

TED GALEN CARPENTER



SMART POWER

*Toward a Prudent Foreign Policy
for America*

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*To my late mother, Magdalene Carpenter, who inspired in me a thirst
for knowledge that has never run dry.*

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Introduction: America's Strategic Incoherence

America's foreign policy exhibits a number of troubling defects. Despite spending as much on the military as the rest of the world combined, Americans do not feel especially secure. And the United States has not enjoyed an era of peace despite the demise of the Soviet empire and the USSR itself. Except for trimming the number of troops stationed in Europe, there was no significant effort to reduce the extent of America's security entanglements in the world following the collapse of the Soviet threat. Indeed, the end of the Cold War ushered in an era of more, rather than less, military activism by Washington. Even before the 9-11 terrorist attacks, the United States had used military force on numerous occasions in an astonishing array of circumstances during the initial 12 years of the post-Cold War period.

Merely listing those incidents suggests the promiscuous nature of Washington's security strategy. Just weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, U.S. troops invaded Panama to overthrow Manuel Noriega, a tin-pot dictator and onetime CIA asset. The following year, the administration of George H. W. Bush sent more than 500,000 American military personnel to the Persian Gulf and waged a war to reverse Iraq's conquest of Kuwait. During the final months of the elder Bush's administration, the president dispatched U.S. Marines to provide humanitarian aid to beleaguered civilians in Somalia who were caught up in that country's civil war. That humanitarian mission morphed into a more ambitious U.S./UN nation-building mission under Bush's successor, Bill Clinton. In 1994, Washington sent troops into Haiti to restore the erratic President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power and try to stabilize that country. The following year, President Clinton abandoned his initial reluctance to get involved in the civil strife accompanying the breakup of Yugoslavia and ordered U.S. planes to bomb secessionist Serb forces in Bosnia. In 1998 Clinton not only launched cruise missile strikes against suspected al Qaeda targets in Afghanistan and Sudan, but he authorized a dramatic new round of military force in the form of bombing raids against Iraq (Operation Desert Fox). He topped off his record of military muscle-flexing by approving a U.S.-led NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999 to force that country to relinquish control over its rebellious province of Kosovo.

Since 9-11, the scope of U.S. combat operations has expanded even further. The administration of George W. Bush decided to invade and occupy two countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, and has persisted in multi-year counterinsurgency and nation-building missions in both places.

That is an extraordinary record of belligerence—some 10 episodes of significant military force in less than two decades. Although the current president repeatedly asserts that the military option is always a last resort for America, the record suggests otherwise. And a country that sends its military to intervene in places as diverse as Panama, Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, Southwest Asia, and the Persian Gulf does not seem to have a well-defined (much less sufficiently discriminating) security strategy. America is strategically overextended—and by a wide margin.

There are three major problems with Washington's current role in the world. One defect is an unwillingness to terminate, or even reconsider, the numerous security obligations that Washington accumulated during the Cold War. Most of those obligations reek of obsolescence. Why, for example, does the United States need to keep nearly 100,000 troops in Europe more than 18 years after the collapse of the Soviet satellite empire in Eastern Europe and more than 16 years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself? Why especially do we need to do so when the European Union collectively has a much larger population and economy than does the United States?

Indeed, there seems to be little reason to retain the NATO alliance at all. NATO was created in the aftermath of World War II, in the pithy words of the alliance's first secretary general, Lord Ismay, "to keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down." While that might have made some strategic sense in the late 1940s, it makes none today. Russia does not even remotely pose the kind of political and military challenge to democratic Europe that the USSR did, and Germany, rather than being a potential disruptive power, is a keystone member of the European Union. It was one thing for the United States to defend a weak and war-ravaged democratic Europe from a powerful and aggressive totalitarian power. It is quite another to continue taking care of the continent's security needs in the 21st century even though democratic Europe is now rich and the Soviet Union no longer exists.

Similarly, there is no legitimate strategic rationale to retain the security commitment to South Korea. At the time that defense pledge was made, South Korea was an impoverished country incapable of defending itself. Moreover, the Korean peninsula was seen as merely one theater in America's global struggle against international communism. Today, South Korea has twice the population and an economy *40 times* that of its communist North Korean rival. It seems absurd on its face to continue subsidizing the defense of such a prosperous and capable country—especially when

it is no longer part of a global security rivalry. Yet, the most Washington is willing to do is to modestly downsize the number of U.S. troops stationed on the peninsula.

The second major defect in the current security strategy is the casual extension of security commitments to new client states that are even less relevant than Washington's traditional Cold War-era allies to America's security needs. An especially egregious example has been the expansion of NATO into Central and Eastern Europe. Instead of retiring the alliance when the principal reason for its existence (the Soviet threat) vanished, NATO's boosters came up with an array of new justifications for keeping the alliance in business. By the mid-1990s, they had latched onto the most dangerous approach possible—expansion into Moscow's traditional sphere of influence. As NATO's leading member, the United States is now obligated to defend one small player (Slovenia) in the volatile Balkans, with the likelihood that it will soon have a similar obligation to other countries in that region. Even worse, Washington has an obligation under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty to regard any attack on the tiny Baltic republics as an attack on the United States. Given the historically contentious relations of those countries with their huge Russian neighbor, that is a blueprint for serious trouble in the future. Not content with damaging Washington's relations with Russia by extending security commitments to the Baltic republics, the United States now flirts with the idea of inviting Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO—steps that may antagonize Moscow beyond endurance.

Such dubious security obligations are not confined to Eastern Europe. Indeed, the commitment that is potentially the most dangerous is Washington's willingness to protect Taiwan's *de facto* independence. That policy could easily lead to armed conflict with China. Under President Chen Shui-bian, Taiwan has repeatedly engaged in actions to emphasize a national identity separate from China and to seek greater international recognition for its existence as an independent state—initiatives that Beijing considers extremely provocative. Yet even if the new government in Taipei proves to be more cautious than Chen's administration, China is unlikely to tolerate indefinitely an upstart secessionist island barely 100 miles off its coast, especially when the overwhelming majority of mainlanders consider Taiwan to be Chinese territory. As China's economic and military strength grows, Beijing's leaders are almost certain to become more insistent about reunification. An armed clash between the mainland and Taiwan is all too likely at some point, and those analysts who assume that economic ties between those two entities—and between China and the United States—will be sufficient to prevent a crisis are being too optimistic. Washington's willingness to defend Taiwan is a high-stakes gamble with a decidedly unfavorable risk-reward calculation.

The third major defect in the current U.S. security strategy is the increased willingness to intervene militarily in murky, often internecine, conflicts. That is not entirely a new phenomenon. One of the worst strategic blunders in American history, the Vietnam war, was such an intervention. During the early 1980s, U.S. leaders committed a similar blunder (albeit, thankfully, on a much smaller scale) by sending troops into Lebanon when that country was in the midst of civil war. A decade later, American military personnel died in Somalia in pursuit of an amorphous mission with little or no strategic value. The United States intervened in two civil wars in the Balkans, which may ultimately lead to greater, rather than diminished, instability in that region.

And, of course, Washington invaded both Afghanistan and Iraq and continues to militarily occupy both countries. The initial operation in Afghanistan at least made sense from a security standpoint. Not only were the perpetrators of the horrific 9-11 terrorist attacks holed up in that country, but Afghanistan's Taliban government had given al Qaeda safe haven, despite the organization's repeated attacks on American interests. Ousting that regime was entirely justified, but instead of simply turning over control of Afghanistan to a post-Taliban government with a firm warning not to tolerate the operations of anti-American terrorists, Washington stayed on in that country and has pursued an increasingly ill-defined, open-ended nation-building mission.

The intervention in Iraq is an even worse case of sloppy strategic thinking. In marked contrast to the rather strong case for invading Afghanistan, Iraq posed no credible military threat to the United States. The Bush administration decided to remove Saddam Hussein from power with the naive expectation that the transition to a friendly, democratic government would be quick and easy and that Iraq would become a secular democratic model that would transform politics throughout the Middle East, thereby "draining the swamp" of popular support for radical Islamic terrorism. It would be difficult to conceive of a more misguided venture. Instead of a rapid and inexpensive U.S. success, the occupation of Iraq is now in its sixth year with no end in sight. It has already consumed more than \$500 billion in direct costs (and perhaps another \$1 trillion in indirect costs) and taken the lives of more than 4,000 American soldiers—plus thousands more who have been physically maimed. That enormous price has been paid for the dubious achievement of enabling a sectarian Shiite government, heavily influenced by Iran, to gain a tenuous hold on power.

The crazy-quilt pattern of U.S. security pledges and military interventions is strong evidence of a foreign policy elite that is intellectually unable to establish priorities or even to develop an analytical framework for assessing strategic choices. Yet it is imperative to have such a framework within which to examine calls to make security commitments or embark

on military ventures. Without it, the United States will persist in a promiscuous security policy, putting the lives and fortunes of the American people at risk even when there is no compelling reason to do so.

A proper analytical framework would seek to determine whether a specific development somewhere in the world is relevant to America's security and well being. If it is relevant, the next step would be to determine just how relevant, which is crucial for deciding what response is appropriate. Asking such questions helps establish a hierarchy of interests and the corresponding responses. In a broad sense, America's security interests can be divided into four categories.

The first level consists of *vital interests*. As described in greater detail in my book, *A Search for Enemies: America's Alliances after the Cold War* (1992), vital interests are matters that have a direct, immediate, and substantial connection to America's physical survival, political independence, or domestic liberty. Thwarting threats to those interests warrants using whatever level of military force may be necessary if other efforts prove insufficient. Maintaining an adequate nuclear deterrent is one measure short of war that is appropriate for defending vital interests. Obliterating (by military force, if needed) terrorist organizations that target the United States is another example of protecting vital interests.

Just below the level of vital interests lie *conditional* or *secondary interests*. In that category are geostrategic assets that are pertinent but not indispensable to preserving America's territorial integrity, independence, and domestic liberty. Preventing a hostile power from dominating a region like East Asia would be a prime example of a secondary interest. America should still endeavor to avoid a direct military intervention to counter a threat to a secondary interest, but it should certainly attempt to bolster other nations in the region and adopt other measures to stymie a bid for regional hegemony by a hostile power. Given the economic capabilities and technological sophistication of several societies in East Asia, a power that was able to subdue those societies and utilize their populations and resources would be on the path to posing a significant threat to America.

The lowest category of security concerns consists of *peripheral interests*. Such interests consist of geostrategic assets that marginally enhance America's security and well being, but whose loss would constitute more of an annoyance than a serious setback. The recent emergence of obnoxious, left-wing populist regimes in Latin America is an example. Washington can usually afford to ignore such developments, and action is justified only if it involves minimal cost and risk to the United States.

It is important to emphasize that most developments in the world do not even reach the threshold of peripheral interests. They belong in the fourth category of *irrelevant matters*. Which faction rules in Burma, Liberia, or Georgia need not be of concern to U.S. officials. Even if a threat should

emerge to the independence of Botswana, New Zealand, or Bosnia, it would pose no measurable threat to America's security. Other than the routine exertions of diplomacy, Washington should make no effort to determine outcomes in such situations.

Given that hierarchy of interests, it appears that the United States has had a noticeable tendency in recent decades to overreact to adverse developments in the international system and often to be concerned about matters that are, at most, marginally relevant to the security and well being of the American people. At times, it has amounted to foreign policy hypochondria. If that unfortunate tendency is eliminated, this country can enjoy the benefits of a more focused and prudent foreign policy.

Among those benefits is a much smaller military budget. Incredibly, even though the United States already spends as much on the military as the rest of the world combined, a vocal lobbying campaign is under way among conservative analysts and pundits to boost that spending still further. Jim Talent, John Tkacik, and other analysts at the Heritage Foundation, for example, assert that the United States should never spend less than 4 percent of gross domestic product on the Pentagon. One prominent candidate for the GOP presidential nomination even called for a floor of 4.5 percent of GDP.

Such proposals are fundamentally misguided. A nation that possesses a huge nuclear deterrent, has a conventional military apparatus that is vastly superior to those of other nations, enjoys the luxury of weak and friendly neighboring states, and faces no serious peer competitor anywhere in the world for at least the next 15 to 20 years should not have to increase military spending from its already lofty height.

Nor is it necessary to boost spending to combat al Qaeda and its ilk. With the exception of the war in Afghanistan, most of the increased military outlays over the past 6 years have had nothing to do with countering that threat. The Pentagon and its allies exploited the public's fears following 9-11 to fund items that the Department of Defense had had on its wish list for many years. Much of the campaign against al Qaeda consists of glorified law enforcement, not large-scale military enterprises. Some of the most impressive successes against that organization have come in places such as Hamburg, London, and Madrid. The 82nd Airborne Division, F-22 fighters, and Virginia class submarines are not relevant in such settings. To be blunt, we don't need to spend 4.0 percent or 4.5 percent of GDP on the military to counter a few thousand stateless fanatics. The hype employed by some overwrought pundits to the contrary, the Islamic terrorist threat is not the functional equivalent of World War III, and we do not need to fund the military as though it is.

By adopting a more rigorous and judicious security strategy, a nation with America's geographic and technological advantages should be able

to make significant cuts in its military outlays, not increase them. Indeed, as other Cato Institute scholars have pointed out, the United States could trim its defense budget by at least 40 percent and still have a sizable security cushion. Such reductions would still result in a budget in excess of \$300 billion, when China, the country with the next highest military outlays, spends merely \$80 billion to \$90 billion.

Military spending levels should be based on an intelligent security strategy, not a reflexive adherence to an arbitrary percentage of GDP to fulfill obsolete or unwise obligations. The United States did not need to intervene in civil wars in the Balkans in the 1990s, since America had no meaningful strategic or economic interests at stake in those conflicts. Likewise, nation-building missions in such places as Somalia, Haiti, and Iraq are unnecessary and amount to strategic masochism. America does not need to defend prosperous countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and the members of the European Union, which are (or certainly should be) capable of defending themselves and playing active security roles in their respective regions. The United States does not benefit by extending risky new defense commitments to an assortment of small client states around the world that add little or nothing to America's security and well being.

America does not need to be—and should not aspire to be—a combination global policeman and global social worker. By adopting a more restrained security strategy, which I have described elsewhere as “strategic independence,” the United States would not merely eliminate an unnecessary financial drain. Even more important, it would reduce the risk of becoming entangled in unnecessary wars. It is tragic beyond measure that tens of thousands of Americans—and millions of innocent foreign civilians—have perished in such foolish interventions as those in Vietnam, Lebanon, and Iraq. A promiscuously interventionist policy virtually guarantees that there will be more (and possibly much larger) tragedies in the future. The American people deserve better.

Finally, a more sensible and cautious security strategy is essential to halt the growing distortions in our system of government. The American constitutional system was never designed for an imperial nation that was perpetually at war or preparing for war. The concept of federalism is antithetical to the existence of a powerful national government, which is a prerequisite for a global interventionist foreign policy. Likewise, the system of checks and balances at the national level among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches is not conducive to an imperial role, which requires an utterly dominant presidency. In the coming decades, Americans are likely to face a stark choice: terminate the current hyperactivist security policy and preserve the American constitutional system, or retain that security policy and watch as the constitu-

tional system morphs into an ever more centralized and authoritarian structure.

In the pages that follow, I examine a variety of foreign policy issues and assess the many problems associated with Washington's current approach to world affairs. The essays consist of articles that I wrote for an array of publications between early 2002 and mid-2007. This collection serves as a companion volume to *Peace & Freedom: Foreign Policy for a Constitutional Republic*, which was published in 2002.

PART 1

Trying to Thwart
the Drive to War
against Iraq

Introduction

Those foreign policy experts who tried to stem the surge toward war with Iraq in 2002 and early 2003 faced a daunting challenge. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks had understandably alarmed the American people and made them unusually receptive to arguments in favor of preemptive military action to neutralize any possible security threat. Bush administration officials skillfully (some critics might say cynically) exploited the public's fears to make the case for attacking Iraq and removing Saddam Hussein's regime from power. Although most officials did not explicitly seek to link Iraq to the 9-11 attacks, since there was no credible evidence of Baghdad's complicity, they rarely passed up the opportunity to make that linkage through innuendo. The message they conveyed to the American people over and over again was that if the United States did not oust Saddam, the danger of another 9-11—this time perhaps involving nuclear weapons—would reach intolerable levels. National security adviser Condoleezza Rice epitomized that strategy when she stated that America could not afford to wait for a smoking gun to emerge in the form of a mushroom cloud.

Once the Iraq mission turned sour, administration policymakers and their political allies tended to argue that the case for war against Iraq had never been based entirely on the issue of weapons of mass destruction. That is technically true. Proponents of war did occasionally cite other reasons for invading and occupying the country, including the prospect that post-Saddam Iraq would become a secular, pro-Western democratic model that would transform the entire Middle East. But fears about weapons of mass destruction were always the dominant component of the case for war. Those who now argue otherwise engage in flagrant historical revisionism.

In making the case against going to war, I emphasized two themes. First, I argued that even if Saddam should someday obtain nuclear weapons, the United States would be able to deter Iraq in the same way that it had deterred other bad actors (most notably the Soviet Union and Maoist China) in the past. War, therefore, was unnecessary, and it threatened to disrupt an already delicate balance of power in the Persian Gulf region. Second, I warned that contrary to the rosy projections of the Bush administration and its neoconservative allies, the mission in Iraq would not be short and easy. By overthrowing Saddam, the United States would become responsible for the future of a fragile, fractious country. The deep divisions

among Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds created the specters of secessionism and civil war, not the likelihood of a united, democratic polity. I warned that Washington was embarking on a dubious nation-building mission of indefinite duration with little prospect of success.

Those of us who made such arguments were drowned out by the pro-war chorus. The administration had powerful political allies who dominated the newspaper op-ed pages and the media airwaves. Pro-war pundits repeatedly exacerbated the public's fears about new terrorist attacks and smeared anti-war forces as being soft on terrorism. It was hardly surprising that Fox News, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other conservative outlets amplified the administration's calls for war. What was surprising was the pro-war stance—or at least supine behavior—of many supposedly liberal outlets. Critics of the war found it extraordinarily difficult to get exposure for their arguments. It is emblematic of the problem that none of the articles against going to war contained in this chapter appeared in the agenda-setting newspapers. Yet that outcome was not for lack of trying. Most of the articles were first offered to one or more of those outlets. Other anti-war experts reported similar problems getting their critiques accepted by prominent publications. The unsettling reality is that the case against war did not receive a fair hearing, and that was a troubling failure of the media to serve as vigilant watchdogs regarding government policies. In the run-up to war with Iraq, the media too often were lap dogs rather than watchdogs.

That was tragic, because the predictions of war proponents were so wildly inaccurate. The Iraq mission did not turn out to be, as neoconservative pundit and former Reagan administration official Kenneth Adelman stated confidently, a “cakewalk.” Instead, it became a bloody, frustrating, multisided conflict that continues to plague us to this day. In retrospect, the predictions made by those of us who sought to prevent the Iraq war proved to be much closer to the mark than the rosy scenarios our opponents embraced.

Overthrow Saddam? Be Careful What You Wish For

Advocates of making the ouster of Saddam Hussein the next stage in America's war against terrorism are becoming increasingly vocal. The United States has the military power to achieve that goal. Yet no matter how emotionally satisfying removing a thug like Saddam may seem,

Americans would be wise to consider whether that step is worth the price. The inevitable U.S. military victory would not be the end of America's troubles in Iraq. Indeed, it would mark the start of a new round of headaches. Ousting Saddam would make Washington responsible for Iraq's political future and entangle the United States in an endless nation-building mission beset by intractable problems.

True, some optimists argue that the Iraqi opposition in exile—especially the largest umbrella group, the Iraqi National Congress—can not only defeat Saddam but can set up a stable successor government with only modest assistance from Washington. But as Marine Corps Gen. Anthony Zinni, former commander of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf, notes, the INC is a motley assortment of groups running the gamut from Marxist revolutionaries to Islamic fundamentalists. That hardly seems the basis for a stable, democratic system.

The reality is that American troops would be needed to install a new government. They also would have to stay on to protect it from authoritarian elements and create democratic institutions strong enough to survive the eventual departure of U.S. occupation forces. Otherwise, another military dictator—a “new Saddam”—would likely emerge. Installing and preserving a democratic Iraqi government would entail a nation-building mission of indefinite duration that would dwarf the ongoing efforts in Bosnia and Kosovo.

The unpromising prospects for a stable democratic system in Iraq should be sufficient to dissuade those who want the U.S. military to march to Baghdad. But there are other, equally daunting problems.

Most notably there is the issue posed by two persistent regional secession movements: the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south. Washington would have to decide whether to commit itself to preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq or to give its blessing to the secessionists. Either option has a serious downside.

Holding Iraq together might take some doing. Attempting to force the Kurds and Shiites to remain under Baghdad's jurisdiction would probably provoke ferocious resistance. Washington would then face the task of explaining to the American people why U.S. troops were dying in military campaigns to suppress the aspirations of populations that merely want to throw off the shackles of Iraq's Sunni Muslim elite.

Yet endorsing the creation of independent Kurdish and Shiite states also has drawbacks. U.S. officials would be presiding over the dismemberment of Iraq—an action that the Sunnis (and others throughout the Islamic world) would certainly resent. Dismemberment would also eliminate the only significant regional military counterweight to Iran.

Furthermore, the establishment of an independent Kurdistan would create a thorny problem for Washington's ally, Turkey. A Kurdish republic

would be an irresistible political magnet for Turkey's Kurdish population—more than half of all Kurds living in the region. Ankara has waged a bloody war for more than 17 years to suppress a Kurdish insurgency in southeastern Turkey. Turkish forces have repeatedly entered northern Iraq since the Gulf War, taking advantage of the fact that Saddam's regime does not exercise effective control of the area. Turkey would find its difficulties multiplied if rebel forces could find sanctuary in a neighboring Kurdish state.

If credible evidence emerges that Iraq was involved in the Sept. 11 attacks, the United States would have no alternative but to remove Saddam from power despite the potential risks and problems. But absent such a justification, a decision to oust Saddam and become responsible for Iraq's political future is ill advised.

United Press International, January 15, 2002

Missing the Point: Bush's Speech to the UN

In his speech to the UN General Assembly, President Bush challenged the world body to enforce the various resolutions that it had passed since 1991 requiring Iraq to unconditionally accept the dismantling of its chemical and biological weapons and nuclear research facilities. If the UN proves unwilling or unable to enforce those resolutions, Bush indicated that the United States would take action on its own.

Bush's speech was a classic case of missing the point. The pertinent issue is whether Saddam Hussein poses a serious threat to the security of the United States. If he does, this country is justified in taking whatever steps are necessary to terminate that threat. Whether the UN approves of Washington's course is irrelevant. Although it might be desirable to have the UN's endorsement, America's security cannot be held hostage to the vagaries of multilateral diplomacy.

But does Iraq pose a serious, credible threat to America? If President Bush were a prosecutor in a criminal case, the evidence that he has presented thus far would not be sufficient to secure an indictment, much less a conviction. The administration's case essentially argues that: 1) Saddam Hussein is intent on acquiring nuclear weapons; 2) he is on the verge of success in that effort; and 3) if he does develop nuclear weapons, he will use them against the United States or its allies.

The administration may be right on the first point, but its other two allegations are dubious. Recent reports from two prominent think tanks concluded that Iraq is years away from being able to build even a crude nuclear weapon, much less deploy a usable arsenal. Moreover, even if Iraq is able someday to deploy a small arsenal, the administration has yet to explain why the United States would be unable to deter an attack.

That professed loss of faith in deterrence seems disingenuous. The United States successfully deterred the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin and his successors. We were able to do so for decades, even though the USSR ultimately acquired thousands of nuclear weapons. The United States also deterred China when that country developed a nuclear weapons capability beginning in the mid-1960s.

Given that historical record, why does Washington conclude that Saddam Hussein would be undeterrable? The president and his advisers cannot believe that Saddam is more brutal than the totalitarian dictators the United States deterred in the past. Stalin and Mao were genocidal monsters who make Saddam look like a rank amateur. Moreover, brutality is not the same as irrationality. Stalin and Mao butchered millions of their own people—70 million combined—but they also understood that they would be signing their own death warrants if they ever attacked the United States.

Saddam likewise understands that the consequence of attacking the United States would be political and personal annihilation. Notably, he refrained from using chemical weapons against U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf war. Furthermore, a man who sleeps in a different location each night to maximize his chances of survival does not seem the suicidal type.

Even the argument that Saddam might pass along a nuclear weapon to al Qaeda or another terrorist group is not credible. Saddam knows that if terrorists detonated such a weapon against an American target, he would be at the top of a short list of suspects. Terrorists are far more likely to get a weapon of mass destruction on the black market from the Russian mafia than they are to get it from Iraq.

The administration's most plausible argument is that Baghdad might threaten its neighbors with nuclear weapons. But even that scenario is fairly remote—and it is not directly relevant to America's security. An attack on Israel is highly unlikely because Israel has an arsenal of 200 to 300 nuclear bombs and warheads. Iraq's other neighbors are somewhat more vulnerable. But collectively they have far more military power than does Baghdad and that should act as a credible deterrent.

Taking the United States into war is a very serious matter, and it is a path that should be taken only if there is no reasonable alternative. That is especially true in the current case. An attack on Iraq would be a high-risk venture with significant potential to destabilize the entire Middle

East-Persian Gulf region. The one scenario in which Saddam might use chemical or biological weapons in his possession is if the United States invades his country to overthrow his regime and kill him. At that point, he would have nothing to lose, and the logic of deterrence would no longer apply.

Even if we manage to avoid that nightmare and the war goes quickly and easily, victory simply means that the United States would undertake another long and futile nation-building mission. Almost all experts agree that U.S. troops would have to stay in Iraq for years to stabilize the situation. That presence would be seen as flagrant U.S. imperialism throughout the Islamic world. And the United States would become even more of a lightning rod for Muslim anger than it is already.

The burden of proof is rightly on those who contend that we must adopt such a perilous course. President Bush did not meet that burden of proof in his speech to the United Nations. Indeed, he and his advisers have failed to make a compelling case in any setting.

Orange County Register, September 15, 2002

“False Historical Analogies on Iraq”

Supporters of the military action against Iraq have recently launched a barrage of accusations that their opponents are advocates of “appeasement.”

Comparisons are made repeatedly to the 1930s and the failure of the Western powers to stand up to Adolf Hitler. Opponents of war with Iraq are likened to the hapless British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

One outraged warhawk even implied such proponents of caution as former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft and Anthony Zinni, a retired general, were worse than Chamberlain.

Such arguments confirm that a little historical knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Participants in debates on current foreign policy issues typically know just enough history to make simplistic and misleading historical analogies to bolster their case.

Knee-jerk opponents of military action anywhere believe that every possible arena for the application of U.S. power threatens to become “another Vietnam.” Hawks believe that a refusal to use U.S. military power, even in the most obscure and insignificant locales, threatens to repeat the disaster of appeasement in the 1930s.

Both sides should renounce their overused analogies, and violators should be subject to sanctions. Some misuses of history, though, are worse than others.

Excessively invoking the Vietnam analogy should be considered a Class A misdemeanor. But promiscuously invoking the 1930s analogy ought to be a felony.

Even comparing Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler is a bit of a stretch. Saddam is a garden-variety Third World thug; Hitler was a genocidal monster of historic proportions. It trivializes Hitler's crimes to equate the two dictators.

Moreover, Saddam was Washington's de facto ally during the 1980s when he attacked Iran. Apparently, U.S. officials at this time in the Reagan administration did not consider him the "new Hitler."

More importantly, Iraq is not Nazi Germany. The European crisis of the 1930s involved one of the world's great powers—one with the second-largest economy and large, well-trained, well-equipped military force—embarking on a frightening and highly destabilizing expansionist binge.

Iraq, on the other hand, has a population of 25 million (only a little larger than the Netherlands), an economy less than one-tenth the size of Denmark's, and a military force that has been degraded by more than a decade of sanctions.

Nazi Germany posed a global threat. Iraq poses—at worst—a threat only to its immediate neighbors.

Even if one believes the "nightmare scenario" that Iraq is on the verge of acquiring a nuclear-weapons capability (and there are ample reasons to doubt that scenario), the Iraqi threat still pales in comparison with that posed by Nazi Germany.

At most, Baghdad could develop only a small number of nuclear weapons. It would hardly be enough to credibly threaten the United States, given America's vast nuclear arsenal.

The United States was able to deter far more capable nuclear powers, including the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin and his successors and China under Mao Zedong. We should certainly be able to deter Iraq.

Indeed, Iraq wouldn't even be the leading nuclear power in its region. Pakistan has a significant arsenal and Israel—with an estimated 200 to 300 nukes—dwarfs any conceivable Iraqi arsenal.

Contrary to the cliché, history does not repeat itself. This is not the 1930s, Iraq is not Nazi Germany, Saddam Hussein is not Adolf Hitler, and opponents of war are not Neville Chamberlain in disguise.

The warhawk faction ought to address the real issues instead of resorting to lazy and inaccurate historical analogies.

Back Off Tough Iraq Policy

Iraq's submission of a massive 12,000-page declaration concerning its chemical, biological, and nuclear programs may slow but will not halt Washington's drive to war.

The war option, though, remains unwise for several reasons.

First, attacking a country that probably possesses chemical and biological weapons is extraordinarily reckless. If the United States launches such an attack, we had better pray that the Iraqi military command turns against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and refuses to carry out orders to use such weapons. Since the U.S. goal is to eliminate his regime, Saddam clearly has no incentive to refrain from using chemical and biological weapons. And if those weapons are unleashed against U.S. forces and allies, the war could turn extremely ugly and bloody.

Second, even if the war goes quickly and easily, military victory will mean the beginning, not the end, of America's headaches in Iraq. The United States would then be in charge of trying to stabilize and rebuild the country. But Iraq is a fragile, artificial entity that could come apart as Yugoslavia did during the 1990s. If the United States allowed that to happen, a huge power vacuum would be created in the Persian Gulf region—to the benefit of Washington's long-time adversary, Iran. Yet trying to hold Iraq together could make U.S. troops the target of secessionist forces that want to throw off Baghdad's yoke.

Finally, a war against Iraq would be a recruiting poster for Osama bin Laden. U.S. leaders may not regard an attack on Iraq as imperialist aggression, but that is how it would be perceived throughout the Islamic world. Thousands of new recruits would flock to al Qaeda and other extremist organizations, thus intensifying the terrorist threat to the United States. Washington's policies in the Middle East have already made the United States unpopular in the region. Attacking Iraq and occupying the country for years to come will make America a lightning rod for Islamic anger.

The Bush administration would be wise to use the United Nations inspections system as a face-saving way to back off from an unwise and dangerous policy.

USA Today, December 9, 2002—Reprinted with permission from *USA Today*

Pro-War Camp Can't Make the Case That an Attack Is in National Interest

President George W. Bush, his surrogates, and the White House's pro-war allies in Congress and the media routinely cite an array of reasons a U.S. military campaign to overthrow Saddam Hussein is a good idea.

Four reasons are especially prominent in the arguments of the pro-war camp. But all of them have major, obvious flaws.

- *Saddam Hussein is an evil ruler who represses, tortures, and murders his own people. His overthrow would be an act of liberation.*

There is no doubt that Saddam is a murderous tyrant. But that characteristic does not distinguish him from several dozen other rulers around the world. If overthrowing a dictator is sufficient reason for the United States to go to war, one must ask how many other holy crusades are in our future. When does the United States attack North Korea's Kim Jong Il, Cuba's Fidel Castro, Sudan's genocidal slave-masters, or Burma's murderous military junta—to name just a few of the world's most odious regimes?

The United States is supposed to be a constitutional republic. As such, the job of the U.S. military is to defend the vital security interests of the American people. U.S. troops are not armed crusaders with a mission to right all wrongs and to liberate oppressed populations. American dollars are too scarce and American lives too precious for such feckless ventures.

- *Saddam's overthrow would trigger a democratic transformation in the Middle East, producing new regimes that would be far friendlier to both Israel and the United States.*

That is a fantasy, not a realistic goal. It is highly improbable that overthrowing Saddam's regime and setting up a democratic successor in Iraq would lead to a surge of democracy in the region. Indeed, it probably wouldn't even lead to a stable, united, democratic Iraq over the long term. A U.S. occupation force would be needed for many years just to keep a client regime in power.

The harsh reality is that the Middle East has no history of democratic rule, democratic institutions, or serious democratic movements. To expect stable democracies to emerge from such an environment is naive.

Moreover, even in the unlikely event that a wave of democratic revolutions swept the Middle East following the U.S. conquest of Iraq, the United

States would probably not like the results. If free elections were held today in such countries as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, they would produce virulently anti-American governments.

- *Overthrowing Saddam would weaken the terrorist threat and intimidate other regimes that might be tempted to cooperate with terrorists.*

A war with Iraq is likely to have the opposite effect. It would serve as a recruiting poster for Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. However much Americans might believe that an attack on Iraq is justified, it would be perceived throughout the Islamic world as aggressive U.S. imperialism. That perception would be intensified if the United States occupies Iraq for an extended period and takes control of the country's oil resources.

As far as intimidating other regimes is concerned, if the U.S. ouster of the Taliban government in Afghanistan did not show how perilous it is to harbor anti-American terrorists, it is not apparent how overthrowing the Iraqi government would convey that message with greater clarity.

- *If we do not oust Saddam, Iraq will someday use its weapons of mass destruction to blackmail the United States, or even worse, will pass along such weapons to al Qaeda, which will use them against American targets.*

The United States successfully deterred the likes of Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong—two brutal and erratic rulers. And those dictators possessed nuclear, not just chemical and biological, weapons, whereas there is no credible evidence of an active Iraqi nuclear weapons program. The pro-war faction has never explained why the United States cannot deter a garden-variety thug like Saddam Hussein.

Saddam and the other members of the Iraqi political elite know that threatening, much less attacking, the United States would be an act of suicide. Young, useful idiots like the Sept. 11 terrorists may be suicidal, but rulers of countries almost never are. Iraq's rulers know that attacking the United States would lead to an annihilating counterstroke from the world's largest nuclear arsenal.

Nor is it likely that Iraq would pass along chemical or biological weapons to al Qaeda. Evidence of a connection between Baghdad and al Qaeda is flimsy at best.

Moreover, Saddam knows that he would be at the top of a very short list of suspects as the source of such a weapon if al Qaeda detonated one against an American target.

The only circumstance under which Saddam might pass a weapon to al Qaeda is if the United States invades Iraq, because he would then have nothing to lose.

Going to war is serious business. The issue is not whether Iraq has cooperated sufficiently with UN inspectors or complied with UN resolutions. The issue is not whether the Iraqi people and the Middle East region would be better off without Saddam Hussein. The issue is not even whether Iraq possesses chemical or biological weapons. The only pertinent issue is whether Iraq poses a serious, imminent threat to the United States, thereby justifying preemptive war. The pro-war camp has utterly failed to make the case that Iraq poses such a threat.

Orange County Register, February 2, 2003

Uncomfortable Questions about U.S. Policy toward Iraq

As the United States heads for war with Iraq, several unsettling questions remain. The mere existence of those questions raises doubts about the administration's rationale for its policy.

If Iraq poses a serious threat to America's security, why has the Bush administration waited so long to take military action? President Bush took office in January 2001, more than 25 months ago. The Sept. 11 attacks occurred some 18 months ago. And the president listed Iraq as a member of the "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union address more than 13 months ago.

In short, the Bush administration has, to put it mildly, proceeded at a most leisurely pace to meet the alleged security threat from Iraq. Is it really credible that U.S. leaders would wait 13 months—to say nothing of 18 months or 25 months—to neutralize a truly grave threat?

The United States certainly did not dawdle in that fashion to meet the threat posed by al Qaeda and its Taliban allies. Within a month of the Sept. 11 attacks, U.S. forces were pounding Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. The contrast with Washington's lackadaisical pace toward Iraq is striking.

If Iraq poses a dire threat, why has the United States bothered to go to the United Nations? Again, the contrast with America's actions in Afghanistan is stark. In the latter case, the United States invoked the right of self-defense and took action on its own. In the case of Iraq, U.S. leaders have wasted months going through the diplomatic agony of securing a UN resolution and the endless weeks of pointless UN inspections. Washington continues to play the diplomatic game of trying to secure a second resolution—one that would explicitly authorize the use of force.

The United Nations is an international debating society, not a serious security body. The United States and the other major powers have typically taken to the UN only those issues that are peripheral to their own security. They bypass the world body and take action unilaterally or with regional coalitions on more serious matters. The willingness to go through a multistage diplomatic farce at the UN suggests that Bush administration officials, despite their statements, do not really regard Iraq as a major security threat to the United States.

If Iraq wanted to give chemical and biological weapons to al Qaeda, why hasn't it done so over the past decade? Iraq has possessed chemical and biological weapons since at least the mid-1980s. Indeed, the United States helped Baghdad get the raw materials needed to develop such weapons because Washington considered Iraq a *de facto* ally in its war against Iran. Al Qaeda has existed since the early 1990s. Yet there is no evidence that Saddam Hussein's regime ever passed along weapons of mass destruction to the terrorist group. It is a safe assumption that if al Qaeda had received such weapons, it would have used them on the United States long ago.

Despite that lengthy track record, the administration argues that there is a grave danger that Iraq will give weapons of mass destruction to al Qaeda in the future. In fact, that is one of the key arguments Washington has made to justify going to war.

In short, there is a major disconnect between the administration's inflammatory rhetoric and its actions to date. If Iraq actually poses a serious threat to America's security, the administration should have taken military action many, many months ago. In particular, if there was a credible danger of Baghdad passing along chemical or biological weapons to al Qaeda, the United States should have launched attacks against Iraq on the heels of the military operations in Afghanistan.

Instead, the administration has proceeded to war at a snail's pace. That conduct suggests that the strident comments about the danger posed by Iraq are little more than cynical propaganda to dupe a gullible public.

Orange County Register, March 6, 2003

PART 2

Assessing the Iraq
Debacle

Introduction

Within weeks of the U.S.-led invasion, it became evident that the Iraq mission was not going as smoothly as its advocates had hoped and predicted. There was rampant disorder in Baghdad and other major cities, and disturbing signs began to emerge of an armed insurgency. Initially, U.S. officials blamed the rising violence on criminal elements and Saddam “dead-enders”—stubborn supporters of the ruling Baathist Party—even though evidence existed that support for attacks on American forces was much broader than that. Optimism about the mission’s medium- and long-term prospects remained sufficiently high within the U.S. government that the Coalition Provisional Authority dissolved the Sunni-dominated Iraqi army.

Proponents of the Iraq war would later criticize the decision to disband the army as a fatal mistake. They were correct in the sense that it was a dubious move to throw tens of thousands of armed young men out on the streets without employment prospects. Yet, the Coalition authorities faced a classic lose–lose situation. If they disbanded the army, they risked augmenting the ranks of the embryonic insurgency (as indeed happened). But if they kept the force intact, Iraq’s Shiites (some 60 percent of the country’s population) would fear that the Sunni elite was poised to retake power, and they might turn against the U.S. occupation.

As the level of violence climbed, it was apparent that the United States and its allies had insufficient military forces to restore and maintain order. Before the war, Army Gen. Eric Shinseki had cautioned that several hundred thousand troops would be needed, and that they would have to stay in Iraq for many years. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and other administration officials derided Shinseki’s assessment, and he was quickly marginalized. The Bush administration had assumed that a relatively small force would be sufficient because the transition to a post-Saddam democratic government would be swift and easy. They simply never anticipated a serious insurgency, much less a long-term one. Indeed, the Pentagon assumed that U.S. forces in Iraq would be down to no more than 60,000—and perhaps as few as 30,000—by the end of 2003.

It soon became apparent that such a reduction was not going to occur, given the steady increase in the scope of violence. The growing realization that the Iraq occupation was not going well also caused the U.S.-led coalition to fray. The notion that the Iraq mission was a multilateral

venture was never terribly credible to begin with, as most coalition members offered little more than written support or token forces. In reality, the “coalition” was always an overwhelmingly U.S.-British enterprise, with modest support from such allies as Spain, Italy, and Poland. Madrid’s decision to withdraw its forces following a Socialist Party victory in 2005 elections began a parade of drawdowns and withdrawals. By mid-2007, even Britain began to scale back its military presence.

Meanwhile, the security situation went from bad to worse. The Sunni-dominated insurgency became increasingly bold and capable, and foreign fighters affiliated with al Qaeda began to join the fray. Even worse, following the massive February 2006 bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra, one of Shiite Islam’s holiest sites, there was a surge of sectarian violence in the country. By December 2006, even President Bush had to admit that Washington’s strategy was failing. His solution, though, was not to withdraw U.S. forces and terminate the mission, but to escalate the effort with the “surge”—the deployment of an additional 30,000 troops, primarily to Baghdad and Anbar Province.

In a narrow military sense, the surge seemed to enjoy some success. The number of insurgent attacks declined—although it should be noted only to the rather high levels that existed in the months immediately before the Golden Mosque bombing. Moreover, the larger political objective of the surge—to stabilize the security environment so that Iraq’s feuding Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish political leaders could forge the compromises necessary to bridge the sectarian gaps and create an effective government for a united country—seemed no closer to realization in early 2008 than it did when the Iraq mission began. In addition to the impact of the surge, much of the decline in violence is attributable to Washington’s new strategy of bribing influential Sunni tribal chiefs and arming their followers. It is uncertain whether those Sunni leaders will stay bribed. If they do not, then the United States will have engaged in the dubious strategy of arming both sides for a new and potentially even bloodier round of civil war. Finally, questions remain about what would happen when the additional U.S. forces deployed during the surge rotated out of Iraq, as those units are scheduled to do sometime during the second half of 2008.

One of the more depressing aspects of the Iraq venture is the growing willingness of even many original critics of the war to support, albeit reluctantly, a long-term U.S. military presence in that country. Administration officials and other pro-war types do not even show reluctance. They speak openly of keeping troops in Iraq as long as the United States has maintained forces in such places as Germany, Japan, and South Korea—that is, more than half a century. Aside from the fact that those Cold War-era commitments are themselves obsolete, I have highlighted

the point that Iraq is nothing like Germany, Japan, and South Korea. Those countries are all peaceful, stable, cohesive societies, whereas Iraq clearly is not. To note the most obvious difference, U.S. military commanders in Germany, Japan, and South Korea never had to worry about armed insurgents attacking American military personnel.

Nevertheless, Washington seems intent on keeping a sizable U.S. military presence in Iraq indefinitely. Moreover, U.S. leaders seem to contemplate maintaining a large political presence as well. The new U.S. embassy in Baghdad will be nearly as large as Vatican City and will house more than 1,000 diplomatic personnel. Such a massive political footprint suggests that Washington plans to call most of the shots in Iraq for a long time to come.

Proponents of the current mission argue that America cannot leave Iraq anytime soon because such a withdrawal would embolden al Qaeda and other extremist Islamic elements. Many pro-war types insist that by pulling out of such places as Lebanon and Somalia when U.S. troops suffered fatalities, Washington conveyed a dangerous message of weakness to the terrorists. Indeed, some warhawks are so intent on historical revisionism that they argue that the United States should have remained in Vietnam. I suggest in various articles that such reasoning is appropriate only for those who embrace a masochistic foreign policy.

At this writing, it appears most unlikely that the United States will achieve the goals that it had when it invaded Iraq in 2003. The notion of post-Saddam Iraq as a stable, united, secular democratic country that would be friendly to Israel and the United States was always a chimera. Even most U.S. policymakers have tacitly retreated from such utopian goals. The mission now seems to be more a matter of trying to save face. But one needs to ask how many more Americans should die because political leaders are unwilling to admit that they made a mistake.

Where Are the WMDs?

As U.S. troops continue to search for evidence of Iraq's alleged arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, an important question needs to be asked: Why didn't Iraq use those weapons on invading coalition forces? That such weapons were not used was one of the biggest (and most pleasant) surprises of the war.

There are four possible explanations:

- Saddam Hussein's regime had the weapons but decided to refrain from using them. Although that is a possibility, it is a remote one.
- Iraq's command and control system broke down so quickly that the weapons could not be used. That explanation seems improbable as well.
- Iraq no longer had chemical and biological weapons. They were destroyed in the 1990s. That was, in fact, Baghdad's official position in the months leading up to the war. Most experts scoffed at such assertions.
- As a final act of revenge, Saddam transferred the weapons to al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. This is the most chilling possibility.

If either the third or the fourth explanation proves to be true, it is bad news for the Bush administration and all Americans.

If Iraq no longer had chemical and biological weapons, the primary justification for the war was erroneous, thousands of people died needlessly, and America's reputation will suffer a severe blow throughout the world.

Conversely, if Baghdad did have such weapons and passed them along to extremist organizations, the blowback from the military victory in Iraq could be more terrible than we wish to contemplate.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 29, 2003

Focus on U.S.' Exit, Not UN's Iraq Role

Foreign and domestic critics of U.S. policy in Iraq have been urging the Bush administration for months to cede the leading role to the United Nations. The administration now seems willing to request a new Security Council resolution that would give more authority to the United Nations. But the contemplated changes are too limited to mollify critics.

Washington's latest policy shift is likely to fail. What would work? Withdrawing U.S. troops and allowing the Iraqis to shape their own destiny.

Although the administration apparently intends to give the United Nations a more prominent role in security operations and the political transformation process and the economic reconstruction of Iraq, Washington is not about to relinquish control. All U.S. troops in Iraq are certain to remain under an American commander. And a U.S. official is likely to remain in charge of the civilian reconstruction effort.

The administration apparently aims to create a UN facade for what would remain a U.S. mission. The Bush team hopes that by creating at least the illusion of a powerful UN role, other countries will contribute troops and treasure. That motive is understandable.

It has become painfully clear that the 140,000 U.S. troops in Iraq are insufficient to maintain a stable security environment. And the Iraq mission is getting very expensive. Military operations alone are running at a nearly \$4-billion-per-month pace, and L. Paul Bremer, the chief civilian administrator, estimates that rebuilding Iraq will cost "many tens of billions of dollars."

It is hardly surprising that the United States would like other countries to bear some of those burdens. But numerous governments have rebuffed Washington's request for aid, contending that they could not participate without a stronger UN mandate. It is important to note that such countries as Germany, Turkey, Pakistan, and India—which the United States has lobbied hard for assistance—have populations that are overwhelmingly opposed to the U.S. presence in Iraq, and the governments must take that sentiment into account.

In any case, few countries are beating down the door to help the United States. That's not likely to change merely because Washington is willing to give the United Nations a modestly greater role. The majority of the costs and risks will be America's as long as we have forces in Iraq.

Moreover, even if the United States ceded the leading role to the UN, it would not solve a fundamental problem: The longer U.S. forces stay in Iraq, the more America will be seen as an occupier rather than a liberator. Attacks directed against Americans and other targets will likely increase, not decrease. And as the bombing of the UN headquarters confirmed, the insurgents are not making a distinction between the United States and those who assist the United States.

What's needed is an exit strategy. U.S. authorities should accelerate the transfer of power to an interim Iraqi government. If a greater UN role would facilitate that exit strategy, fine. If it would impede a rapid exit, then Washington should resist deeper involvement by the world body.

The goal in any case should be to get U.S. troops out of Iraq as soon as possible and let the Iraqi people determine their own destiny. We should not become distracted from that fundamental objective by a far less important debate about the proper extent of UN authority in Iraq.

Atlanta Journal-Constitution, September 7, 2003

Peter Pan Strategy in Iraq

The Bush administration and its political allies continue a propaganda barrage against the news media, accusing journalists of overemphasizing the negative in Iraq. That criticism comes close to embracing a Peter Pan strategy: the notion that everything in Iraq will be fine if we just think happy thoughts.

But things are not fine in Iraq. The rocket attack on the al-Rashid hotel—the headquarters of the U.S. occupation authority—and the epidemic of suicide car bombings in recent days make that point abundantly clear.

United States military personnel are under attack daily and, most worrisome of all, the attacks are becoming more intense and sophisticated. As much as the White House and its supporters might want to spotlight other developments—how many schools have reopened, how many bridges have been repaired, etc.—the safety of U.S. troops is the primary concern of most Americans.

In May and June, an average of 12 attacks per day were directed at U.S. troops. In September, when commanding officer Gen. Ricardo Sanchez finally conceded the gravity of the security situation, that number stood at about 17 attacks per day. Now, an average between 25 and 35 per day are reported.

U.S. casualties, naturally enough, are also rising. In May and June, two to three American soldiers a week were killed by hostile fire. The figure is now four to five each week.

Moreover, the number of fatalities is just the tip of a very ugly iceberg. Gen. Sanchez conceded that approximately 40 troops a week were being wounded, many severely. If that trend continues, it would amount to more than 2,000 wounded in a year.

By historical standards, the ratio of wounded in action to killed in action is extraordinarily high. That likely reflects the high quality of medical care provided by the U.S. military. If the medical capabilities of even a decade or two ago were in effect today, the number of fatalities would be greater. Still, many of those who would have perished from their wounds in earlier wars will emerge from Iraq alive but utterly shattered physically.

The spreading geographical distribution of the attacks also is a concern. U.S. spokesmen like to emphasize that the majority of assaults have occurred in the so-called Sunni Triangle in central Iraq, and they attribute the concentration there to die-hard supporters of Saddam Hussein.

But that pattern is changing. A recent attack that killed three U.S. soldiers took place in Karbala, in the previously—and relatively—quiet southern part of Iraq. Furthermore, the attackers were members of a Shiite militia, not Saddam's forces.

Days later, an attack killed two Americans near Kirkuk in northern Iraq, the region that had been the most pacific and stable part of the country. In short, the opposition to the U.S. occupation now includes groups other than Saddam's Sunni holdouts.

Administration officials have a point when they argue that reconstruction is progressing. Some progress has been made in reconstruction. But though the United States may be opening new schools, it's likely that some of the older members of the student body may be guerrilla fighters in their off hours.

Washington and its Iraqi allies may patch together remnants of the infrastructure, but insurgents can blow up almost anything at their leisure. Consider the oil pipeline in northern Iraq. Two months ago, the U.S. authorities declared the pipeline ready to ship oil. Yet little oil has flowed since then because of repeated sabotage.

The administration and its allies may focus on transitory achievements and downplay the importance of the security issue all they wish. Their actions, though, are reminiscent of the grim joke: "Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was your evening?" Security is central. Without it, all of the other accomplishments mean little.

It may be premature to describe Iraq as a quagmire, but the trend is ominous. Supporters of the Iraq mission seem determined to shoot the messengers who report bad news. But that won't change the grim reality of that news.

United Press International, October 30, 2003

America Alone Again, Naturally

Secretary of State Colin Powell has proclaimed the Iraq donors' conference of 77 nations and 20 international organizations held in Madrid a solid success. But that is true only if one adopts the reasoning embodied in Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" that nothing is as it seems.

Before the donors' conference convened, the World Bank estimated that Iraq would need approximately \$56 billion in reconstruction aid over the next several years. President Bush asked Congress to approve \$20.3 billion

in grants to Iraq. The other \$36 billion the United States sought came from the other parties in Madrid.

The results? A total package of \$13 billion in pledges, of which at least \$9 billion will come in the form of loans, not grants. Indeed, at least \$6 billion will come from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, not individual nations.

Despite Powell's attempt at spin control, that outcome is deeply disappointing. Not only is the total contribution meager, but the administration may have an interesting time explaining to Congress and the American people why the U.S. aid to Iraq should be entirely in the form of grants while the other donors insist primarily on loans.

