ON THE NATURE OF AMERICANS AS A WARLIKE PEOPLE: WORKSHOP REPORT

LONG TERM STRATEGY GROUP

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Contract No.: HQ0034-07-C-1050

April 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The most general conclusion reached at the workshop is that the American willingness to use military force has not declined as a result of shifts in American culture or the recent experiences in Iraq.

This level of American belligerency was seen as, in large measure, the result of the persistence of Scotch-Irish culture in America, with its emphasis on violent responses to challenge, a culture that was reinforced by the endemic war with Native Americans on the frontier, and the experiences of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. The role of Scotch-Irish culture must also be understood as having been reinforced by slaveholding, and American Protestant religious beliefs, at least throughout the 18th and 19th century. American exceptionalism, which has broader roots in American political culture, also reinforced the tendencies of the Scotch-Irish culture.

The rival political culture in the United States was that of the Puritans, who insisted that individuals could not unilaterally employ violence in response to challenges, since the use of violence had to be authorized by a higher authority. While this culture has been an important factor as well, it does not appear to have grown in strength as a result of the increased size of American universities or social contacts with Europe. Universities now compete with many other sources of political views from think tanks and the internet, and there is a growing cult of irrelevance among the social science professors which gives them less to say on current debates.

Factors that may affect American attitudes toward war in the future that were identified but that were not explored include the role and attitudes of Hispanic and Asian immigrants, and a prolonged economic contraction. The limited data available suggests that Hispanic Americans may reinforce Scotch-Irish culture more than do Asian Americans. Economic contraction may decrease overall levels of tolerance, including tolerance of foreign actors.

OVERVIEW

The goal of the workshop was to develop our understanding of the willingness of the American people to support the use of military force, or war, in the future. The method employed was to begin with the arguments presented by Stephen Rosen in the paper that was circulated ahead of the meeting, and to evaluate them critically, on the basis of a better understanding of American history than was contained in the paper, better data about currently observable trends in American attitudes toward war, or better concepts or other ways of understanding the factors that have affected the level of American belligerency.

One participant, in reviewing the goal of the workshop, endorsed the importance of the task, saying that American policy makers frequently make decisions on the basis of what they believe to be the willingness of the American people to support military actions, without any substantial effort to determine what the actual nature of American sentiment has been or is likely to be. The decision to terminate hostilities in Iraq in 1991, for example, was based on what American leaders thought the public reaction to the one-sided military destruction of Iraqi military units would be, not on the actual reactions. Work that clarified the historical bases of American support for warfare would, therefore, be of value.

The central arguments advanced by Rosen were set forth, and some initial critiques were made. The core of his argument was based on insights from Louis Hartz in his book *The Liberal Tradition*, Samuel Huntington in his book *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, and David Hackett Fischer in his book *Albion's Seed*. In the *Liberal Tradition*, the hypothesis was advanced that fragments of older European societies settled in North and South America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand and elsewhere, and there reproduced the political culture that they had brought with them. Specifically, Hartz argued that middle-class Englishmen migrated to North America and created a political culture that reflected their values of rule of law, equality, and individual liberty. In the absence of any indigenous competing political culture, what had been one of many alternative perspectives on political culture in England became the dominant and only culture in British North America. Huntington adopted this hypothesis and argued that the Whig values became the American "creed" to which subsequent immigrants had to assimilate. Contrary to what Franklin Roosevelt stated in his speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution, Americans were not all immigrants. There were "settlers," or founders, who created a culture to which immigrants were attracted and which they had to adopt.

