

## Stopping at the Water's Edge

Pundits and pessimists argue that a slim Republican margin in the House of Representatives, an equally divided Senate, and a president elected with no clear mandate for action will bring an already gridlocked Washington to a complete standstill. These predictions may prove true on some domestic issues, but foreign policy, like time, waits for no mandate.

The president—and the Congress—will be forced to deal with the inevitable crises beyond our borders and our ongoing international obligations. The question is not whether but how foreign policy issues will be addressed: through a partisan tug-of-war or through bipartisan cooperation among those who believe that U.S. national security and national interests demand that politics stop at the water's edge. At the risk of challenging conventional wisdom, the prospects for cooperation are greater than one might think.

In truth, the numbers game in Washington is rarely the key to consensus on U.S. foreign policy. Throughout the Cold War, narrow partisan margins and divided government coexisted with a bipartisan consensus that the first priority for the United States was to contain the Soviet Union and prevent a nuclear holocaust. To be sure, U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the Nixon administration's new policy of *détente* produced cracks in the consensus. Disagreement emerged over the degree to which communism was monolithic, the lengths to which the United States should go to contain the communist threat in places such as Southeast Asia and later in Latin America, and the wisdom of trying to contain Soviet power through negotiation rather than isolation. This debate was largely over methods, not over the fundamental goal of containment.

U.S. policymakers have struggled to find an organizing principle to guide foreign policy since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Unlike the Cold War,

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when the enemy was defined and the threat understood, the last decade has left the United States as the dominant power in a messy and increasingly complex international arena where few conflicts directly threaten vital U.S. interests, yet many require U.S. attention. No longer confronted on the international stage by another global superpower—or in fact any serious challenger—U.S. policymakers are searching for a common vision of the U.S.

role in the world. This search is conducted against a backdrop of ethnic and regional conflicts; emboldened state and nonstate actors; a proliferation of transnational security threats; and increasing global interdependence in economic, environmental, and health care sectors. In this scenario, it is hardly surprising that a myriad of new and often conflicting international priorities have arisen within the U.S. government.

In the executive branch, the influence of the Commerce and Treasury Departments, as well as the U.S. trade representative, in foreign policy has grown steadily and clashed frequently with the more traditional priorities still espoused by the State and Defense Departments. Acknowledging that its role and responsibilities have also changed, the Department of Defense has added a peacekeeping office within its structure and beefed up its ability to deal with strictly humanitarian crises. At the Department of State, an office for a new undersecretary for global affairs has been created to raise the profile of transnational issues such as preventing and managing massive refugee flows and addressing global environmental problems. Although the more traditional diplomats may prefer to focus on the political dimensions of U.S. relations with other nations, the State Department has been forced to strengthen its efforts to promote U.S. business and economic interests abroad.

In Congress, where Republican freshmen from the House class of 1994 were known to brag that they did not even hold passports, the end of the Cold War has relegated foreign policy to the back burner for most members, except in times of crisis or election-year politics. Many engage in international issues selectively, tending to advance the specialized interests of their own constituents over a foreign policy driven by any concept of the national interest. The outcome of debates over such seminal issues as U.S. participation in the United Nations (UN) and expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have been determined as much by special interests and ethnic politics as by the strategic ramifications of those decisions. Even in the Senate, charged with significant constitutional

responsibility for U.S. foreign policy and a history of meaningful dialogue, the level of debate has been frustrating and less than visionary.

In many of these debates, disagreement does not fall neatly along partisan lines. Though for different reasons, members of Congress in the extremes of both parties have joined forces to form an odd-fellows kind of neo-isolationist movement. They support policies that would have the practical effect of limiting U.S. engagement in multinational institutions and organizations that held such great promise for international cooperation just a decade ago. They argue against a free trade agreement with China, fight against the terms of U.S. membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and use clearly unaccountable global bureaucrats at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as an excuse to oppose even the most reasonable initiatives. Striking a nationalist tone on the right, they argue that U.S. troops should not be wasting their valuable time and resources keeping the peace in places that are not vital to U.S. national interests. Reaching a similar conclusion, those on the left argue that multinational organizations are too powerful, the U.S. military too influential, and the U.S. international presence too far flung. Beyond this confluence, the Left and the Right disagree on almost everything else.

