

Speaking Truth to Power: Preventive Diplomacy Backed by Force



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The conjunction of an immense military establishment and a huge arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, and even spiritual—is felt in every city, every state house, and every office of the federal government. . . . In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Farewell Address to the Nation,
January 17, 1961

This chapter argues for the return of moderates to the foreign policy arena in the United States. The nation needs to apply to terrorism the kind of balance President Eisenhower advocated in America’s Cold War strategy. The United States should pursue a policy of preventive diplomacy backed by force and disregard our present policy of force without sufficient diplomacy. High on the agenda must be a global strategy of eliminating nuclear weapons, building on bipartisan legislation already in place. The downward spiral of foreign aid funding must be dramatically reversed if America ever is to be perceived by the world as a model of democracy, justice, and equality.

American citizens must better educate themselves on what really is happening in the world and build activism into their daily lives. Grassroots activism is the basis for reversing present policy and the deplorable state of American democracy. In terms of action, we are confronted by the “fierce urgency of now,” as articulated in the 1967 Riverside Church speech of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., who, like Dwight Eisenhower, spoke truth to power.

WHY DO THE AGGRESSIVE UNILATERALISTS ALWAYS WIN?

At its inception, the Bush administration said it wanted strong people with different points of view. The trouble was that those with an aggressive, anti-United Nations, anti-treaty, anti-alliance, unilateral point of view always won out over those few with a more pragmatic point of view, like Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The aggressive unilateralists were willing to use Colin Powell's diplomatic skills when it served a military objective, but they rarely let him finish the job. The Iraq war is a perfect example. Colin Powell secured a 15-0 vote in the U.N. Security Council, indicating that Iraq would face "serious consequences" if it did not cooperate with U.N. inspectors and disarm in a prompt manner. Once they received international support based on one set of assumptions—that there would be inspections, that the inspections would be given a reasonable amount of time to work, and that any military action would be subject to an additional Security Council vote—the aggressive unilateralists decided to upset the apple cart. They tried to undermine the inspections and smear Hans Blix, a perfectly decent and competent diplomat. They made it clear that, if there was no second U.N. resolution authorizing the war, the United States would invade anyway with a "coalition of the willing"—which, as many have pointed out, was really a coalition of the bullied and the bought.

Americans were told that force was going to be only one of the tools in the toolbox when dealing with Iraq. But it did not turn out that way. The Bush administration departed from the way it originally conceptualized the war, through multilateral efforts. It is likely that the aggressive unilateralists had no intention of really pursuing Iraq and terrorism in a more nuanced way and that they only gave lip service to multilateralism to sell war to the public. This was necessary because, when you look at the poll numbers, the American public, especially the vast middle that any candidate needs to get elected president, is not comfortable with the idea of America taking all the risks and paying all the costs without friends and allies to pitch in. Americans don't like high casualties. They don't want to pay a lot of money. They don't want to go it alone. And so in that sense—to keep Middle America on board—Colin Powell was needed.

American voters are not highly informed about foreign policy. That made it easier for the aggressive unilateralists to allege a link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda and go to war with Iraq—in part using as its propagandizing tools the conservative think tanks in Washington, the Defense Policy Board, and conservative media such as Fox News and Clear Channel.

From 1989 to 1992, American foreign policy was crafted by moderates like Brent Scowcroft and James Baker, who were able to counter the conservative propaganda machine. But no such counterbalance is present today. The aggressive unilateralists have won out over the pragmatists not only in terms of going to war in Iraq, but also in terms of not involving the president in hands-on, personal

diplomacy in Israel-Palestine and not stopping the slaughter in Liberia, among many other examples.

In the public debate on foreign policy, then, it is critically important to ask, again and again, why the aggressive unilateralists always won over the pragmatists and whether these unending victories were healthy for the nation.

HEEDING THE WARNINGS OF PRESIDENT EISENHOWER

Foreign policy can be made healthier for the American people if we heed the warnings of President Eisenhower. Framing policy at the height of the Cold War, President Eisenhower said this “hostile ideology, communism” is “ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method. Unhappily, the danger it poses promises to be of indefinite duration. To meet [the danger] successfully, [we need] not so much the emotional and transitory sacrifices of crisis, but rather those [sacrifices] which enable us to carry forward steadily, surely, and without complaint the burdens of a prolonged and complex struggle with liberty the stake.”

