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What the Bush Administration Hopes to Gain From Attacking Iraq

The Push for War

Anatol Lieven, *The London Review of Books* (literary biweekly), London, England, Oct. 3, 2002

The most surprising thing about the Bush administration's plan to invade Iraq is not that it is destructive of international order; or wicked, when we consider the role the United States (and Britain) have played, and continue to play, in the Middle East; or opposed by the great majority of the international community; or seemingly contrary to some of the basic needs of the war against terrorism. It is all of these things, but they are of no great concern to the hard-line nationalists in the administration. This group has suffered at least a temporary check as a result of the British insistence on U.N. involvement, and Saddam Hussein's agreement to weapons inspections. They are, however, still determined on war-and their power within the administration and in the U.S. security policy world means that they are very likely to get their way. Even the *Washington Post* has joined the radical rightist media in supporting war.

The most surprising thing about the push for war is that it is so profoundly reckless. If I had to put money on it, I'd say that the odds on quick success in destroying the Iraqi regime may be as high as 5/1 or more, given U.S. military superiority, the vile nature of Saddam Hussein's rule, the unreliability of Baghdad's missiles, and the deep divisions in the Arab world. But at first sight, the longer-term gains for the United States look pretty limited, whereas the consequences of failure would be catastrophic. A general Middle Eastern conflagration and the collapse of more pro-Western Arab states would lose us the war against terrorism, doom untold thousands of Western civilians to death in coming decades, and plunge the world economy into depression.

These risks are not only to American (and British) lives and interests, but to the political future of the administration. If the war goes badly wrong, it will be more generally excoriated than any within living memory, and its members will be finished politically-finished for good. If no other fear moved these people, you'd have thought this one would.

This war plan is not like the intervention in Vietnam, which at the start was supported by a consensus of both political parties, the Pentagon, the security establishment, and the media. It is true that today-for reasons to which I shall return-the Democrats are mostly sitting on the fence; but a large part of the old Republican security establishment has denounced the idea and the Pentagon has made its deep unhappiness very clear.

The administration has therefore been warned of the dangers. And while a new attack by Al-Qaeda during the war would help consolidate anti-Muslim American nationalism, the administration would also be widely accused of having

neglected the hunt for the perpetrators of Sept. 11 in order to pursue an irrelevant vendetta. As far as the Israeli lobby is concerned, a disaster in the Middle East might be the one thing that would at last bring a discussion of its calamitous role into the open in the United States.

With the exception of Donald Rumsfeld, who conveniently did his military service in the gap between the Korean and Vietnam Wars, neither Bush nor any of the other prime movers of this war served in the military. Of course, Gen. Colin Powell served in Vietnam, but he is well known to be extremely dubious about attacking Iraq. All the others did everything possible to avoid service. If the war goes wrong, the "chicken hawk" charge will be used against them with devastating political effect.

Vietnam veterans, both Democrat and Republican, have already started to raise this issue, stirred up in part by the insulting language used by Richard Perle and his school about the caution of the professional military. As a recent letter to the Washington Post put it, "The men described as chicken hawks avoided military service during the Vietnam War while supporting that war politically. They are not accused of lacking experience and judgment compared to military men. They are accused of hypocrisy and cowardice." Given the political risks of failure-to themselves, above all-why are they doing this? And, more broadly, what has bred this reckless spirit?

To understand the administration's motivation, it is necessary to appreciate the breathtaking scope of the domestic and global ambitions which the dominant neo-conservative nationalists hope to further by means of war, and which go way beyond their publicly stated goals. There are of course different groups within this camp: some are more favorable to Israel, others less hostile to China; not all would support the most radical aspects of the program. However, the basic and generally agreed plan is unilateral world domination through absolute military superiority, and this has been consistently advocated and worked on by the group of intellectuals close to Dick Cheney and Richard Perle since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

This basic goal is shared by Colin Powell and the rest of the security establishment. It was, after all, Powell who, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared in 1992 that the United States requires sufficient power "to deter any challenger from ever dreaming of challenging us on the world stage." However, the idea of preemptive defense, now official doctrine, takes this a leap further, much further than Powell would wish to go. In principle, it can be used to justify the destruction of any other state if it even seems that that state might in future be able to challenge the United States. When these ideas were first aired by Paul Wolfowitz and others after the end of the Cold War, they met with general criticism, even from conservatives. Today, thanks to the ascendancy of the radical nationalists in the administration and the effect of the Sept. 11 attacks on the American psyche, they have a major influence on U.S. policy.

