

FEAR VS. HOPE: AMERICA AND GLOBAL SECURITY

TO BE TRULY SECURE, AMERICA NEEDS TO CHANGE THE WAY IT LOOKS AT THE REST OF THE WORLD — AND PAY ATTENTION TO SOME LARGER UNDERLYING TRENDS.

BY GORDON ADAMS

The 2004 presidential campaign could have facilitated a useful debate about the nature and purpose of American engagement in the world. But instead, it focused narrowly on terrorism and Iraq policy (and, to a lesser degree, homeland security). As a result, seven months later we are saddled with a near-term policy that could easily produce long-term insecurity, a national security strategy built on a scaffolding of fear and a vision of global hand-to-hand combat with terrorist organizations.

That strategy commits us to pre-empting — acting unilaterally if necessary — any effort we choose by any group or nation anywhere in the world to employ weapons of mass destruction or use terrorist methods to attack the United States or U.S. interests. It has recently been sup-

plemented to commit us to promote democratization around the world, with Iraq and Afghanistan serving as the test cases.

But while real, the security problems this approach is intended to address — terrorism and weapons of mass destruction — are tactics used in the pursuit of larger goals by nations and transnational movements. Dedicating the entire architecture of national security to combating these two threats, as we have done for the past four years, has actually made matters worse. Iraq has become a breeding ground and training site for terrorists, while the race to acquire nuclear technology continues elsewhere, partly in response to U.S. policy.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration is ignoring some powerful underlying trends in international security affairs that spawn terror and enhance the demand for nuclear weapons and other WMDs. Unless these trends are addressed, and soon, we will be fighting terrorists and fearing nukes for a very long time indeed. However, addressing them requires an integrated use of all the tools of statecraft and a long-term engagement with other states and organizations, even those that are not “like-minded” — perhaps especially those.

Successful engagement on these long-term issues will require a profound shift in the way Americans view themselves and the impact of their country on the world. Above all, it calls for a recognition that the United States does not stand above events in the world, responding to “threats,” but is, itself, an “independent variable,” an actor whose past and present actions have shaped how the rest of the world views

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us and how other countries set their respective security strategies.

Focusing on Symptoms

Giving priority to the symptoms of world disorder is not only ineffective, but counterproductive to our own security. Terror is not an “ism.” It is a tactic, one used by organizations (sometimes supported by states) to pursue broader political aims. Weapons of mass destruction have always been just that — weapons, developed by states and organizations for a larger purpose, such as deterrence, projection of power or assertion of sovereignty.

The invasion of Iraq and the overall war on terror both illustrate this dilemma. Going after Saddam Hussein before the job was finished on Osama bin Laden was a fundamental miscalculation. Regardless of their connection (which all available data suggest was, at most, arm’s-length), prosecuting the Iraq war directly and specifically distracted us from pursuing al-Qaida. There is overwhelming evidence that troops, special forces, CIA assets and Civil Service personnel were drawn out of Afghanistan to prepare for Iraq, reducing significantly the forces available and ready to pursue al-Qaida in the hills between Afghanistan and Pakistan. And as anyone with government service knows, the attention span of senior officials is limited by the same time and energy constraints that affect all humans; accordingly, terrorism fell to the second tier as soon as the White House decided to invade and occupy Iraq.

Worse, our massive misunderstanding and mishandling of ethnic and religious tensions in Iraq contributed to the chaos that followed the war, forcing U.S. troops to remain there far longer than anticipated. We have become the occupiers, the alien virus that has invaded the host Iraqi body. As a result, Iraq and terror are now connected in a way they were not two years ago. Indeed, the National Intelligence Council concluded recently that Iraq is now the principal training ground for terrorist organizations such as al-Qaida. Or to quote from a 2004 Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies report:

“During the past year Iraq has become a major distraction from the global war on terrorism. [It] has now become a convenient arena for jihad, which has helped al-Qaida to recover from the setback it suffered as a result of the war in Afghanistan. With the growing phenomenon of suicide

bombing, the U.S. presence in Iraq now demands more and more assets that might otherwise have been deployed against various dimensions of the global terrorist threat.”

The need to keep more forces in the Persian Gulf region for a longer time than planned is stressing not only the U.S. Army, but our entire military. Currently, we are calling to active duty nearly 185,000 National Guard and reserve forces at a time. And our stated commitment to ward off all possible security threats means we will need even more troops, which will be more widely dispersed as other adversaries take them on globally. Overstretch will be the result.

The administration’s repeated supplemental funding requests for this effort are having serious negative consequences for the budget deficit, squeezing funding for domestic needs. In turn, our mounting deficits have a destabilizing effect on the dollar and the willingness of other governments to hold U.S. Treasury notes, with long-term consequences for the U.S. economy and our global leadership role.

