

by Srdja Trifkovic

## A New Balance of Power

Seven years is a well-rounded time span, for better (“Behold, there come seven years of great plenty”) or for worse (“And there shall arise after them seven years of famine”). As we enter the final year of George W. Bush’s presidency, it is time to look at his septennial foreign-policy scorecard without malice, which his name often evokes these days, but with the charity that rejoiceth in truth.

During his first campaign, Mr. Bush said that we needed a “humbler” foreign policy than that conducted under Bill Clinton. He singled out the U.S. intervention in Haiti “to restore democracy” and the “nation-building” mission in Kosovo as the sort of adventures that would be avoided under his watch. That now seems light years ago. After Dr. Jekyll’s brief early spell, Mr. Hyde took over, fortifying himself with ever-larger doses of the potion.

The first disquieting signs came before September 11, with Mr. Bush’s strong advocacy of further NATO enlargement and his support for the missile-defense system that demanded American abrogation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Moscow. Already by the summer of 2001, the Bush administration sounded completely unyielding on missile defense. Its chief proponent was Donald Rumsfeld, who argued that it was needed to maintain global hegemony: “a number of countries with regional ambitions do not welcome the U.S. role as a stabilizing power in their regions,” he wrote, and therefore “want to place restraints on the U.S. capability to project power or influence into their regions”; but their ability to do so can be curtailed by missile defense. As I wrote at the time,

A foreign policy based on the American interest would not need any missile shields, because it would desist from global power projection and thus make the threat to the United States less likely.

In addition, months before September 11, Mr. Bush declared that the United States would do “whatever it took to help Taiwan defend itself”—which amount-

ed to the revival of the defense treaty with Taipei that had been defunct since 1979. In the aftermath of the spy-plane affair (April 2001), the administration also announced that it would sell offensive weapons to Taiwan, in violation of the Taiwan Relations Act. This was a stunning reversal of the policy initiated by Richard Nixon and followed by all his successors, including Ronald Reagan.

A reasonable and responsible president would have treated September 11 as a wake-up call to revise the nation’s strategic priorities. In particular, he would have sought to eliminate unnecessary strains in America’s relations with Russia and China, whose active help, or at least supportive benevolence, would be needed to meet the deadliest threat of the new century.

The failure to define a viable strategy in the “War on Terror” was Mr. Bush’s major conceptual shortcoming. It stemmed from his inability to grasp the nature and motivation of the enemy.

In the months leading up to September 11, and contrary to conventional accusations that the United States is hostile to Islam, President Bush was eager to reach an understanding with the Taliban regime as part of a strategy to keep Caspian energy sources and pipelines out of Russian hands. After September 11, he turned the preexisting pattern of pro-Islamic favoritism into an obsession. According to a GOP insider,

Continuing up to the present, the pronouncements from American officials from Bush on down regarding Islam as a religion of “peace and tolerance”—in which the factor of *jihad* ideology is ignored in favor of reference to a generic “terrorism” committed by “evildoers”—display the extent to which U.S. policymakers became fixated on the notion that victory in the misnamed “war on terror” could only be achieved by getting the Muslim world on our side.

The key assumption of Bush’s approach, that generosity and appeasement would be rewarded by friendship, was



mistaken: Loyalty to unbelievers is not a Muslim trait, but pragmatism is—and it prescribes that, when dealing with fools, one milks them for all one can get. His never-ending attempts to bring the Islamists into the tent have played right into the hands of global *jihad* (notably in Turkey) and caused instability (Egypt, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority).

The President’s specific policy blunders stemmed from his conceptual failure. As we now know, he used September 11—or blithely allowed Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Perle, *et al.*, to use it—in support of an unrelated, unjustified, and ultimately disastrous war in Iraq. At the same time, he has continued to act in relation to Russia and China as an antagonist. His actions are directly contributing to the emergence of a new global balance and, in particular, to the growth of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a major economic, political, and military counterweight to the United States.

Six years ago, this did not appear imminent. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, Vladimir Putin was the first foreign leader to contact President Bush, promising that Russia would do “whatever is necessary” to help the United States. He authorized American aircraft to fly over Russian territory in pursuit of “humanitarian and support missions” in Central Asia. His influence with the former Soviet republics—Uzbekistan, in particular—was decisive in their decision to allow U.S. forces to use their bases, all in the name of the “War on Terror.”

Mr. Bush subsequently attempted to make that presence permanent, however, in pursuit of the neoconservative policy of encircling, reducing, and ultimately eliminating Russia as a great power. In 2002, the United States unilaterally abrogated the ABM Treaty and announced a new major expansion of NATO. In 2003

and 2004 came the U.S.-supported and -financed “color revolutions” in Georgia and the Ukraine, the geopolitical equivalent of Putin engineering anti-American regime changes in Mexico and Canada. Elements of forward missile defense are now in Poland and the Czech Republic. All U.S. plans for Caspian gas and oil still require transit routes that studiously avoid Russia.

