

Perspective on United States Security Policy
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The recent American election will undoubtedly inspire concern in Europe in that it appears to have endorsed security policies featuring the assertive use of force and the explicit disregard for established provisions of international legal restraint. Such policies have been pursued by the Bush administration against the judgment of European allies, many of whom fear that actions derived from those policies have done more to stimulate violence than to contain it.

I personally share those concerns and acknowledge their validity. I want to provide some mitigating perspective, however. The outcome of the American election was determined primarily by domestic social issues, and the electorate does not endorse a belligerent foreign policy. President Bush's margin of victory was significantly less than statistical expectations for an incumbent candidate under prevailing economic conditions, and can be attributed largely to religious conservatives expressing their opposition to gay marriage and abortion practices. The war in Iraq diminished political support for the president, draining away much of the extraordinary surge he enjoyed as a result of the 2001 terrorist attacks. The underlying attitudes of the American electorate are well aligned with those in Europe on the fundamental issues of security policy, as are the inherent interests of our respective societies. Moreover, there are very powerful circumstances that will predictably drive us into yet more intimate collaboration for purposes of mutual protection.

In the time I have available I will not be able to defend those judgments in full detail, but I hope to provide a summary that will encourage and perhaps help to direct your own reflections on the matter.

The American Election

Statistical expectations of the election outcome are regularly issued in advance on the basis of models that relate historical voting patterns to local economic conditions six months in advance of the election and to other standard determinants of voting behavior.¹ They provide a baseline assessment abstracting from the details of candidate personality

¹ See "2004 Presidential Election Model," Global Insight, <http://www.wmrc.com/pdf/us-election-summary-sept04.pdf>; James E. Campbell, "Introduction – the 2004 Election Forecasts," PS vol. XXXVII, No. 4, October, 2004, pp 733-735, PSONline www.apsanet.org.

and immediately topical issues, and their predictive record is quite good. Most of the models projected a larger margin for President Bush than he actually achieved.

The fact that his election victory occurred despite a sharp divergence between the president's policies and voter attitudes is strikingly revealed in polling that was done both in advance of the campaign season and in the final stages of the election process.² In particular it is evident that Bush supporters substantially misperceived both the evidence about Iraq and the details of Bush administration security policies in order to bring their partisan preference more in line with their underlying attitudes.

Regarding Iraq:

- 72% of Bush supporters incorrectly believed that just before the war Iraq had major WMD programs. In contrast 26% of Kerry supporters believed that.
- 57% of Bush supporters incorrectly believed the Duelfer report confirmed Iraq's possession of WMD. 23% of Kerry supporters so believed.
- 75% of Bush supporters incorrectly believed there to be a significant connection between Iraq and al Qaeda. 30% of Kerry supporters believed that.
- 56% of Bush supporters incorrectly believed that the 9/11 commission confirmed a connection between Iraq and al Qaeda. 27% of Kerry supporters so believed.

Had those assessments been more accurate, it apparently would have made a difference. 58% of Bush supporters and 92% of Kerry supporters believed that the US should **not** have initiated war against Iraq in the absence of major WMD programs and links to al Qaeda.

Regarding more general security policies, Bush supporters substantially misperceived his position on international treaties, incorrectly believing that he supports

- The land mine treaty (72%),
- The CTBT (69%),
- The ICC (54%),
- And the Kyoto protocol (51%).

Again, those misperceptions apparently serve to make President Bush more acceptable to those dedicated to supporting him for other reasons. The American electorate as a whole solidly supports the major international security treaties and the underlying principle of international cooperation. Specifically:

- 87% support the CTBT
- 73% support enhanced international inspection of nuclear activities.
- 92% support international inspection of biological laboratories.
- 83% support generally collaborative principles of policy.

² Reports on opinion polling results can be found at: www.pipa.org.

The Evolution of Security Policy

In the aftermath of the election it is probable, but not inevitable, that the Bush administration will pursue security policies that are more aggressive and less aligned with international law than either the American electorate or European allies would advocate. In particular the administration is likely to prosecute its objections to nuclear material production programs in North Korea and Iran by attempting to impose political isolation and threatening the use of force without offering the constructive incentives – most notably, credible security guarantees – that most careful observers believe are essential to any reasonable resolution of those issues. Similarly the administration is likely to continue to block efforts by the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva to initiate negotiations on preventing an arms race in outer space. On that issue the United States stands virtually alone against the rest of the world.