In short, Washington is alienating its friends, allies and neutrals around the globe. No rhetoric and no public relations effort can conceal the reality that the U.S. is unpopular today virtually around the world.

Underlying Global Trends

A new and more hopeful long-term security vision is badly needed if our growing insecurity is to be reversed. That vision needs to be based on the recognition that there are three major, interrelated global trends under way that are fueling the threats of terrorist attacks and the proliferation of WMD.

First, as the World Bank has warned, is the emergence of three classes of nations: the globalized, the “new globalizers” (e.g., China, India and Mexico) and the “poor” (the swath of underdeveloped countries from southern Africa to the tip of Indonesia). Or call them the “haves,” the “soon-to-haves” and the “have-nots.” Societies in that last category suffer from high rates of unemployment, population growth and hopelessness, rendering them a fertile breeding ground for security threats. This linkage may well constitute the most critical, yet underappreciated, security issue facing the U.S. Our current strategy of policing “the gap” (to use Thomas Barnett’s term) is simply not working. To meet the security threats generated there, we need broad international engagement in new forms of assistance, international finan-

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cial reform, and a trade policy that is more ambitious and targeted to meet the needs of the “have-nots.”

The second global trend is the crisis of governance. The geography of the “have-nots” overlaps closely with the regions where governance is either authoritarian, weak, unstable, brittle or non-existent. This governance problem was masked by the Cold War, but is now exposed in countries ranging from Indonesia, where the feeble light of elections flickers but civil society remains fragile, through Pakistan, where poor governance poses a serious regional (and perhaps global) security challenge, to the Middle East, where autocratic governance clearly conceals high risks of social and political instability. Moreover, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the governance crisis prevails in an even broader part of the world.

The current prescription for addressing poor governance, and the only positive security message the U.S. has provided in the last four years, is to promote democracy. Democracy is unquestionably a “good thing,” though we may not like the results of democratic elections, whether in Iraq or elsewhere. Helping countries develop governments that are at least minimally representative and responsive, have effective control over their territory, and can “deliver” for their people is essential in order to pave the way for meaningful solutions to multiple social and economic crises. It is also needed to stem the tide of such transnational threats as mass migrations, trade in narcotics, human trafficking and international crime. (Conversely, its absence reinforces the problem of global inequality.) But democracy promotion alone is an inadequate and even dangerous answer to our security problems. Achieving democracy is a long-term and uncertain process. Moreover, democracy, installed from the outside and with no

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attention to economic inequality or ethnic and religious hatred, risks becoming tyranny. Democracy promotion will not address our larger security agenda, as will be discussed below.

The third trend sweeping through many of the same nations can be called “tribalism,” a surge of ethnic and religious hatred unleashed by the end of the Cold War that has become one of the most powerful forces reinforcing conflict around the world. Contrary to the optimistic predictions of a decade ago, history has not “ended,” but has become inflamed.

While tribalism is linked to inequality and weak or brittle governance, it is also identifiably separate. Conflicts of belief do not always fit with a “realist” approach, or with a focus on economic stress. The “clash” of Islam and Christianity is only one manifestation; Kashmir has a different version, as do the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Balkans.

Collectively, these three trends constitute the underlying “threat” to our national security and to global stability. They operate in synergy, a “witches’ brew” that national security policy-makers around the globe will face for decades. Only by recognizing these trends and creating a hope for greater equality, effective governance

and an end to tribal warfare will the U.S. and the international community be able to truly come to grips with the symptomatic dilemmas of terror and proliferation.

Toward an Integrated Strategy

The U.S. needs an integrated, global and hopeful vision of national security, one that focuses on the long term and on overcoming these trends. The current candidate for such a unifying vision is democracy promotion. But while attractive, the promotion of democracy will not address these underlying trends and could make them even more dangerous. First of all, democracy is not a recipe for ending the inequality that results from a globalized economy and failed governance. It is also a very far-off result of very complex processes, which include the emergence of an economic middle class, more effective governance and a reduction in tribalism.

Promoting democracy without addressing poverty, government failure and tribalism only delivers these stresses into a system of governance that cannot resolve them. This, in turn, leads to the kind of rollbacks we have seen in Russia, where economic setbacks have led to a sustained centralization of power and a sharp decline in democracy. Letting countries “eat democracy” exposes them to the risk of tyranny, if these underlying issues are not addressed.

The Bush administration has been swift to hail the January legislative elections in Iraq as vindication of its strategy. Yet democratization was a post-hoc rationale for a policy whose main pillar, Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction, had collapsed. Moreover, elections took place there not because the U.S. encouraged them, but because leading Shiites insisted on them despite the objections of a substantial, irredentist minority that sustains the insurgency.

