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COMMENTARY

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Anti-Americanism: Causes and Characteristics

Recent Commentary by Andrew Kohut

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The numbers paint a depressing picture. Just a quarter of the French approve of U.S. policies, and the situation is only slightly better in Japan and Germany. Majorities in many countries say America's strong military presence actually increases the chances for war. And most people believe America's global influence is expanding.

The latest survey on America's tarnished global image? No, those numbers come from a poll conducted by Newsweek...in 1983. The United States has been down this road before, struggling with a battered image and drawing little in the way of support even from close allies. But for a variety of reasons, this time it is different: the anti-Americanism runs broader and deeper than ever before. And it's getting worse.

In 2002, in a survey of 38,000 people in 44 countries, the Pew Research Center found that the U.S. global image had slipped. But when we went back this spring after the war in Iraq – conducting another 16,000 interviews in 20 countries and the Palestinian Authority – it was clear that favorable opinions of the U.S. had plummeted.

Just four years ago, in a State Department survey, 78% of Germans said they had a favorable view of the U.S. That fell to 61% in our 2002 poll – and to 45% in the survey conducted this spring. Opinion of the U.S. in France has followed a similar track: 62% positive in 1999-2000, 63% last year and 43% in the most recent survey.

What is most striking, however, is how anti-Americanism has spread. It is not just limited to Western Europe or the Muslim world. In Brazil, 52% expressed a favorable opinion of the U.S. in 2002; this year, that number dropped to 34%. And in Russia, there has been a 25-point decline in positive opinions of the U.S. over the past year (61% to 36%).

If anything, fear and loathing of the U.S. has intensified in recent months. A Eurobarometer survey conducted among European Union countries in October found that as many people rate the U.S. as a threat to world peace as say that about Iran. Even in the United Kingdom, the United States' most trusted European ally, 55% see the U.S. as a threat to global peace. And in four countries – Greece, Spain, Finland and Sweden – the United States is viewed as the greatest threat to peace, more menacing than Iran or North Korea.

The U.S. image in the Middle East has been dismal for some time. State Department surveys show that, four years ago, just 23% of Jordanians expressed a favorable view of the U.S. What has changed is that these sentiments have now spread to predominantly Muslim countries far outside of the region. Just 15% of Indonesian Muslims look favorably at the U.S. – down from 61% in 2002.

Moreover, there is considerable evidence that the opinion many Muslims have of the United States has gone beyond mere loathing.

America a Threat to World Peace, Say Europeans

European Union public saying each country a "threat" to world peace

	%
Israel	59
Iran	53
North Korea	53
United States	53
Iraq	52
Afghanistan	50
Pakistan	48
Syria	37
Libya	36
Saudi Arabia	36
China	30
India	22
Russia	21
Somalia	16

Eurobarometer survey of 7,515 Europeans conducted Oct. 8-16, 2003

Worried about Potential U.S. Military Threat

■ Worried ■ Not Worried

In this year's Pew survey, majorities in seven of eight predominantly Muslims nations believe the U.S. may someday threaten their country -- including 71% in Turkey and 58% in Lebanon. And Muslims are increasingly hostile to Americans as well as America; in the past, as the 1983 Newsweek survey showed, people did not let their distaste for U.S. policies affect their view of the American people. In addition, an overwhelming percentage in most Muslim nations -- and as many as half or more in countries like Brazil and South Korea -- said they were disappointed that the Iraqi military put up so little resistance in the war against the United States.

Anti-Americanism's Roots: Policies and Power

To pinpoint the causes of anti-Americanism, we asked people who have a negative view of the U.S. the reasons for their hostility. Is it President Bush or America generally? Not surprisingly, solid majorities in most countries blamed the president, not America. Yet these results do not tell the whole story. Undoubtedly, Bush has become the lightning rod for anti-American feelings, but the problem is bigger than Bush. American policies and power fuel resentment for the U.S. throughout the world. The administration brought those resentments to the surface and intensified unhappiness with the U.S.

Global publics believe the United States does too little to solve world problems and backs policies that increase the yawning global gap between rich and poor. Again, these sentiments were evident well before the war in Iraq.

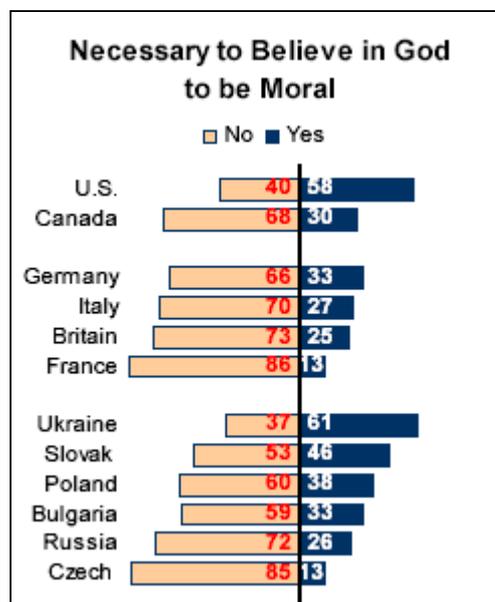
Similarly, opposition to strong American support for Israel long predates the Bush administration. For Muslims, it has become an article of faith that the U.S. unfairly sides with Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians -- 99% of Jordanians, 96% of Palestinians and 94% of Moroccans agree. So too do most Europeans. The only dissent comes from Americans, where a 47% plurality sees U.S. policy as fair. Even in Israel, more respondents view U.S. policy as unfair than say it is fair.