Sandwiched between the extremes are the moderates who must necessarily be the target audience for the new Bush administration if bipartisanship is to be forged in foreign policy. The moderates cut across both political parties and, like President George W. Bush, agree on the fundamental idea that the United States must be engaged in the world and meet its obligations to provide constructive leadership. Although there are differences on the question of where, when, and for how long U.S. troops should be deployed abroad, congressional support for U.S. deployments in Haiti and Bosnia demonstrate that a consensus can be forged on this issue, the most difficult foreign policy question facing any U.S. policymaker. Even during the last eight years, when partisanship was paramount and impeachment of a president was on the congressional agenda, a consensus ultimately emerged in the Congress on some key foreign policy issues: free trade in North America, preservation and expansion of the NATO alliance, military intervention in Kosovo, WTO membership for China, normalization of relations with Vietnam, political and financial support for the Middle East peace process, and support for global efforts to stop the spread of AIDS in Africa.

Without question, the neo-isolationists in both parties will continue their efforts to set limits on U.S. global engagement. The challenge for the Bush administration will be to define a global role for the United States that moderates in both parties can support. In shaping that role, the next president must be guided by three fundamental realities.

First, our greatest assets as the world's remaining superpower are our friends and allies. Whether dealing with China, Russia, Iraq, proliferation, terrorism, or the spread of HIV/AIDS, the nations and issues that challenge U.S. national interests cannot be addressed without the help and support of our allies. Although we do not hesitate to call on our friends when we need their help, we often miss opportunities to benefit from their advice and support by failing to consult regularly with them on the full range of issues and interests we share. To build a more coherent, consistent U.S. foreign policy, we should move away from this damaging trend.

Second, the best way to advance U.S. interests—be they economic, security, or humanitarian—is to maintain an open dialogue with those nations with whom we have serious disagreements. The new president and the new Congress must resist the temptation to cut the United States off from potential adversaries. Greater dialogue will give us an opportunity to clarify our interests and our expectations, combat dangerous misperceptions, and perhaps lay the groundwork for eventually narrowing the differences between us.

Third, no foreign policy can be sustained over time without the support of the U.S. public. Bush should take the opportunity to address the U.S. public directly and frequently about the importance of U.S. international engagement. He must acknowledge the limits to our ability to promote some of our interests—human rights in China, political change in Iraq, ethnic peace in the Balkans—and that these important and difficult issues require sustained U.S. effort in concert with our allies. The new administration must be more realistic in communicating with the U.S. public and Congress about what we can achieve and over what time period.

## **A Bipartisan Agenda for U.S. Foreign Policy**

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U.S. foreign policy makers face many challenges in the years ahead, and we know with certainty where some of them will lie. Here is a modest proposal on some of the key agenda items the new president and the new Congress will face, and some thoughts on how we might best confront the problems together.

### **CHINA**

China will continue to be the most important—and most difficult—bilateral U.S. relationship in the years to come. It is clear that the Bush administration will maintain the policy of engagement with China, but it must engage China more effectively to better serve our national interests and rebuild the consensus in Congress in support of engagement. Bush must do four things to meet that challenge.

First, he must recognize that engagement is not an objective in and of itself. Engagement is a process through which the United States and China pursue respective interests—some mutual, some not. Given the differences, engagement must be long term and promises to be challenging. When China takes actions to which we object, whether toward Taiwan or its own citizens, we cannot let fear of disrupting the process of engagement restrain us from responding firmly, in public as well as private.

Second, the president must more clearly articulate U.S. national interests with regard to China if we are to do more than simply lurch from one crisis to the next. We need to give Americans a better understanding of why we must engage China and what is at stake for the United States. If Americans fail to understand the linkage of interests with China, then setbacks in one area, such as human rights or trade, can undermine our ability to effectively maintain the overall relationship. By clearly stating our interests and our goals, we can stay focused on the issues of real importance and avoid unnecessary and harmful distractions.

