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Opening Dinner Remarks
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Welcome to Philadelphia and the 48th National Meeting of the Philadelphia Society.

There are, of course, many veterans of the Philadelphia Society who have far longer experience of these meetings than I do.

But I still remember attending my second meeting of the Society in 1995 here in Philadelphia, shortly after coming back from a stint of service abroad, and how at once exciting and comfortable it was to be meeting here in the Sheraton Society Hill, steps away from where our nation's history was forged.

Our topic for this conference – *America and Her Detractors in the Modern World* – has been a long time in the making.

I think I first proposed this topic to Bill Campbell right here in the lobby of this hotel the last or second-last time we met here.

Having the honor and privilege of serving as the Society's 36th President this past year has coincided with bringing this topic – simply put, Anti-Americanism – to our annual meeting agenda.

Why Anti-Americanism?

Simply put, it's more than plain that, since the end of the Cold War and despite the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union and the almost universal discredit of Soviet-style Communism, the United States has not found itself surrounded by friends in the world.

While we have acquired more allies, for instance through the process of NATO expansion, we have also found many implacably hostile leaders, regimes, and nations 'out there' in the world.

Occasionally – as in Venezuela – a nation that we previously regarded as a regional exemplar of democracy and freedom and a friendly neighbor has been transformed into a hostile adversary – usually by the arrival in power of some left-wing demagogue.

In the Cold War, America's main enemies and detractors were united in alliances and blocs; they shared a common ideology that claimed universal appeal and applicability; they embraced messianic, utopian goals – which, just incidentally, had a lot to do with extinguishing, as much as possible, human freedom.

But what of our detractors today? Some are officially atheist; some are fundamentalist Muslim. Some have rigidly state-controlled economies; some have mixed or even still substantially free economies. Most have secular leaders, but at least one is ultimately governed by Islamic clergy. Some have regular -- even if sham or rigged -- elections to legitimize their leaders; others couldn't be bothered.

All have dictator-like leader figures at the helm, whether 'elected or not, who project charisma, develop and practice the 'cult of personality', cultivate a populist, David-versus-Goliath image, posture themselves as valiant, tireless strugglers on behalf of their nation's and people's dignity and security, and constantly invoke the fear of imminent attack and warfare to further justify their rule.

OK, so far that just describes a bunch of petty -- if dangerous -- dictatorships.

But what else do they have in common?

Every nation that I'm referring to -- and you can easily pick them all out -- all incorporate and cultivate anti-Americanism as an explicit part of their politics, as the rationale for their leader's rule.

They declare themselves our enemies -- even when no concrete, tangible clash of interests dictates this. They adopt hostile positions -- actually or rhetorically -- at every opportunity. And they flock together -- and work together -- in a kind of league of rogues and reprobates.

Want an example? Notice the sudden discovery of the close historical, fraternal, economic and political ties between several nations of predominantly Catholic Latin America, that happen to be led by this type of populist demagogue, and ... ahem ... Iran!

They espouse a critique of the United States.

We are interventionists.

We are economic exploiters.

We are imperialists.

We are murderers.

We deliberately despoil the planet with the effluents of capitalist production.

We seek and cause wars -- inflicted mainly on the innocent.

At home, we are an iniquitous society of racial discrimination and repression of minorities.

Naturally, they have every right to resist -- who wouldn't? -- and to cooperate with each other to do so.

Funnily enough, there are many in the United States -- and even among the populations of our friends and allies abroad -- who agree!

Most of those here at home nodding in agreement are the American Left – although they don't completely monopolize this viewpoint.

Many abroad who share this critique are either elites and snobs within the populations of our traditional allies – sometimes our oldest allies – in Europe, or others, in other parts of the world, who find this excoriating critique of the U.S. a convenient excuse for, and distraction from, the inadequacies and failures of their own societies.

What makes any of this important is that it has consequences for how the U.S. conducts itself in the wider world – and for Left-Right and partisan politics here at home.

Basically, Leftist U.S. Administrations – like our current one – have a well-thought-out answer to the problems of anti-Americanism abroad, and policy prescriptions to deal with it.

Essentially, they agree with it. This leads to:

Apologizing for real or supposed wrongs in America's past;
Ignoring and minimizing rising threats – even nuclear ones – or dealing with them ineffectually, and propitiating implacably hostile foreign leaders;
Withdrawing and receding under pressure;
'Leading from behind' when action can scarcely be avoided.

They know what to do -- and what they're about – and it all fits together neatly.

So what's our conservative answer? What do we think is the most effective response to the anti-American challenges of these upstart demagogues and the (sometimes significant) countries they lead?

And what are the implications of this latent anti-Americanism in the American Left for our domestic politics?

These are the questions our conference this weekend will give us a chance to explore and think through together.

To do this, we've lined up a program of crack speakers and diverse experts to provide our 'food for thought' – beginning with our dinner speaker, whom I'll be back to introduce in a moment.

But before we get to our 'food for thought,' let's enjoy our food for the evening. Bon appétit!