And the results of the Madrid conference may actually be worse than they appear at the moment. After all, the donors simply made pledges that have yet to be fulfilled. It is a sobering reminder that some of the pledges made at a similar donors' conference for Afghanistan in February 2002 never materialized.

The other actions taken at the Madrid conference were equally uncertain. The crucial issue of debt forgiveness was not directly addressed, although some of the nations holding the debt that Iraq accumulated under Saddam Hussein's regime hinted that they might be willing to consider restructuring, perhaps even forgiving, that debt. Iraq's debt is estimated to be between \$150 billion and \$200 billion—a back-breaking sum for any new Iraqi government.

But comprehensive debt forgiveness seems unlikely. France and Russia, the two largest holders of that debt, have been extremely vague about their intentions. It was also less than reassuring that those two countries (along with Germany) failed to pledge any contributions to the reconstruction effort.

The brutal reality is that American taxpayers are going to be stuck with most of the tab for rebuilding Iraq. What went on at Madrid was little more than financial tokenism.

The reluctance of France, Germany, Russia, and other countries to support the U.S. mission in Iraq financially comes on the heels of their even more obvious reluctance to aid the mission with peacekeeping troops. Washington has had minimal success getting troop contributions. In addition to France, Germany, and Russia, such key nations as India, Pakistan, and Egypt have found reasons to decline U.S. requests. Japan and South Korea have agreed to make small troop contributions, but they have been the exceptions. Washington's principal diplomatic success to date—a pledge of 10,000 peacekeeping troops from Turkey—is now rapidly unraveling. Iraqis have made it clear that they don't want the troops of the formal colonial master in their country, and the Turkish government and people seem to be having second thoughts as well.

Except for its wartime partner Britain, the United States stands essentially alone in Iraq. America will bear the bulk of the financial costs, and it will bear the overwhelming majority of the casualties of this venture. We may continue to look for allies, but we will look in vain.

The administration and its supporters have gone to absurd lengths to portray the Madrid conference as a success. One prominent daily newspaper, habitually friendly to the administration, considered it most encouraging that even some poor nations pledged to do their bit. The editors noted that Vietnam offered to contribute rice and Sri Lanka promised to contribute tea.

Unfortunately, when the American people get the full bill for the Iraq mission in both treasure and blood, they will likely need to drink something much stronger than tea.

United Press International, November 6, 2003

One Year Later: Warning Signs in Iraq

The U.S. mission in Iraq has now entered its second year, and it remains as controversial as ever. Bush Administration supporters contend that, despite the periodic terrorist bombings and insurgent attacks on American forces, major progress is being made toward creating a stable, united, democratic Iraq. Critics counter that not only does the security environment remain extremely dangerous, but there are increasingly worrisome political and ideological trends in Iraqi society.

A recent nationwide poll of Iraqis conducted by ABC News and other organizations gives some comfort to the administration and its allies. A majority of Iraqis feel that their lives are somewhat better than they were a year ago, and the coalition gets reasonably high marks for restoring schools and other portions of Iraq's infrastructure. Nevertheless, the poll reveals even more alarming information about Iraqi attitudes toward the occupation and the country's political future.

Consider the level of hostility regarding the presence of coalition forces. The Kurds strongly support the troop presence, 82 percent to 12 percent. But the Arabs (both Sunni and Shiite) take a very different view. Only 30 percent support the occupation; 60 percent oppose it. Since Arabs make up approximately 80 percent of Iraq's population, that scope of opposition is ample cause for concern. Clearly, opposition to the U.S.-led mission is far more widespread than just disgruntled supporters of Saddam Hussein.

More Iraqis believe that the war humiliated Iraq than believe that it liberated the country. Again, the Kurd-Arab split is pronounced and troubling. Only 11 percent of Kurds believe the war was a humiliation; 48 percent of Arabs regard it in that manner. Just 33 percent of Arabs (and a mere 21 percent of Sunni Arabs) see the war as an act of liberation.

Proponents of the Iraq mission can take some comfort that 78 percent of all respondents, and even 74 percent of Arabs, believe that armed attacks on coalition forces constitute unacceptable behavior. Yet it is sobering that 21 percent of Arab respondents think that such attacks are appropriate. That figure can fairly be interpreted as the hard-core supporters of the insurgency. Since there are nearly 16 million Arab teenagers and adults in Iraq, that translates to some 3.3 million proponents of violent resistance to the occupation. It is additional evidence that the insurgency is not confined to "Saddam diehards," as the administration argued for so long.

Perhaps the most sobering result of the poll is the tepid support for democracy in Iraq. When asked what kind of government Iraq should have a year from now, only 28 percent advocate a democratic system, while 47 percent favor "a single strong Iraqi leader" and 10 percent want a government of religious leaders. When asked what kind of government the country should have in 5 years, the results are just modestly better: 42 percent favor democracy, 35 percent a single strong leader, and 10 percent a government of religious figures.

That means that the United States and its coalition partners are trying to build democracy in a country where not even a bare majority of the population endorses such a system. For democracy to have a good chance to take root and thrive, the support level probably needs to be in the area of 70 to 75 percent. That is especially true because, historically in most non-Western societies, non-democratic forces tend to be more motivated, better organized, and, above all, more ruthless than their democratic adversaries. It is hardly encouraging for the prospects of a democratic Iraq that the enemies of democracy there actually outnumber the proponents.

The poll results raise serious doubts about whether the security environment will improve anytime soon. Except in the Kurdish north, the war is deemed a humiliating occupation rather than a liberation. Likewise, except in Kurdish territory, there appears to be widespread opposition to the occupation, and an alarmingly large contingent of hard-core opponents willing to countenance violence against coalition forces.

The poll results lead to even stronger doubts about Iraq's future. The notion that Iraq will become a stable, united democracy once the occupation ends looks more like a pipe dream than a reasonable expectation. Unless the United States plans to occupy and control Iraq for a very long time, it is likely that the country will revert to authoritarian rule. Given the stark differences in opinion on an assortment of issues between Kurds

and Arabs, there is also more than a small chance that the country will fragment along those ethnic lines. Those are not happy prospects, but they come as little surprise to realist policy experts who warned before the war began that the United States was embarking on a thankless and frustrating mission.

In The National Interest, March 24, 2004

Hawks Didn't See What Was Coming in Iraq

In the world of nature, hawks are renowned for their keen eyesight. But the hawks on Iraq policy have not displayed that quality of their avian models. Indeed, they have failed to see the most obvious pitfalls of their strategy from day one.

Take their prediction that the Iraq mission would be, in the words of Kenneth Adelman, former head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, a “cakewalk.” It has proven to be anything but. Nor is their latest response—that they meant only that the initial military operation would be easy—anything other than a lame excuse. As baseball great Yogi Berra once said: “It ain’t over until it’s over.” Wars are not decided just by their initial engagements. If they were, World War II would have ended with a Japanese victory, given the empire’s successes at Pearl Harbor and elsewhere in the Pacific during the first year. Opponents of the Iraq war predicted that the aftermath would be a prolonged and bloody mess, but the hawks responded to such warnings with derision.

The Bush administration and its hawkish supporters have not fared much better with their other predictions. For example, the Pentagon assumed that the United States would be able to begin drawing down its occupation forces almost immediately. By the autumn of 2003, we were supposed to be down to 30,000 troops. Instead, more than 130,000 troops remain in Iraq and trial balloons continue to float aloft that we will need to send more.

The rosy scenario about troop levels was based on the belief that the overwhelming majority of Iraqis would greet the invading forces as liberators, and that the United States would be able to install Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress as a successor government almost immediately. Instead, it turned out that Chalabi’s domestic support was minimal and the INC was regarded by most Iraqis as nothing more than a group of pampered U.S. puppets.

A comprehensive poll conducted by ABC News and other organizations last month showed that, outside the Kurdish community, Iraqis are evenly divided about whether the war was a liberation or a “humiliation.” Similarly, sentiment is evenly split about whether the occupation should continue or end promptly. Perhaps most worrisome, more than 20 percent of Arab Iraqis endorse violent attacks on U.S. forces. Even before the upsurge of violence in early April, that last result indicated that the insurgency is supported by far more than a handful of Saddam Hussein “dead-enders” and foreign terrorists, as the hawks had argued for so long.

Then there was Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz’s prediction last spring that Iraqi oil revenues would pay all the costs of reconstructing the country. Instead, we have already spent nearly \$20 billion in reconstruction aid—with no end in sight.

Finally, there were the predictions that we would find vast quantities of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Indeed, the existence of such weapons was the primary justification for going to war. To date, we have found no WMD, and it is increasingly unlikely that we ever will. The United States has had control of Iraq for more than a year and has captured most of the Iraqi scientists and officials of the Saddam government. How credible is it that none of these people has come forward with information about WMD stockpiles, given the lucrative rewards the Bush administration would give for such information?

Given the dismal track record of the hawk faction, we should be wary about taking that faction’s advice in the future. Yet the same people who have been so wrong about Iraq policy in the past now contend that we have no choice but to “stay the course” regardless of cost or risk. We should not listen to them.

Psychologists have noted that young children are prone to “magical thinking”—the belief that if one wants something to be true, it is true. Adults know that wishing does not determine reality. The Iraq hawks have engaged in magical thinking throughout the Iraq mission, and they continue to do so. It is time to turn Iraq policy over to foreign policy adults.

Chicago Sun-Times, April 20, 2004

Iraq 2004, Vietnam 1964

As U.S. forces in Iraq reel from a rapidly expanding insurgency, Americans are beginning to ask whether we have stumbled into a Vietnam-style quagmire. It is appropriate to hesitate before making that comparison. Critics of U.S. military interventions have been too quick to

invoke the Vietnam analogy in the past. We heard similar warnings about “another Vietnam” during the interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. In all of those cases, the warnings were—at the very least—overblown.

But this time the critics appear to be right. The breadth of the insurgency, the difficulty the United States is encountering in pacifying the country, the inability to tell friend from foe, and the weakness and unreliability of pro-American indigenous factions are eerily reminiscent of Vietnam. America seems to be in a fight that it cannot win—at least cannot win at any reasonable level of cost in terms of blood and treasure.

U.S. leaders now face a choice similar to the one Lyndon Johnson’s administration confronted in 1964 and early 1965. At that time, it was becoming evident that a limited U.S. military commitment was insufficient to defeat the communist forces in South Vietnam. Administration leaders faced a stark choice: withdraw American forces, even though Washington’s credibility throughout the world might be damaged, or escalate by sending in more troops. The Johnson administration ignored the advice of realist foreign policy experts, such as Hans Morgenthau and Walter Lippmann, and chose to escalate. It thereby transformed a foreign policy setback into a debacle.

The choice in Iraq is much the same. Voices advocating escalation can be heard already, including Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman. In a narrow sense, their analysis is correct: the United States does not currently have enough troops in Iraq to control the deteriorating situation.

But escalation would be as unwise and futile as it was in Vietnam. A growing number of Iraqis—even those who originally were happy to see Saddam Hussein ousted—now view the United States as an alien, occupying power. The willingness of Shiites and Sunnis to bury their long-standing rivalry and cooperate in the latest insurgent attacks is an ominous sign. Even worse, the occupation of Iraq has become a provocation to much of the Muslim world. We have overstayed our welcome in Iraq. Sending in more troops may dampen the current round of fighting, but it will not overcome those problems.

Admittedly, a rapid U.S. withdrawal from Iraq is not without its drawbacks. America’s credibility will take a hit, and radical Islamist forces will interpret the result as a victory for their side. Post-occupation Iraq could be a very ugly place, with a full-blown civil war a possibility. Those are all factors that advocates of the Iraq war should have considered before embarking on that mission. Opponents of the war warned that a U.S. intervention would create more instability, not less, in Iraq and throughout the region. Unfortunately, those warnings went unheeded, and we now face a choice of decidedly less than perfect options.

Advocates of staying the course blithely argue that we cannot “cut and run.” But a principle from the world of investing applies to wise and prudent foreign policy. Smart investors know that it is better to cut losses early rather than stubbornly hold on to an investment that has gone sour—much less pour more resources into such an investment. Those who defy that logic end up like the Enron and Worldcom investors who rode those stocks all the way to the bottom.

The U.S. mission in Iraq is an investment that has gone sour. We should cut our losses now, while they are relatively modest. If we don’t, we will likely be compelled to terminate the mission later under even less favorable circumstances. Moreover, by then we will have wasted tens of billions of dollars and thousands of American lives in a futile venture. A smart superpower should not make such a blunder.

United Press International, April 23, 2004

Despite Bush’s Speech, U.S. Planning Long Stay in Iraq

In his speech at the Army War College, President Bush asserted repeatedly that Iraq would receive “full sovereignty” on June 30. But the president seems to have a peculiar definition of that concept. The United States and its coalition partners plan to give Iraqis nothing more than nominal sovereignty, and the “handover of power” is little more than an exercise in symbolism.

True, the Coalition Provisional Authority will officially go out of business on June 30. But the interim Iraqi government will exercise few prerogatives of sovereignty. According to earlier congressional testimony by Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman, that government will have no authority over coalition military forces operating in Iraq and only limited authority over Iraq’s own security forces. Indeed, the United States and its allies intend to be responsible for Iraq’s security for the indefinite future.

Grossman also indicated that the interim government would have no power to pass new laws or rescind edicts that the CPA issued. Other U.S. officials confirm that the interim government will not have authority over current or future reconstruction contracts. Even the Iraqi news media will continue to be governed by rules promulgated by U.S. military authorities, not the interim government.

The resolution that the United States and Britain just presented to the UN Security Council also provides little indication that Iraq will enjoy

real sovereignty anytime soon. There is no date certain for the departure of coalition military forces. The only requirement is that the mandate for the peacekeeping force must be reviewed by the Security Council after one year. And although the resolution officially gives the Iraqi government control over the country's oil revenues, an "international advisory board" is to make certain that the revenues are used "properly." That provision suggests more than a little foreign control over the decision-making process.

Washington's plans and actions indicate that the United States is preparing for a long stay in Iraq. The appointment of a four-star general to replace a three-star general as commander of U.S. forces in Iraq suggests that U.S. leaders regard the Iraqi deployment as a critically important mission for the foreseeable future. America's embassy in Baghdad is going to be one of the largest U.S. embassies in the world—again suggesting that the United States intends to exercise a great deal of influence in that small country.

These actions raise serious questions about how much real authority even a permanent Iraqi government, scheduled to be chosen in national elections in January 2005, will have. Angry Iraqis, including some previously friendly members of the Governing Council, are openly criticizing the transfer of sovereignty on June 30 as a charade. They have a point. Truly sovereign countries have governments that are able to pass and rescind laws. Those governments, not foreign military commanders, control the security forces operating in their territory. And the governments of sovereign countries certainly are not relegated to the sidelines while foreign entities dictate key elements of public policy.

Bush missed an important opportunity to articulate a new and more sustainable Iraq strategy. He needed to emphasize that the United States intended to transfer the substance, not just the form, of sovereignty to the Iraqi people on June 30. At a minimum, that would require setting a date certain for the withdrawal of all coalition military forces. It also would require allowing the interim government to exercise meaningful authority over the entire range of public policy.

According to the current plan, the Iraqi government after June 30 will have about as much power as the typical 21st century European monarch—that is to say, not much. The occupation of Iraq will continue in all but name. That is a huge disservice to the Iraqi people, and it threatens to entangle the United States in a thankless mission of indefinite duration. The president owed both Iraqis and Americans a better strategy than he outlined in his Army War College address.

Chicago Sun-Times, May 28, 2004

Washington's Imperial Socialism

Critics have castigated the Bush administration's nation-building venture in Iraq as a manifestation of U.S. imperialism. That is an apt description of the Iraq mission, as well as the ongoing missions in Bosnia and Kosovo. America's nation-building bureaucrats are not pursuing just any kind of imperialism, however: It is a distinctly left-of-center variety. As the mission in Iraq shows, an ostensibly conservative U.S. administration is helping to install a system of politically correct welfare-state socialism.

Under the guidance of Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the hand-picked Iraqi Governing Council is busy building a state structure that bears little resemblance to the ideas American conservatives advocate at home. In a country of barely 25 million people, Iraqi ministries plan to have nearly 1.05 million employees on the payroll this year. Overall government spending is similarly outsized. The Governing Council projects spending to hit \$13.4 billion this year, \$19.2 billion in 2005, and \$19.7 billion in 2006. Yet Iraq's entire gross domestic product is estimated at about \$25 billion. Those spending levels would create a staggering burden on the Iraqi economy were it not for the anticipated U.S. reconstruction aid funds (a little more than \$18 billion this year). Still, that aid flow will not go on forever (at least one hopes not). What will the Iraqis do about such excessive spending when they have to rely solely on their own sources of revenue? Bremer and his associates are not exactly teaching the Iraqis the fundamentals of sound fiscal policy.

It is not just the overall spending levels that are troubling. With Washington's blessing, Iraq is building the same type of elephantine bureaucratic structure that is so typical of left-wing, Third World countries. The interim government has no fewer than 25 ministries, including such "vital" ones as Culture, Environment, Labor and Social Affairs, Transport, Water Resources, and—my personal favorite—Youth and Sport. Many of those bureaucracies involve missions that are either unnecessary or could be performed far better by the private sector. Perhaps most ominous for Iraq's economic future is that there is a large Ministry of Planning.

Washington has also helped to establish a powerful central bank. It is especially troubling that the bank will extend loans directly to businesses rather than using private banks as intermediaries. That is yet another method by which the government in Baghdad can exert a tremendous amount of control over economic activity in the future. Indeed, given the

current plans, there would appear to be little or no role for private banking in the “new Iraq” that the United States is helping to create.

The language and arguments the CPA and Governing Council use to promote their policies also reflect redistributionism and other strategies that rely on government control over economic affairs. For example, the 2004 budget for the Iraqi government lists a generous safety net for the poor as one of the “core principles” guiding Iraq’s economic-policy agenda. The old Baath government had a large number of programs for transfer payments, and the new regime is retaining most of them, including one referred to as a “family social bonus.” The new interim constitution guarantees, among others, “rights” to health care, education, and social security.

There is little evidence of a drive to privatize key elements of the Iraqi economy. Indeed, the CPA stands by while the Governing Council continues to operate mundane commercial enterprises such as the Al-Raasheed Hotel. More worrisome, at this point it appears that Iraq’s crucial and potentially lucrative oil industry will be largely government owned and operated.

If any good resides at the commanding heights of the Iraq economy, it is oil. Iraq’s American masters, however, are not content to leave the extraction and export of petroleum to the private sector and market forces. The CPA intends to make the Oil Products Distribution Company, which will be owned by the Ministry of Oil, responsible for the vast majority of the oil extraction that takes place. Even today, any private-sector extraction and export of petroleum requires explicit permission from the Ministry of Oil or one of its affiliates, a regional governor, or the CPA. The limited private commerce in oil that is allowed is heavily regulated by the Ministry of Oil, which has an obvious incentive to limit the scope of any competition to its own enterprise. And the penalties for unauthorized attempts at entrepreneurship are draconian. Any person convicted of violating the oil regulations may be imprisoned and fined up to five times the value of the petroleum products purchased, sold, or transported.

The CPA does not appear to believe in the American model of private media ownership either. Instead, the U.S. authorities have shown enthusiasm for state-run radio and television networks and government-owned newspapers. Instead of breaking up Saddam Hussein’s media monopoly, the CPA simply took it over, renamed it the Iraq Media Network, and hired an American firm to run it. That operation includes a national newspaper, as well as radio and television networks.

Not surprisingly, the IMN operations devote extensive coverage to statements made by officials in the United States, the CPA, and the Governing Council. Critics of those institutions and their policies get little exposure. In addition, the CPA has given the IMN the power to regulate

and license all non-IMN radio and television stations, thus creating an obvious conflict of interest and a powerful incentive to retard the development of private competitors. Having been granted this authority over radio and television, the IMN began to consider a proposal to require all newspapers to obtain licenses—something that would be anathema in the United States.

It is true that private media outlets have emerged in Iraq, but when such enterprises have to go up against well-funded government competitors, they operate at a serious disadvantage. That gives whichever political faction ultimately controls the government in Baghdad an extensive ability to propagandize the population and marginalize dissenting views. That is especially true if most of the nationwide radio and TV broadcasting is in the hands of a quasi-governmental entity. Given that Iraq will emerge from American tutelage as (at best) an embryonic democracy, setting up a state-run media conglomerate is a most unwise step.

The system that the U.S. authorities have brought to Iraq embraces government ownership of key sectors of the economy, an extensive social-welfare apparatus, and a state-dominated media. Those are characteristics that undoubtedly appeal to leftists around the world, but they are alien to America's traditions and values.

And the Iraq mission is not unique in that regard. It replicates many of the policies that the United States and its European allies have imposed in Bosnia and Kosovo. After more than eight years of Western ministrations, Bosnia's economy is only marginally freer than it was when it was part of socialist Yugoslavia under the dictatorship of Josip Broz Tito. Indeed, according to the latest edition of the Heritage Foundation's *Index of Economic Freedom*, Bosnia ranks a dismal 99th—mired in the “mostly unfree” category between those paragons of democratic capitalism Algeria and Tanzania. State-run enterprises are endemic in that country, as they are in the international colony of Kosovo.

Americans have ample reasons to be uneasy about Washington's nation-building missions in Iraq and the Balkans. Those ventures bear more than a slight resemblance to imperialism, and they are often regarded as such by subject populations. That is bad enough. It is worse, however, when America's nation builders encourage, and sometimes impose, policies that have brought political repression and economic stagnation (or worse) to so many societies. It is unlikely that the American people expected a supposedly conservative administration to enshrine the virtues of socialism abroad. Yet that is what the Bush administration is doing. This president's betrayal of conservative principles in foreign policy is now complete.

Chronicles, July 2004—Reprinted with permission from *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, a publication of the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois

Iraqi Elections

The Bush administration and its supporters are investing tremendous hope in Iraq's January national elections. According to the conventional wisdom in Washington, violence may increase as the balloting approaches but, once the election is held, the overwhelming majority of Iraqis will be convinced that the resulting government is legitimate. Except for the foreign terrorists and the Saddam dead-enders, the insurgents will gradually give up and participate in the democratic process. Violence will subside, and a stable, united, democratic, pro-Western Iraq will emerge, allowing the United States to draw down her forces stationed in that country.

It is a charming vision, but those who cling to the Iraq mission previously invested their hopes in other purported milestones that would dampen the insurgency. For most of the warhawks, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime was supposed to be the defining moment. American troops were to be welcomed as liberators, and Iraqi exiles, led by the Pentagon's favorite politician, Ahmed Chalabi, would become the successor government in Baghdad virtually by acclamation. Much to the surprise and dismay of the pro-war faction, it didn't turn out that way.

Then, the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003 was the great milestone. Since virtually all insurgents were supposedly Baathist followers of Saddam, his capture would dishearten the rebels and cause the insurgency to fade. Instead, the insurgency flared with unprecedented ferocity in the spring of 2004.

Next, proponents of the Iraq mission attached great importance to the handover of nominal sovereignty in late June 2004. With American officials no longer directly running the show, Iraqis would certainly rally behind the interim government of Iyad Allawi. That proved to be another faulty prediction; the insurgency intensified.

The national elections will likely prove as disappointing as the previous milestones. Indeed, the elections may make matters even more difficult for the U.S. occupation force.

Contrary to the Bush administration's hopes and expectations, the elections are likely to produce a government that is not only controlled by the Shia majority, but also dominated by religious parties and candidates. In other words, the "new Iraq" is probably going to be Islamic, not secular and pro-Western. It was the fear that the elections would lead to a highly religious government that caused the Kurds (the most secular of Iraq's

factions) to side with Sunni leaders in proposing that the balloting be postponed.

To make matters even worse for the United States, the new government may be quite friendly to Iran. Tehran is skillfully exploiting linkages with its Shia coreligionists in Iraq. The two most influential politicians in Iraq are the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Both men have long-standing ties to Iran.

There is a chance that the elections will prove to be the panacea for which the pro-war faction is hoping. That chance, however, is remote. Iraq was always inhospitable soil for planting a secular, pro-Western democracy. Democracy involves far more than just setting up institutions and holding elections. To be viable, it needs a strong culture of tolerance. Democracy requires that majorities accept and protect individual rights, observe due process of law, protect freedom of expression, and protect property rights.

All of those values are weak or entirely absent in Iraq's political culture. Thus, we should not be surprised if the new Shia-dominated government uses its power to oppress the Sunni minority that was the oppressor for so many decades. Nor should we be surprised if the new national assembly draws up a constitution that enshrines the most coercive aspects of Islamic law and bears almost no resemblance to the American Constitution. The real surprise would be if the political process in Iraq turns out otherwise.

Those who hope that the January elections will be a panacea for Washington's foundering mission in Iraq are almost certainly doomed to be disappointed yet again. One wonders what panacea they will cling to next, since they seem to be running out of options.

Chronicles, February 2005—Reprinted with permission from *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, a publication of the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois

Bush Misreads History

In a September 21 speech insisting that the United States must “stay the course” in Iraq, President Bush warned that an early military withdrawal from that country would encourage al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. Weak U.S. responses to challenges over the past quarter century have emboldened such people, Bush argued. Among other examples, the president cited the decisions to withdraw troops from Lebanon and Somalia after American forces suffered casualties.

Hawkish pundits have made similar allegations for years. But it is a curious line of argument with ominous implications. President Bush and his supporters clearly assume that the United States should have stayed in both Lebanon and Somalia. The mistake, in their opinion, was not the original decision to intervene but to limit American losses and terminate the missions. This is a classic case of learning the wrong lessons from history.

Even hawkish Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), who was a Special Assistant to President Reagan in the 1980s, admits that the decision to send troops into Lebanon was perhaps the worst foreign policy mistake of Reagan's presidency. The United States promptly found itself in the middle of a civil war as a *de facto* ally of the Christian-dominated Lebanese government. American troops became entangled in skirmishes with Muslim militias, and U.S. battleships off the coast proceeded to shell Muslim villages. The disastrous intervention culminated with an attack by a suicide car bomber against the Marine barracks in Beirut that left 241 Marines dead. A few months later, President Reagan cut his losses and pulled out of Lebanon.

The Somalia intervention was equally ill-starred. Although President George H.W. Bush sent troops into that country on a humanitarian relief mission, President Clinton soon signed on to the UN's far more ambitious nation-building project. The United States then became entangled in another multisided civil war. One faction, headed by warlord Mohammed Farah Aideded, increasingly regarded the U.S. forces as an obstacle to its goals. When Washington decided to carry out the UN's edict to arrest Aideded and his followers, Aideded's militias struck back with a vengeance. The skirmishes culminated in an ambush in the capital city, Mogadishu, which left 18 elite Army Rangers dead. Shortly thereafter, President Clinton withdrew U.S. forces.

Both Reagan and Clinton made the right decision. It was not a mistake to withdraw and limit our losses. The real mistake was the decision to intervene in such strategically and economically irrelevant snake pits in the first place.

Those who argue that the United States should have stayed the course in Lebanon and Somalia apparently have a masochistic streak. Both countries were in the throes of massive disorder. Indeed, Iraq today is relatively stable compared to either Lebanon or Somalia at the time of the U.S. intervention. Staying on after the initial disasters would have entangled the United States in multi-year ventures that likely would have cost thousands of American lives. Indeed, it is entirely possible that we would still be bogged down in those quagmires.

Yes, al Qaeda and other terrorist groups apparently concluded that the Lebanon and Somalia episodes showed that U.S. leaders and the American

people have no stomach for enduring murky missions that entail significant casualties. They are likely to draw a similar lesson if the United States withdraws from Iraq without an irrefutable triumph. Indeed, that is why it is imperative to be cautious about a decision to intervene in the first place.

Military missions should not be undertaken unless there are indisputably vital American security interests at stake. No such interests were at stake in Lebanon and Somalia. Once the missions turned sour, U.S. policymakers were left with a choice between a bad option and a worse one. The bad option was to withdraw, even though the move might embolden America's adversaries. But it would have been worse to have persisted with foolish and unnecessary ventures at the cost of far more American lives—and with still no realistic prospect of success.

The Bush administration confronts a similar choice today in Iraq. A decision to withdraw and leave Iraq to its own fate is not without cost. America's terrorist adversaries will certainly portray a pullout as a defeat for U.S. policy. The cost of staying on indefinitely in a dire security environment is even worse. President Bush and his advisers need to consider the possibility that the United States might stay in Iraq for many years to come and still not achieve its policy goals. Moreover, the costs of such a strategy in blood and treasure would be far more than the nearly \$200 billion already spent and the 1,900 fatalities already suffered.

As in Lebanon and Somalia, it would have been better if the United States had never launched the ill-advised nation-building crusade in Iraq. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and so we now must choose between two bad alternatives. Since President Bush has learned the wrong lessons from history, he seems determined to pursue the least advisable one.

Orange County Register, September 29, 2005

Bush's Call to Stay the Course Is Simply an Act of Folly

President George W. Bush has urged Americans to "stay the course" in Iraq. He also insists that he takes responsibility for the faulty pre-war intelligence that led to the invasion and occupation.

Unfortunately, it is not clear what he means by taking responsibility—other than mouthing the words "take responsibility."

The issue of faulty intelligence is no small matter to be dismissed with a rhetorical gesture. Americans have every right to ask whether if they

had known then what they know now, would they have supported the war against Iraq.

Imagine if Bush had gone on television in autumn 2002 and made the following case: "My fellow Americans, I am asking Congress to authorize a war against Iraq to overthrow the dictator Saddam Hussein. Iraq does not have weapons of mass destruction and does not now pose a credible security threat to the United States. Nevertheless, Saddam has been a problem for the Persian Gulf region and an irritant to America for more than a decade, and he has brutalized his own people repeatedly. It would be beneficial to Iraq and the world to remove him from power and attempt to establish a democratic successor government. That will not be an easy task. It will require an occupation of Iraq for many years and cost American taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars. It will also result in the deaths of thousands of American troops. And at the end of the day, there is no guarantee that a stable, united democratic Iraq will emerge. Nevertheless, it is worth taking the gamble that we can create a new democratic Iraq as a model for reform in the volatile and dangerous Middle East."

If Bush had made such a candid speech instead of invoking the threat of phantom weapons of mass destruction, what are the chances that Congress and the American people would have embraced the Iraq mission? Likewise, would they have supported it if other members of the administration had not assured them that American troops would be greeted as liberators and Iraqi oil revenues would pay the costs of reconstruction?

The reality is that, had Americans known then what they know now about Iraq, the chances of a congressional and public endorsement of the mission would have been midpoint between slim and none. Yet Bush now asks us to consider all the previous blunders and misinformation as mere water under the bridge. We should, he insists, stay the course to victory.

But one cannot ignore the administration's lengthy track record of miscalculations and wishful thinking. The president argues that triumph in Iraq is within reach. But his notion of a united, democratic, pro-American Iraq that is friendly to Israel was—and is—a pipe dream.

In the real world, the scenarios are far more sobering. Let's consider the best-case scenario that has any realistic prospect of coming true. It would include a democratic Kurdistan in the north that is independent in everything but official international recognition. The rest of Iraq would be run by a quasi-democratic, Shiite-dominated regime that is quite friendly to Iran. That Shiite-led government in Baghdad would still face a persistent, low-grade Sunni insurgency for the foreseeable future (think Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s).

In other words, even the best-case scenario isn't all that great. And there is always the prospect of a worst-case scenario. That would involve a full-scale, three-sided civil war with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey all meddling to support their respective clients. Worst of all, any American troops remaining in the country would be caught in the middle of that cauldron of chaos.

Bush admonishes Americans to stay the course. But staying the course has no inherent virtue as a strategy. Napoleon stayed the course during his invasion of Russia—and his splendid army perished in the Russian winter. Union general Ambrose Burnside stayed the course during the American civil war—sending wave after wave of troops charging up the bluff against Confederate guns at Fredericksburg, with predictable results. Many investors in Enron and Worldcom stayed the course—and rode those stocks all the way to bankruptcy.

Sometimes, staying the course is simply an act of folly. The American people need to at least consider the possibility that the current mission in Iraq may be one of those occasions.

The Daily Star (Beirut), January 27, 2006

With Zarqawi's Death, U.S. Should Exit Iraq

The air strikes that killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi on June 7 should cause rejoicing in both Iraq and the United States. An especially evil, brutal, bloodthirsty terrorist is gone, and al Qaeda has suffered a significant blow.

That being said, Americans should not assume his death will make a major difference in Iraq's overall security environment. The episode is simply the latest milestone that is not really a milestone in that unhappy country.

We should be especially skeptical of those who proclaim every favorable development as a crucial turning point in the Iraq conflict. We've heard it all before.

The killing of Saddam Hussein's sons, who were deemed the logistical brains of the insurgency, was supposed to be a major achievement. The capture of Saddam himself would certainly cripple the insurgency, because most insurgents were nothing but "dead-ender Baathists."

The transfer of nominal sovereignty to an interim government in June 2004, the election of a constitutional assembly in January 2005, the

approval of a new constitution in the autumn of 2005, and the election of a new Iraqi government in December of that year were all hailed at the time by supporters of the Iraq mission as decisive turning points. They proved to be nothing of the sort.

An optimistic military commander boasted that the insurgency's back was broken following the assault on Fallujah in November 2004. A few months later, Vice President Dick Cheney famously stated that the insurgency was in its "last throes."

The reality is that the level of violence in Iraq has increased rather than declined since those premature claims of victory.

The significance of Zarqawi's death must be viewed in light of that history. His elimination may well weaken the capabilities of the foreign fighters in Iraq, but the significance of that faction has been in decline for months.

Indeed, the primary component of the violence in Iraq is no longer an insurgency directed against U.S. occupation forces and security personnel of the embryonic Iraqi government. Instead, the dominant factor is now tit-for-tat sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites. The elimination of Zarqawi will have little impact on that problem.

Both the Bush administration and the American people need to recognize just how bad the sectarian violence in Iraq has become. In May, there were some 1,400 confirmed deaths in Baghdad alone. While Baghdad is perhaps the most turbulent portion of Iraq, it is hardly the only scene of sectarian killings. One media report indicates that there have been more than 6,000 civilian deaths in the first five months of 2006. That comes out to an average of approximately 40 per day.

Moreover, there are indications that a significant number of deaths are never reported to authorities.

The death toll must be put in context. Iraq's population is a mere 26 million. If that same pace of political violence was taking place in the United States, it would mean nearly 500 killings per day, or more than 180,000 a year. If that degree of carnage was going on, no one would be debating whether America was experiencing a civil war. The reality is that Iraq has already slipped into, at the very least, a low-intensity Sunni-Shiite civil war.

Americans need to ask why they should want their military personnel to try to play the role of referee in such an environment. Zarqawi's death should remove the last excuse for "staying the course" in Iraq. We've overthrown Saddam Hussein, enabled the Iraqi people to create a new constitution, presided over the election of a new government, and now killed the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq.

Enough is enough. At some point, the Iraqi people need to stand on their own feet and decide whether they will cooperate in governing the

country or whether they will wage an increasingly bloody sectarian war. If they choose the latter, America does not have a dog in that fight.

Let's celebrate the elimination of Zarqawi. And then let's use the occasion to announce a firm schedule for the withdrawal of all American troops.

FoxNews.com, June 9, 2006

Washington's Masochistic Policy in Iraq

"Iraq could move toward civil war," the commander of U.S. Central Command conceded to Congress on Thursday. Gen. John Abizaid said securing Baghdad was the top U.S. priority, and that the violence there was as bad as he had ever seen it. Sens. Christopher J. Dodd and Chuck Hagel, a Democrat of Connecticut and Republican of Nebraska, have since said they believe an Iraqi civil war has already begun. Amid soaring civilian casualties, other U.S. commanders have said American troops will need to remain in Iraq until at least 2016. Why would anyone want to keep U.S. troops in such an environment for another decade to referee a burgeoning blood feud between Sunnis and Shiites?

Let's be clear what staying in Iraq until 2016 might mean. More than 2,550 American troops have already perished in the Iraq conflict—an average of a little more than 800 a year. If that pace did not slacken—and there is no evidence it would—there would be another 8,000 dead Americans by 2016. At that point, U.S. fatalities in Iraq would exceed the number the Soviet Union suffered during its ill-fated occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The financial cost would be staggering as well. According to the Congressional Research Service, as of mid-June, the tab for the Iraq mission is already more than \$319 billion, and the meter is now running at approximately \$80 billion a year. Another decade in Iraq would mean an additional \$800 billion of taxpayers' money down the drain, bringing the total cost of Washington's Persian Gulf intervention to more than \$1 trillion.

Even those who argue that a huge sacrifice is necessary to make Iraq into a model of democracy and transform the Middle East into a region of peace and stability ought to reconsider their views in light of the emerging reality. A recent UN report provides the depressing news that more than 14,000 Iraqi civilians have died violently in the first six months of 2006, mostly from insurgent attacks or sectarian strife. And the trend is even more worrisome. The death toll in January was 1,778; in June, it

was 3,149. Put another way, the carnage is now running at more than 100 victims each day.

We must remember that this is occurring in a country of only 26 million people. A comparable pace in the United States would be a horrifying 1,200 deaths per day—438,000 per year. If political violence were consuming that many American lives, there would be little debate about whether the United States was experiencing a civil war.

It is time—indeed, it is long past time—for an exit strategy to get all American troops out of Iraq. No reasonable person should contemplate maintaining a military presence in Iraq for a decade.

Opponents of withdrawal protest that we will leave Iraq in chaos. We might, but advocates of staying the course do not explain how the United States can prevent the contending factions in Iraq from fighting the civil war that they already seem to have started. At least, no one has explained how the United States can keep the peace there at anything resembling a reasonable cost in American blood and treasure. In the early days of the war, proponents assumed that no more than a few hundred U.S. lives would be lost, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz assured Congress that Iraq's oil revenue would pay for most of the mission.

Nevertheless, proponents of staying the course argue that, whatever the practical obstacles, we have a moral obligation to the Iraqi people not to withdraw until the job of building a stable democracy is done. Leaving aside the very real possibility that the job might never be done, that argument begs a fundamental question: What about the moral obligation of the U.S. government to its own soldiers and to the American people? There is clearly an obligation not to waste either American lives or American tax dollars. We are doing both in Iraq. Staying the course is not a moral strategy; it is the epitome of an immoral one.

Keeping our troops in harm's way for another decade while Iraq slides further into sectarian civil war is a policy that should appeal only to masochists. We need an exit strategy that is measured in months, not years.

San Francisco Chronicle, August 8, 2006

“Withdrawal from Iraq Now Will Be Less Painful than Years from Now”

The U.S. mission in Iraq has now lasted longer than America's involvement in World War II. That should be an occasion for sober reflection.

In less than four years—from 1941 to 1945—the United States and its allies managed to defeat two of the most powerful militaries in the world. By contrast, today, we are still mired in an endless conflict in a single small country after the same amount of time.

Those who helped get America into the Iraq quagmire denounce any proposal for withdrawal as “cut and run.” Now that we have passed the World War II milestone, we must demand that the hawks be specific about their strategy. Vacuous statements such as “we will stand down when the Iraqis can stand up” or “we must stay until the job is done” will not suffice.

Except when the survival of the nation is at stake, all military missions must be judged according to a cost-benefit calculation. Iraq has never come close to being a war for America’s survival. It was an elective war—a war of choice, and a bad choice at that. How much are Americans willing to pay in blood, treasure, and toil to try to prevail in Iraq?

The costs have already been staggering. We have spent more than \$340 billion, and the meter is running at more than \$7 billion a month. The loss of life is even more horrific. Nearly 2,900 American troops have perished, and the Iraqi government estimates that 150,000 of its citizens have died in the carnage.

And there is no end in sight. Not only did America’s involvement in World War II last less than four years, it was obvious well before the end that the Axis powers would be utterly defeated. In Iraq, the security environment is worse today than it was when the U.S. occupation began in the spring of 2003. The Sunni-led insurgency against U.S. forces is now merely one component of an increasingly chaotic situation. The upsurge in sectarian violence is an even larger problem, and it has undeniably embroiled the country in a civil war.

The American people need to ask the Bush administration and its hawkish supporters at what point they will admit that the costs have become unbearable. How much longer are they willing to have our troops stay in Iraq? Two years? Five years? Ten years? How many more tax dollars are they willing to pour into Iraq? Another \$100 billion? \$300 billion? \$1 trillion? And most crucial of all, how many more American lives are they willing to sacrifice? One thousand? Five thousand? Ten thousand?

Proponents of the mission studiously avoid addressing such unpleasant questions. They act as though victory in Iraq can be achieved merely through the exercise of willpower. President Bush epitomized that attitude during his recent trip to East Asia, when he asserted that the United States would definitely win in Iraq—unless we decided to quit before the job was done.

That is a dangerous delusion. Victory is by no means guaranteed, no matter what effort the United States makes. Iraq is a fractious place that

may not prove even to be a viable country. America's credibility in the world will take a hit if we withdraw our forces and admit that the mission has failed. That should be a sobering lesson not to undertake impractical nation-building ventures in the first place. But a withdrawal now will be less painful than a withdrawal years from now, after we have incurred far greater losses in lives and money.

It is better to bite the bullet and start to pull our troops out today. Otherwise, we may still be having the same debate in 2013—when our involvement in Iraq will surpass the length of our war in Vietnam. That is a milestone no one should want to pass.

Chicago Sun-Times, November 26, 2006

No al Qaeda Takeover of Iraq

In his State of the Union Address last Tuesday, President Bush warned that if the United States fails in Iraq, al Qaeda will gain a safe haven from which to launch attacks against America. It is an argument that the president, other members of the administration, and neoconservative hawks have been using for years.

In late 2005, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld warned that al Qaeda leaders “would turn Iraq into what Afghanistan was before 9/11—a haven for terrorist recruitment and training and a launching pad for attacks against U.S. interests and our fellow citizens.”

Despite such scare mongering, it is highly improbable that al Qaeda could use Iraq as the kind of safe haven it enjoyed in Afghanistan. There, the organization had the protection of an entrenched, friendly government, which it will not have in Iraq. Al Qaeda also had a much larger force in Afghanistan—an estimated 18,000 fighters. Even the U.S. government concedes that there are fewer than 2,000 al Qaeda fighters in Iraq, and the Iraq Study Group put the figure at only 1,300.

Indeed, foreign fighters make up a relatively small component of the Sunni insurgency against the U.S. and British occupation forces. It strains credulity to imagine 1,300 fighters (and foreigners at that) dominating a country of 26 million people.

The challenge for al Qaeda in Iraq would be even more daunting than those raw numbers suggest. While the organization has some support among Sunni Arabs there, opinion even among that segment of the population is surprisingly negative.

A September 2006 poll conducted by the University of Maryland's prestigious Program on International Policy Attitudes found that 94 percent of Iraqi Sunnis had a somewhat or highly unfavorable attitude toward al Qaeda.

As the violence of al Qaeda attacks has mounted, and the victims are increasingly Iraqis, not Americans, many Sunnis have turned against the terrorists. There have been a growing number of reports during the past year of armed conflicts between Iraqi Sunnis and foreign fighters.

And the anemic Sunni support for al Qaeda is overshadowed by the intense Shiite and Kurdish hostility to the group. Almost to a person, they loathe al Qaeda. The PIPA poll showed that 98 percent of Shiite respondents and 100 percent of Kurdish respondents had somewhat or very unfavorable views of the organization.

The notion that a Shiite-Kurdish-dominated government would tolerate Iraq becoming a safe haven for al Qaeda is improbable on its face. Even if U.S. troops left Iraq, the successor government would continue to be dominated by Kurds and Shiites, since they make up more than 80 percent of Iraq's population. And, in marked contrast to the situation under Saddam Hussein, they now control the military and police.

At best, al Qaeda could hope for a tenuous presence in predominantly Sunni areas of the country while being incessantly stalked and harassed by government forces—and probably hostile Iraqi Sunnis as well. That doesn't exactly sound like a reliable base of operations for attacks on America.

Sen. Chuck Hagel, a Republican of Nebraska, has it right. "I have never been persuaded to believe that whether we stay there six months, a year, or two years, that if we would leave, that somehow Iraq would turn into a haven for terrorists."

His skepticism is well placed.

The notion of al Qaeda using Iraq as a sanctuary is a specter—a canard that the perpetrators of the current catastrophe use to frighten people into supporting a fatally flawed, and seemingly endless, nation-building debacle.

San Diego Union-Tribune, January 26, 2007

U.S. Needs to Stop Iraq Problem from Spreading to the Region

It's now too late to stop the civil war in Iraq, but we may yet succeed in preventing it from becoming a regional meltdown. President Bush's

decision to send 21,500 more troops into Iraq is an act of desperation, as they, like the rest, will end up trying vainly to referee a multi-sided civil war. Washington should focus on a more achievable—and more vital—objective: working with Iraq's neighbors to quarantine the violence there. If the war spills over beyond Iraq's borders, it could easily escalate into a Sunni-Shiite conflagration, undermining U.S. policy throughout the Middle East.

Iraq's neighbors are already lining up on opposite sides of the internal sectarian struggle. Predominantly Shiite Iran has close ties with the two leading Shiite political parties and has supported the even more radical Muqtada al-Sadr. Tehran wants a Shiite-controlled government to retain power in Baghdad and would react badly if it appeared that Iraq's Sunni minority might be poised to regain power.

But Iraq's other neighbors are apprehensive (to put it mildly) about a Shiite-controlled Iraq. Saudi Arabia regards the prospect of such a state on its northern border as anathema, worrying about the impact on its own Shiite minority—which is concentrated in the principal oil-producing region. There are indications that wealthy Saudis are already providing funds to Sunni forces in Iraq.

Syria retains significant ties to Baathist elements in Iraq and has, at the very least, looked the other way as fighters and military hardware pass through the Syrian border to enhance the insurgency in Iraq. Turkey has its own policy priority: to prevent the emergence of an independent Kurdish republic in northern Iraq.

A regional proxy war in Iraq would turn the Bush administration's mission there into even more of a debacle than it is already. Worse, Iraq's neighbors could be drawn in as direct participants in the fighting—a development that could create chaos throughout the Middle East. Washington needs to take steps now to try to head off those dangers.

The best approach would be for the United States to convene a regional conference that included Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, and Turkey. The purpose of such a conference should be to make all parties confront the danger of the Iraqi turmoil mushrooming into a regional armed struggle that ultimately would not be in the best interests of any country involved. Washington should stress the point that Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq's other neighbors risk having events spiral out of control if they do not quarantine the violence in Iraq. The U.S. goal should be a commitment by the neighboring states to refrain from meddling in that country's sectarian strife.

A regional conference must focus solely on preventing the violence in Iraq from spreading. It should not attempt to address other issues such as the Iranian nuclear program, the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, or democratic

reforms in the Middle East. Broadening the agenda in that way is a recipe for failure.

Even with a limited agenda, there is no guarantee that such a conference would be successful. All of Iraq's neighbors have significant incentives to try to prevent a victory by one Iraqi faction or another. But U.S. leaders can make it clear to Turkey and Saudi Arabia that their close ties to the United States will be at risk if they exacerbate the chaos in Iraq. Dealing with Iran and Syria requires the opposite approach. Washington should convey to both countries that reasonable restraint will be rewarded with improved relations with the United States.

The Bush administration needs a healthy injection of realism to adopt a quarantine strategy. The goal of preventing civil war in Iraq is already lost, and maintaining a long-term U.S. military occupation of Iraq to forestall a regional proxy war is too high a price to pay, both in money spent and American lives sacrificed. Enlisting Iraq's neighbors to contain the violence is the only feasible alternative.

Chicago Sun-Times, February 10, 2007

Reject False Prophets: The First Step in Mitigating the Iraq Debacle

In marked contrast to the optimism that the Bush administration and its supporters expressed about developments in Iraq as late as the spring of 2006, only a few diehards now deny that the security environment in that country is dire. When Senator Carl Levin asked Secretary of Defense nominee Robert Gates whether the United States was winning in Iraq, Gates replied bluntly: "No, sir." The Bush-appointed bipartisan Iraq Study Group epitomized the new pessimism, noting in its December 2006 report that the situation in Iraq is "grave and deteriorating."

There is no shortage of suggestions about what the United States should do going forward. Unfortunately, many of the loudest voices belong to the same people who prodded the Bush administration into invading and occupying Iraq in the first place. If we are to extricate the United States from the Iraqi morass, the first step must be to ignore the "experts" who led us into that morass and begin to listen to real experts who correctly warned about that debacle.

It is clear in retrospect that the administration and its supporters miscalculated badly about the Iraq intervention. President Bush's May 1, 2003, speech aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Lincoln* beneath a large "Mission

Accomplished” banner was the perfect symbol for the misplaced optimism about Iraq that pervaded the administration and its hawkish political allies.

Kenneth Adelman, head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency during the Reagan years, famously predicted that the mission would be “a cakewalk.” Other advocates of the war were equally ebullient. It would be like Paris in 1944, with the Iraqis greeting American troops as liberators, not occupiers. In April 2003, pro-war syndicated columnist Mark Steyn predicted that “in a year’s time Baghdad and Basra will have a lower crime rate than most British cities.” Furthermore, there would be “no widespread resentment at or resistance of the Western military presence.”

Warnings about the deep ethno-religious divisions in Iraq were summarily dismissed. On April 1, 2003, *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol opined that “there’s been a certain amount of pop sociology in America . . . that the Shi’a can’t get along with the Sunni, and the Shi’a in Iraq just want to establish some kind of Islamic fundamentalist regime. There’s almost no evidence of that at all.” A month later, *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer stated confidently that “the United States is in a position to bring about a unique and potentially revolutionary development in the Arab world: a genuinely pluralistic, open and free society.” Other proponents of the war assumed that Iraq would not only be a collegial democracy at home, but also would have an extremely friendly policy toward both the United States and Israel. Some even predicted that the new Iraqi government would construct an oil pipeline with a terminus in Israel.

According to that rosy scenario, the transition to a democratic Iraqi government would be swift and easy. Defense Department planners assumed that U.S. troop levels would be down to 50,000 or perhaps even lower by the end of 2003. Some military experts, though, warned that such optimism was unwarranted. General Eric Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, predicted that the occupation would require “several hundred thousand troops” for a period of “many years.” Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz flatly rejected Shinseki’s assessment in congressional testimony. For his candor, Shinseki was marginalized.

Wolfowitz also scoffed at notions that the occupation would be a financial drain. He predicted that Iraq’s oil revenues would pay for the entire costs of reconstruction. Again, those officials who dared sound discordant notes were shown the door. Larry Lindsey, chairman of the President’s Council of Economic Advisers, warned that the cost of the Iraq occupation could exceed \$200 billion. He was pressured out of his post soon thereafter.

Of course, in one sense, Lindsey was wrong. The Iraq war did not cost \$200 billion; it has cost \$350 billion and counting. And that figure does not include long-term, indirect costs—for example, the continuing medical

care and rehabilitation expenses for the more than 22,000 service personnel who have been wounded (many severely). Former Representative Lee Hamilton, co-chairman of the Iraq Study Group, has stated that the costs could certainly exceed \$1 trillion in the near term. Another estimate by Columbia University economist Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard University economist Linda Bilmes in January 2006 concluded the direct and indirect costs of the Iraq war would be some \$1.2 trillion—assuming that the United States began to withdraw its troops in 2006 (which, of course, Washington did not do) and could reach \$2 trillion.

