

BUSH'S ILLIBERAL POWER.

Force Full

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July 11, 1995: The U.N. safe area of Srebrenica was under savage Bosnian Serb attack. Some 40,000 Muslims were on the run. Based in Sarajevo, I heard the sound of NATO planes roaring overhead. By the time I pried open the shutters, I caught only the backsides of the F-16s. They suggested, in their haste and numbers--18, all told--a newfound determination. Theirs was a rescue mission.

Later in the day, I heard the planes again, this time heading in the opposite direction. They had been to Srebrenica and were returning to their base in Aviano, Italy. They had plinked a single, geriatric tank. I know I imagined it, but I swear the tails of the planes were drooping in humiliation. Over the course of the next few days, Bosnian Serb forces systematically murdered some 7,000 Muslim men and boys. The U.N. safe area was no more.

Such was the fate of liberalism and American power in the 1990s. American might would not be exerted on behalf of anything besides the most narrowly defined American interests: physical security and economic prosperity. In the sloth induced by our seeming invincibility and unprecedented wealth, the United States retreated. By the mid-'90s the Powell Doctrine had acquired a partner: Thomas Friedman's McDonald's Doctrine. Since no two countries with golden arches on their skylines had ever made war on each other, it would be left to Big Macs to prevent gross violations of human rights. By the end of the fat decade, the fall of the Wall, which had once seemed to signal the triumph of freedom, had come to represent the ascent only of the free market. With an invisible hand doing the liberalizing, American politicians would risk nothing, American citizens would sacrifice nothing, and American companies would benefit. Foreign policy would be carried out less by the State Department than by the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, and Treasury. In the liberal progress narrative, soon to become an alibi, universal human rights were inevitable, and history's end was nigh.

It was a lost decade. A journalist friend of mine traveled with Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Europe in 1993 for one of his fruitless Balkan negotiations. When the official delegation stopped at Shannon Airport for refueling on the way home, Christopher, not generally sociable, surprised my friend by pulling up beside him at the bar. "What can I get you?" the burly bartender asked the secretary. Christopher responded, "I'd like an Irish coffee, please ... but hold the whiskey and make it decaf." When I think of the '90s, I think of Christopher's Irish coffee. The United States wanted American power to defend human life, but only on the condition that we hold the Americans, hold the power, and, in the end, hold our principles.

The very qualities that made liberals prone to care about evil seemed to make them incapable of coping with it. A liberal was, as Robert Frost observed, "a man too broadminded to take his own side in a quarrel." Liberals resisted black-and-white

characterizations, sought nuance and understanding, and dithered. They were also torn by the dual impulses of protecting human rights on the one hand and restraining U.S. hegemony on the other.

To be fair, it is not always obvious how best to advance human dignity. Would the Chinese be better off if Congress denied their country permanent normal trade relations? Would lifting an arms embargo against Bosnia's Muslims have meant fewer concentration camps? What principles should replace the Washington Consensus on economic development? But this uncertainty over means served as one excuse among many for slighting or scrapping the principled ends.

Now that Bill Clinton's invisible hand has been replaced by George W. Bush's iron fist, however, we see the opposite problem: an overreliance on power in the name of principle. With the United States overwhelmingly strong but notably vulnerable, the question today is whether the United States is structurally capable of using its tremendous power for the good of others.

Foreign policy is an explicitly amoral enterprise. Only presidential leadership or domestic political mobilization can override the system's innate orientation toward short-term self-interest. It took the September 11 attacks for someone--Bush was always a closet moralist--to step forward. After the squeamish moral relativism of the '90s and the worrying ascent of copperhead isolationism within the Republican Party, there were two attractive aspects to Bush's approach: He saw that evildoers littered the planet; and he saw that, like it or not, if the United States didn't become police chief of the world, Americans, too, would pay a price. Some in his administration even realized that the long-standing dichotomy between American moral values and American strategic and economic interests was both false and unsustainable. The world and the United States were more dangerous places if tyrants flourished, AIDS went untreated, and corporations exported human rights abuses that were outlawed at home. There would be blowback.

