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## Let Them Hate as Long as They Fear

By PAUL KRUGMAN

**“W**hy does our president condone the swaggering and contemptuous approach to our friends and allies this administration is fostering, including among its most senior officials? Has 'oderint dum metuant' really become our motto?" So reads the resignation letter of John Brady Kiesling, a career diplomat who recently left the Foreign Service in protest against Bush administration policy.

"Oderint dum metuant" translates, roughly, as "let them hate as long as they fear." It was a favorite saying of the emperor Caligula, and may seem over the top as a description of current U.S. policy. But this week's crisis in U.S.-Mexican relations — a crisis that has been almost ignored north of the border — suggests that it is a perfect description of George Bush's attitude toward the world.

Mexico is an enormously important ally, not just because of our common border, but also because of its special role as a showcase for American ideals. For a century and a half Mexico has — often with good reason — seen its powerful neighbor as an exploiter, if not an outright enemy. Since the first Bush administration, however, the United States has made great efforts to treat Mexico as a partner, and Mexico's recent track record of economic stability and democracy is, and should be, a source of pride on both sides of the border.

But Mexico's seat on the U.N. Security Council gives it a vote on the question of Iraq — and the threats the Bush administration has made to get that vote are quickly destroying any semblance of good will.

Last week The Economist quoted an American diplomat who warned that if Mexico didn't vote for a U.S. resolution it could "stir up feelings" against Mexicans in the United States. He compared the situation to that of Japanese-Americans who were interned after 1941, and wondered whether Mexico "wants to stir the fires of jingoism during a war."

Incredible stuff, but easy to dismiss as long as the diplomat was unidentified. Then came President Bush's Monday interview with Copley News Service. He alluded to the possibility of reprisals if Mexico didn't vote America's way, saying, "I don't expect there to be significant retribution from the government" — emphasizing the word "government." He then went on to suggest that there might, however, be a reaction from other quarters, citing "an interesting phenomena taking place here in America about the French . . . a backlash against the French, not stirred up by anybody except the people."

And Mr. Bush then said that if Mexico or other countries oppose the United States, "there will be a certain sense of discipline."

These remarks went virtually unreported by the ever-protective U.S. media, but they created a political firestorm in Mexico. The White House has been frantically backpedaling, claiming that when Mr. Bush talked of "discipline" he wasn't making a threat. But in the context of the rest of the interview, it's clear that he was.

Moreover, Mr. Bush was disingenuous when he described the backlash against the French as "not stirred up by anybody except the people." On the same day that the report of his interview appeared, The Financial Times carried the headline, "Hastert Orchestrates Tirade Against the French." That's Dennis Hastert, the speaker of the House of Representatives. In fact, anti-French feeling has been carefully fomented by Republican officials, Rupert Murdoch's media empire and other administration allies. Can you blame Mexicans for interpreting Mr. Bush's remarks as a threat to do the same to them?

So oderint dum metuant it is. I could talk about the foolishness of such blatant bullying — or about the incredible risks, in a multiethnic, multiracial society, of even hinting that one might encourage a backlash against Hispanics. And yes, I mean Hispanics, not Mexicans: once feelings are running high, do you really think people will politely ask a brown-skinned guy with an accent whether he is a citizen or, if not, which country he comes from?

But my most intense reaction to this story isn't anger over the administration's stupidity and irresponsibility, or even dismay over the casual destruction of hard-won friendships. No, when I read an interview in which the U.S. president sounds for all the world like a B-movie villain — "You have relatives in Texas, yes?" — what I feel, above all, is shame.