



Cartoon 7 Onward Into the Fog of War

This cartoon points out the irony of invading, bombing and killing for peace. Immodes displays of violence are likely to increase polarization and produce new generations of terrorists seeking revenge. The GWOT creates a self-sustaining cycle of violence.

Source: M. Wuerker

America, Right or Wrong

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At first sight there is something surprising in this strange unrest of so many happy men, restless in the midst of abundance.

(Alexis de Tocqueville)

Traumatized by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Americans very naturally reacted by falling back on old patterns of belief and behavior. Among these patterns has been American nationalism. This nationalism embodies beliefs and principles of great and permanent value for America and the world, but it also contains very great dangers. Aspects of American nationalism imperil both the nation's global leadership and its success in the struggle against Islamist terrorism and revolution.

More than any other factor, it is the nature and extent of this nationalism which at the start of the twenty-first century divides the United States from a largely postnationalist Western Europe. Certain neoconservative and Realist writers have argued that American behavior in the world and American differences with Europe stem simply from the nation's possession of greater power and responsibility. It would be truer to say that this power enables America to do certain things. What it does, and how it reacts to the behavior of others, is dictated by America's political culture, of which different strands of nationalism form a critically important part.

Insofar as American nationalism has become mixed up with a chauvinist version of Israeli nationalism, it also plays an absolutely disastrous role in U.S. relations with the Muslim world and in fueling terrorism. One might say, therefore, while America keeps a splendid and welcoming house, it also keeps family demons

in its cellar. Usually kept under certain restraints, these demons were released by 9/11.

America enjoys more global power than any previous state. It dominates the world not only militarily, but also to a great extent culturally and economically, and derives immense national benefits from the current world system. Following the death of communism as an alternative version of modernization, American free market liberal democracy also enjoys ideological hegemony over the world. According to all precedents, therefore, the United States ought to be behaving as a conservative hegemon, defending the existing international order and spreading its values by example. After all, following World War II, the United States itself played the leading part in creating the institutions which between 2001 and 2003 the Bush administration sought to undermine.

Instead, under George W. Bush the nation was drawn toward the role of an unsatisfied and even revolutionary power, kicking to pieces the hill of which it is the king. In particular, many observers saw the idea of preventive war against potential threats (rather than preemptive war against imminent ones) as a decisive shift not only to unilateralism, but to a revolutionary, anti-status quo position in international affairs, a position reminiscent of Wilhelmine Germany before 1914 rather than Victorian Britain.

This book seeks to help explain why a country which after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had the chance to create a concert of all the world's major states – including Muslim ones – against Islamist revolutionary terrorism chose instead to pursue policies which divided the West, further alienated the Muslim world and exposed America itself to greatly

increased danger. The most important reason why this has occurred is the character of American nationalism, which I analyze as a complex, multifaceted set of elements in the nation's political culture.

[...]

Nationalism has not been the usual prism through which American behavior has been viewed. Most Americans speak of their attachment to their country as patriotism or, in an extreme form, superpatriotism. Critics of the United States, at home and abroad, tend to focus on what has been called American imperialism. The United States today does harbor important forces which can be called imperialist in their outlook and aims. However, although large in influence, people holding these views are relatively few in number. They are to be found above all in overlapping sections of the intelligentsia and the foreign policy and security establishments, with a particular concentration among the so-called neoconservatives.

Unlike large numbers of Englishmen, Frenchmen and others at the time of their empires, the vast majority of ordinary Americans do not think of themselves as imperialist or as possessing an empire. As the aftermath of the Iraq War seems to be demonstrating, they are also not prepared to make the massive long-term commitments and sacrifices necessary to maintain a direct American empire in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Apart from the effects of modern culture on attitudes to military service and sacrifice, American culture historically has embodied a strong strain of isolationism. This isolationism is, however, a complex phenomenon which should not be understood simply as a desire to withdraw from the world. Rather, American isolationism forms another face of both American chauvinism and American messianism, in the form of a belief in America as a unique city on a hill. As a result, it is closely related to nationalist unilateralism in international affairs, since it forms part of a view that if the United States really has no choice at all but to involve itself with disgusting and inferior foreigners, it must absolutely control the process and must under no circumstances subject itself to foreign control or even advice.

