

# Explaining American hypocrisy

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**Abstract:** *America's power position in the world – although less unchallenged than it once was, or perhaps because of that – has made it especially susceptible to hypocrisy and collective self-delusion, to what the Greeks called hubris; this continues to lead its foreign policy into unanticipated disasters. The syndrome is discussed with special reference to the Ukraine crisis of 2014, although the morass of American policy in the Middle East would yield even more dramatic examples. Norbert Elias's theory of established–outsider relationships is deployed in understanding how the USA relates to the rest of the world, together with Elias's idea of the duality of normative codes in nation states. The formation of we-images and associated we-feelings, based on a highly selective 'minority of the best', feeds into a collective self-stereotype of unquestioned virtue and self-righteousness on the part of the more powerful party to a conflict. The formation of exaggerated they-images of other players, based on a 'minority of the worst', is a complementary part of the process. But the process also leads to a neglect of the corresponding negative they-images of the USA (and its allies) that are formed on the side of the weaker outsider groups – and this neglect becomes especially dangerous as the outsiders gradually become relatively more powerful.*

**Keywords:** *United States; foreign policy; international relations; hypocrisy; Ukraine; Russia; Norbert Elias; established–outsiders relations; duality of normative codes; hegemonic fever; we-image and they-image; mediatization; Monroe Doctrine.*

*O, wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as others see us!  
It wad frae monie a blunder free us  
—Robert Burns, To a Louse*

Many people around the world are regularly astonished at the hypocrisy of American foreign policy, including in its recent manifestation over the Ukraine crisis. Sir Simon Jenkins (2014) put it well and wittily in the *Guardian* newspaper:

How dare anyone excuse a great power hurling brute force against a small one, justifying it with some nonsense about extremists and a 'responsibility to protect'? There should be no place for such cynical bullying in a twenty-first-century world order. And for what? So a leader with a virility complex can play to his domestic gallery. The whole thing is utterly unacceptable. There must be costs and consequences.

But enough of Iraq. What of Ukraine?

While by no means seeking to justify the Russian intervention in Ukraine, nor to defend President Putin, Jenkins went on to ask:

Did no ghost of Iraq or Afghanistan, of Kosovo or Libya, hover over their shoulders? [...] The occupation of Crimea is a village fete compared with the shock and awe over Baghdad and Belgrade and the killing fields of Falluja and Helmand. As the western powers repatriate their bloodstained legions, surely a twinge of humility is in order.

Apparently not ...

The question that faces the social scientist is how to explain this hypocrisy – or, more neutrally, this lack of collective self-awareness, this collective sense of self-righteousness on the part of the western powers and especially of the USA. At a casual level, it is often seen as a manifestation of Americans' intense 'patriotism', of 'shared values' (that hardy perennial of American sociology), and sometimes of their persisting religiosity (on which, see Mennell 2007, chapter 11). But this 'hypocrisy' is by no means unique to the USA. As Norbert Elias pointed out, in his remarks on 'the duality of normative codes within nation states',

most of the sovereign interdependent nation states which together form the balance-of-power figuration in the twentieth century produce a two-fold code of norms whose demands are inherently contradictory: a moral code descended from that of the rising sections of the *tiers état*, egalitarian in character, and whose highest value is 'man' – the human individual as such; and a nationalist code descended from the Machiavellian code of princes and ruling aristocracies, inegalitarian in character, and whose highest value is a collectivity – the state, the country, the nation to which an individual belongs. (Elias 2013: 169). [1][#N1]

The people responsible for 'foreign policy' in most countries, including the USA, are probably aware at some level of this duality of moralising and Machiavellian codes of behaviour – even if they regard only the moralising discourse as fit for public consumption – and are themselves influenced by both codes. But the duality is especially evident in the American case precisely because of the USA's power position in the world. As Johan Goudbloom has remarked, thanks to its power position in the world 'America has to a certain extent been able to continue to live in the 1890s'. [2][#N2] And, particularly as its world hegemony is beginning to decline, the continuous chest-beating proclamations of America's moral virtue and superiority grate more seriously in the ears of the rest of the world. That is one good reason to focus on the American case. Instances of its 'hypocrisy' could best be examined in the morass of the Middle East, but that would require a book, not an article. The main principles and processes at work can be seen in the Ukraine crisis of 2014.

## Furor hegemonialis

At a relatively simple level, one explanation of this 'lack of collective self-awareness' or 'collective self-righteousness' is to be found in politicians' typically short-term horizons and their lack of historical knowledge. Besides the recent disasters cited by Simon Jenkins, one might mention that over the last two decades the United States has been seeking to detach the successor states of the former Soviet Union from Russia's sphere of influence, to incorporate them if possible into the American Empire, [3][#N3] and to encourage governments hostile to Russia (where such hostile governments did not already exist).

On 9 February 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and just before German reunification, the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and US Secretary of State James Baker reached agreement that the Red Army would withdraw from Germany, and in return NATO troops would not move

forward at all. The West did not honour this agreement, perhaps on the flimsy legal basis that the Soviet Union was subsequently dissolved, and so the counterparty to the agreement no longer existed. More likely, given the parlous state of Russia in the 1990s, the USA simply knew it could get away with it, and get away with double standards more generally.

Many commentators thought it would have been wise if NATO had been abolished when the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, but it was too central an institution of the American Empire, as was demonstrated by its deployment in Afghanistan, well outside its nominal theatre. [4],[#N4] Instead, NATO extended its boundaries right up the frontier of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic – three former Warsaw Pact states, but never parts of the USSR – joined in 1999. Then in 2004, the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – each of them independent states between the two world wars, but incorporated into Russia both before and after that period – were accepted into NATO. Three more former communist states, Bulgaria, Slovakia and (formerly Yugoslavian) Slovenia, joined the same year. Finally, 2009 saw the accession of Albania and Croatia. George F. Kennan, architect of the Cold War policy of containment, expressed the view that ‘Expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era’ (1997).

Now, in the light of their history, it is certainly understandable that many of these states – most obviously Poland, the Baltic republics, Hungary, the Czechs and the Slovaks – were eager for protection against any future Russian intervention. Their position in relation to Russia has been akin to that of the countries of Latin America in relation to the USA; one recalls the remark attributed to Mexican President Porfirio Diaz (1830–1915), ‘Poor Mexico! So far from God, and so close to the United States’. The lack of historical consciousness is again evident here: have recent American Presidents and Secretaries of State never heard of the Monroe Doctrine, which was used to justify continual American intervention – military, political, economic and subversive – in the states of Latin America? Central America has been regarded as America’s ‘back yard’. Ukraine is Russia’s back yard. Since for centuries Russia and much of Ukraine were parts of the same state, perhaps a still better analogy would be the establishment of a hostile government in the Deep South; we all know the result when that happened in 1861. That thought has not stopped American politicians dangling before the Ukrainians the possibility of their joining NATO. Ukrainian membership of NATO would in principle have led to Russia losing its historic naval base at Sevastopol, and the US Navy taking its place there.

