



## **Bubba Dubya? A curiously Clintonian turn in U.S. foreign policy**

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On September 20, 2001, President George W. Bush put the world on notice. "We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Unanimously, senators and congressmen gave Bush a standing ovation.

Now, faced with falling poll numbers, and wanting the affirmation of the foreign policy elite here and abroad--from the Quai d'Orsay to Auswärtiges Amt and Turtle Bay--the president seems to have reversed course. He still speaks about democracy and the war against terror, but increasingly his administration charts the path of least resistance and paper compromise so dominant during the Clinton years. This may please diplomats, but

it does not ensure national security. It's déjà vu all over again in the White House.

### **Reviving the North Korea Model**

On May 31, 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reversed U.S. policy toward Iran. "We are agreed with our European partners on the essential elements of a package containing both the benefits if Iran makes the right choice, and costs if it does not."

Her announcement delighted European diplomats and validated former Clinton administration officials. An April 26 statement signed by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and five European former foreign ministers had advised, "We believe that the Bush administration should pursue a policy it has shunned for many years: attempt to negotiate di-

rectly with Iranian leaders about their nuclear program." Sandy Berger, Clinton's second-term national security adviser, applauded the

move: "[Rice] has done a very effective job in the last year and a half of consolidating foreign policy back in the State Department." To Albright and Berger, 1990s-style diplomacy, with its emphasis on multilateralism and consensus over substance, is an end in itself.

In the wake of Rice's announcement, senior U.S. diplomats and European officials speaking on background outlined the proposed carrots and sticks: If Tehran promises to suspend uranium enrichment, sits down, and talks, it will receive light water nuclear reactors. If Tehran refuses to talk, Europe, Russia, and perhaps even China will discuss sanctions at the U.N. Security Council. There is no consensus about what these sanctions would constitute, nor is there a timeline. Just two days after Rice's concession, her Russian counterpart hinted at just how flaccid the proposed sticks were. Speaking in Vienna, Sergei Lavrov commented, "I can say unambiguously that all the agreements from yesterday's meetings rule out in any circumstances the use of military force."

Precedent gives little ground for optimism. What Bush offered Tehran mirrors what Clinton gave Pyongyang. On October 21, 1994, Ambassador Robert L. Gallucci signed the U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework. In exchange for a freeze of the Stalinist dictatorship's nuclear program, Washington offered to supply Pyongyang with two light water nuclear reactors and a basket of additional

incentives. Clinton explained, "North Korea will freeze and dismantle its nuclear program. South Korea and our allies will be better protected. The entire world will be safer as we slow the spread of nuclear weapons."

But North Korea did not freeze its nuclear program, and the world did not become safer. In 1998, Pyongyang signaled its renewed belligerence when it launched a nuclear-capable Taepodong-1 missile over Japan. It continued to enrich uranium and later withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The Central Intelligence Agency now estimates North Korea has a couple of bombs; the Stalinist state claims to have more. The idea that Clinton's deal was a success is revisionist nonsense. It is a model only for the triumph of appearance over substance. Kim Jong Il played Clinton; Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is playing Bush.

### **Terror Training Camps**

It is not just the actions of the Bush administration that recall the Clinton years, but also the inaction. The Clinton administration knew that Afghanistan played host to terror training camps. The 9/11 Commission detailed the Clinton administration's decision to trust diplomacy. A declassified December 8, 1997, State Department cable detailed high-level talks between Assistant Secretary Karl F. Inderfurth and a Taliban delegation. The Taliban promised to "keep their commitment and not allow Bin Laden and others to use Afghanistan as a base for terrorism." The State Department lauded its own success. "We believe our message . . . came through loud and clear." It didn't.

On August 7, 1998, al Qaeda attacked the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Thirteen days later, Clinton ordered a retaliatory missile attack on a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan and on Zhawar Kili, a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan. International reaction was tepid at best. While Prime

Minister Tony Blair stood by Clinton, most European allies were lukewarm. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan expressed "concern" and the Kremlin denounced U.S. actions.

