

Anti-Americanism in Greece: Time to overcome it

I. About two years ago I had been asked to critique a book by author-journalist Robert Kaplan with a provocative title *The Coming Anarchy*. It had been translated in Greek by a young and promising colleague. The setting was at a local university in Athens.

I explained to the audience that Kaplan's thought reflects a deep pessimism which Kaplan considers to be the essence of Realism. His model and idol is Henry Kissinger! Kissinger (according to Kaplan) begins with the assumption that "disorder is worse than injustice". He (Kissinger) considers that revolutions (e.g. the Bolshevik) lead to great suffering, is deeply traumatized by the "Munich Syndrome" (appeasement of Nazi aggression), and believes that great powers must at all costs preserve the *status quo*. Kaplan, as did Kissinger, criticizes harshly utopian approaches, attacking sharply American "idealist" leaders such as Woodrow Wilson, John Foster Dulles and Jimmy Carter. He believes that America's objective must not be "global salvation" but the promotion of tangible American interests.

In presenting my critique I argued that the USA is not exceptional in the exercise of its foreign policy. As in the case of other states, Greece included, their governments operate in order to promote their interests, using moral and legal discourse mainly to justify pragmatic policies. In other words, idealism fits best with the rhetoric and propaganda of states and realism fits well with their calculations and tangible benefits. To support my thesis, I made reference to the vital and diachronic target of US foreign policy which was (and is) the maintenance of the balance of power in Eurasia, known to geopolitical thinkers as the "world island".

In order to prevent hegemony by a single power in Eurasia, the US entered World War I (with considerable delay), in 1917, opting to support the weaker side —the Entente powers. A similar pattern was followed in World War II in which the US entered with nearly a two year delay after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Finally, I argued that the Cold War also took place to prevent Soviet hegemony over the “world island”. In other words, I maintained that national interests prevailed over international law and morality.

A distinguished journalist of a high circulation evening paper, who was in the audience, discerning apparently an anti-American edge to my analysis, asked me three basic questions in rapid fire: “What would have happened in Greece without America’s intervention in World War I?”. Almost automatically, I responded that our borders would have been somewhere near Lamia (closer to Athens than Thessaloniki). There followed, logically, a second question: “What would have happened to Greece if the United States had not entered in World War II? Surgically, I responded that our borders today would have been somewhere near Lamia. The third question, also of central importance, focused on the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. “What would have happened if the United States had not become involved in the Greek civil war?” Monotonously, I responded that our country would have become a Peoples Democracy, member of the Warsaw Pact, and, today, it would have been waiting in line, as a post-communist entity, to become a member of NATO and the EU. For reasons of political correctness I did not refer to the status of our borders.

The conclusion of our exchange was clear. American interventions in Europe in the 20th century have been positive—in fact decisive—for the fate of our nation and for much of the rest of our continent. But we should not view these interventions as acts of philanthropy or philhellenism. We, simply, were lucky enough that our interests and those of the Atlantic superpower coincided.

II. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and particularly given the irresponsible behaviour of a number of Greek hooligans in a football match, the media—with CNN in the forefront—carried footage giving the impression that the Greeks were celebrating at a time of terrible carnage in New York and Washington DC. It was true, however, that a number of commentators—journalists, academics, actors and priests—adopted the logic of “cause and effect”. On one side they clearly condemned the murderous acts of the terrorist fanatics, but they hurried to remind their listeners that American governments, over the years, had adopted arrogant and invasive policies—thus separating the

“good” American people from the “bad” American governments. On the whole, excepting the Greek government’s and the major opposition party’s statements, Greek society once more appeared sceptical, ambivalent and hesitant —the “odd man out” of the West. The Greek-American community, a privileged and active segment of American society, expressed predictably disappointment, if not dismay, with what they perceived as acute anti-Americanism in Greece.

At this point, without proceeding with elaborate definitions of the concept, we should ask ourselves the question: “Is there anti-Americanism in Greece?”. My response is ... “yes” there is! And it is worth our while to identify and analyze deeper causes that have created it so that we can realize that they are no longer relevant.

In a brief presentation we can list only telegraphically the set of our complaints concerning America’s handling of Greece after World War II:

1. Intervention in our civil war! The vanquished of that war (the Greek Communist Left), that finally reentered the Greek political process after the collapse of the colonels’ regime in 1974, is today a vocal and activist section of our society (about 5% of the electorate).
2. Relationship of a big and rich power with a small, poor, divided and dependent society in the 1950s and 1960s; hence the creation of psychological distance.
3. Support —given America’s anti-Soviet and anticommunist strategy of containment— of extraparliamentary institutions such as the monarchy and the armed forces.
4. Acquiescence, if not embrace, of the military dictatorship (1967-1974) in the name of the maintenance of US bases and facilities in Greece.
5. Equidistance —if not a pronounced Turkish tilt— in the troubled Greek-Turkish relationship, especially after the colonels’ coup against Makarios in 1974 and the Turkish invasion which the coup triggered.
6. Following the restoration of democracy in 1974, a severe, if not tutorial, stance criticizing Greece for inadequate responses to the small but deadly band of domestic terrorists called “17 November”. It is worth noting here that most of the killer organization’s

members are currently in custody and their trial is now in the process of unfolding.

III. I believe that it is high time for us to engage in what might be likened to social group therapy. Once we internalize the causes of our “anti-Americanism” then we can easily overcome its latent manifestations, which became especially acute—as elsewhere in Europe—during the recent American-British operation against Saddam in Iraq.

We can finally overcome anti-Americanism because we are no longer an “unstable democracy” of the pre-1974 variety. We are no longer a poor, isolated and dependent country that exported its young as immigrants in all directions. We are no longer deeply divided socially, politically and economically. On the contrary, we are a member of the Eurozone and Schengen, and we are rapidly improving our previously troubled relations with Turkey, having thoroughly normalized our contacts with our Balkan neighbours.

In conclusion, as a country in the club of advanced economies and consolidated democracies, we have common interests with all our EU partners and with the United States. If, in addition to our common interests, we consider our common acceptance of the values of democracy, pluralism and economic interdependence, we will realize that we no longer have reasons to maintain our reflexive anti-Americanism. We can part with it without much noise or sentiment.

One final thought: I am not at all persuaded by Secretary Rumsfeld’s taxonomy regarding “old” versus “new” Europe. Because all of us in Europe come or go together! Old Europe was about colonialism, regional and world wars, totalitarian and authoritarian ideologies, the holocaust, walls and other divisions. New Europe is about integration, enlargement, conditionality, subsidiarity and cohesion. As such, we should complement, not compete with, the United States. Today we can use our enormous economic capabilities and our prestige to influence the world for mutual benefit. But we must first learn to define our goals and our objectives. The ongoing Convention and the upcoming Intergovernmental Conference will add yet another layer of cohesion to the remarkable experiment that is the European Union.