In other words, Eisenhower reminded Americans that the struggle against communism needed to be part of our everyday lives. He asked that we not sacrifice our liberties while fighting the struggle. Eisenhower continued: “Only thus shall we remain, despite every provocation, on our chartered course to permanent peace and human betterment. Crises there may continue to be, and meeting them, whether foreign or domestic, great or small, there is a recurring temptation to feel that some spectacular and costly action could become the miraculous solution to all current difficulties.”

Eisenhower’s point here was that there was no silver bullet. Our policy against communism required economic, fiscal, political, and democratic balance. Eisenhower asked that we proceed soberly as adults, not go to extremes, not undermine our resilient economy, and not overreact.

Yet we have done just that since September 11, and so Eisenhower’s policy admonitions are as relevant to terrorism in the twenty-first century as to communism in the 1950s.

A few years after the military-industrial-complex warning, President John Kennedy faced the Cuban missile crisis. Kennedy carried on in a steady way, speaking truth to power and overruling hardliners who wanted to go to war. If a similar crisis occurred today, say in a confrontation with a nuclear-armed North Korea or an unexpected showdown with China, would right-wing ideologies similarly be overruled?

Certainly President Eisenhower’s admonitions were not followed in Iraq. Iraq was the kind of “spectacular and costly action” Eisenhower warned against. In terms of the economic and fiscal balance Eisenhower said was crucial, America is spending

more than \$1 billion a week in Iraq and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future—at least until reconstruction is completed (and the current estimate is that it will take until 2008 or 2009). Meanwhile, a projected ten-year budget *surplus* of \$5.6 trillion has turned into a budget *deficit* of \$521 billion—far more than triple the \$158 billion imbalance of fiscal 2002 and billions higher than the record shortfall of \$374 billion of 2003.

Similarly, think about the political and democratic balance President Eisenhower sought. There is much rhetoric today about creating democracy in places like Iraq. But there is little reflection on the state of democracy in America. Nor is there much discussion of the link between what is happening abroad and at home. For example, in the name of democracy, a hand-picked regime in Iraq is giving out contracts to corporate friends of the administration in Washington, corporations like Halliburton, Bechtel, and DynCorp. Similarly, back home, the administration was handpicked for office in 2000 by a partisan majority of the Supreme Court, despite the fact that the opposition had received more votes. The power of office and right-wing networks in the media and think tanks then were used to advance the financial interests of corporate supporters and beneficiaries of tax cuts, skewed to the well-off.

What kind of message does that send to the world? Unless America enacts genuine campaign finance reform and genuine voter democracy reform, other nations will continue to correctly point out that the United States has a double standard on democracy. Phyllis Bennis's comparison in chapter 8, of the double standard on democracy of the American and Greek empires is very apropos. And unless we roll back the Patriot Act, other countries will know we are not serious about individual liberties and the right to privacy.

PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY BACKED BY FORCE

With President Eisenhower's sense of balance as our foundation, the United States needs to build a policy of preventive diplomacy backed by force.

Foreign Policy in Focus, a network coordinated by the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., and the Interhemispheric Resource Center in New Mexico, have been developing the theme of "a safer America in a safer world." We need to expand on that theme, spreading hope and opportunity, not fear and loathing. That is a far smarter way to fight global terror than the use of force without sufficient accompanying diplomacy.

We need to use all the tools in the toolbox, not just the military one. President Clinton had the beginnings of a credible policy of diplomacy backed by force, even though he was not able to consistently implement it because of the Monica Lewinsky scandal and efforts by his opposition to undercut him at every turn. To illustrate,

over the course of the Clinton administration, progress was made on the North Korean nuclear issue. The North Korean Framework Agreement was a step in the right direction.

Even though Clinton's policy was only partially developed, it was leagues ahead of what we have now, which is a policy outside the mainstream of five decades of bipartisan foreign policy assumptions, Republican and Democratic. Don't forget that many of the treaties that were trashed or criticized in recent years, from the antiballistic missile treaty to the START arms-reduction agreements, were negotiated and signed under President Nixon and President Reagan.

Diplomacy backed by force means America in the role of Atticus Finch, as played by Gregory Peck in the film adaptation of Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Peck played a Southern trial lawyer, defending the rights of an African-American unjustly accused by whites. Ironically, an America that stood up for justice, stood with the underdogs, and felt secure enough to put down the gun instead of automatically picking up the gun at the slightest provocation—an America that was more Gregory Peck and less John Wayne—would be far better suited to fighting a threat like al Qaeda than an America that follows present policy.