But, oh dear. While the Bush administration has issued an unprecedented pledge to promote human rights--its National Security Strategy document mentions "human rights" five times, "human dignity" nine times, "liberty" eleven times, "democracy" 13 times, and "freedom," the favorite formulation, 46 times--it has exerted its power in the most illiberal ways. Here are the '90s, inverted: power without the liberalism, without the humility it requires in acknowledgment that none of us possesses absolute truths. If Clinton acted as though the United States could do no right with power, Bush behaves as though the United States can do no wrong. Bush has said, unabashedly, "[W]e go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world." In offering moral advice--always a dangerous, presumptuous business--the Bush administration has been too self-assured. "Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place," Bush says, citing a "single surviving model of human progress." American officials bellow not just practical help but epistemological answers, often in religious, even messianic terms. And, for a country in need of intelligence and law enforcement cooperation, they are starkly exclusionary. "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you're with us, or you're with the terrorists," the president has

said. The "we can all get along" self-soothing naïveté of recent years has given way to the dark assumption that none of us can get along. Bush's National Security Strategy made an overt appeal for imbalance of power: "Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States." Critics of U.S. decision-making became opponents. And opponents and competitors become enemies.

The exceptionalist impulses behind Bush's choices have been with us for a long time. What distinguished this round was that by 2002 the checks that could usually be counted on to rein in a president's militant moralism had vanished. On Capitol Hill, the House International Relations Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had gone out of fashion; Banking and Appropriations were in, and the globetrotting internationalists of yore had been replaced by a younger, untraveled, uncurious lot. They wouldn't challenge a wartime president's worldview. Congress nodded or whimpered. It did not meaningfully dissent, a devastating abdication for the branch responsible for investigation, legislation, and financial control. The media withered as well, becoming the home for Bob Woodward-style stenography rather than Woodward and Bernstein-style scrutiny. And the American people remained relatively insulated from the vitriolic anti-Americanism bubbling abroad.

Other checks also faded. The one thing guaranteed to reduce legislative deference to an overzealous executive is American casualties. But, thanks to U.S. technological supremacy, the American soldier seems to have, very nearly, grown immune. The Gulf war, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan showed that the United States could make war virtually from the skies.

So, too, went the check once performed by our European allies. We needed them less and thus learned we liked them less (funny how that happens). For the first time in 50 years, they saw that linking their fates to ours rendered them more, not less, vulnerable to attack. As our claims about Saddam Hussein's threat went unheard by them, their criticisms slid off of us. The French, we noted, often seemed unable to distinguish the Republican Party from the Baath Party.

And international institutions certainly could not restrain American will. Clinton administration officials had said the United States would act "multilaterally when we can and unilaterally when we must." Without saying so explicitly, the Bush administration shifted the presumption with watershed effect: The United States will act unilaterally when it can, multilaterally when it must--on issues like trade, nonproliferation, and law enforcement. With the unsigned of the Rome Treaty on the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the rejection of the Kyoto Protocol and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty--coming on the heels of the prior American refusal to pay its U.N. dues and its prior rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the land mines ban, and other international treaties--the United States came to be seen less as it sees itself (the cop protecting the world from rogue nations) than as the very runaway state international law needs to contain.

Now it's true that the mere fact that something is multilateral doesn't make it good or wise: Libya is running the U.N. Human Rights Commission, and, until last week, Iraq

was scheduled to chair the U.N. Disarmament Conference in May. The U.N. Security Council is anachronistic, undemocratic, and consists of countries that lack the standing to be considered good-faith arbiters of how to balance stability against democracy, peace against justice, and security against human rights. But, for all of the flaws in the international system, it remains a fact that securing international consent or participation increases a policy's legitimacy in the eyes of others. Robert Kagan is right that weak states need multilateralism more than strong states, but strong states fighting asymmetric threats--Al Qaeda operates cells in more than 60 countries--need weak states to help them out, and such strong, needy states benefit enormously from enforceable rules of the road.

But the biggest flaw in the U.S. approach (this was true of Clinton as well) is not its oft-lamented unilateralism. It is something much harder to cure: its *la cartism*. From Washington's point of view, everything is to be assessed anew and apart. Our policies will attend to human welfare in one part of the globe but not in others. We will bomb Kosovo because of Slobodan Milosevic's treatment of the Albanians, but we will refrain from even mentioning Chechnya with Vladimir Putin. We will liberate the Kurds in Iraq, and yet, in exchange for the affection and bases of Turkey, we won't trouble Ankara about its abuse of Kurds. We will gripe about the shortage of democracy in Palestine, but not in Pakistan. We will lambaste Yasir Arafat, investing significant political capital in regime change, but we will only ritualistically take issue with Ariel Sharon. We will call upon South Africa to lift its trade barriers, but we will maintain farm, textile, and steel subsidies. One doesn't have to fetishize consistency, a known impossibility in political life, to note that systematic and sustained inconsistencies of this magnitude leave others confused and us disdained. Different circumstances and security threats require different responses, but it is incumbent on American officials to explain the discrepancies rather than to pretend they don't exist.

