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# U.S. National Security Policy Post-9/11: Perils and Prospects

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Two years after the attacks of September 11, what perils does U.S. national security policy face, and what prospects? In short, are we on the right track, and where do we go from here? Let me begin by acknowledging the impossibility of doing this topic justice in one brief article. So rather than be comprehensive, I will only focus on the most salient issues.

I will not pretend to be perfectly objective. While I do not view myself as a partisan when it comes to national security affairs, I did serve in the Clinton administration and, as you will see, I do have major policy differences with the current one. However, the critique I will present here is anything but partisan. In fact, it reflects what I believe are concerns now shared broadly by a bipartisan cross-section of national security experts as well as by much of the American public.

## II. THE BIG DIG

Are we on the right track? No, I am afraid, quite the opposite. I think the state of our national security policy can be summed up in three words: the big dig. It is a huge—and seemingly endless—mess of enormous expense. The United States and our national security policy are in a massive hole.

The critical question for this President and the next is: how do we climb out? Allow me first to describe what I believe to be the contours of this hole and then to suggest some strategies for climbing out.

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On September 11, 2001, our homeland was attacked in a massive and shocking way, and it became evident to all Americans that we must wage a long-term war on terrorism. In truth, that war was underway well before 9/11. We had already been attacked many other times in many places—New York in 1993, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Yemen to name just a few—and we had struck back militarily and through other means. What changed on 9/11, apart from our devastating losses, was Americans' understanding of the scale and importance of this war.

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Our leaders also gained greater will and ability to commit the resources necessary to fight it most effectively.

Something else changed. For a brief and powerful moment, most of the rest of the world genuinely shared our loss. Most were prepared to support us in almost every conceivable way to win the war on terrorism. Needlessly and senselessly, we have squandered that good will. How? In part, by employing bullying rhetoric (as President Bush did in his address to Congress on September 20, 2001, when he said, "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists"), by reinforcing perceptions of American bias in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and by demanding the world fall in line, on our schedule and on the basis of shifting rationales, to depose Saddam Hussein. While a number of countries continue to cooperate with us, their will to take difficult steps that serve our interests—such as to deploy troops to Iraq—is diminished, in part due to the high-handed manner in which we have dealt with them at the very time we needed them most.

President Bush began the war on terrorism well. He rightly pursued a pragmatic and multi-faceted approach, combining the tools of diplomacy, military force, intelligence, and law enforcement to go after al-Qaeda's finances and cells around the world. He orchestrated an initially successful military campaign in Afghanistan that ousted the Taliban and disrupted al-Qaeda's operational bases, even if it failed to put al-Qaeda out of commission. The Administration also lent valuable military support to governments trying to cool other hotbeds of terrorism from the Philippines to Yemen.

But two years later, we are devoting our attention, our troops, and our resources almost exclusively to Iraq, which the President now acknowledges had no known link to the 9/11 attacks. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda remains a powerful and aggressive enemy. It continues to operate not only in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan but also in at least 60 countries worldwide. Over the last year or so, al-Qaeda has struck in Casablanca, Kuwait, Amman, Bali, Mombasa, Jakarta, Riyadh, various parts of Pakistan, and possibly Baghdad.

Osama bin Laden and his top deputy appear alive and well and surely are plotting the next devastating attacks against the United States, perhaps with

chemical, biological, or radiological weapons. Although the Administration boasts that two-thirds of al-Qaeda's known leaders have been killed or captured, it simultaneously acknowledges that al-Qaeda sleeper cells abound here in the United States.

Iraq, where we have 130,000 troops operating in a veritable shooting gallery, has been dubbed a "terrorist magnet" by Lieutenant-General Ricardo Sanchez, the commander of coalition ground forces in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> This the Administration portrays as a good thing. The theory is, as the President implied in his September 7, 2003, speech to the nation, if we can kill al-Qaeda on the Iraqi battlefield, then we will not have to fight them on the home front. Does anyone really believe that regime change in Iraq has eliminated the possibility of an al-Qaeda attack using weapons of mass destruction here at home?

