

ADMINISTRATION FOREIGN POLICY FAILURES

Soon after the Bush Administration took office, our nation faced one of the most serious threats to our national security in our history. Through misguided policies, arrogance, and failure to adhere to the principles that have inspired our country, they have left our nation's security in a more precarious and dangerous position than when they assumed office eight years ago.

Afghanistan and the Threat of Terrorism. The Bush Administration's "Global War on Terror" was not only ill-conceived but lacked appropriate attention towards the real culprits behind the attacks of 9/11 – Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. After driving the Taliban out of power in Afghanistan, the Administration diverted its attention, resources, and troops to Iraq instead of achieving stability, sustainable economic progress, and peace in Afghanistan where bin Laden and his followers are still hiding out. As a result, Afghanistan's security situation is worse today than in 2002. With large portions of the country under the control of narcotics-traffickers, the Taliban, or other insurgents, the Bush Administration has failed to deliver peace, security, and prosperity to this vital impoverished nation. The result? Bin Laden and his followers to continue to hide in remote mountainous areas.

Pakistan and the Threat of Terrorism. The Bush Administration has made repeated foreign policy mistakes in dealing with Pakistan, a country in which Al Qaeda and other extremist groups still find safe haven and are actively plotting against the United States. Instead of using the diplomatic, military, and economic might of the United States to crack down on the extremists in the tribal areas of Pakistan, the Bush Administration put all of its trust in a military dictator who failed to deliver any significant security gains for the United States and who has since been forced out of power. The Administration provided billions of dollars to Pakistan with little or no accountability and without significant results. By failing to eliminate the threats posed in this region, the Bush Administration has not only wasted billions of taxpayer dollars but has also severely jeopardized our national security.

Detainees and Guantanamo / Undermining Respect for Human Rights and Rule of Law. The approach of President Bush and his Administration to detainees from counter-terrorist operations has undermined U.S. leadership on human rights and eroded support for our country around the globe. Seven years after the first detentions in Afghanistan, only one detained suspect, Osama Bin-Laden's driver, has been convicted by military commissions established by the President. The Administration refused to apply provisions of the Geneva Conventions to detainees, it authorized interrogation techniques (such as waterboarding) that previous American Presidents have declared to be war crimes, and its leadership failures led to scandalous treatment of Iraqi prisoners at the infamous Abu Ghraib prison.

These actions have damaged the U.S. image abroad and reduced respect internationally for the rule of law. This has undermined public support for U.S. efforts to combat terrorism, made it harder for other governments to cooperate with the United States, and severely limited the ability of the United States to exercise moral leadership on issues relating to human rights and rule of law. These policies have helped terrorists recruit foot soldiers in their efforts against us and put U.S. troops at risk. These unlawful acts have been rejected repeatedly by the U.S. Supreme Court in such cases as *Rasul*, *Hamdan*, and *Boumediene*.

International Cooperation and America's Image Abroad. The world has long looked to the United States as a lodestar of freedom and human rights in times of peace and leadership in times of crisis. But this White House has cavalierly wrecked our hard-won credibility. George W. Bush failed to learn the lessons of his own father's administration – and, indeed, of great presidents throughout our country's history – that some challenges best are handled in concert with others, and he chose to act unilaterally instead.

The Bush Administration frittered away much of the international good will that welled up after September 11, 2001, leaving us much less secure than we were seven years ago. By needlessly forcing the start of the war in Iraq before a true coalition could be built, ignoring our obligations under international agreements and stonewalling global efforts to address urgent environmental challenges, this administration has snubbed potential partners and alienated existing allies.

Dealing with Global Climate Change. President Bush's denial, obfuscation, and dissembling in the face of global scientific consensus about the threat to global security posed by climate change is one of the greatest policy and moral failures of any American President. The United States – the world's greatest polluter and its greatest innovator and problem solver – refused for eight crucial years even to participate in building a global regime to face the impending environmental and security catastrophe. In so doing it handicapped the competitive position of U.S. industry in perhaps the greatest new phase of growth and innovation since the industrial revolution.

Non-Proliferation and North Korea. The Bush Administration's eagerness to reject foreign policies of the Clinton Administration led it to a failed policy toward North Korea's nuclear program. Despite the success of the Clinton Administration's Agreed Framework with Pyongyang, which had shut down North Korea's plutonium-producing capability, the Bush Administration ended the framework and took a hard-line approach to the DPRK. Following the termination of the Agreed Framework process in 2003, Pyongyang withdrew from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, expelled IAEA inspectors, resumed the production of weapons-grade plutonium, and finally tested a nuclear device in October 2006. North Korea's resumption of plutonium production and its testing of a nuclear weapon between 2003 and 2006 strengthened Pyongyang's hand and increased risks related to nuclear proliferation and Northeast Asian security. It was

not until the Bush Administration changed course and pursued a policy of greater engagement with Pyongyang that substantial progress has been made on reducing the threat of North Korea's nuclear program. However, the time the Administration lost due to its ineffective hard-line policy has weakened the United States' hand in the negotiations and made it more difficult to achieve the goal of denuclearization.

Relations with Russia. By focusing its foreign policy almost exclusively on Iraq, the Bush administration failed to foster cooperative relationships with world powers such as Russia. Fueled by petro dollars, Russia emerged from the ashes of economic ruin following the collapse of communism to re-establish itself as a global force. By naively misreading the eyes and soul of a former KGB officer turned president and mistakenly believing Putin to be a reform-minded democrat, President Bush underestimated the rising strength and growing threat of the Russian Federation. He dismissed without consideration Russia's objections to U.S. policies on Kosovo, arrogantly neglected to engage Russia in diplomatic discussions regarding his misguided missile defense shield in Central Europe, turned a blind eye to Russia's flagrant human rights violations in Chechnya and elsewhere, and stood idly by while Putin, as president, systematically dismantled Russia's fledgling democratic structures. Georgia is now paying the price for Bush's misreading of Russia and his inability to act. Ukraine, the Baltic states, and Russia's other former satellite states are already recalibrating the new power relationships in their neighborhood, and that is not benefiting our own foreign policy.