To understand the genesis of this extraordinary ambition, it is also necessary to grasp the moral, cultural and intellectual world of American nationalism in which it has taken shape. This nationalism existed long before last

September, but it has been inflamed by those attacks and, equally dangerously, it has become even more entwined with the nationalism of the Israeli right.

To take the geopolitical goals first. As with National Missile Defense, the publicly expressed motive for war with Iraq functions mainly as a tool to gain the necessary public support for an operation the real goals of which are far wider. The indifference of the U.S. public to serious discussion of foreign or security affairs, and the negligence and ideological rigidity of the U.S. media and policy community make searching debate on such issues extremely difficult, and allow such manipulation to succeed.

The immediate goal is indeed to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. There is little real fear, however, that Saddam Hussein will give those weapons to terrorists to use against the United States-though a more genuine fear that he might conceivably do so in the case of Israel. Nor is there any serious prospect that he would use them himself in an unprovoked attack on the United States or Israel, because immediate annihilation would follow. The banal propaganda portrayal of Saddam as a crazed and suicidal dictator plays well on the American street, but I don't believe that it is a view shared by the administration. Rather, their intention is partly to retain an absolute certainty of being able to defend the Gulf against an Iraqi attack, but, more important, to retain for the United States and Israel a free hand for intervention in the Middle East as a whole.

From the point of view of Israel, the Israeli lobby and their Representatives in the administration, the apparent benefits of such a free hand are clear enough. For the group around Cheney, the single most important consideration is guaranteed and unrestricted access to cheap oil, controlled as far as possible at its source. To destroy and occupy the existing Iraqi state and dominate the region militarily would remove even the present limited threat from OPEC, greatly reduce the chance of a new oil shock, and eliminate the need to woo and invest in Russia as an alternative source of energy.

It would also critically undermine the steps already taken towards the development of alternative sources of energy. So far, these have been pitifully few. All the same, Sept. 11 brought new strength to the security arguments for reducing dependence on imported oil, and as alternative technologies develop, they could become a real threat to the oil lobby-which, like the Israeli lobby, is deeply intertwined with the Bush administration. War with Iraq can therefore be seen as a satisfactory outcome for both lobbies. Much more important for the future of mankind, it is also part of what is in essence a strategy to use American military force to permit the continued offloading onto the rest of the world of the ecological costs of the existing U.S. economy-without the need for any short-term sacrifices on the part of U.S. capitalism, the U.S. political elite, or U.S. voters.

The same goes for the war against Al-Qaeda and its allies: The plan for the destruction of the existing Iraqi regime is related to this struggle, but not as it has been presented publicly. Links between Baghdad and Al-Qaeda are unproven and inherently improbable: What the administration hopes is that by crushing another middle-sized state at minimal military cost, all the other

states in the Muslim world will be terrified into full co-operation in tracking down and handing over suspected terrorists, and into forsaking the Palestinian cause. Iran for its part can either be frightened into abandoning both its nuclear program and its support for the Palestinians, or see its nuclear facilities destroyed by bombardment.

The idea, in other words, is to scare these states not only into helping with the hunt for Al-Qaeda, but into capitulating to the United States and, more important, Israeli agendas in the Middle East. This was brought out in the notorious paper on Saudi Arabia presented by Laurent Murawiec of the Rand Corporation to Richard Perle's Defense Policy Board. Murawiec advocated sending the Saudis an ultimatum demanding not only that their police force cooperate fully with U.S. authorities, but also the suppression of public criticism of the United States and Israel within Saudi Arabia-something that would be impossible for any Arab state. Despite this, the demand for the suppression of anti-Israeli publications, broadcasts and activities has been widely echoed in the U.S. media.

"The road to Middle East peace lies through Baghdad" is a line that's peddled by the Bush administration and the Israeli lobby. It is just possible that some members of the administration really believe that by destroying Israel's most powerful remaining enemy they will gain such credit with Israelis and the Israeli lobby that they will be able to press compromises on Israel.