Why? Because we are in a propaganda war, and the Department of Defense's policy of talking loudly and arrogantly and carrying many, many big sticks has alienated the majority of the people on the planet. These are the people and governments we need to work with to curb a threat like al Qaeda, a network that functions in perhaps as many as sixty countries. "Regime change" is an irrelevant, costly extravagance in the face of a network like al Qaeda, which can operate with relatively small amounts of money, without government sponsorship, preying on the weaknesses and complexities of our globalized economic system to sustain itself.

The costs of regime change through the doctrine of "preventive war" misdirect our resources away from the battle against al Qaeda. In so doing, "preventive war" may have *increased* the ability of terrorists to strike America, not decreased it.

ELIMINATING NUCLEAR WEAPONS GLOBALLY

The United States is worried about Osama bin Laden, a global businessman, obtaining nuclear missiles. So we must ask, where are the nuclear missiles that Osama is most likely to buy? They are in the former Soviet Union.

There still are places in the former Soviet Union where the security guards are barely paid. They sleep on couches at the worksite because they can't afford a decent place to live. Not only does Russia have thousands of weapons, but enough nuclear material to build tens of thousands more.

What to do? Several years ago, a task force led by a Republican moderate, Howard Baker, and a Democratic moderate, Lloyd Cutler, came up with a very good

report, which recommended enhancing “Nunn-Lugar.” Nunn-Lugar is the catch-all phrase for a set of programs designed to neutralize the nuclear capability of the former Soviet Union by helping to pay for destruction of nuclear missiles and warheads and by finding alternative employment for weapons scientists, so they don’t sell their skills to the highest bidder on the global market. It was conceived by Sam Nunn, the former Democratic senator from Georgia who chaired the Armed Services Committee, and Richard Lugar, the moderate Republican senator from Indiana who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Baker-Cutler report said that the Nunn-Lugar programs were working well, but that their funding should be increased, from about \$1 billion per year to \$3 billion a year for ten years, a modest figure as measured by Pentagon budgets.

The White House has not shown leadership on this critical issue. Congress has bumped Nunn-Lugar up by about \$1 billion, but this level remains far below the recommendations of Baker and Cutler. America’s \$1 billion outlay for one week in postwar Iraq could have raised funding to the levels needed.

But Senator Lugar, in his own quiet, effective way, has persisted. He has urged that Nunn-Lugar not only be better funded but globalized—not limited just to Russia. He is saying that America needs the funds and the flexibility to buy up bomb-grade materials and destroy them, so they don’t fall into the wrong hands.

Of course, the goal should be to get rid of nuclear weapons altogether. There are no “right hands” when it comes to nuclear weapons. Their mere existence is dangerous, destabilizing, and demoralizing. Like a loaded gun under your pillow, nuclear weapons are just as dangerous to the folks who have them as they are to the folks who don’t. Brandishing them and threatening people with them, as the American government has done, is a sure-fire recipe for convincing countries that they need their own nuclear missiles, if for no other reason than to get themselves off the Department of Defense’s “regime change” list.

Tyrants around the world surely have noticed the deferential treatment that North Korea, which may have a few nuclear weapons, got compared with Saddam Hussein, who did not. So what the American government seems to be saying by its actions is, “Get nuclear weapons and we’ll treat you nice, and negotiate. Fail to get nuclear weapons and we’ll bomb you into the Stone Age and kill your family.” What kind of incentive is that to dissuade dictators from trying to get nuclear weapons? Does the United States even care about nuclear proliferation, or does it think that the Star Wars system is going to save America?

These preventive policies, like expanding and globalizing Nunn-Lugar, are the kinds of strategies the U.S. government should be pursuing, because once you get rid of the nuclear weapons, Osama bin Laden can’t buy off some security guard who hasn’t had a square meal in three weeks.

America also needs to strengthen the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty, or SORT, with Russia. The nonprofit organization Peace Action has said SORT is “sort

of a treaty,” except for all the loopholes. For example, at the moment, when weapons are taken off deployment, they can be stored, not destroyed. That is absurd. There should be a time line. Now the rules are too vague. We should be working bilaterally and with regional partners, not only in North Korea but also in India and Pakistan, giving them whatever incentives they need to dismantle existing nuclear programs, not build new ones.

In addition, the United States must strengthen the enforcement of the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. That means America must adhere to the same standards for inspection as everybody else—and there is no reason we shouldn’t.