In the course of the negotiations in late 2013 and early 2014 concerning the proposed association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, many European politicians spoke of the need not to force the people of Ukraine into making a straight choice between the EU and Russia, recognising an amicable association with both was possible. In practice, however, the EU offered a totally neoliberal agreement – with completely insufficient financial support for the near-bankrupt Ukraine – all aimed fairly explicitly at making President Viktor Yanukovich lose the upcoming Ukrainian elections. Relatively speaking, though, EU diplomats led by Baroness Ashton trod fairly carefully. The attitude in Washington was very different. In conversation with Geoffrey Pyatt, the US ambassador to Ukraine, Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the State Department said, ‘Fuck the EU’. When this conversation found its way on to the Internet, she had to apologise, but the remark was undoubtedly symptomatic of real attitudes that are usually concealed. [5],[#N5]

President Yanukovich’s rejection of the partnership agreement with the EU led to the first phase of the Maidan protest movement, what has been called the ‘Euromaidan’, consisting especially of students keen on (for example) visa-free travel to Western Europe. But in early November 2013, things took a decisive turn to the political right. The strong involvement of the far-right Svoboda party imparted a strong neo-nationalist

flavour, with all its dominant mythologies, first in the Maidan and then eventually in the new Ukrainian government that replaced the Yanukovich regime. On 21 November, US Vice-President Joe Biden popped up in Kiev, followed on 15 December by Senator John McCain, to encourage the protestors seeking the overthrow of the elected government of Ukraine. We now know that American money – according some reports as much as \$5 billion, routed through NGOs – was flowing in to support the protesters. This was, to be blunt, a *coup d'état*. As the American realist International Relations scholar John J. Mearsheimer (2014) has argued, 'US and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border. Now that the consequences have been laid bare, it would be an even greater mistake to continue this misbegotten policy'.

The episode also shows how oblivious Western politicians and diplomats were – wilfully or not – to Ukraine's problematic and fractured history. Its frontiers, as they stood at the beginning of 2014, were of relatively recent provenance. The Crimea, as is now well known, was only in 1954 transferred for merely administrative reasons from one of the constituent republics of the USSR to another – from the RSFSR [6],[#N6] to Ukraine – which at the time were just the equivalent of provinces of one country. (The transfer was a much more casual affair than, for instance, Connecticut's cession in 1800 of its Western Reserve to form part of what was to become the state of Ohio.) The Crimea had historically been part of Russia ever since its conquest from the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century. The western sliver of today's Ukraine, Galicia and Volhynia, once part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, was even more problematic: the region of which Lviv (formerly Lvov and Lemberg) is the main city was part of Poland between the First and Second World Wars, although most of its population spoke Ukrainian. The majority of Ukrainians – even after the great famine of 1932–3 precipitated by Stalin – fought on the side of the Soviet Union and thus of the Western Allies, but fairly considerable numbers in the West fought alongside the Nazis in the Ukrainian Liberation Army. Svoboda, one of the political parties most active in the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime, had its roots around Lviv and traced its origins to this pro-Nazi faction, which was why in the events of 2014 some people in eastern Ukraine referred to them as 'fascists' – and indeed it has been said that their entry into the Kiev government is the first time such a party has gained a share of power in a European country since the Second World War.

[7],[#N7]

It also needs to be remembered that, as already noted, for a large part of its history a substantial proportion of the territory of today's Ukraine was part of Russia. Indeed, 'Russia' traces its name and origins to medieval Kievan Rus; the capital moved from Kiev to Moscow because of the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. A significant later episode was the rising in the late seventeenth century of the Ukrainian peasantry around Zaporozhia in eastern Ukraine, supported by Russian troops, against exploitation by the Polish gentry and the expansion of the Polish–Lithuanian commonwealth; this marked an important stage both in the rise of Tsarist power in Europe and in the ultimate collapse of the Polish commonwealth. [8],[#N8]. To this day, a very large part of the population of Ukraine, in the east and south, speaks Russian as its first language and – as the turbulent politics of Ukraine since its independence in 1991 have shown – many people continue to identify closely with Russia. [9],[#N9]. One of the first acts of the Ukrainian parliament after the overthrow of Yanukovich was to resolve to abolish Russian's status as an official language of the state; this was swiftly countermanded, but Russian-speakers in the east and south of the country could hardly be blamed for seeing this early decision as the writing on the western wall.

Even this brief and inadequate summary of the actually much more complex history of Ukraine should be enough to make it obvious why diplomats could have foreseen the need to tread carefully.

Although the USA is in general quite selective in showing respect for international law, a certain legalism often pervades its foreign policy. This again is a manifestation of the duality of normative codes, of which

policy-makers are probably fully conscious, but which they regard as part and parcel of geopolitics. In the case of Ukraine, the West was perfectly correct in pointing out that, in the course of the negotiations that resulted in Ukraine surrendering the part of the USSR's nuclear arsenal that had been based on its territory, Russia as well as the USA and UK gave a guarantee that Ukraine's borders would be maintained. More generally, respect for the sovereignty of states is rooted legally in treaties back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and arguably to the 1555 Peace of Augsburg's famous principle of *Cuius regio, eius religio*. But such treaties have been more honoured in the breach, especially when hostile moves by one state are perceived as a threat to the sovereign interests of another. Beyond these basic principles, a longstanding thread in American foreign policy has been to assume that the government of a country speaks for all its citizens and can bind them to its will. [10],[#N10]. This 'homogenisation' of America's perception of the other states of the world may be grounded in the fact that a very high proportion of Americans are intensely patriotic (or nationalistic, to use a more accurate term), sharing a strong 'we-image' [11],[#N11], of themselves as Americans, and have a tendency to think that all other countries and peoples are just the same. [12],[#N12]. At the most extreme, this can take on a faint hint of racism. President Woodrow Wilson, himself a Southerner by origin, seems when propounding the principle of 'self-determination' at Versailles to have assumed that the ethnic boundaries of Europe were clear and unambiguous. But, as Sir Ivor Jennings pointed out in the 1950s:

Nearly forty years ago a Professor of Political Science who was also President of the United States, enunciated a doctrine which was ridiculous, but which was widely accepted as a sensible proposition, the doctrine of self-determination. On the surface it seemed reasonable: let the people decide. It was in fact ridiculous because the people cannot decide until somebody decides who are in fact the people (Jennings 1956: 55–6). [13],[#N13]

It was well known internationally that the structure of we-images (and their associated we-feelings) among the people of Ukraine was far from simple, but that did not impede American meddling in the country.

