, Director of The Globalism Research Institute at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia, claimed that the United States, rather

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<sup>33</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” *Boston Review*, October-November 1994. <<http://phil.uga.edu/faculty/wolf/nussbaum1.htm>> (March 28, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Stefan Halper & Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 122.



than being in the forefront of the free world, "had become hostage to a blatant democratic deficit."<sup>35</sup>

At the century's end, by not tending to the political dimension of its power base and eroding its moral authority, the United States had used up much of the credibility, good will and prestige it had earlier won through hard slogging international political effort. By operating under the assumption that politics could be overcome by force, erased by law and economics, or transcended by virtue, American political leaders from both the left and right had failed to grasp the fundamental truth of globalization: it breeds politics on a far larger scale than ever before because, as John Dunn notes, people the world over are aware that they are deeply affected by the actions of distant fellow humans.<sup>36</sup> It is this context of global awareness, not yet shared by most Americans, that placed the collapse of international confidence in American leadership one good shove away from the tipping point as the 21<sup>st</sup> century dawned.<sup>37</sup>

### **One Good Shove**

Some may contend that one good shove came with the American decision to go to war with Iraq, but it may well have come years earlier from American neo-conservatives who saw the 2000 election as an opportunity to turn the "unipolar moment into a unipolar era" subordinating relations with allies to American policy priorities.<sup>38</sup> In the first six months of his administration, President George W. Bush announced his intention to go ahead with National Missile Defense and reject six international agreements including the Kyoto

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<sup>35</sup> Tom Nairn, "America Versus Globalization," (*Open Democracy*, January 9, 2003), <<http://opendemocracy.net/home/index.jsp>>, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Dunn, 134.

<sup>37</sup> See Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Halper and Clarke, 235.

Protocol and the ICC Treaty and withdraw from the venerable Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

Indifferent to the charges of “unilateralism” arising from the international community or the political impact of these decisions abroad, the Bush Administration had not bothered to engage the residual public diplomacy professionals newly transferred to the State Department following the demise of USIA in 1999. Consequently, Halper and Clarke found that public diplomacy was “absent from the process of explaining the decisions and unable to blunt the vitriolic response across Europe in particular.”<sup>39</sup> European publics polled during late summer 2001 expressed their unhappiness with George W. Bush because they believed, in overwhelming numbers, that he based his decisions only on U.S. interests without either understanding Europe or taking its views into account.<sup>40</sup> It may be, as Robert Kagan insists, that Europe and the United States live on separate strategic and ideological planets and conflicts of interests will always arise.<sup>41</sup> But, by failing to explain these policy decisions with greater care and respect, the United States had violated one of the rising norms of international politics.

Before a month had passed, the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 revealed a landscape that most Americans had not even imagined. Not only did the attacks themselves confirm the existence of a group of human beings from far away that valued differently: it brutally demonstrated that some groups of people were also capable of coming into the United States to kill and die for their differing beliefs. Globalization had

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>40</sup> “Bush Unpopular in Europe, Seen As Unilateralist,” *Pew Research Center for People and the Press*, August 15, 2001 <<http://Pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=5>> (August 13, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Robert Kagan, “America and the World: The Crisis of Legitimacy,” *The 21<sup>st</sup> Annual John Bonython Lecture*, November 9, 2004 <<http://www.cis.org.au/Events/JBL/JBL04.htm>> (February 16, 2005).

run away from its American initiators, as Giddens had predicted, to pit extreme fundamentalism against the cosmopolitan core in the heart of New York City.<sup>42</sup> Rather than ending history, the technology driving the world closer apart and further together had bled different steams of history into a lethal cross-current making Americans feel vulnerable to global forces for the first time.

Surveying the American public within days of 9/11, The Pew Research Center found nearly eight-in-ten Americans favored retaliating against those responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, even if it meant the loss of thousands of U.S. casualties.<sup>43</sup> Given America's preponderant military power and demonstrated national willingness to use it abroad, the decision to take the fight to the enemy was inevitable. Any modern state would justly respond to foreign attacks on its soil in order to guarantee its citizens' lives and personal security. However, global public ambivalence to America's decision to act with military force came as a surprise.