Two years later, our homeland is not appreciably safer. Indeed, it was unreasonable to suggest that we could dramatically improve homeland security in short order. But, we could have done more than we have. Valuable time has been wasted, and scarce resources have been channeled to other priorities.

Today, we are bearing the lion's share of the burden in Iraq—90 percent of the troops and almost two-thirds of the reconstruction costs. Contrast that with recent situations where the United States has led militarily and others have borne the brunt of the post-conflict burden. Advance consultation, diplomacy, and cooperation with our allies paid dividends in Kosovo, for instance, where the U.S. share of the postwar bill was less than 15 percent. Without comparable efforts in Iraq, the American taxpayer is footing the difference.

Much has changed since we went to war in Kosovo in 1999. Our G-8 partners and others are increasingly wary of U.S. power and intentions. They fear and distrust what they perceive to be the growing U.S. tendency towards unilateral action in world affairs. This fear has been reinforced by the doctrines of preemption and zero tolerance for competitor states, as outlined in President Bush's National Security Strategy. Too many of our traditional partners view their role as checking U.S. power rather than joining with us in advancing our shared interests. Meanwhile, our adversaries are taunting and testing us—from Kim Jong Il to Saddam Hussein to Osama bin Laden. Fearful friends and emboldened adversaries are far from an optimal combination.

Finally, there are the costs we cannot quantify—the costs of diverting our attention from other, I would argue more urgent, national security priorities, most notably North Korea and Iran. Similarly, the Middle East peace process has broken down for many reasons, but one cannot help but sense active U.S. engagement came too little, too late. For over two years, the U.S. posture was to distance ourselves from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In postponing our involvement until after Iraq, we may have missed a window to advance the peace.

### III. CLIMBING OUT

How to climb out? While the White House apparently does not yet see it this way, this is the question facing President Bush today. It is also the question that will face whoever is elected as U.S. president in November 2004. U.S. national security depends directly on whether our leaders will ask this question plainly and are able to answer it effectively.

The short-term challenges we face are complex and simultaneous: to increase Americans' security in the wake of an unrelenting terrorist threat, to repair the damage with our international partners in order to regain their fullest support in combating terrorism and the threat of weapons of mass destruction, and to succeed in Iraq.

Meeting these challenges will be difficult and costly, no less so because some of the problems we face, arguably, are of our own making. It is not too late to change course, but we will live with the consequences of our failures for a long time to come. When you are in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging—the sooner the better.

#### *A. A New U.S. Leadership for All*

First and foremost, to climb out, I believe, the United States has to exercise an entirely new type of leadership. We are the world's most powerful and wealthy nation. Yet, we cannot assure our own security or maintain our prosperity without the acquiescence, and indeed the cooperation, of others.

We need other countries, their citizens and businesses, to trade with, to finance our debts, and to maintain the dollar as the world's premier currency. We also need others to help us find and destroy terrorist cells and their secret bank accounts. We need others to stop weapons proliferation, to fight infectious diseases, to curb organized crime and drug trafficking, to halt global warming, to prevent and resolve regional conflicts, to keep the peace, and rebuild failed states. We have neither the ability nor the resources to tackle these challenges alone. The threats the United States now faces are increasingly transnational in nature. Our responses to those threats, if they are to be effective, also must be transnational.

Thus, the United States must lead as if we understand that leadership does not exist in a vacuum. By definition, leaders must have others with whom to lead and join. If others are to join with us, they must see our leadership as serving not just our own interests, but theirs as well. This is common sense, but it is also a far cry from the way we currently act.

Today, we face an international community increasingly skeptical of U.S. intentions and resentful of our power. How did we get here? We started before Iraq, in large part by almost reflexively spurning collective instruments, especially

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the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Kyoto Protocol, the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (BTWC), and the International Criminal Court (ICC). Further, we convey a belief that the United States stands above international law. We seek exclusive immunities for U.S. soldiers serving in military operations abroad and we justify unilateral U.S. military actions through a far-reaching doctrine of preemption, while warning others not to follow suit.