Uneasy officials were not the only ones to warn that the administration's optimistic scenario was unwarranted. In January 2002, more than a year before U.S. troops entered Iraq, I cautioned that “no matter how emotionally satisfying removing a thug like Saddam may seem, Americans would be wise to consider whether that step is worth the price. The inevitable U.S. military victory would not be the end of America's troubles in Iraq. Indeed, it would mark the start of a new round of headaches. Ousting Saddam would make Washington responsible for Iraq's political future and entangle the United States in an endless nation-building mission beset by intractable problems.”

As war grew nearer, other experts echoed such warnings. On September 26, 2002, 33 prominent foreign affairs scholars published an advertisement in the *New York Times* with the headline “War in Iraq Is *Not* in America's National Interest.” Among the points they made was that the administration of George H. W. Bush “did not try to conquer Iraq in 1991 because it was understood that doing so could spread instability in the Middle East. . . . This remains a valid concern today.” They added: “Even if we win easily, we have no plausible exit strategy. Iraq is a deeply divided society that the United States would have to occupy and police for many years to create a viable state. Experts who signed that ad included University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer, MIT professor Barry Posen, Columbia University professor Richard K. Betts, and the dean of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Stephen M. Walt. In February and March 2003, Boston University's Andrew Bacevich and Texas A & M University's Christopher Layne added their voices to the chorus warning of disaster, with Layne correctly predicting a “post-Saddam quagmire.”

Not only did the administration and other proponents of war ignore warnings from experts before the United States launched its invasion, they refused to recognize growing evidence later on that the mission was going badly. Even as the security environment deteriorated, the chorus of optimism scarcely diminished. In May 2005, Vice President Dick Cheney asserted confidently that the insurgency was “in its last throes.” When the Iraqi parliament approved the Islamist-leaning government of Nouri

al-Maliki in April 2006, the editors of *National Review* stated that it symbolized the triumph of democracy and that the “purveyors of doom now have some explaining to do.”

By late 2006, though, the evidence of massive disorder in Iraq was irrefutable. Instead of admitting error, though, most of the hawks have redoubled their efforts to give advice about proper future strategy. Arguing that it would be disastrous for the United States to acknowledge defeat, they offer a variety of schemes to salvage victory for the ill-starred intervention. The most prominent proposal by far is to increase U.S. troop levels in Iraq. The increasingly shrill neoconservatives argue that the Bush administration had launched the mission with too few troops to begin with—even though most of the lobbyists for war had argued exactly the opposite at the time. (Indeed, some of them, including Wolfowitz, had proposed going in with an even lighter force—no more than 40,000 or 50,000 troops.) Now, they insist that even the existing force of 145,000 is insufficient.

However, the hawks cannot agree on how many additional troops would be enough. Some propose only another 20,000 or so. Still others contend that at least 50,000 will be needed, and American Enterprise Institute scholar Frederick Kagan makes the case for sending 50,000 to 80,000 troops—a position endorsed by the editors of the hawkish *Washington Times*. Senator John McCain talks openly about dispatching another 100,000. The hawks also have a range of views about how long the buildup would be needed. Some argue that it would be only a short-term mission (a few months) to stabilize the security environment in Baghdad (where the disorder is most severe). Others hint that the buildup might have to last several years. At any rate, President Bush indicated, in a speech to the nation delivered on January 10, that he is still listening to the hawks by announcing that he plans to send 21,500 additional troops to Iraq.

Given their track record, such armchair generals are the last people on the planet America should turn to for advice on future policy regarding Iraq. Instead, advice should be sought from the experts who correctly predicted disaster if the United States invaded that country. Not surprisingly, most of those experts now advocate a prompt withdrawal from Iraq, despite the inevitable blow to America’s pride and credibility. Layne, Bacevich, Mearsheimer, and Walt have been especially outspoken about the folly of “staying the course.”

Except when the survival of the nation is at stake, all military missions must be judged according to a rigorous cost-benefit calculation. Iraq has never come close to being a war for America’s survival. Even the connection of the Iraq mission to the larger war against radical Islamic terrorism was always tenuous, at best. For all of his odious qualities, Saddam Hussein was a secular tyrant, not an Islamic radical. Indeed, the radical

Islamists expressed nearly as much hatred for Saddam as they did for the United States. Iraq was an elective war—a war of choice, and a bad choice at that.

Those who pushed America into the Iraq quagmire denounce any proposal for withdrawal as “cut and run.” It is well past time to counterattack and demand that the hawks be specific about *their* strategy. Vacuous statements such as “we will stand down when the Iraqis can stand up” or “we must stay until the job is done” are simply unacceptable.

It is especially pertinent to ask the Bush administration and its hawkish backers at what point they will admit that the costs of this venture have become unbearable. How much longer are they willing to have our troops stay in Iraq? Five years? Ten years? Twenty years? How many more tax dollars are they willing to pour into Iraq? Another \$500 billion? \$1 trillion? \$3 trillion? And most crucial of all, how many more American lives are they willing to sacrifice? Two thousand? Five thousand? Ten thousand?

Proponents of the mission studiously avoid addressing such unpleasant questions. Instead, they act as though victory in Iraq can be achieved merely through the exercise of will power. President Bush epitomized that attitude during his November 2006 trip to East Asia, when he asserted that the United States would definitely win in Iraq—unless we decided to quit before the job was done. A worrisome indicator of Bush’s thinking is that he did not regard America’s long and bloody war in Vietnam as a mistake. The mistake, in his view, was that the United States did not stay the course until victory was attained. If that is the governing attitude regarding the Iraq conflict, we are in for a prolonged and horrifically costly mission.

We need an exit strategy measured in months, not years. Alarm bells should be ringing when the people who pushed America into the folly of a nation-building mission in Iraq are now advocating a redoubled effort. Given their dismal track record, we ought to understand that such a strategy is the one thing we must not do under any circumstances. They are false prophets who have led the republic into disaster. We must spurn them regarding Iraq and every other foreign policy issue.

Chronicles, March 2007—Reprinted with permission from *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, a publication of the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois

“Go to Kurdistan? No”

An increasing number of moderates opposed to the Bush administration’s policy in Iraq—and even some supporters of it—are flirting with the option of redeploying U.S. forces to the Kurdish areas in the north.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, a Democratic presidential contender, has openly advocated such a policy. Others, including former UN ambassador Richard Holbrooke (a probable Secretary of State in the next Democratic administration) and *Washington Post* war hawk Charles Krauthammer, have floated similar proposals.

The redeployment strategy has understandable appeal to moderates. It would get American troops out of the most violent and dangerous portions of Iraq, such as Anbar Province and Baghdad, while not amounting to a complete U.S. withdrawal. Unlike other groups in Iraq, most Kurds actually like the presence of American forces. Nevertheless, the Kurdistan option is almost as misguided as the current policy: It would expose the United States to an entirely new set of risks.

American troops in Kurdistan would not be under incessant attack as they have been elsewhere in Iraq, but retaining military bases there is a bad idea.

Any long-term U.S. military presence anywhere in Iraq is likely to inflame passions among Arabs and other Muslims who believe that the United States plays an imperial role in their region and is determined to perpetuate the occupation of Iraq. Maintaining even a limited number of bases in the Kurdish north could validate that allegation and further damage America's standing in the Muslim world. Indeed, Arabs would likely regard Kurdistan as "another Israel"—a second alien U.S. client state in their region.

Even worse, a military presence could easily entangle the United States in Kurdistan's probable struggles with Arab factions in Iraq over control over the cities of Mosul and Kirkuk—especially the latter's oil riches.

A referendum on Kirkuk's political status is supposed to take place later this year. In preparation, the Kurdish regional government has been moving Kurdish residents into the city and driving out Arabs—effectively reversing the Arabization resettlement program that Saddam Hussein engineered. Whatever the outcome of the referendum (which the Kurds are likely to win), that explosive quarrel will continue and probably escalate.

A U.S. troop presence could even entangle the United States in the murky and potentially contentious relationships between Iraqi Kurdistan and two of its neighbors, Iran and Turkey. Ankara has already begun rattling sabers, declaring on several occasions that it will not tolerate Kirkuk becoming part of Kurdistan. Turkey believes that such an outcome would lead to the persecution of the Turkmen minority, which it has pledged to protect, in the city. Placing Kirkuk under Kurdish control would also give Kurdistan the oil revenues needed to make a bid for full-fledged independence, which Turkish leaders regard as a grave threat to the territorial integrity of their country, given its large Kurdish minority.

Ankara also has a major grievance with the authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan regarding the activities of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged a war of secession in southeastern Turkey for more than two decades. PKK fighters routinely use Iraqi Kurdistan as a sanctuary for attacks into Turkey.

Iraqi Kurdistan also has troubled relations with Iran. Tehran contends that another Kurdish insurgent group, the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), which seeks to liberate the Kurds in Iran, operates out of Kurdish territory in Iraq.

On the surface, Kurdistan might appear to be a safe haven for beleaguered U.S. troops in Iraq. Compared to the rest of the country, the region is relatively peaceful and well governed at the moment.

But appearances can be deceiving. Kurdistan has dangerously volatile relations with all of its neighbors—both inside and outside Iraq. Redeploying our troops to Kurdistan would be a snare, and one that Americans would have occasion to regret for years.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 14, 2007

How Exactly Is Iraq Like South Korea or Germany?

In a briefing to the media Wednesday, press secretary Tony Snow remarked that President Bush's long-term political model for Iraq was the nearly 6-decade-old U.S. troop presence in South Korea. It was just the latest instance in which the Bush administration tortures historical precedents in an attempt to make them fit the Iraqi mission.

The key difference between South Korea and Iraq is glaringly obvious. The United States has been able to stay in the ROK during the 54 years since the end of the Korean War because South Korea has been peaceful. One will look in vain for incidents (even in the 1950s, to say nothing of today) in which South Korean insurgents were attacking U.S. troops and blowing up civilian targets. Unfortunately, such violence is a daily reality in Iraq. Indeed, May was the third deadliest month of the war for U.S. forces.

If American troops had been under incessant assault in South Korea, they would have departed that country many years ago. America stayed in Korea for decades, but it did not do so in chaotic Vietnam, Lebanon, or Somalia. And those are far more pertinent models than Korea for the current and prospective situation in Iraq.

Unfortunately, South Korea is not the only historical model that the Bush administration and other supporters have misapplied. Early in the Iraq mission, administration officials and other cheerleaders repeatedly cited Washington's successful political transformations of Japan and Germany after World War II and argued that similar success beckoned in Iraq.

Again, that optimism ignored some hugely important differences. Japan was an ultra-cohesive society whose sense of nationhood long predated the existence of the United States. Germany's history of unity was less entrenched, but was still substantial. Iraq, by contrast, was an ethno-religious amalgam cobbled together by the British foreign ministry after World War I. It had, at best, a very weak sense of nationhood.

Another crucial difference is that Japan and Germany had some secular democratic influences in their history. (Indeed, Germany probably would have made it as a stable liberal democratic nation had the Depression not occurred when it did to empower the Nazis.) Iraq had virtually no such traditions. The notion that the nation-building experience in Japan and Germany could be imported to Iraq was a case of wishful thinking.

Yet another misapplication of history was the belief that the Iraq experience would track the experience of post-Soviet Central and Eastern Europe. The rationale was that, just like those earlier captive nations, the Iraqis would view the United States as a liberator.

That assumption was erroneous. The Central and East Europeans hated the Soviet Union as their imperial oppressor and saw the United States, the USSR's principal adversary, as a savior. But Iraqis and other populations in the Middle East have long regarded the United States as their imperial oppressor. The notion that Iraqis would view the United States the same way as did the Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, and Estonians was appallingly naive.

Historical models always have to be applied with great care. Contrary to the cliché, history never truly repeats itself. In trying to shoehorn the Iraq experience into earlier models in vastly different regions, the Bush administration proves the old adage that a little historical knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Bush and his supporters know just enough history to be a menace to themselves and everyone around them.

Hartford Courant, June 4, 2007

PART 3

America's Other
War: Afghanistan

Introduction

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the overwhelming majority of Americans favored military action against al Qaeda and its Taliban sponsors in Afghanistan. Indeed, that degree of national unity had not been seen since the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor six decades earlier. I was an early and vocal advocate not only of rooting al Qaeda out of its sanctuary in Afghanistan, but also of overthrowing the Taliban regime that had aided and abetted the terrorist organization.

Initially, the U.S. mission in Afghanistan appeared to be a great success. Working with forces from the rebel Northern Alliance, U.S. troops quickly routed Taliban and al Qaeda units and established a new government under President Hamid Karzai. Although the notion of Karzai as a leader of a strong central government was largely a fiction, since he remained in power only through shrewd tactical alliances with regional warlords, the Taliban and al Qaeda appeared to be spent political forces by early 2002. Even at the point that Washington's policies appeared to be working, though, I worried that America's enemies had not been crushed, but were using the border areas of Pakistan as a new sanctuary to regroup.

Perhaps even worse, the Bush administration began to take its eye off the objective of destroying al Qaeda in its lair. By late 2002 and early 2003, the administration was shifting not only its attention but crucial military resources (including highly effective Special Forces units) from the Afghan theater to the looming war in Iraq. Al Qaeda and the Taliban soon exploited that blunder. The security situation in Afghanistan began to deteriorate, and by 2006, experts were openly expressing concern that the mission in Afghanistan might go the way of the increasingly chaotic and unpromising venture in Iraq.

Washington added to its mounting problems by trying to combat the drug trade in Afghanistan at the same time that it waged the armed struggle against the Taliban and al Qaeda. As I pointed out in several articles and studies, that was a serious misjudgment. The opium trade was an indispensable component of Afghanistan's fragile economy. By most reliable estimates, it accounted for at least one-third of the country's gross domestic product. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan farmers and their families depended on opium poppy cultivation for their livelihoods, and numerous warlords friendly to the Karzai government depended on revenues from drug trafficking to pay the militias that secured their power base. A strong anti-drug campaign threatened to drive both farmers and

warlords back into the arms of the Taliban and fatally undermine Karzai's grip on power. True, the Taliban and al Qaeda also used the drug trade for revenue, but trying to stamp that out entailed far too many unpleasant political and strategic side effects. The reality is that Washington needs to look the other way regarding most aspects of drug trafficking (especially drug crop cultivation) and give the war against the terrorists priority.

From the vantage point of early 2008, the mission in Afghanistan is faring somewhat better than the war in Iraq, but the prospects for success are not nearly as promising as they seemed following the initial U.S. victories in late 2001 and early 2002. Indeed, Afghanistan threatens to become a murky, endless nation-building mission against an enemy that continues to use western Pakistan as a sanctuary with great effectiveness. Some serious rethinking of policy is needed in Washington.

Head Straight for Pakistan

General Tommy Franks, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, recently caused a stir when he hinted that U.S. forces might pursue al Qaeda fighters across the border into Pakistan. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has now quietly but firmly rejected that suggestion. That's too bad, because General Franks was right. Instead of sending U.S. troops to (at best) marginally relevant arenas such as the Philippines and the Republic of Georgia for training missions, the next stage of the war against terrorism needs to be fought in Pakistan.

There is overwhelming evidence that, after the initial victories last autumn by the United States and the Northern Alliance, hundreds of Taliban and al Qaeda fighters fled Afghanistan to seek refuge in Pakistan's rugged North-west Frontier Province. A similar pattern occurred in response to the recent U.S. offensive, Operation Anaconda.

The reality is that al Qaeda will never be destroyed as long as it can enjoy a de facto sanctuary in Pakistan. One of the most serious mistakes in the otherwise successful U.S. military operation in Afghanistan was the decision to trust the Pakistani government to seal the border and trap Taliban and al Qaeda troops. It is now clear that Pakistan failed to fulfill that task.

Given the terrain, sealing the Afghan-Pakistani border would have been a daunting task even for the most capable military force. But it seems that the Pakistani authorities made something less than a wholehearted effort. Indeed, there is evidence that elements in Pakistan's military, as well as the notorious Inter-services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), actually

helped evacuate Taliban and al Qaeda fighters following the first U.S.-led offensive in October.

Although such treachery might seem shocking, it would be consistent with Islamabad's track record. The Bush administration likes to tout Pakistan as an enthusiastic ally in the war on terrorism, but the regime of military dictator Pervez Musharraf is a very recent convert in that struggle. Prior to the September 11 attacks, the Pakistani government—especially the ISI—was the chief patron of the terrorist Taliban regime in Afghanistan. And religious schools, the madrassas, in Pakistan were renowned incubators for the terrorist recruits who joined Osama bin Laden.

It would be a mistake to allow misplaced gratitude to the Musharraf regime for belatedly abandoning the Taliban to deter us from taking the war against al Qaeda to its next logical stage. The principal nest of terrorist vipers is not in the Philippines, Georgia, Yemen, or Somalia. It is in Pakistan.

Washington should inform Musharraf that we intend to wipe out the al Qaeda sanctuaries in the northwest frontier province, with or without Islamabad's permission. The reality is that the writ of Pakistan's central government has rarely extended to that region in any case. Typically, the local tribes exercise most of the real power. Musharraf would be wise to recognize his lack of control and give the U.S. permission to take military action. If he declines to do so, the United States should make it clear that from now on we will regard Pakistan as part of the problem in the struggle against terrorism, not part of the solution, and will treat the country accordingly. The recent comment by Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar that his government was prepared to discuss allowing U.S. troops to cross the border in pursuit of al Qaeda suspects is an encouraging development and should be explored.

But whatever Musharraf's ultimate decision about granting permission, the United States should not shrink from confronting al Qaeda in its Pakistani lair. The war against the perpetrators of the September 11 atrocities will not be successful until that mission is accomplished.

National Review Online, April 4, 2002

Avoiding Distractions: The Case against Nation-Building in Afghanistan

The assassination of Afghan Vice President Abdul Qadir has produced a crescendo of calls for an intensified U.S. military effort in Afghanistan.

Senators Bob Graham (D-Fla.), Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), and other influential members of Congress immediately called for a more robust and prolonged U.S.-led mission to stabilize the country. Even President Bush, who once scorned the nation-building ambitions of the Clinton administration, rushed to give assurances that the United States was committed to promoting long-term stability in Afghanistan.

Such calls are dangerously misguided. Even if the task of nation building in Afghanistan were feasible (and there are compelling reasons to believe that it is not), it would be a distraction from America's overriding goal in that part of the world: destroying the al Qaeda and Taliban forces that were responsible for the terrorist attacks on September 11. Proponents of nation-building sometimes act as though America's principal mission is to rebuild Afghanistan, and that fighting al Qaeda and the Taliban is merely an annoying prerequisite. They need to keep their eye on the real prize.

The call for a more active U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is based on several fallacies. One is the notion that poverty and the existence of "failed states" breed terrorism. If that were true, sub-Saharan Africa would be the principal incubator of terrorism because that region is littered with chronically misgoverned failed states inhabited by desperately poor people. Yet sub-Saharan Africa is relatively quiescent, whereas the more prosperous states of the Persian Gulf region produce the greatest number of terrorists. Most of the Sept. 11 hijackers were middle class Saudis, and one might have thought that such evidence would have destroyed the myth of the connection between poverty and terrorism.

A second fallacy is that only a prolonged U.S. military presence and Washington's firm backing for a powerful central Afghan government can prevent Afghanistan from reverting to the chaos and extremism that marked the rule of the Taliban. But Afghanistan's troubles began not when its neighbors left the country alone, but when they meddled and attempted to prop up friendly governments. First the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s and then Pakistan in the 1990s sought to install and maintain pliant regimes. It cannot be emphasized often enough that, without the meddling of Pakistan, the Taliban would never have come to power in Afghanistan, and the country would not have become a haven for al Qaeda.

If outside powers simply leave Afghanistan alone, the country is likely to revert to its traditional form of governance. That was a highly decentralized system with a nominal national government but with most power held by tribal leaders and so-called regional warlords. It may not be either efficient or democratic by Western standards, but it served the Afghan people reasonably well for decades before the Soviet Union interfered.

One other aspect of Afghanistan's history ought to give would-be nation-builders pause. Although factions in the country's complex ethnic mosaic often fight among themselves, they tend to unite against any outside power that is seen as interfering in the country's internal affairs. The British in the 19th century and the Soviets in the 1980s made that painful discovery. American forces were initially greeted as liberators as they ousted the unpopular Taliban regime. But the longer our forces linger, the more they are likely to be viewed as an occupying imperial power, and the more they will become entangled in the country's ruthless political intrigues.

Finally, the call for nation-building assumes that the primary terrorist threat is still located in Afghanistan. But that has not been true for months. The principal nest of al Qaeda and Taliban forces is now across the border in Pakistan. And Washington is neglecting that menace. Although a few U.S. troops have engaged enemy fighters (and more recently a handful of Pakistani forces has also joined the fray), a major offensive in Pakistan's western tribal regions is required—and the sooner the better.

Increasing the number of U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan to back the government of President Hamid Karzai against its opponents would be putting our troops in the wrong place against the wrong adversary. At best, a nation-building mission would be an endless, frustrating venture similar to those in the Balkans. At worst, American forces could become the targets of outraged Afghans. In either case, the real enemy will be smiling across the border in Pakistan.

National Review Online, July 11, 2002

Focus on Terror, Not Drugs

The war on drugs is interfering with U.S. efforts to destroy al Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan. U.S. officials increasingly want to both eradicate drugs and nurture Afghanistan's embryonic democracy, symbolized by the pro-Western regime of President Hamid Karzai. But they need to face the reality that it is not possible to accomplish both goals.

Afghanistan has been one of the leading sources of opium poppies, and therefore the heroin supply, for many years. Indeed, there has been a steady upward trend in opium production for more than two decades. The only significant interruption to that trend occurred in 2001, following an edict by the Taliban regime banning opium cultivation on pain of death. (Taliban leaders had previously stockpiled large quantities of opium and

wanted to create a temporary scarcity, to drive up prices and fill the regime's coffers with additional revenue.) Today, Afghanistan accounts for nearly 75 percent of the world's opium supply.

During the civil war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, in the 1990s, both sides were extensively involved in the drug trade. Since U.S. forces and their Northern Alliance allies overthrew the Taliban in 2001 and drove them as well as al Qaeda operatives into neighboring Pakistan, drug commerce has been even more prominent. The trade now amounts to approximately \$2 billion, nearly half impoverished Afghanistan's annual gross domestic product.

Some 264,000 families are estimated to be involved in growing opium poppies. Given the role of extended families and clans in Afghan society, the number of people affected is actually much greater. Indeed, it is likely that 20 percent to 25 percent of the population is involved directly or indirectly in the drug trade.

For many of them, opium-poppy crops and other aspects of drug commerce are the difference between modest prosperity and destitution. They will not look kindly on efforts to destroy their livelihood.

Unfortunately, this year, the U.S. government has increased pressure on the fragile Karzai government to crack down on drug-crop cultivation. In August, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld also ordered American military forces in Afghanistan to make drug eradication a high priority.

That move is a big mistake. The Taliban and their al Qaeda allies have already shown a resurgence in Afghanistan, especially in the southern part. If zealous American drug warriors alienate hundreds of thousands of Afghan farmers, the Afghan government's hold on power could become even more precarious.

U.S. officials need to keep their priorities straight. America's mortal enemy is al Qaeda and the Taliban regime, which made Afghanistan a sanctuary for the terrorist organisation.

The drug war is a dangerous distraction in the campaign to destroy those forces. American officials should look the other way with regard to the drug activities of Afghan farmers. In this case, the war against radical Islamist terrorism must take priority.

South China Morning Post, October 27, 2004

America's Other War: The Deteriorating Situation in Afghanistan

Americans are understandably concerned about the grave security situation in Iraq. The United States has suffered more than 2,500 fatalities in that conflict and has yet to defeat the insurgency. Indeed, the level of violence in Iraq is increasing, and much of that violence now consists of sectarian bloodshed between Sunnis and Shiites. The American people worry, with good reason, that Iraq might be on the brink of full-scale civil war, with U.S. troops caught in the middle.

Until recently, the mission in Afghanistan seemed to be an impressive contrast to the debacle in Iraq. Even though Washington never deployed troops in Afghanistan in anything close to the numbers it did in Iraq (some 20,000 versus the current 133,000 in Iraq), the policy appeared to be a success. U.S. forces, allied with the indigenous Northern Alliance, routed al Qaeda and Taliban fighters in late 2001 with minimal American casualties. Washington helped install a pro-Western government headed by Hamid Karzai, who was acceptable to most of the significant political powerbrokers in Afghanistan. During 2002, political stability appeared to be returning to the country, and Osama bin Laden and his followers were on the run in the Tora Bora Mountains. Speculation was rife in Washington that the terrorist leader and most of al Qaeda's top operatives would soon be captured or killed.

That did not happen. Instead, the U.S.-led military offensive in eastern Afghanistan faded in the last half of 2002 and early 2003. Key units, including a crack unit of Special Forces personnel, were redeployed out of the country at a crucial time. They were sent to Iraq, as the Bush administration geared up for war against Saddam Hussein. In retrospect, that was a major strategic blunder that allowed the Taliban and al Qaeda to regroup.

And regroup, they have. These terrorists are now inflicting significant casualties on American forces: In 2005, 99 U.S. soldiers were killed, compared with 52 in 2004, 48 in 2003, and a mere 12 in 2001. Fifty-five soldiers have died already in the first five-and-a-half months of 2006—and that is before the surge in fighting that takes place every year during the summer months. Those totals do not include fatalities suffered by other coalition (primarily NATO) forces and Afghan units or civilian casualties, which also are on the rise. Overall, more than 1,600 people perished in

insurgent-related violence in 2005—by far the highest annual toll since the war began in 2001. More than 1,000 people have been killed so far in 2006.

A report issued in October 2005 by the Center for American Progress warned: “Despite the capture or killing of a number of key Taliban and al Qaeda leaders, as well as coopting some of the leaders into the political process, the insurgency is far from defeated.” The report warned further: “The Taliban have become increasingly sophisticated, employing new warfare tactics. They are now using improvised explosive devices and suicide bombs, tactics that appear to have been imported from Iraq.” That threat is likely to get worse. Early this year, fugitive Taliban officials claimed that they had recruited some 200 suicide bombers to attack Afghan government and foreign military targets.

An April 2006 report from the Council on Foreign Relations (“Afghanistan’s Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy”) succinctly describes the worrisome security situation:

After years of claiming that greater American and Afghan casualties are either signs of “desperation” by foundering terrorists or the result of more aggressive U.S. tactics that are pushing opposition fighters out of their safe havens, the U.S. government has now admitted that the insurgency is growing and becoming more effective.

Indeed, the definitive victory over al Qaeda and the Taliban that seemed so tantalizingly close in late 2001 and most of 2002 is in danger of slipping away. The Bush administration has been so preoccupied with the mission in Iraq that it is ignoring a resurgent danger in Afghanistan. Washington’s focus has shifted from Osama bin Laden and his allies, who pose a clear and present danger to America, to the will-o’-the-wisp of trying to transform Iraq into a model democracy. Waggish critics of the administration now jibe that Osama bin Laden has become “Osama Bin Forgotten.”

The United States needs to refocus her attention on the primary enemy, and that enemy is centered in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, given the reinvigorated insurgency, Washington faces serious obstacles to achieving victory in that country.

In addition to the other problems the United States confronts in Afghanistan, the war on drugs threatens to interfere with the U.S.-led effort to destroy al Qaeda and the Taliban. U.S. officials increasingly want to eradicate drugs, as well as nurture Afghanistan’s embryonic democracy. Under pressure from Washington, Karzai has called upon the Afghan people to wage war against narcotics with the same determination and ferocity with which they resisted the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Given

the economic and social realities in Afghanistan, however, that is an unrealistic and potentially very dangerous objective.

There is little doubt that drug eradication in Afghanistan has become a high priority for Washington. Several factors account for the Bush administration's concern, but the most important is the fear that drug commerce will corrupt Afghanistan's entire economic and political structure. Robert B. Charles, who just recently left his post as assistant secretary of state for international narcotics and law-enforcement affairs, emphasized that point to a congressional committee:

[S]tability in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without addressing the drug issue, and counternarcotics programs cannot be deferred to a later date. Afghanistan is already at risk of its narco-economy leading unintentionally but inexorably to the evolution of a narco-state, with deeply entrenched public corruption and complicity in the drug trade undermining stability, containment of other threats, and all our assistance programs.

Just before moving from ambassador to Afghanistan to his current position as ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad also warned: "The narcotics trade poses a mortal threat to Afghanistan. Narcotics pose a threat to Afghanistan's political future: drug dealers could take over the political system. Narcotics poses a threat to the economy: criminal gangs and mafia can bring the economy under their control."

In addition to the general problem of corruption caused by drug money, U.S. officials are deeply concerned that the opium trade could provide a lucrative source of revenue for the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other enemies of the United States. Charles noted that the drug trade had helped the Taliban regime stay in power during the late 1990s. Indeed, the DEA estimated that the Taliban collected more than \$40 million per year in profits from the opium trade, with some of the cash going to terrorist groups that operated out of that country. Today, according to Charles, "There are strong indications that these heroin drug profits provide funds, to varying degrees, to Taliban remnants, al Qaeda, destabilizing regional warlords, and other terrorist and extremist elements in the region."

In early May 2006, a U.S. official in Afghanistan, speaking on condition of anonymity, told the *Washington Post*:

Drug trafficking is a threat to the security and very future of Afghanistan. It is a narco economy but not yet a narco state. If we lose Afghanistan to this thing, which we could, once again we would have a fertile breeding ground for the next Taliban, the next Al Qaeda, the fundamentalists who thrive in unstable conditions.

Yet Washington faces a serious dilemma if it conducts a vigorous drug-eradication campaign in Afghanistan in an effort to dry up the funds

flowing to al Qaeda and the Taliban, because these are clearly not the only factions involved in drug trafficking. Many of Karzai's political allies are warlords who control the drug trade in their respective regions. They use the revenues from that trade to pay the militias that keep them in power in their fiefdoms and give them national political clout. Some of them backed the Taliban when that faction was in power, switching sides only when the United States launched her military offensive in Afghanistan in October 2001. There is a serious risk that anti-drug measures might cause them to change their allegiance yet again. Even the *Washington Times*, which strongly favors the war on drugs, conceded that "a number of heavily armed Tajik tribal leaders that have not been hostile to U.S. forces could lash out if their drug interests are directly and aggressively challenged." In addition to the need to placate cooperative warlords, the U.S.-led coalition secretly relies on opium-poppy growers as informants on movements of Taliban remnants and al Qaeda units. Disrupting the opium crop might alienate those crucial sources of information.

According to the United Nations, there are more than 350,000 Afghan families involved in opium-poppy cultivation. Even measured on a nuclear-family basis, that translates into roughly 2.3 million people—about 10 percent of Afghanistan's population. Given the role of extended families and clans in Afghan society, the number of people affected is much greater than that. Indeed, it is likely that at least 30 percent of the population is involved directly or indirectly in the drug trade. For many of those people, opium-poppy crops and other aspects of drug commerce are the difference between modest prosperity and destitution. They will not look kindly on efforts to destroy their livelihood.

Afghan government officials have tried to make their American patrons understand the extreme sensitivity of pursuing anti-drug efforts directed at poppy farmers. "To take away the livelihood of farmers could be dangerous in some parts of Afghanistan," warned the country's counter-narcotics minister.

That danger is especially acute with regard to the ethnic Pashtun farmers in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the core of Karzai's political constituency. As one Western diplomat in Afghanistan told Reuters, "If he bulldozes in and destroys crops, if he arrests and punishes farmers, they're definitely going to think that the Taliban have a point when they say the government is bad."

Nevertheless, the U.S. government is putting increased pressure on Karzai to crack down on the drug trade. The Afghan regime is responding cautiously, trying to convince Washington that it is serious about dealing with the problem without launching an anti-drug campaign that might alienate large segments of the population. It has tried to achieve that balance by focusing on high-profile raids against drug-processing labs—

mostly those that are not controlled by warlords friendly to the government in Kabul. For example, on the eve of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit in March 2005, Afghan counternarcotics squads destroyed several drug laboratories and confiscated more than two tons of opium in raids in the eastern province of Nangarhar. The timing of the raids was probably designed to make a favorable impression on Rice. "This successful operation shows that the government of Afghanistan is serious about ridding our country of drugs," Gen. Sayed Kamal Sadat, the head of the counternarcotics police, emphasized in a statement to the press.

Although Afghan officials have been receptive to U.S. prodding to pursue interdiction initiatives and have been enthusiastic about the prospect of developmental aid for crop substitution and alternative development projects, they have been less responsive to another U.S. goal: crop eradication. The Karzai government has especially resisted the aerial spraying of poppy fields—a strategy that Washington has successfully pushed allied governments in Colombia and other South American countries to adopt.

Yet even the limited measures that Kabul has taken against the drug trade appear to be a factor in the increased public support for the Taliban, especially in southern Afghanistan. Since the government launched a campaign in March 2006 to eradicate some poppy fields manually (which is far less efficient than aerial spraying) in the southern Afghan province of Helmand (the center of the drug trade), the level of violence there has spiked. Drug traffickers have formed alliances with Taliban and al Qaeda units to sabotage the eradication program and undermine Kabul's overall authority. U.S., British, and Canadian troops in the province have come under repeated attack. Roadside bombs have blown up military vehicles, and both Afghan government offices and the local U.S. military base have been subjected to bombings.

There is no question that the drug war is a major complication in Washington's broader strategy of defeating the insurgency. This is a case in which U.S. officials need to establish priorities, because it will be extraordinarily difficult to achieve both objectives.

Developments in Afghanistan over the past year suggest that the victory over al Qaeda and the Taliban that seemed imminent in 2002 is slipping away. Insurgent units mount a growing number of mortar, rocket, car-bomb, and suicide attacks on U.S., NATO, and Afghan government targets. Moreover, they seem to be increasingly sophisticated and lethal in their attacks. There are portions of the country, especially in the south, where U.S. forces rarely venture except in sizable, robust units. In those hostile areas, the writ of the Kabul government (or, as is more often the case, the writ of friendly warlords loyal to Karzai) is no longer taken seriously.

In short, the security environment in Afghanistan is beginning to resemble that of Iraq. The United States may well have missed a crucial window of opportunity in late 2002 and early 2003 to administer a crushing blow to the al Qaeda–Taliban alliance. If the Bush administration had not diverted crucial military resources, especially Special Forces personnel, from the Afghan theater to Iraq, that definitive victory might have been secured. Unfortunately, we will never know for certain. What we do know is that we now face a revitalized, resilient, and increasingly dangerous adversary.

Moreover, it is not clear that the policy options available to Washington with regard to Iraq are available with regard to Afghanistan. Iraq was a needless diversion in the war against radical Islamic terrorists. For all of his evil qualities, Saddam Hussein was a conventional, secular tyrant who loathed the radicals and was determined to keep them out of his country. To the extent that Iraq has become a magnet for Islamic extremists, it is the result of an ill-advised U.S. invasion and occupation that destabilized the country. Even so, most Iraqis dislike the foreign fighters and would likely kill or expel them once the unpopular U.S. occupation ends. Iraq was not and is not crucial to the security of the United States. We can and should withdraw our forces as quickly as possible.

The situation in Afghanistan is different. The enemy we face there is the organization that attacked us on September 11 and the Taliban ally that gave that organization a safe haven. If we withdraw precipitously, there is a very real danger that al Qaeda and the Taliban could regain power and again constitute a mortal peril to the United States. American forces cannot leave Afghanistan until the enemy units are defeated utterly or at least weakened to the point that they pose only a minor threat to America's security. That means that vigorous military operations must continue in Afghanistan—and in the border areas of Pakistan in which insurgent units often take cover.

Washington needs to make some difficult choices to achieve victory. One requirement is to de-emphasize counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. It is clear that vigorously pursuing that goal antagonizes major portions of the population and plays into the hands of the insurgents. Unless a specific anti-trafficking initiative has a direct bearing on denying funding to al Qaeda or the Taliban, antidrug objectives need to be put on the back burner.

U.S. leaders also may need to consider an option that is likely to be unpopular with the American people. Defeating the Afghan insurgents may require a modest increase in the number of U.S. troops over the short term. At the moment, guerrilla fighters have too many safe havens in the Afghan–Pakistan border region. They are using those sanctuaries to prepare for and mount attacks elsewhere in the country. If more American

forces are needed to regain the military initiative that was lost in late 2002 and early 2003, it is a step that should be taken.

Unfortunately, because of the Bush administration's obsession with going to war against Iraq, an opportunity to score a decisive, low-cost victory in Afghanistan may have been squandered. In the coming months, and perhaps years, that victory will have to be secured at greater cost in terms of both blood and treasure. It is yet another U.S.-policy failure that should have been avoided.

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PART 4

The War on Terror

Introduction

The Bush administration's response to the 9-11 attacks has gone far beyond attempting to destroy the perpetrators of those horrific events. Instead of declaring war against al Qaeda—or even against radical Islamic terrorism in general—the U.S. government proclaimed an amorphous Global War on Terror (GWOT). Critics point out that terrorism is a tactic, not an identifiable adversarial entity, but the Bush administration is not dissuaded. An even more telling criticism is that if one took the administration's rhetoric seriously, the United States would be at war with an assortment of organizations that, while they might use terrorist tactics against their opponents, do not have any quarrels at this point with the United States. It would seem a dubious strategy indeed for Washington to risk needless confrontations with the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, the Chechen secessionists, or the Basque separatists in the name of the GWOT. Their targets are not and never have been America. Hence, the administration's globe girdling rhetoric is either fatuous or dangerous.

Worse, even the administration's anti-terror strategy against radical Islamic groups misconstrues the impetus for their vendetta against America. Administration officials and their neoconservative allies repeatedly insist that the terrorists “hate us for our freedoms.” Yet most knowledgeable experts conclude that the principal factor driving radical Islamic groups is anger over U.S. *policies* in the Muslim world. Even the Defense Science Board and the 9-11 Commission, hardly partisan critics of the Bush administration, conceded that point in comprehensive reports. Indeed, Osama bin Laden himself ridiculed the notion that al Qaeda was motivated by antipathy toward freedom and democracy per se, noting if that were true, his organization would have attacked Sweden. The list of Muslim grievances against the United States is a long one, including Washington's knee-jerk support for Israel's every action, propping up corrupt autocratic regimes such as those in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the U.S.-led embargo against Iraq between 1991 and 2003 that led to the needless deaths of several hundred thousand Iraqi children, and the subsequent gratuitous invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The stubborn refusal of U.S. officials to acknowledge that the root of Washington's problem with the Muslim world is what America *does*, not what America *is*, leads to hopelessly flawed policies to counter the threat of Islamic terrorism. Indeed, Washington's de facto imperial role in the Middle East serves as a perfect recruiting poster for al Qaeda and other

extremist groups. It causes even moderately inclined Muslims to conclude that the radicals may be right when they argue that the United States is out to destroy their civilization and religion. For every terrorist that U.S. forces kill in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. foreign policy creates several new ones. The current strategy is counterproductive and doomed to fail.

In addition to misconstruing the underlying causes of Islamic terrorism directed against the United States, warhawks tend to hype the severity of the threat—sometimes to ludicrous proportions. An intellectual cottage industry has emerged in the United States among some conservatives determined to portray terrorism as a menace so dire that it threatens America's very existence. Neoconservative pundits describe the ongoing struggle as "World War III" (or in *Commentary* magazine editor Norman Podoretz's formulation, World War IV—with the Cold War having been World War III).

Such threat inflation does not serve America well. As I pointed out in several articles, terrorism has always been the weapon of the weak, not the strong. It is absurd to equate the limited menace posed by a few thousand stateless actors with the severe threats once posed by such totalitarian great powers as Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. Although radical Islamic terrorism is a threat that must be taken seriously, it does not put America's existence or liberty in danger. Indeed, the main threat to domestic liberty arises from overreaction to the terrorist threat, not the threat itself. As we deal with the problems posed by radical Islamic terrorism, it is imperative not to lose perspective and cast away the values that make America worth defending.

Fixing Foreign Policy: How the U.S. Should Wage the War on Terror

For more than half a century, the U.S. military was an instrument of Washington's foreign policy in far-flung regions of the world. The idea of retaliating for an attack on American territory was barely on the radar screen.

Not so now. U.S. forces have fought al Qaeda terrorists in the mountains of Afghanistan and helped overthrow the Taliban government that made that country a haven for Osama bin Laden and his followers. Those actions were entirely appropriate, and the United States should take the next stage of the war into Pakistan, where most of the remaining al Qaeda fighters have regrouped.

But we must stay focused on the threat posed by bin Laden's network. In particular, we should not use terrorism as a pretext to settle old scores against Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration has made contradictory statements about the scope of the military's mission. At times, officials seem to focus on those responsible for the September 11 attacks. On other occasions, they suggest that America's goal is a war against terrorism per se—even terrorists who aren't targeting the United States. In his State of the Union address, President Bush went even further, singling out Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as an "axis of evil" and implying that those countries' efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction were part of a global terrorist threat.

America badly needs to clarify its objectives. A war against al Qaeda and any other organization or government that targets the United States is different from a general crusade against all organizations that use terrorist tactics against some adversary. The latter would be an extraordinarily broad and difficult mission. Yet even that mission would be narrower than a crusade against all terrorist organizations, plus all evil regimes that might possess weapons of mass destruction. A prime requirement of any good security strategy is that its objectives be realistic and attainable. Neither the second mission nor the third meets that test.

Equally troubling is Washington's failure to adjust its overall security strategy to meet the new threat posed by groups such as al Qaeda. There has been no willingness to rethink old commitments and obligations. Instead, all the existing missions have been preserved and the new one simply added to the list.

That is a terribly myopic approach. At the end of the Cold War, the United States should have conducted a detailed audit of its security commitments around the globe, determined which were no longer relevant, and developed a strategy appropriate for the new era. The refusal to undertake such a reassessment was a major failing of U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s.

With the events of September 11, such a reassessment is no longer merely desirable. It is imperative. It is clear that even a narrowly defined anti-terrorist campaign will be a major American concern for several years. Obsolete or nonessential commitments are a distraction that the nation can ill afford, financially or otherwise.

A new, more relevant approach should do three things:

Encourage multiple centers of power. Many officials appear afraid of a global environment with several economic and military great powers and an assortment of mid-sized regional powers. But rather than resisting a return to a more historically normal condition of multipolarity—a process

that is occurring gradually in any case, regardless of American preferences—Washington should accept that change and turn it to America's advantage. The presence of other significant political and military players in the international system can provide us with important security buffers, especially if those players are stable and democratic.

Ideally, such states would forge effective regional security organizations—a more robust European Union, for example. In most cases, though, regional multipolarity would involve more-informal balance-of-power arrangements.

Even that outcome would usually serve American interests. Indeed, the mere existence of multiple powers—even if some of them are not especially friendly to the United States—makes it less likely that a hegemonic threat comparable to the Soviet Union could arise again. Regional powers would be the principal firebreaks against disorder and aggression in their respective spheres of influence, a development that would provide significant indirect security benefits to the United States.

Reject the “light switch” model of engagement. American involvement in world affairs can take a variety of forms. Yet whenever critics suggest pruning Washington's overgrown global security commitments, defenders of the status quo reflexively cry “isolationism.” That reaction reflects what might be called the light switch theory of American engagement, in which there are only two possible positions, on or off. Either the United States continues pursuing an indiscriminate global interventionist policy that puts our soldiers at risk in Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, and the like, or we turn into “Fortress America” and “wall ourselves off from the world.”

The contention is either disingenuous or obtuse. No serious analyst advocates creating a hermit republic. It is possible to adopt a security policy between the extremes of global interventionism—essentially the current policy—and Fortress America. Moreover, there are different forms of engagement in world affairs, of which the political-military version is merely one. Economic ties are increasingly important, as are diplomatic and cultural connections.

There is no reason why the United States must have identical positions along each axis of engagement. It is entirely feasible to have extensive economic and cultural relations with the rest of the world and to have an active and creative diplomacy without playing the role of the world's policeman, much less the world's armed social worker. It is only in the areas of security commitments and military intervention that the United States needs serious reductions in its level of engagement.

Set priorities. Even a country as large and powerful as the United States cannot dictate outcomes everywhere and on every issue. Our attention

and energy should be focused on significant adverse changes in the international system—in other words, on developments with the potential to threaten America's own security and well-being. We cannot afford to get bogged down in an assortment of petty conflicts, all in the name of preserving Washington's global leadership. There is a difference between parochial squabbles and serious security threats. Policymakers should learn it.

In most cases, subregional and internecine disorders will not impinge on vital U.S. interests. Washington can therefore afford to view them with detachment, intervening only as a balancer of last resort when the conflict cannot be contained by other powers in the region—and is expanding to the point where American security is threatened.

From the standpoint of American interests, what usually matters is the conduct of the dozen or so major powers—nations with significant military or economic capabilities. As long as those states remain at peace with one another and no menacing would-be hegemon emerges, the only remaining threat to America's security is the risk of terrorist attack. Events involving minor countries may create annoyances, but they do not disrupt the overall stability of the international system. Put bluntly: China's behavior should matter to the United States, but whether Kosovo becomes independent, Somalia holds together, or injustices occur in Burma should not.

A more cautious global political and military role would allow the United States to decommission superfluous military units and cut the defense budget even as it fights its terrorist adversaries. Moreover, by refusing to be on the front lines of parochial conflicts, America would reduce its risk exposure—including the risk of terrorist reprisals.

Making these changes would have been wise even before the events of September 11. The terrorist attacks have made them more urgent. It borders on the absurd for military leaders to complain about a lack of personnel to wage the war against al Qaeda while 100,000 American troops sit uselessly in Western Europe, another 100,000 are deployed in Japan and South Korea, and thousands more are tied down in babysitting missions in Bosnia and Kosovo. To wage war against its terrorist adversaries, America must clear the decks of outdated or misguided military commitments.

Reason, October 2002—Reprinted with permission from *Reason* magazine

Instinct for the Capillaries: The 9-11 Commission Report

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (the 9-11 Commission) released its report to much media fanfare in late July. Although the commissioners labored mightily, they have given birth to a mouse. The report is safe, cautious, and eminently bipartisan. In other words, it largely avoids discussing the most serious issues surrounding the threat that radical Islamic terrorism poses to America.

Much of the document deals with the failures of the FBI, the CIA, and other agencies to anticipate and thwart the devastating attacks launched on September 11, 2001. Some of the criticisms (the lack of communication between key agencies, the absence of effective screening mechanisms at the borders, and the missing of key clues) are warranted. Others are classic exercises in 20/20 hindsight.

The commission also addresses a few larger issues, and most of its judgments are balanced rather than inflammatory. For example, the report examines a series of contacts between the government of Iraq and al Qaeda operatives. In marked contrast to the hysterical exaggerations of neoconservative war hawks, however, the commissioners note that those contacts were sporadic and that Saddam Hussein's regime rebuffed Osama bin Laden's request for space to establish training camps, as well as assistance in acquiring weapons. The members of the commission conclude that there is:

no evidence that these or earlier contacts ever developed into a collaborative operational relationship. Nor have we seen evidence indicating that Iraq cooperated with al Qaeda in developing or carrying out attacks against the United States.

Although the commission studiously avoids discussing the merits of the Iraq war (to avoid controversy and to make it possible to have a unanimous report), those conclusions may make the Bush administration uneasy. After all, the president and his advisers cited two major reasons for attacking Iraq: the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction and the alleged connections between Baghdad and al Qaeda. The first allegation was discredited long ago, and now the commission has effectively discredited the second.

Another pertinent issue is the relationship between Iran and al Qaeda. That relationship seems more substantive and intriguing than the minimal one between Iraq and the terrorist group. Senior al Qaeda operatives traveled to Iran for training in explosives in the early 1990s, and the commission cites evidence that both Iran and al Qaeda may have been involved in the Khobar Towers attack. There also is evidence that Iranian officials allowed at least eight, and perhaps as many as ten, of the September 11 hijackers to transit their country from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia. The report stresses, however, that there is no evidence that Tehran knew about the terrorist plot, much less had anything to do with it. Predictably, neoconservatives ignore that caveat and cite the report as justification for a policy to topple the fundamentalist Islamic regime.

More important than the issues the report addresses are the issues it skirts. The failure to discuss the Bush administration's argument that the Iraq war was a crucial part of the War on Terror is an obvious omission, but there are others. Although the commission properly chastises both the Bush and Clinton administrations for not taking the al Qaeda threat seriously enough, there is little discussion about what either administration was doing instead of focusing on Bin Laden.

The Clinton administration certainly was not inactive on the foreign-policy front during the mid and late 1990s. That was the period in which the United States invaded and occupied Haiti, intervened in the Bosnian civil war, enforced draconian sanctions against Iraq and periodically bombed that country, and wrested Serbia's province of Kosovo away from Belgrade's jurisdiction through a NATO air war. Not one of those interventions was relevant to America's security interests. But our attention and resources were focused on those matters instead of the very real threat that was emerging. The Bush administration's obsession with ousting Saddam Hussein (which predated the September 11 attacks) reflected similar myopia.

An even more serious deficiency is the commission's tepid treatment of the crucial issue of how U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East creates resentment that strengthens the forces of radical Islamic terrorism. In fairness, the report presents a more sophisticated treatment than the Bush administration's argument that the terrorists hate America because of her commitment to freedom and other noble values. (One wag has aptly described this as the "they hate us because we're beautiful" thesis.) Instead, the commission acknowledges that there is a great deal of anger in the Muslim world at U.S. policies.

But the commission's prescriptions are either contradictory or anemic. An example of the former is the call for a greater commitment to democracy and freedom in the Middle East juxtaposed with proposals for close cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan—two of the least democratic

governments in the region. An example of the latter is the admission that U.S. support of Israel antagonizes large swaths of Muslim opinion without an accompanying call for any meaningful change in U.S. policy toward Israel.

Instead of addressing such sensitive matters, the commission merely calls for a greater effort at public diplomacy to win the hearts and minds of Muslims. That approach woefully misconstrues the problem. The reservoir of hatred in the Middle East toward the United States that has been building for decades is not the result of a failure of Muslims to understand U.S. policy. They understand it all too well. And they are not going to be won over by a slick, Madison Avenue PR campaign. The problem is the content of U.S. foreign policy, not its packaging.

By failing to address these and other vital issues, the 9-11 Commission has missed a historic opportunity. It chose to play it safe and issue a bland, comfortable report that focuses on secondary matters. Instead of going for the jugular of Washington's misguided and dangerous policy in the Middle East, the commission showed that it had an instinct only for the capillaries. That likely suits the Bush administration and the war hawk faction just fine.

Chronicles, September 2004—Reprinted with permission from *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, a publication of the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois

Drug Prohibition Is a Terrorist's Best Friend

Under pressure from Washington, Afghan President Hamid Karzai is urging his people to fight narcotics as ferociously as they fought the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Such a struggle seems destined to undermine the campaign against al Qaeda and the Taliban. Karzai and his American patrons can prevail against the country's opium growers or its terrorists, but not both.

Afghanistan has been one of the leading sources of opium poppies, and therefore heroin, since the 1970s. Today, the country accounts for more than 75 percent of the world's opium supply. It is clear that some of the revenues from the drug trade—at least 10 percent to 20 percent—flow into the coffers of al Qaeda and the Taliban.

That is obviously a worrisome development. But it is hardly unprecedented. For years, leftist insurgent groups in Colombia, principally the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and right-wing paramilitaries have been financed largely by that country's cocaine trade. Conservative estimates place the annual revenue stream to the FARC alone at between \$515 million and \$600 million per year. (In 2002, the U.S. ambassador to Colombia put the figure at "several billion" dollars.)