In the argument presented by (b) (7) derived from Fischer, this understanding had to be refined by looking more closely at the identities of the Englishmen and women who migrated to North America. Specifically, the Scotch-Irish population that migrated to North America was five to ten times as large as any other group of English migrants, and brought with them the culture of the English-Scottish border area, a culture shaped by endemic warfare that placed high value on violent and immediate personal responses to challenges and high loyalty to clan and kin. This cohort was initially larger, and had higher fertility rates than groups in New England and the Delaware Valley. They settled on the frontier that was still strongly contested by Native Americans, and the original Scotch-Irish culture proved to be functional and appropriate given the endemic war on the frontier. This population created a culture that moved westward, that was demographically dominant through the second half of the nineteenth century, and that created the

cultural environment to which subsequent immigrant groups had to assimilate. The value placed on violent immediate responses to challenges shaped the views of this group, and thus of the United States as a whole, toward war. This attitude was visible in the Revolutionary War in the Carolinas, and in the Civil War, particularly in the armies of the southern states. The Scotch-Irish response to the perceived sinking of an American battleship in Havana harbor was argued to have been at the heart of the spasm of American imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century. This attitude was argued also to have been a major factor in leading the United States into a European war in response to unrestricted submarine attacks on American merchant ships in 1917, despite American aversion to being led into European great power competitions and Irish-American hostility to England.

The other politically relevant migrant cohort was the Puritans, who were also violent (capital punishment, torture, mob violence), but committed to social order and the idea that violence had to authorized or sanctioned, and could not be initiated by an offended party. War, therefore, had to be authorized by a higher authority in the international community, either by international law or the action of a multi-lateral council. It should not simply be launched unilaterally. The Puritan culture was committed to war against the unlawful actions of the British monarchy in the American Revolution, and to war against the "treason" of the American South, particularly South Carolina in 1861. It was shocked by the war fever of the United States in the war with Spain and in World War I, and, most recently, in the war with Iraq in 2003. Demographically outweighed by the Scotch-Irish culture, this cohort may nonetheless be over-represented in American universities, where it may exercise a growing influence, though that influence is also likely to be overstated, since basic attitudes toward challenges and responses are determined earlier in life, at least according to some academic studies.

DISCUSSION

The critique of this overall argument began with historical observations. One historian noted that the severity of the Native American security challenge to the British settlers was very real, and that the papers of President George Washington indicate that he was more worried about a unified Native American challenge to the United States than any other security threat facing the United States. Another participant added that his own personal observations of culture in the Appalachian regions of the United States were consistent with the thesis of the paper.

However, the historian added, there were a number of confounding factors that were independent of Scotch-Irish culture but which reinforced the patterns of behavior associated with it. For example, the Royalist cohort of English migrants to the United States gravitated toward careers as officers in the American army, a factor that reinforced the martial tendency of the United States but which was independent of Scotch-Irish culture. Further, slaveholding cultures in general have been observed by scholars such as John Hope Franklin to be highly sensitive to considerations of status and honor and prone, for example, to dueling. The behavior of slaveholders is observable in the serf-holding areas of Russia, and so the willingness to respond violently to challenges cannot simply be associated with Scotch-Irish culture, though it would reinforce them, rather than weaken the tendency to respond violently to challenges. In addition, the Scotch-Irish in America were Protestant and very anti-Catholic. The "Bible Belt" of the American South took the lead in supporting the war against Spain, in part because of Protestant hostility to Catholic Spain. The economic downturn at the end of the nineteenth century, it was observed, also had the effect of increasing popular hostility to American business elites who wanted peace and thus indirectly increased the power of popular bellicosity.

Finally, it was argued that it was possible to overstate the Scotch-Irish challenge and violent response argument with regard to Woodrow Wilson's decision to enter World War I. British propaganda had a great influence on American attitudes toward Germany by 1917, and this affected attitudes toward war. For example, Willa Cather's novel *One of Ours* reflected the impact of the view that France, the cradle of culture and liberty, was being overrun by a barbaric power. It would be a mistake, furthermore, to focus exclusively on American sentiments and to ignore the role of German decision-making in leading to the outbreak of World War I. Germany had backed down on the issue of submarine warfare in 1915 and 1916, but finally decided to go ahead with unrestricted submarine warfare and risk a conflict with the United States in 1917 because of shifts in the internal political balance of power within Germany. Beyond that, the documentary record shows that Wilson appears to have believed that American involvement in the war against Germany would be primarily as a naval power, not as a participant in a ground war. None of these observations refute the basic argument of the paper, though they do indicate that American decisions to go to war were more complex than the paper by itself would suggest.

