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The Roots of Anti-Americanism

By Sam Vaknin

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The United States is one of the last remaining land empires. That it is made the butt of opprobrium and odium is hardly surprising, or unprecedented. Empires – Rome, the British, the Ottomans – were always targeted by the disgruntled, the disenfranchised and the dispossessed and by their self-appointed delegates, the intelligentsia.

Yet, even by historical standards, America seems to be provoking blanket repulsion.

The Pew Research Center published last December a report titled "What the World Thinks in 2002". "The World", was reduced by the pollsters to 44 countries and 38,000 interviewees. Two other surveys published last year – by the German Marshall Fund and the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations – largely supported Pew's findings.

The most startling and unambiguous revelation was the extent of anti-American groundswell everywhere: among America's NATO allies, in developing countries, Muslim nations and even in eastern Europe where Americans, only a decade ago, were lionized as much-adulated liberators.

"People around the world embrace things American and, at the same time, decry U.S. influence on their societies. Similarly, pluralities in most of the nations surveyed complain about American unilateralism." – expounds the Pew report.

Yet, even this "embrace of things American" is ambiguous.

Violently "independent", inanely litigious and quarrelsome, solipsistically provincial, and fatuously ignorant – this nation of video clips and sound bites, the United States, is often perceived as trying to impose its narcissistic pseudo-culture upon a world exhausted by wars hot and cold and corrupted by vacuous materialism.

Recent accounting scandals, crumbling markets, political scams, technological setbacks, and rising social tensions have revealed how rotten and inherently contradictory the US edifice is and how

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concerned are Americans with appearances rather than substance.

To religious fundamentalists, America is the Great Satan, a latter-day Sodom and Gomorrah, a cesspool of immorality and spiritual decay. To many European liberals, the United States is a throwback to darker ages of religious zealotry, pernicious bigotry, virulent nationalism, and the capricious misrule of the mighty.

According to most recent surveys by Gallup, MORI, the Council for Secular Humanism, the US Census Bureau, and others – the vast majority of Americans are chauvinistic, moralizing, bible-thumping, cantankerous, and trigger-happy. About half of them believe that Satan exists – not as a metaphor, but physically.

America has a record defense spending per head, a vertiginous rate of incarceration, among the highest numbers of legal executions and gun-related deaths. It is still engaged in atavistic debates about abortion, the role of religion, and whether to teach the theory of evolution.

According to a series of special feature articles in *The Economist*, America is generally well-liked in Europe, but less so than before. It is utterly detested by the Moslem street, even in "progressive" Arab countries, such as Egypt and Jordan. Everyone – Europeans and Arabs, Asians and Africans – thinks that "the spread of American ideas and customs is a bad thing."

Admittedly, we typically devalue most that which we have formerly idealized and idolized.

To the liberal-minded, the United States of America reified the most noble, lofty, and worthy values, ideals, and causes. It was a dream in the throes of becoming, a vision of liberty, peace, justice, prosperity, and progress. Its system, though far from flawless, was considered superior – both morally and functionally – to any ever conceived by Man.

Such unrealistic expectations inevitably and invariably lead to disenchantment, disillusionment, bitter disappointment, seething anger, and a sense of humiliation for having been thus deluded, or, rather, self-deceived. This backlash is further exacerbated by the haughty hectoring of the ubiquitous American missionaries of the "free-market-cum-democracy" church.

Americans everywhere aggressively preach the superior virtues of their homeland. Edward K. Thompson, managing editor of "Life" (1949–1961) warned against this propensity to feign omniscience and omnipotence: "Life (the magazine) must be curious, alert, erudite and moral, but it must achieve this without being holier-than-thou, a cynic, a know-it-all, or a Peeping Tom."

Thus, America's foreign policy – i.e., its presence and actions abroad – is, by far, its foremost vulnerability.

According to the Pew study, the image of the United States as a benign world power slipped dramatically in the space of two years in Slovakia (down 14 percent), in Poland (–7), in the Czech Republic (–6) and even in fervently pro-Western Bulgaria (–4 percent). It rose exponentially in Ukraine (up 10 percent) and, most astoundingly, in Russia (+24 percent) – but from a very low base.

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The crux may be that the USA maintains one set of sanctimonious standards at home while egregiously and nonchalantly flouting them far and wide. Hence the fervid demonstrations against its military presence in places as disparate as South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia.

