

# Reflections on anti-Americanism and global leadership

By Paul Heinbecker, published in the Hill Times, April 3, 2006<sup>1</sup>

## Being pro-Canadian is a policy posture still worth embracing in our more complex world

Anti-Americanism appears to be thriving around the world. Pollsters, many of them American, have consistently registered a dramatic drop in US popularity. There have been some bright spots, notably Indonesia following US assistance during the Tsunami crisis and India following the warming of relations between Delhi and Washington. And Canada remains one of the most pro-American of countries, although less so than in the past. But the overall tendency can hardly be encouraging in Washington. Still, is opposition to American foreign policy really just anti-Americanism?

Two prominent American academics, Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, define the phenomenon as “*a psychological tendency to hold negative views of the United States and of American society in general*”. Undoubtedly there are certain countries or elites or terrorist groups who can legitimately be described as anti-American by this or perhaps any other definition. But the problem with the way the term is commonly used is that it offers a built-in rationalization for ignoring disagreement. Those who criticize current unilateralist or militarist tendencies of US foreign policy can be dismissed as anti-Americans whose views can and should be depreciated accordingly. In reality, much of the criticism of US foreign policy is heard first, longest and loudest in the United States, written on the pages of the most prestigious US newspapers and proclaimed in Congress itself. Yet, culture wars and partisan political stakes notwithstanding, even Karl Rove, no minor Administration figure, has been careful to portray American critics of US policy not as anti-American or un-American so much as wrong-headed. Nevertheless, foreigners who criticize the same policies in the same terms are presumed to be anti-American. Neo-Cans, the Canadian diminutives of the American Neo-Cons, have a particular proclivity to dismiss those who question US policy as anti-American.

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Given the impact of US policy on world affairs, it is entirely normal, and sometimes unavoidable, for allies and neighbours of the US to speak up about what they see as dangerous elements of that policy. Washington's prosecution of the "War on Terror" not as a metaphor but as a real war is one such element that has, at times, been not only profoundly contrary to US interests but has damaged Canadian interests in effective multilateral cooperation in the process. Voicing disagreement with this policy is no more anti-American than voicing disagreement with the US when it ignores softwood lumber judgements, seeks to drill in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge or victimizes Canadian firms over patent disputes.

Nor is it anti-American to say that the US is making a strategic error in diminishing the importance of the international rules of the road at a time when the rise of competitive powers such as China is both very evident and quite imminent. Surely the objective in these circumstances should be to cultivate a culture of respect for the law in the conduct of international affairs. From the Geneva Conventions, to the Torture Convention, to Guantanamo Bay, Baghram and "black" CIA prisons in Europe, to "rendition" flights, to Secretary Powell's WMD presentation at the Security Council, to disregard of the UN Charter and the Non-Proliferation Treaty, current US policy has at times seemed either sharp practice or outright lawless. It is not a *"psychological tendency to hold negative views of the United States and of American society in general"* to point these things out.

As a consequence of the global leadership role that the US has assumed (and others have conceded) and because of the considerable costs and risks of such leadership, including the US's mission to propagate democracy, many in Washington have come increasingly to see the US as bearing a disproportionate burden. As a result, some argue that the US merits exceptional dispensations from international law and norms of behaviour. However strongly held this view may be in Washington, dissent from it by non-Americans is not anti-American. The promotion of international law had long been a central feature of American foreign policy that others, notably Canada, had supported, indeed embraced. It is hard to credit that that American priority then was no more than a temporary expedient until the day the US would be powerful enough to surmount the law. Moreover, at the end of the Second World War, the US bestrode the world even more colossally than it does today. In 1945, the US share of the world economy was about 40%; today, it's about 32% (22% at purchasing power parity). In 1945, US defence spending totalled, in current dollars,

approximately \$900 billion; today the equivalent figure is \$450 plus billion. President Truman, nevertheless, told the assembled UN delegates in San Francisco in 1945 that “[w]e all have to recognize that no matter how great our strength, we must deny ourselves the license to do always as we please”. It is not anti-American to prefer that American policy posture.

Twenty years ago, the Conservative Government’s foreign policy review, “Competitiveness and Security: Directions for Canada’s International Relations” began by making the point that Canada was North American but not American. It was an attempt to encapsulate, undoubtedly in too few words, the reality of the differences of Canadian and American historical origins and contemporary views. The point was that we were not anti-American, just not American; we were in fact Canadian, indeed pro-Canadian. In the much more complex world we live in today, that is a policy posture still worth embracing.