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The roots of global anti-Americanism

Revelations of Korean rapper Psy's anti-American past are emblematic of a global resentment caused by US militarism.

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As long as unchecked American militarism continues, the phenomena of anti-Americanism will continue to spread and damage the ability of the US to find necessary allies in a strategically-important part of the world

The incongruity of it seemed to be nothing short of a betrayal. After lightheartedly dancing his way into the hearts of Americans and gaining entrance to the inner sanctum of their cherished cult of celebrity, the Korean rapper, Psy, whose song "Gangnam Style" became the **most watched video** in the history of YouTube and made him a pop culture sensation, has been revealed to have a politically active past which places him directly at odds with the American mainstream worldview and which violently **decries its most basic articles of faith**.

The man whom they enjoyed as an unthreatening, comically light-hearted foreigner dancing for their enjoyment was revealed to have only years earlier been a vociferous public critic of American policies and the country's role in the world.

In a 2004 performance, the rapper famous for his "invisible horse dance" denounced the United States in a song called "Hey American":

*"Kill those f---ing Yankees who have been torturing Iraqi captives
Kill those f---ing Yankees who ordered them to torture
Kill their daughters, mothers, daughters-in-law and fathers
Kill them all slowly and painfully"*

For an American public conditioned to the type of unquestionable worship of the military embodied in the phrase "Support the Troops", Psy's words represent nothing less than sacrilege. This song however was not his only offence.

In a previous performance, he had come on stage to protest the presence of 37,000 US troops in South Korea and smashed a miniature American tank in protest over the killing of **two South Korean schoolgirls** by American forces stationed in the country.

As it turned out, the Asian pop-star whom Americans had enthusiastically embraced, arguably the first entertainer to bridge the continental divide so successfully, brought with him not just a culturally unique style of song and dance, but also a worldview which is threateningly alien to most Americans.

If even an innocuous pop singer from a country perceived as benign could espouse views the typical American would attribute to menacing terrorists such as al-Qaeda, it begs serious questions about the pervasiveness of global anti-Americanism as well as to what informs it.

A legacy of violence

While the stories of **American brutality** in places such as Korea are unknown or ignored by the overwhelming majority of Americans, they are less quickly forgotten by the citizens of the countries which have suffered and continue to suffer horrific atrocities at the hands of US troops.

During the Korean War, American troops were believed to have been responsible for hundreds

of instances of **mass-killings of civilians**, including the infamous **No Gun Ri massacre** in which members of the US 7th Cavalry Regiment massacred hundreds of Korean civilians under a railway underpass over the course of three days.

A 2009 investigative film revisiting the massacre documented the words of one Korean survivor who recalled how US troops had indiscriminately murdered men, women and children:

"Children were screaming in fear and the adults were praying for their lives... they never stopped shooting."

Another Korean War survivor described the common American tactic of **firebombing villages with napalm** in a scorched-earth campaign which killed countless civilians:

"When the napalm hit our village, many people were still sleeping in their homes.... Those who survived the flames ran.... We were trying to show the American pilots that we were civilians. But they strafed us, women and children."

The wanton disregard to Korean lives during America's global campaign against Communism continues to extend to the present day in the form of **rape and murder** directed towards Korean civilians by US soldiers stationed at bases throughout the country.

In one 2011 incident, emblematic of long-documented practices by US troops in the country, a 21-year-old soldier, Kevin Flippin, broke into a Korean woman's hotel room and **raped and tortured her for several hours** before robbing her of the equivalent of roughly US \$5 and fleeing back to his base.

Sexual violence and murder has been a recurrent theme throughout the decades of American military presence in Korea and **reflects longstanding behaviour** in countless other countries across the world subject to US military basing and occupation.

Widespread American unfavourability

While the virulent undercurrent of anti-Americanism which was briefly glimpsed in the revelations surrounding Psy's political history have their basis in incidents such as these, Korea is far from being the most anti-American country in the world.

Polls of regions such as Latin America have shown **anti-American sentiment** to be even more rife; a legacy of US military interventionism in the continent which has been most vividly expressed **in the form of torture, murder** and the **subversion of democratically elected leaders** over the past several decades.

However, a **2012 Pew Research poll** showed the least favourable perceptions of the US today to be in countries within the Arab and Muslim worlds; negative views which are thought to have briefly abated upon the election of Barack Obama but which can now be seen to have returned to **their historic lows** during the George W Bush era.

Among countries polled the bottom echelon are exclusively countries with Muslim majority populations. Even those such as Turkey and Jordan whose governments are traditionally allied with the US showed overwhelmingly negative attitudes towards America, with the latter polling at a mere 12 per cent favourability.

Tellingly, Jordan also happens to be home to a massive population of **refugees from the American invasion of Iraq**, the civilian victims of a war who have been forgotten by Americans but continue to live on in desperation and misery in many countries scattered throughout the region.