As a practical matter, however, these assertive ventures are very likely to be contained by circumstance if not by majority judgment. The US operation in Iraq has not succeeded in establishing the conditions necessary for a stable government to emerge, nor has the more broadly accepted operation in Afghanistan yet established the conditions for successful reconstruction in that country. It would be a great deal more difficult and probably infeasible to initiate new ventures of this sort against substantially more capable opponents while the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan remain as troublesome as they currently are and are likely to remain. Those direct constraints will also be reinforced by the domestic fiscal deficit that will predictably impose increasingly severe restrictions on all US government operations. The tax policies of the Bush administration have made it highly reliant on the inflow of foreign investment capital to finance large fiscal and trade deficits, and that fact does put some limit on its ability to defy international judgment. Although that limit has not yet been visibly encountered, it is nonetheless an implicit restriction of major significance.

Over the longer term, moreover, circumstances are likely to impose yet more consequential implications. It seems evident that international security practices have not yet adjusted to the emerging conditions of globalization to the extent that will ultimately be necessary. The large scale, readily observable and intentionally organized forms of aggression that were the dominant concern of the twentieth century are less immediately threatening than they were once considered to be, but more extensive social interaction and expanded access to destructive technology has made smaller scale and more dispersed forms of civil violence of much greater concern. Although any given instance of civil violence can be absorbed and contained, the aggregate potential is a serious threat to the global economy and to the basic legal order required to operate it productively. That potential cannot be contained by the standard methods of contingency reaction in which traditional military forces have specialized. It will have to be addressed by methods of prevention more effective than any yet devised, and that in turn will undoubtedly require both conceptual and institutional innovation.

Operational Implications

Against the smaller scale, more spontaneous, more widely dispersed, more clandestine and less readily attributable forms of violence that are apparently emerging as the primary international security problem, firepower is in general less decisive. Information and justification are both more important. Insurgents and terrorists can readily be defeated if they can be located. They are dangerous to the extent that they can embed themselves in a society willing to protect and support them. They are especially dangerous if they can acquire access to either of the two technologies truly capable of mass destruction – nuclear explosives or virulent biological pathogens. The basic method of protection against violent individuals and the technologies they might use is mandatory disclosure. If they cannot hide, they cannot threaten.³

Although the fact is not yet widely admitted, the traditional methods of acquiring security information – remote observation and illegal spying – are far too inefficient and ineffective to provide adequate protection against smaller scale forms of violence. The activities and the materials required to conduct sporadic clandestine operations are too readily hidden to be detected by these methods. Forced disclosure systematic enough to hold such operations below a tolerable threshold of consequence could only be achieved by intimate collaboration among essentially all organized societies. The purpose would be to set standards of behavior and to provide for the exchange of information required to monitor compliance. That in turn would require fundamental security accommodation. Residual forms of military confrontation will have to be subordinated to protective monitoring if insurgents and terrorists are to be denied the capacity for social destruction on a significant scale.

The techniques of protective monitoring are potentially quite powerful. In principle all financial transactions and all commodity flows could be continuously tracked if we were determined to do so. Similarly, systematic oversight of biological research and global accounting of nuclear explosive materials could be initiated with high standards of accuracy and protection against unauthorized access if we wished to do so. It is predictable that we will eventually wish to do at least some of this and, indeed, that protective monitoring is likely to become a central feature of international security arrangements. The development of those techniques will require a substantial change of political attitude, however, and legal specification sufficiently robust to protect against misuse of the information gathered. It will also predictably require a substantial revision of legacy security policies – especially the doctrine of preemption recently proclaimed by the Bush administration. No country can be expected to allow international monitoring of its nuclear material holdings if it is simultaneously subjected to a threat of preemption.

³ The logic of protective monitoring and the role it might play in the transformation of international security relationships is discussed in John Steinbruner and Nancy Gallagher, “Constructive transformation: an alternative vision of global security,” *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Summer 2004, pp. 83 – 103.

