

A New Realism

A Realistic and Principled Foreign Policy

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Summary: The United States needs a foreign policy that is based on reality and is loyal to American values. The next U.S. president needs to send a clear signal to the world that America has turned the corner and will once again be a leader rather than a unilateralist loner. Getting out of Iraq and restoring our reputation are necessary first steps toward a new strategy of U.S. global engagement and leadership.

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Sixty years ago, in the pages of this magazine, George Kennan presented a compelling case for U.S. global engagement and leadership to contain Soviet power. His strategic vision laid the foundation for a realistic and principled foreign policy that, despite mistakes and setbacks, united the United States and its allies for the duration of the Cold War.

In the wake of the Bush administration's failed experiment with unilateralism, the United States needs once again to construct a foreign policy that is based on reality and loyal to American values. Such a policy must address the challenges of our time with effective actions rather than naive hopes. And it must unite us because it is inspired by the ideals of our nation rather than by the ideology of a president.

In his July 1947 "X" article, Kennan argued that the United States must meet Soviet power with American power and communist ideology with credible democratic leadership. He understood that containing Soviet communism would require strong American international leadership and that such leadership would depend on the power of our military, the dynamism of our economy, and the courage of our convictions. This strategic vision -- because it was based on fundamental realities and fundamental American values -- informed the policies not only of Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower but also of every president, Democratic or Republican, for two generations.

America is a great nation that knows how to defend itself. But its greatness is built on foundations more solid than self-absorption. We defend ourselves best when we lead others, and the key to our history of effective leadership has been our willingness to seek and find common ground, to blend our interests with the interests of others. Truman and Eisenhower understood that defending Europe and America from the Soviets required a strong military, but they also understood that we could not lead our allies if they did not wish to follow.

These and subsequent American presidents knew the importance of moral leadership. While our remarkable military and prosperous economy gave us the power to lead, our commitment to human dignity -- including our willingness to struggle against our own prejudices -- inspired others to follow. If America is to lead again, we need to remember this history and to rebuild our overextended military, revive our alliances, and restore our reputation as a nation that respects international law, human rights, and civil liberties.

Today, we are at the beginning of a new era of unprecedented global opportunities and global threats. New challenges demand that we chart a new strategic course. To do so, we must

reject easy ideological recipes and examine carefully the assumptions that guided us in the twentieth century. We must assess what it means to be America in the world of today -- a world of rapid economic and technological change, grave and worsening energy and environmental risks, and the simultaneous emergence of new world powers and asymmetric security challenges.

In the twenty-first century, globalization in all its forms is eroding the significance of national boundaries. Many of the greatest challenges that we face -- from jihadism to nuclear proliferation to global warming -- are not faced only by us. Urgent problems that once were national are now global, and dangers that once came only from states now come also from societies -- not from hostile governments but from hostile individuals or impersonal social trends, such as the consumption of fossil fuels.

American foreign policy must be able to cope effectively with these realities. We must reject both isolationist fantasies of retreat from global engagement and neoconservative fantasies of transforming other countries through the unilateral application of American military power. Our policy also must go beyond the balance-of-power realism of the last century. In this new, interdependent world, we need a New Realism -- one driven by an understanding that to defend our national interests, we must, more than ever, find common ground with others, so that we can lead them toward our common purposes.

Looking reality in the face also requires recognizing that because of the failures of the Bush administration, U.S. influence and prestige are at all-time lows. The damage is extensive: in an age of terrorism, when we need all the friends we can get, we find ourselves isolated. The Bush administration's policies have weakened our alliances, emboldened our enemies, depleted our treasury, exhausted our armed forces, and fueled global anger against us. From global warming to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to the number of troops that would be needed to pacify Iraq, this president has preferred ideology to evidence. He has been unwilling to accept that leadership requires not just the power to destroy but also the power to persuade. Rather than doing the hard, patient, necessary work of strategic diplomacy, he has indulged the fantasy that he could reorder the world through unilateralism and bullying.

