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HOW COULD a decorated war hero, experienced senator and outstanding debater lose a presidential race that turned largely on national security issues to an incumbent who during his first term badly miscalculated both the urgency of the main war he pursued and the way to win the peace? And given some of the harsh realities now facing the U.S. armed services, particularly the protracted and dangerous deployment to Iraq, how did Republicans find their most loyal demographic, not among the Bible Belt voters of the South and West or the wealthy businessmen along the coasts, but rather among U.S. military members and a large percentage of the more than 25 million veterans? Answering these questions is critical to the Democratic Party's prospects as it looks ahead to elections in 2006 and 2008. The Democratic Party must reestablish its national security *bona fides* among key constituencies if it hopes to win back the White House or Congress.

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National security rightly emerged as the predominant issue of the 2004 election. Some 34 percent of the electorate cited either Iraq or the War on Terror as the policy issue of greatest concern, a significant jump from the twelve percent that cited "world affairs" in 2000. Among that 34 percent, sixty percent favored President Bush, with an overwhelming 86 percent of those most worried about terrorism favoring the incumbent. In the electorate at large, about 58 percent said they most trusted President Bush to wage the War on Terror effectively, to Senator Kerry's 40 percent. All this even though in nominating Senator Kerry, Democrats believed they were offering the country a viable alternative to a president who misdiagnosed the Iraqi threat, went to war with a weak coalition and failed to plan properly for the aftermath of invasion.

The recent election made clear, however, that there is profound anxiety over how Democrats generally manage issues of war and peace. Party leaders' instincts were wrong. Americans did not want the politics of antiwar protest. They wanted a leader who convinced them he had a better plan for the course of the nation at a crucial moment in its history.

In a small but telling example of how the party tends to think about national security, when Democrats thought they had a chance of winning the recent presi-

dential elections, they got much more excited about the topic of who should be Secretary of State than Secretary of Defense. It was widely known that capable individuals such as Richard Holbrooke and Joseph Biden were interested in becoming the nation's top diplomat, and it was obvious throughout the campaign how close both were to Senator Kerry—yet one struggles to recall a single name mentioned to run the Pentagon. As a military officer told one of us, "Don't you find it surprising that at a time of war the Democratic Party spends no time thinking about who the Secretary of Defense should be?"

Especially in the post-9/11 context, voters want to know that Democrats will have the backbone to attack America's enemies before they can strike the United States. And they want to be convinced that Democrats know enough about the nation's armed forces and the tough challenges of leadership to use military force effectively and decisively. In the last election, Democrats as a party offered little more than international cooperation and multilateralism as their prescription for matters of national security. This was complemented by a "laundry list" approach to national security policy, presenting a broad agenda addressing energy independence, civil conflicts, HIV/AIDS, Mideast peace and other matters. These are important, to be sure, but an effective and well-communicated approach to the "hard" security problems of the day was lacking. It is too early to tell if this problem has been rectified under the party's current leadership, but all Democrats, even those whose hearts are primarily in energy or trade or development policy, need to recognize that they cannot cobble together a winning platform from various bits and pieces—a military pay raise here, a call for multilateralism there. Democrats must have a comprehensive, credible approach to national security that resonates with the military vote.

Of Democrats and Soldiers

ONE STRIKING development—dating back roughly to the Reagan era—has been the growing identification of the American military culture with the Republican Party and its increasing disenchantment with Democrats. It is very true, of course, that the military vote (active-duty personnel as well as reservists, civilian employees and veterans) is not a monolithic group. These 30 million voters are not equally conservative politically nor equally inclined to factor military issues prominently in their voting decisions. Yet a *Military Times* survey released last September showed President Bush the preferred candidate among active-duty military personnel by roughly 73 to 18, a staggering ratio found among reservists as well. More than 60 percent of today's military leaders self-identify as Republican, whereas less than 10 percent call themselves Democrats. Overall, 59 percent of all military personnel described themselves as Republicans in the September 2004 survey mentioned above, with 13 percent Democratic and 20 percent independent. The Republican advantage is not nearly so stark among veterans, but even within this category, Republicans hold a two-to-one edge (46 to 22) among veterans who are "civilian leaders" and a six point edge (37 to 31) among the veteran population at large. In the end, among the 18 percent of the population with military experience, 57 percent voted for Mr. Bush to 41 percent for Mr. Kerry. (By contrast, Bill Clinton polled equally to George H. W. Bush among military veterans in 1992.)