And then there is our amnesia. Americans who take office restart the clock with themselves. This is not just an American phenomenon: Who but the losers of history ever acknowledge mistakes? But any slate cluttered by sins of omission and commission is wiped clean. We can promise \$15 billion for AIDS prevention and treatment and blot from memory American threats to impose sanctions on countries that produce generic AIDS drugs. We can go to war against the Taliban, never acknowledging our previous aid to the regime--we offered a grant of \$43 million as late as May 2001--for its help quashing opium production. And it goes without saying that the CIA-assisted coups in Guatemala, Chile, and the Congo; the bombing of Cambodia; and the support for right-wing terror squads in Latin America were simply dark chapters of a distant past. This White House, the most secretive of the last century, has drastically cut back the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the ability of outsiders to explore and expose past policies. Americans who take office restart the clock with themselves.

Others don't see a clean slate. And, when it comes time for them to judge our case for war in Iraq, they will do so on the basis of a much thicker historical and systemic assessment of U.S. foreign policy. In this assessment, intentions, because they are unknowable and untrustworthy, are irrelevant. Abroad, they judge what they can see: means and results; and our policy choices in other arenas have harsh ripple effects on perceptions of our Iraq policy. The multidimensional picture is less persuasive than the single-issue picture: The

United States has never publicly acknowledged its prior support for Saddam's genocidal regime (U.S. aid to Iraq doubled the year *after* he gassed the Kurds). The United States will not subject itself to the jurisdiction of the ICC, so only it will decide whether it has violated the Geneva Conventions as it bombs Iraq. American officials are reportedly abusing Al Qaeda detainees or "rendering" them to countries where they will be tortured ("We don't kick the [expletive] out of them. We send them to other countries so they can kick the [expletive] out of them," one American official told *The Washington Post*). And, although the U.S.-led wars in Kosovo and Afghanistan improved life for the majority of citizens in each, the U.S. habit of hit-and-run left the fate of the people to the Europeans and to the warlords, neither of whom inspire local confidence. When Bush puts forth arguments about Saddam's threat to the United States and to Iraqis, is it any wonder that most believe the president has ulterior motives? If the roles were reversed, and the French were making such claims, would we believe them?

In the '90s, there was scant presidential leadership and insufficient domestic political mobilization for foreign policy grounded in human rights. Now there is a new language out of Washington--a moralism--but, as applied, it is undermining both the principles it espouses and, in the long term, the security it seeks to enhance.

Why do they hate us? President Bush is right about some America-bashers when he answers, "They hate our freedoms--our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other." Many terrorists are indeed nihilistic, anti-modern, or threatened by liberal values. But they depend for their sustenance on mainstream anti-Americanism throughout the world. Some anti-Americanism derives simply from our being a colossus that bestrides the earth. This resentment may be incurable. But much anti-Americanism derives from the role U.S. political, economic, and military power has played in denying such freedoms to others.

U.S. foreign policy has to be rethought. It needs not tweaking but overhauling. We need: a *historical reckoning* with crimes committed, sponsored, or permitted by the United States. This would entail restoring FOIA to its pre-Bush stature, opening the files, and acknowledging the force of a mantra we have spent the last decade promoting in Guatemala, South Africa, and Yugoslavia: A country has to look back before it can move forward. Instituting a doctrine of the *mea culpa* would enhance our credibility by showing that American decision-makers do not endorse the sins of their predecessors. When Willie Brandt went down on one knee in the Warsaw ghetto, his gesture was gratifying to World War II survivors, but it was also ennobling and cathartic for Germany. Would such an approach be futile for the United States? A recent trip to Rwanda suggests such gestures can make a difference. In 1994, the Clinton administration's only response to the extermination of 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu was to insist on the withdrawal of U.N. peacekeepers who were sheltering Tutsi there. In 1998, Clinton became the first American president to visit Rwanda, and he issued something of an apology: "All over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror." I, like many, found his words lawyerly and evasive. Yet many Rwandans today can recite the apology verbatim. They say they were floored: He called the crime genocide, he paid his respects, and he took a measure of responsibility. In

anticipation of another Clinton visit last fall, the Rwandans repaved the road connecting the airport with Clinton's hotel. Since his trip, Rwandans have begun calling it Clinton Boulevard.