While an incredible amount of research has gone into **formulating complex theories** to explain this widespread disdain for the US, Occam's Razor, the logical principle that the simplest explanation is most often the correct one suggests that the American militarism which once ravaged Korea and which has now been set upon the Muslim world is the cause of this growing antipathy.

Pakistan, which polled at roughly 9 per cent favourability towards the US in a **2010 BBC World poll**, once had a vibrantly pro-American polity where Jacquelyn Kennedy was mobbed in the streets with flower garlands by thousands of admirers during a **state visit** and where American popular culture was once **widely revered and emulated**.

In recent decades however, all of this has changed, as Pakistanis have been left to witness the staggering human cost of US warfare in neighbouring Afghanistan as well as to deal with **the millions of refugees** that conflict has sent into Pakistan.

Pakistanis themselves have also increasingly become the direct target of American violence; being **gunned down** in the streets by rogue CIA officers, murdered by **remote operated drones** and renditioned for torture at **clandestine "black-sites"** throughout the world.

By starting a massive war and occupation in Afghanistan which caused widespread destabilisation and social chaos in Pakistan, a country which shares deep ethnic and religious bonds with its neighbour, the US has helped turn a once reasonably benign relationship into an increasingly dangerous one which has fuelled virulent anti-Americanism even among **liberal and secular Pakistanis**.

The degeneration of American popularity in Pakistan is however only one illustration of a broader trend where wanton militarism has generated negative popular perceptions towards the US.

Arrogance and atrocity

For Americans who are commonly feted with reassurances of their country's benevolent role in the world, it may come as a surprise that half of all refugees on the planet today are **running from American wars**.

The wanton, industrial-scale violence, which the US has unleashed upon the civilians of

countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia has naturally generated a tidal wave of negative feeling within these countries which many Americans utterly fail to grasp.

Episodes such as the gang rape and murder of a **14-year-old Iraqi girl and her family** by US troops are emblematic of the fundamental sadism of American policy towards the region. However, in a type of bizarre dark comedy, popularly elected American leaders continue **to question the lack of gratitude** among the populations upon whom they have let loose this violence.

What this appears to represent is a type of brazen ignorance and egotism which has come to represent mainstream government policy; the type of myopia under which a country can launch a full-scale war, invasion and occupation of another sovereign nation under entirely **false pretences**, kill **hundreds of thousands** in the process and create **millions of refugees** and still at the end sincerely ask the question "Why they do hate us?".

While the US military, whom the American public puts forth as the unquestioned heroes and proud symbols of the apex of their society, finds new and innovative ways to inflict violence upon the populations of Arab and Muslim countries - including wanton, lawless and often **completely anonymous target killings**, and even recently the sanctioning of killing so-called **"hostile children"** in Afghanistan, the popular reputation of America as a country naturally sinks to new depths among the countries in the Middle East and around the world.

An illustrative example of the essentially self-destructive arrogance of US policy in the region pertains to that of Afghanistan; where the US in 2001 categorically **refused to negotiate with the Taliban** when the latter expressed a desire to co-operate with the full spectrum of US objectives and hand over Osama bin Laden, on the rhetorical grounds of "refusing to talk to evil".

Fast forward 11 years - with tens of thousands of lives lost, trillions of dollars wasted, and America is doing exactly this, negotiating with the Taliban exactly as it could have done **a decade earlier** were it not for flagrantly irrational government policymaking informed by a mixture of arrogance and bloodlust. For the self-proclaimed preeminent global power to behave in such a shockingly ignorant and destructive manner and to still express wonderment over others' negative perceptions of it speaks to a deep lack of national self-awareness and perspective which could seriously impede the country from operating an effective foreign policy in the future.

An increasingly poisoned relationship

Even among those within the Arab and Muslim worlds and beyond who admire purported American values such as secularism, free speech and free enterprise, the past decade of increasingly wanton and unrestrained violence has worked to permanently stain the reputation of a country which was at one time **held in high esteem across social strata**.

American policy towards the Middle East today is popularly perceived to be informed by a cruel, arrogant and **fundamentally racist worldview** in which subject populations are essentially

lesser peoples whose suffering is an accounted-for externality of hegemonic policies.

The type of brutality which Americans inflicted upon Korea decades ago still manifests in the undercurrent of anger held by many Koreans today, so it bears asking how long it will take for negative perceptions of America in the Muslim world to dissipate.

As long as unchecked American militarism in the region continues, these negative perceptions will only escalate and the phenomena of anti-Americanism will continue to spread and damage the ability of the US to find necessary allies in a strategically-important part of the world.

Regardless, as evidence has shown even when such negative feelings are sublimated for the sake of pragmatism, they seldom truly cease to exist. When its history is written, the US will have to come to terms with the legacy of global disdain, distrust and resentment it has engendered over its time as a superpower - a history which may very likely be unkind and incongruent with the image most Americans hold of themselves and of their country.