Certainly there are myriad factors that explain the overwhelming Republican tilt in the military's political preferences. A high percentage of recruits come from rural or "red state" America; religious observance in the military is higher than the national norm among civilians, at a time when the Democrats are seen in-

creasingly as the country's more secular party; Republicans are associated with support for large defense budgets. And Democrats have also needlessly aggravated their own problems. In 2004, following Howard Dean's example from the year before, they more often than not chose angry antiwar rhetoric over a debate on future foreign policy vision or current national security challenges. This was indulgence in emotion over analysis, in Bush bashing over solid political strategizing.

This was compounded by the thinking among Democratic political strategists that national security was not a key issue for Democratic voters. Former DNC Chairman Terry McAuliffe epitomized this thinking when he indicated that national security was a subject where Democrats had only to "check the box" before moving on to issues they preferred to discuss. This attitude was even less defensible in 2004 than in 2000 (when top strategists reportedly counseled Vice President Al Gore to avoid national security issues because they ranked so low in voter surveys).

This attitude ignores the fact that voters always care about national security, particularly in presidential races. The president has a disproportionate impact on American foreign policy and national security decision-making, and voters know this. Many also have an easier time following debates over national security, taking the measure of a candidate from his or her resoluteness and logic in them, than discussions of tax or budget policy or health care reform.

In 2004 in particular, it should have been obvious that national security was paramount in voters' minds. The country was still strongly affected by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, even if not as intensively as a couple years before. In addition, it became fully apparent that the Bush Administration failed to prepare a serious stabilization plan for Iraq, ignored military advice on the size of the force needed for the job, failed to procure the armor needed to protect troops in the field and wound up deploying troops at far greater paces than almost any military specialist thought advisable or sustainable.[2] Despite these serious gaffes in the current administration's defense policy over the last few years, predictions that the Republican sway over the military vote would diminish in the 2004 election were not fulfilled.

The Clinton Legacy

OF COURSE, the problems did not begin with 2004. John Kerry and John Edwards had the misfortune of running as Democrats after their party had been perceived as the weaker of the two parties on national security for more than a generation. Democrats need to challenge this perception.

Setting the Clinton Administration's record straight is the first place to start. The Clinton Administration made its share of mistakes on military matters, particularly in its early years. But it had important successes, too: It showed more military resolve in regard to North Korea in 1994 than the Bush Administration displayed during an even more serious nuclear crisis a decade later, credibly signaled to China that there would be severe repercussions if it attacked Taiwan and eventually worked with NATO to prevail in both the Bosnia and Kosovo conflicts.

[2]One need only reference the Third Infantry Division's after-action report: "Higher headquarters did not provide the Third Infantry Division (Mechanized) with a plan for Phase IV. As a result, Third Infantry Division transitioned into Phase IV in the absence of guidance." A Department of Defense report observed that "late formation of Department of Defense [Phase IV] organizations limited time available for the development of detailed plans and predeployment coordination."

Moreover, even though its containment policy toward Iraq was springing leaks by the end of the 1990s in regard to sanctions enforcement and other matters, it does not look so bad compared with subsequent Bush Administration policy.

The Clinton Administration's major defense reviews helped balance the budget while ensuring that the military was capable of promoting global stability and meeting urgent regional threats. For those who doubted the quality of its major quadrennial defense reviews (QDRs), it is worth noting that Secretary Rumsfeld in his own 2001 QDR did not stray far from the path blazed by the Clinton Administration. The Clinton budgets bought large quantities of fast sealift, precision weapons, mine warfare capabilities and chemical protective gear and provided early versions of the unmanned aerial vehicles that were used effectively in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Clinton Administration also maintained military readiness standards—from training rigor and intensity, to equipment repair, to military pay and benefits—at historically high levels.

The Clinton Administration had one great virtue and one frequent failing in its dealings with the military. The positive was that it listened attentively to military advice in fashioning plans for American operations in the Balkans, Haiti and elsewhere. The negative was that it sometimes deferred too quickly to military advice—or felt too intimidated to challenge the armed forces—and inadvertently may have lost a bit of the military's respect as a result. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and President Clinton took responsibility for the debacle in Somalia and deserved some of it, yet the tactical decisions had been taken by military commanders on the ground, not dictated by the civilians in Washington. Much was made of the fact that Secretary Aspin had denied the military heavier ground equipment a few weeks earlier, but Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell had gone along with the decision.

And while the Clinton Administration may well deserve criticism for its limited response to the 1998 Al-Qaeda bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa, its main mistake was deferring too soon to the nation's top brass. The top military leadership demonstrated considerable reluctance to risk a special forces commando raid against Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. In large part, this hinged on the objection of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Hugh Shelton, a former special operator himself. Admittedly, the chairman had strong arguments against risking American forces in a raid that might come up empty, in a country where U.S. reinforcements were a great distance away. But given the stakes, increasingly apparent even at the time, it should have been considered much more seriously.