U.S. foreign policy should inject *first-order concern for human rights into every policy decision*. American decision-makers must understand how damaging a foreign policy that privileges order and profit over justice really is in the long term. American decision-makers in every branch of government, in every department (the Pentagon frequently undermines State Department stands on human rights), and in every bureau should ask: What are the likely human consequences of this arms deal? Of this aid package? Of this oil contract? Of this Security Council vote? Of this treaty rejection or unsigned? Of this photo op with this abusive foreign leader? Every decision would require a "full cost accounting"--in which the harm to and welfare of foreign citizens would constitute a key variable in the cost-benefit calculus. Even in the event that the real world, with its terrorists and hostile proliferators, intrudes, the radical shift of America's presumption would earn the United States far more trust in times of emergency. Prioritizing human rights doesn't tell a policymaker what to do. Often it can point in two very different directions, and experimentation will be required. Sometimes, human rights may be promoted more smoothly if we remain uninvolved in a democracy struggle, such as in Iran today, where U.S. interference would be unwelcomed by democracy activists. Preparedness to use American power to advance human rights will be counterproductive unless it comes coupled with a sensitivity to local dynamics and aspirations.

And the American approach must *cease its reliance on gratuitous unilateralism*. We make rules and create international institutions precisely in order to bind states when their short-term interests would otherwise lead them toward defection. The United States is willing to bind itself to the World Trade Organization, because it knows it benefits more than any other country from free trade, but not to the ICC, because there is no good selfish reason to expose American citizens to external scrutiny. But the truth is that only U.S. resources and leadership can turn such institutions into forces for the international stability that is indispensable to U.S. security. Besides, giving up a pinch of sovereignty will not deprive the United States of the tremendous military and economic leverage it has at its disposal as a last resort.

American officials must also understand that *their words and tone matter*. It is essential, when a direct threat to U.S. security demands a response, that human rights not be invoked as a rationalization for a security operation, as is being done today regarding Iraq. Such appeals discredit both human rights and security claims. Barking orders and holy truths at a skeptical international audience is extremely counterproductive. Genuine liberalism must supplant the liberal-sounding nationalism of today.

À la cartism undermines America's ability to do what it wants when it wants. The United States has thus far lost its campaign to persuade its allies of the merits of preemptive war with Iraq not because of the dearth of smoking guns. Few who oppose the U.S. attack do so because they disagree with Bush's characterization of the Iraqi regime. Most do so because of what they take to be the character of the U.S. regime. American officials have been engaged in one argument--about Iraq. Our NATO partners, Russia, and other nervous states have been mouthing words about Iraq, but they have in fact been engaged in an

entirely different debate--about U.S. foreign policy. The battle for hearts and minds was lost before it was waged.

A White House serious about prevailing in the war on terror will need hard power. This is a fact that the Clinton administration was too slow to grasp. The United States is clearly better off now that Al Qaeda cannot operate freely in Afghanistan. The threat posed by weapons of mass destruction will not go away with a greater sensitivity to human rights. But, in using hard power, it is essential for the long struggle that the United States win international support and demonstrate its legitimacy. This requires giving before we demand. Doubling foreign aid is progress; proposing \$15 billion for AIDS is extraordinary--but none of these gestures gets at the contradictions at the heart of U.S. foreign policy.

When Bosnia was on fire, those of us who argued that U.S. power should be harnessed for good were doing so for the sake of the Bosnians. We squeezed our humanitarian case into the framework of the day, making unconvincing arguments about how the war would spill over and destabilize Greece and Turkey and perhaps even result in a Balkans-wide war. We also argued that bystanding in the face of genocide against Muslims was radicalizing secular Muslims in Bosnia and even in the wider Islamic world. As it happened, we were one for two: No war broke out south of Macedonia, but Al Qaeda did in fact turn the neglected state of Bosnia into a training base.

The truth, however, is that in those days the best argument for doing the right thing was simply that it was right--an argument rarely made in the postmodern '90s. These days, though, the best argument for marrying power and principle is that power exerted in a unilateralist, morally selective, ahistoric, unprincipled fashion is not simply harming foreigners; it is gravely undermining U.S. security. The terrorists will thrive in a sea of anti-Americanism. That sea will not be drained by adding another \$46 billion to the U.S. defense budget. It will not be drained by training more Arabists in the U.S. government. Liberals and conservatives, hawks and doves alike, must see that American power *can* be a force for human rights around the world, *and* greater human rights enjoyment is an indispensable requirement for the preservation of U.S. power.

Embedding U.S. power in an international system and demonstrating humility would be painful, unnatural steps for any empire, never mind the most potent empire in the history of mankind. But more pain now will mean far less pain later.

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