Third, we must be more realistic about expectations for short- and long-term progress. Concluding a WTO agreement with China was a short-term goal. Promoting human rights and change in China is a long-term objective, and success or failure is not simply a function of our bilateral relationship. We must realize that China's fractious history and desire to maintain power has embedded in its leaders a deep-rooted fear of too much rapid change and a resistance to anything that might undermine stability and cohesion. Due to this tendency, our ability to influence China varies—a point that policymakers in both the executive branch and the Congress must understand and convey more clearly to the U.S. public. For this reason, a pragmatic U.S. approach to China must include multilateral efforts.

Finally, we must be prepared to hold China accountable for its actions. When proliferation agreements or human rights are violated, we must invoke the enforcement mechanisms within international institutions such as the Geneva Human Rights Commission, the International Labor Organization, or soon the WTO, as well as enforce our own domestic laws. The international community must insist that China be responsible for full compliance with its commitments. The U.S. public will not continue to support engagement unless we are more realistic about China's transgressions and oppose them openly.

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## **RUSSIA**

Although U.S.-Russian relations no longer dominate the foreign policy landscape, the question of Russia's future has serious implications for the United States and our European allies. Democratic and economic reform of Russia's central government has been at a standstill for the last several years, and U.S. policy toward Russia has been similarly stagnant since the collapse of the Russian economy in 1998. A strong consensus exists in Congress in support of engagement with Russia, but there has been little sustained interest in addressing the chaos and weakness plaguing Russia today. This situation must change.

Additional economic and democratic reforms at the national level in Russia are probably not forthcoming, but regional and municipal govern-

ments continue the slow and difficult process of reform. A portion of current U.S. assistance to Russia already reflects this difference, focusing for the last few years on building the infrastructure of a market economy, managing privatization, promoting trade and investment, bolstering the free media, and strengthening civil society at the local level throughout Russia. With leadership from the White House, Congress would support an invigorated program of U.S. assistance to Russia

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at the grassroots level. Assistance would be aimed at cultivating a Russian middle class and the institutions of lasting democratic change through technical assistance and a vigorous exchange program with U.S. hospitals, universities, business groups, and nonprofit organizations.

Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and managing the downsizing of Russia's military are two important areas where U.S. efforts will continue to focus on Moscow. Although there is strong bipartisan support for the Comprehensive Threat Reduction Program—the successor to U.S. counterproliferation efforts founded by Senators Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) in the early 1990s—more robust funding and a greater sense of urgency for these demilitarization projects is needed to keep pace with the alarming rate of deterioration in the Russian military.

On the related question of strategic nuclear weapons, Bush will face a major challenge from his own party to follow through on his campaign pledge to reduce U.S. strategic forces. Given the natural attrition of Russia's strategic arsenal, it makes sense for the United States to engage Russia in negotiations over a verifiable, carefully managed transition to lower levels of

these weapons on both sides. This stance will require a reexamination of current U.S. thinking about necessary levels of nuclear weapons. Smaller nuclear arsenals could provide the budget resources needed to improve readiness and implement military modernization programs that have bipartisan support.

There should be bipartisan support to delink negotiations over the next round of strategic arms reductions from the future of a U.S. national missile defense (NMD). Clearly, the technology of the proposed U.S. system is far from operationally effective. If Bush fulfills his promise to explore a more robust NMD system, it may be ten years before the technology is ready for deployment. We must not allow progress on the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks, or START III, to be held hostage to the uncertain future of NMD. Negotiations over possible amendments to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty should continue, if only to maintain open lines of communication and cooperation with Russia on this sensitive issue.

## **NORTH KOREA**

The Bush administration must resist pressure from some conservatives in Congress to significantly alter the current course of U.S. policy toward North Korea. It is still too early to tell the real intentions and final outcome of the North's efforts to reengage the outside world, but the United States should encourage further steps toward the normalization of relations between Pyongyang and our allies in Seoul and Tokyo.