Even when democracy does come, it sometimes does not produce the outcome Washington wants. Palestinians overwhelmingly elected Yasser Arafat as their leader long before the Iraqi elections, yet the Bush administration refused to deal directly with him; then, after Arafat's death, Washington suddenly revived its support for the democratic process in Palestine, claiming a linkage to its Iraq policy. Lebanon is not Ukraine; it is a country that actually had a functioning democracy for decades, whose return was demanded because the Syrians may have overreached with the death of Hariri Rafik. All these political events in the Middle East are desirable, but do not answer the long-term problems of economic drift and tribalism in the region.

While the promotion of democracy may be a useful element of a broader strategy, it is not even clear that it is being effectively supported by the

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U.S. government today. The vast bulk of our funding devoted to the Middle East and the battle against terrorist organizations goes to support regimes that are autocratic if not authoritarian, such as Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan, or

that have established only a thin veneer of democratic elections, such as Afghanistan. And assistance directly supporting the advance of the rule of law and democratization in other parts of the world, including the former Soviet Union, Asia, Africa and Latin America, has been cut, not increased.

For all these reasons, the United States needs to develop a more integrated focus on the underlying dilemmas facing a substantial part of the world. Implementing such a vision will require fundamental changes in the way the U.S. conducts its statecraft, to integrate and take advantage of the synergy of all the tools of statecraft. It will require a genuine willingness to seek international partners in the effort. And it calls for a recognition that the U.S. is neither a "savior nation" nor a "benign hegemon," but another, powerful actor in an international system — whose past and pre-

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*The only positive
security message the
U.S. has is to promote
democracy. But that
is not enough to undo
the damage of the
past four years.*

sent actions have had both positive and negative consequences for its own security and for global security.

Sharpening Our Tools

Integrating the tools of statecraft is the first challenge. One of the singular failings of U.S. national security policy today has been our inability or unwillingness to strengthen, integrate and fully use all the tools at our disposal. Over the past four years, diplomacy has been set aside and used only sparingly and ineffectively. We handed the job of planning Iraqi reconstruction and governance to an institution — the Pentagon — manifestly unskilled at the task, and left the State Department out of the game. We handed the implementation of those policies to the military, untrained for and unskilled at the task and preoccupied, understandably, with security. Secretary of State Powell was embarrassed by an ill-informed brief he presented before the United Nations. The interagency turf struggle, normal in the best of times, became a scorched-earth battle like few have seen, to the clear detriment of an integrated approach to Iraq. Today it may be too late to recover from the damage. Winning without war, as the



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*Terrorism and weapons
of mass destruction
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Chinese strategist Sun Tzu argued, is the best way to win. But it means putting diplomacy front and center, not at the margins.

Our economic tools have also been underutilized; nor have they been integrated into an overall national security strategy. International financial policy has been virtually invisible in this administration; there has been no crafting of strategies to address the capital needs and adverse international financial flows affecting the “have-not” countries. Trade policy has focused on marginal agreements for free trade with already advanced “soon-to-have” countries, but has not addressed the agricultural market problems of the most poor countries. Development assistance has been “reformed” by creating a fifth development assistance program — the Millennium Challenge Corporation — alongside the existing spigots — USAID, defense assistance, State Department Economic Support Funds and Treasury Department contributions to the multilateral development banks. These programs are scarcely coordinated within the U.S. government, let alone with other donors. Yet these are the very tools needed to fashion a coordinated plan for tackling

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the agenda of global inequities.

Our intelligence tool has been especially poorly misused. Nearly all the preparations for the 9/11 terrorist attacks were missed by the intelligence community, and policy-makers ignored the few warnings that came to them. What “truth-telling” intelligence agencies may have wanted to communicate about Iraq was lost in the fog of the intention to go to war and preconceived notions about the basis for that war, and superseded by flawed, biased data that came from outside channels, such as the Iraqi National Congress. As former Rep. Lee Hamilton, co-chair of the 9/11 Commission, has observed, the intelligence community may always have provided the intelligence the president wanted, but it does not seem to have given him what he needed. Of course, there is reason to speculate that this was because he did not want to hear information that contradicted his beliefs — a sign the intelligence tool was poorly integrated into the strategy.

Yet the agenda of fundamental issues we face demands, more than ever before, good intelligence that can be integrated into our national security strategy. Shuffling the boxes on the organizational chart, however well-intentioned, will not ensure that policy-makers obtain such intelligence, and may prove to be a bureaucratic distraction. Intelligence needs to go looking in some dark places to be useful; it will not do to look under the lamppost for the keys simply because the light is better there.