Given the American strategy of encirclement, [14],[#N14] it is not obvious why America should have been surprised when Russia took counter-measures in Crimea; Russia had done the same when the outspokenly anti-Russian and pro-American President Mikheil Saakashvili seemed on the brink of taking Georgia into NATO after coming to power in 2004. That is not to defend Russian intervention in either Georgia or Ukraine. Nor would I wish to deny that the Yanukovich regime in Ukraine, albeit legitimately elected, was anything other than corrupt and unpleasant. But that in itself surely cannot have been the main motive for American-sponsored destabilisation of the regime; the USA has always had – and still does have – close alliances with far nastier regimes, such as Saudi Arabia. [15],[#N15]. What I want to do is call in question the wisdom of western strategy, or, if we are to call a spade a spade, American imperialism.

A further symptom of American hypocrisy in the Ukraine crisis was its exploitation of the tragic crash of Malaysian Airways flight MH17 on 17 July 2014. At the time of writing, though the question is not settled, the most probable cause of the crash does appear to be the firing of an anti-aircraft rocket by the pro-Russian 'rebel' forces in the Donetsk region at what they believed to be a Ukrainian jet fighter. [16],[#N16]. But as Americans well know – because Donald Rumsfeld nonchalantly told them so [17],[#N17] – 'stuff happens' in war zones. Indeed the American military invented the euphemism 'collateral damage' to cover the hundreds of thousands of civilians killed in the course of America's continual overseas wars over recent decades. More specifically, political amnesia seems always to have covered the case of the accidental shooting down of an Iranian passenger jet in the Persian Gulf by the USS *Vincennes* on 3 July 1988, with the loss of 299 lives. [18] [#N18]. Nor was it recalled that on 4 October 2001 the Ukrainian military accidentally shot down an Air Siberia

flight from Tel Aviv to Novosibirsk, killing 78 people. Russia too, on 1 September 1983, mistakenly shot down Korean Air flight KEO07 from New York to Seoul. Such precedents ought to have prompted a degree of caution, but the instant American response to the tragedy of MH17 – especially by Samantha Power, US ambassador to the United Nations – blaming Russia and especially President Putin as an individual [19],[#N19] showed that what Elias (2010a: 91–2) called *furor hegemonialis* (hegemonic fever) had taken full hold. One had the impression that the tragedy was just seized on with delight as a weapon in the power struggle with Russia. It was all part of the game, and of its double standards.

But all these are merely *symptoms* of the problem. What we need is an *explanation* for American hypocrisy. I want to suggest that we can view the relationship between America and the rest of the world as the largest-scale, global, established–outsider relationship. To explain what I mean by that requires a digression.

## Established–outsider relations

Around 1959–60, Norbert Elias and his MA student John Scotson conducted a study (2008) of a small industrial settlement on the periphery of Leicester. Briefly, it contained two working-class groups (white working-class, one should perhaps say now – it was before the advent in Leicester of large numbers of South Asian migrants). The two groups worked in the same factories, and, by ordinary sociological classifications based on their occupations, they were indistinguishable. The main difference, however, was that one group lived in the ‘Village’, an area of housing dating from the 1880s, where many of the families were old-established and had intermarried over the generations, weaving dense social networks. Being long established in the neighbourhood, they had also come to occupy all the main centres of local power – in the churches, charities, clubs, pubs and so on. The other group, living in the ‘Estate’, built on the eve of the Second World War, were relative newcomers, many of them relocated with their employers from London during the war. The essential point is that the ‘established’ Villagers contrived to despise the extremely similar ‘outsiders’ in the Estate. One of Elias’s most interesting insights was into the role played by gossip. The Villagers gossiped among each other about themselves, in terms of a ‘minority of the best’. That is, they constructed a we-image – a kind of group self-stereotype – based on the most upright and worthy members of their own group. That was ‘praise gossip’. It provided the basis for strong we-feelings and a collective sense of virtue. But there was ‘blame gossip’ as well. They gossiped about the people of the Estate, in terms of a ‘minority of the worst’, constructing another stereotype, a ‘they-image’ of the Estate based on the behaviour of just two or three families who were violent and drunk and promiscuous, and whose kids were in danger of becoming ‘juvenile delinquents’. Most people in the Estate were not like that. But they could not retaliate with a wave of counter-gossip, because their social networks and their positions of power were not as well developed as those exploited by the ‘Villagers’. Still more significantly, Elias and Scotson found that the people of the Estate had tended to absorb the Villagers’ adverse image of them into their own we-image – they had begun to think of themselves as to some extent ‘not as good as’ the Villagers. But outsider groups – the less powerful parties to a power ratio – are generally marked by ambivalence, by a fluctuating balance between acceptance of and resentment at their position of inferiority. And, in general, when the power ratio between an established and an outsider group comes to be more evenly balanced, the resentment will come more to the fore. Elias later elaborated and extended this model to form an important component of his overall theory of power ratios. [20]

[#N20]

Now, how does this apply to the USA’s position in the world today? America has very obviously occupied the main loci of world power since 1945, and – at least at first impression – more emphatically since 1990. It is not just a matter of military power, although, as is well known, the USA’s expenditure on its military forces

roughly equals that of all the other 195 or so countries of the world combined. This military apparatus, it should be noted, represents a decisive break with American history prior to the Second World War, when, in times of peace, its forces were modest in scale. [21],[#N21] It is also a matter of overwhelming economic power. The USA was already an enormous industrial power, but emerged from the war in an unprecedentedly dominant position, the economies of both its European allies and enemies and of Japan having been wrecked in course of the conflict. The entrenchment of the dollar as the principal world trading and reserve currency meant that the USA could in effect ‘print money’ and borrow at favourable rates without limit. But it has also provided, as we have seen in recent years, the basis for a great measure of extra-territorial jurisdiction. By US law, all trades in dollars must pass through New York, and thus – for example – European banks have been fined massively under US law for breaking the economic sanctions imposed by the USA on states such as Iran and Cuba. [22],[#N22] The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the credit ratings agencies also serve to impose the American economic regime and its model of capitalism on (most of) the rest of the world. [23],[#N23]

Then there is the more debatable question of cultural ‘soft power’. Certainly the American mass media have extended their global reach beyond merely the distribution of Hollywood films, to the point where – for instance – the extreme right-wing Fox News television channel, as well as many American entertainment channels, are transmitted right round the world. Just how much this is convertible directly into political power and ideological domination is possibly exaggerated by American politicians, because the dissemination of American ‘culture’ probably stokes the ambivalence typical of outsider groups.