A stronger critique of the Rosen thesis was advanced in different forms by the political scientist and the anthropologist. The Scotch-Irish culture was a frontier phenomenon, both in Britain and in the United States, and it tended to persist in the back country or "hollows," not in the towns. Arab pastoral-nomadic behavior was associated with a culture of honor as well, but there were serious questions about whether and how it persisted in Arab areas that had sedentary agricultural populations. The general question was whether and how a political culture persisted and was

transmitted when the environment that created it no longer existed. This led to a useful discussion of the way in which culture can shape the social environment in ways that lead to patterns of behavior that persist, even when the physical environment has changed. One participant noted that he had a brother who calls himself a cowboy, a Chicago cowboy, because he admires the values and social code, as he understands them, of cowboys. In the United States, the code of a culture of honor has been reinforced, he further argued, by shared public social experiences that the culture engendered. For example, the American rebellion against the British state was the result of the pre-existing political culture, and the shared social experience of successful rebellion and the power of slogans such as "Don't Tread on Me" reinforced that culture for subsequent generations. More formally, socially accepted values have been inculcated in schools.

Another participant added that the American ideology of exceptionalism could reinforce a tendency to react violently to challenges, since it would encourage demonization of actors who were not American, though other participants noted that the United States was certainly not unique in demonizing opponents in wartime. The United States, it was then suggested, may be unique in that it was a deliberately constructed political system, with an emphasis on individual liberty. The fact that people had large amounts of liberty combined with the fact that the political order was deliberately fabricated could lead to anxiety that the political order could fall apart. That anxiety, in turn, could increase the force with which the United States responded to challenges.

The discussion then turned from the subject of American bellicosity to the other side of the coin, the strength of anti-war sentiments. It was asked whether any other country had a tradition of conscientious objection in wartime akin to the American tradition, to which the answer was yes, though such movements have taken different forms in European countries. While George Orwell noted in one of his essays a cultural pacifism in some sectors of England that were also in favor of vegetarianism and women's rights, the larger source of European anti-war sentiment seems to have been the perception of murderous incompetence on the part of the officer corps in Great Britain and France during World War I. In contrast, it was observed that Adolf Hitler was not the only German who looked back on his military service in World War I as one of the high points of his life, with camaraderie and commitment to a higher cause, and officers who were mindful of the welfare of their soldiers. In consequence, postwar German fiction, including Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel*, idealized the martial values.

This, in turn, led to a discussion of the conditions under which defeat in war reduces the willingness of a society subsequently to go to war. Germany clearly did not lose its appetite for war after World War I, but neither had the American South after the Civil War, despite unusually high casualties in both cases. The United States extracted a draw from the Korean War, and clearly lost the Vietnam War, but was ready to fight again fifteen years later. The discussion focused on a number of possible explanations for the persistence of military sentiment after defeat in war. One major factor is the way in which the war is portrayed on the defeated side. The historian noted that in the disputes about how the Civil War should be portrayed in textbooks, "Private" John Allen, a Mississippi politician who had served in the Confederate Army, insisted that any depiction of Northern soldiers in textbooks show them running away from Southern troops. Texans remember and remind others that Texas never surrendered to the North. Federal

monuments to honor military officers constructed after the Civil War included those honoring Southern officers, at Gettysburg and at West Point. Confederate political leaders were not put on trial, and the war is portrayed in Northern textbooks as a civil war between brothers.   An important observation was that the Southern defeat did not undermine Southern identity or belief in Southern values. Rather, it appears that many in the South felt that they had fought well and honorably and had only lost as a result of overwhelming industrial inferiority. The reintegration of the South into the United States was aided by decisions made in the South not to engage in guerrilla warfare after 1865, and by the North during the war to avoid, to the extent possible, attacks on white Southern civilians and their property. The behavior of the United States Army in South Carolina was the exception, since that state was seen as particularly culpable for the attempted secession.