Clinton valued international affirmation. The symbolic Tomahawk strike complete, he sought to assuage allies with renewed commitment to international multilateral diplomacy. Both Clinton and the Taliban reverted to business as usual. Sensing weakness, al Qaeda accelerated its training program. In March 2000, I spent three weeks in the Taliban's Afghanistan. In Kabul, shopkeepers described meeting Arabs and Filipinos training for jihad. While the Taliban denied hosting terror training camps, residents near Rishkhor, a camp just a few kilometers from Kabul, spoke of continued activity. Eighteen months later, graduates from Afghan camps like these brought down the World Trade Center.

Today, the location is different, but the White House's desire to turn a blind eye is the same. In the 1990s, Afghanistan was a forgotten backwater; this decade, it is Somalia. Terrorists love a vacuum. On June 5, the Islamic Courts Union, an Islamist group affiliated with al Qaeda, seized Mogadishu, Somalia's capital. Both journalists and policymakers were underwhelmed. Perhaps, some mused, this radical Islamist gang

could restore order. Reporting was similarly blasé when the Taliban seized Kabul just under a decade ago.

The Islamic Courts Union and the terrorist threat they pose did not materialize out of thin air; rather, they are a product of Bush administration neglect. Somalis living in Mogadishu speak of terrorist training camps established in the Lower Juba region, along the Kenyan border. According to Somali officials, the camps are not indigenous, but are run by Palestinians and Syrians. Senior U.S. military officials acknowledge the growing al Qaeda presence, but say they are forbidden to intervene. Not only has the Bush administration long nixed U.S. military action against terror training camps but now also forbids the U.S. military from filling the vacuum in still stable regions of the country, such as Somaliland and Puntland.

As the Bush administration wishes the problem away, rich Saudi and Persian Gulf financiers work to consolidate the region as a jihadist base. While Clinton did little to stop the capital flow from Gulf Arab sheikhs into the Taliban's Afghanistan, today the Bush team ignores the almost daily flights from Dubai to the Somali airfield at Baledogle, about 70 miles northwest of Mogadishu. Here, chartered jets bring men and materiel for al Qaeda affiliate al-Ittihad al-Islami and the Taliban-like Islamic Courts Union, which is slowly consolidating its control over Mogadishu.

### **Clinton Redux**

In 1993, Bill Clinton came to the White House without foreign policy experience. He followed the advice of professional diplomats and, for eight

years, did what was short-term popular, but long-term unwise.

He trusted U.S. security to the goodwill of international organizations. The intellectual elite applauded, even as Saddam Hussein, for example, exploited the United Nations for financial gain, the European Union funded Palestinian terrorists, and Iran developed secret nuclear facilities under the nose of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

He let public opinion polls determine national security. After a disastrous October 3, 1993, raid in Mogadishu, he ordered U.S. troops to evacuate the country, mission incomplete, a key factor, Osama bin Laden later said, in bolstering al Qaeda's confidence.

Bush's recent about-face also seems driven more by public relations than strategy. Bush administration figures once said they would not replicate Clinton's mistakes. On March 18, 2004, Rice told CNN interviewer John King that a proper U.S. response to 9/11 was "an American strategy that is bold and decisive and takes the fight to [the terrorists]" and not Clinton's laid-back, law-enforcement approach that "led to September 11." Four days later, Vice President Dick Cheney reiterated the message and

then, on March 23, 2004, so did Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Today, the Bush administration is in full retreat from that high ground. The Iranian president can threaten war, but if nuclear reactors are what it takes to get the United Nations to promise to consider whether to discuss talking about the possibility of taking action, then Bush is willing to agree. Meanwhile, authorities in Turkey complain that Central Intelligence Agency officers meet with representatives from Kurdish terrorist groups, former CIA officers meet with Hezbollah, and the State Department plays a shell game with Hamas, withholding money on one hand, but dispensing the same funds through the United Nations Refugee Works Administration with the other. Rice now even hints at scaling back U.S. opposition to the International Criminal Court. Like Clinton before him, Bush is being tempted by the siren song of international peer affirmation.

During his September 20, 2001, speech before the joint session of Congress, Bush declared, "We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail." Increasingly, though, the administration seems to be tiring and faltering. And if it retreats to the policies that led to 9/11, it will fail.

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