

The global trash talkers' past time

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Written for The Muhlenberg Weekly by Adam Yu

Before you go on with the bulk of this article, I need to provide you with some quick background information. I wish I had informed you earlier that I have been studying abroad and living in Ferrara, a small northeastern Italian city, for the past month. Over these past few weeks I, along with the dozen or so students in the program, have been making my way around Italy and trying to squeeze as many cities as possible into our travel itinerary. The point I'm trying to convey is that I have been living in Europe for some time now and have had first-hand experience with Europeans. This week's article is a reaction to some of my not-so-welcoming encounters with Europeans.

Without getting into a long-winded recap of last weekend's chaotic Carnival celebration in Venice, let me just jump to the hostility my fellow travelers and I met. While waiting at a bus station, a middle-aged, scruffy Italian man approached several of us. He came up to our group screaming, "F*%@ America" and calling us "stupid Americans." This guy went on about how terrible America is, and he was yelling at us in an unintelligible rant. I'm guessing he heard us speaking English without any hint of some other European accent and knew we were Americans.

This harshness towards the United States and its citizens is most definitely present here in Europe, but it is not as common as many of us expected (quite a nice surprise). It is obvious the negative opinion of the United States abroad saw a sharp rise during the presidency of George W. Bush and the initiation of combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Staunch anti-American sentiments coming from western Europe were, and continue to be, directed towards American foreign policy.

The current military operations occurring in Afghanistan and Iraq have stirred up emotionally-charged rhetoric and unwarranted accusations of American wrongdoing throughout Europe and elsewhere in the world. All too often, the shouts of insults and

mockery towards Americans and our government/military have to do with a far-fetched assumption of an imperialist, warmongering foreign policy.

Not surprisingly, readings assigned in college-level classes here and the professors themselves have gone beyond using subliminal messages and snide, smart-aleck remarks to express their anti-American attitudes. As stated earlier, most of these comments and bashing sessions focus on America's presence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Much of the anti-Americanism revolves around the thought of the United States building some sort of global empire through military force. An important point to note is that the following examples of anti-American rhetoric are not only heard abroad, but equally as much back in the United States by Americans themselves.

One of the most preferred ways to slander America is comparing our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan to the past colonialism practiced by the western European powers. This accusation could not be further from the truth. The building of empires and colonialism refers to a country that is intentionally exerting its military power to seize another country or piece of territory solely for the benefit of the mother country.

Let's look at Great Britain's former colonial policies. As the mother country, Great Britain exploited her colonies' natural resources and people in order to make economic and territorial gains.

In addition to taking advantage of their colonies, imperial countries set out on their quests for territory without any intention of leaving (unless forced to leave by war). Instead, as history has shown, colonies were set up with the specific intention of establishing a permanent government to represent the reigning monarch, an ever-present military occupation force, and an economically beneficial trade infrastructure. Simply put, imperialist countries take for the sake of taking.

I must ask those who question the US motives in the Middle East, "Has the United States ever displayed any of the classic signs of imperialism?" First of all, the US has not taken any natural re-

sources, despite some ridiculous accusations of us using Iraqi and Afghani oil revenues, from any country.

We don't have fleets of cargo ships and oil tankers shipping goods and raw materials back home. Actually, we pump money into the Iraqi and Afghan economies and reconstruction efforts. The US has been doing quite a bit to help get these two countries on their feet. As for territorial expansion, the US-led efforts in the Middle East were anything but acts of expansion. Can anyone honestly say that the President, Congress, and military leaders purposely drew up plans to expand our borders and annex Iraq and Afghanistan? Of course not. This idea conjures up an image of the competition the European colonial powers were part of when they carved up Africa. America was not and is not part of some diabolical plot to snatch up more land.

Finally, the US effort in Iraq and Afghanistan has been crystal-clear with respect to our intention to leave. We have aided the two countries in establishing functioning governments, self-reliant defense forces, stable economies, and improved infrastructure. America is setting up an Iraqi and Afghan state. Also, the US government and military have been doing the best they can to stick to a tentative plan to drawdown US forces in Iraq, and eventually Afghanistan. We are acting more like a parent than an empire builder. We are doing as much as possible to leave two independent, functioning states.

Even with former President Bush out of the White House, people all over the world have kept up the image of America as a warmongering, imperialist country. Whether or not America is accused of being a colonial power simply to express hatred of Bush or because some truly believe America's intentions are malicious, we must think twice and consider what is really going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. Let's not encourage the past-time of blaming America first and bashing her to pieces.