

Why Kerry: Bush Policies Endanger Israel

by Rep. Henry Waxman and Mel Levine

Republicans are trying to woo traditionally Democratic Jewish voters to President Bush. Their argument is that the president's re-election is in

the best interest of both the United States and Israel. We strongly disagree.

The United States and Israel have long been bound by a strong commitment to democracy, pluralism and tolerance. Both nations' greatest strength comes from the power of these ideals.

Yet under President Bush, we are recklessly squandering the United States' credibility and moral authority. The result is damaging to U.S. foreign policy and perilous for Israel.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most intractable problems in the world. Progress toward peace will require adroit and steadfast leadership from the U.S. president. Neither the United States nor Israel is served by a U.S. president who is disdainful of the facts, lacks curiosity and won't change course even when its flaws are manifest.

Some hoped that the war in Iraq would lead to stability in the Mideast and security for Israel. But just the opposite has happened.

Hostility toward the United States and Israel has never been higher. Iraq has become a magnet for terrorists. Civil war could break out once our troops leave, spreading conflict throughout the region.

The fact is that President Bush's policies have failed. This administration's mismanagement of the situation in Iraq has created a situation where both the United States and Israel are less secure.

The highly respected Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University has concluded that instead of stopping Islamic extremists, the Iraq War "has created momentum for many terrorist elements, but chiefly Al Qaeda and its affiliates."

The ironies abound. We went to war to stop Saddam Hussein from spreading weapons of mass destruction. He had none, but while we weren't looking, Iran and North Korea pushed ahead with their nuclear ambitions.

Now the Saudis, Egyptians and others could feel compelled to speed up their efforts to join the nuclear club. A nuclear power in the Mideast that threatens U.S. and Israeli interests has grown more likely — not less.

We wanted to promote democracy in Iraq, but the best we can hope for may be a strongman to run the country with some legitimacy. Whatever its shape, the new Iraqi government will give power to the Shiite majority, which will be close to Iran, the leading sponsor of Hezbollah terrorists. Emboldened mullahs in Iran have dire implications for both the United States and Israel.

Tragically, President Bush was slow to turn his attention to Israel. More than 300 Israeli civilians were murdered and more than 2,000 were wounded in more than 200 Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians from the time President Bush took office, before he proposed the "road map" for peace and tried to stem the violence. More Israelis have been killed by terrorists during the Bush administration than any other.

What about Sen. John Kerry? The Republicans smear and distort his Senate record, but the fact is that Kerry has a 100 percent perfect voting record on Israel. Kerry has had decades of experience in foreign policy and his visits to Israel have reinforced his understanding of her security needs. He understands nuances and differences in Israeli politics and the Arab world, and he knows that it is a mistake to think of all Arabs and Muslims in one stereotype.

And, most important of all, he understands the importance of the U.S.-Israel alliance and the need to pursue policies that are in America's and Israel's best interests. He will not make decisions in an echo chamber detached from the realities of the Mideast.

President Bush has been an extremist, not a conservative. His administration wants to blur the separation of church and state. He is determined to put his majority on the Supreme Court, which will decide issues on choice and civil liberties for generations to come.

He has put severe constraints on embryonic stem cell research, which has extraordinary potential for saving lives. He has weakened our economy. And he has turned us away from fighting for equal opportunity and social justice. These are not the values that most American Jews support.

Americans and Israelis both need a U.S. president who can bring the world to understand that securing a safe and strong Israel is an essential component of peace in the Mideast.

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