Iraq was the icing on the cake. While we had a good case that we were enforcing a decade of United Nations Security Council resolutions, we squandered that rationale by prematurely halting inspections and refusing to wait even a few weeks to achieve far broader international support. Instead, we demonstrated U.S. willingness to use its vast power for what most of the world viewed as unnecessary, if not illegitimate, purposes.

Moreover, we have managed to aggravate, even alienate, large swaths of the globe by our perceived inattention to their concerns. The countries of Latin America, which were promised more active engagement than ever before by President Bush, feel betrayed. Mexico's President invested a great deal of political capital in improved relations with the United States in exchange for the lost promise of immigration and other reforms. New free trade agreements for the Americas have not materialized. Instead, we have met the region's political and financial crises with studied ambivalence.

Africa, a region I know well, has lent strong political support to the war on terrorism. Still, many African people and leaders feel largely neglected by this Administration, despite President Bush's recent trip. American marines float off the shores of Liberia, the one country in Africa to which we have unique historical ties, while hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians continue to suffer enormously. President Bush pledged meaningful U.S. support for West African peacekeepers, but instead delivered only 150 soldiers at the Monrovia airport for 11 days. In contrast, Britain intervened three years ago to end decisively the war in neighboring Sierra Leone. France recently deployed troops to Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The United States again missed a golden opportunity in Liberia not only to save lives but to help stabilize a strategically significant region. We also lost a timely chance to demonstrate that the United States is prepared (even if only occasionally, on a limited basis, and in a low-risk circumstance) to use our military power not just when we are directly threatened but also when we can enhance the security of others.

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As a consequence of such behavior, we appear to many a hegemon out for itself, rather than a global leader concerned about the common good. This perception undermines the moral strength of our leadership, or soft power, and weakens international support for our legitimate objectives.

This is why we must urgently change the tone and substance of America's international leadership. We must lead not only for ourselves, which goes without saying, but wherever and whenever we can, we must also lead for the greater global good. In doing so, we will advance our own economic and security interests, which in a globalizing world we cannot accomplish alone. Crucially, we will also motivate others to join with us rather than resent us, cower from us, or seek to counterbalance us.

What would new American leadership entail? First, the United States would care, and be seen to care, about what others think. We would not dictate, but listen. We would consult and, yes, even on occasion, take the advice of others—at least on how to do things, if not as often on what to do. This was a lesson I learned repeatedly, and sometimes painfully, as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Listening is not necessarily Americans' strong suit, but by doing so, we can not only gain the respect of others but learn valuable lessons as well. For instance, African leaders provided quiet yet important advice to me and other senior U.S. officials on issues ranging from influencing key players in regional conflicts to mounting a successful campaign to keep Sudan, a state sponsor of terrorism, off the United Nations Security Council. They offered advice on how to counter more effectively Libyan influence in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as suggestions on responses to early overtures regarding resolution of the Lockerbie case. We have much to gain from others, particularly when we seek to build consensus for our objectives at the outset rather than merely call for international cleanup crews after the mess is made. In short, the United States must restore diplomacy to a leading place in our international arsenal.

Second, we must make collective instruments and institutions work for us, rather than allow our actions to weaken or destroy them. The rest of the world cares deeply about international treaties and bodies. So should we, as we helped to create many of them, such as the United Nations and NATO. Moreover, these institutions often, if not always, prove useful and necessary vehicles. Working within international fora, we can roll up our sleeves and seek to revise problematic treaties such as Kyoto and the BTWC. This was President Clinton's intention when he signed the ICC treaty. The international community needs and wants the United States to be party to key international legal regimes. Hence, most states would likely agree to negotiate adjustments, if convinced our intentions were constructive and our aim was to join rather than jettison such frameworks. The United States should also maintain its political and practical investment in NATO rather than dismiss it, as we did when our allies invoked the collective

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defense clause to assist us after September 11. If the UN is to be there when we need it, as we often do, we need to nurture and strengthen it even when we do not need it. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has just called for a radical reexamination of the mission and structure of the UN. The United States should play as constructive a role in this effort as we did more than 50 years ago when we helped form the world body in San Francisco.