What is not very much in doubt is the capacity of the mass media *within the USA* to provide a functional alternative to ‘praise gossip’ in the formation of a we-image of collective virtue prevalent among the American people. [24],[#N24] The Americans in effect base their view of themselves on a ‘minority of the best’, and often perceive the rest of the world in terms of a ‘minority of the worst’.

The USA is, and has long been, a great country. In its history and its institutions there is an abundance of material on which to construct a we-image of virtuous superiority. They are so familiar that there is no need to list them here. But a process of selection is still involved. There are also many examples of what is *not* included in the American we-image, but which play a considerable part in the rest of the world’s *they-image* of America, and a brief listing of some of them may be useful here. They include:

In the world at large:

- the USA’s continuous record of military intervention in countries in many parts of the world;
- its programme of kidnappings and targeted assassinations of people deemed to be its enemies;
- the USA’s bloated military machine;
- its highly selective adherence to international law;
- its use of imprisonment without trial;
- its routine use of torture; [25],[#N25]
- its programme of spying, even on supposed allies, and indiscriminate surveillance throughout the world;
- its highly selective rhetoric of ‘human rights’; [26],[#N26]
- its support for Israel and for corrupt authoritarian regimes in the Middle East;

- and the apparent inability of American leaders to understand anyone else's situation.

Furthermore, within American society:

- an electoral system corrupted notably by the manipulation of the franchise and gerrymandering of electoral boundaries so that election outcomes are increasingly distorted; [27] [#N27]
- a highly politicised judiciary;
- the power of the military–industrial complex, President Eisenhower's warning (1961) against which has been studiously ignored – to the detriment of American democracy;
- more generally, the extreme domination of government by big business and big finance. It has been estimated that one-thousandth of the population provides 25 per cent of electoral campaign funding, and there is little doubt that public policy in the USA follows the sources of political donations rather than public opinion. The Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision in 2010 has effectively abolished all limits on electoral donations and expenditure short of specific *quid pro quo* bribery; [28] [#N28]
- the gross, and growing, social and economic inequality of American society, which – because of America's global economic power – is increasingly being imposed in other countries too; [29] [#N29]
- the power of groups who deny large parts of modern scientific knowledge – on the basis of religious belief in the case of banning the teaching of evolution, but also from short-term economic self-interest in the case of obstructing measures to ameliorate the problem of climate change;
- America's high rates of violence; these have fallen somewhat in recent years (as they have in many countries), but are still very much higher than in other modern societies. This is linked to:
- the gun culture, the obsession of a large proportion of Americans with the right to own guns, which is incomprehensible to most outsiders; [30] [#N30]
- America's exceptionally high rates of incarceration, its vast prison population being very disproportionately composed of African-Americans, one symptom of the enduring legacy of racism in American society;
- the retention of the death penalty, now considered unacceptable in most Western countries, and a disqualification for any country wishing to be a member of the Council of Europe or the European Union. [31] [#N31]

All these items are controversial and much debated; the point that is relevant here, however, is that they are all potential ingredients for the 'they-image' of America that is being constructed by increasing numbers of people across the world.

Yet the rest of the world often seems to accept the Americans at their own self-estimate – albeit ambivalently. Sociologists have long been aware of the ways in which relatively less powerful groups tend to emulate the more powerful, to adopt and imitate their ways – often only semi-consciously. The trend towards the



Americanisation of Western Europe has been evident since the Second World War. Indeed, the states of Europe have to varying extents undergone a process of what, using a technical expression from the nineteenth century, can be called 'mediatisation'. That is the term used in German history to describe a lesser state being subordinated to a larger state, while the ruler of the lesser state retained the title and dignity, though less of the power, previously held. The great majority of the principalities within the Holy Roman Empire were mediatised in the Napoleonic period, but a later phase, in the Wilhelmine period, saw the kings of (for example) Bavaria and Saxony surviving in subordinate rank to the kings of Prussia, who in 1871 had been proclaimed Emperors of Germany. The creation of the NATO alliance after the Second World War, in the face of the perceived threat from the Soviet Union, can be seen as a continuation of the mediatisation process. The British are a particularly pathetic case. Because the United Kingdom shares a common language with the United States, cultural aspects of the assimilation process appear to have gone especially far there. But it is seen in its political aspects too: it is now many decades since Britain had even the semblance of a foreign policy separate from that of the Americans. On the one hand, this subordinate position appears to be widely embraced by British people; on the other hand, for a country that a century earlier was itself the dominant world power, it is also experienced as deeply humiliating. Curiously, the resentment felt about Britain's declining standing in the world is commonly projected on to the European Union, in the affairs of which the UK has a formal and substantial say, rather than towards the United States, over which in practice (despite the unilaterally-perceived 'special relationship') Britain has little or no influence, and which can be argued to curtail British 'sovereignty' in more powerful ways than does the EU. [32].[#N32]. Many commentators have remarked on the problematic quality of the British we-image in its post-imperial phase. Norbert Elias commented that 'Britain in the recent past is a moving example of the difficulties a great power of the first rank has had in adjusting to its sinking to being a second or third-class power', and added:

Freud [...] attempted to show the connection between the outcome of the conflict-ridden channelling of drives in a person's development and his or her resulting habitus. But there are also analogous connections between a people's long-term fortunes and experiences and their social habitus at any subsequent time. At this layer of the personality structure – let us for the time being call it the 'we-layer' – there are often complex symptoms of disturbance at work which are scarcely less in strength and in capacity to cause suffering than the individual neuroses. (Elias 2013: 6)

With their close identification with the USA, but also with their conflicting feelings about their reduced position in the world, the British – or, to be more exact, the English – have become Americans with an inferiority complex.

If that is true of Britain, how much more acute must the 'difficulties' and 'suffering' be for Russia, which has within the last quarter of a century both sunk factually from being a world super-power on a par with the USA and also been systematically humiliated by America. [33].[#N33]. For that matter, we are still living with the consequences of America's own traumatic humiliation in the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001.

Yet it must be acknowledged that there is also – across much of the world, not just in Britain – a widespread acceptance of American domination, possibly related to the feeling that, for all the stupidities and counter-productivity of their military and diplomatic policies, the Americans provide some sort of stable framework in an alarming world. Were it possible in the course of the twenty-first century to achieve the final internal pacification of the world, that would be an immense blessing to humanity as a whole, something that people have dreamed of for centuries. To live in peace, security and safety is a privilege that large parts of the world's

population do not enjoy. The consequences would be immense, and they would be expected to precipitate a civilising spurt: to quote Elias once more, ‘if [...] people are forced to live in peace with each other, the moulding of the affects and the standards of emotion management are very gradually changed as well’ (2012: 195–6, translation slightly modified). If there were any form of world government, there would be considerable external benefits for the rest of the world. The governments of the other countries of the world could well regard these benefits as worth the price of their lands undergoing a kind of mediatisation. Whether the achievement of this goal would be universally welcomed if the USA came in effect to serve the function of a world government – as it does already in some respects (see Mandelbaum 2006) – is highly questionable.

