



**REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON ANTI-AMERICANISM  
CO-CHAIRS: TOD LINDBERG AND SUZANNE NOSSEL**

**Executive Summary**

Public opinion polls show that anti-Americanism has risen markedly over the last three years in much of the world. Notably, unfavorable views of the United States in Western countries are more heavily concentrated among young people. While President George W. Bush's policies have been a spark for negative attitudes, America's image problem is increasingly much bigger than its current Administration.

Within the rubric of anti-Americanism, there exists a great variety of different motivations, attitudes, and criticisms of the United States. As Robert Keohane and Peter Katzenstein have described, these forms of anti-Americanism include: liberal Anti-Americanism, born of liberals' frustration and disillusionment with America's failure to live up to its supposed ideals; sovereign-nationalist anti-Americanism, reflecting opposition to superpower intrusions on national sovereignty; radical anti-Americanism, which views every form of American influence as pernicious; cultural elitist anti-Americanism, which considers Americans and American culture to be boorish and crass; and legacy anti-Americanism, rooted in resentment over historical wrongs. These variants of anti-Americanism intersect and overlap, such that attitudes toward the United States among any particular population can manifest many different "Anti-Americanisms."

An upswing in measured anti-Americanism does not necessarily entail an upswing in near-term, measurable negative consequences of anti-Americanism. We must be careful neither to understate nor to overstate the severity of problems anti-Americanism poses or contributes to.

**The effects of anti-Americanism**

Several potential effects of anti-Americanism are of greatest concern: 1) anti-Americanism can feed terrorism and violence toward the United States, 2) anti-Americanism can harm U.S. commercial interests abroad, and 3) anti-Americanism can harm U.S. political interests by making it more difficult to rally support for specific U.S. policy objectives.

Anti-Americanism can fuel violence by motivating terrorist recruits, making people more willing to harbor and assist terrorists, and undermining global

counterterrorism cooperation. Looking at evidence from the Middle East, anti-Americanism does appear to play a significant role in the recruitment of some participants in violent terrorist movements and in the choice of others to abet terrorism. Because many other countries share an interest in combating terrorism, it is not clear that anti-Americanism has hampered U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

There exists considerable debate and limited empirical evidence on whether anti-Americanism has significantly affected U.S. economic interests. Some corporate chief executive officers, such as the founders of Business for Diplomatic Action, are seriously concerned about the economic impact of anti-Americanism. While available evidence does not demonstrate negative economic consequences resulting from anti-Americanism, there are signs that perceptions of U.S. companies and brands are affected by attitudes toward the U.S. Accordingly, the possibility that persistent negative perceptions of the United States will erode American economic influence is hard to dismiss.

Similarly, evidence demonstrating that anti-Americanism compromises U.S. political influence is mixed. That the political impact of anti-Americanism is difficult to isolate reflects the fact that the foreign policies of other countries are determined by many factors. The U.S.'s economic and military strength mean that other countries may opt to cooperate with Washington despite anti-American attitudes at home. Nevertheless, there are signs that anti-Americanism inhibits U.S. policymaking by causing the United States to scale back its requests in inhospitable environments, rather than risk possible rejection. In parts of the Muslim world especially, the discourse of anti-Americanism helps to fuel a culture of anti-modernity because key ideals of modernity are associated with the United States. Anti-Americanism has also contributed to a climate in which other powers whose interests are not aligned with Washington have succeeded in expanding their economic and political influence around the globe. In these ways, anti-Americanism can interfere with the achievement of U.S. foreign policy objectives writ large.

### **Responding to anti-Americanism**

Combating anti-Americanism is vital to stemming the flow of terrorist recruits, protecting the American economy, and increasing U.S. diplomatic and political influence. To the extent that anti-Americanism per se contributes to these problems, there is urgent need for steps to address it. While a raft of sound proposals on public diplomacy measures have been written and issued, the Administration has been unable to sustain a visible, sustained, and effective drive to implement these ideas and show results.

It is especially important that clear responsibility for devising strategies to address anti-Americanism is assigned to an official invested with sufficient authority and resources to do so effectively. This official should lead a government-wide effort to integrate public diplomacy by providing training in communications, culture, and public diplomacy to every person serving the United States overseas or dealing with government detainees. The effort cannot be limited to an isolated cadre of public diplomacy officers without direct policy influence. This effort would be advanced by the establishment of regular listening tours in which representatives of all major Cabinet departments meet

with their counterparts overseas along with nongovernmental organizations, citizens' groups, and students.

In addition, the United States should shift its public diplomacy efforts from a public relations approach to a sales approach. While public relations involves one-way communication strategies, a sales-based approach requires understanding what motivates the recipient of a message to “buy” or inhibits the recipient from accepting and embracing the ideas being proffered. The United States could improve its understanding of foreign populations and the effectiveness of its sales pitch by conducting face-to-face meetings with communities overseas, recruiting more Muslim-Americans to participate in public diplomacy efforts, evaluating foreign service officers and military personnel based on their public diplomacy record, promoting greater education in Arabic and other strategic languages, and providing scholarships to encourage young Americans to study in the Middle East.