The discussion then turned to the subject of whether other factors may have led to a large shift in American attitudes toward war beginning in the 1960s. Factors that are commonly mentioned include shifts in the character of media coverage of war, changes in the views of the faculty at universities, and a general decline in manliness.

The first response to this argument was that American voters display some degree of rationality and pragmatism. They tended to support the 2003 war in Iraq when Iraq was believed to pose a nuclear or biological weapons threat to the United States, while they continued to oppose the use of American military force in Darfur for humanitarian purposes. Support for the war in Iraq declined when the threat appeared not to have been real. The American public supported military operations when they were part of comprehensible wars that pitted armies against armies, but not otherwise, on the grounds that nation building and counter-insurgency were really the job of the indigenous government and peoples, not the United States as a foreign military intervening in the affairs of others. When the American war in Iraq began to produce success in 2007, the American people supported the policies that led to success, but did not reverse their position about the wisdom, or lack of it, of the original decision to go to war, and did not reverse their desire to take American troops out of Iraq. The war in Afghanistan was and is supported, in contrast, because of the clear link between Afghan-based Al Qaeda forces and the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. In sum, the American people are not anti-war, but have judged wars on the basis of whether they dealt with comprehensible threats to the United States and produced desired results.

The response to this was that most wars that we can envision today will be complex wars that are not simply about armies crossing borders, and will involve hostile armies, failed states, and insurgents. Beyond this, the increasing importance of transnational interactions—economic, environmental, and other—will increase the cognitive load imposed on the American public when they are asked to support or oppose military actions by the United States. When asked to make such decisions, will the American people default to simple models based on their political culture, or will they display bounded rationality? Will they use simple images of challenges and the need to respond or judge threat levels and the effectiveness of policies?

In this vein, the importance of the other major political culture in the United States, the Puritan culture, was brought up again. If the Scotch-Irish were demographically and culturally dominant up until the 20th century, had the balance shifted toward the Puritan culture because of the growth

of higher education and the change in the character of the professoriate that began in the 1960s? Were upper middle class Americans becoming more "European?" Would that, in turn, shift public attitudes in the United States toward the view that the use of force was illegitimate unless approved by supra-national authorities? If that were the case, we would expect to see shifts in attitudes when people who went to college in the 1970s reached the ages when they were political leaders sometime in the 1980s or 1990s. If this trend is observable now, will it wane, since there appears to be a negative correlation between levels of education and numbers of children born?

The analyst of American public opinion made several observations in response to these conjectures. First, Americans who are now 18-25 years old have more sources of information outside of universities than earlier generations did. Think tanks, the media, and the internet have diluted the impact of the views of the professors whom undergraduates encounter. Second, professors in the social sciences make less effort to speak to the practical political concerns facing Americans, as part of the so-called academic culture of irrelevance. Third, with regard to attitudes toward international organizations and authorities, college students now appear, again, to be pragmatic, arguing that given the size of the problems that the United States wants to manage and the limits on American resources, success depends on getting multi-lateral support, not simply international authorization. Fourth, they believe that the United States was challenged by 9/11 but that it will be challenged in the future and so will have other chances to have an impact on the world, and that they will have their chance. They also appear to be offended by talk of moving the global economy off a dollar standard.

The other respondents commented that it may not be the Puritan culture that is of importance today, but a general hostility toward traditional manly values. Beyond that, it was not clear what would be the influence of Hispanic and Asian culture brought to the United States by the new waves of immigration. A preliminary response to this last point is that evidence suggests that Hispanic Americans share a culture of honor with the Scotch-Irish culture, self-selecting, for example, into the Marine Corps rather than the Army. Child development studies done by Jerome Kagan have yielded data that Chinese American children display greater reticence when startled by light and noise. To what extent, if any, that will affect their subsequent attitudes toward challenges is unclear.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The final points of the discussion were more open ended.