Unlike previous empires, the U.S. national identity and what has been called American Creed are founded on adherence to democracy. However imperfectly democracy may be practiced at home and hypocritically preached abroad, democratic faith does set real limits to how far the United States can exert

direct rule over other peoples. Therefore, since 1945 the United States has been an indirect empire resembling more closely the Dutch in the East Indies in the seventh and eighteenth centuries than the British in India.

As far as the mass of the American people is concerned, even an indirect American empire is still an empire in denial. In presenting its imperial plans to the American people, the Bush administration has been careful to package them as something else: on one hand, as part of a benevolent strategy of spreading American values of democracy and freedom, on the other, as an essential part of the defense not of an American empire, but of the nation itself.

A great many Americans are not only intensely nationalistic, but bellicose in response to any perceived attack or slight against the United States: "Don't Tread on Me!" as the rattlesnake on the American revolutionary flag declared. This attitude was summed up by that American nationalist icon, John Wayne, in his last role, as a dying gunfighter in the film *The Shootist*: "I won't be wronged, I won't be insulted and I won't be laid a hand on. I don't do these things to other people, and I require the same from them."

As an expression of pride, honor and a capacity for self-defense, these are sympathetic and indeed admirable words. However, in this context it is useful to remember an eighteenth-century expression, "to trail one's coat." This phrase means deliberately provoking a quarrel by allowing your coat to trail along the ground, that another man would step on it, thereby allowing you to challenge him to a duel. One might say that American imperialists trail America's coat across the whole world while most ordinary Americans are not looking and rely on those same Americans to react with "don't tread on me" nationalist fury when the coat is trodden on.

Coupled with an intense national solipsism and ignorance of the outside world among the American public, and with particular American prejudices against the religion of Islam, this bellicose nationalism has allowed a catastrophic extension of the war on terrorism from its original – and legitimate – targets of al Qaeda and the Taliban to embrace the Iraqi Ba'athist regime, anti-Israeli groups in Palestine and Lebanon, and quite possibly other countries and forces in future. This reserve of embittered nationalism has also been tapped with regard to a wide range of international proposals which can be portrayed as hurting America or infringing on its national sovereignty, from

the International Criminal Court to restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions.

A mixture of American energy interests and the addiction of most Americans to the automobile might well have killed the nation's adherence to the Kyoto Treaty in any case. The treaty's American opponents were however tremendously helped by that section of opinion whose political culture means that they see any international treaty involving sacrifices and commitments by the United States as a plot by hostile and deceitful aliens. Many Americans genuinely believe these ideas to be a matter of self-defense – of their economy, their way of life, their freedoms or their very nation.

This background helps explain tragicomic statistics such as the fact that the majority of Americans believe that their country spends more than 20 percent of its budget on foreign aid and that this figure should be reduced; the true figure is less than 1 percent and is the lowest in the developed world. Evidence like this allows international critics of American hegemony to portray the nation as a purely selfish imperial power, without generosity and without real vision. This pattern is strange, and very sad, when contrasted with the tremendous generosity of many Americans when it comes to domestic and private charity, and brings out the degree to which chauvinist nationalism can undermine even the noblest of impulses.

Under the administration of George W. Bush (Bush Jr.) the United States drove toward empire, but the domestic political fuel fed into the engine was that of a wounded and vengeful nationalism. After 9/11, this sentiment is entirely sincere as far as most Americans are concerned, and it is all the more dangerous for that. In fact, to judge by world history, there is probably no more dangerous element in the entire nationalist mix than a sense of righteous victimhood. In the past this sentiment helped wreck Germany, Serbia and numerous other countries, and it is now in the process of wrecking Israel.

