

Notes for an Intervention

by Paul Heinbecker*

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**“Reflections on “Anti-Americanisms in World
Politics”**

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Check Against Delivery

*Paul Heinbecker is Distinguished Fellow, International Relations, at the Centre for International Governance Innovation, and Director of the Centre for Global Relations, Governance and Policy at Wilfrid Laurier University. He served as Canada’s Ambassador to the United Nations (2000-2003) and Germany (1992-1996). He was then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney’s chief foreign policy advisor and speech writer. This paper does not necessarily reflect the views of the institutions above

I find the term “anti-Americanism” inappropriate insofar as it is used to characterize disagreement with US foreign policy.

I have encountered the anti-American phenomenon, “*a psychological tendency to hold negative views of the United States and of American society in general*” (definition, as given on page 8), sufficiently often in the course of six assignments abroad during my career as a Canadian diplomat to have no doubt that it is probably stronger now than ever and may be morphing into something quite durable. I do agree, at the same time, that deconstructing the phenomenon as the authors are doing is at least interesting and possibly helpful for US policy makers and commentators, even if inevitably I do not agree with the researchers’ findings on every point. But I fear that the very use of an “ism” word validates the contempt on the part of some in Washington for defenders of the international legal and multilateral systems, ironically built under US leadership. The word offers a built-in rationalization for ignoring disagreement, in the sense that those who criticize current unilateralist or plurilateralist directions of US foreign policy are just anti-Americans whose views can and should be disregarded accordingly.

A further problem with the word “anti-Americanism” is that much of the criticism of US foreign policy heard abroad (but not all, notably, regarding Israel) is akin to that heard in the US, in the most prestigious pages of the US media and in Congress itself. In fact, some of the criticisms are heard first and loudest in the United States. The culture wars and political stakes in the US notwithstanding, even Karl Rove, no minor Administration figure, is careful not to portray American critics of American policy as anti-American or un-American so much as wrong-headed. Yet, foreigners who criticize the same policies are presumed, in the terms of this study, to have *a psychological tendency to hold negative views*.

In my view, it is entirely appropriate, and sometimes even necessary, for friends of the US to criticize elements of US foreign policy without fear that their doing so will be labelled, especially by US academics, as neurotic. From the Geneva Conventions to the Torture Convention to the UN Charter to the Non-Proliferation Treaty to Guantanamo Bay and Baghram to “black” CIA prisons in Europe to the WMD presentation at the Security Council to the issue of extraordinary renditions and torture, current US policy has at times seemed either sharp practice with respect to international law or, worse, actually lawless. Leaving aside the argument

that Washington's prosecution of the "War on Terror" not as a metaphor but as a real war has, also, at times been profoundly contrary to US interests, it has damaged Canadian interests in effective multilateral cooperation and endangered Canadians in the process. We have a right to say so and not to be characterized as anti-American for doing so. Nor is Canadian disagreement with the US confined to international security matters. US positions on bilateral issues such as NAFTA and softwood lumber simply ignore Canadian wins in dispute settlement processes, including the findings of US courts.

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 civilisatrice" to propagate democracy, many in Washington have come increasingly to see the US as bearing a disproportionate burden. As a consequence, they seem to argue that the US merits exceptional dispensations from international law and norms of behaviour. However strongly this view may be held 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 this American priority was no more than an expedient until the day the US would be powerful enough to disregard 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 sort of American policy posture.

Nor is it anti-American to fear 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 other powers such as China is both very evident and quite imminent. Surely the objective for the rest of us ought to be to develop, not deprecate, international law and to cultivate a culture of respect for the law in the conduct of international affairs. Is it really a "*psychological tendency to hold negative views of the United States and of American society in general*" to point these things out?

According to the study, these comments would qualify me as a Liberal anti-American, criticizing the US for not living up to its own ideals. I acknowledge disappointment with US foreign policy but I reject the anti-American label.

Twenty years ago, I wrote a foreign policy review for the Conservative Mulroney Government that began with the words “Canada is North American, but not ‘American’”. It was an attempt to encapsulate, probably excessively briefly, the reality of the differences of our historical origins and contemporary views. The point was that we were not anti-American, just not American, in fact pro-Canadian. In my view, the otherwise excellent Katzenstein/Keohane study needs to acknowledge more clearly that the world cannot be readily categorized as anti-American and pro-American. Differences of view are not inherently “anti”. Nor are others’ views of Washington necessarily at the heart of the matter. That was the problem with President Bush’s declaration after 9/11 that the world was either with the US or with the terrorists. The enormous sympathy for the US notwithstanding, most of the rest of the world (not including Canada) was “with” neither.

These central points for me aside, I quite enjoyed reading the drafts and look very much forward to participating in the discussion.