[34].[#N34]

At the end of the Second World War, it was briefly anticipated by some idealists that the mediatisation would come through the United Nations, which would serve the function of keeping the peace throughout the world. Its Charter even envisaged a standing force of UN troops, ready to act under the auspices of the Security Council (of which the five principal victor nations were to be permanent members, with the power of veto). That vision was almost immediately dead in the water with the onset of the Cold War. Interestingly, in his 2014 West Point speech, President Obama remarked:

After World War II, America had the wisdom to shape institutions to keep the peace and support human progress – from NATO and the United Nations, to the World Bank and IMF. These institutions are not perfect, but they have been a force multiplier. They reduce the need for unilateral American action and increase restraint among other nations.

In other words, in retrospect at least, American leaders see the United Nations not as a superior authority whose rulings are to be respected even by the USA, but rather as something created by America as an instrument of American power. [35].[#N35]

So, if some form of world government seems in the long term to be desirable, and if it is no longer realistic to think of the United Nations providing it, should we accept incorporation into a single world state, ruled by America? And is that feasible?

## Why not a world state?

The 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* represented what I have called the Dubya Addendum to the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (Mennell 2007: 211–12). The earlier declaration of the USA’s right to police the western hemisphere was now to be extended to the whole globe. In a speech at West Point on 1 June 2002, President George W. Bush stated that ‘our security will require all Americans to be [...] ready for *pre-emptive action* when necessary to defend our liberty and defend our lives’ (Bush, 2002; my emphasis). Since America’s interests, especially the interests of American business, span the globe, the sphere of influence first claimed by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in the name of President Monroe was to be extended across the world, and Theodore Roosevelt’s ‘Big Stick’ was now to be used against any state or any group anywhere hostile to American interests. Although the presidency of the junior Bush is now regarded as wholly catastrophic, the policy has never been repudiated. It has, it is true, been more thoughtfully qualified by his successor. In his speech at West Point on 28 May 2014, Barack Obama said:

Since World War II, some of our most costly mistakes came not from our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences –

without building international support and legitimacy for our action; without levelling with the American people about the sacrifices required. [...] America must always lead on the world stage. If we don't, no one else will. The military that you have joined is and always will be the backbone of that leadership. But US military action cannot be the only – or even primary – component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail.

He added:

For the foreseeable future, the most direct threat to America at home and abroad remains terrorism. But a strategy that involves invading every country that harbours terrorist networks is naïve and unsustainable.

On the other hand, he said:

The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it – when our people are threatened, when our livelihoods are at stake, when the security of our allies is in danger. In these circumstances, we still need to ask tough questions about whether our actions are proportional and effective and just. International opinion matters, but America should never ask permission to protect our people, our homeland, or our way of life.

That certainly leaves wide scope for the definition of national interests and a wide open door for military adventurism, even if the course of events in Afghanistan and Iraq has had a sobering effect. In view of the strength of pressure from the extreme right wing of American politics, probably no president could have gone further in renouncing the worldwide use of force. And the facts on the ground are still consonant with the 2002 *National Security Strategy*. In 2014, American military forces were deployed in more than 150 countries around the world (out of about 196). The USA has garrisoned the planet, the Russian Federation and China being the most extensive territorial exceptions.

But why does the 'Dubya Addendum' approximate to the goal of creating a world state? An answer to that question necessitates some consideration of the concept of 'state'. In everyday speech in America, its meaning can be clouded by the fact that the 'States of the Union' are what in Canada would be called 'Provinces', or in Germany *Länder*. But among social scientists, the almost universally accepted definition of a state is that provided by Max Weber: a state is an organisation which successfully upholds a claim to binding rule-making over a territory, by virtue of commanding a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence (Weber 1978: 1, 54). *By that definition*, the 2002 *Security Strategy* comes very close to declaring the entire territory of the globe to be a single state, and the United States to be its ruler.

This rather startling statement requires some qualification and discussion.

First, Weber's definition does not require that the ruling apparatus hold a monopoly of the *use* of violence throughout its territory. There will always be violent crimes. What is important is that the state apparatus claims a monopoly of the *legitimate* use of force. That is to say, if private citizens or – more relevantly in this context, subsidiary rulers – resort to the use of violence for their own revenge, they have to contend with the likelihood of their being punished by the forces of the monopoly apparatus, which claim an exclusive right to the legitimate use of violence. In the Ukraine/Crimea crisis (as a little earlier in the case of the Syrian civil

war), the United States loudly asserted such a right to inflict punishment, but was less clear about whether it had the effective means to do so.

Second, the crucial word in Weber's definition is *legitimate*, and, because of the static quality of his definition, it has proved seriously ambiguous. Was Weber referring to the *legitimacy of the ruler's monopoly of force in the eyes of the ruled*? Or was it rather that the rulers were successful in upholding their *claim* that only *their own* use of violence was legitimate? Does legitimacy reside at first only in the eyes of rulers, their rule only later becoming also legitimate in the eyes of their subjects?

Early states were difficult to distinguish from protection rackets. As Johan Goudsblom (1998) has noted, early military–agrarian regimes were based on a 'fatal symbiosis' between a productive but vulnerable peasantry and an unproductive but violent stratum of warriors. Usually, farmers had to be protected against the danger posed by the warriors from neighbouring territories, although in the absence of that danger the warriors of one's own ruler could themselves pose sufficient danger to ensure the peasants delivered levies of produce and labour or, later, taxes. But the existence of a real external threat, and the provision of effective protection from it, were and are conducive to the development of a sense *on the part of subjects* that their rulers are exercising *legitimate* authority. This may be viewed as marking a gradual transition from the dominance of state-formation processes to the dominance of nation-building processes. The development of a sense of solidarity, of we-feelings about one's country, was an important part of modern governments' internal policies when there remained a danger of war with other countries. [36],[#N36] Goudsblom has spoken of what he calls 'the paradox of pacification':

An old adage says *Si vis pacem para bellum* – 'if you want peace, prepare for war'. This adage exposes one side of the paradox of pacification. For the other side, we might coin the maxim *Si vis bellum cura pacem* – if you wish to wage war (with some chance of winning), you have to see to peace (within your own ranks) (Goudsblom 2001).

This part of the problem hardly merits thought *within* the USA: the part played in world affairs by the United States is clearly viewed as legitimate by most Americans themselves (and when minorities have engaged in anti-war protests on American streets, they have been widely viewed as unpatriotic).