Third, we need to lead as if we fully understand that the United States has a critical stake in enhancing the security, health, freedom, and economic well-being of others around the world. As President Bush has said, "A world where some live in comfort and plenty, while half the human race lives on less than \$2 a day, is neither just nor stable. Including all of the world's poor in an expanding circle of development—and opportunity—is a moral imperative and one of the top priorities of U.S. international policy."<sup>2</sup>

As long as we continue to be perceived as miserly (which comparatively we are), hypocritical, protectionist, or arrogant in many parts of the world, we will fail to sustain the partnerships that are so critical to combating the transnational threats we

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face. We will also give rise to a new generation of young people steeped in anti-American sentiment, distrustful of our intentions, and buoyed when we fail.

We need leadership guided by enlightened self-interest—the understanding that we win when others win and lose when others lose. It is we who lose when educated young Muslim men turn to radicalism after losing hope for a good job or a bright future. It is we who lose when failed states like Afghanistan, Somalia, and Pakistan cannot keep terrorists out of their territories, even if they want to. We lose when Saudi citizens feel repressed by a corrupt regime that we support. We lose when poor governance and weak healthcare infrastructure in southern China allows SARS to spread for months undetected. We lose when African villagers chop down forests of trees for firewood because they lack alternative fuels.

New American leadership should aim to maximize global public goods—global peace and stability, global economic opportunity and growth, public health, democracy, and respect for human rights. In turn, we would enhance our own security and secure our own leadership.

As a practical matter, the United States should view it as our fight to close the gaps between rich and poor. It must be our fight, not just that of the developing world, to educate the uneducated (especially girls), to train and to employ jobless youth, to prevent and treat infectious diseases (especially HIV/AIDS and

malaria), to open our markets fully to goods and services from the developing world, and to end agricultural subsidies that deprive poor farmers of their best route out of poverty. The United States ought to lead our G-8 partners in a comprehensive, long-term commitment to foster global growth and freedom through substantially increasing aid, through free trade, investment in micro- as well as global enterprises and debt relief, while fighting corruption and strengthening democratic institutions.

The Administration, to its credit, has made promises that represent a start down this path. The President's proposed Millennium Challenge Account, if fully funded (which now seems unlikely), would represent a 50 percent increase in U.S. development assistance starting in 2006. However, under current plans, roughly only a dozen high-performing countries would benefit initially. Most of the world's most populous, needy, and important developing countries would be left out. This outcome does not negate the need for increased foreign assistance. It does call into question the wisdom of investing it all in an interesting development experiment that is unlikely to yield long-term benefits where they are needed most.

Similarly, I welcome the President's proposal to increase U.S. global spending on HIV/AIDS by \$10 billion to \$15 billion over five years. This investment, which should be even greater, represents a belated but crucial recognition that we must demonstrate care for the concerns of others. Unfortunately, these funds, if appropriated, will be back-loaded, delaying unnecessarily our response to a disease that has already killed over 20 million people and infects more than 6,000 new victims every day. In four months in Iraq, we will spend a billion dollars more on just our military operations than we will in five years to fight HIV/AIDS. Leaders or ordinary citizens in many parts of the world will not fail to notice how we prioritize our spending.

Moreover, if we are serious about fighting terrorism, the United States must become more, rather than less, engaged in the difficult and sometimes thankless tasks of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and nation-building in failed states. We must do so not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in such places as Liberia and the DRC. We can no longer afford to view any part of the world as unimportant to U.S. national security interests. Our battlefield is the globe, and we must adapt our strategies and tactics accordingly.

### *B. Back to Basics in the War on Terrorism*

I have described at some length potential long-term strategies. The next major step in climbing out of the big hole is to re-cast our short-term approach to the war on terrorism. We need to get back to basics. Today, we are consumed by a secondary issue: Iraq. Like it or not, we must see this job through. At the same time, we need to devote far greater effort and attention to the global fight

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against al-Qaeda and other terrorists with global reach.