The Clinton national security legacy is complex, with lessons both about what to do right and what not to repeat. But Democrats can and should be proud of what was accomplished during the Clinton years—and be prepared to build a national security strategy on its achievements, rather than fall back on either the "politics of anger" or a reflexive endorsement of whatever steps a Republican administration takes.

Learning Lessons

IT WOULD be wrong for Democrats to think that competing with Republicans on national security requires a strategy of being "more Republican than the Republicans." A Democrat need not reflexively support any weapon system under the sun to establish credibility on national security issues. With regard to Iraq, there was and continues to be a serious antiwar argument, reflected in the views of former National Security Advisor General Brent Scowcroft as well as a group of several dozen of the

nation's best political science professors (ranging from Barry Posen to Steven Walt to Richard Betts). Indeed, the antiwar stance adopted by Howard Dean and General Wesley Clark was just as strategically defensible as Kerry's and Edwards's reluctant support for the war or Senator Lieberman's unflinching endorsement. It was not a sign of weakness for Democrats to be ambivalent about the merits of overthrowing Saddam Hussein by military invasion. What voters responded to was whether a candidate's position was well conceived, resolute and above petty partisan politics.

IN THIS regard we would offer several friendly criticisms of the Kerry-Edwards effort. First, whatever the political imperative of competing with Howard Dean for the antiwar vote, both senators made a mistake in the fall of 2003 by opposing the proposed $87 billion supplemental funding package for Iraq and Afghanistan. If they truly needed to vote against that package, they also should have felt obliged to present a clear and serious alternative bill immediately—and pressed for its passage. Indeed, they could have included many of the proposals Kerry later advocated in a March 2004 address, such as guaranteeing adequate armored protection for U.S. forces in Iraq or mandating greater oversight of how funds were disbursed. Instead, both Kerry and Edwards acquired a reputation as politicians willing to withhold support for U.S. troops on the battlefield in order to score partisan points.

Second, the ticket also made a mistake by tacking left on the Iraq issue during the general campaign. The ticket's "wrong war—wrong time—wrong place" rhetoric was indeed reminiscent of Howard Dean, just as President Bush said. Moreover, Senator Kerry's statement that he would have done "almost everything" differently than Mr. Bush on Iraq was too strong, given that on many matters the two were not far apart. (That was true partly because President Bush "borrowed" some of Kerry's ideas, such as a faster transition to Iraqi sovereignty, greater involvement of allies in the operation, better benefits for troops in the field and more focus on job creation in the reconstruction effort.)

Finally, because the Kerry-Edwards ticket too often seemed only to offer criticisms, President Bush was able to project an image of resoluteness and firm beliefs. Even when voters disagreed with some of President Bush's policies, his unflinching views about the rightness of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and the importance of bringing democracy and freedom to the Greater Middle East made an impression on voters and gave them a sense both of his future foreign policy and of his commitment to follow through on his initiatives. The election demonstrated that slogans don't substitute for ideas. In both the 2002 and 2004 elections, Democrats were too content to criticize the Bush Administration for isolating the United States in the world and acting unilaterally. These are largely fair criticisms. But they do not address the question of whether the policies Bush followed were sufficiently important to justify stepping on some allied toes. Democrats had a tendency to argue about the means without engaging in a debate over the desired ends.

This is not to say that the Kerry-Edwards team did not do some big thinking about policy. For example, it argued for an acceleration of efforts to secure loose nuclear materials around the world, arguably the greatest threat to American national security. However, with this as with many other proposals, the candidates did not explain much of what, besides added funds, would be needed to accomplish their objectives. And just when the Kerry campaign developed momentum on this and other foreign policy ideas in late May and early June of 2004 (and Kerry's lead over Bush in the polls in-

creased from two to seven percent), the campaign apparently decided it had "checked the box" on national security. Plans for another speech dealing with national security were scrapped, as the campaign took the MacAuliffe line that it was time to get back to domestic matters.

Whether intended or not, this sent a very clear signal to the "national security" voter bloc that the Democrats were interested in talking about defense issues only as an election tactic. Moreover, it did nothing to address a widespread perception that their party's interest in military policy revolves largely around social issues, such as gays in uniform or women in combat billets—that Democrats are more interested in the military as a vehicle for social engineering than for protecting the country.