THE TWO SOULS OF AMERICAN NATIONALISM

Like other nationalisms, American nationalism has many different faces. It concentrates on what I take to be the two most important elements in the historical culture of American nationalism and the complex relationship between them. Erik Erikson wrote that

"every national character is constructed out of polarities." As I shall show, this is certainly true of the United States, which embodies among other things both the most modern and the most traditionalist society in the developed world.

The clash between those societies is contributing to the growing political polarization of American society. At the time of this writing, the American people more sharply and more evenly divided along party lines than at any time in modern history. This political division in turn reflects greater differences in social and cultural attitudes than at any time since the Vietnam War. White evangelical Protestants vote Republican rather than Democrat by a factor of almost two to one, with corresponding effects on the parties' stances on abortion and other moral issues. The gap is almost as great when it comes to nationalism, with 71 percent of Republicans in 2003 describing themselves as "very patriotic" compared to 48 percent of Democrats. This difference reflects in part racial political allegiances, with 65 percent of Whites describing themselves as "very patriotic" in that year to only 38 percent of Blacks. Gaps concerning attitudes to crime and faith in American business are even greater.

It is however not the opposition, but the combination of these different strands which determines the overall nature of the American national identity and largely shapes American attitudes and policies toward the outside world. This combination was demonstrated by the Bush administration, which [...] drew its rhetoric at least from both main strands of American nationalism simultaneously.

The first of these strands [...] stems from what has been called the "American Creed," an idea I also describe as the "American Thesis": the set of great democratic, legal and individualist beliefs principles on which the American state and constitution is founded. These principles form the foundation of American civic nationalism and also help bind the United States to the wider community of democratic states. They are shared with other democratic societies, but in America they have a special role in holding a disparate nation together. As the term "Creed" implies, they are held with an ideological and almost religious fervor.

The second element forms what I have called the American nationalist "antithesis" and stems above all from ethnoreligious roots. Aspects of this tradition have also been called "Jacksonian nationalism,"

after President Andrew Jackson (1767–1845). [...] Because the United States is so large and complex compared to other countries, and has changed so much over time, the nationalist tradition is correspondingly complex.

Rather than the simple, monolithic identity of a Polish or Thai ethnonationalism, this tradition in the United States forms a diffuse mass of identities and impulses, including nativist sentiments on the part of America's original White population, the particular culture of the White South and the beliefs and agendas ethnic lobbies. Nonetheless, these nationalist features can often be clearly distinguished from the principles of the American Creed and of American civic nationalism, and although many of their features are specifically American – notably, the role of fundamentalist Protestantism – they are also related to wider patterns of ethnonationalism in the world.

These strands in American nationalism are usually subordinate to American civic nationalism stemming from the Creed, which dominates official and public political culture. However, they have a natural tendency to rise to the surface in times of crisis and conflict. In the specific case of America's attachment to Israel, ethnonationalist factors have become dominant, with extremely dangerous consequences for the war on terrorism.

The reason why "civic nationalism," rather than "patriotism," is the appropriate name for the dominant strand in American political culture was well summed up in 1983 by one of the fathers of the neoconservative school in the United States, Irving Kristol:

Patriotism springs from love of the nation's past; nationalism arises out of hope for the nation's future, distinctive greatness. . . . The goals of American foreign policy must go well beyond a narrow, too literal definition of "national security." It is the national interest of a world power, as this is defined by a sense of national destiny.

In drawing this distinction, Kristol echoed a classic distinction between patriotism and nationalism delineated by Kenneth Minogue, one of the great historians of nationalism. Minogue defined patriotism as essentially conservative, a desire to defend one's country as it actually is; whereas nationalism is a devotion to an ideal, abstract, unrealized notion of one's country, often coupled with a belief in some

wider national mission to humanity. In other words, nationalism has always had a certain revolutionary edge to it. In American political culture at the start of the twenty-first century, there is certainly a very strong element of patriotism, of attachment to American institutions and to America in its present form, but as Kristol's words indicate, there is also a revolutionary element, a commitment to a messianic vision of the nation and its role in the world. [...]