In relation to China, Mr. Bush has been less brazen but more incoherent. He has tried a mix of containment, confrontation, and accommodation, in a manner likely to increase both China’s economic and military power *vis-à-vis* the United States and her distrust of American motives and goals.

If Mr. Bush had wanted to preempt the rise of China as a rival and potential enemy, he should have acted boldly to halt further American investment in the Chinese economy, to reverse the massive outsourcing that had started before he came to the Oval Office, and to erect effective trade barriers against the continuing deluge of Chinese-made consumer products in American stores. He has done none of those things. In facilitating the growth of China’s economic base (by allowing continued demographic deluge across the southern border, among other things), he has been an appeaser of this country’s corporate interests to the detriment of a coherent security policy and world-affairs strategy.

If Mr. Bush was not willing to act vigorously to halt the transfer of American wealth and American industrial potential to Shanghai and Guangdong, he should have accepted the rise of China as a first-class power with the best possible grace and on the grounds that no fundamental sources of conflict between America and China exist. Such a relationship could have been skillfully managed—with more reciprocity in the field of trade and exchange rates—but it was not. Its foundation—the acceptance of the fact that Taiwan is part of China, that she will eventually be reintegrated, and that it is in the American interest to facilitate peaceful reunification—was lacking.

After seven years of Mr. Bush’s contradictory course, China’s growing wealth and power, coupled with her mistrust of America, have produced interesting results in the form of Beijing’s strategic partnership with Russia. Directly resulting from Bush’s policies, the Shanghai process may soon reshape the Asian architecture by turning China into a distribution

hub for oil and gas exports to South Korea and Japan, two of the largest energy importers in the world—which, in turn, may lead to their strategic realignment.

The Bush administration has attempted to counter the growing SCO influence in Central Asia and the Far East primarily by courting another Asian giant, India, as a future counterbalance to China’s power. The final objective—the emergence of a “Quadrilateral of Democracies,” a political grouping consisting of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—is yet another Bush pipe dream, however. India is wary of an alignment with America so long as she remains Pakistan’s key backer, and New Delhi is aware that Washington’s objective is to use India as a dispensable auxiliary. The Indians are developing close cooperation with the SCO, instead. Recent U.S.-Indian naval war-games in the Bay of Bengal were immediately followed by an elaborate Russian-Indian counterterrorism exercise. Last month, the Indian navy exercised for the first time with the Chinese fleet in the East China Sea. The policy of “super-alignment”—an evenhanded cultivation of everyone who counts—is paying dividends without tying India to a distant and unpredictable America.

The main reason Mr. Bush has found it so hard to attract overseas partners for his schemes—outside such places as Tirana and Riga—is the loss of credibility he has suffered as a result of the ongoing quagmire in Iraq. He is still staying the course, predicated on the creation of military preconditions for an elusive political solution, and has no exit strategy. But even after he leaves the White House, there will be no precipitous withdrawal, and the drain on American resources and willpower will continue.

Mr. Bush may yet make things much more interesting by attacking Iran, which is exactly what our jihadist enemies would like him to do. The danger is that he will do it in his last year in office, not because it is a feasible military-political project, but because his foreign-policy premises, and the strategies derived from those premises, have grown more perilously sincere and ideologically rigid with each passing year of his presidency. Controlling “our destiny by our leadership” and striving for “the end of tyranny in the world” is not a political philosophy; it is a clinical diagnosis.

Thucydides wrote that politics threatened by a state with imperial pretensions should band together to discourage or

contain excessive power. His lesson still stands, as Russia and China are proving. An imbalance existed in the 1990’s with the emergence of the United States as a global hegemon. Had it been allowed to continue for too long, it may have been resolved only through the disaster of a major war.

The imbalance is being corrected, thanks to Mr. Bush’s millenarian hubris, and his successors will be forced to operate within a global system very different from one that is conducive to his claim that

History has called America . . . to fight freedom’s fight . . . by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere . . . the non-negotiable demands of human dignity.

His fixation on being on the right side of destiny is dangerous not only because it breeds irrational belief in the correctness of one’s own intuitive judgment, but (as Lincoln and Wilson have shown) because it engenders a decisionmaking style inimical to the political and constitutional tradition of the United States. In addition, the historicist fallacy that “History” is an entity on a linear march has bred a gnostic mind-set that makes it easy to murder those deemed to be on its “wrong” side.

If there is one thing for which we should be thankful to Mr. Bush, it is his unwitting contribution to the emergence of a multipolar world. External restraint is being imposed on America. It is dictated by the perfectly normal desire of Russians, Chinese, Indians, and many smaller nations to prove that “History” has not called America to anything. The Thucydidean prudence they exercise is eminently American in spirit, because a global balance of power reflects internationally what the system of checks and balances does at home. Its speedy reestablishment will render ludicrous the hubristic ravings of benevolent global hegemonomists.