The Bush administration's foreign policy also has lacked sound principles. The president has regularly employed the rhetoric of the virtuous, but his actions have not matched his words. Moralizing has substituted for moral leadership, lecturing others about democracy has substituted for respecting democratic values. George W. Bush has claimed to be championing democracy, but the rest of the world sees a great nation diminished by secret prisons, torture, and warrantless wiretapping. And every day that we remain mired in Iraq, the world is reminded of the folly, the dishonesty, and the disregard for the opinions of others that got us there.

The next president needs to send a clear signal to the world that America has turned the corner and will once again be a leader rather than a unilateralist loner. To do this, the new president must first end the Iraq war. We need to withdraw all our troops and embrace a decisive new political strategy that engages all the nations of the region, as well as the international donor community. Only when we have done this can we begin the hard work of rebuilding our military and our alliances and restoring our tarnished reputation -- so that we can move forward and lead the world in addressing urgent global problems.

THE NEW CHALLENGES OF A NEW CENTURY

Getting out of Iraq and restoring our reputation and leadership capacities are necessary first steps toward a new strategy of U.S. global engagement and leadership. But these steps alone

are not enough. To address new problems effectively, we must first understand them in all of their complexity. We must question old assumptions, break old paradigms, and embrace new approaches equal to our new tasks. Six trends are transforming the world today.

The first trend is fanatical jihadism bursting from an increasingly unstable and violent greater Middle East. This trend had been growing for years, but the invasion and collapse of Iraq have greatly fueled its rise. A second trend transforming the world (in ways still not well understood by the public) is the growing power and sophistication of criminal networks capable of disrupting the global economy and trafficking in WMD.

Together, these two trends raise the frightening specter of nuclear terrorism. We know that al Qaeda has tried to acquire nuclear weapons and that the Pakistani nuclear scientist A. Q. Khan sold nuclear technology to rogue states. We know that parts of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal still are not secure and that nuclear materials are scattered around the world in dozens of countries and hundreds of locations, some of them no more secure than a grocery store. The proliferation of nuclear weapons to new countries, especially North Korea, has further increased the opportunities for jihadists to obtain them, as has the diffusion of nuclear energy technologies that can be converted for use in weapons programs. Iran, a nation with close ties to the world's most skilled terrorist organization, Hezbollah, is enriching uranium. And al Qaeda has said that it wishes to kill four million Americans, including two million children. In its madness, it claims that such a slaughter of innocents would "balance the scales of justice" for crimes that it alleges we have committed against Muslims. We would be mad not to take it at its word.

A third trend transforming the world is the rapid rise of Asian economic and military power. India and China are destined to be global powers in the decades ahead -- one as a democracy, the other not. And a fourth trend is the reemergence of Russia as an assertive global and regional player with a large nuclear arsenal and control over energy resources -- and one tempted by authoritarianism and militant nationalism. The rise of India and China and the reemergence of Russia call for U.S. strategic leadership to integrate these powerful nuclear-armed nations into a stable global order.

A fifth trend transforming our world is the increase in global economic interdependence and financial imbalances without the sufficient growth of institutional capacities to manage these realities. Globalization has made every country's economy more vulnerable to resource constraints and financial shocks that originate beyond its borders. A global energy crisis or a sudden collapse of the U.S. dollar could do great damage to the world economy.

The sixth trend we face is that of grave global environmental and health problems. Climate change and pandemics such as AIDS do not respect national borders. Poverty, ethnic conflict, and overpopulation spill over national boundaries, feeding into a growing underground economy of money launderers, counterfeiters, and smugglers of drugs, arms, and human beings.

Together, these six trends present us with problems that are international and societal in their origins -- and that, accordingly, will require international and societal solutions. They also demand political leadership that only the United States, the sole superpower, can provide. If the world succeeds in defeating jihadism, preventing nuclear terrorism, integrating rising powers into a stable order, protecting the stability of global financial markets, and fighting global environmental and health threats, the United States will deserve much of the credit. If the world fails to meet these challenges, the United States will deserve much of the blame.