As the American historian and social critic Richard Hoftstadter (1917–1970) wrote, "The most prominent and pervasive failing [of American political culture] is a certain proneness to fits of moral crusading that would be fatal if they were not sooner or later tempered with a measure of apathy and common sense." This pattern has indeed repeated itself in our time, with the aftermath of the Iraq War leading to a new sobriety in American policies and the American public mood. In the meantime, however, the Bush administration's appeal to this crusading and messianic spirit had played a major part in getting the nation into Iraq in the first place.

If Minogue's and Kristol's distinction between patriotism and nationalism is valid, then it must be acknowledged that nationalism, rather than patriotism, is the correct word with which to describe the characteristic national feeling of Americans. And this feature also links the American nationalism of today to the unsatisfied, late-coming nationalisms of Germany, Italy and Russia, rather than to the satisfied and status-quo patriotism of the British. Thus this feature helps explain the strangely unsatisfied, Wilhelmine air of U.S. policy and attitudes at the start of the twenty-first century.

But if one strand of American nationalism is radical because it looks forward to "the nation's future, distinctive greatness," another is radical because it continuously looks backward, to a vanished and idealized national past. This "American antithesis" is a central feature of American radical conservatism: the world of the Republican Right and especially the Christian Right, with their rhetoric of "taking back" America and restoring an older, purer American society. [...] [T]his long-standing tendency in American culture and politics reflects the continuing conservative religiosity of many Americans; however, it also has always been an expression of social, economic, ethnic and above all racial anxieties.

In part, these anxieties stem from the progressive loss of control over society by the "original" White

Anglo-Saxon and Scots Irish populations, later joined by others. Connected to these concerns are class anxieties – in the past, the hostility of the small towns and countryside to the new immigrant-populated cities; today, the economic decline of the traditional White working classes. As a result of economic, cultural and demographic change, in America, the supremely victorious nation of the modern age, large numbers of Americans feel defeated. The domestic anxieties which this feeling of defeat generates spill over into attitudes to the outside world, with 64 percent of Americans in 2002 agreeing that "our way of life needs to be protected against foreign influence," compared to 51 percent of British and 53 percent of French. These figures lie between those for Western Europe and those for developing world countries such as India (76 percent) – which is piquant, because the "foreign influence" that Indian and other cultural nationalists in the developing world most fear is, of course, that of the United States.

These fears help give many American nationalists their curiously embittered, mean-spirited and defensive edge, so curiously at variance with America's image and self-image as a land of success, openness, wealth and generosity. Over the years, the hatred generated by this sense of defeat and alienation has been extended to both domestic and foreign enemies.

This too is a very old pattern in different nationalisms worldwide. Historically speaking, in Europe at least, radical conservatism and nationalism have tended to stem from classes and groups in actual or perceived decline as a result of socioeconomic change. One way of looking at American nationalism and the troubled relationship with the contemporary world which the nation dominates is indeed to understand that many Americans are in revolt against the world which America itself has made.

However, except for the extreme fringe among the various "militia" groups, the neo-Nazis and so on, these forces of the American antithesis are not in public revolt against the American Creed and American civic nationalism as such. Most radical nationalist and radical conservative movements elsewhere in the world in the past at least opposed democracy and demanded authoritarian rule. By contrast, Americans from this tradition generally believe strongly in the American democratic and liberal Creed. However, they also believe – consciously or unconsciously, openly or in private – that it is the product of a specific White Christian American civilization, and that both

are threatened by immigration, racial minorities and foreign influence. And I am not saying that they are necessarily wrong; a discussion of this point lies outside the scope of this book. I am only pointing out that people with this belief naturally feel embattled, embittered and defensive as a result of many contemporary trends.