Georgia and Russian Action in the Caucasus Region. After celebrating the Rose Revolution and the triumphant rise of western-educated President Saakashvili, the Bush administration heralded Georgia as a "beacon of democracy" in the Caucasus. In its giddy enthusiasm for Georgia's entry to the global roster of democratic nations and troop contributor to the unpopular war in Iraq, the administration failed to admonish our ally as President Saakashvili took steps to centralize his power and to weaken democratic opposition to his policies. The Bush Administration did not succeed in its efforts to achieve for Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for NATO membership. The response to the Russia-Georgia conflict was embarrassingly slow. Only after the French president and foreign minister had gone to Moscow and Tbilisi to negotiate did we send our Secretary of State to the region. As Russian tanks rolled across Georgian territory, the world watched President Bush flirt with bikini-clad volleyball players in Beijing.

The Middle East. Nowhere have the foreign policy failures of the Bush Administration been more evident than in the Middle East. Bush officials have left virtually every corner of that region in worse shape than they found it.

Iraq. In Iraq, the Administration pursued a needless war based on the false premises that Iraq was harboring weapons of mass destruction and was closely allied with al-Qaeda. It fundamentally misjudged the response of Iraqi Arabs, who greeted us not with "flowers and sweets," as the Administration promised, but with suicide bombs and IEDs.

Moreover, in Abu Ghraib the Administration trampled on fundamental American values and soiled the reputation of the United States throughout the world.

Iran. Iran's march towards a nuclear-weapons capability continued apace throughout the past eight years. The Administration also boosted Iran strategically by removing the two major enemies on its borders, Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Administration became so bogged down with its failed Iraq policy that it did not have the resources or the will to focus on dealing with this enormous threat to international stability. For seven years the Administration resisted the idea of direct, unconditional engagement with Tehran, despite the obvious failures of its intransigent policy.

Democratization in the Middle East. The Administration's centerpiece policy for the region – democratization – has been applied inconsistently and has largely failed, bringing anti-US forces to the fore and undermining U.S. interests, such as the Middle East peace process. Hamas won the Palestinian election in Gaza in 2006, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood far exceeded expectations in September 2005 parliamentary elections. Moreover, the Administration was powerless to prevent Egyptian police from rioting against voters merely going to the polls. As Egypt scorned the Administration's calls for greater democracy and the Administration responded by reducing those calls to a whisper, the United States appeared weak and confused, lacking the courage of its professed principles.

The Hamas election was a special case. In blessing the participation of an armed terrorist group in Palestinian elections, the Administration stripped its democratization policy of any meaningful content. In subsequently refusing to deal with the elected Hamas government – however correct that decision may have been – the Administration left itself wide open to Arab world charges of a double-standard that made a mockery of its efforts to promote democracy. This was particularly true because the Administration had not even warned the Palestinian public that a Hamas victory would have negative repercussions for U.S.-Palestinian relations. Worst of all, Hamas's victory foreclosed any prospect of a peace process, just a few months after Israel's encouraging withdrawal from Gaza.

Middle East peace process. Aside from the Hamas debacle, the Administration's peace process approach has been a flop from a strictly diplomatic viewpoint, seriously contributing to the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate that persists today. For nearly seven full years, the Administration resisted direct involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian problem, even though a brutal intifada was raging throughout that period, entailing the loss of more than 6,000 Israeli and Palestinian lives. Since convening the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, the Administration has little to show for its last-ditch effort at legacy. Although the issues are famously difficult, the Administration should be faulted for its failure to administer the process effectively. Eschewing the concept of a special

negotiator – presumably because that was President Clinton’s approach – Secretary Rice has made repeated visits to the region, her stature diminished by each successive failure to make progress.

The Turkish-brokered Israeli-Syrian talks have left the Administration appearing weak and indecisive. Clearly unenthusiastic about the talks, the Administration has refused to engage (despite the wishes of both parties), and for the first time in history a US Administration has sat on its hands while Israel pursued peace talks.

Lebanon. In Lebanon, the Administration has repeatedly made the wrong call. Rather than pushing for a cease-fire in the early days of the 2006 war, the Administration encouraged Israel to pursue war against Hezbollah. It also encouraged the progressive March 14 forces to hang tough against Hezbollah during an 18-month stalemate that ended only when Hezbollah flexed its military muscles in the street and, following a Qatar-brokered agreement, emerged with unprecedented institutional power in Lebanon. March 14 might have averted the crisis and cut a better deal for itself early on had it not come to believe that the U.S. and the West, in some undefined way, would help it prevail in a showdown with Hezbollah.

Saudi Arabia and Oil Politics. As oil prices quintupled, the Administration was helpless; its Saudi friends repeatedly rebuffing pleas from the President and Vice-President to boost production significantly.

As a result of all the failure to engage on the Israeli-Palestinian front, the Iraq war and Abu Ghraib, the constant vacillation between commitment to liberalization and resort to *realpolitik*, the Bush Administration will leave office having dragged U.S. popularity and moral standing among Middle Easterners to their lowest levels ever. In a private conversation, a senior Arab official neatly encapsulated the damage wrought by the Administration on U.S. diplomacy. “It used to be almost impossible for us to say no to the United States,” he said. “Nowadays it’s almost impossible to say yes.”