Our first priority is homeland security. We must speed our efforts to harden critical infrastructure, equip and train first responders, and improve bio-preparedness. The President and Congress cannot achieve vital improvements on the cheap. State and local governments desperately need increased federal assistance. Our leaders also need to level with the American people about our continued vulnerability and call upon us to sacrifice—not our liberties but, perhaps, some degree of our luxury—to enhance our common security.

Next, we need to finish the job in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Al-Qaeda and, presumably, bin Laden continue to operate in the common border region. We have largely abandoned the military fight in this arena, which seems neither wise nor sustainable. In conjunction with Pakistani and Afghan authorities as well as NATO forces in Kabul, we should renew aggressive efforts to hunt down and eliminate al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants.

Third, we must stop soft-pedaling the Saudi Arabia problem. There are suggestions that Saudi authorities are now taking counterterrorism cooperation more seriously in the wake of the Riyadh bombings. If not, we should spare no effort to press them. At the same time, we need to conduct tough, private conversations with royal leaders about instituting democratic reforms. They do not want it, and we are scared of it. But without such reforms, both the Saudi and U.S. leaderships are sitting on a ticking time bomb.

Fourth, we need to continue to strengthen and expand intelligence-sharing and law enforcement cooperation with countries that can help us wrap up al-Qaeda operatives, cells, and finances. Such efforts are crucial to thwarting potential attacks. They are limited only by some governments' capacity to cooperate and by others' reluctance to appear too close to the United States. Where the problem is capacity, the United States can provide weak states with substantial counterterrorism assistance to help strengthen their immigration controls, customs regimes, and airport security. The Administration has announced a \$100 million program to assist vulnerable East African nations. This good initiative should be increased and expanded to other regions of Africa and beyond.

Last but by no means least, getting back to basics on terrorism must entail invigorated efforts to prevent terrorists from obtaining weapons of mass destruction (WMD). At the core of this effort should be renewed and expanded support for the Nunn-Lugar program, a post-Cold War initiative aimed at securing WMD facilities in the former Soviet Union and deterring former Soviet scientists from selling their knowledge. These former Soviet assets remain a risk to us and to others. We now face a similar problem in Iraq. To limit potential proliferation problems from Iraq's former weapons programs, we should invite back UN inspectors, give them full support, and apply the Nunn-Lugar strategy to Iraqi scientists.

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### *C. Refusal to Fail in the Middle East*

In order to maintain the ability to respond militarily, if necessary, to other potential threats, such as Iran and North Korea, we need to achieve the swiftest possible success in Iraq. There, our military is overcommitted and our objectives are unrealistic. Realistically, without prematurely declaring victory and withdrawing (as some in the Administration may be tempted to do as the election approaches), we need to redefine success. Actual “mission accomplished”<sup>3</sup> in Iraq can be something short of the establishment of a beacon of secular democracy to light the path for all the Middle East.<sup>3</sup>

What do we need at a minimum? We need a whole and stable Iraq free of Ba’thist leadership and massive human rights violations. We need an Iraq verifiably rid of WMD, with a functioning, broadly representative government able to provide basic security and services to its people, and which poses no threat to its neighbors. Ideally, this government will be friendly to the United States. We need to leave Iraq as soon as reasonably possible, but on our own schedule, having achieved our minimum objectives. We cannot cut and run nor appear to be driven out by terror tactics. These should be our bottom lines.

In the meantime, we need to set forth a realistic yet aggressive timeline for transferring sovereignty to Iraqis, to offer them a horizon and assuage fears that

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our occupation is indefinite. We need to get a grip on security—in part by recalling, vetting, and retaining the Iraqi armed forces as well as by involving other countries’ troops in much larger numbers. But, if necessary, we must also be prepared to beef up temporarily the complement of U.S. forces. Drawing lessons from elsewhere and expertise from skilled nongovernmental organiza-

tions, we should give urgent attention to building over the long term durable democratic institutions from the ground up.

