

America's Troubled Image Abroad



by Øystein LaBianca

I was in Copenhagen, Denmark, on my way to Kastrup Airport, when the first bombs fell over Baghdad. It was a Friday morning, and the center of town was the scene of mass demonstrations protesting the war. The mood in the streets was definitely anti-Bush, anti-American, anti-coalition, despite Denmark's official decision to back the U.S. in this conflict.

Late in the afternoon on that same Friday, our flight landed at Chicago O'Hare Airport. The events of the day, and the intense security check on boarding the flight, had assured that the mood during the Atlantic crossing would be subdued, to say the least. It was a relief to finally walk off the tarmac and be home—safe.

With the troops on the ground in Iraq, the debate over this war here on campus and elsewhere had by this time definitely turned silent.

Instead, homeowners all over Southwestern Michigan and throughout the nation were hoisting flags and tying yellow ribbons to signal their support for the president and the troops. With so many young men and women in harm's way, Americans joined the rest of the world in praying for a quick end to the conflict, and for minimal loss of life.

Unlike the earlier Gulf crisis, which was fought by a broadly-based coalition of European and Middle Eastern countries, this latest war with Iraq is nearly universally regarded as "America's war." This is a war that, unlike any other since the beginning of the Cold War, has split old solidarities and strained decades of cooperation and friendship between the United States and its former allies. It is a war that has greatly weakened the United Nations as a forum for debate on global issues,

has divided NATO—America's partners in fighting the Cold War—put "old Europe" at odds with "new Europe," and widened the gulf between Arab leaders who supported the war and the Arab masses who opposed it.

In my estimate, this first major war of the New Millennium may be nothing less than a sort of global political earthquake—a cataclysm that in its wake is churning up an entirely new line-up of global alliances and adversaries. It is a war that, for better or worse, has anointed the United States of America as the undisputed superpower of the world. What America wants, America gets! In other words, with this war, America has clearly demonstrated that it has

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the economic superiority and military prowess to act alone, if necessary, to achieve its ends. It no longer needs the cooperation of the United Nations, the backing of "old Europe" or the approval of another superpower. America is the world's sole superpower and its president the world's most powerful leader.

This is an awesome new role for the United States. One must remember, of course, that this is a role for which this country has been preparing for a century. Was it not America, under President Wilson, who proposed the creation of the League of Nations at the conclusion of the First World War? Was it not America that led out in the establishment of the United Nations and funded the rebuilding of Old Europe and Japan after the Second World War? Was it not America that created NATO as an instrument to fight Communism? Was it not America that won the

Cold War against the Communists? In the wake of September 11, 2001, was it not America that organized the global war on terror?

Today, more than ever before, the questions that are uppermost in the minds of America's friends and foes everywhere are these: What does America want? What does President Bush want? What do the American people want? And, will they use their awesome military might again to get what they want?

To the average American, these concerns might seem alarmist—even downright un-American, especially as most Americans see themselves and their nation as well-meaning and fair in dealings with the rest of the world.

Furthermore, most Americans assume that what America stands for—and goes to war for—are causes that have universal appeal, such as elimination of weapons of mass destruction, free-

dom of religion and expression, rule of law and equality under the law, and sovereignty of the people through democratically elected national leadership.

These are indeed ideals with widespread appeal around the world. They are ideals for which émigrés from bad governments on every continent have sacrificed life and limb to come to America. They are ideals for which American troops have died on many a battlefield around the world. They are ideals that the rest of the world admires about America and seeks to emulate.

What is not well understood by many Americans, however, is the extent to which America is associated abroad not only with these lofty ideals, but also with the less lofty phenomenon of globalization. Globalization is widely seen as having everything to do with making the world compliant to the interests of

big corporations—from ADM to McDonald to Zenith—and very little to do with spreading the lofty ideals that Americans associate with the Star Spangled Banner.¹

In his best-selling book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman identifies a cluster of “golden rules” that a country must comply with to become part of the global market. These include such actions as making “the private sector the primary engine of economic growth...eliminating and lowering tariffs on imported goods... removing restrictions on foreign investment...getting rid of quotas and domestic monopolies...increasing exports...privatizing state-owned industries and utilities... opening industries, stock and bond markets to direct foreign ownership and investment [and] deregulating the economy to promote as much domestic competition as possible.”²

The agencies that monitor a country's compliance with these rules are the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank (WB). As the United States is one of the most powerful players on all of their operating boards—if not the most powerful—it has come to be regarded abroad as the tailor that is making everyone wear the same “Golden Straightjacket.” This causes resentments, not only because of the natural human tendency to want to be in control of one's own life and destiny, but also because in many countries, the straightjacket simply seems to fit badly. Brazil and Argentina are two very recent examples of countries that are balking at having to wear it. The mass demonstrations in Seattle, Toronto, Genoa, and other places where these organizations hold their meetings is further evidence of the growing opposition to their policies.