But this is certainly not what public statements by members of the administration-let alone those of its Likud allies in Israel-suggest. Rumsfeld recently described the Jewish settlements as legitimate products of Israeli military victory; the Republican Majority Leader in the House, Dick Armey (a skeptic as regards war with Iraq), has advocated the ethnic cleansing ("transfer") of the Palestinians across the Jordan; and in 1996 Richard Perle and Douglas Feith (now a senior official at the Pentagon) advised Binyamin Netanyahu to abandon the Oslo Peace Process and return to military repression of the Palestinians.

It's far more probable, therefore, that most members of the Bush and Sharon administrations hope that the crushing of Iraq will so demoralize the Palestinians, and so reduce wider Arab support for them, that it will be possible to force them to accept a Bantustan settlement bearing no resemblance to independent statehood and bringing with it no possibility of economic growth and prosperity.

How intelligent men can believe that this will work, given the history of the past 50 years, is astonishing. After all, the Israelis have defeated Arab states five times with no diminution of Palestinian nationalism or Arab sympathy for it. But the dominant groups in the present administrations in both Washington and Jerusalem are "realists" to the core, which, as so often, means that they take an extremely unreal view of the rest of the world, and are insensitive to the point of autism when it comes to the character and motivations of others. They are obsessed by power, by the division of the world into friends and enemies (and often, into their own country and the rest of the world), and by the belief that any demonstration of "weakness"

immediately leads to more radical approaches by the "enemy."

Sharon and his supporters don't doubt that it was the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon-rather than the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories - which led to the latest Intifada. The "offensive realists" in Washington are convinced that it was Reagan's harsh stance and acceleration of the arms race against the Soviet Union that brought about that state's collapse. And both are convinced that the continued existence of Saddam Hussein's regime of itself suggests dangerous U.S. weakness and cowardice, thus emboldening enemies of the United States and Israel across the Middle East and beyond.

From the point of view of the Arab-Israeli conflict, war with Iraq also has some of the character of a Flucht nach vorn-an "escape forwards"-on the part of the U.S. administration. On the one hand, it has become clear that the conflict is integrally linked to everything else that happens in the Middle East, and therefore cannot simply be ignored, as the Bush administration tried to do during its first year in office. On the other hand, even those members of the American political elite who have some understanding of the situation and a concern for justice are terrified of confronting Israel and the Israeli lobby in the ways which would be necessary to bring any chance of peace.

When the United States demands "democracy" in the Palestinian territories before it will reengage in the peace process it is in part, and fairly cynically, trying to get out of this trap. However, when it comes to the new rhetoric of "democratizing" the Arab world as a whole, the agenda is much broader and more worrying; and because the rhetoric is attractive to many liberals we must examine this agenda very carefully.

Belief in the spread of democracy through American power isn't usually consciously insincere. On the contrary, it is inseparable from American national messianism and the wider "American creed." However, this same messianism has also proved immensely useful in destroying or crippling rivals of the United States, the Soviet Union being the outstanding example.

The planned war against Iraq is not after all intended only to remove Saddam Hussein, but to destroy the structure of the Sunni-dominated Arab nationalist Iraqi state as it has existed since that country's inception. The "democracy" that replaces it will presumably resemble that of Afghanistan-a ramshackle coalition of ethnic groups and warlords, utterly dependent on U.S. military power and utterly subservient to U.S. (and Israeli) wishes.

Similarly, if after Saddam's regime is destroyed, Saudi Arabia fails to bow to U.S. wishes and is attacked in its turn, then-to judge by the thoughts circulating in Washington think-tanks-the goal would be not just to remove the Saudi regime and eliminate Wahabism as a state ideology: it would be to destroy and partition the Saudi state. The Gulf oilfields would be put under U.S. military occupation, and the region run by some client emir; Mecca and the Hejaz might well be returned to the Hashemite dynasty of Jordan, its rulers before the conquest by Ibn Saud in 1924; or, to put it differently, the British imperial program of 1919 would be resurrected (though, if the Hashemites have any sense, they would reject what would without question be

a long-term death sentence).

Beyond lies China. When the Bush administration came to power, its major security focus was not the Middle East. There, its initial policy was benign neglect ("benign" at any rate in the case of Israel). The greatest fears of right-wing nationalist gurus such as Robert Kagan concerned the future emergence of China as a superpower rival-fears lent a certain credibility by China's sheer size and the growth of its economy. As declared in the famous strategy document drawn up by Paul Wolfowitz in the last year of the first Bush administration-and effectively proclaimed official policy by Bush Jr. in his West Point speech in June-the guiding purpose of U.S. strategy after the end of the Cold War should be to prevent the emergence of any "peer competitor" anywhere in the world.