Until all countries do allow that, protection against insurgent access to these materials will not be as decisive as it will ultimately need to be.

Substantive Implications

Over the next decade or so, it is reasonable to expect that the techniques of protective monitoring and the various issues they raise will be pursued primarily in connection with the management of nuclear materials and biotechnology. As noted, the misapplication of those two technologies would in principle allow a small clandestine operation to directly cause massive social destruction. None of the other technologies popularly included in the mass destruction category have comparable potential. The technical details of protective monitoring in each of these two areas would be very different, but the underlying reasoning and basic principles would be the same.

For different reasons protective monitoring techniques are also likely to be discussed in application to space activity over the next decade. In several official documents, the United States is currently proclaiming an intention to dominate the use of space for national military advantage, and that intention is considered by China in particular to violate the basic provisions of the Outer Space Treaty, which provides the basic framework for international legal regulation. There is an incipient collision of policy and of principle which ultimately will have to be resolved, and it is plausible that protective monitoring techniques will play a significant role in the resolution.

It is also plausible to expect significant interest in applying protective monitoring techniques to the problems of post conflict reconstruction that will predictably be a central security concern over the next several years. That implies, however, the monitoring of individuals, organizations and small arms flows, all of which are likely to be a great deal more difficult and more controversial than the monitoring of massively destructive technology. Probably the simpler, less intrusive and more compelling applications – nuclear materials and biotechnology -- will have to be mastered before the more demanding ones could seriously be attempted, but that is something that remains to be seen.

Over a yet longer span of time – two decades or so – protective monitoring is likely to become a compelling concern in connection with the global warming phenomenon. In that application it might well come to be known as preventive monitoring. We have all been authoritatively warned by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that human induced carbon gas concentrations in the atmosphere will have to be sharply restricted if the risk of triggering catastrophic shifts in global climate patterns is to be contained within prudent bounds. Higher standards of protection in that regard would require a dramatic transformation in global patterns of energy production and use. It would be very difficult to accomplish that without something like a tenfold increase in nuclear power generation. For that to be even remotely acceptable in security terms, the entire nuclear fuel cycle would have to be much more carefully managed than it currently is, and protective monitoring techniques would have to be

developed to a very high standard. That situation has strong potential to restructure international security relationships quite profoundly.

The Problem of Terrorism

Let me conclude my remarks with a few comments on the problem of terrorism. As all of you are undoubtedly aware, it has been the dominant focus of concern in the United States since the events of September 2001. But I am afraid emotions on this subject have well outrun serious reflection. In particular we have not yet understood that our reactions to these events have caused far more damage than the events themselves. We cannot know whether that was actually the intent of the perpetrators, but it certainly has been the principal effect.

It will be important for the United States and the rest of the world as well eventually to come to understand that the form of terrorism demonstrated on September 11 is basically an autoimmune disease, whereby perpetrators incapable of undertaking a decisive direct assault attempt to provoke self-destructive reactions within the victim's society. There are many effects of that sort that have occurred, the most significant of which has been the massive disruption of international social relationships by means of visa restrictions, export controls and various other things that have served to impede international interactions. It is difficult to know how long it might take us to moderate this instinctive reaction and begin to reverse the extensive damage it has done, but we could certainly use all the help we can get.

That truly essential task is complicated by the fact the autoimmune reaction is not entirely irrational. The malicious intent and operational capacity demonstrated on September 11 went well beyond the bounds of previous experience. That makes it very difficult to know what the scope of danger might be. We are obliged to assume that the people who conducted the attack would use mass destruction technology if they were able to do so, and that assumption does plausibly justify the perception of imminent threat underlying the preemption doctrine. For that reason it compounds the danger of autoimmune reaction. One can interpret the Iraq venture as evidence of that compounding.

In this situation I believe it is essential to develop the logic and the practice of protective monitoring as rapidly as possible. That is the most promising and most constructive focus for the impulse for preventive effort that has risen in the United States in the wake of the terrorist assaults. I urge those of you who are alarmed by the election and by the apparently unjustified wielding of military power to pursue the constructive alternative.

With that plea in mind, I close with what I hope is a constructive observation: There is opportunity in danger, but it requires wisdom and dedicated effort to develop it.