One key reason for this opposition is that there is no opportunity for consent of the governed with these institutions. Try to get elected to the board of the IMF, the WTO, or the WB, and you will see what I mean! Indeed, as developing nations around the world are fitted to this “Golden Straightjacket,” their leaders become more attentive to the demands of these American-dominated institutions than to the demands of their own citizens. Thus the very freedom and democracy that Americans believe their country is championing abroad ends up being trumped by the antidemocratic actions of the IMF, WTO and WB—and the tailor gets the blame!

The challenge America faces as the world's sole superpower is how to balance its historic championing of freedom and democracy with its sponsorship of globalization and the hunger for profits that drives it. Sadly, as globalization has accelerated, America's traditional image as the beacon of freedom and democracy is rapidly being overshadowed by its emerging image as backer of profit-hungry international corpo-



Asian Pacific students in Andrews University's IDP program

rations. Indeed, to many cynical observers abroad, freedom and democracy are mere slogans used by lobbyist-politicians in America to win the hearts and minds of the voter to their REAL mission, which is to champion policies

Andrews University is lifting high the best of what America has to offer.

that serve the special interests of corporate America.

In the Middle East, for example, the point of view of much of the media and the man on the street is very much along these lines. America's foreign policy in their region is ultimately all about oil and not about democracy and freedom.³ The most recent war with Iraq, for example, is in the Arab language media frequently referred to as the “the Third Oil War.” The second was the Gulf War of 1991, and the first the six-day war of 1967 between Israel and the Arabs.⁴

Why are the Arabs so cynical about American intentions? To begin with, they note the irony of decades of American support for hopelessly undemocratic regimes in the rich oil states—regimes that as long as they served American oil interests were not only allowed to persist, but were actively protected by America against uprisings by disenfranchised populations.

Second, they see America's backing of Israel's economy and military as a means to extend its own military capability in this oil-rich region of the world.

Third, they doubt that America would have intervened in the Gulf were it not for the oil riches of Kuwait.

And fourth, with regard to the recent Iraq war, they note the absurdity of Iraq being a

greater threat to America than say, North Korea or Iran; they note the haste and diligence with which the oil assets of Iraq were protected, while the country's archaeological heritage, attesting to humanity's earliest experiments with rule of law, could not be saved; they note the irony of the democracy being imposed on the people of Iraq rather than being freely chosen, among other options, by the Iraqi people themselves. And last, but not least, they note the preference for American companies in the issuance of contracts to rebuild Iraq.

As Americans, we may vehemently disagree with this negative portrayal of our intentions and actions as being all about greedy protection of our economic interests, not about good deeds on behalf of freedom and democracy. But can we afford to ignore it? Can we afford to dismiss it on the grounds that the media “over there” is hopelessly biased and slanted negatively toward America? In my view, here at Andrews University we cannot, for if we do, we imperil our mission to prepare graduates who have the wisdom, the understanding and the tact necessary to win the confidence of individuals and whole communities whose perceptions of America and the West may be very different from our own.

In this connection, I am glad to have this opportunity to highlight Andrews' very own community and international development program, which is an example of how Adventist



European students in Andrews University's IDP program

higher education is seeking to address divisions in the world caused by globalization.

To begin with, the program targets natural-born citizens of the world's poorest and most conflicted countries who work either for ADRA or other church organizations concerned with helping to improve the quality of life of the poor and needy. The aim of the program is to share with these students the principles of freedom, democracy, organization and industry

that have brought prosperity to America, Western Europe and certain other countries.

To avoid uprooting the students from their home areas, families and places of employment, the program has been designed so that students attend four 21-day intensives once per year at field sites in Africa, Asia, Eurasia, Europe, and Latin America. After five years in the program, participants earn the Master of Science in Administration: International Development.

Over 160 students from more than 70 countries around the world have already graduated from the original program—which was a joint undertaking of Andrews and ADRA International—and over 200 are enrolled in the current program, which is being operated by Andrews in partnership with sister institutions on four continents.⁵

Through training of these community leaders in participatory management of small, project-focused groups, the program disseminates the best practices of administration and project management in regions of the world where such skills are desperately needed. Participants are taught how to lead small community groups in planning, implementing and monitoring projects that improve the food security and income generation capacity of the poorest families in their communities. They are also informed of how globalization works and taught principles that can guide them and their communities as they seek to engage with the global market. (For more information about this program, including how you may become involved as a student, a sponsor, or an instructor, visit www.andrews.edu/grad/idp.)