What radical U.S. nationalists have in mind is either to "contain" China by overwhelming military force and the creation of a ring of American allies; or, in the case of the real radicals, to destroy the Chinese Communist state as the Soviet Union was destroyed. As with the Soviet Union, this would presumably involve breaking up China by "liberating" Tibet and other areas, and under the guise of "democracy," crippling the central Chinese administration and its capacity to develop either its economy or its army.

To judge by the right-wing nationalist media in the United States, this hostility to China has survived Sept. 11, although in a mitigated form. If the United States can demonstrate overwhelming military superiority in the Middle East, there will certainly be groups in the Republican Party who will be emboldened to push for a much tougher line on China. Above all, of course, they support formal independence for Taiwan.

Another U.S. military victory will certainly help to persuade these groups that for the moment the United States has nothing to fear from the Chinese navy or air force, and that in the event of a Taiwanese declaration of independence, the island can be defended with relative impunity. Meanwhile, a drastic humiliation of China over Taiwan might well be seen as a key stepping-stone to the overthrow of Communism and the crippling of the Chinese state system.

At present these are only long-term ambitions-or dreams. They are certainly not shared even by a majority of the administration, and are unlikely to be implemented in any systematic way. On the other hand, it's worth bearing in mind that the dominant groups in this administration have now openly abandoned the underlying strategy and philosophy of the Clinton administration, which was to integrate the other major states of the world in a rule-based liberal capitalist order, thereby reducing the threat of rivalry between them.

This tendency is not dead. In fact, it is strongly represented by Colin Powell, and by lesser figures such as Richard Haass. But their more powerful nationalist rivals are in the meantime publicly committed to preventing by every possible means the emergence of any serious rival or combination of rivals to the United States, anywhere in the world, and to opposing not just any rival would-be world hegemon, but even the ability of other states to

play the role of great power within their own regions.

Under the guise of National Missile Defense, the administration-or elements within it-even dreams of extending U.S. military hegemony beyond the bounds of the Earth itself (an ambition clearly indicated in the official paper on Defense Planning Guidance for the 2004-09 Fiscal Years, issued this year by Rumsfeld's office). And while this web of ambition is megalomaniac, it is not simply fantasy. Given America's overwhelming superiority, it might well work for decades until a mixture of terrorism and the unbearable social, political and environmental costs of U.S. economic domination paid to the present order of the world.

As things stand, the American people would never knowingly support such a program-nor for that matter would the U.S. military. Even after Sept. 11, this is not by historical standards a militarist country; and whatever the increasingly open imperialism of the nationalist think-tank class, neither the military nor the mass of the population wishes to see itself as imperialist. The fear of casualties and of long-term overseas military entanglements remains intense. And all opinion polls suggest that the majority of the American public, insofar as it considers these issues at all, is far more interested than this administration in cooperation with allies.

Besides, if the U.S. economy continues to stagnate or falls sharply, the Republicans will most probably not even be in power after 2004. As more companies collapse, the administration's links to corrupt business oligarchies will become more and more controversial. Further economic decline combined with bloated military spending would sooner or later bring on the full consequences of the stripping of the public finances caused by this administration's military spending and its tax cuts for the rich. At that point, the financial basis of Social Security would come into question, and the Republican vote among the "middle classes" could shatter.

It is only to a minimal degree within the power of any U.S. administration to stimulate economic growth. And even if growth resumes, the transformation of the economy is almost certain to continue. This will mean the incomes of the "middle classes" (which in American terminology includes the working proletariat) will continue to decline and the gap between them and the plutocracy will continue to increase. High military spending can correct this trend to some extent, but because of the changed nature of weaponry, to a much lesser extent than was the case in the 19th and most of the 20th centuries. All other things being equal, this should result in a considerable shift of the electorate to the left.

But all other things are not equal. Two strategies in particular would give the Republicans the chance not only of winning in 2004, but of repeating Roosevelt's success for the Democrats in the 1930s and becoming the natural party of government for the foreseeable future. The first is the classic modern strategy of an endangered right-wing oligarchy, which is to divert mass discontent into nationalism. The second, which is specifically American, is to take the Jewish vote away from its traditional home in the Democratic Party, by demonstrating categorical Republican commitment not just to Israel's

defense but to its regional ambitions.