American Protestant fundamentalist groups also do not reject the Creed as such. In terms of their attitude to culture and the intellect, however, their rejection of contemporary America is even deeper, for they reject key aspects of modernity itself. For them modern American mass culture is a form of daily assault on their passionately held values, and their reactionary religious ideology in turn reflects the sense of social, cultural and racial embattlement among their White middle-class constituency. Even as America is marketing the American Dream to the world, at home many Americans feel that they are living in an American nightmare.

America is the home of by far the most deep, widespread and conservative religious belief in the Western world, including a section possessed by two millenarian hopes, fears and hatreds – and these two phenomena are intimately related. As a Pew Research Center Survey of 2002 demonstrates, at the start of the twenty-first century the United States as a whole is much closer to the developing world in terms of religious belief than to the industrialized countries (although a majority of believers in the United States are not fundamentalist Protestants but Catholics and "mainline," more liberal Protestants). The importance of religion in the contemporary United States continues a pattern evident since the early nineteenth century and remarked by Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830s, when religious belief among the European populations had been shaken by several decades of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution but American religious belief was fervent and nearly universal.

As of 2002, with 59 percent of respondents declaring that "religion plays a very important role in their lives," the United States lies between Mexico (57 percent) and Turkey (65 percent) but is very far from Canada (30 percent), Italy (27 percent), or Japan (12 percent). In terms of sheer percentage points, it is indeed closer on this scale to Pakistan (91 percent) than to France (12 percent). As of 1990, 69 percent of Americans believed in the personal existence of the Devil, compared to less than half that number of

Britons. When a U.S. senator exclaimed (apocryphally) of the Europeans, "What common values? They don't even go to church!" he was expressing a truth, and this is as true of the U.S. political elites (but not of the cultural or economic ones) as of the population in general. Among the fundamentalist Protestant sections of the United States, there has been a strong historical inclination to a paranoid style, originally directed against Catholics, Freemasons and others, and perpetuated by the Cold War and the communist threat. In our own time, "the recent Evangelical engagement with public life reflects religious and cultural habits that Anglo-American Protestants, both liberal and Evangelical, learned when threatened by Americans of different religious and ethnic backgrounds."

The extreme tension between these fundamentalist religious values and the modern American mass culture which now surrounds them is an important cause of the mood of beleaguered hysteria on the American Right which so bewilders outside observers. Across large areas of America, these religious beliefs in turn form a central part of the identity of the original White American colonist population, above all in the Greater South, or what former First Lady Lady Bird Johnson described simply as "us – the simple American stock."

The religious beliefs of large sections of this core population are under constant, daily threat from modern secular culture, above all via the mass media. And perhaps of equal importance in the long term will be the relative decline in recent decades in the real incomes of the American middle classes, where these groups are situated socially. This decline and the wider economic changes which began with the oil shock of 1973 have had the side effect of helping force more and more women to go to work, thereby undermining traditional family structures even among those groups most devoted to them.

The relationship between this traditional White Protestant world on one hand and the forces of American economic, demographic, social and cultural change on the other may be compared to the genesis of a hurricane. A mass of warm, humid air rises from the constantly churning sea of American capitalism to meet a mass of cooler layers of air, and as it rises it sucks in yet more air from the sides, in the form of immigration. The cooler layers are made up of the White middle classes and their small-town and suburban worlds in much of the United States; the old White populations of the Greater South with their specific

culture, and the especially frigid strata of old Anglo-Saxon and Scots Irish fundamentalist Protestantism.

The result of this collision is the release of great bolts and explosions of political and cultural electricity. Like a hurricane, the resulting storm system is essentially circular, continually chasing its own tail, and essentially self-supporting, generating its own energy – until, at some unforeseeable point in future, either the boiling seas of economic change cool down or the strata of religious belief and traditional culture dissolve. Among these bolts is hatred, including nationalist hatred.