Ending the North Korean nuclear program and stopping its development and proliferation of advanced ballistic missile technology will continue to dominate U.S. interests on the Korean Peninsula. It is important that the Bush administration not allow the Congress to undermine the 1994 Agreed Framework, which holds real promise for verifiably freezing and eliminating the North Korean nuclear program in exchange for annual shipments of heavy fuel oil and the construction of two light-water reactors to provide a long-term energy source to North Korea. If there are changes to be made in the framework, they must be negotiated and acceptable to all interested parties. Congress should not unilaterally alter the agreement by underfunding or injecting new conditions on the promised U.S. contributions.

Clearly, the United States—working with our allies in Seoul and Tokyo—must also continue efforts to curtail North Korea's ballistic missile program. Congress maintains serious concerns about the wisdom of trading U.S. assistance to a North Korean space program for a halt in its missile program. Congress should give the next administration full latitude, however, to negotiate a missile agreement that can reduce the threat to our allies and the U.S. public from North Korea's missile programs.

## **IRAQ**

Nearly ten years after the United States and a coalition of allies defeated Saddam Hussein, the international sanctions regime against Iraq has clearly failed to force a change in leadership in Baghdad and has lost meaningful support in the world community as a means of eliminating his weapons programs. Each newspaper story about commercial flights from Moscow or Paris into Baghdad International Airport further discredits the sanctions regime. Meanwhile, the people of Iraq continue to suffer terribly, as Saddam profits from the sanctions, using them as a tool for maintaining his reign of terror. The oil-for-food program has improved access to food and medical supplies in Iraq, especially in the northern territories not under Saddam's control, but humanitarian conditions in Iraq remain bleak.

In Congress, concern that Iraq is rebuilding its WMD programs is bipartisan. Since the withdrawal of UN weapons inspectors from Iraq two years ago, however, little serious attention has been paid—either by the Congress or the White House—to addressing Iraq's growing threat to the stability of the Persian Gulf region. What little debate there might have been over the UN's attempt to lift economic sanctions on Iraq in exchange for a resumption of inspections evaporated as it became clear that Saddam would not consider allowing UN inspectors to return. In the absence of international inspections, it is vital that tight sanctions remain in place on exports of military goods and dual-use technologies to contain Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbors.

Secretary of State Colin Powell is preparing to reinvigorate the international sanctions regime. Such an effort is not only warranted, but long overdue. Rebuilding the coalition to hold Saddam accountable to international law, however, will not be easy. Given the *de facto* evisceration of the UN sanctions regime, the United States may have to find another way to ensure that goods and technology meant for Iraq's weapons programs do not find their way to Baghdad. We should be willing to consider adjusting the current economic sanctions, as long as such a change is accompanied by renewed commitments from U.S. allies and others to enforce the sanctions on military and dual-use exports to Iraq.

## **ALLIES**

As the Bush administration reaches out to U.S. allies, it will hear the growing refrain that the United States has acted too unilaterally in its international leadership over the last several years. The many examples of the United States trying to go it alone in foreign policy include our failure to sign the 1997 Convention to Ban Landmines; our refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Kyoto Protocol; our failure to

pay our UN dues on time; our reliance on unilateral, third-party sanctions that punish our closest friends for doing business with nations like Cuba and Iran; and our threat to unilaterally deploy an NMD system. One of Bush's greatest challenges in overcoming the resulting resentment of the United States by our allies will be in confronting members of his own party. Most of these issues have been driven by congressional conservatives, in part out of partisan frustration with a Clinton administration foreign policy they criticized for not being sufficiently focused on U.S. values and priorities. Again, congressional moderates from both sides can help. Bipartisan proposals exist that would reform the U.S. approach to unilateral sanctions, allow the United States to reduce its emission of greenhouse gases, and develop the technology needed to allow the United States to ratify the CTBT while maintaining the reliability of our nuclear arsenal.

Bush has spoken about the need for bipartisan cooperation in the years ahead. Foreign policy may well be one area where a thoughtful, bipartisan agenda can succeed. Perhaps, without the distraction of partisan conflicts with former president Bill Clinton, the next Congress and the new president can build on these proposals and work together to bring the United States closer to the values and interests we share with the friends and allies on whom we depend to maintain international peace and stability.

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