A NEW REALISM

To cope with this new world, we need a New Realism in our foreign policy -- an ethical, principled realism that harbors no illusions about the importance of a strong military in a dangerous world but that also understands the importance of diplomacy and multilateral cooperation. We need a New Realism based on the understanding that what goes on inside of other countries profoundly impacts us -- but that we can only influence, not control, what goes on inside of other countries. A New Realism for the twenty-first century must understand that to solve our own problems, we need to work with other governments that respect and trust us.

To be effective in the coming decades, America must set the following priorities. First and foremost, we must rebuild our alliances. We cannot lead other nations toward solutions to shared problems if they do not trust our leadership. We need to restore respect and appreciation for our allies -- and for the democratic values that unite us -- if we are to work with them to solve global problems. We must restore our commitment to international law and to multilateral cooperation. This means respecting both the letter and the spirit of the Geneva Conventions and joining the International Criminal Court (ICC). It means expanding the United Nations Security Council to include Germany, India, Japan, a country from Latin America, and a country from Africa as permanent members.

We must be impeccable in our own respect for human rights. We should reward countries that live up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as we negotiate, constructively but firmly, with those who do not. And when genocide or other grave human rights violations begin, the United States should lead the world to stop them. History teaches that if the United States does not take the lead on ending genocide, no one else will. The norm of absolute territorial sovereignty is moot when national governments partner with those who rape, torture, and kill masses of people. The United States should lead the world toward acceptance of a greater norm of respect for basic human rights -- and toward enforcing that norm through international institutions and multilateral measures.

We need to start taking human rights in Africa particularly seriously, because the two worst genocides in recent history have taken place there, in Rwanda and now in Darfur. We failed to stop the killing in Rwanda, and for years we have failed to stop the killing in Darfur. America must hold itself to a higher standard of leadership. The United States should have sent a special envoy as soon as the mass killings began in Darfur. We could still do more to mobilize multilateral pressure on the Sudanese government and on China, which has great influence over Sudan. It is shameful that the Bush administration continues to wring its hands over Darfur when it is within our power to do something.

In the long run, I believe that the most important tool to stop human rights violators will be the ICC. If the United States joined the ICC and supported it enthusiastically, the calculus of leaders who engage in or allow crimes against humanity to take place would change. A strong ICC would hold criminal leaders accountable. When all else fails, the United States also should take the lead in providing military support to local and regional forces opposing genocide and in assembling multilateral interventions to stop the killing.

The United States must also be the leader, not the laggard, in global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We must embrace the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and then go well beyond it. We must lead the world with a man-on-the-moon effort to improve energy efficiency and to commercialize clean, alternative technologies. We must implement an ambitious national cap-and-trade system to cut our fossil fuel consumption dramatically and negotiate an equally ambitious and binding global agreement to get others, most urgently

China and India, to follow us into a sustainable-energy future. I have developed these ideas in detail in my energy plan, which environmental groups agree is the most ambitious plan presented by any presidential candidate.

The United States needs to stop considering diplomatic engagement with others to be a reward for good behavior. The Bush administration's long refusal to engage diplomatically regimes such as Pyongyang and Tehran only encouraged and strengthened their most paranoid and hard-line tendencies. Both governments, not surprisingly, responded to Washington's snubs and threats about "regime change" by intensifying their nuclear programs.

THE REAL THREATS

Most urgently, we need to focus on the real security threats from which Iraq has so dangerously diverted our attention. This means doing the hard work to build strong coalitions to infiltrate and destroy terrorist networks, to stop nuclear proliferation, and to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists. In the twenty-first century, a nuclear threat will come not from a missile but from a suitcase or a cargo hull. In such a world, nuclear security will not be achieved with missile defense or a new generation of nuclear weapons. It will come through tough, patient, determined diplomacy to secure fissile material worldwide.