Externally directed chauvinist hatred must therefore be seen as a byproduct of the same hatred displayed by the American Right at home, notably in their pathological loathing of President Bill Clinton. In Europe, Clinton was generally seen as a version of Tony Blair, a centrist who "modernized" his formerly center-Left party by stealing most of the clothes of the center-Right and adopting a largely right-wing economic agenda. To radical conservatives in America, this was irrelevant. They hated him not for what he *did*, but for what he *is*: the representative of a multi-racial, pluralist and modernist culture and cultural elite which they both despise and fear, just as they hate the atheist, decadent, unmanly Western European nations not only for what they do, but for what they are.

In the U.S. context it is also crucial to remember that as in a hurricane or thunderstorm, rather than simply being opposing forces, the two elements which combine to produce this system work together. In a curious paradox, the unrestrained free market capitalism which is threatening the old conservative religious and cultural communities of Protestant America with dissolution is being urged on by the political representatives of those same communities.

This was not always so. In the 1890s and 1900s, this sector of America formed the backbone of the Populist protest against the excesses of American capitalism, and in the 1930s, it voted solidly for Roosevelt's New Deal. Today, however, the religious Right has allied itself solidly with extreme free market forces in the Republican Party – although it is precisely the workings of unrestrained American capitalism which are eroding the world the religious conservatives wish to defend.

The forces of radical capitalism in the United States may come to depend more and more on appeals to radical conservatism and nationalism to win votes and to defend their class interests. [...] The clash between cultural and social loyalties and the imperatives of capitalist change is an old dilemma for those social and

cultural conservatives who at the same time are dedicated to the preservation of free market economics. As the distinguished U.S. political and ethical thinker Garry Wills has noted, "There is nothing less conservative than capitalism, so itchy for the new."

THE THREAT TO AMERICAN HEGEMONY

Because of a deep-rooted (and partly justified) belief in American exceptionalism and the decline of the study of history in American academia, Americans are not used to studying their own nationalism in a Western historical context – and it is vitally important that they begin to do so. For surely no sane person, looking at the history of nationalist Europe in the century prior to 1945, would suggest that the United States should voluntarily follow such a path. In particular, American nationalism is beginning to conflict very seriously with any enlightened, viable or even rational version of American imperialism, that is to say, with the interests of the United States as world hegemon and heir to the roles of ancient Rome and China within their respective regions.

Nationalism provides one clue to the difference between the strategy and philosophy of Clinton and those of George W. Bush and to the difference between an American approach which seeks legitimacy for American hegemony and one which makes a public cult of the unrestrained exercise of American will.

A number of highly distinguished American and other observers have, however, seen little basic difference between the international policies of Clinton and Bush. People on the Left view the policies of all U.S. administrations as reflecting above all the enduring dynamics and requirements of an imperial version of American capitalism: the domination of the world by capitalism and the primacy of the United States within the capitalist system. This analysis is indeed partly true, but in emphasizing common goals, left-wing analysis have a tendency to lose sight of certain other highly important factors: the means used to achieve these ends; the difference between intelligent and stupid means; and the extent to which the choice of means is influenced by irrational sentiments which are irrelevant or even contrary to the goals pursued. Of the irrational sentiments which have contributed to wrecking intelligent capitalist strategies – not only

today, but for most of modern history – the most important and dangerous is nationalism.

Walter Russell Mead, an American nationalist and no Marxist, sees Bush's globalization of the Monroe Doctrine as a process stretching back to World War II. Andrew Bacevich and Chalmers Johnson, basing their work in part on the analysis of the economic and institutional roots of American imperialism by William Appleman Williams, also see the administrations of Clinton and Bush as characterized by an essential continuity when it comes to the extension of American power.

For them, Bush's Iraq is just Clinton's Kosovo or Haiti on a much larger scale and with greatly increased risks. Clinton after all moved rather quickly to combat Russia's plans to retain a sphere of influence on the territory of the former Soviet Union and was not too scrupulous about the regimes he helped in the process. Clinton preserved the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as what was then seen as the essential vehicle of U.S. strategic dominance in Europe and, as Bacevich argues, fought the Kosovo war largely to justify NATO's continued existence as this vehicle.