Public diplomacy is another critical tool. We have had a lot of public relations efforts, but precious little public diplomacy. The PR campaigns we have waged in the Middle East, whether by radio or television, have not been well-received in the region; they may even have backfired when inconsistent with our policy. Furthermore, it is not enough to throw money

***How the U.S. uses its
position as the sole
superpower shapes how
the rest of the world
regards us.***

at the problem: public diplomacy must reflect understanding and empathy for the regions and populations we wish to reach.

Finally, we have the military tool, especially large in size and budget under the current administration. Vital as it is, armed might is still a support function in the national security toolkit. Or to put it another way, it is often the horse on which effective diplomacy rides, but it cannot and should not be the lead horse on the team. As we have seen in Iraq, our overstressed military is willing to do whatever policy-makers ask of them, and to devise inventive responses to get the job done; but the armed forces are simply not well-suited to the task of “nation-building” — leading efforts to promote effective governance and economic development. We run the risk of damaging this essential instrument by over-relying on it and using it inappropriately.

Even with a complete set of integrated tools, the United States cannot tackle these underlying security issues alone. Virtual unilateralism must end; it is counterproductive to achieving our national security goals. Economic inequality, brittle or anarchic governance and tribal strife cannot be addressed in a “my way or the highway” manner. This is not an argument about permission slips or global tests; it is about the underlying problems

and how they can be effectively addressed.

That means persuading others of the wisdom of our vision. Only then can we enlist the participation and cooperation of a very wide array of actors — allies, international organizations and governments, even those wary of us — in support of tackling these underlying problems. It also means accepting the fact that we have squandered an extraordinary amount of good will in the world over the past four years, which will not be easily rebuilt.

The Need for Self-Awareness

The United States has acted in and on the world for more than two centuries. It has done so not as an “exceptional nation,” unlike any other, nor the “indispensable nation” once championed by Secretary of State Albright, let alone a “benign hegemon.” The sooner we get over these notions, the easier it will be to tackle the broad agenda, integrate the tools, and win the support and trust of others.

We are the most militarily powerful country in the world and have a history of interaction, involvement, support, invasion, intrusion and cooperation — a web of experience that links us to the rest of the world. We are, and have often been, the elephant of which the ants are wary, sometimes doing good and sometimes not, but always pursuing what we see as our interests. And while we are a great democracy, our democratic process is sometimes flawed and far from the only example for the world to follow.

Throughout our history, Americans have been eager to pat ourselves on the back for being the “good guy” who always acts selflessly, with the best interests of everybody else in mind. We rarely see ourselves the way others see us, understanding that what we do and have done in the past has had an impact on their lives, on how they view security, and on how they view us. So

we are startled, in our ahistoric way, when disapproval of our policies rises around the world and we are not beloved. Yet that is precisely where we are today.

Gen. Wayne Downing, who once ran the White House counterterrorism office, has said that Osama bin Laden has been able to “convince the Islamic world that the U.S. is the common enemy,” while “we have done little or nothing. That is the big failure.” This is classic myopia. There is no awareness in such a statement that our policies and actions in the region may have contributed to making bin Laden’s message attractive to less extremist Muslims. Nor does it take into account the very real possibility that many Muslims hate our policies, not our culture and values.

To paraphrase James Carville, “It’s the policy, stupid” should be the mantra of every national security policy-maker, rather than delusions that we are a target because our opponents “hate our freedom” or resent our exports of Coca-Cola, McDonald’s and Microsoft. From the perspective of many in the region, American policy toward the Middle East is driven by our desire to ensure an endless supply of cheap oil and to support the Sharon government in its dispute with the Palestinians. It is to accomplish those goals, they contend, that Washington backs authoritarian monarchies, stations troops in the region and detains (and mistreats) Muslims for years at a time. Even our support for democracy is sometimes seen as hypocritical, given our tendency to downplay it when other interests, such as fighting terrorists, are at stake.

No matter how strongly we defend our policies, they just are not selling in the region. And even the most skillful public diplomacy will not change that. This point of self-awareness is critical. When we support autocratic governments, regardless of our motives, we

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are not going to become beloved. When we lash out at other governments for not supporting us at all times, we may feel good, but the risks to our security have increased at the same time. And when we invade and occupy a country that has not attacked us, it calls into serious question our commitment to self-determination.

Persisting on our current path will only build popular support for groups like al-Qaida, leaving us insecure for a very long time, indeed. Conversely, offering a hopeful vision through willingness to tackle the agenda of underlying global security threats would go a long way toward dealing with the root causes of the near-term threats of terror and nuclear proliferation in an integrated and effective way. Of course, this will require us to listen to others and to show some humility and awareness of our own history and its impact on the rest of the world. Showing, in Thomas Jefferson’s words, “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind” will not rob us of our confidence and security. In fact, the reverse is the case: until we learn from history, and are able to see ourselves as others see us, our engagement and our leadership are doomed to failure. ■



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