The harsh reality is that terrorist groups around the world have been enriched by prohibitionist drug policies that drive up drug costs, and which deliver enormous profits to the outlaw organizations willing to accept the risks that go with the trade.

Targeting the Afghanistan drug trade would create a variety of problems. Most of the regional warlords who abandoned the Taliban and currently support the U.S. anti-terror campaign (and in many cases politically undergird the Karzai government) are deeply involved in the drug trade, in part to pay the militias that give them political clout. A crusade against drug trafficking could easily alienate those regional power brokers and cause them to switch allegiances yet again.

Unfortunately, Washington is now increasing its pressure on the Karzai government to crack down on opium cultivation, offering more than a billion dollars in aid to fund anti-drug efforts. In addition, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced in August that U.S. military forces in Afghanistan would make drug eradication a high priority—a mission that the military properly continues to resist.

U.S. officials need to keep their goals straight. Recognizing that security considerations sometimes trump other objectives would not be an unprecedented move by Washington. U.S. agencies quietly ignored the drug-trafficking activities of anti-communist factions in Central America during the 1980s when the primary goal was to keep those countries out of the Soviet orbit. In the early 1990s, the United States also eased its pressure on Peru's government to eradicate drugs when President Alberto Fujimori concluded that a higher priority had to be given to winning coca farmers away from Shining Path guerrillas. U.S. leaders should refrain from trying to make U.S. soldiers into anti-drug crusaders: Even those policymakers who support the war on drugs as an overall policy ought to recognize that American troops in Central Asia have a difficult enough job fighting terrorists.

There is little doubt that terrorist groups around the world profit from the drug trade. What anti-drug crusaders refuse to acknowledge, however, is that the connection between drug trafficking and terrorism is the direct result of making drugs illegal. The prohibitionist policy that the United States and other drug-consuming countries continue to pursue guarantees a huge black market premium for all illegal drugs. The retail value of drugs coming into the United States (to say nothing of Europe and other

markets) is estimated at \$50 billion to \$100 billion a year. Fully 90 percent of that sum is attributable to the prohibition premium.

Absent a worldwide prohibitionist policy, this fat profit margin would evaporate and terrorist organizations would be forced to seek other sources of revenue.

Drug prohibition is terrorism's best friend. That symbiotic relationship will continue until the United States and its allies have the wisdom to dramatically change their drug policies.

National Post, January 4, 2005—Reprinted with permission from *National Post*

War on Terror Is Not Another World War

Compared to the lethal menaces of the 20th century, the strategic threat posed by radical Islamic terrorists is minor league. On September 11, 2001, the terrorists killed some 3,000 people, and subsequent attacks in Bali, Madrid, Istanbul, London, and Mumbai have killed hundreds more. Tragic as those deaths are, they pale in comparison to the nearly 100 million deaths of the two world wars.

True to their label, the Islamic terrorists are terrifying, and they can sometimes inflict nasty damage, as we discovered to great sorrow five years ago. But terrorism has always been the strategy of weak parties, not strong ones, and radical Islamic terrorism is no exception.

The closest historical analogy for the radical Islamic terrorist threat is neither the two world wars nor the Cold War. It is the violence perpetrated by anarchist forces during the last third of the 19th century. Anarchists committed numerous high-profile assassinations, including a Russian czar, an empress of Austria-Hungary, and President William McKinley. They also fomented numerous bomb plots and riots, including the notorious Haymarket riot in the United States. The Newt Gingriches of that era also overreacted and warned of a dire threat to western civilization. In reality, though, the anarchists were capable only of pinpricks, and life went on.

The radical Islamists are only a little more potent. U.S. intelligence agencies estimate that there are no more than a few thousand al Qaeda operatives—many of whom are hunkered down in the wilds of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

However fearsome they are, we must keep their threat in perspective. Even in the improbable worst-case scenario—the one in which al Qaeda

gets its hands on a nuclear weapon and somehow figures out how to detonate it (not an easy task)—the scope of destruction, while terrible, would still not begin to rival the horrors of the last century's bloodletting, much less what would have happened if the Cold War had turned hot. There is no realistic prospect of al Qaeda obtaining thousands of nukes.

Consider the scope of the threat posed by Nazi Germany and its allies in World War II. Germany was the world's number 2 economic power and had an extraordinarily capable military—probably the best in the world. At the peak of its success, the Wehrmacht managed to conquer most of Europe, and Japanese forces overran most of East Asia. It took the combined military efforts of several great powers to defeat the fascists' bid for global dominance. When the dust settled, more than 50 million people were dead.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the world's number 2 military power. Moscow dominated Eastern and Central Europe, and its conventional forces could have overrun the rest of the continent and condemned millions more people to communist slavery. With an arsenal of thousands of nuclear weapons, it was capable of obliterating most American cities and effectively ending modern civilization in the United States. The Soviet Union, like Nazi Germany before it, was a strategic threat of the first magnitude.

Absurd proclamations that America's conflict with al Qaeda and its radical Islamist allies constitutes the next world war are becoming a growth industry. Newt Gingrich is the latest to sound the alarm, but Norman Podhoretz, publisher of *Commentary* magazine, Fox News commentator Sean Hannity, and many other pundits and politicians have made the same allegation. Indeed, the only thing these would-be national saviors seem to disagree about is whether the current conflict is World War IV or V instead of World War III.

Yet most countermeasures that the United States and other countries have undertaken are glorified law enforcement tactics rather than full-scale warfare. Last month's airline bombing plot in Britain was disrupted in that way, as were the previous breakups of al Qaeda cells in Hamburg and Madrid. With the exception of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, this is the nature of the war against radical Islamic extremists. Whereas once we carpet-bombed our adversaries, we now pursue largely non-military tactics.

We must recognize that terrorism poses a frightening and tragic but manageable threat to the United States. Gingrich, Podhoretz, and other panic mongers do us a huge disservice by exaggerating its danger. The only way the current struggle could ever become a world war is if American leaders followed their advice and escalated our response into a war between the West and Islam.

As we mourn our dead, we must remember that we have more power than our enemies to worsen our fate. For both the dead and the living, we must make sure that does not happen.

San Diego Union-Tribune, September 6, 2006

Violent Awakenings: How Do Pearl Harbor and September 11 Compare as Turning Points for America?

Numerous pundits have described the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, as the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century. There are certainly some similarities between the events. Both were unexpected attacks that deeply traumatized the American people. And the loss of life in both cases was horrific, with nearly 2,400 perishing in the assault on Pearl Harbor and more than 2,900 on Sept. 11.

The attacks also galvanized the American people into supporting vigorous military action against the parties responsible. In the case of Pearl Harbor, the United States immediately began to wage war against Japan and its Axis allies, Germany and Italy.

Within two months of Sept. 11, the American military was on the ground in Afghanistan, working to eliminate al Qaeda fighters and to oust the Taliban government, which had made the country a safe haven for them.

Nevertheless, it is easy to overstate the similarities between the two horrific events. There are also extremely important differences, especially in terms of the impact on the policies the United States pursued in the months and years that followed.

Pearl Harbor plunged America into the maelstrom of World War II, a struggle that involved the core security interests of the republic and symbolized rival visions for the future of the planet. Japan and its allies were making a bid for dominance in their respective regions and beyond. Had they succeeded, there would have been a major shift in the global balance of power—to the extreme detriment of the United States.

And the Axis powers had the tangible capabilities to make a credible bid for global dominance. Germany had the second-largest economy in the world, Japan the fifth, and Italy the sixth. Germany and Japan had modern, well-trained militaries that had already conquered vast swaths of territory by the time of Pearl Harbor. They posed a major strategic threat to America.

Recognizing the scope of the danger, U.S. leaders mobilized the country for war. Conscription produced a massive expansion of the military, taxes were increased, and rationing of consumer goods became pervasive. The government pursued the last measure largely to give the public a sense of being an integral part of the war effort.

Developments following Sept. 11 have been far different. The United States remains committed to an all-volunteer military, federal taxes have been reduced—not increased—and there is little sense of national sacrifice. Indeed, except for military personnel, their families and friends, there is minimal public involvement in the “war on terror.” For most Americans, the war is largely an abstraction.

That is perhaps inevitable, for the threat posed by radical Islamic terrorism, while frightening, pales in comparison with that of the Axis powers.

Terrorism has always been the strategy of weak parties, not strong ones, and its current incarnation is no exception. U.S. intelligence agencies estimate that there are no more than a few thousand al Qaeda operatives—many of whom are hunkered down in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Most countermeasures that the United States and other countries have undertaken are glorified law-enforcement tactics rather than true warfare. There is no need for wholesale mobilization.

World War II led to an unprecedented degree of national unity and a virtual consensus that the United States should play a highly active role in world affairs. That consensus endured into the subsequent Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union and was not seriously weakened until the failed war in Vietnam.

There has been no such prolonged unity about policy in the aftermath of Sept. 11. Indeed, the policy consensus did not last much beyond the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Sharp divisions were already emerging in late 2002 and early 2003 as President Bush pressed his case for war against Iraq. Those divisions have become even more pronounced as the Iraq venture has turned into a bloody quagmire.

Pearl Harbor was a watershed in the history of America’s foreign policy and the republic’s place in the world. For all its emotional impact, the Sept. 11 tragedy has not played a similar role, nor is it likely to.

Press Enterprise (Riverside, CA), December 6, 2006

PART 5

Attempting to
Head Off War
against Iran

Introduction

Even as the United States became more deeply mired in the Iraq nation-building mission, American hawks began to beat the drums for military confrontation with Iran. Those calls for harsher measures against the clerical regime in Tehran have become increasingly shrill as Iran has pursued a nuclear program in defiance of international calls to remain nonnuclear. The Iranian government insists that it is simply trying to master nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, but both the United States and Iran's neighbors are convinced that Tehran is on a quest to build nuclear weapons. President Bush insists that such an outcome is "intolerable," and Washington has worked with its European allies (as well as more reluctant UN Security Council partners China and Russia) to impose economic sanctions against Iran in an effort to compel the regime to reverse course.

Although U.S. leaders insist that they seek a peaceful solution to the nuclear problem, they also stress that the military option remains on the table. Indeed, saying that the prospect of Iran armed with nuclear weapons is intolerable implies that if sanctions and diplomacy fail, Washington would be willing to use force to keep Iran nonnuclear. The sentiment in favor of using force has been reinforced in the past year because of the emergence of another issue. Bush administration officials charge that Iran is systematically undermining the American missions in Iraq and Afghanistan by assisting insurgents who are fighting the U.S. occupation forces. Specifically, U.S. officials accuse Iran of supplying the insurgents with military hardware that has been used in attacks on American military personnel. The evidence for such conduct is actually quite sparse, but the hawkish narrative now seems to be that Iran is already killing our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and one can only imagine how irresponsible Tehran could become if it also possessed nuclear weapons. In short, the hawks are building a two-tier argument for preemptive war.

In a variety of articles and studies, I argue that the U.S. policy toward Iran is counterproductive and dangerous. Sanctions annoy the Iranian government and cause economic pain to ordinary Iranians without having much prospect of causing Tehran to capitulate on the nuclear issue. Indeed, the historical record of sanctions inspires little confidence that regimes can be successfully pressured to abandon high-priority policies, and the nuclear program certainly seems to be a high-priority policy for the clerical leadership.

A strategy based on sanctions is dubious, but the military option would be utter folly. As I point out, a war against Iran would risk further destabilizing a region that has already been badly destabilized by the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. In particular, attacking Iran could alienate Shiite Muslims in Iraq and elsewhere (including Saudi Arabia's principal oil producing region), thereby triggering a whole new array of security problems for the United States. Tehran could retaliate for a U.S. attack in a variety of ways, including trying to close the Strait of Hormuz, through which flows half of the world's oil supply; sending units of the Revolutionary Guard across the border into Iraq to work with friendly elements of Shiite militias in that country; and unleashing its terrorist ally, Hezbollah, to attack American targets throughout the Middle East and beyond.

I've recommended that instead of embarking down such a dangerous path, the United States should adopt an entirely different strategy. The essence of my proposal is to call for a grand bargain with Iran. Under that approach, the United States would offer to lift all economic sanctions against Tehran, move to normalize diplomatic relations between the two countries, and offer a formal pledge that there would be no U.S. effort to oust the clerical regime by force. In exchange, Iran would be expected to open its nuclear program to unfettered international inspection to guarantee that there would be no diversion of nuclear material from a peaceful power generation program to the building of weapons.

There is, of course, no certainty that the clerical government would accept a proposed grand bargain. Tehran has sent mixed signals over the past several years about whether it is interested in diplomatic dialogue and improved relations with the United States. Even if the effort to achieve a grand bargain failed, however, Washington should not resort to military force. Instead, it should rely on deterrence, just as the United States deterred other odious, nuclear-armed regimes in the past.

Living with a nuclear Iran would certainly not be a comfortable situation, but the parade of horrors presented by neoconservatives is far-fetched. Hawks allege that Iran would give nuclear weapons to terrorist organizations—even though Iranian leaders would know in advance that they would be signing their death warrants by taking such a step—and might attack Israel—which possesses at least 150 nuclear weapons of its own, enough to incinerate Iran. The lack of faith in deterrence is both curious and unwarranted. The risk that Iran might act irrationally is overblown, and the hawks certainly have not made the case that the risk is so great that a preemptive war, with all its probable horrendous consequences, is preferable.

Caution on Iran

The Bush administration is vigorously pushing two policy objectives regarding Iran. One is to deter Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Indeed, President George W. Bush stated recently that the United States “will not tolerate” Iran having such weapons. The other goal is to encourage regime change by backing students and other dissidents who are challenging the rule of the religious elite. Both objectives are worthy, but if the administration is not careful, its strategy could backfire.

All Americans would sleep easier if Iran remained nonnuclear. But the administration’s enthusiasm for regime change makes it more, not less, likely that Tehran will seek to build a nuclear arsenal. Iranian leaders notice how the United States treats nonnuclear adversaries. Washington has engaged in ten major military operations since the end of the Cold War—an extraordinary pace. And Tehran certainly noticed how easily the United States used its powerful military to conquer Iran’s next door neighbor, Iraq. President Bush’s explicit linkage of Iran to Iraq and North Korea in his famous “axis of evil” comment makes the Iranians even more nervous. Now that one member of the axis has been taken down, it would scarcely constitute paranoia if Iran’s leadership concluded that their country might be next on Washington’s hit list. The Bush administration’s professed enthusiasm for regime change reinforces that apprehension. Since Iran can never hope to match America’s conventional military capabilities, its most appealing—and cost effective—option is to build a nuclear deterrent.

Washington’s strategy of promoting regime change could backfire in another way. There is little doubt that a growing number of young Iranians are fed up with the repressive rule of the mullahs and want a more open society. But outspoken U.S. endorsements of their resistance campaign could be the kiss of death. U.S. support gives the religious hierarchy the perfect pretext to portray even cautious advocates of political reform as traitors and American stooges.

We must remember that there are millions of Iranians who have not made up their minds yet about whether to support the current ruling elite or back the challengers. Many of those moderates seem increasingly disillusioned with the mullahs, but they are not necessarily fond of the United States. A recent poll of Iranian opinion by Zogby International showed alarmingly high levels of hostility toward U.S. foreign policy, as well as suspicions about U.S. motives.

A good many Iranians also remember that the United States interfered once before in their country's internal affairs, and the outcome was not a happy one. It was a coup orchestrated by the CIA in 1953 that ousted a democratic government and restored the autocratic Shah of Iran to power. His corrupt and repressive rule for the next quarter century paved the way for the Islamic fundamentalist revolution. Any hint of CIA meddling today would cause the moderates to make common cause with the ruling religious elite.

The trend in Iran is at least mildly encouraging. Opposition to the mullahs is growing by the month. If the United States resists the temptation to envelop the reformers in a suffocating embrace, there is a very good chance that the Iranian people will engage in regime change on their own within a few years. The emergence of a wholly indigenous democratic government in Iran could have profound implications not only for that country but for the entire Islamic world.

In short, the Bush administration should proceed cautiously. It needs to avoid needless saber rattling that could spook the current regime and cause it to pursue a crash program to acquire nuclear weapons. And Washington should be very careful about public expressions of support for Iranians who are pressing for political change, lest the U.S. endorsement undermine their efforts.

This is a delicate time in Iran. Adept U.S. policies could well be rewarded with beneficial changes. Conversely, heavy-handed policies could produce extremely unpleasant results.

United Press International, July 14, 2003

Dubious Assumptions about Iran

A consensus is gradually emerging in the United States that Washington and its allies must take whatever action is necessary to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power.

Various options are advocated, from UN-mandated economic sanctions to airstrikes on suspected nuclear installations to active subversion of the mullah-controlled regime in Tehran.

All of these options are based on key assumptions about both the probable conduct of the Iranian government and the underlying political situation in Iran. Unfortunately, many of those assumptions are dubious at best.

A nuclear Iran would attack Israel. Advocates of a hardline policy toward Tehran argue that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it will use those weapons against Israel, its hated adversary. Fears of such a scenario have risen sharply in recent months following comments by Iran's president that Israel should be wiped off the map.

Such a comment is certainly reprehensible, but does it negate the long-standing realities of deterrence? Israel has between 150 and 300 nuclear weapons of its own. Even if Iran does go forward with its nuclear program, it will not be able to build more than a dozen or so weapons over the next decade.

It would be suicidal for a country with a tiny nuclear arsenal to attack a country with a large arsenal. One should not confuse repulsiveness with suicidal tendencies. The current government of Iran is certainly repulsive, but it has never given evidence that it is suicidal. In all likelihood, rhetoric about wiping Israel off the map is merely ideological blather. Israel has more than a sufficient capability to deter an Iranian nuclear attack.

Iran would pass along nuclear weapons to terrorist groups. Tehran has a cozy relationship with a number of terrorist organizations in the Middle East, most notably Hezbollah. The pervasive assumption in the West is that if Iran obtains nuclear weapons, sooner or later it would pass one along to a terrorist ally.

But how likely is it that Iran would make such a transfer? At the very least, it would be an incredibly high-risk strategy. Even the most fanatical mullahs in Tehran realize that the United States would attack the probable supplier of such a weapon—and Iran would be at the top of Washington's list of suspects.

Significantly, Iran has possessed chemical weapons for decades, yet there is no indication that it has passed on any of those weapons to Hezbollah or to Palestinian groups that Tehran supports politically. Why should one assume that the mullahs would be more reckless with nuclear weapons when the prospect of devastating retaliation for an attack would be even more likely? The more logical conclusion is that Iran, like other nuclear powers, would jealously guard its arsenal.

It would be easy to overthrow the mullahs. American proponents of regime change—most prominently Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute—insist that the current government in Tehran is ripe for overthrow. Indeed, advocates of regime change typically argue that an invasion of the country would be unnecessary; rather, American financial and political support for dissident groups, combined with destabilizing special forces operations, should be sufficient.

There is undoubtedly significant popular discontent with the dour and repressive mullahs, but it is easy to overestimate the extent and clout of the opposition. It is not reassuring that many of the loudest American

enthusiasts for a strategy of regime change are the same people who argued that the Iraq mission would be brief and easy and that Ahmed Chalabi was the most popular politician in Iraq. Those predictions proved to be spectacularly wrong, and we therefore should be doubly cautious about following the advice of that faction regarding Iran.

A democratic Iran would renounce all nuclear ambitions. This is the favorite assumption of those Americans who believe that Washington should pursue an aggressive policy of regime change. They argue that Tehran's nuclear program is merely the pet initiative of the Islamic elite, while the bulk of the Iranian people are indifferent or hostile. Regime change, therefore, would not only remove an odious regime, but also provide the ultimate solution to the nuclear problem.

It is yet another dubious assumption. Tehran's nuclear ambitions date back to the Shah of Iran in the 1970s. The bulk of the evidence suggests that a "peaceful" nuclear program has widespread support in Iran for reasons of national pride and regional prestige. The goal of a nuclear-weapons arsenal is more controversial, but given the dangerous neighborhood in which Iran is located, support for that objective also goes well beyond the mullahs and their staunch allies. Washington could be making a serious miscalculation if it assumes that a democratic Iran would be content to remain non-nuclear.

The Iranian nuclear issue is a hellishly difficult problem, and the United States has no good policy options. But whatever course U.S. leaders ultimately adopt must at the very least be based on sound assumptions. Unfortunately, some of the most crucial assumptions appear to be anything but well founded.

FoxNews.com, February 8, 2006

U.S. Snub of Iran Is Wrong Response

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad recently surprised the international community by sending a lengthy letter to President Bush—the first communication to an American chief executive from an Iranian head of state in decades.

It was a curious document—a rambling 18-page treatise on history, religion, politics, and world affairs. As a foundation for serious, substantive negotiations on the Iranian nuclear crisis, the letter was decidedly inadequate.

Nevertheless, Washington's initial response was disappointing and incredibly shortsighted. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice dismissed the letter even before it had been translated. President Bush's reaction was not much better. He criticized it for not answering "the question the international community is asking." Namely, "When will Iran give up its nuclear program?"

In other words, unless Iran's leaders are willing to preemptively surrender on the issue that is the principal U.S. grievance, Washington is not interested in any dialogue with Tehran. That is unsophisticated and ineffectual diplomacy.

Ahmadinejad's letter is only the most high-level indication that the Iranian political elite is interested in negotiations, and perhaps even a normal relationship, with the United States. A proper response would have been to issue a formal reply to the Iranian president. That does not mean that the administration would have needed to concede any of the substantive points in the letter, but a reply would have indicated that we were at least willing to talk.

One should have no illusions. The current Iranian government is one of the more repressive, difficult, and odious regimes on the planet. Tehran's policy of supporting groups that use terrorist tactics is especially reprehensible. Ahmadinejad's hateful screeds against Israel are both bizarre and repulsive.

But the United States does not have the luxury of engaging only pleasant, democratic, and tolerant governments. One of the great challenges of effective diplomacy is to deal with, and get results from, regimes that most Americans would prefer did not exist.

Since the days of Woodrow Wilson, Washington's typical response to unfriendly, repressive governments (especially of small countries) is to try to isolate and berate them. Before Wilson, the general U.S. practice was to deal with any government that controlled a country, whether we liked the regime or not. That policy was far more realistic and productive. The current approach is akin to the maturity level one would expect from an elementary school student: "I don't like you, and I'm not going to speak to you."

That strategy has produced utterly unsatisfying results. For more than two decades after the end of the Vietnam War, Washington did not have diplomatic relations with Hanoi, even though Vietnam was a significant political and military player in Southeast Asia. We have pursued a similar policy of truculence toward Cuba for four-and-a-half decades, without dislodging the Castro regime's grip on power.

Even worse, we have adopted the same approach toward North Korea and Iran, even though both countries are on the brink of entering the global nuclear-weapons club. Consider that for a moment. We have no

relations with two countries that may soon have nuclear arsenals (and in North Korea's case, may already have one). That is not only foolish, it is profoundly dangerous.

Washington needs to change its policy immediately, and the place to start is with Iran.

The Iranian leadership is reaching out to the United States. Is anyone in the Bush administration astute enough to recognize an important opportunity when it comes knocking at the door? The world is waiting to find out.

Kansas City Star, May 29, 2006

Bombing for Regime Change

An Israeli airstrike is being blamed for killing almost 60 civilians in the Lebanese village of Qana on Sunday. Since Israel began its assault in southern Lebanon last month, Israeli leaders have stressed that their primary objective is to degrade Hezbollah's ability to launch rockets against northern Israel. But they also mention another motive: forcing the Lebanese people to understand that supporting Hezbollah will bring them nothing but grief. With that realization, so the reasoning goes, most Lebanese will turn against the terrorist organization.

Logic suggests that the more likely reaction will be greater Lebanese hatred of Israel and, hence, more support for Hezbollah. It is bizarre to assume that displacing a population and destroying a country's infrastructure will somehow lead the people being targeted to turn against the adversaries of the attacking power rather than the attacking power itself.

Nevertheless, American hawks are urging the Bush administration to emulate Israel's dubious strategy and launch airstrikes against Iran—both because of that country's apparent quest for nuclear weapons and its support of Hezbollah. A military assault, they argue, would result in the fall of the repressive clerical government. Iranians would supposedly be so enraged at the clerics for bringing destruction upon them that they would overthrow the mullahs. William Kristol, editor of the *Weekly Standard*, explicitly embraces the bombing-as-political-catalyst rationale.

Asserting that "the Iranian people dislike their regime," he predicts that "the right use of military force . . . could cause them to reconsider whether they really want to have [it] in power."

The notion that populations will rise up against the governments of their own countries and make common cause with countries that are

killing their loved ones defies history and comprehension. In spite of massive bombing of Germany and Japan in World War II, the fascist regimes there remained in power to the bitter end. U.S. bombing of North Vietnam during the 1960s and early 1970s did not dislodge Ho Chi Minh or his successors from power. NATO's U.S.-led bombing of Serbia in 1999 actually caused Slobodan Milosevic's popularity to increase for a time. It was not until later—primarily for domestic reasons—that the democratic opposition was able to get rid of him.

Bombing Iran would almost certainly be counterproductive to the goal of regime change. Like most other people, Iranians could be expected to rally around the flag if their country came under attack. Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, a liberal critic of the theocracy, likely expresses the views of most of her fellow citizens when she warns Washington not to attack Iran: "We will defend our country till the last drop of blood." If that is the attitude of a pro-Western, liberal Iranian, one can only imagine what Iranians who are less hostile to the current government would do.

Trying to achieve forcible regime change is especially likely to backfire with respect to Iran. A good many Iranians remember that the United States interfered once before in their country's political affairs. It was, after all, a coup orchestrated by the CIA that ousted a democratic government and restored the autocratic Shah to power in 1953. His corrupt and repressive rule over the next quarter century paved the way for the Islamic revolution and the emergence of the current odious regime. Any attempt to bomb Iran into regime change is almost certain to reawaken those old grievances, even among Iranians who loathe the mullahs.

Bombing may be an effective way to wage war, but it is a terrible way to win hearts and minds. Israel was unwise to pursue that strategy in Lebanon, and the United States would be foolish indeed to try it in Iran.

Philadelphia Inquirer, August 1, 2006

Haste Not Called For with Iran

In a rare U.S. appearance, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was scheduled to speak today at the United Nations in New York. Beyond the novelty of the visit, though, and amid the European Union's claims of progress in negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program, Americans no doubt have a sense of *déjà vu*. A rogue state in a critical region, weapons of mass destruction, inspections, negotiations, the threat of sanctions, indecisive multilateral bodies . . . haven't we seen it all before?

Iran's nuclear efforts understandably make us nervous, but there is no need to panic. We still have enormous power to deter Iranian aggression, and as we've learned in Iraq, the risks of inaction are preferable to the guaranteed catastrophe of starting a war.

The bulk of the evidence indicates that Iran is years away from being able to build nuclear weapons. U.S. intelligence agencies maintain that Iran will not have such a capability for another five to 10 years, and prominent independent experts agree. A report by the GOP-dominated staff of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence late last month cast doubt on the conclusions of the intelligence community but offered little more than innuendo and unsubstantiated assertions to make its case. Indeed, even the Israeli government, which has an obvious interest in presenting a worst-case scenario of the Iranian nuclear threat, concedes that Tehran will not be able to build such weapons for at least three years.

Even three years is a significant amount of time to weigh policy options. Only the most eager Iran hawks argue that the danger is imminent. Given their lengthy, inaccurate track record on the issue, they have little credibility. Former CIA director James Woolsey, for example, asserted in February 1993 that Iran might well have the bomb by 2001.

The most recent thesis of the uberhawks is that, while Iran might not be able to build nukes on its own in the immediate future, North Korea, whose program is more advanced, might sell Tehran a bomb or two. No one has ever presented any evidence that Pyongyang would take such a step. Indeed, it is unlikely that North Korea would do so, knowing that not only the United States but other countries—including Pyongyang's principal allies, Russia and China—would be most displeased, and might respond with punitive measures.

Leaked information from the latest report by the International Atomic Energy Agency indicates that Iran is still not on the verge of barging into the global nuclear weapons club. As the *New York Times* reported late last month, there is evidence that Iran is continuing to enrich uranium, but no indication that the level of enrichment is anywhere near that needed for weapons production. Indeed, the enrichment level is consistent with that used for peaceful power generation purposes—precisely what Tehran has insisted that it is doing all along.

Given the record of faulty, alarmist speculation about Iran's nuclear program, we should be extremely skeptical of new predictions that Tehran is on the brink of becoming a nuclear-weapons power. When a potential threat is measured in years, policymakers can consider strategies carefully rather than taking precipitous action.

As we learned in the Cold War and in our continued containment of Cuba and North Korea, we have time, and an abiding ability to wait out even the most odious enemies. U.S. leaders should bear that in mind

before they embrace reckless suggestions to launch preventive air strikes against Iran's nuclear installations, which could easily plunge the Persian Gulf region into a general war. It would be tragic enough if we were compelled to take such a risk to neutralize an imminent threat to our security. It would be doubly tragic if we ignited a terrible war merely to thwart a remote, hypothetical threat.

Orange County Register, September 19, 2006

U.S. Should Try for a Grand Bargain with Iran

Iran would be at or near the top of a list of countries Americans would least like to see have nuclear weapons, and the reasons for apprehension have deepened dramatically in the past year with the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iran under the mullahs since the revolution of 1979 has been a weird and ominous country. With Ahmadinejad's new prominence, the weirdness quotient has reached new levels. Iran is now headed by an individual who expresses the hope that Israel be wiped off the map and denies that the Holocaust ever occurred. Those are sentiments not found in civilized circles anywhere in the world.

If one could wave a magic wand and eliminate Iran's nuclear program, all responsible governments would be grasping for that wand. Alas, in the real world such magical solutions do not exist. U.S. policymakers have only a choice among problematic options. Some choices, though, are clearly better than others.

Above all, as policymakers consider the various options, they need to avoid a sense of panic. U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that Iran will not be able to build nuclear weapons for another five to 10 years. Prominent independent experts agree with that assessment. Even the Israeli government, which has an obvious interest in presenting a worst-case scenario of the Iranian nuclear threat, concedes that Tehran will not be able to build such weapons for another three years. Based on recent information, some Bush administration policymakers now embrace a similar conclusion, although the intelligence community has not changed its official estimate. Yet even three years is a significant amount of time to craft a response.

Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, scholars at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, note that most government and independent analyses of Iran's nuclear program in the 1990s predicted

that the country would be able to build nuclear weapons by 2000. That clearly did not happen. The reason for the faulty estimates, according to Cordesman and Al-Rodhan, is that they “often were based on the unrealistic assumption that Iran’s nuclear program would evolve without interruptions, technical difficulties, or voluntary suspensions.”

Given that track record, we should be doubly skeptical of newer predictions that Tehran is on the brink of becoming a nuclear power. The bulk of expert opinion both inside and outside the U.S. government now concludes that Iran is still a long time away from having a nuclear arsenal. When a potential threat is measured in years, it allows policymakers to carefully consider alternative ways of addressing the problem. There is no need for precipitous action.

Although it is possible that negotiations between the leading powers in the international community and Iran may produce a settlement to the vexing issue of Iran’s nuclear program, it is more likely that those negotiations will fail. If that happens, U.S. policymakers face a set of highly imperfect options.

The Five Options

One option—and the most likely initial response—is to seek a UN Security Council resolution imposing economic sanctions on Tehran. However, sanctions have a poor record of getting regimes to abandon high-priority policies. Even if Russia and China can be induced to overcome their reluctance to endorse sanctions, it is unlikely that such measures would halt Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons.

A second option is to intensify efforts to subvert Iran’s clerical regime. Washington already has a modest program to do that under the Iran Freedom Support Act. Unfortunately, such a strategy may backfire, undermining the domestic legitimacy of Iranian dissidents. Moreover, there is no certainty that a democratic Iran would choose to be non-nuclear.

Option three is to launch preemptive air strikes against Iran’s nuclear installations. That is the most unwise strategy. At most, such strikes would delay, not eliminate, Tehran’s program. There is also a grave risk that Iran would retaliate with the full range of options at its disposal, including attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq and through proxy organizations. Attacking Iran would also further alienate Muslim populations around the world, creating the very real prospect of a war of civilizations.

Option four is to reluctantly accept Iran as a member of the global nuclear weapons club and rely on the deterrent power of America’s vast nuclear arsenal. While that strategy is not without risk, the United States has successfully deterred other volatile and unsavory regimes, most notably Maoist China during that country’s Cultural Revolution.

The best option, though, is to try to strike a grand bargain with Iran. Washington should offer to normalize diplomatic and economic relations with Iran in exchange for Tehran's agreement to open its nuclear program to rigorous, on-demand international inspections to guarantee that there is no diversion of nuclear material from peaceful purposes to building weapons.

Try for a Grand Bargain

We should make a serious diplomatic effort to get Iran to give up its quest for nuclear weapons—and that means going substantially beyond the scope of the EU-3-led negotiations. Washington should propose a grand bargain to Tehran. That means giving an assurance that the United States will not use force against Iran the way we did against such non-nuclear adversaries as Serbia and Iraq. It also means offering restored diplomatic relations and normal economic relations. In return, Iran would be required to open its nuclear program to unfettered international inspections to guarantee that the program is used solely for peaceful power-generation purposes.

The strategy of offering a grand bargain also attempts to understand why Iran might be pursuing a nuclear weapons program and what it is likely to take to get that country to choose a different course. Why would Iran want to build nuclear weapons? In attempting to answer that question, we need to look at why the vast majority of countries decide to remain non-nuclear. Only a small number have ventured down the path of creating a nuclear capability, and some of them have turned around while on that path. South Africa is a notable example.

Why Nations Choose to Build Nuclear Weapons

There are important reasons why most nations choose not to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. For one thing, it is very expensive. The opportunity cost to most societies is regarded as prohibitive. Occasionally, a poor country such as North Korea will be willing to make a nuclear-weapons program the highest priority, but most governments will not make that sacrifice. A decision to go nuclear has important adverse diplomatic repercussions as well. Trying to build a nuclear arsenal is not the way to win friends in the international community. The majority of governments become extremely agitated when a country seeks to break out of the nonproliferation system and become a nuclear weapons state, and any would-be nuclear power has to take that hostility into consideration. Finally, by trying to acquire a nuclear arsenal, a country may trigger or exacerbate a regional arms race, and at the end of the process end up no more secure than it was at the beginning. In fact, it might be even less secure.

On the other hand, there are some important reasons why a country might decide to go nuclear. One reason is prestige. The global nuclear weapons club is a very exclusive association. All five permanent members of the UN Security Council are nuclear weapons states, and a sixth, India, is likely to become a permanent member of the council in the next few years. Countries that have nuclear weapons are treated differently than are non-nuclear powers. Before they became nuclear powers in 1998, India and Pakistan were treated with less than a great deal of respect by other international actors. India was considered a chronic Third World under-achiever, and Pakistan was viewed as a problem state—if not a potential failed state. Consider how those countries are treated now, since they have joined the nuclear weapons club. It is markedly different.

Another motive for going nuclear is to deter or possibly intimidate a regional adversary. That appeared to be a consideration for both India and Pakistan. India had long sought to overawe its smaller neighbor, and possessing a nuclear arsenal eventually became part of that strategy. Pakistan, in turn, concluded that it had to neutralize India's growing conventional military advantage as well as its new nuclear capability. A nuclear deterrent was the most decisive and cost-effective way to achieve that goal. Beyond its regional rivalry with Pakistan, India was also concerned about the rising military power of China. There was no question the perceived Chinese threat was a factor in India's decision to go nuclear, as then-minister of defense George Fernandes has emphasized.

In addition to the motive of deterrence within a region, there is a potential motive of broader deterrence—especially to deter the United States. With regard to that factor, we need to be realistic about the unintended consequences of some U.S. actions. The United States has taken major military action on ten occasions since the end of the Cold War. Although many Americans may think that those episodes were justified, other countries don't necessarily see it the same way. In particular, countries such as Iran and North Korea have seen how the United States has treated non-nuclear adversaries such as Serbia and Iraq, and that may have led them to conclude that the only reliable deterrent to U.S. coercion was a nuclear arsenal.

Why Iran Might Want to Be a Nuclear Power

So what are Iran's possible motives for going nuclear? Prestige is certainly one consideration—that was a factor even when the Shah was in power. But prestige does not appear to be the dominant reason in Iran's case today. Deterrence, both regional and extraregional, seems to be a more important consideration. Iran is located in a volatile region, surrounded by hostile neighbors. Russia, Israel, Pakistan, and India all have nuclear weapons already, so regional deterrence issues probably loom

large for Tehran. Iran very likely is also reacting to U.S. actions. President Bush's "axis of evil" speech, linking Iran to Iraq and North Korea, came as a prelude to an invasion and occupation of Iraq. A policymaker in Tehran (or Pyongyang) seeing his country linked to Iraq in that fashion might well assume that his country will also be on the U.S. hit list at some point.

In addition to President Bush's hostile rhetoric, the United States has deployed its forces in ways that many Iranians find menacing. U.S. troops are already in several Persian Gulf states, and have been in the region since the first Persian Gulf war. Additional forces have now been deployed to some of the Central Asian republics, to Afghanistan, and, of course, most recently to Iraq. To leaders in Tehran, those moves look suspiciously like an encirclement strategy with Iran as the next target for U. S. military action. Iran's apparent response in wanting to build nuclear weapons is not irrational; it is quite logical.

A grand bargain is the one offer that might induce Iran to abandon the quest for a nuclear arsenal, despite the various powerful incentives to pursue that goal. Normalized relations, an end to economic sanctions, the removal of any threat of a campaign of forcible regime change, and a settlement of Tehran's multibillion-dollar financial claims are very appealing carrots that Washington can offer. But it is hard to imagine Iran giving up its long-standing effort to build a nuclear arsenal for much less than that package of incentives.

It is possible, though, that Tehran would spurn a proposed grand bargain, despite the attractiveness of the incentives. The Iranian political elite still seems uncertain about whether even to seek a rapprochement with the United States. Those who propose a grand bargain also have to acknowledge that Iran may be unalterably determined to join the global nuclear weapons club for reasons of prestige and security. But we will never know unless we make the offer.

Signs That Tehran Might Want an Improved Relationship with Washington

There are intriguing signs that at least some portions of the clerical regime would like an improved relationship with the United States. According to the *Washington Post*, the Iranian government approached the Bush administration in 2002—after Bush's hostile "axis of evil" comment in his State of the Union address—and proposed cooperating with the United States against al Qaeda. As a gesture of good faith, they informed Washington of the identities of 290 members of al Qaeda that Iran had captured and sent back to their home countries. The Bush administration spurned that overture. Aides to Vice President Dick Cheney

and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld argued that any diplomatic engagement would “legitimate” Iran and other state sponsors of terrorism.

In the spring of 2006 Ahmadinejad surprised Washington and the rest of the international community by sending a lengthy letter to President George Bush—the first communication to an American chief executive from an Iranian head of state in decades. It was a curious document—a rambling 18-page treatise on history, religion, politics, and world affairs. As a foundation for serious, substantive negotiations on the Iranian nuclear crisis, the letter was decidedly inadequate. Nevertheless, it was a sign that even the hardest of the Iranian hardliners was interested in some dialogue with Washington.

Ahmadinejad’s letter was not the only feeler for negotiations. A few days later, *Time* magazine published an open letter from Hassan Rohani, representative of Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. That letter was considerably more focused and substantive than Ahmadinejad’s missive. The former Speaker of the Iranian parliament, Mehdi Karroubi, has been perhaps the boldest of all in favoring a rapprochement with the United States. “This silence between the two countries cannot go on forever,” he told the Associated Press in May. “The ice should be broken and the walls of mistrust should fall.”

Although those initiatives may have been a factor that finally induced Washington to join the EU-3-led negotiations with Tehran, U.S. leaders still avoid any suggestion of bilateral negotiations with the Iranian government. Indeed, Secretary of State Rice went out of her way to stress that U.S. participation in the multilateral talks in no way implied that Washington was willing to consider a grand bargain. That attitude needs to change. Bilateral negotiations will be necessary to pursue the strategy of a grand bargain, because the United States holds most of the carrots that Iran desires. The European powers (and Russia and China) might be able to facilitate such negotiations, but progress will be unlikely unless there are direct talks between Tehran and Washington.

And we have little to lose by making the offer of a grand bargain—unless we were to let negotiations drag on endlessly. Proposing the grand bargain to Tehran and indicating that the offer would remain on the table for a maximum of six months would have no significant downside. If the Iranians rejected the proposal—or if they simply stalled—all of the other options would still be available.

The Need to Deal with Obnoxious Regimes

To create the possibility of achieving a grand bargain, however, the United States has to overcome an entrenched reluctance to negotiate with repressive and obnoxious regimes. We simply do not have the luxury of confining our diplomacy to friendly governments. One of the great

challenges of effective diplomacy is to deal with, and get results from, regimes that most Americans would prefer did not exist. Unfortunately, that is an unpleasant reality that seems to elude recent generations of U.S. policymakers. Since the days of Woodrow Wilson, Washington's typical response to unfriendly, repressive governments (especially of small countries) is to try to isolate and berate them. Before Wilson, the general U.S. practice was not to apply a moral litmus test for diplomatic relations. That policy was far more realistic and productive. The current approach is akin to the maturity level one would expect from an elementary school student: "I don't like you, and I'm not going to speak to you." We need a far more sophisticated, flexible, and mature approach to deal with Iran.

If Iran turns down the proposal for a grand bargain, Washington's fallback position should be to rely on deterrence, despite the limitations of that strategy and its unpleasant side effect of creating incentives for greater nuclear proliferation. The one thing we should not do is start yet another war that would further destabilize the Persian Gulf region and threaten the lives and welfare of millions of people.

World Politics Watch, October 19, 2006

Evidence Suggests Iran Wouldn't Pull Trigger

Coauthored with Justin Logan

French President Jacques Chirac caused a stir last week by suggesting that an Iranian nuclear weapon would have little offensive use. "Where will it drop it, this bomb?" Chirac mused. "On Israel? It would not have gone 200 meters into the atmosphere before Tehran would be razed."

Though he later retracted this diplomatic faux pas, Chirac's remark represents a fundamental reality.

Some hawks in the Iran debate argue that the Iranian leadership is not rational, and hence, fundamentally undeterrable.

Bernard Lewis, the Princeton historian and adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney, argues that Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Iranian government "clearly believe" that "the cosmic struggle at the end of time . . . ending in the final victory of the forces of good over evil" has begun. Israeli historian Benny Morris posits that a nuclear Iran would bring about a "second Holocaust."

If Lewis and Morris were right, there would be no point even contemplating deterring a nuclear Iran—Israel's and even America's nuclear arsenals would be useless against it. Thankfully, their reasoning is flawed and their evidence thin.

First, Ahmadinejad is not a Stalinesque—or even Putinesque—center of power in Tehran. The Iranian president has increasingly been a target of official criticism, and recent reports indicate that he may not remain in power to the end of his four-year term.

Iran's powerful Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is a more significant political player than Ahmadinejad. Though Khamenei also embraces odious ideas, it is important to evaluate Iran's actions, not just its rhetoric.

Consider the Iran-Iraq War. Smoldering with radicalism from the Islamic revolution, Iran's early rhetoric was uncompromising, and in November 1981 it issued clear proclamations that it had no intention of stopping the war as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power.

By 1988, however, a long string of devastating tactical routs had made clear that outright strategic defeat was possible, so the Iranian leadership changed course. They sued for peace, jettisoning their original objective of deposing Hussein and taking a deal that left Iran on the light side of the postwar balance of power.

That the clerical leadership saw this reality and decided to end the conflict suggests that for all its religious bombast, it was making rational strategic calculations. In hindsight, even extreme radicals like Khomeini—who were viewed at the time as irrational—did not meet the description.

The evidence indicates that Iran's leadership remains rational today. Though it would certainly terrify the Israeli population, Iran has never passed chemical or biological weapons to Hezbollah or other client organizations.

Why? Most likely because they fear Israeli reprisals. And if the Iranians fear Israel's response to a chemical or biological attack, they are certainly aware how much more severely Israel would respond to a nuclear assault, whether by proxy or directly launched from Iran.

Never in history have leaders made a decision that was absolutely certain to destroy their own country in a matter of hours. Until someone can come up with definitive evidence that Iran is the first such country, we must work from the assumption that Chirac's reasoning is right.

Kansas City Star, February 7, 2007

Talk to Iran: It's Working with North Korea

For several years the United States has dealt with two major nuclear proliferation crises, one involving North Korea, the other Iran. The United States has accomplished some progress with North Korea, which says it has shut down its reactor at Yongbyon and readmitted inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency. The same cannot be said of Iran, where there is no indication the impasse will break anytime soon.

Instead of continuing to pursue a policy that has yielded no positive results, or even worse, deciding to escalate the confrontation, the Bush administration should engage Iran with the same proactive diplomacy it has used toward North Korea. As distasteful as it might be to U.S. leaders, that would require an unprecedented willingness to engage the regime in Tehran.

Washington made little progress with the North Koreans until the United States ended its refusal to enter negotiations before they ceased all violations of the 1994 agreement, which was supposed to freeze their nuclear program. Eventually, the United States succumbed to pressure from China and East Asian allies and agreed to multilateral negotiations in the form of the six-party talks. But it has only been in the past six months or so that the United States has engaged in direct negotiations with North Korea.

These talks were crucial to the breakthrough that has taken place, and they have involved far more than a narrow focus on the nuclear issue. Washington and Pyongyang are now considering such matters as the normalization of diplomatic and economic relations, the removal of North Korea from the State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism, and a treaty to formally end the Korean War.

A U.S. diplomatic initiative involving Iran would require similar characteristics. Direct, high-level negotiations between Washington and Tehran—far more rigorous than the sporadic U.S.-Iranian talks on Iraq—would be imperative. A useful step would be for President Bush to appoint a prominent special envoy, perhaps former secretary of state James Baker, to represent the United States.

Moreover, those negotiations would have to concern more than Iran's nuclear program or the future of Iraq. Indeed, they would need to encompass the entire range of U.S.-Iranian relations. Topics would have to

include removal of U.S. and UN economic sanctions and the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries, as well as the explicit end of Tehran's quest to build nuclear weapons.

One should have no illusions about such an initiative. The obstacles to success would be even greater than they have been with North Korea. Whereas North Korea is a small, impoverished state, Iran is a midsize power with considerable political and economic clout. And although Russia helps Iran with its nuclear program, it lacks the patronage power that China has exerted on its client, North Korea.

The nature of a resolution of the nuclear issue would also likely be different. North Korea has (at least in principle) agreed to give up its entire nuclear program in exchange for concessions from the United States, Japan, and South Korea. It is unlikely that Tehran would agree to such a comprehensive de-nuclearization. Washington may have to accept that reality and focus on achieving sufficient international safeguards to ensure that material from a nuclear power program was not diverted to weapons production.

All of these obstacles are daunting, but if Washington does not adopt a strategy similar to its recent approach toward North Korea, it will soon face highly unpleasant options: accepting Iran as a nuclear-weapons state or launching military strikes to prevent that result.

It's worth trying diplomacy before we reach that point.

Orange County Register, July 25, 2007

PART 6

Prospects for Peace
and Democracy in
the Middle East

Introduction

America's Middle East policy has undergone a strange evolution during the Bush years. When President Bush first took office, he and his advisers seemed inclined to adopt a restrained and skeptical attitude regarding that perpetually turbulent region. In marked contrast to administrations since the days of Lyndon Johnson, which all sought to be the architect of the "Great Middle East Peace Accord," the Bush administration resisted pressure from both its European allies and domestic sources to pursue a pro-active policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. National security adviser Condoleezza Rice epitomized that attitude when she rebuffed calls for an activist U.S. role by observing that one cannot make bread out of a stone. When Israeli and Palestinian leaders became serious about peace—and showed tangible evidence of doing so—Washington stood ready to be helpful, she said, but before then there seemed little point for the United States to expend energy on the issue.

That stance, although wildly unpopular with policy wonks and the punditocracy on both sides of the Atlantic, was correct. Unfortunately, the events of 9-11 drastically altered the Bush administration's views and intentions regarding virtually every aspect of Middle East policy. In the years since the attacks, U.S. officials have again sought to prod the Israelis and Palestinians into making the necessary compromises for peace—with as little success as their predecessors during the past four decades. Worse, the cautious realism that Bush and Rice seemed to embrace during the 2000 presidential campaign and their initial months in office disappeared with respect to the Middle East even more than it did regarding other parts of the world. Crusading Wilsonianism quickly replaced that prudence and common sense about the limits of American power.

Washington was now determined to bring democracy and liberty to the troubled Middle East—at the point of American bayonets, if need be. Iraq was the first installment in that campaign, but the objective was much broader; it envisioned nothing less than the political, economic, and social transformation of the entire region. The spread of democracy was the panacea that would drain the swamp that was producing Islamic terrorism, thereby effectively ending that threat. President Bush became so enthusiastic about the exporting democracy agenda that by his second term he made such astonishing assertions as the one that Muslims wanted to be free as much as Methodists did.

I and other critics winced at the simplistic and culturally illiterate nature of this new U.S. policy. We warned that without the necessary preconditions—especially a vibrant civil society and a pervasive culture of tolerance—democratic elections would merely empower demagogues and religious extremists. Such warnings were validated when Iraqi voters cast their ballots overwhelmingly for sectarian parties and rejected the more secular factions that sought to bridge the ethnic and religious divisions in that country. The folly of democracy as a panacea for the Middle East became even more evident a year later when voters in the Palestinian territories gave Hamas a decisive majority in parliamentary elections and rebuffed the more secular (although hardly moderate) Fatah. If free elections were held in the near future in such countries as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, the results would almost certainly produce governments dominated by anti-American religious zealots.

Washington's democracy project for the Middle East now lies in ruins. The reality is that the initial instincts of Bush and Rice were correct. The United States needs to adopt a lower profile, not play a more activist role, regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the entire array of troubles throughout the region.

United States Can't Do the Impossible in Middle East

Pressure is growing both at home and abroad for the Bush administration to take a more active role in trying to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Secretary of State Colin Powell's just-concluded trip to the Middle East was the first manifestation of that activist strategy. Predictably, the results were meager and disappointing.

Those people who insist that the United States must "do something" to end the bloodletting are ignoring reality and demanding the impossible.

The horrific violence will end when, and only when, the two parties become tired of the bloodshed and decide that they can gain more from negotiations than from force. Otherwise, a hyperactive role by Washington merely gives each side an incentive to manipulate the United States into putting pressure on the opposing side to make concessions.

Neither the Israeli government nor the Palestinian Authority is even remotely close to the point of seriously desiring peace. Indeed, conditions are the least conducive for a meaningful peace process that they have been since the Six Day War in 1967. Under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon,

Israel has the most hard-line government in its history. And the wave of suicide bombings is ample testimony to the radicalization of the Palestinian community.

Holding an international peace conference under such conditions would be an exercise in futility. Equally futile would be an effort to make the recent Saudi proposal the basis for a new round of negotiations.

Those ideas are relatively innocuous, however, compared with some dreadful trial balloons that pundits and policy experts have sent aloft in recent weeks. The worst idea is to put an international peacekeeping force, including U.S. troops, into the West Bank and Gaza.

Indeed, it is a misnomer to refer to such a mission as “peacekeeping.” There is no peace to keep at the moment, nor is there likely to be in the foreseeable future.