But the problem of legitimacy *in the eyes of others* seems to have received less attention in America. [37],[#N37] The commonest view appears to be that what we, America, do is legitimate because we are *good*, and what our opponents do is illegitimate because they are *bad*. This Manichean view of the world is what stands in need of explanation, and part of the explanation, I am suggesting, is the outcome of a giant established–outsider relationship, with a power ratio heavily skewed in favour of the USA.

## Conclusion

Relatively few people foresaw that the fall of the Soviet Union would weaken rather than strengthen the USA's world power, that in place of a bipolar world it would gradually promote a multipolar rather than unipolar world. Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh (1992) had already argued that, alarming as it seemed at the time, the fact of bipolar 'mutually assured destruction' (MAD) during the Cold War forced the two great powers to restrain themselves: they saw the shared danger of crises escalating to nuclear war (especially after the Cuban missile crisis, which was a close escape). He raised the possibility that the unintended outcome of nuclear stalemate and forced restraint served as the functional equivalent of a world government – that is, it

provided a highly stable balance of power, together with a strong incentive for large numbers of states to align themselves obediently to one superpower or the other – but the unipolar and then multipolar worlds put an end to that speculation.

Writing a decade later, the political scientist Joseph Nye (2003) contended that the USA could no longer ‘go it alone’. Another of this small group of perspicacious writers was Norbert Elias. As early as 1970, he offered a clear theoretical exposition of why, where power ratios are becoming relatively less unequal, the course of social processes will come to be far less governed by the plans and intentions of the most powerful players, and much more the unplanned outcome of the interweaving of the plans of many players. He also pointed to the likely ideological consequences of this, the effect it has on people’s perceptions of the social forces in which they feel entrapped (Elias 2102b: chapter 3 ‘Game models’). Later, in *Humana Conditio* (2010a), his principal excursion into the study of global politics, he examined the possibility of one side or the other ‘winning’ the Cold War outright. He thought that was unlikely to happen; in that he was wrong: the USSR collapsed, and the USA emerged as the overall ‘hyperpower’, or so it seemed. But Elias also argued, correctly, that if one of the two superpowers were to come out decisively on top, its domination would be undermined precisely *because of* the disappearance of the danger posed by its erstwhile opponent, and the consequent reduction in the fear prevalent in its client states, and thus in the need they felt for American protection. Indeed, in many parts of the world, people may reasonably feel that they principally need protection *from* the dangers posed by the USA: in that respect, the emerging world state may recall the protection-racket quality of the early military–agrarian states.

This goes a long way to explain the constant search underlying American foreign policy for a big bad enemy posing an existential danger. As Gore Vidal observed, there is always ‘a horrendous foreign enemy at hand to blow us up in the night out of hatred of our Goodness and rosy plumpness’ (2004: 6). Since 2001, the infinitely malleable notion of ‘terrorism’ has served that purpose admirably, although its vague compass pointed America into almost aligning itself with offshoots of Al Qaeda in the Syrian civil war. [38][#N38] After that, recognising at last that the USA is out of its depth in the Middle East, there was an almost audible sigh of relief in Foggy Bottom when it realised it could get back to the much simpler and more familiar business of demonising Russia.

I have said that some sort of world state – the final internal pacification of the world as whole – could bring great benefits. But just as a pooling of sovereignty under the United Nations seems improbable, so does the peaceful acquiescence of nearly 200 states in mediatisation within an American Empire. Might American government eventually come to recognise that unilateral world domination by the USA is unsustainable for much the same reasons that American anti-imperialists like Mark Twain and Carl Schurz put forward at the beginning of the twentieth century? They harked back to the slogan of the American War of Independence: ‘no taxation without representation’. In other words, in the era of America’s first empire, they said that the USA could not in the long term dominate the people of its colonies – the Philippines, Hawaii or Cuba – without giving them representation. They would either have to be given independence or be made citizens and given the vote. [39][#N39] Today’s American dominion is much more extensive. In these circumstances, might American governments gradually decide that, rather than giving all the peoples of the world a say in American government, the prudential course would after all be to make use of the structures of the United Nations? It seems unlikely. Yet in the light of history, it can safely be predicted that – unless a prior catastrophe brings about the collapse of the world’s ecosystems or an annihilating nuclear war reduces humankind to a much lower level of social organisation – new levels of integration will in the long term take shape to deal with the problems that are arising from new forms of global interdependence.

This essay took its departure from events in Ukraine in 2014, but could easily have referred to many other escapades in American foreign policy. My purpose has not been to paint President Putin or Russia as whiter than white. Nor is it entirely adequate to focus exclusively on the USA, because there has also been a cacophony of hysterical condemnation of Russia from (to varying extents) the European nations too: as I write, the British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg is calling for the FIFA (soccer) World Cup to be moved away from Russia, where it is scheduled to be held in 2018. [40][#N40] But I have argued that America's power position in the world – although less unchallenged than it once was, or perhaps because of that – has made it especially susceptible to hypocrisy and collective self-delusion, to what the Greeks called *hubris*; this continues to lead its foreign policy into unanticipated disasters. As part of what I have described as the 'largest-scale, global, established–outsider relationship', the West may be seen as involving itself in the largest-scale global 'civilising offensive' – that is, it sees itself as proudly spreading the result of the long-term European civilising process across the globe. If so, the persistent duality of normative codes remains a problem.

Many people may see all this as too complicated. They might argue that American foreign policy should be seen in far simpler terms, as old-fashioned *Realpolitik*. Does it just aim at extending the territory of its world empire and the dominance of its variety of capitalism by any means necessary, with all its ideology and 'patriotism' thrown as a veil over starker realities? I am inclined to think not. It seems to me that the theory of established–outsiders relations, the kernel of a broader theory of power ratios and their consequences developed by Norbert Elias, has something to offer here. It adds something beyond *Realpolitik*. The formation of we-images and associated we-feelings, based on a highly selective 'minority of the best', feeds into a collective self-stereotype of unquestioned virtue and self-righteousness on the part of the more powerful party to a conflict. It goes along with them forming exaggerated they-images, based on a 'minority of the worst', of other players. But it also leads to a neglect of the corresponding negative they-images of the USA (and its allies) that are formed on the side of the weaker outsider groups – and this neglect becomes especially dangerous as the outsiders gradually become relatively more powerful. Above all, these established–outsiders processes go a long way to explaining the Manichean quality of America's view of the world beyond its own shores, its cowboys-and-Indians, baddies-and-goodies naivety, and its 'Aw, shucks!' innocence when confronted with the consequences of its activities. [41][#N41] If the makers of foreign policy were to take on board the 'established–outsiders' perspective on global politics, it might contribute to *more* realistic policies, less susceptible to confounding by unanticipated consequences.