DEVELOPING PEACEKEEPING CAPACITY

Instead of fighting wars against regimes with no known ties to terrorists, or at least the ones we are worried about like Iraq, America should be developing actual peacekeeping capabilities. We barely train our troops to do the kind of policing work we are asking them to do in Iraq. We should be working more closely with countries that know how to train soldiers for policing, like the Canadians, the French, and the Germans, as Joseph Wilson points out in chapter 14.

The Americans trained for peacekeeping in places like Iraq ought to be enlisted military, not National Guard reservists. We need to take pressure off National Guard reservists, who have been deployed in Iraq for too long. A lot of reservists are police, firefighters, nurses, and public-health professionals. We need them in America. We need them on the front lines here if there is another attack at least as much as we need them in Iraq, Afghanistan, Riyadh, Tehran, or wherever the administration next plans to attack.

NURTURING ALLIANCES AND FOLLOWING THE MONEY

We need to build and nurture our alliances with other countries. When the State Department released a recent *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report, the spokesperson made a point of saying that the two countries that have given America the most help in dealing with al Qaeda recently were France and Germany. The State Department made this point to emphasize that, if the Defense Department doesn’t stop insulting France and Germany, important ties will be further damaged.

A broad spectrum of people realize that having allies is a good thing and insulting countries is a bad thing. If we are to have an effective policy against terrorism, America must follow the money, and that means leaning on the Saudis,

leaning on the Pakistanis. We need to have a more responsible approach to the global economy that says if certain aspects of the financial system must be regulated in order to make sure we don't have another World Trade Center disaster and if money therefore has to flow a little more slowly, then so be it. The ideology of free movement of goods and money should not come at the expense of the safety of our children or of future generations. If we need tighter banking laws to make it harder for terrorists and thugs to use offshore banks and secret accounts to finance their activities, and if that means slowing down the flow of money a bit, that's a small price to pay for a margin of safety for us and those who will come after us.

CHANNELING AID THROUGH MULTILATERAL AGENCIES

As Jessica Tuchman Mathews argues in chapter 3, the downward spiral of foreign aid funding in the State Department must be dramatically reversed if America ever is to be perceived by the world as a model of democracy, justice, and equality.

To help achieve the goal of nurturing alliances, the United States should channel its economic and security aid through multilateral agencies. That way we can secure the benefits of implementing our priorities without a backlash based on the notion that the United States is calling the shots all on its own or buying off key leaders.

For example, instead of having the Saudis building faith-based schools that teach the ideology of jihad, we should be helping build secular schools throughout the Muslim world. But these can't come from the United States. For credibility, they must be funded through the United Nations.

Miriam Pemberton and I have pointed out how America spends between \$6 billion and \$7 billion a year of our scarce foreign aid budget subsidizing weapons exports. That must stop. The money must be converted into economic aid. If we are going to bother to fund programs against HIV/AIDS, the money should pass through the Global AIDS Fund, not be tied to some ridiculous bilateral package that says a nation must teach abstinence before America will provide AIDS drugs.

THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW

What can average Americans do about our foreign policy and the deplorable state of American democracy?

They can begin in modest ways. For example, Americans need to better educate themselves about what's going on. Political literacy can be improved by visiting sites

on the web that are independent of corporate control, like CommonDreams.org, AlterNet.org, TomPaine.com, and TheNation.com.

Better-informed citizens can then join with others, becoming more powerful through partnerships. One might, for example, join the local chapter of Peace Action (PeaceAction.org), the nation's largest grassroots peace and justice organization, or get on the mailing list at MoveOn.org, the innovative, visionary web-based activist network discussed by Eli Pariser in chapter 31.

The most important thing is for citizens to find a way to build activism into their everyday lives. Some people may get so worked up that they quit their jobs to work for the candidates of their choice—fighting for education all can afford, jobs, job training and retraining, health care, Social Security, and rescission of tax cuts for the rich. Others may take personal risks, like committing civil disobedience at the offices or factories of local war profiteers. Still others may pursue the difficult work of trying to win over friends, colleagues, or professional associates. The main thing to remember is that nothing is too little to matter. Democratic participation needs to become a habit.

We must live every day as if the future of real democracy at home and abroad depends on it—because it does. I began this chapter with Dwight Eisenhower speaking truth to power. I end it with Martin Luther King Jr. speaking truth to power, also at a moment of genuine national emergency. In “A Time to Break Silence,” his Riverside Church speech of April 4, 1967, against the war in Vietnam, Dr. King told the people: “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.”

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