Deploying troops in the West Bank and Gaza under the current conditions would be similar to the disastrous United Nations “peacemaking” ventures in Somalia and Bosnia. It would be especially dangerous to have U.S. forces take part. They would become prime targets for Palestinian extremists eager to strike at Israel’s chief patron.

The Bush administration’s initial instinct to adopt a low-profile role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was correct. National security adviser Condoleezza Rice had it right several months ago when she observed that the United States could not make bread out of a stone.

All Americans want to see the bloodshed in the Middle East come to an end. But that is a task the belligerents must do for themselves. Although the United States may be a superpower, it cannot perform miracles.

USA Today, April 18, 2002—Reprinted with permission from *USA Today*

Roadmap to Nowhere

President Bush has put his prestige on the line with a bold initiative to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unfortunately, that “road map for peace” will likely lead to another dead end.

Israel’s acceptance of the road map was highly conditional. Only after the Bush administration reversed its initial position and agreed that there could be changes to the plan did the Israeli government endorse it. By permitting changes, though, the United States has set the stage for endless demands and quibbling by both sides.

The initial reaction in the Palestinian community was even worse. An upsurge of suicide bombings greeted the road map.

There are admittedly some faint reasons for hope. Ariel Sharon shocked his supporters by conceding that the continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was not healthy for Israel. The new Palestinian prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, conceded that negotiations must consist of give and take, a refreshing change from Yasser Arafat's philosophy of "take and take."

At best, this is merely the faint dawn of wisdom on both sides. But before we become too optimistic, we should remember that every U.S. administration since Lyndon Johnson's has tried to be the architect of an Israeli-Palestinian accord. All have failed.

Even worse, high-profile U.S. initiatives have established a pattern of raising hopes to unrealistic levels and then having those hopes dashed. The resulting disillusionment leads to a hardening of positions by both sides and an escalation of violence.

That dangerous pattern occurred most recently with President Bill Clinton's push for peace at Camp David. The failure of those talks led to Israeli voters replacing the moderate Ehud Barak with the hard-line Sharon. On the Palestinian side, it led to the horrific campaign of suicide bombings.

Israelis and Palestinians will achieve peace only when they conclude that they can gain far more from negotiations and compromise than from violence. At that point, they can achieve peace without a high-profile U.S. role. Until then, no amount of creative diplomacy, prodding, or bribery by the United States will produce a breakthrough.

USA Today, June 2, 2003—Reprinted with permission from *USA Today*

Transforming the Middle East— Washington's High Stakes Gamble

It is increasingly clear that the Bush administration's nation-building policy in Iraq is merely one component of an ambitious project to transform the Middle East politically. That goal is consistent with the principles that President Bush expressed in his second Inaugural address, in which he announced that "it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in the world."

Bush's bold statement symbolizes what Fred Barnes, executive editor of the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*, has described as a "shake-up-the-world" view. Such an approach normally does not appeal to the most powerful country in the international system. Historically, hegemonic

powers, because they owe their dominant position to current international arrangements, tend to pursue conservative policies designed to preserve and enhance the status quo. Upstart revisionist powers are the ones that tend to embrace revolutionary policies. It is unprecedented for an incumbent hegemon to advocate revolutionary change. Thus, the Bush administration is venturing into uncharted waters.

The rationale for the administration's policy is not merely that it would be humane to bring the blessings of democracy to the Middle East (and other regions). That is certainly one component, but the president and his foreign-policy team also believe that promoting democracy is the most effective anti-terror strategy and will, therefore, enhance America's security. "We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands," the president stressed in his Inaugural address.

In a speech to the National Defense University on March 8, Bush reiterated the argument that strengthening democracy is the only hope of stemming terrorism and protecting America's security. "It should be clear that the advance of democracy leads to peace, because governments that respect the rights of their people also respect the rights of their neighbors," he said. "It should be clear the best antidote to radicalism and terror is the tolerance kindled in free societies."

In both speeches, the president conflated democracy and liberty. That is a potentially dangerous misconception, because the former does not necessarily produce the latter. Fareed Zakaria, formerly an editor at *Foreign Affairs* and now at *Newsweek*, aptly used the term "illiberal democracy" to describe political systems that have most of the democratic mechanics (periodic, more or less competitive elections; a national legislature with credible powers) but lack the rule of law, meaningful protections for civil liberties, and strong, vibrant civil societies. There are a considerable number of illiberal democracies in the world today—most notably Russia under Vladimir Putin. Moreover, even some of the democracies that most Americans would consider liberal often engage in thoroughly illiberal behavior toward certain groups. Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and the discriminatory policies of Estonia and Latvia toward their ethnic Russian inhabitants are prominent examples.

It seems a safe assumption that the Bush administration hopes for the emergence of liberal rather than illiberal democracies in the Middle East. True, even the latter might be an improvement on the assortment of full-blown autocracies that are the norm in the region today. When members of the Bush administration speak of a political transformation of the Middle East, however, it is apparent that they have something more ambitious in mind than modest improvements. The question then arises: If democratic dominoes fall throughout the Middle East, what will be the

probable characteristics of successor regimes? Of course, no one can be certain about either the short-term or the long-term consequences of such a volatile process, but the nature of public opinion in the Middle East offers some hints—and rather sobering hints—about the likely near-term results.

Public-opinion surveys in the Middle East reveal a massive reservoir of hostility toward U.S. policies. It cannot be emphasized enough that the original source of that hostility was largely a reaction against Washington's *policies*, not American culture or values. Michael Scheuer stressed that distinction in his seminal book, *Imperial Hubris*, but he is not the only expert to debunk the myth that the radical Islamic terrorist threat arose from a reflexive hatred of American liberty. Even the report of the September 11 Commission conceded that hostility in the Islamic world was directed at specific U.S. policies. Likewise, the Pentagon's Defense Science Board Task Force Report on Strategic Communication issued in September 2004 concluded bluntly: "Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,' but rather, they hate our policies." Unfortunately, that may be changing; there are now signs that their anger at the United States is becoming less discriminating.

The two most recent and comprehensive surveys were those conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press in March 2004, which assessed public opinion in Turkey, Morocco, Jordan, and Pakistan (as well as five European countries), and a six-nation survey of Arab countries (Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt) conducted by Zogby International in June 2004. Both found widespread opposition to U.S. policies and a lack of trust in Washington's motives. The trends also were not encouraging; the extent of opposition was greater than in previous surveys.

The Pew survey found that 66 percent of respondents in Morocco, 73 percent in Turkey, and 57 percent in Pakistan did not believe that the United States was sincere in her desire to promote democracy. Similarly, 66 percent in Morocco, 51 percent in Jordan, and 58 percent in Pakistan believed that Washington was using the "War on Terror" as a pretext for other objectives. When asked what America's real motives were, large percentages cited such goals as controlling Middle Eastern oil, protecting Israel, and trying to dominate the world. More than 70 percent of Jordanians cited each of the first two motives, and 61 percent cited the third motive. When asked to rate Osama bin Laden, 45 percent of respondents in Morocco had a favorable opinion; 55 percent in Jordan; and 65 percent in Pakistan. When asked to rate George W. Bush, the favorable results were 8 percent, 3 percent, and 7 percent, respectively.

The Zogby survey revealed similar results. For example, 85 percent of respondents in Saudi Arabia, 86 percent in Lebanon, and 86 percent in the UAE considered U.S. policies toward Arabs to be unfair. When asked

what their first thought was when they hear the word *America*, 49.5 percent in Saudi Arabia answered either “unfair foreign policy” or “imperialistic”—far more than for any other characteristics. In Jordan, the figure was 47.5 percent; in Lebanon, 31 percent; in the UAE, 37.5 percent; and in Egypt, 32 percent. Even worse, most of the other responses were neutral to negative in nature. When asked what the United States could do to improve her image in the Arab world, the top three answers were: Stop supporting Israel; get out of Iraq; and change overall U.S. Middle East policy.

In short, attitudes toward the United States in the Middle East are extremely and increasingly negative. When that is combined with the pervasive evidence of mounting public enthusiasm for conservative brands of Islam, the prospects for the emergence of Western-style democracies in the region are not favorable. The very strong showing of Hamas-backed candidates in municipal elections in the West Bank and Gaza and similar impressive showings by Islamic fundamentalist candidates in Saudi Arabia's recent local elections are harbingers. Moreover, if democratic systems accurately reflect public sentiment, the prospects for pro-American governments being elected are even more dismal.

The Bush administration may win its high-stakes gamble to transform the Middle East into a bastion of liberal, freedom-loving democracies, and, if it does, both that region and the world as a whole would be much better off. I would also concede that U.S. officials are right when they argue that the existing policy is probably not sustainable much longer and, in any case, has produced malignant results. Yet the odds are against the administration winning its bet.

It is imperative to avoid the trap of assuming that the only choices are the status quo or a grandiose project of democratic nation-building. There are several things that Washington could do to improve America's reputation in the Middle East—and, indeed, throughout the Islamic world.

First, exit Iraq promptly and completely. Few events have enraged opinion in the Islamic world (especially the Arab world) more than the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. The pervasive belief that Washington intends to maintain permanent bases in that country exacerbates the situation. The United States has allayed some of the worst suspicions that Muslims harbored by orchestrating democratic elections for the Iraqi national assembly. It is essential, however, that the Bush administration exploit the window of opportunity afforded by those elections to transfer responsibility for internal security to the new government and begin to withdraw U.S. forces. That withdrawal needs to be finished no later than six months after the new constitution is adopted and nationwide elections are held for a successor government. Washington's position should be that, from then on, Iraq's fate is up to Iraqis.

Second, adopt an arm's-length relationship with friendly autocrats. Another potent source of anger among Muslim publics is the cozy relationship the United States has maintained with the likes of Hosni Mubarak, the Saudi royal family, and a succession of Pakistani strongmen. There may be times when vital U.S. security interests require some cooperation with unsavory regimes. At the moment, for example, the United States has little choice but to work with Pakistani dictator Pervez Musharraf to eradicate the remaining elements of al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and western Pakistan. Even in cases where cooperation is unavoidable, however, the United States should refrain from expressing approval of the regime—much less appearing to be the regime's patron or bodyguard. Washington's multibillion-dollar subsidy of the Mubarak government is precisely the kind of relationship we should avoid. When the United States gets too close to autocratic allies, she risks becoming the target of popular wrath when those regimes are eventually overthrown. That should have been the lesson of America's excessively close relationship with the shah of Iran from 1953 to 1979. Instead of moving from the traditional policy of propping up Middle Eastern thugs to a policy of seeking to *unseat* Middle Eastern thugs, we should adopt a third course: leaving the thugs alone as much as possible and waiting to see how they fare with their own people.

Third, adopt an even-handed policy on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Most Muslims believe that the United States reflexively supports all Israeli governmental actions. Washington must make a greater effort to distance itself from Israel's policies and to phase out its three-billion-dollar per year subsidy to that country. The United States cannot be an honest broker in a complex dispute when she acts so ostentatiously as the financial and diplomatic supporter of one party. In addition to taking a more neutral position, the United States needs to adopt a lower profile. U.S. leaders should make it clear to both Israel and the Palestinians that Washington cannot be the architect of a peace accord. The belligerents will have to do that themselves, with the United States playing, at most, a low-key mediation role that is requested by both sides. Arab populations may not be entirely happy with that posture, since they want Washington to pressure Israel and "deliver" Israeli concessions. But they are more likely to respect a clearly principled position than the hypocritical policy the United States has pursued to this point.

Fourth, greatly narrow the doctrine of preemptive war. There may be occasions when the United States must take military action to thwart an imminent threat to her security. That is different, though, from the Bush administration's conception of preemptive war, which appears to be that the United States has a right to attack another country if there is even the possibility that the country might, at some point in the indefinite

future, pose a security threat. The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq both frightened and angered Muslim populations. The fear that the United States may attack Iran because of that country's nuclear program has intensified both the fear and the anger. All too many Muslims believe that the United States intends to occupy and dominate the entire Middle East. Narrowing the doctrine of preemptive war, combined with a clear statement from the White House that the United States has no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of Muslim countries absent a clear and compelling threat to America's security, would help to decrease anti-American sentiment over time.

There is little doubt that the winds of political change are beginning to sweep the Middle East. Supporters of the Bush administration's policies argue that the U.S. mission in Iraq has been the essential catalyst. It likely has been a factor, but there are others that have been equally important. Yasser Arafat's death has created hope for the first time in years that there may be a chance for meaningful progress toward solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The assassination of Lebanon's former prime minister Rafik Hariri triggered an upsurge of nationalist resistance to Syria's occupation of that country. Those developments had nothing to do with the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq or the holding of democratic elections there.

An even more crucial factor may be the emergence of Arab mass-media outlets. The existence of Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and other satellite networks (together with growing access to the Internet) has broken the monopoly on information that autocratic regimes had long exercised. Muslim populations are now getting significant, unfiltered information about the conduct of those regimes, and their sense of outrage is beginning to be translated into political action. Although the autocracies still have potent mechanism to retain their hold on power, significant political change is likely in most Middle Eastern countries over the next decade.

The United States may not be entirely happy with the nature of those changes, however. It is symptomatic of the dual-edged quality of change in the Middle East that Al Jazeera, which has done so much to break the informational monopoly of the corrupt autocrats, also features numerous news stories with a pronounced anti-American perspective.

One might hope that the Bush administration wins its high-stakes gamble to promote the emergence of liberal, secular, pro-American democracies in the Middle East. That, however, is not the way to bet. If democracy sweeps the Middle East anytime soon, it is more likely to bring to power populist, Islamist, anti-American regimes. That will certainly be the outcome if Washington does not alter the policies that have so infuriated Muslim populations. Before the United States proceeds further down the

path of vigorous promotion of democracy in the Middle East, Americans had better ask themselves if they are prepared to live with the results.

Chronicles, June 2005—Reprinted with permission from *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, a publication of the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois

“Democracy and Demagoguery in the Middle East”

One of the more puzzling aspects of the Iraq misadventure has been President Bush’s serene confidence of ultimate success amid the mounting evidence that the mission is crumbling. We now have some important insights into Bush’s thinking from an interview with *National Review* editor Rich Lowry and other conservative journalists. Lowry quotes the president extensively regarding prospects for democracy in the Middle East.

What emerges from Bush’s remarks is the picture of a man who largely rejects the role of culture in determining political values and systems. Embracing the “universality of freedom,” he states bluntly that “Muslims desire to be free just like Methodists desire to be free.” He adds that “nothing will change my belief.” Later, he states that governments can transform societies (citing the example of Japan after World War II) and that the emergence of governments based on liberty is “inevitable.”

Bush’s view is not merely simplistic, it is dangerous. The president assumes that when people in the Middle East and people in the West speak of freedom, they have the same concept in mind. There is virtually no evidence to support such a belief. For all too many people in the Middle East, freedom means the ability to live the way the local mullah tells them that they ought to live. Moreover, the foundation of an effective democracy is not some subjective desire of a person to live in freedom (however defined), it is the willingness to allow fellow citizens—who may have different values and lifestyles—to live in freedom. That crucial spirit of tolerance is tragically underdeveloped in Middle East societies. So is a pervasive attitude that political, economic, and religious disputes must be settled solely by peaceful means.

Without those two pillars—the essence of a vibrant civil society—prospects for even quasi-liberal democracies in the foreseeable future are extremely dim. Even in Turkey, where such conditions are markedly stronger than in Arab countries, the political system is, at best, a shaky, rather illiberal democracy. Indeed, putting in place the mechanisms of electoral democracy before the necessary cultural conditions are strong

(as the United States has done in Iraq) is likely to make bad situations even worse. Pushing for democracy without those crucial preconditions is akin to trying to build a house from the roof down.

Elections in such an environment will merely empower political demagogues and religious extremists. It is no accident that voters in Iraq spurned the more tolerant, secular parties who sought to reach across the Sunni-Shia-Kurdish divides and instead empowered blatantly sectarian parties. The fallacy of assuming that democracy is a panacea for the Middle East was even more graphically confirmed by the elections in the Palestinian territories when Hamas routed the more moderate (albeit hardly tolerant) Fatah.

That is not to say that Middle East societies will never be ready to implement Western-style liberal democracy. There is no anti-democracy gene in the human pool. Societies change over time, and the emergence of stable, liberal democratic systems in the Middle East might well occur at some point in the future. But that is not likely to happen in the next generation or two, and for the president to base U.S. policy in the region on the expectation that it will is irresponsible.

It was unfortunate but perhaps understandable that President Bush held naive beliefs about the inevitability and imminence of a regional democratic tsunami in 2003 when he launched the Iraq war. Given the bruising experiences of the past four years, however, clinging to such assumptions is simply inexcusable. We need a far more prudent and realistic Middle East policy. Let us hope that the next president will embrace one.

National Interest Online, August 13, 2007

PART 7

New Approaches for
the Troubled
Korean Peninsula

Introduction

The Korean Peninsula has long been an especially dangerous flashpoint for the United States. For more than half a century following the armistice that ended the Korean War, communist North Korea and noncommunist South Korea have faced off across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) with massive deployments of forces on both sides of that truce line. Washington loyally supported its South Korean ally throughout the Cold War and has maintained a sizable troop presence (currently about 28,000) in the country as a tripwire even during the post-Cold War era. While the United States has preserved the alliance with South Korea, Washington has refused to establish any formal diplomatic or economic ties with reclusive, totalitarian North Korea.

U.S. policy toward the two Koreas fairly cries out for change. The troop presence in South Korea is a classic case of an obsolete security commitment. When the United States concluded its “mutual” defense treaty with South Korea, the latter was a war-ravaged, impoverished country utterly incapable of defending itself from its ruthless communist rival. Moreover, U.S. leaders viewed the military standoff on the peninsula as merely one theater in the free world’s struggle against the Soviet Union and China, since North Korea was a client of both Moscow and Beijing.

Both the global and regional security environments have changed beyond recognition. North Korea’s relations with Russia and China have become strained; indeed, Moscow and Beijing seem to prefer closer ties with Seoul than with Pyongyang. That is not surprising, since South Korea is one of the world’s most impressive economic players, while North Korea is a pathetic monument to communist economic mismanagement. The huge economic disparity between South and North Korea also has important security implications. South Korea now has twice the population and an economy at least *40 times* the size of North Korea’s. As I have argued for more than two decades, a nation with those advantages should be able to provide for its own defense instead of continuing to free-ride on the U.S. security guarantee. Not surprisingly, though, South Korean leaders prefer to underinvest in defense and use the money thereby saved for popular domestic expenditures. What is far less excusable is why a parade of U.S. administrations has let Seoul get away with remaining America’s international military welfare queen.

A key argument that defenders of the U.S. alliance with South Korea use to justify that commitment is the threat posed by North Korea’s

long-standing effort to acquire nuclear weapons. Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions have led to two crises, the first in the early 1990s and the second from 2002 to the present. The first crisis appeared to be resolved with the conclusion of the Agreed Framework in 1994, whereby North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for energy aid from a consortium of U.S. allies and a promise from Washington to move toward normalizing economic and diplomatic relations between the two countries. That agreement broke down in late 2002 when U.S. intelligence agencies uncovered apparent evidence that although Pyongyang had mothballed the Yongbyon reactor complex that was capable of producing plutonium, it was pursuing a parallel uranium enrichment project.

In marked contrast to its continued flirtation with the military option regarding the Iranian nuclear issue, Washington has placed more emphasis on resolving the North Korea nuclear crisis through diplomacy. Some hawks, such as Sen. John McCain, have advocated threatening to use military force in the new episode (as McCain had during the earlier episode as well), but cooler heads in the Bush administration seem to have prevailed. Early on, I suggested approaching Pyongyang with an offer similar to the "grand bargain" that I later proposed regarding Iran. But I also urged policymakers to consider what to do if Pyongyang could not be induced to give up its quest for nuclear weapons. Among the options was a greater U.S. willingness to tolerate Japan and South Korea deciding to build their own nuclear arsenals, if they concluded that they needed to counter the threat from North Korea. As time passed, and the multilateral talks on the North Korean nuclear issue appeared to make little progress, I also suggested that Washington approach Beijing about using its influence to undermine the North Korean regime in exchange for a promise from the United States to withdraw its forces from the peninsula.

Developments over the past year suggest that I may have been too pessimistic about the effectiveness of the multilateral talks. After the North Korean nuclear test in autumn 2006, Beijing dramatically escalated the diplomatic and economic pressure on its recalcitrant client. Since then, Pyongyang has been willing to take steps to freeze, and more recently to disable, its reactor at Yongbyon. The North Korean government has also agreed to give a full accounting of its plutonium stocks and all other aspects of its nuclear program—including, presumably, the suspected uranium enrichment program. Pyongyang insists that it is willing to put an end to its nuclear efforts, and Washington has responded with a willingness to discuss the normalization of relations and a possible peace treaty to formally end the state of war on the peninsula.

All of these are surprising and encouraging developments. Nevertheless, we do need to continue viewing this process with a degree of caution.

As I point out in several articles and studies, North Korea has reneged on every agreement it has ever signed on nuclear matters. It should be remembered that optimists thought that the 1994 Agreed Framework had resolved the nuclear issue, only to be disappointed less than a decade later. One might hope that this time it will be different, but we are still a considerable distance away from being certain that we have achieved our goal of a complete, verifiable, and irreversible end to North Korea's effort to build nuclear weapons.

North Korea Crisis Exposes U.S. Risks

North Korea's dramatic admission that it has pursued a covert nuclear weapons program in violation of the agreement it signed in 1994 underscores the gravity of the security burdens and risks the United States continues to bear in Northeast Asia.

In a normal international system, the nations that would be most concerned about a possible North Korean nuclear weapons capability would be Pyongyang's immediate neighbors: South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia. They also would logically take the lead in formulating policies to deal with the crisis.

But thanks to more than a half-century of U.S. smothering behavior, there is nothing normal about the situation in Northeast Asia. Japan and South Korea continue to rely heavily on the United States for their defense needs, and given the ingrained pattern of dependence, they look to Washington to resolve the looming problem posed by North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Even China and Russia expect the United States, as the principal military power in the region, to assume the lead role in that frustrating and probably unrewarding mission.

If it were not for the 37,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea and the nearly 50,000 stationed in Japan, the United States could afford to view the prospect of a nuclear North Korea with relative detachment. U.S. officials regard those troops as crucial military assets in the region. But if Pyongyang cannot be dissuaded from building a nuclear arsenal—and one dare not be optimistic on that score—those troops are no longer assets. They are nuclear hostages.

There is no need to expose American military personnel to such risks. During the early decades of the Cold War, there was a respectable rationale for keeping troops in the region and giving security guarantees to Japan and South Korea. Washington understandably wanted to keep both countries out of the orbit of a rapaciously expansionist Soviet Union or a hostile

and volatile China. For many years, Japan and South Korea were also too weak to provide for their own defense.

Today's security environment bears no resemblance to that earlier era. The Soviet Union has been replaced by a weak, non-communist Russia. China's relations with the United States, while tense at times, are dramatically better than they were when America made its security commitments to Northeast Asia.

Even more important, Japan and South Korea are vastly more capable than they were when they became Washington's security dependents. South Korea now has twice the population of North Korea and an economy some 40 times as large. If Seoul spent even a respectable amount on defense, it could easily outpace its decrepit communist neighbor. But it chooses to spend a smaller percentage of its gross domestic product on the military than does the United States—even though North Korea is on its border, not America's.

Japan's timidity on security matters is even more indefensible. Despite a prolonged recession, Japan still has the second largest economy in the world. It also has a population six times larger than North Korea's. It is pathetic to see a country with those characteristics—one of the world's great powers—rely on another country to resolve a security issue that so clearly impinges on Japan's vital interests.

Washington should begin to reduce its discretionary security risks in Northeast Asia. It is time—indeed, it is well past time—to tell Japan and South Korea they must provide for their own defense and take responsibility for dealing with security problems in their region. The continuing reliance of those two countries on the United States is not healthy for them—and it certainly is not healthy for America. Japan and South Korea, together with China and Russia, should bear the burden of dealing with a dangerous and unpredictable North Korea.

Washington Times, December 2, 2002

A Nuclear Reaction to North Korea

If the admission by North Korea in October that it was pursuing a uranium enrichment programme left any doubt that the country is the ultimate rogue state, there can be none now. This week, a North Korean freighter carrying scud missiles was intercepted on route to Yemen. On Thursday, news emerged that Pyongyang has threatened to reactivate

the plutonium reactor that was explicitly mothballed under the 1994 framework agreement to freeze the country's nuclear programme.

There is widespread and justifiable anger at North Korea's perfidy. But anger does nothing to solve the problem of what to do now. Unfortunately, none of the available options is particularly desirable.

One option is to attempt to salvage the 1994 framework agreement and try to get North Korea to make a new commitment to renounce nuclear weapons. There are several problems with that approach, however. North Korea has already signed a solemn agreement to freeze its nuclear programme and has received significant inducements to do so. Giving Pyongyang more rewards in the hope that it will live up to an agreement it has already violated would seem to be an extraordinarily naive strategy.

The second option is the opposite of the first. Instead of proposing to increase the bribe to North Korea, the strategy would be to threaten military action if it did not immediately abandon its nuclear programme and turn over any weapons it had produced. Indeed, if one takes seriously the "preemptive self defense" provisions of the new national security strategy the Bush administration promulgated in September, Washington should already be threatening Pyongyang with dire consequences. After all, the United States is prepared to go to war against Iraq because of the mere possibility that Iraq might some day do what North Korea has already done.

But there are compelling reasons for not threatening North Korea. Even the most hawkish foreign policy experts seem to realise that adopting that course could easily engulf the Korean Peninsula in war—possibly with nuclear implications. U.S. intelligence sources believe that Pyongyang may already have built one or two nuclear weapons at the time it agreed to freeze its programme. And Beijing reputedly believes that the North may have four or five such weapons.

If the United States launched preemptive military strikes against North Korea's nuclear installations, there would be a serious risk that mushroom clouds could sprout above Seoul and Tokyo. It is not coincidental that both South Korea and Japan are strongly opposed to a confrontational strategy by the United States. Likewise, it is revealing that, in contrast to 1993 and 1994, when hawks inside and outside the Clinton administration hinted darkly about the possibility of preemptive strikes, almost no one recommends that course today.

A third option is to try to organise a multilateral regime of economic sanctions to put pressure on Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear ambitions. Washington's apparently successful effort to persuade its allies to join the United States in suspending fuel oil shipments to the North may be the initial stage in such a strategy. But that approach has limited prospects

for success. Trying to isolate further one of the most economically isolated countries is a little like threatening to deprive a monk of worldly pleasures.

There is another possibility. North Korea's motives for pursuing a nuclear-weapons capability cannot be determined with certainty. But one likely explanation is that Pyongyang believes that it could then intimidate its non-nuclear neighbours—primarily Japan and South Korea—into making political and economic concessions. Washington ought to convey the message that Pyongyang is mistaken if it assumes that it will have a nuclear monopoly in Northeast Asia.

Pyongyang is counting on the United States to prevent Japan and South Korea from even considering the option of going nuclear. U.S. officials should inform North Korea that, if it insists on gatecrashing the global nuclear weapons club, Washington will urge Tokyo and Seoul to make their own decisions about whether to acquire strategic deterrents. That would come as an unpleasant surprise to North Korea.

The prospect of additional nuclear weapons proliferation in Northeast Asia is obviously not an ideal outcome. But offsetting the North's illicit advantage may be the best of a set of bad options. The one chance of getting the North to abandon its current course is if it becomes clear that Pyongyang may have to deal with nuclear neighbours.

If the United States does not adopt that approach, it is almost certain to be stuck with the responsibility of shielding non-nuclear allies from a volatile, nuclear-armed North Korea. More proliferation may be a troubling outcome but it beats that nightmare scenario.

Financial Times, December 13, 2002—Reprinted with permission from *Financial Times*

Time to Get South Korea Off the Security Dole

Peter Huessy's article (*In the National Interest*, August 12, 2003) purports to disagree with my earlier article arguing that China is unlikely to orchestrate the solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis. Huessy emphasizes that, given Pyongyang's economic dependence on the PRC, Beijing has considerable leverage to induce the North to give up its nuclear ambitions.

But I stipulated as much. The thrust of my argument was that Beijing would be reluctant to utilize its leverage on North Korea because doing so would undermine other important political and strategic objectives. Huessy provides no evidence to refute that point.

Indeed, the primary objective of his article was not to discuss the China issue but to offer a brief for keeping U.S. troops in South Korea in perpetuity. He is profoundly misguided. The Korean commitment was obsolete even before the end of the Cold War, and it should have been terminated long ago. In the new strategic environment—with the prospect of a nuclear-armed North Korea looming on the horizon—the commitment is not only outdated, it is extremely dangerous.

When the so-called mutual security treaty was approved in 1954, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was a poverty-stricken country that had been devastated by more than three years of war. The population was demoralized, and the military (although somewhat stronger than it had been when North Korean troops invaded in June 1950) was still decidedly inferior to its communist adversary in training, equipment, and morale.

Moreover, Seoul had to confront not only the hostility of North Korea, but the knowledge that Chinese or Soviet forces might support Pyongyang's units in the event of war. The security treaty with the United States and the U.S. troop presence on the peninsula were tangible guarantees that the ROK would not have to deal with such powerful enemies alone. Given the geostrategic realities in the mid-1950s and for many years thereafter, South Korea could not have provided for its own defense.

During the initial decades of the Cold War, there also was a respectable U.S. strategic rationale for keeping troops in the ROK. Washington understandably wanted to keep that country out of the orbit of a rapaciously expansionist Soviet Union or a hostile and volatile China. A North Korean takeover of South Korea likely would have heralded a general communist offensive to dominate all of East Asia—a development that clearly would have menaced vital American interests. In the absence of a hostile, would-be hegemonic power in the region, that danger is no longer a factor.

Moreover, South Korea is no longer a war-ravaged waif. The ROK has become one of the world's great economic successes. That dynamism and rapid growth contrast sharply with North Korea's stagnation and have given the South an overwhelming economic advantage over its communist nemesis. South Korea's GDP in 2002 stood at more than \$425 billion. Estimates of the size of the North's moribund economy vary widely, but most figures are between \$12 billion and \$18 billion. In other words, the ROK has an economy at least 23 times larger—and perhaps as much as 35 times larger—than that of its enemy. It also has a decisive edge in population—some 47.3 million versus 24.5 million.

In addition to such quantitative advantages, the ROK enjoys important qualitative advantages. Technologically, South Korea is light years ahead of the North. The ROK is a 21st century country in every respect, while North Korea's technology is generally that of a country in the 1960s or 1970s.

The regional security environment also has changed beyond recognition. Neither Beijing nor Moscow would back North Korea if it attempted to use military force against the South. Indeed, both governments have spent the past decade strengthening their diplomatic and economic ties with Seoul. Pyongyang has become an anachronistic embarrassment to Russia and China, not a valued ally. It is absurd to argue that a country with South Korea's enormous advantages cannot defend itself. Yet that is what Huessy and other defenders of the status quo are forced to argue.

The problem is not that South Korea cannot provide for its own defense; the problem is that it chooses not to. South Korea's military budget in 2002 was a meager \$14.1 billion. As a percentage of GDP, Seoul spends less on the military (a mere 3 percent) than does the United States. Yet South Korea is located next to one of the most bizarre and unpredictable states in the world. Seoul's anemic military spending under such circumstances borders on being criminally irresponsible. But South Korean leaders know they can get away with underinvesting in defense because Washington has let them get away with it for years. Huessy and other American enablers of South Korea's security free-riding have encouraged such behavior.

When pressed, most defenders of the security treaty and the U.S. troop presence grudgingly concede that the ROK could build the conventional forces needed to defend itself against North Korean aggression. They increasingly cite another justification for Washington's role as Seoul's security patron: North Korea's nuclear-weapons program.

But that development proves the opposite of what Huessy and other defenders of the alliance argue. If it were not for the 37,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, the United States would not be on the front lines of the North Korean nuclear crisis. The risk exposure of South Korea and Pyongyang's other neighbors is geographic and, therefore, inherent. Our risk exposure is largely discretionary.

U.S. officials regard the American troops stationed in South Korea as crucial military assets. But if Pyongyang cannot be dissuaded from building a nuclear arsenal—and one dare not be optimistic on that score—those troops are not assets. They are nuclear hostages. We should move to end that risk exposure as soon as possible.

Huessy and other defenders of the commitment to South Korea implicitly subscribe to an American version of the Brezhnev doctrine. Soviet dictator Leonid Brezhnev promoted the notion that once a country was a member of the communist camp, it must always remain a member. Huessy and his cohorts apparently believe that once a country is a security dependent of the United States, it must always remain a dependent.

South Korea became capable many years ago of ceasing to be such a dependent. Unfortunately, it has chosen instead to be an international

military welfare queen. It is high time to expel that prosperous and capable country from the security dole.

In The National Interest, August 23, 2003

Acid Test for North Korea

The recent six-nation talks in Beijing produced, unsurprisingly, a stalemate. Afterward, the Pyongyang regime said it saw no point in future talks. Although North Korea probably will relent under pressure from China and Russia, there is scant likelihood new talks would produce any better results without America establishing a dramatically different agenda.

North Korea asserts it pursues a nuclear weapons program because of fear that, otherwise, U.S. military force may impose regime change, as it in Iraq. It is far likelier, however, that fear of America's intentions is but one reason Pyongyang is creating a nuclear arsenal. Other reasons may include the prestige of being a member of the exclusive global nuclear weapons club; the ability of a nuclear North Korea to blackmail its non-nuclear East Asian neighbors; and the prospect of lucrative revenues from selling nuclear technology or warheads.

There is one sure way to find out what North Korea really wants. The United States should put a "grand bargain" on the table. Washington should agree to a nonaggression pact and full normalization of diplomatic and economic relations with Pyongyang in exchange for the simultaneous implementation of a fully verifiable agreement (including a rigorous inspections system) to end North Korea's nuclear program.

Such concessions would cost the United States little. Even the most reckless of Washington hawks hesitate about advocating an attack on North Korea to overthrow the current regime—however much we all want to see that odious system on the ash heap of history. Using military force against North Korea could trigger a major war on the Korean Peninsula and perhaps a broad conflict that could enflame much of East Asia. That is a risk no rational person would want to take. So giving North Korea "security assurances" (i.e., a nonaggression pact) merely renounces an option we would not want to pursue anyway.

Similarly, establishing diplomatic and economic ties with Pyongyang is a step the United States should have taken long ago. Indeed, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a key component of American foreign policy in the region was a proposal to Moscow and Beijing for cross-recognition of the

two Korean states. At the end of the Cold War, Russia and China both established formal ties with South Korea, but the United States never kept its part of the bargain by recognizing North Korea.

Diplomatic recognition does not imply approval of a regime. We have diplomatic relations with a good many odious and repressive governments (Saudi Arabia's comes to mind). Maintaining such relations merely acknowledges it is in our interest to deal with the country in question.

Likewise, economic ties do not imply approval. In North Korea's case, ending economic sanctions might help open that closed and bizarre country to the outside world. It is a strategy we used successfully with China in the 1970s—a country that had recently undergone the convulsive Cultural Revolution.

Most important, offering a “grand bargain” would create an acid test for Pyongyang. If North Korea is developing nuclear weapons only because it fears the United States, Pyongyang should accept the proposal unhesitatingly. Even an intrusive system of inspections should be no barrier to such an agreement.

Conversely, if North Korea demands other concessions or balks at inspections, we would know Pyongyang is not using its nuclear program merely as a bargaining chip but is deadly serious about joining the global nuclear weapons club.

At least we would know where we stand and could consider relevant policy options. This would be far preferable to another round of pointless talks perpetuating ambiguity and impasse.

Washington Times, September 22, 2003

Bush's North Korea Gambit

During his trip to East Asia, President Bush noticeably softened his position on the North Korean nuclear crisis.

Previously, he had stressed that the United States would not give in to Pyongyang's “blackmail.” North Korea was expected to abandon its quest to build nuclear weapons without expecting concessions from the United States. In particular, Washington repeatedly spurned Pyongyang's demand for a nonaggression pact.

Now Bush indicates that the United States may be willing to give North Korea “security assurances” if it gives up its nuclear program. The president emphasizes, though, that such assurances would not come in the form of a binding treaty. Instead, he apparently envisions a multilateral

declaration from the United States and North Korea's neighbors guaranteeing Pyongyang's security.

Bush's new flexibility is refreshing, but it is unlikely to make much difference in the long run. Although Kim Jong Il's regime has stressed the goal of a nonaggression pact with the United States, it is unlikely that such a plan is North Korea's sole or even primary goal. The rulers of North Korea are cynical, calculating communists. They undoubtedly know that, throughout history, nonaggression pacts scarcely have been worth the paper they're written on.

It is unlikely that such rulers would place much faith even in a formal treaty with the United States. They would be even less likely to have confidence in a less formal multilateral security promise. After all, what would Japan, South Korea (or even Pyongyang's nominal allies, Russia and China) do if Washington reneged on the pledge? They certainly would not risk an armed clash with the United States to protect North Korea.

Pyongyang has seen how Washington has treated such non-nuclear adversaries as Serbia and Iraq. It would not be surprising if the North Koreans concluded that the only reliable way to deter the United States from any thoughts of forcible regime change is to have a nuclear deterrent.

Moreover, even in the unlikely event that Kim's government is serious about wanting a nonaggression pact that is hardly the only objective. Time and again, North Korea has emphasized that it wants normal political and economic relations with the United States. That means recognizing the Pyongyang government, exchanging ambassadors, establishing trade relations, and withdrawing U.S. objections to loans to North Korea from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. (Indeed, among Pyongyang's official reasons for resuming its nuclear program in violation of the agreement that it had signed with the United States in 1994 was that Washington had failed to honor its commitment under that agreement to fully normalize relations.)

There is no sign yet that the Bush administration is prepared to radically transform U.S.–North Korean relations in that fashion. But without such a comprehensive initiative there is almost no chance that the nuclear crisis can be resolved through diplomacy. Indeed, there is no certainty that Pyongyang will give up its quest for nukes under any circumstances.

Bush's initiative is a small step in the right direction. But it is manifestly insufficient. The best we can hope for is that it will ignite serious negotiations toward a peaceful settlement of this extraordinarily dangerous crisis.

Forcing North Korea's Hand

North Korea's February announcement that it possesses nuclear weapons sent psychological shock waves throughout East Asia.

The United States and other nations in the region are now redoubling their efforts to get Pyongyang to reconsider its refusal to participate in another round of the six-party talks (involving China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea, as well as North Korea and the United States) aimed at getting the North to end its nuclear program.

An entirely new strategy is needed. Even if North Korea agrees (largely because of Chinese pressure) to rejoin the talks, that would be a meager accomplishment. The multilateral negotiations that began in the spring of 2004 have achieved almost nothing.

Indeed, the participants seem to regard it as a major breakthrough when the parties agree simply to talk some more. Those negotiations are reminiscent of the infamous Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Talks in Vienna between the Soviet Union and the NATO countries during the 1970s and 1980s, which dragged on year after year with no discernable progress.

The brutal reality is that despite the six-party talks, North Korea is no closer today to renouncing its quest for nuclear weapons than it was when the negotiations began. Unless something dramatic changes, the country will soon possess a sizable nuclear arsenal even as the diplomats continue to chatter.

Kim Jong-Il's regime says that it is willing to give up its nuclear program if the United States ends its "hostile attitude" and offers a variety of political and economic concessions. There is ample reason to doubt Pyongyang's sincerity. Indeed, there is a very real possibility that North Korea has decided to crash the exclusive global nuclear-weapons club no matter what concessions the United States or the other members of the six-party talks might offer.

But we will never know for certain until we test Pyongyang's intentions. The only way to do that is to bypass the excruciating pace of the six-party talks and to "cut to the chase." Washington should offer North Korea a "grand bargain" to end the impasse.

Pyongyang has said that it wants a binding nonaggression pact from the United States, as well as normalized diplomatic and economic relations. The Bush administration should offer all three concessions. In

exchange, however, the United States should continue to insist on a complete, verifiable, and irreversible end to North Korea's nuclear program.

That is the proper goal, but the devil is in the details. Achieving such a result would require on-demand international inspections of any suspect site in North Korea (not just those that Pyongyang has admitted to being part of its nuclear program). It would also require the dismantling of all existing nuclear weapons and their removal from North Korean territory. The same standard would be needed with regard to all plutonium and highly enriched uranium stocks so that the North could not reactivate its program at a later date.

Such a bold proposal would call North Korea's bluff. If Pyongyang is sincere about giving up its nuclear-weapons ambitions for a normal relationship with the United States, it would have no choice but to accept the grand bargain.

Conversely, if Kim Jong-Il turned down the deal, we would then know that North Korea is unalterably determined to become a nuclear power. If that is the case, the United States and the nations of Northeast Asia would face a difficult choice about how to respond. They could decide to resort to economic sanctions or military force to compel the North to relinquish its nukes—with all the dangers such a confrontational course would entail. Or they could decide to accept a nuclear North Korea and rely on deterrence to dissuade Pyongyang from doing anything rash with its new arsenal—as uncomfortable as that course might be.

Either way, we would know where we stand. That is preferable to continuing the seemingly endless charade of the six-party talks, a process that has produced only frustration and uncertainty.

FoxNews.com, March 29, 2005

Keep North Korea Talks Focused on Ending Nuclear Threat

North Korea's ongoing development of nuclear weapons poses an especially grave security challenge for the United States.

The most recent round of six-party talks (involving China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, and the United States) made, at best, incremental progress toward a solution to the crisis. Throughout the negotiations, the U.S. goal has remained the same: a complete, verifiable, and irreversible end to North Korea's nuclear program.

A growing number of influential Americans are dissatisfied with such a “narrow” agenda, however. Republican Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas, Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution, and Michael Horowitz of the Hudson Institute are among those who demand that the United States add North Korea’s human rights practices and the issue of regime “transformation” to the list of topics that the next round of six-party talks must address. Congressional passage of the North Korean Human Rights Act last year points to a similar strategy.

That approach would be a profound mistake.

Improving the abysmal human rights situation in North Korea or achieving regime change in that long-suffering country may be desirable in the abstract, but U.S. leaders cannot let those goals interfere with the fundamental objective of the negotiations—the elimination of North Korea’s nuclear weapons capability.

A nuclear-armed North Korea threatens to destabilize the security environment in East Asia, a region of considerable strategic and economic value to the United States. Even worse, a cash-strapped North Korean regime with a surplus of nuclear weapons in its arsenal might be tempted to sell one to al Qaeda or some other terrorist organization.

Progress in the six-party talks has been difficult enough without adding issues to the agenda that the North Korean government regards as an intolerable threat to regime survival. Broadening the agenda in that fashion is almost guaranteed to torpedo any conceivable deal on the nuclear issue.

It is possible (although by no means certain) that Kim Jong Il’s regime may agree to relinquish its nuclear ambitions in exchange for a U.S. nonaggression pledge, a peace treaty formally ending the Korean War and normalized political and economic relations with Washington.

There is almost no chance that the regime will agree to abandon the repressive policies that enable it to retain political power. By making the human rights issue and regime transformation a litmus test for the six-party talks, the United States would be demanding that the North Korean leadership agree to commit political suicide.

It is the hallmark of realism that policymakers sometimes have to accept less than ideal outcomes. The United States often has had to conclude limited agreements with odious governments to advance important American interests.

Washington signed the 1963 Atmospheric Nuclear Test Ban Treaty with the Soviet Union and two decades later negotiated an agreement that pulled both countries’ medium-range nuclear missiles out of Europe. The United States did not insist that the Soviet Union become an enlightened democracy as a condition for signing those documents. U.S. interests and the cause of peace were advanced because U.S. officials were willing

to accept narrow agreements instead of holding out for the wholesale transformation of the Soviet system. That outcome occurred much later and because of an array of different, mostly domestic, factors.

The United States faces a similar situation today with respect to North Korea. If it is possible to conclude an agreement for the complete, verifiable, and irreversible end to that country's nuclear threat, Washington would be foolish to jeopardize the opportunity.

Every American of good will hopes that someday the brutal North Korean regime will end up on the ash heap of history where it belongs. But the United States cannot sacrifice its security interests in an attempt to achieve idealistic (and in the near term, at least, probably unattainable) goals. To do so would be a dangerously shortsighted policy.

Baltimore Sun, August 5, 2005

A Nuisance, Not a Threat

Regardless of how many times North Korea tests its missiles, it does not constitute an existential threat to the United States or its allies.

In fact, some of the suggestions for a response to the missile tests that have significantly increased international tensions are more dangerous than the specter of a North Korean missile capability itself.

The missile tests compound North Korea's continual effort to process plutonium for nuclear weapons, and the prospect of Pyongyang having not only nuclear weapons, but also the means to deliver them at considerable distances has generated alarm in the United States and East Asia.

Hawks in the United States occasionally have advocated preemptive airstrikes to take out Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missile programs.

Shortly before the seven missile tests Tuesday, former Clinton administration Defense Secretary William J. Perry and Assistant Secretary Ashton B. Carter suggested a strike to destroy the Taepodong-2 missile while it was still on the launch pad. It was the only one of the seven that had the potential to reach U.S. territory.

Prudent Americans should reject schemes for preemptive military action. Such a strategy has a high probability of triggering a general war on the Korean peninsula. The last Korean War killed millions of Koreans and more than 50,000 American troops. Today, North Korea is capable of firing about 300,000 artillery shells an hour into South Korea's capital city, Seoul, where nearly half the nation's population resides.

Proponents of preemptive strikes would risk the lives of millions of South Koreans as well as the lives of the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea on, at best, a long-shot gamble that Pyongyang would not respond militarily to an attack on its territory, however much it humiliated the regime. Responsible superpowers do not gamble so recklessly.

Proposals for comprehensive economic sanctions, for which Japan is pushing hard, are only a little less unrealistic and dangerous. To date, China and Russia have strongly opposed sanctions against North Korea, and unless they change their policies, the UN Security Council is unlikely to adopt sanctions that would have any significant impact.

That is probably just as well. Sanctions have a dismal historical record of getting regimes to abandon high-priority policies, and North Korea clearly regards its nuclear and missile programs as high-priority, high-prestige objectives. Pyongyang also has warned that it would regard the imposition of international sanctions as an act of war. Perhaps that is mere bluster, but it would be risky to find out. Even if North Korea conducts additional tests of the Taepodong-2 and other missiles, it is a manageable problem, not a mortal threat to U.S. or regional security.

Granted, no sensible person wants the weird hermit kingdom to have nuclear weapons or missile systems. But the United States has thousands of nuclear warheads and the means to deliver them with pinpoint accuracy. We have deterred other strange and ruthless regimes in the past, most notably the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin and China under Mao Zedong. Both countries had far more nuclear weapons and missiles than North Korea ever can hope to build.

We should be able to deter the likes of Kim Jong Il. The North Korean regime, while bizarre and brutally repressive, has never shown signs of suicidal behavior. And attacking the United States would definitely be suicidal. Even attacking a U.S. treaty ally, such as Japan or South Korea, would be extraordinarily risky.

Instead of supporting coercive measures, Washington should seek to defuse tensions by proposing bilateral negotiations with North Korea on a wide range of issues. Although the six-party talks on Pyongyang's nuclear program have made slight progress over the past three years, there is little evidence that the security situation in Northeast Asia will improve substantially until there is a meaningful dialogue between North Korea and the United States.

It would have been better if Washington had pursued such an initiative before the missile tests because to do so now would seem to be rewarding bad behavior on North Korea's part. Nevertheless, it is the best option available.

Launching preemptive airstrikes or even imposing economic sanctions would be far more provocative and dangerous than relying on deterrence

and trying to engage Pyongyang in productive diplomacy. We need cool heads to prevail in Washington and the various East Asian capitals. North Korea is an annoying problem, but it is not an overwhelming threat.

Baltimore Sun, July 10, 2006

Bringing Down Kim

Fresh activity at North Korea's major missile test site in recent days suggests that Pyongyang may be about to defy the world again with further missile launches. Similar signs of activity at a suspected nuclear test site have raised fears that Kim Jong Il's regime is preparing to escalate its defiance even further, by conducting an underground test.

That's yet more proof, if any were needed, of the increasingly pressing need to look for new ways to deal with North Korea's nuclear weapons programs before the first bomb goes off. Negotiations have failed. It's been almost a year since the last round of six-party talks, with Pyongyang refusing to return to the negotiating table until the United States abandons its financial sanctions against North Korea. So it's time to test the radical alternative of encouraging China to overthrow Kim's regime, in return for America agreeing to end its military presence on the peninsula.

China is concerned enough about the behavior of its long-time ally that such incentives might just be enough to tempt Beijing to act. Chinese leaders were reportedly furious that Pyongyang ignored their repeated requests not to conduct the July 5 missile tests. These included a high-level plea by Chinese premier Wen Jiabao for North Korea to "refrain from taking measures" to increase tensions on the peninsula, delivered barely a week before Pyongyang test-fired at least seven missiles. If Kim's regime now snubs Beijing again with a second round of missile launches or, even more seriously, a nuclear test, China's patience might reach breaking point. All the more so because a North Korean nuclear test would create further pressure on Japan to reconsider its non-nuclear status, and a nuclear Japan is the last thing that Beijing wants to see.

China is also the one country with the ability to bring down Kim's regime, since it provides much of the energy and food that keeps the impoverished regime afloat. According to Korea experts Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, approximately 30 percent of North Korea's total outside assistance and an estimated 38 percent of its imports come from China. The Beijing leadership is wary of using that leverage for fear that too much pressure would cause the North Korean state to implode. That

could produce two consequences that Beijing fears, a massive influx of refugees and a reunified Korea that would continue Seoul's security alliance with the United States, so bringing American forces to China's border.

While there is relatively little the United States can do to ease Beijing's fears of being swamped with refugees, beyond offering to help with financial assistance, the second fear is easily addressed. Washington can pledge that, if China helps bring down Kim's regime and end North Korea's nuclear-weapons programs, the United States would end that security alliance and withdraw all its forces from the peninsula. This would, of course, be conditional on China also agreeing not to deploy any military forces on the peninsula.

Such a concession would do no more reflect the reality that Seoul is already drifting into Beijing's orbit. Trade between South Korea and China is expanding rapidly, and Seoul increasingly sides with Beijing rather than Washington on issues ranging from relations with Japan to the status of Taiwan. That foreign-policy posture is causing complications for Washington, as demonstrated by President Roh Moo Hyun's attempts to downplay the significance of the July 5 missile tests. And the U.S. military presence in South Korea is already in the process of being cut by a third, to 25,000 troops in 2008. Completing the process in the event of a reunified peninsula would help give Washington more room for maneuver, especially as a united Korea could be expected to forge even closer diplomatic and economic ties with China.

That's unlikely to be the only concession Beijing would demand, in return for agreeing to bring down Kim's regime. Chinese leaders have hinted in the past that they would expect U.S. concessions on Taiwan, especially pressure on Taipei to end pro-independence activities and commence talks on reunification, before agreeing to put any significant pressure on Pyongyang. That's a concession Washington can never make, since it's not America's place to dictate to a fellow democracy what policies to adopt.

But a full troop withdrawal and an end to the security alliance with Seoul fall into a very different category. This simply involves relinquishing a waning strategic asset in return for something important. Nor is there any downside to making the offer. The worst that Beijing can do is say no. If, on the other hand, Chinese leaders respond positively, then America will have found a cost-free way to prevent the emergence of a volatile nuclear power.

Muted Applause for the Nuclear Deal

Americans and Asians alike are expressing relief that an agreement on North Korea's nuclear program has emerged from the latest round of six-party talks. The agreement is certainly better than the alternatives of drift or confrontation. Nevertheless, in view of North Korea's track record, our applause should be muted.