This is connected both to the rightward shift in Israel, and to the increasingly close links between the Republicans and Likud, through figures like Perle and Feith. It marks a radical change from the old Republican Party of Eisenhower, Nixon and Bush père, which was far more independent of Israel than the Democrats. Of key importance here has been the growing alliance between the Christian right-closely linked to the old White South-and the Israeli lobby, or at least its hard-line Likud elements.

When this alliance began to take shape some years back, it seemed a most improbable combination. After all, the Christian right and the White South were once havens of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. On the other hand, the Old Testament aspects of fundamentalist Christianity had created certain sympathies for Judaism and Israel from as far back as the United States' 17th-century origins.

For Christian fundamentalists today the influence of millenarian thought is equally important in shaping support for Israel: The existence of the Israeli state is seen as a necessary prelude to the arrival of the Antichrist, the Apocalypse and the rule of Christ and His Saints. But above all, perhaps, this coming together of the fundamentalist right and hard-line Zionism is natural, because they share many hatreds. The Christian right has always hated the United Nations, partly on straight nationalist grounds, but also because of bizarre fears of world government by the Antichrist. They have hated Europeans on religious grounds as decadent atheists, on class grounds as associates of the hated "East Coast elites," and on nationalist grounds as critics of unconstrained American power. Both sides share an instinctive love of military force. Both see themselves as historical victims. This may seem strange in the case of the American rightists, but it isn't if one considers both the White South's history of defeat, and the Christian right's sense since the 1960s of defeat and embattlement by the forces of irreligion and cultural change.

Finally, and most dangerously, both are conditioned to see themselves as defenders of "civilization" against "savages"-a distinction always perceived on the Christian right as in the main racially defined. It is no longer possible in America to speak openly in these terms of American blacks, Asians and Latinos-but since Sept. 11 at least, it has been entirely possible to do so about Arabs and Muslims.

Even in the 2000 elections, the Republicans were able to take a large part of the white working-class vote away from Gore by appealing to cultural populism - and especially to those opposed to gun control and environmental protection. Despite the real class identity and cultural interests of the Republican elite, they seem able to convince many workers that they are natural allies against the culturally alien and supercilious "East Coast elites" represented as supporting Gore.

These populist values are closely linked to the traditional values of hard-line nationalism. They are what the historian Walter Russell Mead and others have called "Jacksonian" values, after President Andrew Jackson's

populist nationalism of the 1830s. As Mead has indicated, Sept. 11 has immensely increased the value of this line to Republicans.

If on top of this the Republicans can permanently woo the Jewish vote away from the Democrats—a process which purely class interests would suggest and which has been progressing slowly but steadily since Reagan's day—there is a good chance of their crippling the Democrats for a generation or more. Deprived of much of their financial support and their intellectual backbone, the Democrats could be reduced to a coalition of the declining unionized white working class, blacks and Latinos. And not only do these groups on the whole dislike and distrust each other, but the more the Democrats are seen as minority dominated, the more whites will tend to flee to the Republicans.

Already, the anti-Semitism of some black leaders in the Democratic Party has contributed to driving many Jews towards the Republicans; and thanks to their allegiance to Israel, the liberal Jewish intelligentsia has moved a long way from their previous internationalism. This shift is highly visible in previously liberal and relatively internationalist journals such as the New Republic and Atlantic Monthly, and maybe even in the New Yorker. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that as a result the internationalist position in the Democratic Party and the United States as a whole has been eviscerated.

The Democrats are well aware of this threat to their electorate. The Party as a whole has always been strongly committed to Israel. On Iraq and the war against terrorism, its approach seems to be to avoid at all costs seeming "unpatriotic." If they can avoid being hammered by the Republicans on the charge of "weakness" and lack of patriotism, then they can still hope to win the 2004 elections on the basis of economic discontent. The consequence, however, is that the Party has become largely invisible in the debate about Iraq; the Democrats are merely increasing their reputation for passionless feebleness; whereas the Republican nationalists are full of passionate intensity....