To understand why, Pew polled abroad and released a report in December of 2001. Pew found that opinion leaders in most regions, commenting on public sentiment in their country, said that U.S. policies were believed to be a principal cause of the Sept. 11 attack. Majorities in all parts of the world, including Western Europe, said that many or most of the people in their countries thought it good that Americans had learned what it is like to be vulnerable.<sup>44</sup> Stunned by the *schadenfreude* revealed in the global public

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<sup>42</sup> Anthony Giddens, 22.

<sup>43</sup> "American Psyche Reeling From Terror Attacks," *Pew Research Center for People and the Press*, September 19, 2001 <<http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=3>> (August 12, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> "America Admired, Yet Its New Vulnerability Seen As Good Thing, Say Opinion Leaders," *Pew Research Center for People and the Press*, December 19, 2001, <<http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=145>> (August 12, 2005).

opinion leader survey and perhaps skeptical of its validity, Pew announced a new Global Attitudes Project to test the observations by conducting public opinion surveys in 25 countries over the course of 2002.

Reporting on "Global Gloom and Growing Anti-Americanism" one year later, in December of 2002, Pew found that despite global empathy with the suffering of Americans on 9/11, discontent with the United States had grown around the world since 2000.<sup>45</sup> Pew discovered that the *image* of the U.S. had been tarnished in all types of nations: among longtime NATO allies, in developing countries, in Eastern Europe and, most dramatically, in Muslim societies. The survey found that people around the world embrace things American but, at the same time, decry U.S. influence on their societies. They believe that the U.S. does not take into account the interests of their country when making international policies. Majorities in most countries also see U.S. policies as contributing to the growing gap between rich and poor nations and believe the United States does not do the right amount to solve global problems.<sup>46</sup>

Neo-conservatives commentators, like Charles Krauthammer, were quick to dismiss reports of rising hostility to the United States by saying, "a search for logic in anti-Americanism is fruitless. It is in the air the world breathes. Its roots are envy and self-loathing – by peoples, who yearning for modernity but having failed at it, find their one satisfaction in despising

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<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that the Pew Research Center for People and the Press does not reveal a history of polling abroad and therefore has no apparent benchmarks for measuring a decline in foreign public opinion of the United States. A review of about 250 reports archived on their web site shows that Pew's first foreign public opinion poll evaluating attitudes toward the United States occurred on August 15, 2001.

<sup>46</sup> "What the World Thinks in 2002," *Pew Research Center for People and the Press*, December 4, 2002, <<http://Pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=165>> (August 13, 2005).

modernity's great exemplar."<sup>47</sup> Krauthammer may not speak for the Bush Administration: the facts do. There has been no significant effort to repair American public diplomacy to date. One can only conclude, as John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchin do, that in its first term, the Bush administration "discounted the discontent because countries opposed to U.S. policy do not have the military wherewithal to stand in America's way."<sup>48</sup> The broader foreign policy community does not mistake military superiority for influence and has demonstrated great concern. In response to the evidence of rising anti-Americanism abroad by this and other surveys, a cottage industry of reports and analysis on America's failed public diplomacy has spewed forth from American foreign policy think tanks.

Thirty reports have been produced in the last four years. Some have seen rising global hostility to the United States as a communication problem and called for turning up the volume on America's official voice. Some have considered it an image problem and called for a "rebranding" of America led by the private American advertising sector because the U.S government is no longer credible. Others insist that global discontent is a problem caused by bad foreign policies and argue that putting lipstick on a pig is simply silly. Finally, some retired public diplomacy professionals insist that an effective public diplomacy will only come with increased resources and structural realignment; they call for restoration of a USIA like organization within the State Department and protection for international academic exchange programs through creation of an endowed firewall. I dissented from this call for a restoration for reasons elaborated here.

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Krauthammer as quoted in Anatol Lieven, *American Right or Wrong*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> G. John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchen, "Liberal Realism: The Foundation of a Democratic Foreign Policy", (*The National Interest*, Fall 2004) < [Http://aspenberlin.org](http://aspenberlin.org)> (November 24, 2004).

Although the reports illuminating the negative international effects of bad foreign policy choices come the closest to seeing the political dimension of the problem facing the United States, none really confronts the possibility that it is not the *image* of the United States that is tarnished, but the *reality* that a fragmented post Cold War American political culture brings to its dealings with a much more highly politicized world that is causing the loss of influence.