Under the new agreement, Pyongyang promises to shut down the Yongbyon reactor within 60 days, in exchange for 50,000 tons of fuel oil. During that period, North Korea must readmit the international inspectors it expelled in 2002, and talks will commence between Washington and Pyongyang on normalizing diplomatic relations.

This last provision echoes the 1994 "agreed framework," which included promises of such talks but never led to meaningful negotiations. The deal is only marginally better than the framework, which froze North Korea's nuclear program by shutting down its reactor at Yongbyon in exchange for energy aid from the United States and its allies. North Korea never fully complied last time, and the agreement broke down altogether in late 2002.

If North Korea disables its nuclear program permanently after deactivating Yongbyon, additional aid will flow, and there are hints (but no more) of additional U.S. economic concessions. The ultimate goal is an end to North Korea's nuclear aspirations. If that occurs, we will have moved substantially beyond the 1994 agreement, in which Pyongyang agreed merely to freeze (not terminate) its plutonium program.

But the devil is in the details, and the agreement could easily break down over numerous issues in the coming months. Several matters remain disturbingly vague.

Although Pyongyang is obligated to account for the plutonium that it extracted from the Yongbyon reactor since 2002, the agreement apparently does not specify what happens to any nuclear weapons that North Korea already may have built.

That is not a trivial matter, given the evidence that Pyongyang may possess as many as 12 or 13 weapons. We certainly do not want a situation in which North Korea has merely agreed to shut down a nuclear program (and be rewarded handsomely for doing so) because it already has a credible arsenal.

Another loose end is North Korea's alleged uranium enrichment program. It was the discovery of that program (distinct from the Yongbyon

plutonium project) by U.S. intelligence agencies that led to the breakdown of the agreed framework in 2002. Pyongyang has not officially acknowledged that such a program exists, but it almost certainly does. No agreement on the nuclear issue will have much value if the uranium enrichment issue is not squarely addressed.

Most sobering of all, we must remember that North Korea has broken every agreement it has ever signed on the nuclear issue. Although it joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, it violated that agreement on two occasions—in the early 1990s and again at the beginning of the current crisis in 2002—before withdrawing entirely from the treaty.

North Korea signed an inspection agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency to implement its obligations under the NPT, but then it illegally blocked inspectors in 1993 and again in 2002. Pyongyang issued a joint declaration with Seoul to keep the Korean Peninsula non-nuclear, only to repudiate that declaration in 2003. And, of course, North Korea abandoned the 1994 agreed framework.

Given that track record, it would be naive in the extreme to get terribly excited about the new agreement. It is a mildly encouraging first step, but we are still a long way from being able to say that the North Korean nuclear crisis has been resolved.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 16, 2007

PART 8

The Dangerous
Taiwan Issue

Introduction

U.S. policymakers understandably have been preoccupied in recent years with such urgent issues as Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea, and the Islamic terrorist threat. However, an even more dangerous long-term problem for American foreign policy has begun to emerge. That issue is the political status of Taiwan.

The Taiwan issue began as a leftover matter from the Chinese civil war that ended in 1949 with communist forces expelling the government of Chiang Kai-shek from the mainland and the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Chiang's remnant regime fled to Taiwan and perpetuated the exiled Republic of China (ROC). The new communist government in Beijing laid claim to Taiwan, over which China had regained political jurisdiction from Japan following the latter's defeat in World War II, and if it had not been for the deepening Cold War rivalry with international communism, Washington might well have stood by as the PRC attempted to conquer what was left of the ROC. However, given that Cold War struggle, a succession of U.S. administrations recognized Chiang's increasingly absurd claim that his regime was the rightful government of all China and signed a mutual defense treaty with the ROC. Two major crises, which could easily have erupted into armed conflict between the United States and China, occurred during this period.

Washington dramatically changed its China policy during the 1970s, culminating in the decision to switch diplomatic recognition from the ROC to the PRC in 1979. That change, though, was accompanied by passage of the Taiwan Relations Act, under which the United States agreed to continue selling Taiwan defensive weapons and implied that it would defend the island from any unprovoked PRC attack.

Given the dramatic improvement in relations between Washington and Beijing, there seemed little danger of another Taiwan Strait crisis—as long as both the ROC and the PRC agreed that there was only one China. But the long political separation of Taiwan from the mainland (not merely after the Chinese civil war, but during the half century of Japan's colonial rule over the island before World War II) led to a growing sense of a separate Taiwanese identity. That sentiment already began to gather strength during the 1990s when Lee Teng-hui became the first native-born Taiwanese president of the ROC. It has become far more pronounced during the past eight years under Lee's successor, Chen Shui-bian, the leader of the staunchly pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party

(DPP). Public opinion in Taiwan, especially among younger Taiwanese, appears to be moving in that direction as well. And since Taiwan is now a democracy, the role of public opinion is far more significant than it was during the authoritarian rule of Chiang Kai-shek.

Washington continues to hope that the status quo in the Taiwan Strait can be maintained indefinitely. It looks to the growing economic ties between Taiwan and the mainland to induce responsible behavior in both Taipei and Beijing. U.S. policymakers believe that China's extensive economic links to the United States will also cause Beijing to avoid taking any rash action in an effort to compel reunification. To foster additional caution, Washington has pursued a policy of "strategic ambiguity" on the Taiwan issue, hoping that Taipei will wonder whether the United States would really risk war with China to defend the island, while Beijing will fear that, if it took military action against Taiwan, the United States would intervene.

I argue in several articles and studies that strategic ambiguity risks miscalculation by both Taipei and Beijing. Worst of all, Taiwanese leaders—especially in a DPP government—seem to assume that the United States would not abandon a fellow democracy under any circumstances and that they can therefore push the envelope with impunity regarding independence. During the past eight years, Chen's government has taken numerous steps that Beijing regards as provocative. The danger is growing that Taipei may someday adopt a measure that crosses one of Beijing's bright red lines and trigger a major crisis in the Taiwan Strait.

The PRC is certainly beginning to assemble the military wherewithal to enforce its claim to Taiwan. China has already deployed more than 1,000 missiles in Fujian Province, across the strait from Taiwan, and Beijing's overall military modernization program is proceeding at a brisk pace. China's goal appears to be to acquire enough military capability to discourage the United States from intervening in the event of a new Taiwan Strait crisis. As China's military and economic power grows, that strategy seems reasonably well conceived.

Although the danger of a crisis in the next few years is rather modest, the situation is far more worrisome looking out a decade or two. It is hard to imagine a scenario in which the Taiwan stalemate is resolved peacefully to the satisfaction of both Taipei and Beijing. One of two developments is likely. One possibility is that Taiwan continues its increasingly bold quest for international recognition as an independent country (as either the ROC or under a new name, such as the Republic of Taiwan), in which case it is just a matter of time before Beijing regards some action as intolerable and responds accordingly. The other possibility is that Taiwan avoids taking provocative actions, but Beijing's willingness to tolerate a *de facto* independent island barely 100 miles off its coast wanes

as China's economic and military clout grows. Either way, a crisis seems unavoidable except in the improbable scenario that China becomes fully democratic and Taiwan then agrees to reunification.

Unfortunately, given its current policy, the United States would likely be caught in the middle of a Taiwan Strait crisis. The consequences of such a collision with China would be extremely bad even today, but they would be far worse a decade or two from now. I have argued that it is imprudent for the United States to incur such risks to defend a small client state. One can sympathize with the desire of most Taiwanese to maintain a political existence separate from the PRC. Among populations that deserve the right to national self-determination in a fair and just world, the Taiwanese stand at the head of the line. But we do not live in a fair and just world. America must look to its own best interests, and those interests are not served by risking war with a nuclear-armed great power like China over anything less than vital stakes. Taiwan, while a modest American economic and strategic interest, does not reach that threshold.

I have suggested that Washington continue to sell Taiwan defensive arms in an effort to encourage Beijing to pursue reunification solely through peaceful means. At the same time, U.S. leaders should inform their Taiwanese counterparts that the United States will not risk war to defend Taiwan's *de facto* independence.

Bush Still Doesn't Get It Right on Taiwan

President Bush made a startling change in Washington's Taiwan policy during a visit by Chinese premier Wen Jiabao in December. With Wen at his side, Bush stated that the United States opposed "any unilateral decision by either China or Taiwan to change the status quo." Making it clear that his warning was directed primarily against Taipei rather than Beijing, he added that "the comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally, to change the status quo, which we oppose."

If that were not enough, the president stood mute when Wen characterized U.S. policy as one of "opposition to Taiwan independence," and expressed China's appreciation for that stance. Whether Bush intended it or not, that characterization suggested that Washington's policy was now closer to Beijing's position than it was even during the last years of

the Clinton administration. The furthest Clinton had been willing to go was to state that the United States “does not support” Taiwanese independence. The difference between “does not support” and “oppose” may be subtle, but it is quite important. Beijing had unsuccessfully pressed a succession of U.S. administrations for an expression of explicit opposition to an independent Taiwan; now China seems to have achieved that goal.

What made Bush’s actions especially surprising is that they were such a sharp reversal from the course he had adopted during the initial months of his presidency. In a television interview on April 25, 2001, Bush appeared to discard all nuances and caveats about protecting Taiwan. When asked by ABC News reporter Charles Gibson if the United States had an obligation to defend Taiwan, the president replied, “Yes, we do, and the Chinese must understand that.” Would the United States respond “with the full force of the American military?” Gibson pressed. “Whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself,” Bush replied. A few weeks after that statement, Bush approved the largest arms sales package to Taiwan since his father’s controversial sale of F-16 fighters in 1992.

But it wasn’t just the firmness of the commitment to defend Taiwan that marked the administration’s policy. During the Clinton years, the U.S. government was so committed to a “one China” policy that it barely tolerated “stopovers” in the United States by Taiwanese officials on their way to destinations elsewhere in the world. When Taiwan’s president, Chen Shui-bian, made such a stopover in 2000, the State Department strongly discouraged him from making any public appearances or even meeting privately with members of Congress. He was kept virtually incommunicado in his hotel. The attitude of the Bush administration was dramatically different. Subsequent visits by Chen and other officials included public appearances and meetings with Washington’s apparent blessing—even as Beijing seethed. At one point in 2002, Taiwan’s defense minister met “informally” with Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz during a security conference put on by a think tank in Florida. That was the highest-level meeting between U.S. and Taiwanese officials in more than two decades.

In short, the Bush administration gave every indication of sympathy for Taiwan’s quest for international recognition of its *de facto* independence. What then accounted for the policy reversal in late 2003?

The most obvious answer is that Chen’s government has been pushing the envelope on the issue of independence to the point that Beijing has responded with rather blunt warnings that such provocations could lead to war. The most controversial action was a decision by Chen’s administration to push for a new statute that would allow the holding of referenda on various issues. The first referendum, scheduled for March 20, originally proposed to condemn China’s growing deployment of missiles across the

Taiwan Strait and ask that this threat to Taiwan's security be removed. Under pressure from Washington, Chen softened the wording somewhat. The new version will ask voters whether Taiwan should purchase more advanced anti-missile systems if China does not remove the offending missiles.

To the authorities in Beijing, even the watered-down version of the referendum is unacceptable, since the Chinese government regards Taiwan as nothing more than a renegade province. Beijing also fears that the March referendum is just the wedge. Chinese leaders suspect that sooner or later, there will be a referendum on changing Taiwan's official name from the Republic of China to the Republic of Taiwan or perhaps even a referendum on declaring independence.

China's warnings that such provocations could lead to a war in the Taiwan Strait are taken seriously in Washington, and they have led U.S. officials to wish that Chen's government would curb its exuberance. But that is only one factor. The Bush administration believes that the United States needs China's help on an array of important issues. The desire for Beijing's assistance against Islamic radical groups is one significant area. But the need for China's cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue is probably the most important factor. U.S. leaders believe that China may be the only power that can induce Kim Jong Il's erratic regime to give up its dangerous and provocative quest for nuclear weapons. Washington knows that Beijing's help will not come for free, and that a change in U.S. policy on Taiwan appears to be the price that Chinese officials are demanding. The Bush administration apparently is ready to pay that price.

Unfortunately, the president has gone from one extreme to the other regarding our policy on the Taiwan issue. His April 2001 unconditional pledge to defend Taiwan was irresponsible. No reasonable American would be happy about the possibility of a democratic Taiwan being forcibly absorbed by an authoritarian China, but preserving Taiwan's de facto independence is not worth risking war with a nuclear-armed power. America should never incur that level of risk except in the defense of its own vital security interests.

And the risk of war is not far-fetched. The status of Taiwan is a hot button issue for most mainland Chinese. Even those Chinese who are not especially fond of the communist regime in Beijing tend to believe that the island is rightfully part of China. Japan stole it from their country in 1895, the United States prevented reunification following the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces in 1949, and they want the territory back.

Conversely, separatist sentiments are growing in Taiwan—especially among younger Taiwanese. To them, China is an alien country. A vibrant

society has grown up on Taiwan, and many Taiwanese point out that their island has been ruled from Beijing only four years out of the last 108—and the government in question was not communist. Taiwan has developed separately from the mainland, and it is understandable if many Taiwanese want that reality ratified through an independent state that enjoys full international recognition.

In short, the ingredients exist for a nasty confrontation between Beijing and Taipei at some point. The United States needs to be careful lest it get caught in the middle of such a conflict.

Although it is imprudent for the United States to pledge to defend Taiwan, it is equally inappropriate for Washington to tell Taiwan what its policies ought to be. It is especially unsavory for the United States to criticize another democratic polity for choosing to hold a referendum on a particular issue—however sensitive that issue might be. Chen Shui-bian's government rightly rebuffed such interference and has declared its intention to go ahead with the March 20 referendum.

Instead of either risking going to war to defend Taiwan or kowtowing to Beijing regarding Taiwan's political status, the Bush administration should adopt an entirely different approach. The president should state that the United States takes no position on the question of Taiwan's independence. It is not our place to support or oppose that outcome. Washington should be willing to continue selling arms to Taiwan, if the Taiwanese are willing and able to pay for them. The Taiwanese ought to be told that the question of independence is up to them to decide, but that if they opt for independence, they must be prepared to bear all of the consequences on their own. Both Taipei and Beijing need to be informed that the United States will not be a party to any war that might break out in the Taiwan Strait.

Such an approach would respect Taiwan's dignity as a democratic society while limiting America's risk. Bush's strategy does exactly the opposite. It pressures Taiwan not to exercise its prerogatives as a vibrant democracy, while it keeps America's risk at a dangerously high level if a conflict should erupt. Bush has had several chances to get America's Taiwan policy right. He still has not succeeded.

In The National Interest, February 4, 2004

Beijing Smothers Hong Kong—and Drives Taiwan Farther Away

Beijing's increasingly heavy-handed tactics that undermine Hong Kong's political autonomy are understandably causing discontent among Hong Kong residents. But those tactics are also having broader effects. In particular, they are alienating even the minority of Taiwanese who might be tempted to consider reunification with the mainland. They are strengthening the hand of pro-independence forces in Taiwan.

The PRC's recent actions are especially disturbing. The April 26 decision by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress to bar direct elections for Hong Kong's chief executive in 2007 and the full legislature in 2008 was bad enough. But when protests erupted in Hong Kong over the decision, Beijing's response was less than subtle.

The communist regime dispatched eight warships to make a show of force in Victoria harbour. At about the same time, some prominent pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong reported threats of violence against themselves and their families. Then, in early May, Beijing escalated the pressure, warning pro-democracy legislators in Hong Kong's Legislative Council that they were violating the law merely by proposing measures to criticize the decision of the Standing Committee.

All of this seemed to violate the spirit, if not the letter, of the autonomy that Beijing promised when it regained sovereignty over Hong Kong from Britain in 1997.

Watching with growing interest and alarm from the sidelines were the people of Taiwan. True, there never has been much enthusiasm in Taiwan for the "one state, two systems" formula on the Hong Kong model, even though Beijing has offered that option to the Taiwanese on numerous occasions. (Indeed, PRC leaders have offered Taiwan an "enhanced" version of that formula, in which the island would retain both its democratic form of government and its armed forces.)

Public opinion polls taken since the late 1990s have shown that a majority of Taiwanese is not inclined to trust Beijing's assurances. There is a faction, though, that has expressed a willingness to consider the one-state, two-systems formula if it worked out well in Hong Kong. That faction is likely to conclude that the verdict is now in, and that Beijing's promises cannot be trusted.

Beijing's tactical blunder comes at a delicate time. Taiwanese opinion is closely divided between those who want to keep the option of reunification at a later date open and those who seek nothing less than the island's formal independence. The narrow reelection of Chen Shui-bian of the officially pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party suggests that separatist sentiment is growing. Chen won his first term in 2000 with less than 39 percent of the vote in a three-way race. This time he captured more than 50 percent of the vote in a two-way race.

Chen's victory is not all that surprising. True, the bulk of the Taiwanese business community favors close ties with the mainland and supported Chen's Kuomintang Party (KMT) opponent. But other Taiwanese (especially younger age groups) regard the mainland as an alien country and have little interest in reunification, now or in the future.

Beijing's bullying tactics toward Hong Kong are strengthening that faction. One prominent Taiwanese recently stated: "De jure independence makes sense, especially after what's been happening in Hong Kong." What was remarkable was that the individual making that bold statement is not a stalwart of the pro-independence DPP. The speaker was Szu-yin Ho, director of overseas affairs for the moderate, status quo-oriented KMT.

PRC leaders need to realize that the more they renege on their commitments regarding Hong Kong's autonomy, the more they will drive Taiwan into the arms of pro-independence forces. Beijing's tactics are, therefore, not only unfair with regard to Hong Kong, they are utterly counterproductive in terms of the objective of eventually regaining sovereignty over Taiwan. It is a lesson that PRC officials should ponder.

Apple Daily (Hong Kong), June 2, 2004

Ticking Taiwan: China Is Growing Impatient about Washington's Policy

When national security adviser Condoleezza Rice stopped in Beijing on her recent trip to Northeast Asia, she undoubtedly hoped that the North Korea nuclear threat would be the primary issue on the agenda.

Instead, she got an earful from Jiang Zemin about China's views regarding Taiwan. It was another indication that time is running out for Taiwan, for China, and for the United States.

Although Jiang is no longer president of the People's Republic of China, his statements carry considerable weight since he remains chairman of the country's powerful Central Military Commission. Jiang stressed that

China was committed to the “one country, two systems” formula for Taiwan’s status and that Beijing would “never” tolerate an independent Taiwan.

He went on to chastise the Bush administration for its policy of selling sophisticated arms to Taiwan—most recently radar that can penetrate deeply into China and facilitate strikes by Taiwanese aircraft.

The substance of such comments was not new, but the tone was unusually firm and uncompromising. Moreover, Jiang’s statements are simply the latest in a series of developments that suggest that Beijing’s patience on the Taiwan issue is running out.

Long gone is the cavalier attitude of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s that the Taiwan issue could remain unresolved for decades without unduly upsetting Beijing. As Taiwan has democratized and accelerated its quest for international recognition, Beijing has become noticeably less sanguine.

A Chinese government white paper issued in 2000 emphasized that the Taiwanese authorities could not expect to indefinitely stall negotiations for reunification. For the first time, Beijing indicated that it might consider such delaying tactics alone sufficient grounds for resorting to military force.

Since then, China has increased its confrontational posture. Just before the inauguration of Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian for a second term in May 2004, the Chinese agency in charge of policy toward Taiwan issued a lengthy and revealing statement.

On the one hand, it offered a number of prospective benefits to Taiwan if the regime there accepted the principle of one China. On the other hand, the statement made it clear that the consequences to Taiwan would be dire if the island continued its separatist ways. There was also a distinct implication that the issue must be settled in years, not decades.

And Beijing is backing up its increasingly insistent language with substantive military measures. China has expanded deployment of missiles on its side of the Taiwan Strait, and now has more than 500 missiles arrayed against Taiwan. Later this month, Chinese soldiers will for the first time practice a D-Day style invasion, conducting mock air, sea, and ground operations on Dongshan Island, a densely populated island off the mainland coast.

Perhaps most ominous, there are reports that China has begun a program to build a large number of amphibious landing craft. One must question whether the Beijing authorities would expend considerable financial resources on such a program unless they were at least considering the option of using force against Taiwan.

It should not be surprising if Beijing’s desire to regain Taiwan is growing more insistent. Taiwan’s status is a hot-button issue for most mainland

Chinese. Even those Chinese who are not especially fond of the communist regime tend to believe that the island is rightfully part of China. From their perspective, Japan stole the province from China in 1895, and, by shielding the island militarily, the United States prevented reunification following the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces in 1949.

As China grows stronger economically and militarily, it is logical that the determination to regain the lost province would also grow. Moreover, Chinese leaders suspect (with good reason) that time is not on their side. Younger Taiwanese in particular regard the mainland as an alien place and have little enthusiasm for reunification. Beijing fears that the prospect of regaining Taiwan may be lost forever if action is not taken relatively soon.

All of this puts the United States in a delicate and dangerous position. U.S. leaders repeatedly try to have it both ways. Even the conservative Bush administration professes allegiance to a one-China policy. Yet Washington also is committed to defend Taiwan if China attacks the island.

U.S. leaders try to stay on that diplomatic tightrope by proclaiming that they oppose any unilateral action by either side to change the status quo.

But the signs are mounting that the status quo will not be sustainable indefinitely. Rice and other Bush administration officials might wish that the problem would go away, but it is not about to do so. American leaders may soon have to change Washington's policy on Taiwan or face the nightmare of having to honor its security commitment to the island. Time is running out.

Kansas City Star, July 22, 2004

Asian Countries Send Taiwan a Message

Recently, the governments of Australia and Singapore gave high-profile warnings to Taiwan to avoid actions that might provoke Beijing and create a military crisis in the Taiwan Strait. Both governments stressed that they would not come to Taiwan's aid if the island's increasingly assertive efforts to consolidate its de facto independence from China lead to armed conflict.

Those comments reflect the growing concern throughout East Asia that tensions over the Taiwan issue are beginning to reach alarming levels. It is clear that Australia and Singapore were sending Taiwan a blunt message. What is less clear, but important, is that they were also sending a crucial message to the United States: Do not count on your friends and allies in

the region to help you fulfill your commitment to defend Taiwan. Given the statements and conduct of the East Asian countries regarding the Taiwan issue over the past decade, that should not come as a surprise to Washington.

Virtually all of the East Asian governments made a concerted effort to distance their policies from that of the United States when the Clinton administration dispatched two aircraft carriers to the western Pacific to demonstrate concern about rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait in 1996. South Korea and the Philippines both stressed that their “mutual” defense treaties with the United States did not cover contingencies in the strait. Such countries as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Australia contented themselves with the banal response of urging restraint on all sides, conspicuously declining to endorse Washington’s moves. Indeed, they echoed Beijing’s position that Taiwan is a renegade province. Even Japan, the principal U.S. ally in the region, merely expressed “understanding” of the naval deployment.

The reluctance of America’s professed friends and allies in East Asia to take a hard-line policy toward China extends beyond the Taiwan issue. That point became clear in April 2001 when a Chinese jet collided with a U.S. spy plane that was conducting surveillance from international air space. The collision forced the U.S. plane to land on China’s Hainan Island. PRC authorities held the crew for nearly two weeks, until Washington conveyed a carefully worded expression of regret for the incident, and kept the plane. During this period of acute tension, what was the response of America’s East Asian allies?

Vocal support for the U.S. position was notably absent. Even Washington’s treaty allies in the region—Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines—declined to say that a U.S. apology to Beijing was unwarranted. Only Singapore’s elder statesman Lee Kuan Yew unequivocally supported the U.S. position.

Japan’s tepid, ambiguous stance epitomized the reaction of America’s friends and allies. Kazuhiko Koshikawa, a spokesman for Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, stated: “We strongly hope this case will be settled in an appropriate and acceptable manner.” Beijing could take as much comfort as Washington from such a comment.

The responses of the various East Asian countries in both episodes underscore an important point. China’s neighbors have no incentive to antagonize that rising power by backing the United States in disputes that do not seem vital to—or even relevant to—their interests. We can expect such discreet neutrality in most, if not all, future confrontations between the United States and the PRC. Beijing has cultivated U.S. allies’ tendency toward neutrality through astute diplomacy that has softened Beijing’s abrasive image among its neighbors while quietly underscoring

the PRC's importance to the economies of those nations. The latter is a critically important factor. For example, China this year will likely supplant the United States as Japan's largest trading partner.

These developments raise serious questions about the wisdom of Washington's commitment to defend Taiwan, especially given Beijing's increasingly obvious impatience about the reunification issue. Not only could the United States find itself entangled in a perilous military confrontation with China over Taiwan, it might have to wage the ensuing struggle virtually alone. Taiwan would undoubtedly contribute to its own defense, but the reaction in various East Asian capitals to Beijing's menacing behavior toward the island in recent years suggests that assistance from Washington's other "friends" would be problematic, at best. The United States had better take that factor into account when it calculates the prospective costs and benefits of its security pledge to Taiwan.

Knight Ridder, September 10, 2004

The Real Trouble with Taiwan

Coauthored with Justin Logan

Two factors have historically deterred the People's Republic of China from attempting to retake Taiwan by force: technologically superior Taiwanese weaponry and concern that the United States might intervene with its own military forces.

Until recently, Taiwan took seriously its responsibility to purchase arms to defend itself. Unfortunately, the Taiwanese people seem increasingly unconcerned about providing for their own defense, and instead want to rely on an implied U.S. security commitment. If the United States does not force Taiwan to get serious about its own security, the result could be an emboldened China and the risk of war in the Taiwan Strait.

Since the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979, the United States has been legally obligated to sell Taiwan "arms of a defensive character" in order to help deter the PRC from attempting to retake the island by force. In 2001, the Bush administration offered Taiwan an arms sale of roughly \$20 billion to counter a campaign of Chinese military modernization aimed directly at retaking Taiwan. Recently, a version of that package, scaled back to \$18.2 billion, was approved by Taiwan's cabinet, but remains held up in the legislature.

Opponents of the arms sales package lament that the weapons are too expensive, and that the island has other priorities. In an absurd display

of denial, Tseng Yung-chuan, the executive director of the opposition Kuomintang's Central Policy Committee, remarked in November 2004 that Taiwan's *existing* defense budget should be cut in half in order to fund social welfare projects.

Taiwan's lack of seriousness is unacceptable because it has the effect of pushing the United States to the forefront of the cross-Strait conflict. China's purchases of advanced Kilo class submarines and Sukhoi fighter planes from Russia are eroding Taiwan's qualitative advantage. Taiwan's anti-submarine warfare capabilities are insufficient and dwindling, and its air supremacy is waning in the face of China's acquisitions. All of these trends are getting worse, and creating a sense in China that it may soon be able to take Taiwan by force or intimidate the Taiwanese into surrender.

One apparent factor in Taiwan's irresponsibility is that it is banking on a U.S. security guarantee. However, Taiwanese legislators (and more than a few U.S. officials) would do well to take another look at the TRA, which some allege commits the United States to defend Taiwan's autonomy.

The act merely asserts that "efforts to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, would be a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States." Moreover, the TRA replaced an expiring mutual defense treaty (MDT) with Taiwan's government, and a debate ensued around the enactment of the TRA as to whether it should replicate the MDT's security guarantee. Proposals to incorporate such a guarantee were rejected.

To be sure, it is possible that the United States could decide to involve itself in a conflict between Taiwan and China. That decision would be ill-advised in its own right, given the potential dangers, but it certainly should not be left to Taiwan's government to force such a momentous decision.

However, given Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian's penchant for provocations, combined with Taiwan's dwindling defense capability, Taiwan is increasingly controlling the politics of the conflict without taking responsibility for the military consequences of its actions.

While it is unfortunate that the democracy on Taiwan faces a confrontation with communist China, Americans should certainly not take Taiwan's security more seriously than do its own citizens. If they decide that social spending is more important than deterring a possible takeover attempt by the PRC, that is their decision. They should not be allowed to free-ride on the expectation that the United States will save them in the event of a crisis.

The United States should continue, under the obligation of the TRA, to sell Taiwan defensive arms with which it can deter a Chinese attack.

However, at the same time, Washington should indicate to Taiwan that it does not intend to involve itself in a war in the Taiwan Strait. As things stand now, the Taiwanese increasingly expect that the United States will defend them, and the Chinese increasingly suspect that it will not. That is the worst of both worlds, and portends a perilous situation for all parties involved.

Knight Ridder, March 11, 2005

How China Can Cool Row with Taiwan

The recent visits to mainland China by Lien Chan and James Soong, the leaders of Taiwan's main opposition political parties, briefly raised hopes that tensions between Taiwan and the PRC might be easing.

Although hard-line elements of Taiwan's pro-independence governing party criticized those trips, a majority of the island's population appeared to welcome measures that might reduce the danger of conflict. U.S. officials likewise seemed pleased with Beijing's cordial treatment of the two political figures and expressed hope that the episode might be the catalyst for a meaningful dialogue between Beijing and Taipei.

Unfortunately, those hopes are already fading. Taiwan's government remains skeptical about the economic concessions that the PRC offered to Lien and Soong.

President Chen Shui-bian also spurned China's proposed new basis for negotiations: "two shores, one China." Indeed, Chen's government even rejected China's gift of two giant pandas.

Dramatic steps are needed if the momentum toward reduced tensions is to be maintained. Beijing could make two very important gestures that would appeal to moderates in Taiwan and win plaudits from the United States and China's neighbors in East Asia.

The first and most important gesture would be to freeze the PRC's deployment of missiles across the Strait from Taiwan. Beijing has already deployed between 650 and 700 missiles and continues to add several dozen each year. Understandably, the Taiwanese people regard those deployments as profoundly threatening.

With such a large number of missiles already in place, the PRC gains little additional military clout by adding to the total. President Hu Jintao should immediately announce a freeze on deployments as a goodwill gesture to Taiwan.

PRC officials are fond of quoting the communique signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1982 in which the United States pledged to reduce and eventually eliminate arms sales to Taiwan. They conveniently ignore the context of that pledge—namely that China was committed to solve the Taiwan issue by peaceful means. An ongoing, massive buildup of missiles seems inconsistent with that commitment. If Beijing wants the United States to hold off on future arms sales to Taipei, the fastest way to achieve that goal is to end the missile deployments.

A second important gesture by the PRC would be to reverse its opposition to Taiwan's application for observer status in the World Health Organization. China has once again blocked Taipei's bid, and that is a mistake on several levels. Given the danger of epidemics in the modern, interconnected world, excluding any major population center from participation in the WHO is shortsighted. Taiwan is an entity with more than 23 million people and should be a significant player in cooperative health measures.

Beijing suspects that Taiwan's WHO application is merely part of Taipei's ongoing quest for official international recognition. That suspicion is warranted, but this particular initiative seems relatively benign. After all, Beijing has not objected to Taiwan's participation in international economic bodies, including the World Trade Organization.

The same attitude should exist with regard to primarily humanitarian organizations, such as the WHO. A reversal of Beijing's policy would appeal to those moderates on Taiwan who are not irrevocably committed to independence but who want Taiwan to have some international "space" while the island's political status remains in dispute.

PRC policymakers will undoubtedly object that Beijing should not be expected to make all of the concessions, that Taipei must reciprocate. That may be true, but the PRC holds most of the carrots and, therefore, needs to make the first concessions. The key challenge is to restore the momentum for reduced tensions, and Beijing has the ability to take the necessary steps.

Washington should strongly encourage Chinese leaders to do so as soon as possible. Because of its implied commitment to defend Taiwan, the United States would have more than minor exposure to an armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Any measure that can minimize that danger benefits America's security and well being.

Taiwan News, June 9, 2005

The Pressure Cooker Heats Up

A relatively quiet period in relations between Taiwan and mainland China came to an abrupt end with Taiwanese leader Chen Shui-bian's New Year speech. It was a strident, assertive address that extolled the virtues of "Taiwanese consciousness" and expressed a determination to defend the island's security at all costs.

There was not an olive branch to Beijing in sight. Those policymakers in Washington who had anticipated a bland, conciliatory speech were caught off guard.

Mr. Chen emphasized that "no matter how cross-strait relations develop," his government would adhere to the four principles of "sovereignty, democracy, peace and parity." The first and last of those principles are anathema to Beijing, as is Mr. Chen's assertion that only the 23 million people of Taiwan have the right to decide the island's future.

Many of these themes were not new, but Mr. Chen presented them in unusually terse and uncompromising language. Moreover, his assessment of Beijing's policy was especially confrontational. Highlighting the mainland's deployment of missiles across the strait from Taiwan (which he said now totaled 784), he accused Beijing of engaging in an overall military buildup that "exceeds the reasonable scope of its defense needs."

Mr. Chen's address increases the likelihood that cross-strait tensions will rise significantly during the rest of his term in office. That highlights a disturbing trend in relations between the two that has been building for more than a decade. It poses serious dangers not only to those two parties but to Taiwan's protector, the United States, as well.

Separatist sentiments are growing in Taiwan—especially among younger Taiwanese. To them, the mainland is an alien country. A vibrant, distinct society has grown up on Taiwan, and many Taiwanese point out that their island has been ruled from Beijing for only four of the last 111 years—and the government in question was not communist.

True, the bulk of the Taiwanese business community favors close ties with the mainland. That faction is an important force for caution and restraint, helping to counteract the influence of the pro-independence faction. But the overall trend seems clear: many public-opinion surveys show that very few Taiwanese are interested in reunification with a communist mainland. A growing number may not be interested even if the mainland someday becomes democratic.

At the very least, there is a broad consensus in favor of the island's current *de facto* independence, and most Taiwanese want some form of political recognition from the international community. Mr. Chen clearly sought to appeal to that sense of a distinct Taiwanese identity in his New Year address.

At the same time that separatist attitudes on Taiwan have become stronger, the determination of the mainland to recover what it views as a renegade province has also increased. As Taiwan has democratized and accelerated its quest for international recognition, Beijing has become noticeably less sanguine.

The United States is at a precarious point in its Taiwan policy. "For the decade ahead, we need to keep the lid on the pressure cooker," said one high-ranking U.S. official.

Unless significant policy changes take place in Taipei, Beijing or Washington, a collision course is all too probable.

It is an immense tragedy just waiting to happen.

South China Morning Post, January 11, 2006

Taiwan: A Troublesome Client

U.S. officials are becoming increasingly uneasy about the behavior of Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian. The latest cause for concern was his February 28 decision to shut down the National Unification Council and announce that the unification guidelines Taipei adopted in 1990 would "cease to apply." Chen had telegraphed that step during a speech a month earlier marking the Lunar New Year. In that speech he also outlined two other major tasks for his government in the year ahead—finalizing a new constitution ahead of a national referendum in 2007, and applying to join the United Nations under the name Taiwan (rather than the island's official name, the Republic of China).

All of those positions were certain to infuriate Beijing. One newspaper with close ties to the Chinese leadership described Chen's speech as "a bombshell," and PRC officials soon branded the Taiwanese leader as a "troublemaker" who was raising cross-strait tensions to dangerous levels.

Beijing reiterated its long-standing warning that it would never tolerate the triumph of separatist policies on Taiwan, even if preventing that triumph required using military force. China's reaction to Chen's apparent scrapping of the NUC was equally uncompromising, as PRC President Hu Jintao warned that the Taiwan leader risked "disaster" with such conduct.

Washington has also reacted negatively to Chen's behavior. U.S. officials had already been surprised and alarmed by his address to the nation on January 1, which had seemingly gone out of its way to challenge Beijing. Now, Chen was escalating tensions again.

The U.S. State Department responded to Chen's Lunar New Year's speech with an unusually blunt statement. It stressed that Washington "does not support Taiwan's independence and opposes unilateral changes to the status quo by either Taiwan or Beijing."

Making certain that Taipei got the message, Department spokesman Adam Ereli emphasized that the statement was being made "in the wake of some comments by President Chen" that might be "inflammatory and send the wrong signal." The extent of Washington's irritation with its Taiwanese client was evident when Ereli added that U.S. policymakers "certainly weren't expecting" the speech and "weren't consulted about it." Although the United States reluctantly accepted Chen's later decision to mothball the NUC, U.S. officials again stressed Washington's overall opposition to unilateral changes.

These latest incidents highlight the fragile and dangerous nature of Washington's policy on the Taiwan issue. The United States has pursued a strategy that both seek to preserve friendly ties with Beijing and protect Taiwan's de facto independence. On the one hand, Washington does not dispute Beijing's contention that the island is part of China. On the other hand, the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act mandates that the United States sell defensive arms to Taiwan and regard any PRC effort to coerce Taiwan as a grave breach of the peace. That policy of "strategic ambiguity" virtually invites miscalculation by Taipei, Beijing, or both capitals.

An especially troubling aspect of U.S. policy is that America has little control over events. The United States has to worry not only about whether its potential adversary (China) remains prudent, but also whether its client (Taiwan) remains prudent. Indeed, as Chen's recent actions suggest, Washington many have to worry more about Taipei provoking a crisis than Beijing doing so. It is dangerous enough to undertake a commitment to defend a client or ally, but it is especially risky when the United States does not (and probably cannot) exercise effective control over the actions of that client or ally. Yet that is precisely the situation today in the relationship between Washington and Taipei.

The dynamics regarding Taiwan are ominous. Chen and his supporters seem determined to push the envelope regarding independence, confident that the United States would never allow a vibrant democracy to be conquered by an authoritarian neighbor. At the same time, Beijing shows increasing determination to prevent Taiwan from consolidating its de facto independence, even at the risk of a confrontation with the United States.

Those trends place America in a delicate and dangerous position. In particular, the risk is growing that excessively assertive policies by Taiwan could drag the United States into war with China. U.S. leaders need to wake up to that mounting danger and decide what to do about it.

United Press International, March 1, 2006

Tougher Than It Looks

China is making a big mistake in pinning its Taiwan policy on waiting for a more moderate successor to President Chen Shui-bian. The reality is that most Taiwanese will never accept reunification with a Communist regime—irrespective of who is the island's president.

Beijing seems to believe that it can blame every cross-strait problem on President Chen and his pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Hence the enthusiasm with which it is courting the Kuomintang Party (KMT), confident that separatist sentiment will suddenly fade away if the opposition party wins the next presidential polls in 2008. That explains its high-profile reception for former KMT leader Lien Chan, when he visited the mainland last year. Chinese leaders feted Mr. Lien for reaffirming that the KMT is committed to eventual reunification. Mr. Lien will be back in Beijing for another visit later this month, when he is expected to receive another warm welcome.

His successor, Taipei mayor Ma Ying-jeou, has won praise from Beijing for similar comments during a recent visit to the United States. Not only did Mr. Ma endorse eventual reunification, but he suggested calming cross-strait tensions by striking an interim agreement between Taiwan and the mainland to preserve the status quo.

But Chinese leaders should examine the fine text of Mr. Ma's statements more carefully before they rush to embrace him. There are two very important caveats to the Taipei mayor's embrace of reunification. First, he has emphasized that reunification can take place only if mainland China becomes fully democratic. Mr. Ma—and most KMT members—have no interest in having Taiwan unify with China in its current, authoritarian incarnation. Second, reunification could take place only with the explicit consent of the Taiwanese people. In other words, Taiwan would have a veto. For all his talk of reunification, Mr. Ma also agrees that Taiwanese voters must be allowed to opt for independence if that is what they one day decide they desire.

All of the KMT's caveats are anathema to Beijing. Beijing's political elite has no intention of giving up the Communist Party's monopoly of power and transforming China into a Western-style democracy. Chinese leaders have repeatedly emphasized that Taiwanese voters cannot have a veto over whether reunification takes place. And Taiwanese independence is an option that Beijing considers utterly illegitimate, even if that is what the island's population might desire.

Rhetoric apart, there is not such a big difference between Mr. Ma's substantive positions and the policies President Chen's administration has pursued. The KMT is simply more subtle and conciliatory in its language, and more cautious about actions that might provoke Beijing. But the bottom line is that reunification would not be significantly more likely under a KMT administration than a DPP one—because Taiwan is a democracy, so it all depends on the wishes of the Taiwanese people. A recent survey by a major research institute in Taiwan showed that a majority of respondents reject the notion that the island must eventually reunify with China, while an overwhelming majority believe that Taiwan's political future should be determined solely by the Taiwanese people.

The KMT can not afford to ignore such sentiments if it wants to survive, let alone see Mr. Ma win the 2008 election as the party's presidential candidate. That means there is no prospect of the party agreeing to negotiate reunification based on Beijing's formula of "one country, two systems," especially as it is only a slightly enhanced version of the Hong Kong model. But the problem is that is precisely what Beijing expects if the KMT win the presidency in 2008.

Until now, Beijing has been able to delude itself that the "Taiwan problem" is all due to President Chen and the DPP. At some point, the Beijing regime will have to realize that its quarrel is really with the bulk of the Taiwanese people. Ironically, a KMT victory in 2008 might deepen rather than ease tensions in the Taiwan Strait by making that reality undeniable.

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The Bush Administration Snubs Taiwan

It was only a few years ago that Republicans castigated the Clinton administration for the way it treated Taiwanese leaders who had stopover visits to the United States during trips to countries that maintained diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan's official name).

Those criticisms were warranted. Clinton officials treated both current Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian and his predecessor, Lee Teng-hui, as pariahs. During their stopovers, they were prevented from even meeting with members of Congress or the media—much less being allowed to give public speeches. Republicans accused the administration of kowtowing to China, which claims that Taiwan is merely a renegade province.

When it came into office, the Bush administration vowed to treat the leader of a sister democracy with far more consideration. And it did. The reception accorded Chen during his stopovers throughout Bush's first term was cordial and respectful, despite strong objections from China. Chen routinely interacted with journalists, members of Congress, and public audiences while in the United States.

Washington's reaction was very different, however, regarding Chen's latest trip in early May. This time, U.S. officials even refused his request to land in New York City for a refueling stop on his way to Central America. Indeed, they indicated that all airports in the continental United States would be off limits. They did offer to let him stop in Alaska, provided that he have no interaction with the public.

There appears to be two major reasons for Washington's hostile response.

Throughout his presidency, Chen has pushed the envelope on Taiwanese independence, often infuriating Beijing and heightening tensions in the Taiwan Strait. He also has tended to blind-side the United States with his initiatives—most notably with his decision in early 2006 to abolish the National Unification Council and the National Unification Guidelines. That action sent a blunt message to Beijing that Taiwan was not interested in political reunification with the mainland, now or in the future.

Chen's behavior has produced rising annoyance in the State Department and even in the White House. U.S. officials have been looking for a way to administer a public rebuke to Chen, and it appears that they found one.

The other reason for snubbing Chen on his latest visit appears to be a calculation that the gesture would increase the likelihood that Beijing would be more supportive of U.S. calls for pressure on Iran in the ongoing nuclear crisis. If that was Washington's expectation, it is extremely naive. China has an array of reasons for not wanting to antagonize Iran. A U.S. decision to snub Taiwan's leader is far too limited a concession to sway Beijing's decision.

In any case, it is a shabby way for the United States to treat the leader of another democracy. Granted, it would have been improper for the administration to have formally recognized the visit or to have held meetings between executive branch officials and Chen. Washington maintains diplomatic relations with China, not Taiwan, and it does not dispute Beijing's claim that Taiwan is part of China.

But Chen should have been accorded the respect and consideration given to any other distinguished foreign visitor.

Washington's conduct also smacked of crude interference in Taiwan's internal political affairs. The treatment accorded Chen contrasted sharply with that accorded Taipei mayor Ma Ying-jeou, the leader of the opposition Kuomintang Party, during his trip to the United States a month earlier. Ma was allowed to make public speeches and was given very cordial receptions throughout his visit. Those contrasting actions convey a not-very-subtle message that Washington would like to see Ma as the next president of Taiwan.

The current policy toward Taiwan is the worst possible combination. Washington maintains an implicit commitment to defend the island if China ever decides to use force to compel reunification. That is an increasingly dangerous and unwise commitment—especially as China's economic and military power continues to mount.

At the same time, U.S. leaders seem to believe that the defense commitment entitles Washington to meddle in Taiwan's political affairs, seeking to affect the outcome of the island's next presidential election in 2008.

A better course would be to phase out the defense commitment while showing proper respect for Taiwan's elected leader. The latest incident suggests that Washington's policy badly needs recalibration.

FoxNews.com, May 12, 2006

What Strategic Ambiguity?

For decades, the United States has practised a policy of "strategic ambiguity" about what its response would be if conflict broke out in the Taiwan Strait. Former assistant secretary of defense Joseph Nye was only a little more blunt than other U.S. officials when he told his Chinese hosts in 1995: "We don't know, and you don't know." But now another U.S. official, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, may have inadvertently eliminated any ambiguity in an emotional, off-hand remark to a congressional committee.

He made the comment while responding to withering criticism by some members of the House International Relations Committee about the Bush administration's refusal to allow Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian to make a transit stop in the continental U.S. Mr. Zoellick warned that Washington should not become too supportive of Taiwan, because that would encourage pro-independence forces on the island. "Let me be very

clear,” he said. “Independence means war. And that means American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines.”

Although his comment was clearly designed to dampen enthusiasm in Congress for the Taiwanese cause, it is more likely to be seen as a green light by the pro-independence faction in Taiwan. For strategic ambiguity to work, both Taipei and Beijing must be uncertain of the U.S. response to a crisis. That uncertainty supposedly will lead to caution in both capitals.

The Taiwanese could assume that the United States would come to their defense if Beijing launched an unprovoked attack, but a United States rescue might not occur if Taiwan provoked the mainland. Conversely, Beijing would have to worry that the United States might defend the island under any circumstances.

What Mr. Zoellick said, however, is that U.S. forces would intervene even if Taiwan created a crisis by asserting its independence. Strategic ambiguity has been revealed as a fraud. Mr. Zoellick’s remark confirmed that Washington would prevent the mainland from conquering Taiwan regardless of how a conflict began.

Mr. Chen and the hardline elements of the Democratic Progressive Party could scarcely imagine a clearer green light for their goal of an independent Taiwan. And, given the turbulent politics in Taiwan these days, Washington has even more reason than usual to worry about what Mr. Chen might do during his final two years in office. His administration is currently buffeted by an array of financial scandals that has reached his immediate family. His public approval rating is even lower than President George W. Bush’s rating in the United States. With the national legislature controlled by an opposition coalition, any domestic policy agenda Mr. Chen might have is dead on arrival.

He may well believe that his only chance for a lasting legacy is to validate Taiwan’s independence—even given the threat of a military response from the mainland. Now that he knows U.S. intervention is certain, he may be more inclined to take that step.

This development underscores the perilous nature of U.S. policy. Washington is at the mercy of decisions in both Beijing and Taipei over which it has little or no control. A precipitous action by either capital could plunge the United States into war. And Washington may now have to worry more about Taiwan’s conduct than the mainland’s.

Strategic ambiguity was a dubious policy which assumed that both Taipei and Beijing would assess the likely U.S. response in exactly the way Washington wanted. But at least it gave the United States the option of avoiding a war at the last minute by abandoning Taiwan. Mr. Zoellick’s inadvertent candor has eliminated that option.

Taiwan's Free Ride on U.S. Defense

The Taiwan legislature's reluctance to pass a "special defense budget" to pay for U.S. weapons systems looks set to continue as the island's presidential campaign heats up. That leaves America in the unenviable position of having an implicit commitment to defend a fellow democracy that doesn't seem especially interested in defending itself.

This conundrum is the culmination of years of partisan bickering between President Chen Shui-bian's Democratic Progressive Party and the Pan Blue coalition, composed of the Kuomintang Party and People First Party. While Mr. Chen supports better defenses, the Pan Blues—who control the legislature—argue that the expenditure is excessive, diverts needed funds from domestic priorities, and could encourage Mr. Chen's administration to exacerbate tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

Though Mr. Chen's administration has repeatedly scaled back the deal, reducing it in stages to a mere \$10.3 billion, from \$18.5 billion, prospects for its passage have barely budged. So far, the Pan Blue coalition has blocked a vote on the measure more than 60 times. It took until December of last year for the majority to agree even to send the proposal for consideration in the budgetary committee. U.S. President George Bush grew so disgusted with Taipei's behavior last month that he personally overruled a Pentagon arms proposal for the island unless and until the special defense budget is approved.

A very disturbing dynamic is developing in Taiwan. On the one hand, Mr. Chen's government seems determined to consolidate Taiwan's separate political status—even if that means taking measures Beijing regards as highly provocative. The latest incidents include, for instance, Taipei's decision to rename various state corporations to substitute "Taiwan" for "China." Yet even as Taipei adopts ever more assertive policies toward the mainland, it underinvests in defense. Its spending on essential matters like procurement, operations, training, and personnel has shrunk, in real terms, by more than 50 percent since 1993, and continues to contract at an alarming rate. Taiwan's regular defense budget has plunged to an anemic 2.2 percent of its annual GDP.

From America's standpoint, Taiwan's political leaders are creating the worst possible combination: the DPP's provocative cross-strait policy with the KMT's irresponsible policy on defense spending. That is a blueprint for trouble. China has already deployed nearly 1,000 ballistic missiles across the Taiwan Strait, and Beijing's military modernization program

appears heavily oriented toward credibly threatening military action against Taiwan. A bold cross-strait policy, coupled with inadequate defense spending, virtually invites a Chinese challenge.

The United States would probably try to rescue Taiwan if Beijing launched a military assault. Yet, given the ongoing erosion of Taiwan's defense capabilities, within a few years it will be not at all certain that the island could even stave off an attack until U.S. forces arrived. It is dubious enough for the United States to risk war with an emerging great power like China to defend a small client state of comparably modest strategic and economic significance. It is even worse to incur such risks on behalf of a client state that is not willing to make a meaningful defense effort.

America is in an unrewarding and potentially dangerous position. Washington must make it clear to all political players in Taiwan, especially the Pan Blue leaders, that free-riding on America's military might cannot continue.

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PART 9

A Delicate
Relationship
with China

Introduction

Most American experts who deal with U.S. policy toward China tend to group into two camps: panda huggers and panda sluggers. Members of the first faction rave about the growing trade ties between China and the United States and assert with a confidence bordering on certainty that economic progress and liberalization will soon lead to political liberalization and the emergence of a full-blown democracy. Moreover, this new democratic China will be a cooperative junior partner of the United States in maintaining the global economy and stabilizing the security environment not only in East Asia but throughout the world. Panda sluggers, by contrast, view China as a 21st-century version of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union—an odious totalitarian power that is fast becoming a strategic adversary of the United States. In the relatively near future, members of that faction warn, Beijing will pose a mortal threat not only to America's economic health but to its security.

I have never felt comfortable in either camp. The panda bashers, I believe, embrace the mercantilist fallacy that economics is a zero sum game—that if China becomes more prosperous and economically influential, America must correspondingly suffer a loss. A more accurate view sees economics as a positive sum game. With China's economic development, America is gaining a prosperous trading partner and an increasingly attractive arena for the investment of capital. In other words, China's increased prosperity is not only good for the Chinese people, but it also benefits the American people.

Panda bashers make equally dubious assumptions about China as an inevitable strategic threat. The equation of the PRC with Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union seems especially misplaced. Those two countries were malignantly expansionist totalitarian powers. By contrast, today's China is authoritarian, not totalitarian, and Beijing's behavior over the past three decades indicates that the PRC is a conventional great power, not a rogue expansionist state.

