



SHANE T. MCCOY—DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE/REUTERS

**HEARTS AND MINDS: Guantánamo's injustices have hurt America's image, Mahubani writes**

steadily, probably at America's expense?

Mahubani argues that the U.S. and the international institutions it effectively runs (the IMF, for example) always confuse America's own interests with what's good for everyone. This is true no matter who is in power, Mahubani says. Indeed, the architects of the U.S. response to the Asian financial crisis were then Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin—now practically worshipped in the U.S. as the man behind the Clinton boom years—and Larry Summers, who succeeded Rubin as Treasury Secretary. Devout Bushies they are not, but neither saw the disconnect that to many Thais seemed utterly obvious after the fact: between what was good for America and what was good for Thailand.

Mahubani is equally forceful about U.S. abuses at its war-on-terror prison camps. He writes that Guantánamo Bay—where inmates have been held indefinitely without formal charges—has had a “profound effect” on the liberal élites that are America's “best friends abroad.” Many Americans don't yet see the corrosive effects of this injustice, viewing Guantánamo as a necessary evil in a grim but vital war against the people who brought down the Twin Towers and beheaded *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl. But I'll bet Christopher Hill gets it. Hill is the U.S. diplomat now charged with trying to get key negotiating partners in line to deal with North Korea and its nukes. One of the most troublesome U.S. allies is South Korea, which is in the midst of a kiss-and-make-up lovefest with its brothers to the North. A few weeks ago, Hill had a testy exchange with South Korean journalists over why Seoul's blame-America-first media don't write more about the heinous human-rights abuses in the socialist paradise next door. It's a good question. One answer, no doubt, is the distrust of America fomented by Guantánamo.

The implicit comparison would drive many Americans to distraction. Guantánamo isn't in the same league as Kim Jong Il's gulag. But it's bad enough, and as Mahubani points out, it has weakened the moral authority that the U.S. had at the end of the cold war. Alas, his brief chapter on what the U.S. can do about this flirts with the banal (“promote greater respect for international law”). Which means the ultimate message of the book is clear if, for Americans, depressing: in places like Guantánamo, the U.S. frittered away much of the world's trust in a painfully short period of time. It will likely take a lot longer to win it back. ■

## BOOKS

# How to Lose Friends

Kishore Mahubani explains how the U.S. squandered the trust that it used to inspire

By **BILL POWELL**



KISHORE MAHUBANI IS THAT rarest of creatures, a card-carrying member of the sober, slightly stuffy international establishment who still occasionally manages to hurl provocative smart bombs into the debate on global affairs—an agent provocateur in gentleman's clothing. In the mid '90s, when the U.S. was aflutter with insecurity about how it was losing the global economic race to (believe it or not) Japan, he wrote an essay for *Foreign Affairs* on “Asian values.” At the time it caused a furious discussion among American foreign-policy élites about whether there was any difference in “values” between East and West—and, if there was, whose values were better.

Now, Mahubani, who served two terms as Singapore's ambassador to the United Nations, has published a cold-eyed look at how the rest of the world views the U.S. in the wake of Sept. 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. *Beyond the Age of Innocence* is written by a friend of America, aimed at Americans. If no one but the reflexive America bashers among the Davos crowd in Europe and Asia read it, the book will have been a failure.

Some of the ground Mahubani covers is familiar enough, but much is not. One of his arguments is that the loss of trust between the U.S. and the rest of the world started years before George W. Bush invaded Iraq “unilaterally.” Mahubani is particularly astute about how the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 damaged America's image overseas. He writes, for example, about how disillusioned Thais were when the U.S. did not bail them out after it had bailed out Mexico during a similar currency crisis in 1994. The reason the U.S. spurned Thailand may seem obvious to a lot of Americans—“you're not on our border,” one U.S. Treasury Department official supposedly told the Thais. But for a country that had followed the global financial rules as dictated by Washington—opening itself up to large capital flows from abroad, only to get hammered as that same money flew back out in a matter of days—the truth hurt in ways that most Americans still don't get. The perception was that the U.S. would prop up another nation if threatened with a massive wave of illegal immigration, but otherwise cared only that big American banks should be able to get their money out of Thailand ASAP. Is it any wonder, Mahubani writes, that China—the one major country that *didn't* play by Washington's rules back then—now sees its influence gaining