It is through academic programs such as this one that Andrews University is lifting high the best of what America has to offer—both its democratic ideals and its engine of material progress. My prayer is that God will bless and keep safe the students and faculty of this wonderful program as they seek to make a difference for Him in an increasingly volatile global village.

¹ For more, see Richard J. Barnet and John Cavanagh, *Global Dreams: Imperial Corporations and the New World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

² Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, Anchor Books, 2000, p. 105.

³ For more on the Arab perspective of America, see Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*, London: VERSO, 2002.

⁴ See the May 19, 2003 issue of TIME Magazine, which has an article entitled "The Oily American: Why the world doesn't trust the U.S. about petroleum: a history of meddling."

⁵ These sister institutions include the University of Eastern Africa in Kenya; Villa Aurora in Italy; The Ukrainian College of Arts and Sciences in the Ukraine; the Adventist University of Bolivia; and Mission College in Thailand.

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Serving God in Iraq

First Lieutenant Keith Roy Hamilton (MDiv '99, MSA '01) lives in Houston, Tex., with his wife, Monise (MDiv '99), and nine-year-old daughter, Paris, and is an Army Reserves officer with Unit 384 in Houston.

When "Operation Iraqi Freedom" began, Hamilton assured his family that the chances of his unit being called up for active duty were slim-to-none, since the 384th is a transportation battalion. So when Hamilton was given orders on February 8, 2003, to report to Fort Polk in Louisiana on February 11, he and his family were thrown into action, doing last-minute things at work and at home before he left for his 365-day assignment. Serving as a chaplain, Hamilton is part of a rare commodity in the military right now and because the 692 Quarter Master Battalion out of Fort Polk was deployed and lacked a chaplain, he was transferred from the 384 to the 692. Because Hamilton is now serving in the Middle East,

just in charge of leading worship services and Bible studies; they also deal with the soldiers and officers, especially the younger ones, who all of a sudden have to face the possibility of death. Chaplains deliver bad news from home, keep up the morale of the unit through programs and contact with loved ones, and counsel and mediate any conflicts that arise between soldiers. It's a 20-hour-per-day job.



Chaplain Keith Hamilton

FOCUS: Do you know where he is stationed right now?

HAMILTON: Last I knew he was in Kuwait, but he called me on April 19 and only had time to say that his unit was being moved and I may not hear from him for several months. He was

not at liberty to tell me where they were going, but I suspect that they are now in Iraq.

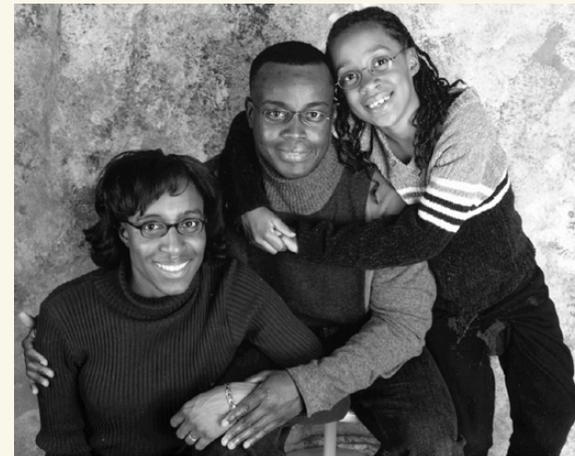
FOCUS: Did Keith have a hard time leaving?

HAMILTON: Even though he was only given two days' notice, he never once complained. His main concern was about Paris and me worrying about him, and missing part of Paris's life and the things she would do while he was gone. She recently won a spelling bee at her school, so we took lots of pictures and sent them to him.

FOCUS: How are you and Paris dealing with his absence?

HAMILTON: We write Keith every other day to help us stay connected to him. Paris and I have had long talks together about the possibility of his not coming home. He left his Chaplain dog tag with

Paris and she refuses to take it off except on Sabbaths when I won't let her wear it to church. I am so proud of him. He joined the military even though I didn't want him to because he felt God was calling him to that ministry. He is Jamaican by birth, though he grew up in New York, and I think it speaks a lot that he would go to war for his adopted country. I pray for him every day that he will be kept out of harm's way and that God will help us understand what he's been through so that we can help him adjust when he comes home.



Monise, Keith & Paris Hamilton

FOCUS was unable to contact him for his reaction to the war in Iraq. Instead, his wife, Monise (former assistant director of University Relations at Andrews University) gave her perspective on his deployment, absence and the effect it all has had on their family.

FOCUS: To the best of your knowledge, what do Keith's duties include?

MONISE HAMILTON: He has a very wide range of duties. His battalion is in charge of water supplies and water purification; however, the last time I received a letter from him (dated April 9), he reported that their equipment still hadn't arrived. Chaplains are not