In his excellent book, *The Cunning of Unreason*, John Dunn defines politics as, “the balance of conflict and co-operation between human purposes on any scale on which you’d care to look at it.”<sup>49</sup> That scale is now global and humans number 6,460,799,685.<sup>50</sup> As we were reminded most cruelly by the atrocious slaughter on 9/11, different interests and ideological commitments are often irreconcilable and must be dealt with by equally intense opposition and force. There will be conflict. Rather than seeing this conflict as political failure, Michael Walzer insists in his new book *Politics and Passion* that “opposition and conflict, disagreement and struggle where the stakes are high” *is* politics.<sup>51</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, politics do not morph into foreign *policy* at the water’s edge. Globalization has erased the water’s edge: immersing us in international politics whether we like it or not. As a consequence, the only way to conceive of engaging this world is politically. Senator Lugar is right to argue that public diplomacy should be a national security function of the highest magnitude because, I believe, public diplomacy is best understood as is the way in which a nation-state engages in politics abroad. It is our

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<sup>49</sup> Dunn, 360.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, World Population Clock, <<http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html>> (August 16, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004,) 117.

political communication with the world. By its frayed condition we communicate very much indeed.

America's public diplomacy has atrophied along with the political dimension of its foreign policy since 1989, because neither the right nor the left in the United States wanted to empower the U.S. government to act politically in the world. Conservatives feared compromising diplomats would negotiate constraints on sovereignty and allow the republic to be subordinated to some foreign power. Liberals distrusted acting on the basis of narrow state interest given what Walzer characterizes as their "theoretical drift – even if the practice lags far behind – towards a global regime that relates directly, with equal respect and concern, to each and every human individual."<sup>52</sup>

Paradoxically, these antagonistic worldviews both have an anti-state impulse at their core. By insisting on ideological purity and refusing to negotiate politically for the common good of the nation, they have succeeded in eroding the international standing of the United States. And, as Francis Fukuyama recently wrote, "failure to appreciate America's own current legitimacy deficit hurts both the realist part of our agenda, by diminishing our actual power, and the idealist portion of it, by undercutting our appeal as the embodiment of certain ideas and values."<sup>53</sup>

### **The Long Road Back**

Repairing the damage is likely to take years. It will require revival of good old American pragmatism, purpose aligned with means, and political skill. Regaining credibility will require climbing back down to earth after eight years of the left-wing idealism of the Clinton administration followed by five years (and counting) of the right-wing idealism of the Bush administration.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>53</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The Neoconservative Moment", (*National Interest*, summer 2004) <<http://aspensberlin.org>> (November 24, 2004), 4-5.

The Bush administration's ideological approach to the world was characterized recently by *Foreign Affairs* managing editor Gideon Rose as "one more failed idealistic attempt to escape the difficult trade-offs and unpleasant compromises that international politics inevitably demand--even from the strongest power since Rome." For Rose, who sees hints of increasing pragmatism in the second Bush administration, "getting real" means that it is time "for the realists to come back in to offer some adult supervision and tidy up the joint."<sup>54</sup>

For liberals, on the other hand, it may require that the United States become virtuous once again. This is the essence of the important concept of "soft power" advanced by Professor Nye. I share in the Jeffersonian view that the American republic needs tending and that the United States leads best by example. My difficulty with the "soft power" concept, particularly advanced by minds less agile than that of Professor Nye, is that its focus on American character is self-referential. And, my reading of the current international political context requires an attitude of engagement that is other-regarding. Professor Nye contends that a country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it "admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness."<sup>55</sup> Perhaps. But, even if Americans do a pretty good job of organizing their own society around the principles of liberty, equality, democracy and justice, if Americans do not convey that they know they live in a broader global society that shares the risks inherent in life on a single planet, America will not have credibility.

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<sup>54</sup> Gideon Rose, "Get Real," *New York Times*, August 18, 2005, op-ed.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Paradox of American Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.



In international politics, Kagan contends, legitimacy is an “elusive and malleable concept” that lies in the eyes of the beholder.<sup>56</sup> The United States will regain legitimacy when other nations believe that the United States is using its power to serve their interests as well as its own. For example, the valuable contribution made by the U.S. military to tsunami relief in Southeast Asia earlier this year increased U.S. standing in the region. Shaping international perceptions of American legitimacy requires both sensible policies and public diplomacy. Because the reference point is *their* hopes, aspirations and fears, the narrative the United States must tell is not America’s story. Rather it is the human story and how America relates to those outside our borders.