At the same time, I believe that the panda huggers are too complacent and optimistic. Economic liberalization does tend to lead to eventual political liberalization, but that is not an ironclad rule. Singapore, for example, has had one of the most liberal economies in the world for nearly four decades, yet that country's political system remains quite authoritarian. It should be noted that China's economic reforms are more than three decades old, but there are no signs of significant political

liberalization. Panda huggers need to at least consider the possibility that China could simply become a very large, nuclear-armed version of Singapore. Such a prosperous but authoritarian China would limit the degree of cooperation that the United States could expect. Beijing's continuing lack of transparency regarding its military spending and its security strategy does not exactly inspire confidence on that score.

Moreover, even if the PRC did become fully democratic, it would not necessarily be content to be Washington's junior strategic partner. Nationalism plays a strong role in democratic countries, as well as authoritarian ones. Even a democratic China is likely to have political and strategic objectives in East Asia and elsewhere that may conflict with Washington's status as the regional and global hegemon. In addition to Beijing's claims to Taiwan, discussed in the previous chapter, no Chinese government is likely to relinquish the country's ambition to be the leading power in Southeast Asia or abandon its claim to the potential oil riches in the South China Sea. Washington would likely find that a democratic China is still a prickly great power and a periodic political and strategic rival.

On balance, Washington's current strategy of economic and diplomatic engagement with China is the best available option. It maximizes the chances that the PRC will be largely a cooperative, status quo power in the international system rather than a radical revisionist power. As its economic ties with the United States and the rest of the world expand, Beijing has an ever greater stake in not disrupting the system that provides it such benefits.

But U.S. policymakers should not be naive about the strategy of engagement. There is still a possibility that China could flex its growing economic and military muscles in a way that would threaten important American interests. Consequently, the United States needs to adopt a hedging strategy—one that would complicate Beijing's strategic calculations if the PRC does turn disruptive and expansionist. A crucial component of that strategy is to reduce America's military profile in East Asia while prodding such major regional powers as Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam (as well as India in South Asia on China's other flank) to play more active and assertive security roles. The emergence of multiple power centers in the region increases the odds that while China is likely to emerge as the single strongest regional player in the coming decades, it would not have a clear path to become the new regional hegemon.

In short, while continued (indeed, enhanced) engagement is basically the right strategy for dealing with China, it should be a wary and watchful engagement.

Beijing's Newfound Reticence Says Much

As U.S. President George W. Bush travels to East Asia to hold summit meetings with the leaders of Japan, South Korea, and China, he does so against a backdrop of dramatically improved U.S.-Chinese relations. Tensions between the two countries have eased considerably since the initial period of the Bush presidency.

Various commentators around the world have noted Beijing's surprisingly mild reaction to revelations that electronic listening devices had been planted on President Jiang Zemin's American-built airplane. Even though Chinese officials implied that the bugging was a U.S. intelligence operation, there were no official charges of spying, nor did the state-controlled media launch an anti-U.S. propaganda campaign. Indeed, the media virtually ignored the incident.

That reaction was in sharp contrast to the shrill statements from Chinese leaders and the massive propaganda offensive that followed the collision between a U.S. spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet in April 2001. The reasons for that difference suggest a number of things about China's internal politics and foreign policy.

Indeed, the April 2001 episode was the last time that Beijing adopted an openly confrontational policy toward Washington. Even before the recent bugging incident, Chinese leaders had responded with surprising restraint to several U.S. actions that might have been expected to provoke harsh responses. When the Bush administration announced the most extensive arms-sale package in years to Taiwan in the spring of 2001, Beijing expressed bland, perfunctory protests. The Chinese government actually worked with the United States to gain cooperation from Beijing's longtime ally, Pakistan, in the war against Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda terrorist network and the Taliban government in Afghanistan—despite the possibility of a long-term U.S. military presence in Pakistan. And when the United States announced its withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty in late 2001, Beijing's protests were decidedly muted, even though a U.S. missile defense system would erode the credibility of China's small nuclear deterrent.

It is inherently difficult to speculate about the motives for policy initiatives in a secretive, authoritarian political system like that of China. Nevertheless, several factors appear to account for Beijing's unusual restraint in recent months.

First, the Chinese Communist Party elite wants to avoid any international controversy before the upcoming Party congress and the formal transfer of power from Jiang to heir apparent Hu Jintao. It is reasonable to assume that members of the elite are currently preoccupied with maneuvering for advantage during the leadership transition.

Second, China's leaders desperately need to preserve and expand the economic relationship with the United States. The global economic slowdown, and especially the deepening recession in East Asia, has made the United States market more crucial than ever. China cannot let quarrels over other matters jeopardize access to that market. Without a continued expansion of trade with the United States, it would be difficult for Beijing to sustain economic growth rates in the high single digits. Yet if that growth rate declines, the already alarming number of unemployed Chinese in the major cities could burgeon rapidly and pose a danger to the regime.

Finally, Chinese leaders are increasingly alarmed at the signs of a growing rapprochement between the United States and China's traditional rival, India. Beijing worries (with good reason) about the possible emergence of a U.S.-Indian "strategic partnership" directed against China.

The Chinese response to the warming relations between Washington and New Delhi has been to try to improve China's own relations with both capitals. At the height of the Cold War, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said that it always ought to be an objective of the United States to have closer relations with both Moscow and Beijing than they had with each other. China's leaders seem to have made it their goal to have closer relations with both the United States and India than those two countries have with each other.

It is hard to predict how long China's accommodating policy toward the U.S. will last. Once the leadership transition takes place, we may see a more assertive, if not confrontational, policy re-emerge. Yet there is reason to think that this will not occur anytime soon. The other two factors encouraging a conciliatory policy by Beijing will still be present even after Hu's leadership team replaces Jiang's. If that is the case, the improvement in relations between China and the United States may persist for an extended period of time.

The Japan Times, February 18, 2002

'America's Troubling New Alliance with Beijing

Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage arrived in Beijing with a highly desirable present for China's communist government. He announced that the State Department was putting the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, the principal separatist organization in China's restless Xinjiang province, on its list of terrorist organizations. Washington has thus embraced Beijing's dubious, self-serving view that the secessionist campaign in Xinjiang is nothing more than a manifestation of international terrorism.

It is likely that Armitage's gesture is part of a move based on realpolitik calculations to repair U.S.-China relations that have been under strain ever since the Bush administration took office. The tensions over the April 2001 collision between a Chinese fighter plane and a U.S. spy plane and Beijing's adverse reaction to President Bush's firm pledge to defend Taiwan are only the most prominent examples. The one area in which there has been close cooperation between the two countries is on the issue of terrorism since Sept. 11. It would, therefore, hardly be surprising that Washington would seek ways to consolidate that cooperation.

Nevertheless, backing Beijing's position regarding Xinjiang reflects neither moral courage nor intelligent policy on the part of the administration. Even worse, this is not the first time that Washington has uncritically accepted the position of another government that its political adversaries are nothing more than terrorists. Since Sept. 11, regimes around the world have tried to secure U.S. backing by packaging their problems with insurgents as part of the global terrorist menace. Russia portrays the conflict in Chechnya in that light.

The Philippines contends that not only is the motley gang of kidnappers, Abu-Sayef, an al Qaeda clone, but also that a long-standing Islamic secessionist movement, the Moro National Liberation Front, is linked to al Qaeda. India insists that the insurgents in Kashmir are part of a terrorist international, and New Delhi argues that its suppression of Kashmiri separatism is the moral equivalent of America's actions since Sept. 11. The government of Colombia contends that left-wing rebels in that country are "narco-terrorists," and is lobbying hard for more U.S. military aid.

U.S. policymakers ought to be wary of such efforts to entangle the United States in parochial quarrels. It is difficult to determine which

allegations have merit, which are exaggerations of the truth, and which are simply convenient fictions propagated by regimes facing intense political pressure. America has enough real enemies without blindly lining up against the adversaries of other governments.

Moreover, it is a worrisome sign that Washington is forging cozy relationships with a variety of repressive regimes, such as those in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia, that routinely suppress political opposition. During the Cold War, the United States all too often accepted the self-serving rationales of repressive allies that their opponents were merely stooges of Moscow. America's gullibility on that score led to entanglement in murky civil wars throughout the Third World—from Vietnam to Nicaragua to Angola. Washington must take care not to make the same blunder in the name of the war against terrorism.

In particular, the United States should be cautious about backing Beijing with regard to the simmering secessionist campaign in Xinjiang. Although the ETIM appears to have had some contact with al Qaeda and has used terrorist tactics on occasion, the underlying issues in Xinjiang are complex. It is a grotesque oversimplification to portray that struggle as an effort by the Beijing regime to suppress terrorism. The Uighur population in Xinjiang has legitimate grievances against China's communist rulers.

The Bush administration would be wise to stay out of that quarrel. If Washington is not careful, it will be seen throughout the Islamic world as having given a moral blessing to Beijing's harsh crackdown on Uighur separatists. It is not in America's best interests to have that reputation.

United Press International, September 9, 2002

The Pentagon's Surprisingly Sober Look at China

Coauthored with Justin Logan

After numerous delays reflecting disagreements within the Bush administration, the Pentagon has finally released its Annual Report to Congress on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China. Previous reports conveyed a very hawkish, worst-case portrait of the PRC's capabilities and intent. The 2005 version, however, presents a reasonably even-handed assessment of the PRC military, and of China-U.S. relations generally.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the latest report is its tone. It lauds a "cooperative and constructive" relationship that has emerged between the United States and China since the 2001 EP-3 spy plane incident. At

the same time, it seems to acknowledge the seriousness of China's warnings about Taiwan. It recognizes China's recent anti-secession law as "a rhetorical counter to the U.S. Taiwan Relations Act," and cites a Chinese general who worries about Taiwan for strategic reasons. In the general's view, reunifying with Taiwan is of "far reaching significance to breaking international forces' blockade against China's maritime security."

America's interest is in managing China's inevitable rise to great power status without needlessly embroiling Americans in a war. Doing so requires a dispassionate assessment of China's views on Taiwan. The DOD report is a good step in that direction. The report acknowledges that controlling Taiwan is a "core interest" for China, and for good reason: aside from the motive of national pride regarding reunification, roughly 80 percent of China's energy imports pass through the waters adjacent to Taiwan.

Securing those sea lanes by way of naval access to Taiwan is a high priority for Beijing. (For a look at how seriously great powers take the issue of securing access to energy supplies, one could examine U.S. policy in the Middle East since the 1940s.) China's economic growth is precariously perched on its ability to meet its growing energy needs, and the PRC leadership feels its energy lifeline is in jeopardy if it does not control vital sea lanes.

While DOD recognizes that "China's ability to project conventional military power beyond its periphery remains limited," it also acknowledges China's growing capabilities regarding Taiwan. China has focused its defense spending on acquiring increasing numbers of fourth-generation fighter aircraft from Russia, bolstering its submarine forces, and other measures designed to make its claims over Taiwan more credible. As China's military power increases, the risks to the United States of shielding Taiwan from China will continue to grow higher, raising serious questions regarding the prudence of Washington's commitment.

From a strategic standpoint, the most significant new component of the report is an effort to put the problems China's military modernization poses in a regional context. Previously, the report has been framed in the context of a United States struggle with China over Taiwan; by contrast, the 2005 report notes that the decisions China makes "will have significant implications—not just for the United States, but for China, the Asia-Pacific region, and the world." In particular, China's military modernization could "accelerate a shift in the regional balance of power, affecting the security of many countries."

This reframing is long overdue, and could be useful in shaking other countries in East Asia from their security slumber. Until now, such regional powers as Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia have been able to shrug off China's growing power because of the assumption that the

United States would do whatever it took to balance against China. With a costly and distracting war continuing in Iraq, the Defense Department may have come to the recognition that its resources are not infinite, and that China's neighbors must share the concern over its growing power and prepare their own responses. The new DOD report, coupled with the recent joint U.S.-Japan security declaration adopted in February, may signal a growing recognition that regional powers must step up to help shape China's rise.

On the issue of regional military capabilities, Taiwan gets a well deserved drubbing for its complacent approach to its own security. "Taiwan defense spending has steadily declined in real terms over the past decade, even as Chinese air, naval, and missile force modernization has increased the need for countermeasures that would enable Taiwan to avoid being quickly overwhelmed." DOD officials have been increasingly frustrated over Taiwan's recalcitrance, and the sharp words in the report should be taken as a sign that the United States is not infinitely patient with wealthy allies who seek to free-ride on an increasingly overstretched United States. If Taiwan's opposition parties continue to succeed in blocking adequate defense measures, China could be emboldened, thus making a U.S.-PRC military confrontation more likely.

The 2005 report is not entirely free from the dubious vestiges of reports past. Historically, the DOD estimates of China's defense spending have represented high-end outliers of a wide range of other calculations. The 2005 report claims that PRC defense spending in 2005 could reach \$90 billion. That estimate is almost certainly overblown. Indeed, one of America's top experts on the People's Liberation Army, James Mulvenon, recently accused the Defense Department of making "wild assed guesses" about PRC military spending that are "not based on empirical fact." A recent Rand Corporation report based on source material from China concluded that an accurate figure would be between \$31 and \$38 billion. The new claim about \$90 billion raises questions about the Defense Department's methodology, to say the least.

The chest-beating at the House Armed Services Committee hearing over the Unocal deal should ring alarm bells in American security circles. Demagoguing the China issue may be useful for political purposes, but it can be incredibly damaging to the U.S.-China diplomatic and economic relationship. The fact is, China is a rising great power, and even if we wanted to, there is little we could do to stop it. But by dispassionately assessing China's intent and capabilities, we can accommodate that country's rise in a way that protects American interests and defuses the risk of a conflict. The new tone of the Defense Department's report seems to be a modest step in the right direction.

In The National Interest, August 16, 2005

Transparency Is the Best Weapon, Beijing

For the second time this year, U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has attempted to rattle China's neighbours by pointing to Beijing's opaque military modernisation. In Singapore in June, Mr. Rumsfeld cited China's "escalating" military budget and said: "Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder why this growing investment."

He returned to the theme recently, while visiting China. In Beijing, he complained that China's "rapid, non-transparent" buildup was sending "mixed signals" to the world.

Mr. Rumsfeld has a point. Although historically it has been notoriously secretive, Beijing should consider that disclosing its actual defence spending may be in its own best interest.

At present, both the U.S. Defense Department's estimate of China's spending and Beijing's official defense budget lack credibility. The American figure, which puts China's spending as high as \$90 billion, has been widely derided in the United States as astronomical.

Nonetheless, that high-end figure is seized upon by China-bashers in Congress and many pundits, and it is deftly used as a club with which to beat Beijing.

Meanwhile, China's official figure of \$30.2 billion is equally dubious. Beijing has long excluded whole categories of spending from its defense budget, leading to the rather lame excuse from Mr. Rumsfeld's counterpart, General Cao Gangchuan, that China does exclude "some funding for development of equipment" from its official budget.

China has had a rough year in Washington. The Anti-Secession Law passed in March intensified tensions with Taiwan, caused an uproar in the United States and led directly to the extension of the European Union's arms embargo against China.

The Chinese bid for Unocal—outrageously demagogued and ultimately defeated by economically illiterate members of Congress—caused more anti-Chinese furore in the United States.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration, cowering under a cloud of domestic scandal and an interminable war in Iraq, does not appear to have the political capital to rein in Congress and repair ties with China. Even so, many China-watchers in the United States—moderates from both parties—do not want to align themselves with hardliners.

The trouble is, Beijing has given these moderates little ammunition to counter the negative rhetoric from “panda-haters” in Washington.

China should consider that opening its defense book could be a good tool to that end.

Of course, Beijing would prefer not to disclose its actual level of defence spending.

But it needs to recognize that it gains little from opacity in comparison to what it loses.

Most credible independent experts believe that spending is in the range of \$40 billion to \$55 billion. While that is not a trivial level of defense expenditure, neither is it unduly alarming.

It is comparable to the military budgets of several mid-sized powers, including Japan. And it is utterly dwarfed by Washington’s defense budget of more than \$440 billion.

Beijing should not fear losing face by disclosing its actual defense spending.

Doing so would demonstrate how inflated the Pentagon’s figure is, and show that China is moving away from its Maoist past and toward a future where it plays by international rules, and not just on economics.

South China Morning Post, October 25, 2005

Modern Chinese Secret?

Beijing announced in early March that it plans to boost China’s defense budget by 17.8 percent in the coming year. That fairly hefty increase continues a pattern of double-digit hikes over the past decade. Both the United States and China’s neighbors in East Asia are expressing growing uneasiness about the trend.

Far more troubling, however, is Beijing’s continuing dishonesty about the actual extent of its military spending. According to the Chinese government, the new defense budget will be \$44.9 billion. However, China’s official defense budget omits several pertinent items. In a moment of unusual candor in 2005, defense-ministry official Gen. Cao Gangchuan admitted that China excludes some funding for the development of equipment from its budget. The omitted categories are actually far more extensive and include various weapons purchases, as well as most military research and development expenditures.

Admittedly, all communist regimes tend to lie as a matter of principle. That habit may have persisted in China even as the officially communist

system there has adopted economic policies more attuned to Milton Friedman than to Karl Marx. Moreover, having misrepresented the actual extent of military spending for years, the Chinese government would find it awkward (at the very least) suddenly to offer accurate figures.

There may be a less mundane and more troubling explanation, however. The refusal to divulge the real amount of military spending could be a clumsy attempt to conceal the scope of the effort to modernize China's military. The PRC's forces are certainly no match for those of the United States, but China has come a long way in the past decade from the antiquated, personnel-intensive "people's army" conceived by Mao Zedong.

Beijing is trying to create a smaller but much more capable force—a true 21st-century military apparatus. Among other things, the PRC has deployed more than 900 missiles across the strait from Taiwan, and it is purchasing first-rate fighter planes from Russia. Beijing has embarked on a campaign to expand and modernize its fleet of submarines. China is also trying to strengthen her capability to strike at U.S. naval forces deployed in the Western Pacific in the event of war. Purchases of the sophisticated Sunburn antiship missiles from Russia clearly point to that objective, and the recent test of an antisatellite capability is intended to neutralize the most prominent feature of America's military superiority: our unparalleled ability to use satellites to see and manage a battlefield.

It is unlikely that China is attempting to challenge America's global military dominance. In any case, that would be an utterly unattainable objective for at least another generation. It is possible, though, that Beijing may have more limited but still troubling goals: attempting to create a force capable of intimidating Taiwan (and, eventually, other neighbors in East Asia) and to discourage the United States from honoring her security commitments in the region, as the prospect of confronting China would be both too costly and too dangerous.

While we should be concerned about the lack of transparency regarding the PRC's defense buildup, there is no need to inflate the Chinese military threat, as the war hawks in Washington tend to do. The Pentagon's annual report to Congress last year concluded that Beijing's real military spending was at least \$70 billion and could be as much as \$105 billion. Given the recently announced increase in China's official budget, the Pentagon's estimates in 2007 will likely be about \$82 billion to \$124 billion.

Most independent experts, however, emphatically dispute the Pentagon's high-end figures. James Mulvenon, one of the top experts on China's military, has even accused the Pentagon of making "wild assed guesses" about PRC spending that are "not based on empirical fact." Other independent estimates usually come in below even the Pentagon's low-end estimates.

That is an important point. If China's actual military expenditures are in the \$60 billion to \$70 billion range, as most analysts believe, that is comparable to what other major powers, such as Russia, Japan, and Great Britain, spend on their military establishments and is only modestly greater than what France spends. And, of course, the PRC's outlays are utterly dwarfed by the more than \$600 billion U.S. defense budget.

The Pentagon does the American people a disservice when it exaggerates the extent of China's military spending. But the Department of Defense's foray into threat inflation is mild compared with the efforts of some nongovernmental hawks. The most egregious is a new study by Heritage Foundation analyst John Tkacik, Jr. Using "purchasing power parity," Tkacik alleges that Beijing's military budget is really \$450 billion, "putting it in the same league as the United States." His calculations, he states, "reflect the reality that a billion dollars can buy a lot more 'bang' in China than in the United States."

That thesis has superficial plausibility, but even a cursory examination shows its fundamental flaws. Purchasing-power parity may have some validity when it comes to personnel costs (a dollar would buy more Chinese infantry than it would American infantry), but it has little, if any, application to weapons purchases. A Russian Kilo submarine or a Sukhoi-30 fighter plane would cost the same whether purchased by China, the United States, or any other country shopping at the global market. Sellers do not provide a special Chinese discount.

The absurdity of Tkacik's thesis is even more evident when one considers the extent of military outputs. If Beijing had been spending in the neighborhood of \$450 billion in recent years, we would have already seen an enormous expansion of PRC military capabilities. So, where are the numerous aircraft carriers (to compete with America's 12), the long-range bombers, the vast expansion of China's tiny fleet of intercontinental ballistic missiles, etc.? If China has been spending in the area of \$450 billion per year on her military, she has been getting results that are extraordinarily anemic even for a communist system. If China's defense budget were comparable in size to America's, the PRC would be fielding a military establishment comparable to America's. Yet not even the Pentagon is making that argument. The overwhelming evidence is that China's military is no match for the U.S. military—and won't be for decades.

Unfortunately, Beijing's penchant for understating its actual defense budget plays into the hands of panda-bashers in the United States. The lack of candor and transparency breeds suspicion that China's "peaceful rise" might not be all that peaceful. If the PRC wants to allay such suspicions and neutralize the influence of the hawks, it needs to come clean about its real level of military spending. The United States and the nations

of East Asia should expect nothing less from what former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick termed a “responsible stakeholder” in the international community.

Chronicles, June 2007—Reprinted with permission from *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, a publication of the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois

PART 10

NATO, the Balkans,
and Relations
with Russia

Introduction

NATO's continued existence is testimony to the accuracy of observations by public choice economists about the ability of bureaucratic institutions to survive long after their missions have ceased to have any relevance. Many experts (myself included) believed that NATO would fade away after the abolition of the rival Warsaw Pact alliance and the collapse of the Soviet Union. After all, NATO was the quintessential Cold War alliance, created to keep democratic Western Europe out of Moscow's geopolitical orbit. With the end of the Cold War, the alliance seemed to have no purpose.

Those of us who predicted NATO's demise in the post-Cold War era failed to reckon adequately with three key factors. First, the alliance was Washington's sole institutional mechanism for preserving U.S. dominance in the transatlantic relationship, and U.S. policymakers were not about to relinquish America's hegemonic status. Second, there were an enormous number of vested interests (from arms manufacturers to policy experts to politicized NGOs) on both sides of the Atlantic who benefitted handsomely from NATO's continued existence. Third, the long decades of European free-riding on the U.S. security guarantee had effectively neutered Europe as a serious security player. The nations of the European Community (later the European Union) enjoyed the financial advantages of letting the United States subsidize their defenses, and it had become habit-forming to let the United States incur most of the risks and make the hard decisions on security issues.

Those factors combined to ensure that NATO would not only remain in business, but expand its membership and seek new missions far beyond the alliance's traditional theater of operations. NATO soon meddled in the civil strife accompanying the breakup of Yugoslavia, first intervening to thwart the secessionist campaign of the Bosnian Serbs and later bombing Serbia to force that country to relinquish control over its restive, predominantly Albanian province of Kosovo.

In the late 1990s, the alliance also offered membership to three former members of the Warsaw Pact: Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. A few years later, NATO approved a much more ambitious round of expansion, even incorporating the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—countries that had once been part of the Soviet Union.

During this process, I pointed out repeatedly that the United States, as the leader of the alliance, was adding security consumers and liabilities,

not security producers and assets. The most worrisome aspect of NATO expansion was that the United States was undertaking a permanent obligation to defend strategically and economically marginal small countries on Russia's border. That, I continue to believe, is a profoundly risky venture.

All of NATO's actions were taken over Russia's vehement objections. Tensions rose between Russia and the West, but given Moscow's economic and military weakness, there was little that Russian political leaders could do at the time but protest—and seethe. That situation has now changed. Vladimir Putin has been noticeably less willing than his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, to tolerate NATO's intrusive policies. Moreover, as a major oil and commodities exporter, Russia is in a much stronger position with oil at nearly \$100 a barrel than it was in the 1990s with oil often at \$15 or \$20 a barrel. Moscow has used that surge of revenue to begin revitalizing its military, and the Putin government has combined disturbingly authoritarian policies at home with increasing efforts to undermine U.S. influence abroad. The cooperative relationship between Moscow and Washington that emerged during the initial years of the post-Cold War period is fading fast. That is most unfortunate, because whether we like the Putin government or not, the United States needs Russia's assistance on a host of issues, from the North Korean and Iranian nuclear problems to dealing with Islamic extremism in Central Asia.

The deterioration of relations with Russia has occurred at the same time that tensions have risen within NATO itself. The United States and key European allies (especially France and Germany) disagreed sharply over policy regarding Iraq, and that animosity has spilled over into other issues. The election of friendlier leaders in both Berlin and Paris may dampen vocal disagreements somewhat in the short term, but there is an underlying systemic problem in the alliance. Throughout the Cold War, fear of the Soviet Union assured a reasonable degree of alliance cohesion. NATO members have no comparable existential threat to foster unity today. On issue after issue, from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to Iran, to global warming, to the international criminal court, there is a veritable chasm separating Washington from many of its traditional allies.

NATO also faces an ongoing operational crisis. The alliance has served as a junior partner to the U.S. pacification and nation-building effort in Afghanistan. But European governments have been grudging at best in providing military personnel for that mission, and even when they have, there are often so many restrictions on the use of those personnel as to render them largely irrelevant. U.S. military commanders are increasingly vocal in their complaints about the lack of effective assistance from the NATO allies.

The bottom line is that, while NATO remains superficially an impressive organization, it is less and less relevant to the security problems facing

either the United States or democratic Europe. Bureaucratic momentum will probably ensure that the alliance will not go out of business in the foreseeable future, but the internal divisions and the lack of focus also make it likely that it will be an increasingly hollow shell.

Casting NATO Line Perilously Far to East

In a rousing speech to an enthusiastic crowd in Lithuania—one of the seven countries NATO leaders have invited to join the alliance—George Bush affirmed a commitment that may come back to haunt a future U.S. president. “Our alliance has made a solemn pledge of protection, and anyone who would choose Lithuania as an enemy has also made an enemy of the United States.”

There is no doubt to whom his message was directed. There is only one conceivable source of coercion against Lithuania and the other Baltic republics now or at any point in the future: Russia. For all the talk of cooperative relations between the United States and Russia, Mr. Bush’s speech was a harsh reminder to Russian President Vladimir Putin that the Baltic states are now allies—or more accurately, clients—of the United States and will never again be part of even an informal Russian sphere of influence.

Mr. Bush’s pledge underscores a crucial point. Most proponents of NATO’s expansion eastward act as though the alliance is now little more than a political honor society. Their logic is that, because the nations of Central and Eastern Europe have become capitalist democracies, they deserve to become members of the West’s most notable club. And because NATO is now a political body, so the argument goes, Russia has no reason to fear or oppose its expansion.

But as Mr. Bush’s promise to the Lithuanians should remind us, NATO is much more than a political club. It is still a military alliance with serious obligations for the United States. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty proclaims that an attack on one member is an attack on all. That means the United States is obligated to defend every member—no matter how small, how militarily and economically insignificant, or how strategically exposed that member might be.

And those obligations go on forever. Therein lies the danger. True, there is little risk of a clash with Russia in the near term. Russia’s military

is in no condition to challenge the United States even in Moscow's geopolitical backyard. Moreover, Putin has adopted a surprisingly accommodating policy in an effort to secure economic and political benefits from the United States and its allies.

But who knows what Putin's successor's successor might be like? Who would dare predict the political environment in Russia a decade or a generation from now? All that would be required to trigger a crisis is a Russian president who tires of the Baltic republics' continuing treatment of their Russian inhabitants as second class citizens and decides that Moscow should rectify that situation by force if necessary.

Indeed, a crisis could be triggered if a future Russian president concludes that a Western military presence in the Baltic region is an intolerable intrusion into what should rightfully be Moscow's sphere of influence.

That is why permanent U.S. security obligations are so unwise. The commitments may make sense—or at least be innocuous—under one set of conditions, but they can become disastrous liabilities when conditions change.

When permanent commitments are made to strategically and economically irrelevant clients, the folly is compounded.

The security pledges to Lithuania and the other Baltic republics are a case in point. If the U.S. commitment is ever challenged, Washington would face a choice between a bad outcome and a worse one.

The United States could renege on its commitment, which would devastate U.S. credibility and create doubts about all other U.S. security commitments and statements elsewhere in the world. That would be a very bad outcome.

But matters would be worse if Washington endeavored to carry out its pledge. Such a move could easily lead to a clash with a nuclear-armed great power. That degree of risk should never be incurred except in the defense of America's most vital security interests. The security of three tiny nations on Russia's border doesn't even come close to meeting that test.

Mr. Bush probably believes that his pledge to the Lithuanians is an exercise in harmless (and popular) political symbolism. But it is much more serious. One of Bush's successors, as well as the American people, may have reason to regret his impetuous and ill-advised commitment.

Washington Times, December 2, 2002

Time to Disagree without Being Disagreeable

George W. Bush's administration now confronts the shocking possibility that France will this week join with Russia in vetoing a new UN Security Council resolution authorizing force against Iraq, and that Germany will oppose the resolution too. Such a feud between Washington and its major allies over a key U.S. policy initiative would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

The disagreement over Iraq has brought the divergence of perspectives into sharp relief, but there have been many other sources of tension. Washington and several of its key allies have adopted different views on such issues as the Kyoto protocol on the environment, the International Criminal Court, ballistic missile defense, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Neither side in these controversies is likely to win any awards for maturity. European critics of the Bush administration routinely deride the president as a trigger-happy cowboy and a closet isolationist, although he could scarcely be guilty of both offenses simultaneously. The U.S. record is worse. Bush administration officials have responded to Franco-German opposition to its Iraq policies with the foreign policy equivalent of a temper tantrum. Donald Rumsfeld, the defense secretary, dismissed the opposition as coming from "old Europe," and invited the nations of Central and Eastern Europe to follow U.S. leadership. Members of Congress followed by proposing economic sanctions against France and Germany.

Neither side wants to admit the obvious: that American and European interests and perspectives are diverging on an array of issues. With the demise of the Soviet Union, there is no longer a focal point of unity in the Western alliance. It has taken more than a decade, but transatlantic relations are beginning to return to their normal pattern—the pattern that existed during the century or so before the Second World War and the Cold War. U.S. and European interests may still overlap on some issues, but we are likely to find more and more instances where they do not coincide.

Both the United States and the leading European powers need to adopt a more realistic and mature attitude about these developments. Too often, Europeans want an activist United States that will be responsible for global security and take a leading role in resolving Europe's specific

security problems, such as the Balkan crises of the 1990s. At the same time, many of those same Europeans want the United States to follow the wishes of its allies passively on key policy issues. They seek a United States that is powerful enough to be a hegemon, but humble enough not to exercise that awesome power unilaterally.

In essence, the European allies want the United States to be a tethered hegemon. But that is an inherently contradictory and unrealistic concept. If the European countries want to be taken seriously by Washington, they must forge a cohesive foreign and security policy and back it up with serious military resources. And, if necessary, they must be willing to challenge U.S. policy and not back down. Beyond those steps, they must ask the United States to do less in the security arena while demonstrating their willingness to do more.

United States policymakers and opinion leaders harbour their own illusions about the country's allies. They expect the prosperous and proud European countries to act as obedient clients of the U.S. whenever Washington pursues an initiative. They apparently expect such deference even when the Europeans disagree with the substance of U.S. policy and when European interests may not be served by that policy. Such expectations may have been plausible at the dawn of NATO, when a war-ravaged Western Europe faced a powerful threat to its security and desperately needed the United States as a protector. They are, however, woefully out of touch with reality in the 21st century.

In short, there is an urgent need for greater realism, as well as greater calm on both sides of the Atlantic. Americans and Europeans could continue the unproductive and demeaning spectacle of transatlantic name-calling until bitterness grows to the point that there is little hope of effective co-operation even on those issues where there are common interests.

It would be far better for both sides to acknowledge that the United States and Europe are two regions with overlapping but frequently different interests and perspectives, and that the divergence is likely to grow rather than diminish. In the future, America and its traditional allies may have to agree to disagree on some important issues. Above all, they must learn to disagree without becoming disagreeable.

Financial Times, March 10, 2003—Reprinted with permission from *Financial Times*

NATO: A Troubled Transatlantic Marriage

The NATO summit in Istanbul will produce a barrage of statements about the importance of the alliance in the 21st century, and there will be an equal number of proclamations about the continued good health of the transatlantic security relationship. Such optimism, however, cannot disguise the growing fissures in the alliance.

NATO has dramatically shifted its focus since the end of the Cold War. During that era, the mission of the alliance was straightforward: To deter a Soviet attack on democratic Europe (or more subtly, to prevent Soviet blackmail). But as NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer emphasized in a May 17 speech, territorial defense is no longer the alliance's sole—or even primary—mission. In the 21st century, the principal goal of the “new and improved” NATO is to “project stability”—both in Europe and other regions.

The alliance has actually been moving in that direction for more than a decade, as evidenced by the proactive military interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo. But at least those missions were in the European theater. NATO's latest troop deployment is in Afghanistan, and the United States is pressing hard for a similar mission in Iraq.

But the farther NATO ventures from its traditional territorial defense mission in Europe, the less competent and united the alliance becomes. Only 6,500 troops are deployed in Afghanistan, mainly in the capital, Kabul, and the surrounding area. Yet even that modest undertaking has strained the alliance. Efforts to deploy more forces elsewhere in the country have been postponed repeatedly.

And that is with a mission that has the united backing of NATO members. The situation is much worse with regard to Iraq. Key alliance members, most notably France and Germany, vehemently opposed the U.S.-led war against Saddam Hussein's government. Alliance unity has improved little in the intervening months. Most recently, Berlin and Paris spurned U.S. pleas at the G-8 summit to endorse a NATO peacekeeping deployment to Iraq. The best the United States is likely to get at Istanbul is approval for a limited alliance mission to train Iraqi security forces. Such a result would be little more than a sop to Washington.

The underlying problem is that there is no consensus among NATO members about what the organization should do outside of Europe. That

is especially true regarding policy in the Middle East and Persian Gulf regions—the most likely arenas for “out of area” missions.

Differences over Iraq policy are obvious, but the discord does not end there. Although the United States and its European allies share the objective of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, there are sharp differences over the strategy to achieve that goal. Washington favors isolating the Islamist regime and applying maximum pressure. Most of the European members embrace a more complex strategy of engagement, entailing incentives, as well as penalties.

Perhaps the greatest degree of transatlantic discord involves the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NATO's European members regard U.S. policy as reflexively pro-Israel. Washington considers the Europeans too soft on Palestinian terrorism, and some U.S. officials even believe they detect a whiff of anti-Semitism from their alliance partners. In any case, there is almost no agreement on the substance of policy.

NATO since the end of the Cold War is reminiscent of a married couple that has drifted apart. Some couples will do almost anything to avoid facing the troubling reality that the marriage no longer works. They may purchase a new home or even decide to have a child to hold the relationship together.

Instead of confronting the question of whether an elaborate, formal transatlantic alliance makes sense in the fluid post-Cold War era, NATO has acted like a married couple in denial. It issues ever more vague platitudes about new missions in other parts of the world. It also has expanded its membership, taking in a dozen countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In the process, the alliance has become more of a political honor society than an effective military organization.

The alliance that once faced down the powerful Soviet Union across the heart of Europe now strains to fulfill a meager mission in Afghanistan and squabbles over a host of policy issues. NATO remains superficially an impressive organization. But as Gertrude Stein famously said of Oakland: “There is no there there.” The alliance lacks either the cohesion or the seriousness of purpose to play a significant role in the 21st century.

United Press International, June 23, 2004

Fanning the Flames in the Balkans

R. Nicholas Burns, undersecretary of state for political affairs, recently put Balkan issues back on the front burner when he pressured Bosnia's

Serb, Muslim, and Croat leaders to replace the country's three-person, multiethnic presidency with a single president.

That step is needed, he said, to create a stronger, more cohesive state. He added that there should be a firm commitment to such reforms by the time Balkan leaders visit Washington this month to mark the 10th anniversary of the Dayton accords that ended the Bosnian civil war. Dayton, Mr. Burns intoned, has served its purpose and now needs to "evolve."

Mr. Burns apparently never heard the adage, "Let sleeping dogs lie." At best, his proposal is unwise. At worst, it could re-ignite the Bosnian civil war.

It's true that the Dayton accords are far from perfect. Dayton created a political structure reminiscent of the waggish definition of a camel—a horse designed by a committee.

Bosnia consists of the Bosnian Serb republic and the Muslim-Croat federation, each with a high degree of autonomy, which are tenuously linked by a weak central government. Most real power resides with the two sub-state units—and even more so with an international high representative backed by a NATO army of occupation.

A decade after the Dayton accords, Bosnia is still largely a pretend country. There is almost no sense of nationhood. The economy is heavily dependent on international aid and the spending of the military personnel and international bureaucrats who infest the country. Indeed, nearly half of Bosnia's gross domestic product consists of such international inputs.

The reality is that Bosnia is not significantly closer to being a viable country today than it was when the Dayton accords were signed. But Dayton did provide one very important benefit: It ended a three-sided civil war that had consumed tens of thousands of lives. The new U.S. proposal threatens to undo that achievement.

The principal reason why the Dayton agreement has maintained the peace is that the Bosnian Serbs received an extensive degree of autonomy. Their fear of being dominated by the country's Muslim community (the largest single faction) was the primary reason they had waged a war for independence during the early 1990s. While many of them grumble about some aspects of the Dayton system (especially the often arbitrary conduct of High Representative Paddy Ashdown), they are not sufficiently discontented to resume the armed conflict.

Washington's desire to create a single-member presidency and establish a more "cohesive" and powerful Bosnian central government poses a clear threat to the Serbs. They see such centralization as a direct attack on the autonomy they have enjoyed for the past decade.

What U.S. officials have never understood is that all factions in Bosnia see politics as a zero-sum game. Since Muslims are the most numerous

faction, centralization would play into their hands, creating an opportunity for them to dominate the state. That prospect, however, is anathema to the Serbs (and to the even more decisively outnumbered Croats).

Instead of trying to create a unified state where there is no sense of nationhood, Washington should be moving in the opposite direction. Dayton is indeed just an interim solution. Since Bosnia has never been and never will be a viable country, Dayton should be the prelude to a three-way partition. The Bosnian Serb republic and the Muslim portion of the federation should each become independent countries recognized by the international community. The Croat portion of the federation should be allowed to merge with Croatia.

Partition is the only hope of a truly lasting solution to the Bosnia problem.

If U.S. policymakers cannot bring themselves to make such a bold move, they can at least let the Dayton accords lumber on a while longer. The one thing they should not do is revive the old interethnic struggle for power. Yet, tragically, that is what Washington seems poised to do.

Baltimore Sun, November 6, 2005

NATO Insists on Poking the Russian Bear

Although the fluttering in the West over the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute has ended for now, there is a deeper problem in relations between Russia and the West.

Over the past several months, NATO has steadily crept into Russia's backyard, romancing the former Soviet republics of Ukraine and Georgia with the prospect of membership in the alliance, and even hinting that NATO may attempt to intervene in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Unfortunately, it seems that poking the Russian bear is back in vogue.

On the heels of "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine, those countries—both of which have prickly relations with Russia—have cozied up to NATO. NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told Ukrainian leaders in October that NATO's door "was, is, and remains open" to Ukraine. Less than a week later, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld encouraged the Ukrainian government's efforts to join the alliance.

By November, Scheffer was using his same line to discuss potential Georgian membership.

NATO boosters ought to close the door of expansion, take a deep breath, and explain what, exactly, NATO's mission is now. Equally important, they need to justify how it is in America's self-interest for the alliance to acquire an expanding roster of fragile and unpredictable client states on Russia's border.

NATO's purpose vanished with the Cold War. There was no longer a danger of Russian aggression against the West. Instead of disbanding, however, NATO took up an array of missions entirely unrelated to its original purpose—without defining its new role. Relations between the alliance and Moscow are increasingly testy. Now the alliance continues to poke at Russia by swallowing up former members of the Soviet bloc as fast as it can.

By taking in the Baltic republics as members, NATO is already deeply involved in countries that have historically been well within Russia's sphere of influence. The alliance seems poised to intrude further, and the Russian bear is beginning to growl. Nikolai Bordyuzha, spokesman for the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, warned that NATO bases surrounding Russia would constitute "a potential threat to Russia's security."

Russia—like any other country—tends to get alarmed when the world's sole superpower extends security guarantees and military cooperation to countries on its borders. As NATO continues to expand, the United States has been hailing, and in some cases directly supporting, "color revolutions" that have caused instability and chaos in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. This is a dangerous mix from Moscow's perspective.

It is also a dangerous mix from America's standpoint. NATO is much more than a political club. It is a military alliance with serious obligations for the United States. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty proclaims that an attack on one member is an attack on all. That means the United States is obligated to defend every member no matter how small, how militarily and economically insignificant, or how strategically exposed that member may be.

And those obligations go on forever. Therein lies the danger.

True, there is little risk of a clash with Russia in the near term, but who knows what Putin's successor might be like? Who would dare predict the political environment in Russia a decade or a generation from now?

We don't need to treat Russia with kid gloves, but reasonable caution and consideration is in order.

Orange County Register, January 26, 2006

U.S. Allies Bring Little to Table in Iraq, Afghanistan

Ever since the United States became the world's leading power at the end of World War II, Washington has emphasized the importance of having allies. Indeed, U.S. leaders have often seemed obsessed with that goal, even when many of those allies add little or nothing to America's tangible strength. With the partial exceptions of Japan and the major NATO countries, most of Washington's alliance partners throughout the Cold War were actually protectorates and client states rather than true allies. They were security liabilities, not security assets.

The situation has not improved much since the end of the Cold War. That point is all too clear with the so-called coalition of the willing in Iraq. As it prepared to overthrow Saddam Hussein, the Bush administration was desperate to portray the venture as a multilateral enterprise. The truth, though, is that it has been an overwhelmingly American-British mission from the outset.

Most of the other members of the coalition have provided support that ranges from extremely modest to pure tokenism. Indeed, several have provided no military personnel at all, merely giving endorsements of the mission. Most of the remaining countries have sent contingents of a few hundred—and often just a few dozen—personnel. At the peak level of support, the coalition (not counting the British) consisted of 37 nations and a paltry 30,000 troops. It is now down to 27 nations and fewer than 10,000 troops. Several long-time allies, including Spain and the Netherlands, have withdrawn all of their forces already.

Even when the commitments have been more substantial numerically, the military significance may be far less than it appears. For example, South Korea stationed 3,200 troops in Iraq, but it did so only after formal combat operations ceased. Worse, Seoul insisted that all its troops be stationed deep inside Kurdish territory, where there was virtually no danger of combat.

The South Korean deployment was a profile in courage, though, compared to the “contribution” that Japan has provided. First of all, Tokyo sent only noncombat personnel. Second, other coalition troops (primarily the Dutch) have had to provide security for the Japanese contingent. In other words, Japan's participation did little to enhance the mission in Iraq; it merely created more potential targets to protect.

The allied performance in Afghanistan is only marginally better. America's NATO allies agonized for months before sending a small peacekeeping force to maintain order in and around the capital city, Kabul. Only recently, after intensive prodding, have the allies agreed to expand that force and undertake peacekeeping missions outside the Kabul environs. Even then, the European governments stress that their mission is pure peacekeeping; they will not assist U.S. forces in fighting Taliban and al Qaeda units. As in Iraq, the allied presence in Afghanistan seems focused more on political symbolism than on providing a meaningful military contribution.

Washington pays curiously little attention to what real strengths existing or potential allies bring to the table. Consider the countries that the United States lobbied to join NATO during the alliance's last round of expansion. We added such military powerhouses as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Such tiny states are inevitably security consumers, not security producers. They add next to nothing to America's already vast military power. Indeed, the Baltic republics, given their tense relations with Russia, merely create potential arenas in which the United States could become entangled in unnecessary wars.

It is a great curiosity that the nation that has the greatest degree of power in the international system since Rome is so obsessed with acquiring, maintaining, and placating a network of small, largely ineffectual, and often indifferent allies. Alliances can sometimes be useful, but merely having allies for the sake of having allies makes little sense. Washington needs to adopt a much more realistic and calculating strategy.

Chicago Sun-Times, February 11, 2006

Cheney's Useless Allies

During a recent visit to the Balkans, Vice President Dick Cheney endorsed the aspirations of Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia to join NATO. That is a spectacularly bad idea. Those three nations would contribute nothing to improving the security of the United States. All they would do is create yet another set of potential headaches for Washington.

NATO was once a serious alliance with a serious purpose. Throughout the Cold War, it was the mechanism that prevented the Soviet Union from intimidating or (less likely) invading democratic Western Europe—a region of considerable strategic and economic importance. True, the

United States was always the dominant player in the alliance, but Washington could count on credible secondary military powers, most notably Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Turkey. NATO may not have been the ideal instrument for U.S. interests, since it did allow the European allies to under-invest in defense and sometimes free-ride on the U.S. defense guarantee, but the alliance at least arguably served America's security.

Since the end of the Cold War, that is no longer true. In particular, the new members that the alliance has admitted are little more than weak client states that expect the United States to defend them. That was true even of the first round of expansion that added Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. It was more evident in the second round that added such military powerhouses as Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

Taking on the obligation to defend the latter three countries was especially unwise, because Washington now poses a direct geopolitical challenge to Russia right on Moscow's doorstep. Relations between Russia and its small Baltic neighbors are testy, to put it mildly. At the moment, Russia may be too weak to challenge the U.S./NATO security commitment to those countries, but we cannot be certain that will always be true.

Cheney's endorsement of NATO membership for Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia confirms that the alliance has now entered the realm of farce. The military capabilities of those three countries are minuscule. According to the most recent edition of *The Military Balance*, published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Croatia's military budget is a mere \$626 million, and its military force consists of 20,800 active-duty personnel. Albania's budget is \$116 million, and its force is 21,500. For Macedonia, the figures are \$129 million and 10,890 personnel.

Collectively, the three countries spend less on their militaries in a year than the United States spends in Iraq in four days. How adding such military pygmies to NATO is supposed to enhance the security of the United States is truly a mystery.

But these proposed allies are not merely useless, they are potentially an embarrassment to the alliance, if not a danger. When Cheney asserts that the three Balkan countries would help "rejuvenate" NATO and rededicate the alliance to the values of freedom and democracy, he is out of touch with reality.

Croatia is just a few years removed from the fascistic regime of Franjo Tudjman. Albania is notorious for being under the influence of organized crime. Indeed, the Albanian mafia is legendary throughout southeastern Europe, controlling the bulk of gambling, prostitution, and drug trafficking. Macedonia has a huge problem with its Albanian minority in the north and west of the country. The Albanian inhabitants there have sought

a degree of political autonomy that amounts to independence in everything but name. Indeed, serious questions remain about the proper location of the border between Macedonia and predominantly Albanian Kosovo—a province of Serbia that has been under international occupation since NATO's 1999 air war against Serbia, and which is likely to be granted independence within the next few years.

It is baffling why NATO (and especially the United States as the leader of the alliance) would want to take on such members and their problems. That is a policy that should appeal only to masochists.

NATO is fast becoming a parody of itself. It is increasingly a combination political honor society and geopolitical babysitting club. The prospective admission of the three Balkan countries confirms that the alliance has outlived any usefulness it once had. Someone should take the merciful step and put NATO out of its misery.

United Press International, May 26, 2006

A Military Pledge Too Far for Washington

The diplomatic food fight between Russia and Estonia over the latter's removal of a Soviet war memorial should be one of those things Americans can safely ignore. But because Washington successfully pressed its NATO allies into admitting Estonia and the other two Baltic republics into the alliance, the United States now has a treaty obligation to defend those tiny nations on Russia's border if Moscow resorts to force. It is an unwise, extremely dangerous commitment. As American trade with Asia increases by leaps and bounds, and China and India grow to great power status, the Baltics are the last place the United States needs to assert itself.

Most American proponents of NATO's eastward enlargement act as though the transatlantic alliance is little more than a political honour society. Their logic is that, because Eastern European nations have become capitalist democracies, they deserve to be members of the West's most prominent club. And because NATO is now primarily a political body, so the argument goes, Moscow has no reason to fear or oppose its expansion.

But as the Estonia episode should remind us, NATO is still a military alliance with serious U.S. obligations. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty proclaims that an attack on one member is an attack on all. And even worse, those obligations go on forever. Therein lies the danger. True, in the near term, there's little risk of a clash with Russia. But who would

dare predict the political environment in Russia a generation from now? All it would take to trigger a crisis is a Russian president who tires of the Baltic republics' treatment of their Russian inhabitants as second class citizens and decides to rectify that situation, by force if necessary.

Although Moscow would probably first use economic pressure to force a change in policy, nationalist emotions inside Russia could lead to an adoption of military measures.

Indeed, a crisis could result if a future Russian president concludes that NATO's mere presence in the Baltic region is an intolerable intrusion into Moscow's sphere of influence. Russian concerns on that score have been exacerbated by the efforts of the Baltic states to have NATO combat aircraft deployed in their territory. As Russia's economic and military recovery progresses, its determination to stand up to the United States and its allies is also likely to grow.

That is why permanent U.S. security obligations are so unwise. The commitments may make sense—or at least seem innocuous—under one set of conditions, but they can become disastrous liabilities when conditions change.

When permanent commitments are made to strategically and economically irrelevant clients, the folly is compounded. The security pledges to Estonia and the other Baltic republics are a prime example. If the U.S. commitment were ever challenged, Washington would face a choice between a bad outcome and a worse one. It could renege on its obligations, devastating American credibility and casting doubts on U.S. security commitments and statements elsewhere in the world. Or, even worse, the United States could carry out its pledge, which could easily lead to a clash with a nuclear power. America should never incur that degree of risk except in the defense of its most vital security interests. The security of three tiny nations on Russia's border doesn't even come close to meeting that test.

Washington should at the very least propose the elimination of Article 5. If NATO is now meant to be primarily a political organization, as its supporters contend, there should be little objection. Conversely, if NATO supporters demand that Article 5 be maintained, then their assurances that the alliance is not directed against Russia are disingenuous and we can expect serious tensions with that country in the future.

In any case, the United States should never have made military commitments to these republics. These obligations are a dangerous liability, and the United States must extricate itself from them.

South China Morning Post, May 24, 2007

PART 11

The Disastrous War
on Drugs

Introduction

It has now been nearly four decades since President Richard Nixon proclaimed a war against illegal drugs. Although most of the federal government's resources have been devoted to combating drug use and drug trafficking inside the United States, the international arena has also been a significant concern for U.S. policymakers. That has been especially true regarding the major drug-producing countries of Latin America (Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia) and the principal drug-transiting country (Mexico). More recently, as noted in Chapter 3, Afghanistan has also become a focal point of U.S. anti-drug policy.

As I described in detail in my book *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs in Latin America*, (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2003), despite much U.S. government propaganda to the contrary, the successes of this supply-side campaign against illegal drugs have been modest and fleeting. At the same time, the adverse side effects have been numerous and extremely unpleasant.

Throughout the 1990s, Washington put intense pressure on the governments of the Andean countries to get tough on drug crop cultivation, as well as drug trafficking. That led to the phenomenon that various policy experts have described as the "push-down, pop-up" effect. When the United States exerted most of its pressure on Peru and Bolivia, the amount of drugs coming out of those countries did indeed decline temporarily. However, drug production soared in neighboring Colombia. The result was that the total amount of illicit drugs flowing out of South America to consumer markets in the United States and elsewhere remained about the same.