At the same time, we need to be willing to compromise substantially and share real responsibility for governance with the UN and Iraqis. This is not only the price we have to pay, albeit at this late stage, to gain meaningful contributions of troops and dollars, it is also what we should do to maximize our chances of success. The UN knows a lot more than the U.S. Defense Department about nation-building, and Iraqis know a lot more than we about their fractious and complex society. In sharing responsibility for governing, we would also share the responsibility for failure, should it come. We would take the United States and our troops at least partially out of the political and military bull’s-eye in which we now find ourselves.

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Just as we must refuse to fail in Iraq, so too must we refuse to give up on, or take another holiday from, the Middle East peace process. Continued and escalating conflict between Israelis and Palestinians poses several threats we cannot ignore. First, it costs our friend Israel scores of innocent civilians each year through vicious terrorist attacks. Second, hundreds of Palestinians, mainly innocents, are killed by Israelis each year. Third, the occupation deprives Palestinians of liberty, hope, and economic opportunity. This deprivation is unsustainable and poses an enduring risk to Israel and to the United States because it fuels wave after wave of suicide bombers. Fourth, this festering sore serves as a potent rallying cry not just for Arabs and Muslims but for much of the world's dispossessed and disaffected. The United States' perceived imbalance makes us a target for the anger this conflict engenders far beyond the Palestinian territories.

For all of these reasons and others, we need peace in the Middle East. The Road Map has foundered on the familiar shores of Palestinian terror, Israeli retaliation, and American half-measures. The United States warmly welcomed former Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas but did little concretely to strengthen his hand. We promised to pressure both sides to fulfill their obligations—to dismantle terrorist infrastructures and rollback settlements, for example—but when the going got tough and the parties got going, the United States let both sides out of the noose. Now, while Israel's wall goes up, we remain paralyzed. Except for wishing Yasser Arafat away, we have no practical plan for progress. As politically difficult as this problem is, we need our President to expend the capital, force the compromises, and twist the arms of regional leaders to wrest peace from the jaws of catastrophe. This President is well-positioned to accomplish this goal, provided he tries seriously.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

Let me conclude by summarizing: the hole we are in is deep and its walls are steep. Yet we can and we must climb out. Our President should begin this process now. Further delay will cost us all dearly. The way out entails, at least in part, urgent and dramatic resort to the humble leadership President Bush promised in his campaign.

We can begin by taking affirmative steps to allay international concern about what many perceive to be our brazen exercise of American power for selfish and dubious objectives. We need to demonstrate that our stewardship of the globe as the world's remaining superpower aims to benefit others as well as ourselves, that we seek power not just for its own sake but to enhance the security, liberty, and prosperity of our own and other peoples.

We can also prove a consistent preference for cooperation and consultation with our international partners over knee-jerk unilateralism. We can build up

regional and international institutions rather than sideline or undermine them. We can jettison the convenient fiction that it is often us against the UN, ignoring the fact that for over 50 years we have been the UN's most influential member and that the UN's failings are therefore U.S. failings. We can find ways to commit to, or if not, to modify, international treaties and instruments rather than merely toss them aside and walk away. In short, we can change the tone and substance of our international engagement as a first and relatively easy step in repairing battered relationships.

At this especially dangerous moment in history, the United States must exhibit strong, steady, principled leadership in pursuit of our national security objectives. We should recognize our limitations and prioritize the threats we face. We should seek to strengthen our international partnerships with countries large and small through collaborative leadership and compassionate policies. We should show our adversaries and allies alike both our determination to defend our interests and our patient resolve.

We almost certainly face tough and deadly battles ahead, but we can fight them with greater strength, more committed partners, and perhaps even shorten their duration if we have the vision to adjust our strategies, tactics, and tone. The United States and its leaders must take the long view, recognizing that to preserve our power and defend our interests most effectively, we need to lead more justly, openly, and generously. We are more than capable of doing so, if only we have the wisdom and the will to change. ■

#### NOTES

1 CNN's Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer, July 28, 2003.

2 The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>> (accessed November 18, 2003).

3 "President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended," May 1, 2003, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/iraq/20030501-15.html>> (accessed November 18, 2003).