Clinton, however, although dedicated to American hegemony, was not an American chauvinist. His vision of global order involved American hegemonic leadership rather than dictation and a desire to "place America at the center of every network" rather than simply to dictate in every situation. This at least was certainly the perception of his critics on the American Right, one of whose leaders accused Clinton of "moving us incrementally into a network of global organizations."

This desire to exercise American leadership through international institutions is an important strand in American international policy dating back to World War II. It stems in part from a conscious determination not to repeat the U.S. mistake of withdrawal from the world after 1919 and in part from the international needs and perceptions of American capitalism. Thus although partisans of the Bush administration repeatedly described its rhetoric of democratization and humanitarian intervention after 2001 as Wilsonian, such an attribution is quite wrong in historical terms, for President Woodrow Wilson also believed passionately in the creation of international institutions and in exerting U.S. power and influence through those institutions. Clinton, not Bush, therefore was the true Wilsonian of our time.

Moreover, Clinton's version of American hegemonic leadership, although often resented by the leaders of other states, was nonetheless far more acceptable to most than Bush's approach from 2001 to 2003. Clinton's strategy was detested by Russians and others who saw its content as a threat to their geopolitical interests and its democratizing language as arrogant, mendacious and hypocritical. Nonetheless, it was greatly preferred by most world governments to the Bush administration's approach in its first three years of power, since it paid some attention to their interests and, equally important, did not publicly humiliate them before their own populations by demanding ostentatiously servile displays of deference and obedience.

The dominant forces of the Bush administration in 2001–2003 were much more overt imperialists than their predecessors. Moreover, in response to their own sentiments but also to appeal to the American people, they made things worse by packaging imperialism as American nationalism, thereby adopting a number of gratuitously unilateralist measures and approaches. And this was no pose or piece of cynical manipulation of American nationalism. Bush, his leading officials and his intellectual and media supporters are genuinely motivated by nationalism, in a way that Clinton was not: and as nationalists, they are absolutely contemptuous of any global order involving any check whatsoever on American behavior and interests.

The harshly nationalist character of the Bush administration was evident from its coming to power at the start of 2001. A whole set of moves bitterly alienated much of the rest of the world and created a level of hostility to the administration in Europe which contributed greatly to the later rejection of the Iraq War by large majorities in most European countries. As antiterrorism coordinator Clarke remarked presciently in the summer of 2001, "If these guys in this administration are going to want an international coalition to invade Iraq next year, they are sure not making a lot of friends."

The rejection of vital international treaties on arms control seemed motivated by a blind nationalist desire for absolute American freedom of action and increased dangers to the United States from terrorism using weapons of mass destruction. The spirit behind these moves was described by John Bolton, later under secretary of state for arms control and international security, as "Americanism," but nationalism is a simpler description. [...]

Most damaging of all to U.S. prestige in Europe was the outright rejection of the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions and the abandonment of early attempts by U.S. officials to find a substitute – a decision taken in a way which displayed utter contempt both for the international community and American allies in Europe, but also for moderate sections of Bush's own administration. This indifference to environmental threats will probably also be the strongest criticism leveled at the United States and its hegemony by future generations. The attitude to environmental policy displayed by the Bush administration therefore undermines the United States not only today, but in its role as the new Rome, a civilizational force transcending the current epoch.

For coupled with the growing craze for gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles (SUVs) in the U.S. middle classes, this more than anything else seemed to suggest that Americans are interested in using their power over the planet purely for their own most selfish and shortsighted interests and that talk of wider U.S. responsibilities was utter hypocrisy. The former Energy Secretary Paul O'Neill attributed the White House decision on Kyoto to a feeling of "the base likes this and who the hell knows anyway" – not a sentiment calculated to increase faith in American leadership and decision making elsewhere in the world.