And yet, ironically, my line of argument actually reduces the sense of *blame* attributed to America, because these processes pervade all kinds of power balances between groups of people, and they can certainly be seen at work in imperial powers of the past, notably Britain in *its* imperial heyday. As Christopher Clark (2012: 166) notes, discussing the paranoid German phobia that took hold in the British Foreign Office in the first decade of the twentieth century, 'British foreign policy – like American foreign policy in the twentieth century – had always depended on scenarios of threat and invasion as focusing devices'.

## Notes

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1. Stephen D. Krasner makes similar points in his book *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (1999). Not much has changed in the twenty-first century. †[#N1-ptri]

2. Personal conversation. ♣.[#N2-ptri]
3. It is still common for Americans to deny that there *is* an American *Empire*. The failure to think clearly about their country's pursuit of global hegemony may help to explain why the outcome has been described as an 'empire of ignorance' or an 'incoherent empire' – see Andrew Alexander (2011) and Michael Mann (2004). It is still more relevant to the repeated failure to anticipate the 'blowback' from the USA's global interventions, described by Chalmers Johnson in his classic 'blowback trilogy' (2001, 2004, 2006). ♣.[#N3-ptri]
4. At the same time, the doctrine of 'liberal interventionism' was being developed as a justification for military adventures in the name of 'humanitarianism' – a neat way of seeming to reconcile the duality of normative codes mentioned above. ♣.[#N4-ptri]
5. See Ed Pilkington's report in *The Guardian*, 6 February 2014 . One wonders whether the story reveals that America's European allies are regarded as, to use the Leninist term, 'useful idiots', who provoke great anger if and when they stop being useful and become instead an obstruction to American aims. ♣.[#N5-ptri]
6. Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, today's Russian Federation or just plain 'Russia'. ♣.[#N6-ptri]
7. Don Kalb, Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Central European University, Budapest, and a specialist on this region, comments: 'Svoboda never scored more than ten per cent of the vote even in its home areas, but its agenda became the national agenda, and its vocabulary and mythology too, to some extent, between November 2013 and February 2014. In other words, perverse outcomes of revolutionary popular mobilisation, in particular the readiness of liberals to ally with fascists who were able to protect them within and around the Maidan, explain the swift right-wing turn' (personal communication). ♣.[#N7-ptri]
8. I am grateful to Don Kalb, in personal communication, for drawing this episode to my attention. ♣.[#N8-ptri]
9. Judging from maps printed in Western newspapers, Russian appears to be the majority first language over slightly more than half the total area of Ukraine – which is not to say that the majority of the whole population speak Russian as their first language. Such simplified maps hide a great many complexities. Don Kalb (personal communication) points out that very few people in Ukraine do not speak both Ukrainian and Russian; those who do not are mainly the under-educated in poor regions. He comments that there are many marriages between couples with differing first languages. 'Within those marriages it is not self-evident that the Russian speakers would identify with Putin and the Ukrainian partner would affiliate with Poroshenko and the Maidan. I hear many very unexpected and indeed very complex stories. In general: the easy delineation of Russian ethnics from Ukrainian ethnics is nonsense and facilitates violence (from both sides).' ♣.[#N9-ptri]
10. This is a hangover from an older-established tradition. As Clark (2012: 168) remarks of Europe on the eve of the First World War, 'Personifying states as individuals was part of the shorthand of European political caricature, but it also reflects a deep habit of thought: the tendency to conceptualise states as composite individuals governed by composite executive agencies animated by an indivisible will.' The same syndrome can be seen in the personal demonisation of Vladimir Putin. ♣.[#N10-ptri]
11. 'We-image' is Norbert Elias's shorthand term for the kind of *collective* self-image that members of a group construct together of the group to which they belong and about which they form emotionally charged *we-feelings*. See especially Elias 2010b. ♣.[#N11-ptri]
12. An obvious illustration is the American neo-conservatives' view that once Saddam Hussein had been removed and a few statues demolished, processes of democratisation would automatically prevail in Iraq. ♣.[#N12-ptri]

13. Much later, Benedict Anderson elaborated the point in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983).  
[♣\[#N13-ptri\]](#)
14. From 2001 to 2005, when it was asked to leave, the USA had an air force base in Uzbekistan (a former Russian base), and from 2001 to 2014 one in Kyrgyzstan; around 2001 it debated whether to open one in Tajikistan too. The ‘Stans’ of central Asia are all distasteful regimes. [♣\[#N14-ptri\]](#)
15. The case of the US–Saudi Arabia alliance is especially interesting. The Saudi regime, quite apart from being authoritarian and oppressive to its own citizens, has been very active internationally in promoting the extreme Wahabi–Salafist form of Islam that has fed Al Qaeda and related terrorist organisations hostile to the USA. But the regime itself maintains a pro-Western stance, sells a great deal of oil to, and buys a great many armaments from, the USA. [♣\[#N15-ptri\]](#)
16. Two Ukrainian jet fighters were reported to have been near the airliner just before it was downed, but this seems not to have been investigated – certainly not by journalists. The distinguished Dutch journalist and academic, Karel van Wolferen, has in two of his blogposts (2014) denounced the ‘corruption’ of Western journalists in taking at face value what they were told by the Pentagon and for failing to investigate and question the official line both with regard to the MH17 disaster and the wider question of the *coup d’état* of February 2014. [♣\[#N16-ptri\]](#)
17. On 11 April 2003, in comments on looting in Baghdad – notably of the great National Museum of Iraq – following the American invasion. [♣\[#N17-ptri\]](#)
18. The terrorist bombing of Pan-American flight 103, which crashed at Lockerbie in Scotland on 21 December 1988 with the deaths of 259 people on board and eleven on the ground, was almost certainly a reprisal for this incident. Far from being punished, the captain of the *Vincennes* was subsequently awarded a medal. [♣\[#N18-ptri\]](#)
19. I have discussed elsewhere the pervasive tendency among Americans in general to think in terms of individuals and their motivations, and their corresponding difficulty in thinking in terms of impersonal and unplanned social processes. This is, I believe, deeply rooted in American culture, and flavours American sociology as well as economics. See Mennell (2014a). [♣\[#N19-ptri\]](#)
20. See Elias’s essays ‘Towards a theory of established–outsiders relations’ (2008a [1976]) and ‘Further aspects of established–outsiders relations: the Maycomb model’ (2008b [1990]), in Elias and Scotson 2008: 1–36 and 207–31 respectively. [♣\[#N20-ptri\]](#)
21. For calculations of the ‘military participation ratio’ (the ratio of military personnel to the whole population) since the late eighteenth century, see Mennell (2007: 243–4). [♣\[#N21-ptri\]](#)
22. Another example is the judgement of a federal court in favour of an American vulture fund (led by a right-wing Republican), ruling that Argentina must repay at full face value the bonds that the fund had bought at junk prices after Argentina’s 2002 default. This ruling forced Argentina, which had been making a good recovery from its 2002 default, to default all over again on 31 July 2014. Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the Nobel Prize for economics, and formerly chief economist of the World Bank, said, ‘We’ve had a lot of bombs being thrown around the world, and this is America throwing a bomb into the global economic system. We don’t know how big the explosion will be – and it’s not just about Argentina’ (Stiglitz 2014). [♣\[#N22-ptri\]](#)
23. Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh argues (personal communication) that the IMF, World Bank and even NATO are beginning to become somewhat less passive puppets of the USA. On the other hand, it could be argued that the entire financial muscle of Wall Street and the City of London is exerted to enforce what was once the ‘Washington Consensus’ on matters economic. But this is too large a topic to be adequately explored here. [♣\[#N23-ptri\]](#)
24. The ‘social media’, notably Facebook and Twitter, may now be coming to play some part in this too. It has been argued that such social media may become a democratising influence, rectifying the power imbalance between the mass media controlled by big business and a hitherto mainly passive public. In