In January 2000, Staff Sergeant Frank J. Ronghi sexually molested, forcibly sodomized ("indecent acts with a child") and then murdered an 11-years old girl in the basement of her drab building in Kosovo, when her father went to market to do some shopping. His is by no means the most atrocious link in a long chain of brutalities inflicted by American soldiers overseas. In all these cases, the perpetrators were removed from the scene to face justice – or, more often, a travesty thereof – back home.

Americans – officials, scholars, peacemakers, non-government organizations – maintain a colonial state of mind. Backward natives come cheap, their lives dispensable, their systems of governance and economies inherently inferior. The white man's burden must not be encumbered by the vagaries of primitive indigenous jurisprudence. Hence America's fierce resistance to and indefatigable obstruction of the International Criminal Court.

Opportunistic multilateralism notwithstanding, the USA still owes the poorer nations of the world close to \$200 million – its arrears to the UN peacekeeping operations, usually asked to mop up after an American invasion or bombing. It not only refuses to subject its soldiers to the jurisdiction of the World Criminal Court – but its facilities to the inspectors of the Chemical Weapons Convention, its military to the sanctions of the (anti) land mines treaty and the provisions of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, and its industry to the environmental constraints of the Kyoto Protocol, the rulings of the World Trade Organization, and the rigors of global intellectual property rights.

Despite its instinctual unilateralism, the United States is never averse to exploiting multilateral institutions to its ends. It is the only shareholder with a veto power in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), by now widely considered to have degenerated into a long arm of the American administration. The United Nations Security Council, raucous protestations aside, has rubber-stamped American martial exploits from Panama to Iraq.

It seems as though America uses – and thus, perforce, abuses – the international system for its own, ever changing, ends. International law is invoked by it when convenient – ignored when importune.

In short, America is a bully. It is a law unto itself and it legislates on the fly, twisting arms and breaking bones when faced with opposition and ignoring the very edicts it promulgates at its convenience. Its soldiers and peacekeepers, its bankers and businessmen, its traders and diplomats are its long arms, an embodiment of this potent and malignant mixture of supremacy and contempt.

But why is America being singled out?

In politics and even more so in geopolitics, double standards and bullying are common. Apartheid South Africa, colonial France, mainland China, post-1967 Israel – and virtually every other polity – were at one time or another characterized by both. But while these countries usually mistreated only their own subjects – the USA does so also exterritorially.

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Even as it never ceases to hector, preach, chastise, and instruct – it does not recoil from violating its own decrees and ignoring its own teachings. It is, therefore, not the USA's intrinsic nature, nor its self-perception, or social model that I find most reprehensible – but its actions, particularly its foreign policy.

America's manifest hypocrisy, its moral talk and often immoral walk, its persistent application of double standards, irks and grates. I firmly believe that it is better to face a forthright villain than a masquerading saint. It is easy to confront a Hitler, a Stalin, or a Mao, vile and bloodied, irredeemably depraved, worthy only of annihilation. The subtleties of coping with the United States are far more demanding – and far less rewarding.

This self-proclaimed champion of human rights has aided and abetted countless murderous dictatorships. This alleged sponsor of free trade – is the most protectionist of rich nations. This ostensible beacon of charity – contributes less than 0.1% of its GDP to foreign aid (compared to Scandinavia's 0.6%, for instance). This upright proponent of international law (under whose aegis it bombed and invaded half a dozen countries this past decade alone) – is in avowed opposition to crucial pillars of the international order.

Naturally, America's enemies and critics are envious of its might and wealth. They would have probably acted the same as the United States, if they only could. But America's haughtiness and

obtuse refusal to engage in soul searching and house cleaning do little to ameliorate this antagonism.

To the peoples of the poor world, America is both a colonial power and a mercantilist exploiter. To further its geopolitical and economic goals from Central Asia to the Middle East, it persists in buttressing regimes with scant regard for human rights, in cahoots with venal and sometimes homicidal indigenous politicians. And it drains the developing world of its brains, its labour, and its raw materials, giving little in return.

All powers are self-interested – but America is narcissistic. It is bent on exploiting and, having exploited, on discarding. It is a global Dr. Frankenstein, spawning mutated monsters in its wake. Its "drain and dump" policies consistently boomerang to haunt it.