Nuclear terrorism is the most serious security threat we face: nothing will stop suicidal jihadists from using a nuclear bomb if they get their hands on one. Some good things are already being done to improve global nuclear security. The nuclear agreement with India, if the Indian Parliament approves it, will help bring a great democracy, a natural ally of the United States, into the global nuclear regime. The Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has reduced the danger from Russian loose nukes. Its budget should be increased and its timetable accelerated. The Proliferation Security Initiative is also an effective program. But the ease with which A. Q. Khan was able to obtain and distribute nuclear technology demonstrates that the danger from loosely guarded nuclear materials is global and will require a comprehensive, global solution.

The United States, as the leading nuclear power, must immediately lead a comprehensive, global effort to reduce the number of nuclear weapons and the amount of bomb-grade fissile material in the world, to consolidate and secure that which remains, and to consolidate nuclear enrichment worldwide in a limited number of highly secure facilities through a global-fuel-banking agreement. A comprehensive strategy also must prevent the construction of any new power plants that use highly enriched uranium.

If we want other countries to cooperate with us, we need to show that we are willing to do our part. We should reaffirm the commitment we made to the long-term goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world when we signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. We should offer to reduce our arsenal to a few hundred weapons -- enough to deter any attack -- if other nuclear nations reduce their arsenals, too, and if non-nuclear-weapons powers agree to stronger global safeguards and the consolidation of nuclear enrichment.

We must engage China and Russia more effectively, strategically, and systematically, making nuclear security our top priority, especially with Russia. One of the few occasions on which President Bush tried to engage Russian President Vladimir Putin on this issue was at a February 2005 conference in Bratislava, Slovakia. During these negotiations, the United States rightly sought to include Russia's conversion of civilian reactors that use highly enriched uranium. When Russia demurred, however, this item was omitted. The conference

was used to berate Russia about human rights violations rather than to pressure it to safeguard its tactical nuclear weapons and fissile material. We should be concerned about creeping authoritarianism in Russia, which is a potential long-term danger to our national security. But we also need to realize that even superpowers have limited leverage over the internal politics of other states and that we should prioritize matters we actually can influence. The top priority of the U.S. president must be preventing a nuclear 9/11.

Fighting nuclear trafficking will require better human intelligence and better international intelligence and law enforcement coordination. And it will require tough and persistent U.S. diplomacy to unite the world, including China and Russia, behind efforts to contain the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea, even as we provide these nations with incentives and face-saving ways to permanently renounce nuclear weapons. We should remember that no nation has ever been forced to renounce nuclear weapons but that many nations have been convinced to renounce them. The case of Libya shows that even regimes with terrorist pasts can be persuaded to give up their nuclear weapons ambitions. In a rare resort to diplomacy, and building on connections begun by President Bill Clinton, the Bush administration convinced Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi to abandon his plans to develop WMD and to end his support for terrorism. Rather than threatening regime change, we convinced Qaddafi that by coming out of the cold, he would have a secure future. After years of delay, progress is now finally being made with North Korea as well.

We should approach Iran the same way. We need to stop the saber rattling and instead work tirelessly with the international community to impose severe multilateral sanctions. The Iranians must know that they have no future as a nuclear weapons power: the international community will stand united behind painful sanctions. But they also must know that they will receive benefits similar to those that Libya received if they renounce uranium enrichment. If they meet international security standards, sanctions will end, and they will have guaranteed access to fuel enriched and banked elsewhere.

We must also open an ideological front in the war against jihadism. There is a civil war within Islam between extremists and moderates -- and we have been inadvertently helping our enemies in that civil war. We need to start showing, both through our words and through our deeds, that we are not embroiled, as the jihadists claim, in a clash of civilizations. Rather, the clash is between civilization and barbarity. Our enemy is not Islam: most Muslims reject terrorism. Even most Muslims who do not share our liberal democratic values do share our commitment to peace. To enlist them as partners, we need to respect our differences and to present them with a vision that is better than the apocalyptic fantasy of the jihadists -- a vision of peace, prosperity, tolerance, and respect for human dignity.