But resentment of American power, as much as its policies or leadership, also drives anti-American sentiments. People around the world -- and particularly in Western Europe and the Middle East -- are suspicious of America's unrivaled power. Western Europeans not only overwhelmingly opposed the war, they also were highly dubious of the administration's stated reasons for conducting it. Solid majorities in Russia, France and Germany said prior to the war that the U.S. was primarily motivated to control Iraqi oil. Turks said the war was being waged for a different, equally nefarious purpose: Six-in-ten saw it as part of a broader American assault on unfriendly Muslim nations.

The Values Divide

Much has been made of the deep values differences that divide Americans and Western Europeans. Americans prize individualism and personal empowerment more than do Western Europeans. There is much more support for an extensive social safety net in Europe than in the U.S. And perhaps more than any other issue, religion has come to define the transatlantic values gap. Among wealthy nations, Pew has found, the United States is the most religious nation -- in sharp contrast to mostly secular Western Europe. A 58% majority in the U.S. views belief in God as a prerequisite to morality -- just a third of Germans and even fewer Italians, British and French agree.

Yet it is also the case that these differences are not new. The values gap is no larger than it was in the early 1990s, when the Times-Mirror Center conducted its "Pulse of Europe" survey. Moreover, when we asked global publics if tensions with the U.S. were based mostly over differences in policies or values,



majorities in three of four Western European countries surveyed pointed to policies as the source of friction, not values.

Conflicting attitudes toward security and military issues – especially in the wake of the war in Iraq – are also a major source of tension between the United States and Western Europe. Americans are more likely than Western Europeans to believe in the necessity of sometimes using force to deal with global threats. And Americans are much more comfortable with the idea of military preemption – the use of force against potentially threatening countries who have not attacked – than are Western Europeans.

No End in Sight

Given the source and nature of anti-Americanism in Europe and elsewhere, it is difficult to imagine it moderating any time soon. A new president may bring a more accommodating style to U.S. foreign policy, but the substance is not likely to change significantly – no matter who is the next president, there seems little doubt the U.S. will strongly support Israel, wage an aggressive fight against global terrorism, and more generally pursue its own security and diplomatic interests.

Moreover, the ties that bind the United States to Western Europe and to allies around the world are much weaker than they were than during the Cold War. Indeed, the war on terror has proven no match for the Cold War as a unifying force. Anti-Americanism is especially prevalent in countries like South Korea and Turkey, which were stalwart friends of the U.S. during the Cold War and remain key strategic allies.

In addition, the United States finds itself as the world's dominant nation at a time when modern media and global public opinion are putting immense pressure on national leaders and creating a new and unpredictable climate in international affairs. Last year, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder scored a huge political victory when he openly broke with Washington over the war in Iraq. Intense German opposition to the war – and the Bush personally – clearly influenced Schroeder's strategy. Similarly, the Turkish government bowed to overwhelming public sentiment when it rebuffed the Bush administration's request to use Turkey as a staging area for the war. It would be hard to imagine Ankara defying Washington in such a fashion during the Cold War.

Despite the widespread hostility toward the United States and many of its policies, the ideals it has long promoted are widely popular. Freedom of speech, fair elections, an impartial judiciary are prized goals for people around the world. Even globalization and expanded trade are widely supported. Ironically, these ideals are winning converts globally not because they are associated with the U.S., but in spite of that connection.

These findings are drawn from polls conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, a series of worldwide public opinion surveys. The project has issued two major reports, "What the World Thinks in 2002" – based upon 38,000 interviews in 44 nations – and "Views of a Changing World, June 2003" – based on 16,000 interviews in 20 nations and the Palestinian Authority. Surveys were conducted by local organizations under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates. The Gallup trends from 1974-5 are drawn from the "Human Needs

	Commitment to Democratic Ideals		
	<i>Very important to live in a country where...</i>		
	People can openly criticize the gov't	There are honest, two-party elections	The media can report without censorship
Regional medians	%	%	%
Latin America	71	66	67
Sub-Saharan Africa*	71	73	63
Eastern Europe	57	60	60
Predominantly Muslim countries			
Mali	79	82	68
Turkey	83	75	68
Bangladesh	81	71	64
Senegal	71	87	53
Lebanon	67	71	57
Pakistan	63	46	38
Indonesia	56	40	40
Uzbekistan	42	42	44
Jordan	32	28	35
Significant Muslim populations			
Nigeria	68	75	69
Tanzania	56	62	42

Based on total national population. In nations with significant Muslim and non-Muslim populations (Lebanon, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Tanzania) an analysis of Muslim and non-Muslim responses shows no systematic differences by religion.

* Includes African nations with relatively small Muslim populations: Angola, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda. Questions not permitted in Egypt.

and Satisfactions” survey published by Kettering and Gallup International in 1977. Full details about the surveys, and the project more generally, are available at www.people-press.org.

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