Both Saddam Hussein and Manuel Noriega – two acknowledged monsters – were aided and abetted by the CIA and the US military. America had to invade Panama to depose the latter and plans to invade Iraq for the second time to force the removal of the former.

The Kosovo Liberation Army, an American anti-Milosevic pet, provoked a civil war in Macedonia two years ago. Osama bin-Laden, another CIA golem, restored to the USA, on September 11, 2001 some of the materiel it so generously bestowed on him in his anti-Russian days.

Normally the outcomes of expedience, the Ugly American's alliances and allegiances shift kaleidoscopically. Pakistan and Libya were transmuted from foes to allies in the fortnight prior to the Afghan campaign. Milosevic has metamorphosed from staunch ally to rabid foe in days.

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This capricious inconsistency casts in grave doubt America's sincerity – and in sharp relief its unreliability and disloyalty, its short term thinking, truncated attention span, soundbite mentality, and dangerous, "black and white", simplism.

In its heartland, America is isolationist. Its denizens erroneously believe that the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave is an economically self-sufficient and self-contained continent. Yet, it is not what Americans trust or wish that matters to others. It is what they do. And what they do is meddle, often unilaterally, always ignorantly, sometimes forcefully.

Elsewhere, inevitable unilateralism is mitigated by inclusive cosmopolitanism. It is exacerbated by provincialism – and American decision-makers are mostly provincials, popularly elected by provincials. As opposed to Rome, or Great Britain, America is ill-suited and ill-equipped to micromanage the world.

It is too puerile, too abrasive, too arrogant – and it has a lot to learn. Its refusal to acknowledge its shortcomings, its confusion of brain with brawn (i.e., money or bombs), its legalistic-litigious character, its culture of instant gratification and one-dimensional over-simplification, its heartless lack of empathy, and bloated sense of entitlement – are detrimental to world peace and stability.

America is often called by others to intervene. Many initiate conflicts or prolong them with the express purpose of dragging America into the quagmire. It then is either castigated for not having responded to such calls – or reprimanded for having responded. It seems that it cannot win. Abstention and involvement alike garner it only ill-will.

But people call upon America to get involved because they know it rises to the challenge. America should make it unequivocally and unambiguously clear that – with the exception of the Americas – its

sole interests rest in commerce. It should make it equally known that it will protect its citizens and defend its assets – if need be by force.

Indeed, America's – and the world's – best bet are a reversion to the Monroe and (technologically updated) Mahan doctrines. Wilson's Fourteen Points brought the USA nothing but two World Wars and a Cold War thereafter. It is time to disengage.

Sam Vaknin is the author of *Malignant Self Love – Narcissism Revisited* and *After the Rain – How the West Lost the East*. He is a columnist for *Central Europe Review*, *PopMatters*, and *eBookWeb*, a United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent, and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in *The Open Directory Bellaonline*, and *Suite101*. Visit Sam's Web site at <http://samvak.tripod.com>

Anti-Depressants -- The Anti-Child

By Gary R. Hess

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Do you have a child or younger sibling who is depressed? If so, I would think twice about letting him or her take anti-depressants.

Recently the US Food and Drug Administration released a statement declaring certain brands of anti-depressants (such as the well known Prozac) should have black box warnings.

This is due to a new study showing a strong correlation between young people and suicide rates after taking an anti-depressant.

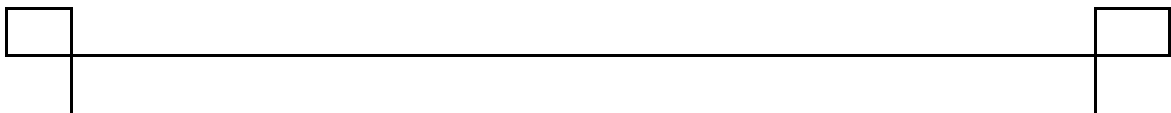
If your child, younger brother or sister is depressed try to seek other forms of help instead of resorting to anti-depressants. Such methods as talking to a counselor or psychiatrist have been deemed useful, but first try to speak with them face to face about their problems. Most children need to know that there is someone there to care for them when they are in their time of need.

If they say they don't want to talk about it, be persistent. They will tell you soon enough and if not, go back to the other methods and talk to their school counselor or another professional's help.

Gary is a writer for



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