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## **The Talking Cure; If elected, Kerry would fight terrorism with diplomacy, not war. But can diplomacy win?**

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PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL JOHN KERRY SEEMS IN MANY WAYS the perfect foreign-policy foil to President George W. Bush. Educated partly in Switzerland and fluent in French, Kerry is the son of a diplomat who worked intensively with U.S. allies during the early Cold War. And so Kerry inherited the vision of a world rife with complexity and susceptible to reason -- one where the power of diplomacy was an article of faith, even while military solutions couldn't be discounted. Kerry touts a "bold, progressive internationalism" in his foreign-policy speeches, and in his statements on Iraq, he has all but promised a return to the multilateralist, institution-based foreign policy so many Democratic strategists deem vital to U.S. security.

That diplomacy and alliances are essential tools in the pursuit of the national interest, and that military muscle is to be avoided except in the case of last resort, were once simple truisms of the bipartisan, realist foreign-policy establishment. Today, however, a significant challenge to that worldview has risen from the right. In the face of a vast and nebulous terrorist threat, and in the absence of any countervailing superpower, the Bush administration has advocated a martial unilateralism. Under Bush, the White House has shunned not only many traditional U.S. allies but even, at times, its own State Department. Implacable enemies, it has decided, are better persuaded by force than by diplomatic overtures or economic blandishments. After all, Bush's proponents point out, it was fear, not love for the United States, that drove Libya to abandon its nuclear weapons program in the wake of the Iraq War.

With American prestige at an all-time low around the world, Bush's tough talk has alienated not just America's allies but also many of its voters. Kerry's emphasis on multilateralism and diplomacy appeals strongly to a Democratic base that's turned off by the Bush administration's go-it-alone, dead-or-alive, bring-it-on swagger. It should also draw swing voters unhappy with American conduct in Iraq.

If elected, however, a Kerry administration would have to offer more than soothing words and repaired alliances. Beyond the war in Iraq, the great challenge to U.S. security is terrorism. And terrorism on today's scale is a qualitatively different problem than those that faced Cold War diplomats of Kerry's father's time. It offers no negotiating partners, and its roots are intertwined with economic, geopolitical, and cultural issues on a grand scale. A change of administration would help restore some global goodwill toward the United States, and that alone would be a boon to American security. But much more would depend on that administration's creativity and savvy. Kerry's gamble -- and ours -- would be that policies based on diplomacy can deflate the terrorist threat. But that's far from a sure bet.

IN DECLARING WAR ON TERRORISM, THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION proceeded from a faulty assumption: that terrorism was a state-based problem. If only that were so. Then the threat of U.S. force would be sufficient to discipline those states that harbor or support terrorists, and that would solve, or at least substantially address, the problem. But terrorism is a multiheaded monster that crosses borders, melts into populations without the knowledge or consent of governments, and requires relatively little by way of infrastructure.

What it does require, however, is a base of antipathy toward the United States and sympathy for terrorist causes and tactics. The latest Pew Research Center poll of global attitudes finds pervasive support in Muslim countries for suicide bombings in both Israel and Iraq. The poll also found that Osama bin Laden is viewed favorably by 65 percent of Pakistanis, 55 percent of Jordanians, and 45 percent of Moroccans. Some of these respondents are potential terrorist recruits; more of them simply comprise the social milieu within which violent groups can operate with tacit sympathy, sometimes with material support, and without exposure. The war on terrorism really is a battle for what has been called, with a bitter resonance John Kerry surely appreciates, the "hearts and minds" of that larger population, which can choose either to nurture or to eject violent extremists. A smart, forward-thinking counterterrorism policy would recognize that because terrorists are nonstate actors, and terrorism a nonstate problem, traditional diplomacy also would not work. It would aim its diplomacy at people rather than states.

This kind of diplomacy is known as "public diplomacy." It is obviously not an approach that would work with the zealots and violent extremists. But when it comes to swaying larger populations and shifting public attitudes, U.S. policy-makers can and must make real inroads.

Terrorism experts like Harvard's Jessica Stern, author of *Terror in the Name of God*, and Richard J. Chasdi, an adjunct professor at Wayne State University's Center for Peace and Conflict Studies and the author of two studies of Middle East terrorism, point to economic and educational deprivation and lagging modernization in much of the Arab world as conditions that encourage aggression. They recommend building and equipping schools, roads, and hospitals. Such "positive sanctions," as Chasdi terms them, could help peel the pragmatists away from the extremists. Stern suggests "taking a lesson from the Saudis," who have stepped into communities that lack schools and offered them madrassas. Similarly, Stern notes that terrorist organizations have ingratiated themselves with communities by offering social-welfare services not provided by the state. The United States should follow close behind, Stern suggests, offering parents an alternative to Wahhabist indoctrination. U.S. -- financed schools would not be ideological; they would simply offer basic education and skills training, which are desperately needed and would keep students out of the madrassas.