And so Democrats have several lessons they must absorb from the failed 2000 and 2004 campaigns. First, Democrats need to learn to "talk the talk" of military affairs. Too many candidates and top political operatives are uncomfortable using the language of the military. In the last two campaigns, both Senator Kerry and Vice President Gore failed to lay out a broad vision for the armed forces in a major speech—or, what would have been better yet, a series of speeches. In contrast, Governor Bush, prior to his first run in 2000, gave several speeches specifically devoted to the military and national security. Even if the specific policy recommendations he made needed major adjustments, Bush got a lot of credit for his attention to the details of the so-called revolution in military affairs, defense transformation and military compensation issues. Those speeches, plus the choices of Dick Cheney and Colin Powell for his core national security team, combined with Gore's relative silence on the subject, gave Bush widespread credibility that few expected the young governor from Texas to establish so soon. While Senator Kerry did a good job on the subject of specific military benefits for reservists, troops in Iraq and others affected by deployments, he failed to lay out a broader defense vision.

But Democrats won't be able to "talk the talk" unless their candidates and leading political strategists are prepared to listen. Too often meetings on Democratic foreign policy and national security issues look like a directory of non-profit organizations. There is of course nothing wrong with NGOs, but they tend to be peopled by advocates for individual objectives rather than those who have an integrated view of foreign policy that clearly emphasizes American national security priorities. Some steps have been taken. Democrats have recently recruited a number of prominent military men and women, including General Jack Keane, Admiral William Crowe, General Claudia Kennedy and General John Shalikashvili. Indeed, a retired four-star, Wes Clark, was an unsuccessful candidate for president in the 2004 election.

Outside of election periods, however, retired military people are still rarely involved in the political dynamics or strategic thinking of the Democratic Party. Certainly, the would-be 2008 nominee must recruit some top advisers with military experience and serious, forward-looking views of national security and ensure they have access to him- or herself as well as to the political team. In addition, however, the Democratic Party must undertake new efforts to bring retired and active duty service personnel into their discussion groups and learn more of the critical issues that animate defense discussions. (It would also help if more leaders from business and finance were included alongside academics and civilian officials in Democratic conversations about national security.)

Democrats also need to gain the confidence to challenge the military when appropriate. Using military force is—and should be—an inherently contentious enterprise; Democrats must get more comfortable with the debates and more confi-

dent in their judgment. Furthermore, annual defense budgeting should not be an attempt to protect existing Pentagon rice bowls, but rather a process in which strategic judgment prevails and permits some bowls to be broken. In short, constructive friction is intrinsic to the process—and Democratic officials need to have the confidence, which comes from close familiarity with military affairs, to make national security decisions. Put differently, while avoiding the extremes to which he has sometimes taken his philosophy, Democrats need to emulate one of their least favorite Bush Administration officials, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. He has been right to ask tough questions of the military. What is needed is a kindler, gentler, more respectful Rumsfeldian, rather than the habitual Democratic deference to uniformed judgment on things military.

Democrats should not pretend that civilian and military roles can be neatly separated into two broad and distinct bins—high strategy, the primary province of civilians, and military operations, where the uniformed services possess the nation's principal expertise. There are usually no clear lines distinguishing strategy from operations. The political goals of the nation's conflicts fundamentally affect the tactics and operational plans available to the military to prosecute them, meaning that military planners and commanders must also think about and understand strategy. And the question of how wars are conducted affects decisions on whether to fight them, so civilians must concern themselves with the technical subjects in which the armed forces specialize.

Democrats & Grand Strategy

DEMOCRATS FULLY agree with their Republican colleagues that the current threat to American peace and security—what might be called first-generation Al-Qaeda—needs to be totally destroyed using all the tools of American power. But they are equally concerned that we appear to have no long-term strategy to prevent the creation of the next generation of Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups. After four years in office, President Bush has finally begun to develop such a strategy, as reflected in his focus on freedom and democracy for his second inaugural address. But the challenge requires more than that vision, however constructive it may be. Democrats need a more comprehensive and inspirational vision of their own to tackle this challenge. It should acknowledge the validity of the president's ideas but build on them.[3] By mastering the "hard" security issues they have typically avoided, Democrats will also be better able to engage such matters as the battle of ideas in the War on Terror—a debate that the country, Republicans and Democrats alike, acutely needs.