It is this passion which gives the nationalist right so much of its strength; and in setting out the hopes and plans of the groupings which dominate the Bush administration, I don't want to give the impression that everything is simply a matter of conscious and cynical manipulation in their own narrow interests. Schematic approaches of this kind have bedeviled all too much of the reporting of nationalism and national conflict. This is odd and depressing, because in recent decades the historiography of pre-1914 German nationalism—to take only one example—has seen an approach based on ideas of class manipulation give way to an infinitely more subtle analysis which emphasizes the role of socio-economic and cultural change, unconscious identifications, and interpenetrating political influences from above and below.

To understand the radical nationalist right in the United States, and the dominant forces in the Bush administration, it is necessary first of all to understand their absolute and absolutely sincere identification of themselves with the United States, to the point where the presence of any other group in government is seen as a usurpation, as profoundly and inherently

illegitimate and "un-American." As far as the hard-line elements of the U.S. security establishment and military industrial complex are concerned, they are the product of the Cold War, and were shaped by that struggle and the paranoia and fanaticism it bred. In typical fashion for security elites, they also became conditioned over the decades to see themselves not just as tougher, braver, wiser, and more knowledgeable than their ignorant, innocent compatriots, but as the only force standing between their country and destruction.

The Cold War led to the creation of governmental, economic and intellectual structures in the United States which require for their survival a belief in the existence of powerful national enemies-not just terrorists, but enemy states. As a result, in their analyses and propaganda they instinctively generate the necessary image of an enemy. Once again, however, it would be unwise to see this as a conscious process. For the Cold War also continued, fostered, and legitimized a very old discourse of nationalist hatred in the United States, ostensibly directed against the Communists and their allies. But usually with a very strong coloring of ethnic chauvinism.

On the other hand, the roots of the hysteria of the right go far beyond nationalism and national security. Their pathological hatred for the Clinton administration cannot adequately be explained in terms of national security or even in rational political or economic terms, for after a very brief period of semi-radicalism (almost entirely limited to the failed attempt at health reform), Clinton devoted himself in a Blairite way to adopting large parts of the Republican socio-economic agenda. Rather, Clinton, his wife, his personal style, his personal background and some of his closest followers were all seen as culturally and therefore nationally alien, mainly because they were associated with the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s.

The modern incarnation of this spirit can indeed be seen above all as a reaction to the double defeat of the right in the Vietnam War-a defeat which, they may hope, victory in Iraq and a new wave of conservative nationalism at home could cancel out once and for all. In Vietnam, unprecedented military defeat coincided with the appearance of a modern culture that traditionalist Americans found alien, immoral, and hateful beyond description. As was widely remarked at the time of Newt Gingrich's attempted "Republican Revolution" of the mid-1990s, one way of looking at the hard-line Republicans-especially from the religious right-is to see them as motivated by a classical nationalist desire for a return to a Golden Age, in their case the pre-Vietnam days of the 1950s.

None of these fantasies is characteristic of the American people as a whole. But the intense solipsism of that people, its general ignorance of the world beyond America's shores, coupled with the effects of Sept. 11, have left tremendous political spaces in which groups possessed by the fantasies and ambitions sketched out here can seek their objectives. Or to put it another way: The great majority of the American people are not nearly as militarist, imperialist or aggressive as their German equivalents in 1914; but most German people in 1914 would at least have been able to find France on a map.

The younger intelligentsia meanwhile has also been stripped of any real

knowledge of the outside world by academic neglect of history and regional studies in favor of disciplines which are often no more than a crass projection of American assumptions and prejudices (Rational Choice Theory is the worst example). This has reduced still further their capacity for serious analysis of their own country and its actions. Together with the defection of its strongest internationalist elements, this leaves the intelligentsia vulnerable to the appeal of nationalist messianism dressed up in the supposedly benevolent clothing of "democratization."

Twice now in the past decade, the overwhelming military and economic dominance of the United States has given it the chance to lead the rest of the world by example and consensus. It could have adopted (and to a very limited degree under Clinton did adopt) a strategy in which this dominance would be softened and legitimized by economic and ecological generosity and responsibility, by geopolitical restraint, and by "a decent respect to the opinion of mankind," as the U.S. Declaration of Independence has it. The first occasion was the collapse of the Soviet superpower enemy and of Communism as an ideology. The second was the threat displayed by Al-Qaeda. Both chances have been lost—the first in part, the second it seems conclusively. What we see now is the tragedy of a great country, with noble impulses, successful institutions, magnificent historical achievements and immense energies, which has become a menace to itself and to mankind.

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