The Clinton and Bush administrations responded with Plan Colombia, a multiyear, multibillion-dollar effort to stem the surging drug commerce in that country. U.S. officials have proclaimed Plan Colombia a great success, and drug cultivation and production levels in Colombia are down. But the commerce has now rebounded in Peru and Bolivia, and other previous insignificant source countries, such as Ecuador, Venezuela, and Brazil, are now more involved in the trade. The push-down, pop-up effect remains as prominent as ever.

Perhaps the worst side effect of Washington's supply-side campaign is that it fosters violence and corruption in our Latin American neighbors. As I note in various articles, a prohibitionist strategy creates a huge black market potential profit that attracts the most ruthless, violence-prone

elements of society. As these criminal organizations come to dominate the trade, their warfare over turf leads to soaring levels of violence. That was the pattern in Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s, and it is equally prominent in Mexico more recently. In the latter case, some of that violence is now spilling over the border into the southwestern United States.

Violence is not the only odious side effect of an anti-drug policy that creates a lucrative black market in drugs. Trafficking organizations also acquire the financial resources to bribe officials ranging from low-level police officers to high-level bureaucrats and politicians. Indeed, Mexican drug organizations have coined a phrase to describe the choice they give to law enforcement personnel and political leaders: silver or lead. In other words, the choice is to be bribed or killed.

In addition to creating conditions for corruption and violence in drug-supplying countries, U.S. policy has fomented other troubles. An especially bad feature of the war on drugs is the effort to eradicate drug crops. Washington could scarcely have come up with a more effective means of stoking anti-American sentiment. Farmers who grow drug crops watch as aerial spraying destroys their families' chance at something more than a subsistence living. Even worse, aerial spraying is notoriously indiscriminate, often eradicating other crops—including the food crops that poor farmers depend on to sustain their families. Washington has already made needless enemies in Colombia and other Latin American countries. As noted in Chapter 3, it is now on the brink of doing the same in Afghanistan.

Ideally, Washington should abandon the entire prohibitionist strategy. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent at the local, state, and national levels to pursue this hopelessly flawed strategy over the past four decades. America has filled its prisons with drug law offenders, yet finds itself unable to keep drugs out of those prisons. One must ask: If law enforcement agencies cannot even keep high-security prisons free of drugs, what possible chance is there to prevent illegal drugs from coming into a large, free, and open society? The prohibition of currently illegal drugs has not worked any better than the banning of alcohol did during the original Prohibition era in the 1920s.

If U.S. political leaders cannot bring themselves to end the prohibitionist strategy yet, the least they can do is not cause needless problems for people in other countries. Unfortunately, Washington shows no signs of backing away from its insistence that foreign governments wage war against their own populations. Indeed, the Bush administration has proposed yet another ambitious anti-drug initiative, this time focused on Mexico. The so-called Merida Plan creates the likelihood that the growing drug-related violence in that country will become even worse in the next few years. It also confirms that U.S. policymakers have learned nothing from the failure of earlier anti-drug campaigns.

Trumpeting Another Phony 'Breakthrough'

U.S. and Colombian officials are busy celebrating an alleged breakthrough in the war on drugs. According to a new UN study, the U.S.-funded aerial-spraying campaign and other anti-drug programs in Colombia have reduced the amount of acreage devoted to coca plants (the raw material for cocaine) by 38 percent over the past three years. Even those drug warriors who reluctantly concede that previous campaigns to cut the supply of drugs coming out of Latin America were failures argue that "this time it is different."

Perhaps. But there are ample reasons to be skeptical. For example, even as coca production falls in Colombia, it is on the rise in neighboring Peru. Moreover, there are signs of increased coca production in neighbors such as Ecuador, Venezuela, and Brazil that until now have not been major factors in the drug trade.

That raises the question of whether coca production overall has suffered a blow or whether the U.S.-sponsored efforts in Colombia have merely caused production to shift to other locations. It would hardly be the first time.

In the early 1970s, the Nixon administration put intense pressure on Turkey to eradicate the cultivation of opium poppies (the raw material for heroin). The effort seemed to pay off as the quantity of heroin coming out of Turkey plunged. But Mexico promptly replaced Turkey as the leading supplier of heroin to the United States, and the amount of the drug coming into this country scarcely declined at all.

A similar pattern occurred again in the mid- and late 1970s when the U.S. pressured Mexico to crack down on the marijuana trade. That country soon ceased to be the leading source of marijuana to the U.S. market. But Colombia immediately supplanted Mexico as the primary source, and there was never a marijuana shortage in the U.S. market. Furthermore, when the anti-marijuana campaign in Mexico receded at the beginning of the 1980s, that country quickly resumed its status as America's leading supplier.

Perhaps the most telling reason to view Washington's latest claims of success with skepticism is the street price of cocaine in the U.S. If the supply of the drug was truly being disrupted, there should be a major price spike. Instead, the price has remained steady—and low. In some

places, it can be bought for as little as \$120 per gram, significantly less than just a few years ago. That confirms supplies are plentiful.

Even within Colombia itself, there is less to the supply-side victory than it first appears. There have been two extremely unpleasant side effects. First, the crackdown on coca growing has driven thousands of Colombian farmers back into poverty. Farmers can earn up to 10 times as much growing coca as they can any other legal crop. Needless to say, they are not happy about losing their source of income, and many show new sympathy for anti-government guerrillas.

The crackdown has also led to a sharp increase in farmers growing opium poppies, resulting in Colombia (along with Mexico) supplanting Asia as the leading source of heroin entering the United States.

The latest boasts of success coming out of Washington are likely to prove as unfounded as the previous ones. U.S. officials keep defying the most basic economic law: supply and demand. The reality is that as long as there is substantial demand in the United States (and other countries) for illegal drugs, there will always be potential suppliers willing to incur the risks entailed in reaping the lucrative black market premium. Supply-side “victories,” therefore, will always be fleeting illusions.

Orange County Register, July 20, 2003

Another One Bites the Dust: ‘Plan Colombia’ Is the Latest Failed Drug War Policy

John Walters, the head of the *Office of National Drug Control Policy*, recently startled the media by admitting that the \$3.3 billion Plan Colombia, now in its fourth year, has failed to make a significant dent in the amount of cocaine flowing out of that country. Walters added hastily, however, that he expected to see substantial progress in the next year or so.

His comments are the latest in a familiar and dreary pattern. Each new initiative in Washington’s international campaign to stem the supply of illegal drugs is launched with great fanfare. During the early phases, isolated examples of success are touted as evidence that the overall strategy is working. Ultimately, though, reality intrudes, and it becomes clear that the drug supply is as plentiful as ever. Thrown on the defensive, drug warriors admit that the task has proven more difficult than anticipated, but argue that, if we stay the course, success is just around the corner. When

such predictions prove faulty often enough, the existing initiative is quietly buried and a new one is launched with the appropriate fanfare.

That is what has occurred with Plan Colombia. The Clinton administration initiated the program in 2000, and within months U.S. officials boasted about the amount of coca plants (the raw ingredient for cocaine) that the aerial-spraying program was eradicating. Similar claims of success continued until recently. The State Department's most recent annual *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* contended that the amount of coca cultivation in Colombia fell from 420,000 acres in 2001 to 280,000 acres in 2003.

That statistic was superficially impressive, but it ignored two important factors. First, although the acreage devoted to coca cultivation may have declined in Colombia, the acreage in Peru and Bolivia (the other two major players) had risen sharply. That reversed the trend of the mid and late 1990s, when U.S.-funded anti-drug measures led to a crackdown that reduced cultivation in Peru and Bolivia—only to see it explode in Colombia, and spread to new locales such as Ecuador and Brazil.

Second, even if the acreage devoted to coca in the entire Andean region has declined slightly in recent years, drug traffickers have become more efficient. In other words, they are able to produce the same amount of cocaine from a smaller number of cultivated plants. The bottom line is that the supply of cocaine flowing into the United States (and other markets) remains plentiful, as even the nation's drug czar now admits.

Indeed, the situation in Colombia may be even worse than Walters's remarks suggest. Washington has placed great confidence in the willingness of Colombian President Álvaro Uribe to wage a vigorous war on drugs. But a 1991 assessment by the Defense Intelligence Agency concluded that Uribe was in league with drug-trafficking organizations. Indeed, the DIA concluded that Uribe himself was one of the top 100 drug traffickers.

Uribe has denied those allegations, and the U.S. State Department criticized the DIA's assessment and expressed continued confidence in him. Nevertheless, given how thoroughly drug-trafficking cartels have penetrated Colombia's political establishment over the years, the episode creates more than a little doubt.

The Colombian police and military are certainly notorious for drug-related corruption. Just last month, the police commander of one of the major drug-producing provinces and his deputy were sacked after an 80-lb. cocaine seizure mysteriously disappeared. That was the latest in a series of scandals that included the resignation of the head of the National Police when it became apparent that members of his force took more than \$1 million in bribes to return some two tons of cocaine they had seized from traffickers.

Plan Colombia has not succeeded any better than earlier anti-drug initiatives. And contrary to the drug czar's tenacious optimism, that pattern is not likely to improve in the next year—or the next ten years. One wonders how many times United States officials have to travel down the road of failed prohibitionism before they realize that it always leads to a dead end. Given the huge profit margin that exists because drugs are illegal, supply-side campaigns are doomed to fail. It is time that Walters and other policymakers recognize that reality.

National Review Online, August 12, 2004

Is Mexico the Next Colombia?

Despite recent improvements in the overall security situation in Colombia, the Bush administration remains worried about that country. Washington's nightmare scenario is the emergence of a narco-trafficking state allied with extremist political elements and terrorist organizations. U.S. leaders are sufficiently concerned about that possibility that they are ready to continue America's extensive antinarcotics aid to Bogota for several more years.

The fears about Colombia are not unfounded, but U.S. policymakers have a serious problem brewing much closer to home—in Mexico. The drug trade in Mexico has mushroomed in recent years. Five years ago, Thomas Constantine, then head of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, told Congress that the power of Mexican drug traffickers had grown “virtually geometrically” over the previous five years and that corruption throughout the country was “unparalleled.” Matters have grown substantially worse since his testimony.

Mexico is now a major source of heroin for the U.S. market, as well as the principal transit and distribution point for cocaine coming in from South America. People both inside and outside Mexico have begun to worry that the country may descend into the maelstrom of corruption and violence that has long plagued Colombia, the chief drug-source nation in the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, Mexicans now openly speak of the “Colombianization” of their country.

True, Mexico does not face a large-scale radical political insurgency like that afflicting Colombia. The absence of such an insurgency is an important difference because it means that there are no significant anti-American political forces that can exploit the illegal drug trade for revenues to fund their cause. Nevertheless, the similarities between the

situations in Colombia and Mexico are greater than the differences, and Washington has been slow to react to that troubling reality.

In just the past few months, there have been several alarming developments. Rival drug gangs in numerous cities—especially cities along the border with the United States—are waging ferocious turf battles. Several of those struggles, including the one in and around the popular resort city of Cancun, have involved present or former police officers.

The worst situation exists in the border city of Nuevo Laredo. There, the level of violence—and the level of police corruption—reached the point in early June that Mexico's national government suspended that entire police force and sent in the federal police to patrol the streets. For President Vicente Fox's administration, the final straw came when Nuevo Laredo's new police chief was assassinated on June 8, just hours after his appointment.

Federal authorities proceeded to purge the city's police force. After being required to take polygraph exams, 305 of the 765 police officers were dismissed. Indeed, 41 of them were arrested for attacking the federal police when those units arrived in the city. The "new and improved" Nuevo Laredo police were put back on the streets in late July, wearing new uniforms with white shirts. The white color was chosen deliberately, according to Mexican federal authorities, to demonstrate that they were a trustworthy new entity. Those officials apparently were serious.

Aside from the considerable doubt that the purge of the local police would have any lasting benefit, the federal takeover of law enforcement had no meaningful impact on the extent of violence in Nuevo Laredo. Indeed, the number of drug-related killings actually went *up* during that period.

The fiasco with the Nuevo Laredo police is just one indication of the mounting corruption within Mexico's political and law-enforcement systems. Earlier this year, evidence came to light that some of the country's biggest drug kingpins were still running their organizations even while they were inmates in supposedly high-security prisons. The power of the drug organizations is generating fear throughout the country. There is even concern that ruthless drug gangs may have targeted Vicente Fox for assassination, and security around the president has been tightened.

All of this is familiar to those who have studied the impact of the drug trade on Colombia over the past two decades. Another Colombian pattern also is beginning to emerge in Mexico: the branching out of the drug gangs into kidnapping for ransom and other lawless activities. Indeed, several American citizens traveling in Mexico have been victimized. That danger reached such an alarming level that the U.S. State Department issued a travel alert in January—much to the annoyance of the Mexican government.

It would be a tragedy if the corruption and violence that has plagued Colombia also engulfs Mexico. Such a development would automatically be of grave concern to the United States. Colombia is reasonably far away; Mexico is our next-door neighbor and a significant economic partner in the North America Free Trade Agreement. Chaos in that country would inevitably impact Americans—especially those living in the Southwest.

It should not come as a surprise, though, if Mexico is on the path to becoming the next Colombia. The trade in illegal drugs is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise, with the United States as the principal retail market, and Mexico is a key player. Rival gangs are willing to do whatever is necessary to gain control of that trade.

U.S. policy seems to assume that, if the Mexican government can eliminate the top drug lords, their organizations will fall apart, thereby greatly reducing the flow of illegal drugs to the United States. Thus, U.S. officials have rejoiced at the willingness of President Vicente Fox's administration to make the capture of major drug-trafficking figures a high priority. But that is the same assumption that U.S. officials used with respect to the crackdown on the Medellin and Cali cartels in Colombia during the 1990s. Subsequent developments proved the assumption to be erroneous. The elimination of the Medellin and Cali cartels merely decentralized the Colombian drug trade. Instead of two large organizations controlling the trade, today some 300 much smaller, loosely organized groups do so.

The arrests and killings of numerous top drug lords in both Colombia and Mexico over the years have not had a meaningful impact on the quantity of drugs entering the United States. Cutting off one head of the drug-smuggling Hydra merely results in more heads taking its place.

Mexico can still avoid going down the same tragic path as Colombia. Time, however, is growing short. Washington had better pay far more attention to the problem that it has to this point, and U.S. officials need to come up with better answers than the ineffectual and discredited policies of the past.

Chronicles, November 2005—Reprinted with permission from *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, a publication of the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois

Drug-Warrior Wishful Thinking

If you had received a dollar every time a U.S. government official announced that victory was near at hand in the war on drugs, you would be a rich person. The latest “turning point” proclamation came on November 16 when the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy

cited evidence that Washington had achieved a breakthrough in the fight to staunch the flow of cocaine coming into the United States.

What caused this burst of optimism? The street price of cocaine rose 19 percent to \$170 per gram between February and November 2005. White House officials contend the price increase indicates a shortage of cocaine, thus validating Washington's \$4 billion effort to wipe out drug crops in Colombia through aerial spraying. In addition to the price spike, officials assert that the purity of cocaine on America's streets has declined 15 percent—another sign, they say, that supply is dwindling. "These numbers confirm that the levels of interdiction, the levels of eradication, have reduced the availability of cocaine in the United States," White House drug czar John P. Walters boasted. "The policy is working."

Yet the government's own data suggest that such optimism is overblown. For the past twelve years, street prices of cocaine have fluctuated between \$120 and \$190 per gram. Clearly, a price of \$170 is well within that "normal" range. Indeed, the price of cocaine has fluctuated 19 percent or more—both up and down—many times during the 12-year period. The latest fluctuation is nothing to get excited about.

If one examines the price trend over a longer period, the "achievement" is even less impressive. During the early 1980s, cocaine sold for more than \$500 per gram. The long-term trend has clearly been toward lower prices, suggesting that the supply of cocaine has become more plentiful. As Ethan Nadelmann, executive director of the Lindesmith Center's Drug Policy Foundation, notes: "A small blip upward after so many years of decline in price and increase in purity is essentially meaningless."

Other statistics, including some from the federal government itself, cast doubt on the argument that the cocaine supply coming out of South America is being squeezed in any significant manner. Earlier this year, even after reporting that 336,000 acres of coca plants (the raw ingredient for cocaine) had been eradicated through spraying in 2004, the White House conceded that the amount of coca across Colombia had remained "statistically unchanged" from 2003. The news out of Bolivia and Peru, two other major sources of cocaine, was even worse: According to a United Nations report issued in June 2005, coca cultivation in Peru was up 14 percent from the previous year. In Bolivia it was up 17 percent.

Worst of all, even if by some miracle the supply-side campaign against cocaine (and other drugs) succeeded, it would be a dubious achievement. Let's say cocaine prices returned to the levels of the early 1980s. The inevitable result would be that people who have a cocaine addiction would be driven to commit even more crimes than they do today to support their habit. That would not enhance the peace and safety of America's cities.

The reality is that a supply-side strategy of drug prohibition cannot produce a worthwhile result. If it fails and drug supplies remain plentiful, it is a waste of time and money. If it “succeeds” and creates a supply shortage and a resulting price spike, it drives addicts into lives of greater and greater criminal behavior. One would be hard-pressed to come up with a better definition of an inherently bankrupt policy.

John Walters may boast about the latest alleged triumph in the war on drugs all he wishes. But at best, it is nothing more than a minor, temporary, and dubious achievement in an unwinnable war.

National Review Online, December 4, 2005

Strung Out: Prohibition Stays Put South of the Border

Mexico’s president, Vicente Fox, has succumbed to pressure from Washington and refused to sign the reform measure on illegal drugs that the Mexican congress had passed. That legislation would have decriminalized the possession of small quantities of illegal drugs. Mexico seemed poised to join the ranks of the Netherlands and a few other countries that have abandoned the zero-tolerance model embraced by the United States. Under the proposed law, possession of up to 25 milligrams of heroin, 5 grams of marijuana (about four joints), or 0.5 grams of cocaine (about 4 “lines”) for personal use would no longer have been a criminal offense. Small quantities of other drugs, such as peyote or amphetamines, would have been treated in the same fashion.

Once again, the United States proves to be the bully of the Western Hemisphere when it comes to the war on drugs. Washington will not tolerate even the slightest deviation from a prohibitionist policy. Any Latin American country that flirts with reform risks Washington’s wrath and the explicit or implicit threat of economic and political retaliation. Mexico is the latest victim of that intolerance.

Ironically, the legislation was only a modest step in the right direction. One of the more odious features of the war on drugs around the world is the practice of filling the jails with small-time (often recreational) drug users. Mexican legislators merely proposed to end that cruel folly in their country.

Indeed, the real problem with the limited decriminalization measure is that it did not go nearly far enough. It did not get to the root of the growing incidence of drug-related corruption and violence in Mexico.

Both problems have reached epidemic proportions. There have been numerous cases of police personnel moonlighting as security forces for drug-trafficking organizations. Prominent officials tasked with implementing anti-drug laws have been caught taking bribes from drug kingpins. Even the Catholic Church has acknowledged that some of the charitable contributions it takes in come from drug trafficking.

Violence connected with the illegal-drug trade has been on the rise for several years in Mexico. Such cities as Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, and Nuevo Laredo have been especially hit hard. Nearly a thousand people perished in killings connected with the drug trade in 2005. Some Mexicans now worry that their country is spiraling down into a maelstrom of violence similar to that which afflicted Colombia during the late 1980s and the 1990s.

And the violence is no longer confined to Mexico. Political officials in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and California complain that drug-related killings are spilling over the border into their states. Mexican drug gangs operate openly in a number of southwestern U.S. cities.

Most of the corruption and violence is caused by the enormous black-market premium in the illicit-drug trade. The risk factor involved in defying the law means that drugs sell on the street for 10 to 20 times more than they would in a legal setting. An aggressive trafficking organization can make tens—or even hundreds—of millions of dollars a year. That huge financial lure attracts those people who are most inclined to risk jail or death in a cutthroat trade—in other words, the most ruthless and violence-prone elements.

Unfortunately, even the Mexican reformers showed no willingness to legalize the production or sale of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or other drugs to deflate the black-market premium. Indeed, they argued that the decriminalization measure would enable law-enforcement agencies to devote more personnel and resources to suppressing trafficking. The basic prohibitionist strategy would have remained intact. The vast potential profit in the drug trade would persist—and so would the corruption and violence that is tearing Mexico's society apart.

Decriminalizing the possession of small quantities of drugs was a modest sign of enlightenment. But Mexico (like other countries) needs to abandon the entire prohibition model to produce truly meaningful benefits. Unfortunately, given Washington's fanaticism on the subject, the prospects for intelligent reform anytime soon are virtually nonexistent. President Fox's capitulation to U.S. pressure demonstrates that point all too well.

Mexico's Drug Trade

Mexico is a key player in Washington's war on drugs. Unfortunately, the country is looking more and more like a 1980s Colombia—only this time, the corruption, violence and terror surrounding the drug trade are right next door. To ward off disaster, the prohibitionist policy must be abandoned.

Mexico is a major source of heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine for the U.S. market, as well as the principal transit and distribution point for cocaine coming in from South America. For years, people both inside and outside Mexico have worried that the country might descend into the maelstrom of corruption and violence that plagued the chief drug source in the Western Hemisphere, Colombia, for some twenty years, starting in the early 1980s. There are growing signs that the “Colombianization” of Mexico is now becoming a reality.

That tragic prospect is a direct result of Washington's policy of drug prohibition. A prohibitionist strategy inherently creates a huge black-market premium for trafficking in illegal drugs. The enormous potential profit also attracts the most violence-prone criminal elements. It is a truism that when drugs are outlawed, only outlaws will traffic in drugs. If Mexico goes down the same path that Colombia did, the consequences to the United States will be much more severe. Colombia is relatively far away, but Mexico shares a border with the United States and is closely linked to this country economically through the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Chaos in Mexico is already spilling over the border and adversely impacting the United States—especially the southwestern states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

The prominence of the drug trade in Mexico has mushroomed over the past decade. One consequence of the increased prominence of the Mexican cartels is a spike in violence. Although there are nearly a dozen drug-trafficking organizations in Mexico, three groups are especially powerful. Those groups battle law enforcement agencies and one another for control of the access corridors to the lucrative U.S. market. Even supposed victories in the drug war prove to be mixed blessings at best. As STRATFOR, a risk-assessment consulting organization, notes, “inter-cartel violence tends to swing upward after U.S. or Mexican authorities manage to weaken or disrupt a given organization. At any point, if rival groups sense an organization might not be able to defend its turf, they will swoop in to battle not only the incumbent group, but also each other for control.”

The turf battles have been ferocious. Thousands of individuals have perished in incidents of violence related to drug trafficking in the past few years. And there is no sign that the pace of the carnage is lessening. By mid-October 2006, drug-related violence had claimed the lives of more than 1,700 civilians. It was on pace to top the 1,800 killings in 2005 and had already eclipsed the 1,304 in 2004. In addition to civilians, at least 123 law enforcement officials, including two judges and three prosecutors, were gunned down or tortured to death in 2006.

The principal hit men for the cartels have increasingly come from a once elite force in Mexico's military, known as the Special Air Mobile Force. These ex-military renegades, known as the Zetas, were originally sent to the border with the United States to combat drug trafficking. Instead, many of them became assassins for the cartels. Mary Anastasia O'Grady, editor of the *Wall Street Journal's* "Americas" column, described the tactics of the Zetas in a July 1, 2005, article. Noting that they are often involved in execution-style slayings of traffickers from rival organizations, O'Grady emphasizes that they have other functions and serve a larger purpose: the Zetas are also known for their intimidation of police and city officials and extortion practices against local businesses. Their success depends heavily on terrorizing the population, which explains why slayings have now become very public events. Such brutality demonstrates that compliance with the drug traffickers is not always a matter of greed. It can also be a matter of survival for public officials and their families.

Beheadings have become a favorite form of intimidation directed at both rival traffickers and law enforcement authorities. *New York Times* correspondent James McKinley describes one typical incident. In the tourist town of Acapulco, killers from one drug gang decapitated the commander of a special strike force along with one of his agents. They jammed the heads in a fence in front of the municipal police station and left a note: "So you will learn to respect us."

The worst atmosphere of both violence and corruption appears to exist in the northern border city of Nuevo Laredo, a metropolis of 350,000 across the Rio Grande from Laredo, Texas. Of the killings during 2005 that Mexican authorities attributed to drug trafficking violence, almost one third took place in Nuevo Laredo or the surrounding state of Tamaulipas. The level of violence—and the level of police corruption—reached the point in early June that Mexico's national government suspended the entire Nuevo Laredo police force and sent in the federal police to patrol the streets. For President Vicente Fox's administration, the final straw came when Nuevo Laredo's new police chief was assassinated just hours after his appointment.

Federal authorities proceeded to purge the city's police force. After being required to take polygraph exams, 305 of the 765 police officers

were dismissed. Indeed, 41 of them were arrested for attacking the federal police when those units arrived in the city. The “new and improved” Nuevo Laredo police were put back on the streets in late July, wearing new uniforms with white shirts. The white color was chosen deliberately, according to Mexican federal authorities, to demonstrate that they were a trustworthy new entity. Unfortunately, the federal takeover of law enforcement had no meaningful impact on the extent of violence in Nuevo Laredo. Indeed, the number of drug-related killings actually went *up* during that period. “There really is a feeling that you can get away with murder in Nuevo Laredo,” Michael Yorder, the U.S. consul general in Nuevo Laredo concluded.

It must be emphasized, though, that while the situation in Nuevo Laredo may be worse than in other portions of the country, it is by no means unique. The level of violence in Juarez, Tijuana, Acapulco, Cancun, Veracruz, and other cities has also reached alarming proportions.

The fiasco with the Nuevo Laredo police is just one indication of mounting corruption within Mexico’s political and law enforcement systems. Several of the most egregious episodes of violent drug-turf struggles, including in and around the popular resort city of Cancun, have involved present or former police officers. In March 2005, prosecutors charged 27 state, federal, and local police in Cancun.

There have been numerous similar episodes of police involvement in the drug trade over the past decade or so. In February 2000, Tijuana’s police chief was assassinated—the second such assassination in less than six years. A short time later, seven men, including two former members of the Tijuana police force were arrested for the chief’s killing. The men confessed to working for the Sinaloa cartel. In another incident, a bloody gun battle ensued in downtown Tijuana when police attempted to stop a drug trafficker’s armed motorcade. The commander of the police unit and three officers were killed by the trafficker’s bodyguards. Those bodyguards, it turned out, were local police officers.

The Fox government has made a serious effort to crack down on police that have been coopted by the drug cartels. More than 700 officers have been charged with offenses ranging from taking bribes from the cartels to instances of drug-related kidnapping and murder. Yet most knowledgeable observers believe that those arrested represent only the tip of the very big iceberg of corruption.

Nor is the discovery of such corruption a new phenomenon. More than a decade ago, the National Police Commander was caught with 2.4 million dollars in the trunk of his car. Later, he was convicted of giving more than 20 million dollars to another government official to buy protection for one of Mexico’s most notorious drug lords. Perhaps the most embarrassing incident occurred in the mid-1990s when President Ernesto Zedillo

appointed General José de Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo to be Mexico's new drug czar. The general seemed to have excellent drug-fighting credentials, having personally led a much-publicized raid against the head of the Sinaloa cartel. American officials, including then U.S. drug czar Barry McCaffrey, greeted General Rebollo's appointment enthusiastically. Three months later, the Mexican government announced that its new drug czar was in a maximum-security prison, charged with taking bribes and protecting the nation's largest drug trafficker. The general had indeed been tough on drug trafficking—tough, that is, on organizations that competed with his patron's cartel.

The passage of years has done little to reduce the corruption of Mexico's military. In April 2003, for example, three military officers, including a brigadier general, were convicted of accepting bribes from one of the cartels to protect drug shipments heading into the United States. In October 2002, more than 600 members of the army's 65th infantry battalion, headquartered in Sinaloa, were investigated for ties to drug trafficking organizations and for protecting opium poppy and marijuana crops. The corruption problem was deemed so pervasive that the authorities dissolved the entire battalion. Corruption clearly extends into the nation's prison system. In early 2005, evidence came to light that some of the country's biggest drug kingpins were still running their organizations even while they were inmates in supposedly high-security prisons. Indeed, according to U.S. and Mexican law enforcement officials, the struggle in Nuevo Laredo is being waged between rival cartels whose leaders are incarcerated.

It is not certain that any institution in Mexico has remained entirely uncontaminated by the drug trade. There are even allegations that the Catholic Church has willingly been the recipient of contributions from known drug traffickers. Just three years ago, the Fox government's investigation of money laundering included inquiries into the role of the Church. Cardinal Juan Sandoval of Guadalajara even had his bank records subpoenaed during the course of the investigation.

Bishop Ramon Godinez, of the central state of Aguascalientes, caused an uproar in October 2005 when he conceded that donations from traffickers were not unusual and argued that it was not the Church's responsibility to investigate the source of donations. "Just because the origin of the money is bad doesn't mean that you have to burn it," Godinez said. "Instead, you have to transform it." The money, he said, was "purified" once it passed through the parish doors.

All of this is familiar to those who studied the impact of the drug trade on Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s. Another "Colombia" pattern is also beginning to emerge in Mexico: the branching out of the drug gangs into other activities, including kidnapping. Such expansion once made

Colombia the kidnapping capital of the world, and a similar phenomenon is emerging in Mexico. Danger has reached such an alarming level that the U.S. State Department has issued periodic travel alerts advising American visitors to exercise great caution when traveling in certain areas of Mexico.

Drug-related violence does not necessarily stay in Mexico either; according to drug czar John Walters, “The killing of rival traffickers is already spilling across the border. Witnesses are being killed. We do not think the border is a shield.” A Dallas narcotics officer reaches a similar conclusion. “We’re seeing an alarming number of incidents involving the same type of violence that’s become all too common in Mexico, right here in Dallas. We’re seeing execution-style murders, burned bodies, and outright mayhem, . . . It’s like the battles being waged in Mexico for turf have reached Dallas.” Perhaps most worrisome, there are indications that Zeta hit squads are taking up residence in American cities, camouflaged by the burgeoning Hispanic immigrant communities.

The rising violence along the U.S.-Mexico border—along with problems associated with the general influx of illegal aliens—impelled both Arizona governor Janet Napolitano and New Mexico governor Bill Richardson to declare a state of emergency in August 2005. California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is under growing pressure from powerful political constituencies to do the same.

U.S. law enforcement officials along the border are increasingly the targets of violence. At one time, “smugglers would drop the drugs or abandon their vehicles when confronted by U.S. law enforcement.” That is no longer the case. “In today’s climate, U.S. Border Patrol agents are fired upon from across the river and troopers and sheriff’s deputies are subject to attacks with automatic weapons while the cartels retrieve their contraband.” Some of the attacks have come from Mexicans wearing military uniforms. It is not certain whether they were smugglers with stolen uniforms or if rogue elements of the Mexican military were attacking U.S. law enforcement personnel on behalf of traffickers.

It should not come as a surprise if Mexico is on the path to massive drug-related violence. The global trade in illegal drugs is a vast enterprise, estimated at at least \$300 billion a year, with the United States as the principal retail market. Drug trafficking in Mexico alone is estimated to be a multibillion-dollar industry. One can only hope that Mexico’s drug commerce does not grow to the point it has in Afghanistan. In that country, the drug trade accounts for more than one-third of the country’s gross domestic product. Mexico is not yet at that dire point, but the trade is lucrative enough that rival gangs are willing to do whatever is necessary to gain or retain control of it.

U.S. policy seems to assume that if the Mexican government can eliminate the top drug lords, their organizations will fall apart, thereby greatly

reducing the flow of illegal drugs to the United States. Thus, U.S. officials have rejoiced at the willingness of President Fox's administration to make the drug war—and especially the capture of major drug-trafficking figures—a high priority. Since Fox took office in 2000, Mexico has arrested more than 36,000 drug traffickers, including top figures from nearly all the cartels. Washington expects that Fox's successor, Felipe Calderón, will continue the campaign with equal vigor.

But the belief that neutralizing drug kingpins will achieve a lasting reduction in drug trafficking is the same assumption that U.S. officials made with respect to the crackdown of the Medellín and Cali cartels in Colombia during the 1990s. Subsequent developments proved the assumption to be erroneous. The elimination of those two cartels merely decentralized the Colombia drug trade. Instead of two large organizations controlling the trade, today some 300 much smaller, loosely organized groups do so.

More to the point, the arrests and killings of numerous top drug lords in both Colombia and Mexico over the years have not had a meaningful impact on the quantity of drugs entering the United States. Cutting off one head of the drug-smuggling Hydra merely results in more heads taking its place. Jorge Chabat, a Mexican security and drug policy analyst notes: "For years, the U.S. told Mexico's government, 'The problem is that the narcos are still powerful because you don't dismantle the gangs.' Now they're doing just that . . . and the narcos are more powerful than ever."

Mexico can still avoid going down the path of chaos, but time is growing short. Washington had better pay far more attention to the problem than it has to this point, and U.S. officials need to come up with better answers than the ineffectual and discredited policies of the past. If Washington continues to pursue a prohibitionist strategy, violence and corruption will become a dominant and permanent feature of Mexico's life. The illicit drug trade has already penetrated the country's economy and society to an alarming degree.

The brutal reality is that prohibitionism simply drives commerce in a product underground, creating an enormous black-market potential profit that attracts violence-prone, criminal elements. Even the U.S. State Department concedes that point; nevertheless, it remains blindly committed to a prohibitionist strategy.

Drug organizations possess and wield the ultimate instrument of corruption: money. The drug trade has access to almost unimaginable quantities of it. No commodity is so widely available, so cheap to produce, and as easily renewable as illegal drugs. They offer dazzling profit margins that allow criminals to generate illicit revenues on a scale without historical precedent.

When the United States and other countries consider whether to persist in a strategy of drug prohibition, they need to consider all of the potential costs. Drug abuse is certainly a major public health problem, and its societal costs are considerable. But as we have seen over the decades in Colombia and other drug-source countries, banning the drug trade creates economic distortions and an opportunity for some of the most unsavory elements to gain tenacious footholds. Drug prohibition leads inevitably to an orgy of corruption and violence. Those are very real societal costs as well, and that reality is now becoming all too evident in Mexico. U.S. officials need to ask whether they want to risk a chaotic, embryonic narco-state on America's southern border. If they don't want to deal with the turmoil such a development would create, they need to abandon their prohibitionist strategy—and do so quickly.

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PART 12

The Connection
between Foreign
Policy and Domestic
Liberty

Introduction

The Bush administration's Global War on Terror (GWOT) highlights the extent of possible tension between national security objectives and domestic liberty. In recent years, the federal government has taken a number of actions that worry civil libertarians. Provisions of the so-called Patriot Act have received the most adverse attention, but the problems are much broader and deeper. U.S. leaders have authorized widespread electronic surveillance of communications without the requirement to secure warrants, used secret warrants to seize bank records, sent accused terrorists for interrogation to friendly countries that routinely practice torture, established an arbitrary "no fly" list that has ensnared thousands of people (including, at one time, a United States senator), and set up the detention center at Guantanamo Bay where interrogation techniques are employed that seem suspiciously like torture.

Beyond those and other measures put into practice, the Bush administration has made extraordinarily vast claims of power to wage the war on terror. Early on, administration officials even asserted the right to designate anyone, even an American citizen, as an enemy combatant, and confine that individual indefinitely without trial, without any court proceeding whatsoever, indeed, without even access to an attorney. If upheld, such power in the executive branch would make a nullity of the Constitution.

The GWOT has intensified the erosion of civil liberties in the name of national security, but it hardly originated it. Indeed, major blows against the Constitution long predated the GWOT. America came perilously close to losing the Bill of Rights during World War I, as the administration of Woodrow Wilson brutally suppressed anti-war opinion, including putting vocal critics in prison. During World War II, the administration of Franklin Roosevelt committed the shameful act of setting up relocation centers (i.e., concentration camps) for Japanese Americans. During the Vietnam War, both the U.S. military and the FBI spied on and harassed opponents of that conflict. And since the end of World War II, presidents have routinely initiated wars without seeking a congressional declaration of war as required by the Constitution.

Such unhealthy developments have occurred less because of nefarious measures adopted by power-hungry individuals than because of the basic requirements of a global interventionist foreign policy. As I have argued for many years, it is not possible to maintain a limited, constitutional

government at home and have the United States play an imperial role abroad. Such a role enshrines the values of militarism (including an expensive, oversized military), obsessive secrecy, and ruthlessness. Moreover, as Heritage Foundation scholar John Hulsman once put it, an empire requires an emperor. It is no coincidence that the vast growth of presidential power in the past century has tracked almost precisely the rise of America as the world's policeman. That unchecked executive power has now reached the point where it poses a serious, perhaps mortal, threat to the liberty of the American people.

Perhaps the most worrisome aspect of our current situation is the unlimited time frame for the vast new powers being exercised by the federal government in the name of national security. The civil liberties abuses during World War I faded with the reemergence of peace. Japanese Americans were released from the odious relocation centers even before the fighting ceased in World War II, and they were given (albeit belatedly) financial compensation for the violation of their rights. Those conflicts and all other wars in which the United States has been a party came to an end at some point, and at least most of the damage to constitutional liberties could be repaired. Even the long Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union eventually ended.

But the GWOT is different. Given the amorphous nature of the threat, it is difficult to imagine any American president proclaiming an end to that conflict. That means that any liberties that we relinquish and any additional powers that the federal government successfully claims are likely to become permanent features of the American political and constitutional landscape.

As noted in Chapter 4, the threat posed by radical Islamic terrorism, although frightening, is actually rather limited. The terrorists do not have enough power to destroy the American way of life and the American tradition of liberty. But Americans can do that to themselves if they carelessly allow the federal government to infringe on their liberties in the name of fighting terrorism. Benjamin Franklin once stated that those who would sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither. Americans in the 21st century would be well advised to heed that admonition.

“Protecting Liberty in a Permanent War”

With the detention of Jose Padilla (aka Abdullah al-Mujahir), the Bush administration has made an extraordinary assertion of power. It is sweeping and unnerving. The administration contends that, by merely designating a person as an “enemy combatant,” the government can hold him in

prison without according him a trial. Indeed, the government does not have to charge him with any criminal offense, much less present evidence of an offense. That is true even if the person in question is an American citizen and is apprehended on American soil.

Civil libertarians are justifiably alarmed at such an ominous shadow over the constitutional rights of all Americans. But there is another aspect that has received less attention even though it is equally alarming. It is a truism that civil liberties have suffered in most of America's wars. But in all of those earlier episodes there was a certainty that the conflict would end someday. A peace treaty would be signed, or the enemy country would either surrender or be conquered. In other words, America would someday return to normal and civil liberties would be restored and repaired.

The war against terrorism is different. Because the struggle is against a shadowy network of adversaries rather than a nation state, it is virtually impossible even to speculate when it might end. President Bush's initial comment that it might last "a year or two" was long ago consigned to the discard pile.

Indeed, it is not clear how victory itself would be defined. Even if the war is confined to combating al Qaeda, there is no way to confirm at any point that the organization's operatives have been neutralized. The concept of victory becomes more elusive if the goal is the eradication of all terrorism from the planet, as administration officials have sometimes hinted. That is a guaranteed blueprint for perpetual war.

Nor would the mere prolonged absence of attacks on American targets be definitive evidence of victory. How long a period of quiescence would be enough? A year? Five years? Ten years? The reality is that no president would want to risk proclaiming victory in the war on terrorism only to have another terrorist attack occur on his watch. The political consequences of such a gaffe would be dire indeed. For similar reasons, the color-coded warning system adopted by the Office of Homeland Security will likely never go below yellow. The safe political course would be always to emphasize the need for continuing struggle and vigilance.

In short, America is now waging a permanent war. That reality makes civil liberties considerations even more important than in previous conflicts. Whatever constitutional rights are taken from us (or that we choose to relinquish) will not be restored after a few years. In all likelihood, they will be gone forever.

We therefore need to ask whether we want to give not only the current president but also his unknown successors in the decades to come the awesome power that President Bush has claimed. It is chilling to realize that the president is insisting that all he must do is invoke the magical incantation "enemy combatant" and an American citizen can be stripped

of his most fundamental constitutional rights without any meaningful scrutiny by the judicial branch. A place where that is possible is not the America we have known. It is not an America that we should want to know.

Washington Times, June 25, 2002

Liberty and Empire

It is increasingly evident that libertarians find foreign policy a very difficult and divisive matter. Most libertarians oppose the Iraq war, but a substantial number of libertarians supported it, and a smaller, but still significant, number embrace a policy of trying to expand freedom in the world through military force. I find this profoundly troubling. Foreign policy should not be a difficult issue for libertarians.

Advocates of liberty and constitutional government should be united in opposition to the promiscuously interventionist policy that the United States has today. And if one doubts that it is a promiscuously interventionist foreign policy, consider that the United States has used large-scale military force or the threat of large scale military force on 10 separate occasions in the scant 15 years since the end of the Cold War, in places as disparate as Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, and Iraq. That seems to be a bit excessive for a country that is merely protecting the security interests of its population.

By interventionist foreign policy, I refer to the coercive measures taken by the U.S. government—CIA covert operations, economic sanctions, blockades, and military assaults. I do not mean trade relations or diplomatic positions, or even governmental education or propaganda campaigns to try to advance liberty in the world. One might debate the wisdom of such measures, but they are separate issues.

I'll grant that in the security arena there are individual hard cases. No strategy or policy is self-executing; judgments have to be made. Reasonable people can disagree about whether a threat exists, or how serious a threat might be, or if a threat requires coercive, even military, action. But that is different from an argument that all of foreign policy is a gray area and that libertarian principles teach us nothing about what kind of foreign policy is appropriate. Nonintervention should be the default position for a constitutional republic.

I had a discussion about this with a hawkish colleague of mine a few weeks ago, and he conceded that nonintervention should be the default

position—unless there is a “good reason” for it not to be. That is the wrong standard. A “good reason” isn’t good enough; there has to be a compelling reason. It has to be a situation in which virtually any alternative course of action is worse than taking coercive measures.

There is also the matter of burden of proof when it comes to military action. One of the most annoying features about the debate leading up to the war against Iraq was the attitude of the pro-war faction that the burden of proof was rightfully on those who wanted to remain at peace. The burden of proof should be on those who want to use military force—those who say that in this specific case, there is a compelling argument to take this republic into war.

More troubling than some of the disagreements about individual foreign policy cases are those libertarians who believe that it’s possible to have a libertarian crusading state—a global interventionist foreign policy designed to free the unfree—while having a constrained state at home. Such a position is wholly illogical.

Among other things, libertarians who embrace that view seem to assume that domestic policy and foreign policy operate in hermetically sealed compartments. They don’t. To be blunt, if we continue our current interventionist foreign policy, we won’t be able to maintain government even in its current, far-too-large, incarnation. We certainly will not be able to downsize it. That’s because there are inherent requirements of a global interventionist foreign policy and there are inherent results.

One of the requirements is that the country must have a very large, very expensive military. There is no way around that. The United States cannot be intervening willy-nilly in various parts of the world with a small military. We are finding that out in Iraq now. Even with the large military we have, it is not large enough.

One can see the financial requisites of a hyperactive foreign policy in the defense budget. We spend more than \$400 billion a year on the military. The country with the second largest military budget spends \$55 billion a year. Most modern industrial states spend somewhere between \$20 and \$40 billion a year. Talk about opportunity cost. That vast disparity in military spending is the imperial premium. It is the premium for having a global interventionist foreign policy instead of one dedicated solely to self-defense.

There are also very important social and political consequences. With an interventionist foreign policy, there are inevitable changes in the structure of the political system. Power flows inexorably from the private sector to the government sector. Within the governmental sector, it flows from the local and state governments to the federal government. Within the federal government itself, it flows inexorably from the judicial and legislative branches to the executive branch.

This isn't some nefarious conspiracy by "evildoers" or even power-hungry politicians. One can't have a global interventionist foreign policy if every initiative is going to be debated at length by Congress. An interventionist power must have a policy that is predictable, efficient, and reliable. And that requires the concentration of decision-making authority in an imperial presidency. It's no accident that the imperial presidency has developed during the era of global interventionism.

A key result of a global interventionist foreign policy is that it increases America's risk exposure. For instance, as a result of our alliance with the European countries in NATO, we have extended security commitments to Russia's neighbors. Now, I'm very fond of the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. But I'm not willing to take this republic into war to defend them if Russia turns expansionist again. One can apply the same principle to our commitment to Taiwan. That security commitment creates a very real risk of a war someday between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Our risk exposure is substantially greater when we have an expansive foreign policy.

America's risk exposure has also increased as we have alienated the Muslim world with an "in-your-face" political and military presence. We can debate whether U.S. foreign policy is the proximate cause of the rise of radical Islamic terrorism, but it certainly is a significant factor, and it may well be the dominant factor.

Now, what about the terrorist threat? It is a very real danger, but it's also important to put the threat into perspective. We're facing a force of several thousand fanatics. They certainly can do damage to us, but compared to the existential threat that existed during the Cold War, when one serious misstep by the United States or the Soviet Union could have led to a civilization-extinguishing event, the terrorist threat is relatively modest. We should be concerned about it, but we must not panic, or toss our principles overboard in combating this menace—as some libertarians are tempted to do.

It is perfectly reasonable as a matter of self-defense to go after terrorist groups that have attacked America. But that is different from an amorphous war on terror. Terror is a tactic, not an entity. It has long been the weapon of the weak against the strong; it is not a new phenomenon. We can and should go after specific groups that have used terrorist tactics against us, but we must recognize that we are never going to be able to eradicate terrorism from the face of the earth.

As a practical matter, we can't launch attacks on every group that uses terrorism as a tactic—there are too many such groups. Most of them, though, do not direct their attacks against the United States. Other enemies are the target of their wrath. Going after every terrorist group—and

thereby making every country's enemies our enemies—simply is not in our interest.

A war against a specific terrorist group is dramatically different from launching a moralistic, Wilsonian crusade to overthrow tyrants and force-feed the blessing of democracy to populations around the world. That is an inappropriate role for a restrained constitutional government, much less a libertarian government.

Libertarians, even more than other people, ought to understand the distinction between what may be proper conduct for private individuals and groups, and what is proper for a constitutional government of delegated and enumerated powers. An individual has the right to spend his wealth and risk his life as he wishes. But no person has the right to force friends, neighbors, and complete strangers to spend their wealth and risk their lives to implement his moral agenda.

Yet that is precisely what happens when the U.S. government pursues a global interventionist foreign policy and intervenes militarily when there is not a clear threat to the security of the American public.

We also must always keep in mind the consequences of intervention in terms of blood. Take the Iraq mission. Some libertarians want the United States to stay on Iraq until it becomes a tolerant, secular, peaceful, capitalist, pro-Western society.

But how many American lives should be sacrificed in pursuit of that goal, assuming it can be achieved at all? More than 1,100 American soldiers have been killed already, along with another 8,000 wounded, many with life-altering injuries. How many casualties would be too many in the crusade to remake Iraq politically, socially, and economically? Three thousand dead? Five thousand dead? Ten thousand dead? All of those numbers are now in play because of the original decision to invade and occupy Iraq.

Seldom do I hear the proponents of intervention discuss the costs in that way, the cost in blood as well as treasure. Yet that is the most crucial issue. The lives of the American people are not, or at least should not be, available for whatever foreign policy objectives suit the whims of national political leaders. Such blood sacrifices should be made only when the security of Americans is in severe peril.

The U.S. government has a fiduciary responsibility to protect the security and liberty of the American republic. It does not have a moral or constitutional writ to institute the political elites' conception of good deeds internationally any more than it has a writ to do so domestically.

Given the scope of Washington's interventionist foreign policy, we face an increasingly stark choice. Either the United States will adopt a more circumspect role in the world in order (among other reasons) to preserve domestic liberty and constitutional government, or those values will continue to erode, perhaps beyond recovery, to satisfy the requirements of

a global interventionist foreign policy. That choice will determine not only how the United States is defended, but whether this country retains the values and principles that make it worth defending.

Liberty, January 2005

A Useless and Intrusive PR Display

Coauthored with Charles V. Peña

The U.S. response to the July 7 terrorist bombings of the London tube system has been predictable: more hasty security measures. On July 21, police began conducting random searches of bags and packages carried by people on the New York city subway; those who refuse to be searched are not allowed to ride.

According to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, “These kinds of security measures are necessary.” But any security measure must pass two litmus tests. First, it must be proven to be effective. Second, it must not violate constitutional rights. Mayor Bloomberg’s “necessary” security falls down on both counts.

The odds of catching a would-be subway bomber are not very good. New York’s subways carry about 4.5 million passengers on the average weekday, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. If on any given day there were a single terrorist riding the subway, and half the passengers were carrying some sort of bag, the probability of finding him or her during any particular search using a truly random search pattern would be about one in 2.25 million or about four ten-millionths of one percent. Such odds are only slightly better than winning New York’s Mega Millions lottery (about one in 175 million). Even multiplied by thousands of intrusive searches that’s a poor bet—and that assumes terrorists are too dim to adapt by, say, strapping bombs to their bodies.

Random searches on the subway are as useless as random searches of airline passengers at the gate—a practice that fortunately has been eliminated by the Transportation Security Agency after TSA administrator James M. Loy decided it was a “stupid rule.” The spectacle of security personnel patting down grandmothers and toddlers deserved the ample ridicule it generated. Furthermore, the procedure netted exactly zero terrorists. It is also rather telling that British authorities are not instituting random searches on the London tube system—a testament to the fact that doing so would be ineffective and cripple a transportation system that moves seven million people daily.

Aside from the futility of random searches, Bloomberg's panacea ought to be rejected because the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right of the people to be "secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures." Without probable cause—such as someone fitting the physical description of a suspected terrorist—a random search of subway passengers is the antithesis of the Fourth Amendment.

That amendment is already in the intensive care unit thanks to the numerous exceptions made in the name of the war on drugs, as well as some of the provisions of the USA Patriot Act. If Mayor Bloomberg's measures are adopted nationwide, the prohibition against unreasonable searches will be in danger of expiring entirely.

According to New York Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, passengers are free to "turn around and leave" to avoid being searched and having their rights violated. But this is hardly providing the protection of the Fourth Amendment. To begin, it is an impractical solution. Presumably, people are using the subway to go somewhere—most likely to work. It is highly unlikely that many employers will take kindly to an excuse of not wanting to have Fourth Amendment rights violated as a reason for being late or not showing up to work. Also, a decision to turn around and leave is likely to be viewed as suspicious behavior by law enforcement and might be used as "probable cause" for detention and an even more extensive search.

Officials in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco are waiting to see what happens in New York before deciding to implement random searches on Metro and BART, respectively. But deliberation won't change the fact that random searches are both ineffective and a gross violation of constitutional rights. The decision should be a no-brainer.

The outrage in America after the London tube bombings is certainly understandable—as is the desire for Americans to feel safe. At most, that's all random searches on the subway will do: make people feel safer. But such measures won't actually make them safer. It is all too easy to adopt the attitude of one New York subway passenger: "It's just part and parcel of the world we live in."

But nothing could be further from the truth. The world we live in is represented by the Constitution and the principles upon which American society rests. As such, we should heed Benjamin Franklin's admonition that those who would "give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." Random searches on the subway ultimately mean we have neither.

Reason Online, July 26, 2005

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