The more American rhetoric highlights American virtue, the greater the target offered to those whose identity is formed by being “not-American.” This negative identity and the political power that flows from it require an inflated image of the United States to shove away from. As a matter of effective global communication strategy the United States should not contribute by singing its own praises. This self-referential focus works against American credibility in an age of globalization.

Additionally, by suggesting that the United States can “entice and attract” rather than argue and persuade, many “soft power” devotees assume they know, and we can know, what is good and right for all human beings and therefore transcend politics. But, if other societies admire our values, emulate our example, and aspire to our level of prosperity and openness we will have created a dense world of politics indeed. Because, as John Dunn writes in a chapter called *The Political Implications of the Triumph of Capitalism*, “In a human world increasingly dominated by a search for

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<sup>56</sup> Kagan, 5.

personal profit and monetary advantage the chances of human purposes and judgments converging on clear and convincing public goods are very slight.”<sup>57</sup> Slighter still is the possibility of transcending international politics when the American example is clearly seen and resoundingly rejected by significant groups in the world. These humans too, Walzer insists, will fight for their values with “both conviction and passion, reason and enthusiasm, in always unstable combination.”<sup>58</sup> This is particularly the case of “groups committed to a traditionalist or fundamentalist version of religion and culture who are marginal, vulnerable, poor and stigmatized, in part at least, because of that commitment.”<sup>59</sup> Globalization is the reason for the intensification of local cultural identities in different parts of the world including the United States. And, as the homegrown British Jihadis who bomber the Underground exemplify, these identities, often hybrid constructions, transcend national boundaries. They present at once: a domestic political problem of defining terms for coexistence within the commonweal; and, a global problem of the struggle between cosmopolitanism and fundamentalism that has the potential to destabilize the global order.

In this inevitable world of politics, American public diplomacy will require a corps of professionals with deep cultural comprehension and political acuity having skills of language, listening, and observation to make the arguments for American values and interests that are credible and persuasive in other societies. Understanding what is credible in the context of other societies – with their own history and politics – is the foundation upon which effective public diplomacy is constructed. Without a comprehensive understanding of other cultures, Americans of the right and left are imprisoned in their own

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<sup>57</sup> Dunn, 361.

<sup>58</sup> Walzer, 120.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 45.

echo chambers without reference to the history changing opinions of billions of people.

The United States may take some credit for contributing to a 21<sup>st</sup> century world heavily populated by other modern democratic states within which interests are negotiated, values are debated and political identities are formed and contested in elections. Whether or not history's arrow points to democracy, as Fukuyama believes, the global spread of liberal democratic capitalism continues to be an American objective. Paradoxically, in this free world that Americans struggle to create, to ask that others follow the lead of the United States is to invite serious discussion – at home and abroad - of the ideas and policies America chooses to advance. The United States has an enormous global agenda. To achieve any portion of it Americans will need the co-operation of others. A good place to begin is the recognition that there are *others* and they may value differently.

These others have lives of their own to live. They find the meaning in their lives in a multitude of ways that are not destined to disappear. Values clash. As Isaiah Berlin wrote so many years ago, "It does not follow that some [values] must be true and others false.... These collisions of values are the essence of what they are and what we are.... Some among the great goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss."<sup>60</sup> John Gray exhorts fellow liberals to return to this older liberalism of toleration "which has to do with handling the conflicts of cultures that will always be different, not founding a universal civilization." And he argues that relinquishing some liberal hopes

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<sup>60</sup> Isaiah Berlin as quoted by Ronald Dworkin in "Do Liberal Values Conflict?" Edited By R. Dworkin, and M. Lilla and R. Silvers, *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York: NYRB, 2001), 74.

that theories of justice and rights can deliver us from the tragedies of politics, actually may gain us advances in human freedom.<sup>61</sup>

Conservatives too have had the insight that culture matters, not as destiny but as an important factor in shaping possibilities. For that reason, realists like Steven Walt writing about the American occupation of Iraq insist, “nationalism is the most powerful political ideology in the world, and trying to run large alien populations by force is a losing game.”<sup>62</sup> If American liberals and conservatives can hear and heed these voices within their own traditions perhaps the United States can once again wake up from the fantasy of abolishing world politics and carry its culture of argument onto a very crowded, noisy global stage. When that day comes, the United States will need public diplomacy once again.

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<sup>61</sup> Gray, 135-139.

<sup>62</sup> Walt, 13.

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