Where to go from here? One area the Democrats, as a party, might start with is the question of national service. In recent years, party spokesmen have done little more than raise public anxieties about the prospect of a national draft. Military compensation packages are now generally good, but there is room for Democrats to be innovative by encouraging more young Americans—especially from our nation's elite universities—to serve, by exploring the possibility of shorter tours of duty for some specialties if that allows more to serve usefully, and by encouraging the study of languages and cultures that is increasingly needed by intelligence personnel and diplomats to win the War on Terror. Democrats should sharply criticize

[3] A broader agenda should extend to political, educational and economic reform across the Islamic world, new mechanisms for intensive political dialogue between Westerners and Muslims and an evenhanded promotion of peace in the Middle East.

universities that deny ROTC access to their campuses over the gays-in-the-military issue. Whether or not the Department of Defense is right in this policy, many universities' responses are disproportionate, wrongheaded and harmful to the nation's security—and top Democrats should say so.

Democrats must prove that they can be good stewards of America's military potential—improving the force for tomorrow's challenges and employing it prudentially yet decisively when appropriate. There are three security challenges the nation will soon face, which we believe the Democratic Party must address if it wants to rebuild its national security credentials and become more competitive for the military vote.

The first is the role of the military in post-conflict reconstruction. U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the intense difficulty of winning the peace in countries where we've already won the war. With the Bush Administration conducting the country's largest nation-building effort since the 1940s, the debate over whether the United States should do such things is over, and the common Republican position on the issue from the 1990s has decisively lost. It is now time to take advantage of that fact and prepare the military and other government institutions for the challenges ahead. The U.S. military is getting better at such missions but continues to have weaknesses and is not aided enough by other parts of the government. We are asking our uniformed personnel to succeed at tasks for which they have little training. This post-conflict resolution role requires revisiting the Goldwater-Nichols reforms of the 1980s, extending beyond the Department of Defense to the rest of government. Among other things, a cadre of reconstruction specialists should be created, with mechanisms to rapidly expand their ranks in times of crisis. This is not just a humanitarian position; given Al-Qaeda's proven ability to use the territories of failed states for sanctuary and for revenue-generating illicit activity, it is a security imperative as well.

Second, Democrats must keep paying attention to threats and possible conflict scenarios that involve classic warfare, be it against other states or terrorist organizations. Clinton's 1997 QDR focused a good deal on the "asymmetric challenges" that countries like North Korea might pose to the United States and its allies in wartime. Defense policymakers need to ensure that we consider the needs of facing a similar potential challenge from Iran or China: fielding enough advanced capabilities to find Iranian or Chinese mines and submarines in shallow waters near their countries, improving our deployed forces' defenses against cruise and ballistic missiles, and keeping reconnaissance and communications systems operational in the face of hostile attempts to defeat our high-tech advantages. Democrats must not become so transfixed by engagement strategies for difficult countries that we forget to prepare militarily for the possibility that such well-advised strategies may fail.

Third, Democrats can and must continue to contribute to homeland security. They must learn to take political credit for ideas, such as the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, which were originally theirs. (Instead, in the midterm elections of 2002, the Democrats lost the Senate partly by putting up obstacles to the rapid creation of a Department of Homeland Security, even though such a department was Senator Joseph Lieberman's idea before Bush co-opted it.) The last several years have seen progress, but with the country focused largely on offensive military operations abroad, and with the homeland security mission so new and so daunting, much remains to be done. A comprehensive strategy is still lacking. For example, private-

sector infrastructure remains largely unprotected, largely due to the Bush Administration's ideological opposition to placing any demands upon it. But there are solutions short of the heavy hand of government regulation, such as requiring owners to possess terrorism insurance and then letting the insurance markets encourage adoption of the best practices.

DEMOCRATS HAVE their work cut out for them if they are to rebuild their national security credentials. However, they have a good deal of talent in Congress and elsewhere (even if not in their top leadership at the moment) and time to think. They have proven they can win elections even at the presidential level, despite their modern reputation of having difficulty with national security issues. Although national security will likely figure more heavily in voters' minds in the next elections than they did in 1992, most Democrats have more experience with the subject than Governor Clinton did in 1992 as well. And if the governor of a small southern state without foreign policy or military experience can win the presidency, the likely cast of candidates for 2008 should have a shot as well.

This prognosis should be encouraging for Democrats, provided they roll up their sleeves and develop big ideas and good national security instincts—and avoid defaulting to criticisms of Republicans as the essence of their own foreign policy. A Democratic party that is weak, or perceived as weak, on national security is a problem not just for Democrats but for the country as a whole. The two party system does not work properly when one party fails to offer clear and cogent visions for the big issues of the day—or loses the public's trust that it can do so. Only when two serious and confident participants consistently lock swords on critical foreign policy debates will the nation engage in the analysis and in-depth discussion necessary for the development of successful policies. The health of our foreign and national security policy are at stake. □