- There were questions about the impact of prosperity, or the lack of it, on American attitudes. Benjamin Friedman's *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth*, a book that links American prosperity to more tolerant views of fellow Americans, might suggest that less prosperity will make Americans less tolerant of foreigners.

- The ease of international travel might make Americans more aware of the complexity of foreign cultures, but Americans might continue to travel abroad to American "bubbles," and so not gain any greater familiarity with foreign cultures. On the other hand, one participant noted the argument made by Niall Ferguson in his *War of the World* (and, in another context, by Sam Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations*) that increased contact among cultures can, under some conditions, lead to higher levels of friction and hostility.

- The role of religion in America may be high and growing, but to understand the impact of religious views on American attitudes toward war it would be important to understand the views and role of American religious leaders. Protestant clerics had been powerful pro-war activists in the American Revolution, Civil War, Spanish-American war, and some had been powerful anti-war activists in the Vietnam War. The influence of rabbis on American Jews and Israel is similarly worth exploring.

- The role of childhood developmental factors and attitudes toward challenges, response, and the use of force is worth investigation.

APPENDIX 1: READ-AHEAD MATERIAL

On the Nature of Americans as a Warlike People

Executive Summary

The nature of the security environment that prevails over the next 20 years will be heavily conditioned by the basic role the United States chooses to adopt. In the current environment, there is discussion of a general tendency of rich industrialized states to be less and less willing to use war as an instrument of state policy, and a reduced willingness of the United States in particular to use war as an instrument of policy in the aftermath of its experience in Iraq.

This monograph argues the contrary, that the United States will continue to use war as an instrument of state policy in the same way that it used war during the last 50 years. This argument is based on a demographic and cultural analysis of the bases of American political culture as it was founded in the 17th and 18th centuries, and reinforced in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Scotch-Irish population was the largest cohort of settlers in British North America, and settled in the frontier where they were engaged in intense, endemic, but irregular warfare against the North American Indians for 160 years. This created a political culture in which the willingness to stand and fight when challenged was deeply ingrained into American society, a culture to which subsequent immigrant groups adapted. The cultural rivals to the Scotch-Irish were the Puritans, who were no less violent, but who believed that the use of force to defend order had to be authorized from above. Both cultures were reinforced by the American Revolutionary War, and clashed in the Civil War, when the Puritan legacy regarded secession as an unauthorized use of force that had to be punished, whereas the non-slave holding Scotch-Irish culture saw itself as being challenged to fight by the North. The end of the war saw the reintegration of the Scotch-Irish culture into the American military. The result is a nation, one portion of which is ready to fight wars when it sees itself as challenged, and one portion that seeks authorization before being willing to fight. The Scotch-Irish culture has been dominant, and remains so, though it is in tension with the Puritan culture, which has sought cultural dominance through influence in higher education. Observable demographics and polling data, however, suggests that the influence of higher education with regard to attitudes toward war is not growing.

The result is a continuation of the basic patterns of American war-making that have been observed since the end of World War II for the foreseeable future. This, in turn, will lead the United States into continued military engagement in the world, on the assumption that challenges do not disappear. The United States will go into war united when there is a challenge and an authorization for war, and will go into war divided when there is only a challenge.

APPENDIX 2: AGENDA

On the Nature of Americans as a Warlike People

27 March 2009 – Agenda

9-10 am: Historical roots of American military patriotism

10-10:15 am: Break

10:15 am-noon: Current trends

Working lunch

12:30-2 pm: Future prospects

APPENDIX 3: RECOMMENDED READING

Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1922).

Niall Ferguson, *War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2006).

David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989).

John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956).

Benjamin Friedman, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2006).

Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991).

Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981).

Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997).

Ernst Junger, *Storm of Steel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, 1929).

APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANT LIST

Convener

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