In the vision set out in its new National Security Strategy of 2002 (NSS 2002), embodying the so-called Bush Doctrine, American sovereignty was to remain absolute and unqualified. The sovereignty of other countries, however, was to be heavily qualified by America, and no other country was to be allowed a sphere of influence, even in its own neighborhood. In this conception, "balance of power" – a phrase used repeatedly in the NSS – was a form of Orwellian doublespeak. The clear intention actually was to be so strong that other countries had no choice but to rally to the side of the United States, concentrating all real power and freedom of action in the hands of America.

This approach was basically an attempt to extend a tough, interventionist version of the Monroe Doctrine (the "Roosevelt Corollary" to the Doctrine, laid down by President Theodore Roosevelt) to the entire world. This plan is megalomaniac, completely impracticable (as the occupation of Iraq has shown) and totally unacceptable to most of the world. Because, however, this program was expressed in traditional American nationalist terms of self-defense and the messianic role

of the United States in spreading freedom, many Americans found it entirely acceptable and indeed natural.

The accusation against the Bush administration then is that like the European elites before 1914, it has allowed its own national chauvinism and limitless ambition to compromise the security and stability of the world capitalist system of which America is the custodian and greatest beneficiary. In other words, members of the administration have been irresponsible and dangerous not in Marxist terms, but in their own. They have offended against the Capitalist Peace.

This difference is terribly important from the point of view of the stability of the world and of U.S. hegemony in the world. A relatively benign version of American hegemony is by no means unacceptable to many people around the world – both because they often have neighbors whom they fear more than America and because their elites are to an increasing extent integrated into a global capitalist elite whose values are largely defined by those of America. But American imperial power in the service of narrow American (and Israeli) nationalism is a very different matter and is an extremely unstable base for hegemony. It involves power over the world without accepting any responsibility for global problems and the effects of U.S. behavior on other countries – and power without responsibility was defined by Rudyard Kipling as "the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages."

American nationalism has already played a key role in preventing America from taking advantage of the uniquely beneficent world-historical moment following the fall of communism. [...] [I]nstead of using this moment to create a "concert of powers" in support of regulated capitalist growth, world stability and the relief of poverty, preventable disease and other social ills, nationalism has helped direct America into a search for new enemies.

Such nationalism may encourage its adherents to cultivate not only specific national hatreds, but

also hostility to all ideals, goals, movements, laws and institutions which aim to transcend the nation and speak for the general interests of humankind. This form of nationalism is therefore in direct opposition to the universalist ideals and ambitions of the American Creed – ideals upon which, in the end, rests America's role as a great civilizational empire and heir to Rome and China, and upon which is based America's claim to represent a positive example to the world. These ideals form the core of what Joseph Nye has called "soft power" in its specifically American form. [...]

Nationalism therefore risks undermining precisely those American values which make the nation most admired in the world and which in the end provide both a pillar for its current global power and the assurance that future ages will look back on it as a benign and positive leader of humanity.

The historical evidence of the dangers of unreflecting nationalist sentiments should be all too obvious and are all too relevant to U.S. policy today. Nationalism thrives on irrational hatreds and on the portrayal of other nations or ethnoreligious groups as congenitally, irredeemably wicked and hostile. Yesterday many American nationalists felt this way about Russia. Today, prejudices are likely to be directed against the Arab and Muslim worlds – and to a lesser extent any country that defies American wishes. Hence the astonishing explosion of chauvinism directed against France and Germany in the run-up to the war in Iraq. [...] Other nations are declared to be irrationally, incorrigibly and unchangingly hostile. This being so, it is obviously pointless to seek compromises with them or to accommodate their interests and views. And because they are irrational and barbarous, America is free to dictate to them or even to conquer them for their own good. This was precisely the discourse of nationalists in the leading European states toward each other and lesser breeds before 1914, which helped drag Europe into the great catastrophes of the twentieth century.