We should support democracies and democrats around the world, but we should give up on the failed policy of promoting democracy at gunpoint. We must recognize that democratization is a complicated, difficult, long-term project. It took decades or centuries for today's democracies to consolidate themselves. I believe that all nations would benefit from democracy, but we need to recognize that democratization does not happen overnight, especially in nations with deep ethnic or religious divisions or weak civil societies.

COOL EYES AND ARDENT PRINCIPLES

The United States' reputation as a model of freedom and human dignity is one of our greatest resources. We tarnish it at our peril. In the wake of the Bush administration's violations of our values, a skillful public diplomacy effort will be needed to convince the world that the United States has rediscovered itself. Such public diplomacy should include radio and

television broadcasts in local languages, as well as expanded educational and exchange programs.

For such efforts to be credible, however, we really need to live up to our own ideals every day. If we want others to value civil liberties, we need to stop spying on our own citizens. Prisoner abuse, torture, secret prisons, denials of habeas corpus, and evasions of the Geneva Conventions must never again have a place in our policy. We should start by closing our prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and explaining clearly to the world why we have done so.

We must reengage the Middle East peace process with the determination to succeed, so that we can deprive the jihadists of their most effective propaganda tool. We must use all our sticks and carrots to strengthen Palestinian moderates and to achieve a two-state solution that guarantees Israel's security. I would ask Bill Clinton to serve as a high-level full-time envoy to help broker a final settlement. We should also engage discreetly in Kashmir, the tinderbox of Asia.

We are spending more than \$2 billion per week on Iraq, but we are not doing nearly enough to protect our cities, nuclear power plants, shipping lanes, and ports from a terrorist attack. We must spend more to recruit, equip, and train more first responders, and we must drastically improve our public health facilities, which more than six years after 9/11 are not ready for a biological attack. And we need to allocate federal homeland security dollars to the places where they are needed -- the population centers and facilities that we know al Qaeda targets.

The United States of America also needs to start paying attention to the Americas. We need better border security and comprehensive immigration reform. And to reduce both illegal immigration and anti-American populism in Latin America, we must work with reform-minded governments there to alleviate poverty and promote equitable development. We need to strengthen energy cooperation in the region and foster democracy and fair trade. Our efforts to promote democracy must include Cuba. We should reverse the Bush administration's policies restricting remittances to and travel to visit loved ones in Cuba, and we should respond to steps toward liberalization there with steps toward ending the embargo.

Finally, the United States should lead the global fight against poverty, which is the basis of so much violence. Through example and diplomacy, we must encourage all developed countries to honor their commitments to the UN Millennium Development Goals. A commission on the implementation of sustainable-development goals, composed of world leaders and prominent experts, should recommend ways of meeting those commitments. The United States should lead donors on debt relief, increase assistance to very poor countries, and focus aid programs more on primary health care and affordable vaccines. We should double our development assistance and encourage other rich nations to do the same. We need a World Bank focused on poverty reduction and an International Monetary Fund that has a more flexible approach to preserving and building social safety nets. We must promote equitable multilateral and bilateral trade agreements that create jobs in all the countries involved and that protect workers and the environment. We should encourage the expanded use of generic drugs in poor countries, and we should stimulate public-private partnerships to reduce the costs of and enhance access to HIV antiretroviral drugs, antimalaria drugs, and bed nets.

Most important, the United States should lead a multilaterally funded Marshall Plan for Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa. For a small fraction of the cost of the Iraq war, which has made us so many enemies, we could make many friends. A crucial effort in fighting terrorism must be support for public education in the Muslim world, which is the best way to

mitigate the role of those madrasahs that foment extremism. Development alleviates the injustice and lack of opportunity that proponents of violence and terrorism exploit.

The challenges facing us today are unprecedented. We need to learn from the mistakes of the Bush administration and adopt twenty-first-century strategies to solve twenty-first-century problems. We need to see the world as it really is -- so that we can lead others to make it a better, safer place. This is the New Realist vision of an enlightened and effective policy for the challenges of a new era: a realistic, principled policy that looks at the world through cool eyes but is inspired by ardent principles.