principle, they make possible the dissemination of heterodox points of view as a counterbalance to the mainstream media. It is too early to be sure about this; the evidence is as yet inadequate. For the moment, it seems safer to assume that the social media reinforce or subvert mainstream opinion in about the same ratio as the older mass media do. ♣.[#N24-ptri]

25. To his credit, President Obama has used the word ‘torture’ instead of the usual euphemism ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’. In his speech at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, on 23 May 2013, he remarked that ‘in some cases, I believe we compromised our basic values – by using torture to interrogate our enemies, and detaining individuals in a way that ran counter to the rule of law’. ♣.[#N25-ptri]
26. ‘Human rights’ are one example of how civilising processes have found their way across national boundaries, albeit selectively, and with the internal contradictions that are characteristic of civilising processes generally. The concept of ‘civilising process’ is of course one of Norbert Elias’s major contributions to the social sciences (2012a). Andrew Linklater (2011) has begun, in the first volume of a planned trilogy, to demonstrate the relevance of Elias’s ideas to International Relations. ♣.[#N26-ptri]
27. There is a long tradition of corrupt elections in America (see Gumbel 2005), but the scandalous presidential election of 2000 drew the world’s attention to the fact that the conduct of elections in the USA does not measure up to modern standards in the wider democratic world. It had world-historical consequences. ♣.[#N27-ptri]
28. On these points, see Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page (2014) and Zephyr Teachout (2014). Teachout contends that corruption in the broad sense of the privileging of private interest over the public good was the major threat to democratic government anticipated by the framers of the Constitution, and that it is now pervasive. ♣.[#N28-ptri]
29. On this, see Piketty (2013). For a comment by the present author on the link between globalisation and growing inequality, see Mennell (2014). ♣.[#N29-ptri]
30. For a persuasive explanation of the origins of the gun culture, see Spierenburg (2006). ♣.[#N30-ptri]
31. The death penalty *has* been abolished in many states, and executions in the USA today are not very numerous outside states such as Texas, but again African-Americans are very disproportionately represented among those who are executed; see Garland (2011). ♣.[#N31-ptri]
32. One curious example is the British supposedly ‘independent nuclear deterrent’. The vast expense of maintaining and shortly replacing its four nuclear weapons submarines constitutes such a large part of the British defence budget that the rest of its forces are being cut back to an unprecedented extent. Many politicians argue that the ‘nuclear deterrent’ is necessary in order to justify Britain’s continuing permanent membership of the UN Security Council. It seems to be less well known to the British public that the ‘British’ nuclear missiles cannot be fired without American authorisation. ♣.[#N32-ptri]
33. This was less characteristic of American policy under President George H. W. Bush in the years immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it set in decisively during Madeleine Albright’s tenure as Secretary of State under President Clinton. ♣.[#N33-ptri]
34. The economic power conferred by the US dollar’s status as the world reserve currency is, as mentioned above, an important factor in the USA’s claim to extra-territorial jurisdiction for its laws. ♣.[#N34-ptri]
35. The creation of the UN was linked with the idea of Great Power responsibilities for preserving international order, but since two of the five permanent members of the Security Council soon came to be seen as America’s enemies, and deployed their vetoes accordingly, American attitudes to the UN have always been beset with tensions. ♣.[#N35-ptri]
36. This may be ceasing to be true, at least in many countries. Nico Wilterdink has hypothesised that the increase in economic inequality evident in Western societies since about 1980 was connected to the strengthening of international interdependencies between business and financial elites, and a

corresponding weakening of their ties of interdependence *within* nation states. See Wilterdink (2000) and also Mennell (2014a).<sup>♣</sup>[\[#N36-ptr1\]](#)

37. That was one of the main messages of the late Chalmers Johnson's 'blowback' trilogy published in the years following 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq, but the three books seemed to provoke only hostility among policy-makers – he was widely seen as having 'joined the America haters'. Johnson was rather entering a plea for a measure of detachment in the face of short-term emotional involvements.  
<sup>♣</sup>[\[#N37-ptr1\]](#)
38. The USA was rescued from this predicament by the widely admired diplomatic skills of Sergei Lavrov, President Putin's Foreign Minister; the episode seems not to have generated any gratitude on the American side.<sup>♣</sup>[\[#N38-ptr1\]](#)
39. This is a very practical question today. Stiglitz (2006: 120–2, 211*n*) gives the example of the USA's insistence for narrowly commercial reasons of trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPs) in the Uruguay round of world trade negotiations which, through preventing the production of cheaper generic drugs in poor countries, probably condemned hundreds of thousands of people to death (especially from AIDS). In contrast, for all the imperfections of the American political system and the inequality of American society, notions of 'fairness' do usually play some residual part in determining domestic policy, for fear of the electoral consequences of not doing so. <sup>♣</sup>[\[#N39-ptr1\]](#)
40. On the other hand, Vice-President Biden, in an address at Harvard University on 2 October 2014, remarked that 'It is true they [European countries] did not want to do that [impose sanctions on Russia]. It was America's leadership and the president of the United States insisting, oft times almost having to embarrass Europe to stand up and take economic hits to impose costs.'<sup>♣</sup>[\[#N40-ptr1\]](#)
41. I am grateful to Bruce Mazlish for drawing my attention to this 'Aw, shucks!' reaction, as he called it.  
<sup>♣</sup>[\[#N41-ptr1\]](#)

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# Biography

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