A new global balance will also help relegitimize the notion of America as a nation among other nations and a state among other states, with definable and limited national interests as the foundation of her diplomacy. Contrary to what Mr. Bush and his dwindling band of apologists may claim, this is neither defeatism nor isolationism; it is sanity. ◀

## POLITICAL THEORY

## Abortion: No Libertarian Triumph

by Doug Bandow

A debate has broken out over the continuing viability of the “fusion” of libertarians and conservatives. If the latter are represented by President George W. Bush and the 109th Congress, the alliance seems dead. Concocting a coalition of libertarians and liberals isn’t going to be any easier, however. Brink Lindsey of the Cato Institute has attempted to do so in the *New Republic*, with only modest success—as indicated by some of the sharp leftist responses to his proposal. One of his most disturbing arguments, however, was in an area of agreement with liberals. Lindsey characterized “the legalization of abortion” as one “of the great libertarian breakthroughs of the era.”

Libertarians often are characterized as abortion advocates, and many are. However, many are not. Abortion is one issue on which libertarians sharply divide.

According to libertarian principles, a person has a “right” to an abortion only if the procedure violates no one else’s right. You can cut off your own arm, but not your neighbor’s arm. You can “control” your own body, but not your neighbor’s body. Thus, for libertarians, the key question in deciding abortion is What is the status of the unborn? Part of, or separate from, the mother? Possessor or violator of rights?

There are libertarians who do not view the unborn as, in philosopher Tibor Machan’s words, “a full-fledged human being or person.” They lack “at least the latent capacity for rational thought and choice,” certainly “until late in their development.” Sharon Presley and Robert Cooke of the Association of Libertarian Feminists make a similar point, distinguishing between the “biologically human fetus and the psychologically human child.”

Of course, it is impossible to define when someone becomes capable of “rational thought and choice.” That capa-

bility is not imparted at birth. Rather, it develops over time, presumably starting in the womb but continuing through early childhood. Some people suffer from disabilities and appear never to develop that capability. That makes them no less human, however. Presley and Cooke contend that only after birth is “the organism . . . subject to outside environmental stimuli.” Moreover, “Birth is also the point at which purposeful action can begin.” This is true but irrelevant, since it does not address the innate aptitudes of the human person. People are people because their natures are similar, not because their environments are similar.

At birth, a fetus obviously becomes an independent creature, one whom everyone acknowledges to be a human being—and, thus, possessing the same rights as his mother. Yet sometime before birth, a baby becomes physically capable of surviving outside of the womb, a status that deserves legal recognition.

Even before viability, the fetus is genetically unique, a being apart from its mother while contained therein. The baby enters the continuum of life far earlier, however—at conception or implantation. It is the latter moment when, all else being equal, the new being will begin its natural progression to birth and adulthood. At early stages, we might not see a baby, let alone a person. But we see what is destined to become a baby and a person. And it is destined to develop, in Machan’s words, the capability of “rational thought and choice.”

Science and medicine, then, seem to lean toward according personhood, or “person status,” to the baby. Set aside religious arguments about a soul. A fetus is markedly different from normal body parts and, left undisturbed, will become a separate, unique adult.

For some libertarians, the personhood of the baby is not important. One argument is that a pregnant woman is like someone who wakes up to find himself connected to a world-class violinist: Cut the tube, and the latter dies. This, so goes the argument, is tragic, but not the person’s responsibility.

A similar claim comes from economist Walter Block. He presents the issue as one involving trespass. The pregnant woman is a property owner; the baby is an illegal trespasser. Block allows that

trespass should be remedied by the least lethal method possible, which might change as technology advances. Should it become medically possible to remove the child and keep him alive at an earlier stage of development, such would be the proper response to the unwanted pregnancy. (Presley and Cooke object to this argument, since “the real point of abortion [is] not that the woman does not want to be pregnant, or that she does not want to raise a child, but that she does not want to bear this child.” Even if a baby could be removed safely, the putative mother, they insist, can choose to kill it.)

Walter Block makes a related contention that “there is no ‘right to life’ itself”—that is, “an obligation to keep that person alive.” While one normally cannot kill another human being, one can kill the baby because it is “dependent” on its mother—living inside another person. As leading libertarian Murray Rothbard put it, abortion “should be looked upon not as killing the fetus but as ejecting it from the mother’s body.” The baby’s death is merely “incidental to the act of abortion.” Presley and Cooke are even more forthright: “[E]ven if the fetus were a person, it could not justifiably claim a right to live at the expense of the woman’s resources, or her right to self-determination.”

Rothbard compared the case of the unborn with a claim that “a full, adult human being has the legal . . . right to remain enclosed within the body of another human being without the latter’s consent.” That is “absurd,” so, obviously, the baby has no right to remain in his mother’s womb. He also wrote that barring an abortion effectively enslaves a woman, “alienating her will.”

Presley and Cooke take on the issue from a different perspective. They contend that abortion should be looked at from the perspective of the mother, not the child:

[T]he woman’s right to self-determination includes not only the right to control her physical body and all that happens within it, but the psychic and existential components of her life and well-being as well. That is, she has the right to make choices about how her body will be used to further her own