compatible with the way the UN was meant to function. It was the rise of American unipolarity—not the Iraq crisis—that, along with cultural clashes and different attitudes toward the use of force, gradually eroded the council's credibility."

In response to the emerging U.S. predominance, coalitions of competitors predictably formed. "Since the end of the Cold War," Glennon writes, "the French, the Chinese, and the Russians have sought to return the world to a more balanced system." As Hubert Vedrine, then France's foreign minister, explained in 2001, "We have to keep defending our vital interests just as before; we can say no, alone, to anything that may be unacceptable." U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld could not have said it better.

"States pursue security by pursuing power," observes Glennon, and in doing that, they use the institutional tools available. For France, Russia, and China, the Security Council and their veto power were the tools at hand in the Iraq crisis. Had Washington been in their position, it probably would have done as they did. And, Glennon believes, had the three nations found themselves in the position of the United States during the Iraq crisis, each of them would have "used the council—or threatened to ignore it—just as the United States did."

No rational state today would imagine that the UN Charter protects its security, says Glennon. The UN Charter permits the use of force only in self-defense and only "if an armed attack occurs." But the provision has been flagrantly violated so often since 1945 that it has been rendered inoperative. NATO's humanitarian intervention in Kosovo in 1999 was as blatant a violation as the recent preventive war in Iraq. "The charter has gone the way of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the 1928 treaty by which every major country that would go on to fight in World War II solemnly committed itself not to resort to war as an instrument of national policy."

If a new international framework is to be designed in the future, Glennon warns, it must reflect "the way states actually behave and the real forces to which they respond." If it is built again on "imaginary truths that transcend politics," such as the notion of the sovereign equality of states, it is doomed to failure.

America's Blind Spot

"The Paradoxes of American Nationalism" by Minxin Pei, in *Foreign Policy* (May–June 2003), 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Though Americans are among the most patriotic people on earth, they have a hard time acknowledging and dealing with the nationalism of others—a blind spot that can spell trouble for U.S. foreign policy, argues Pei, codirector of the China program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"American nationalism is hidden in plain sight," he observes, sustained chiefly by civic volunteerism rather than, as in authoritarian regimes, by the state, and all the more authentic and attractive for it. Even before the 2001 terrorist attacks, a survey showed that 72 percent of Americans were "very proud" of their nationality. That was less than the 80 percent of Mexicans, 81 percent of Egyptians, and 92 percent of Iranians who said they were "very proud" of theirs, but it was far more than the 49 percent of the British, 40 percent of the French, and 20 percent of the Dutch expressing national pride.

Americans do not regard their nationalism as nationalism at all, says Pei, because it is not based on notions of cultural or ethnic superiority. They view it, rather, as being founded on a set of universal political ideals that the rest of the world should gladly embrace. But, as Pei notes, even in Western Europe, "another bastion of liberalism and democracy," a recent survey found that less than half the respondents "like American ideas about democracy."

Unlike nationalism in most other countries, he says, American nationalism is

based on past triumphs, not past humiliations and defeats. It's forward-looking, imbued with "a missionary spirit and a short collective memory." But the U.S. effort to "liberate" Iraq, for example, looks like something else to inhabitants of the Middle East, who are "haunted by memories of Western military invasions since the time of the Crusades."

Washington's "insensitivity" to foreign nationalism stirs resentments and prompts accusations of hypocrisy, Pei believes. What's more, it undermines efforts by the United States to isolate hostile regimes such as North Korea. "The rising nationalism of South Korea's younger generation . . . hasn't yet figured in Washington's calculations concerning Pyongyang's [nuclear] brinkmanship."

Americans' own insularity compounds the problem. Pei cites a survey showing that, in the past five years, only 22 percent of Americans have traveled to a foreign country, compared with 66 percent of Canadians, 73 percent of Britons, 60 percent of the French, and 77 percent of Germans. And even in the wake of September 11, 2001, Americans are not much interested in international affairs. In an early 2002 survey, only 26 percent said that they were following foreign news "very closely."

Little wonder, then, that American nationalism evokes "mixed feelings" abroad. That might not matter much under other circumstances, says Pei, but when the nationalism drives U.S. foreign policy, the unfortunate result is "broad-based anti-Americanism."

Economics, Labor & Business

Is the Revolution Over?

"IT Doesn't Matter" by Nicholas G. Carr, in *Harvard Business Review* (May 2003), 60 Harvard Way, Boston, Mass. 02163.

Information technology (IT) was once thought a vital strategic tool for gaining an edge on competitors. But these days, argues Carr, *Harvard Business Review*'s editor at large, IT has become just another humdrum means of doing business.

"You only gain an edge over rivals by having or doing something that they can't have or do," he points out. "By now, the core functions of IT—data storage, data processing, and data transport—have become available and affordable to all."

Before IT was so widespread, many companies—including Mobil Oil, American Airlines, and Federal Express—were indeed able to steal a march on competitors by their innovative use of proprietary IT. But, says Carr, as happened with other "infrastructural" technologies—the telegraph, railroads, electric power—"the window for gaining advantage" remained open only briefly. The cost of a technology drops, "best practices" are quickly identified and disseminated, and the opportunities for breakthrough uses decrease. Today, hardware and software available right off the shelf have much more power than most companies need. As a result, Microsoft, IBM, Sun, and other IT producers are rushing to reposition themselves as suppliers of "Web services"—charging annual fees and becoming, in effect, utilities.

IT "is entwined with so many business functions . . . that it will continue to consume a large portion of corporate spending," Carr writes. But a kind of mania drove IT expenditures during the 1990s from about 30 percent of all capital spending by U.S. corporations to nearly 50 percent. He urges companies to cast a cold eye on the amounts they spend for IT. Most workers don't need the latest blazingly fast PC to do their jobs, and a huge investment in data storage simply to save employee e-mails and files makes no sense.

What's more, Carr maintains, being stingy with IT dollars is unlikely to damage a firm's competitive position. A consulting firm that looked at 7,500 large U.S. companies last year found that the typical company spent 3.7 percent of revenues on IT. But the 25 firms with the highest financial returns spent, on average, less than one percent.