This kind of aid works at a grass-roots level. It is distinct from the sort that involves writing checks to corrupt and hated governments for infrastructural projects that are rarely credited to U.S. funding. A sobering anecdote in the October report of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, a congressionally mandated, bipartisan panel, indicates that the United States has failed in the past to effectively leverage even its most generous assistance programs. "Egypt is the second-largest recipient of U.S. assistance in the world," the report states. "We were told repeatedly during our visit to Cairo that Egyptians were grateful to the Japanese for building their opera house. But they were unaware that the United States funded the Cairo sewer, drinking water, and electrical systems and played a key role in reducing infant mortality in Egypt. Whether aware of extensive American aid or not, Egyptians, by a wide margin, hold unfavorable opinions of the United States. A survey in 2002, for example, found that only 6 percent of Egyptians had a favorable view of America."

Among the lessons to be taken from this experience is that it matters not just that the United States provide aid, but how, to whom, and under what conditions it does so. Louise Richardson, the executive dean of the Radcliffe Institute and a scholar of national-security and terrorist movements, suggests that if we provide aid to autocratic Arab and Muslim states, we must also insist on getting something in return -- namely, liberal reforms, or the direct alleviation of material conditions within the country. "If, in the name of stability, we are handing aid to corrupt leaders who violate the values we say we stand for," says Richardson, "how do we persuade people that we are being honest when we call for democracy and human rights?"

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION HAS RIGHTLY LINKED THE appeal of terrorism in the Arab world to political disenfranchisement. Repressive states in the Middle East, from the grim autocracies of Syria and Saudi Arabia to the somewhat more relaxed autocracies of Jordan and Kuwait, are run by nearly unchallenged executives; these states may hold elections, but they are rarely free and fair, and though they may have parliaments, the parliaments normally wield little real power. Such governments tolerate few or no opposition parties, offer few if any freedoms of the press or of association, and frequently trammel basic human rights stipulated under international law. That repressive states should breed groups that channel frustrated political energies into violence is predictable.

The neoconservative solution to this problem began with the invasion of Iraq, which was to touch off a reverse domino effect of liberalization. But rather than cleanly implanting a liberal democracy in Iraq, the U.S. invasion has so far produced a foreign occupation beset with chaos and violence -- a rallying point not for restive democrats in neighboring states but for restive anti-American extremists. A Kerry administration that based its foreign policy on diplomacy rather than force would take a very different approach to democracy promotion in the Middle East. The Bush administration selected the weakest, most hostile, and most autocratic Arab state -- and then invaded it. A Kerry administration should do

the exact opposite. It should select the most stable, friendliest, and most liberal Arab states and nudge them down the path of constitutional and legal reform.

The complexity of reform in the Arab world cannot be overestimated. Because in most of these countries civil society is underdeveloped or co-opted by the state, a sudden democratic opening would likely empower Islamists, who have the only grass-roots infrastructure available. But Islamists advocate a decidedly illiberal vision, religious law that would in most cases explicitly curtail the rights of minorities and women. So in many Arab states, those who advocate human rights side with autocratic governments that clamp down on all opposition rather than support the Islamists' call for democratic opening. The result is frequently a suspension of both rights and popular political participation.

That's why, in a paper for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the scholar Daniel Brumberg suggests starting with states like Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Morocco, which have relatively small populations, reasonably developed economies, and some degree of associational life. These countries could withstand a significant push, writes Brumberg, toward "party development, educational reforms, promoting the rule of law, and pressing for constitutionally mandated organizations to protect human rights." Larger, less stable states like Egypt should be pressed toward more incremental reform. The key to advancing such an agenda clearly lies not in the threat of invasion but in the effective use of U.S. soft power and diplomacy.

IN AN AGE OF TERRORISM OF THE SCALE AND REACH OF al-Qaeda, some problems are relatively new and require innovative solutions. Others are just as susceptible to traditional diplomacy as they ever were, and for that, John Kerry offers an obvious and immediate advantage over the current administration.

Counterterrorism experts agree that U.S. -- mediated movement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would alleviate a good deal of tension. The Bush administration has inflamed resentment over that issue as never before. "The United States has never supported the Likud [Party] view," notes Ivo H. Daalder, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "But this president has." Only a new administration would have the credibility and the flexibility to bring the United States back to the negotiating table as anything close to an honest broker. Not that the Palestinian question is the root cause of terrorism, cautions Stern, "but it's a very important symbolic asset to recruitment," and making progress on it "will make the terrorists' job harder."

Even more obvious is the need to repair America's traditional alliances, which most foreign-policy experts believe our allies would like very much to see renewed. A trans-Atlantic rift serves no one. We need the western Europeans' help in gathering intelligence, infiltrating terrorist groups, and restricting terrorists' movements. And while western European countries have not withheld such cooperation in the war on terrorism, the damage to American standing has produced an appearance of fragmentation just when we most need a united front. Popular European hostility to the United States under Bush has also contributed to a global climate of anti-Americanism and instability. "It doesn't help our legitimacy if we are perceived as arrogant by those whose help we need," says Stern.

A Kerry administration could quickly reverse the course of the trans-Atlantic rift by reaching out to allies and forging a foreign policy that treats them respectfully as partners. Says Daalder, "The No. 1 strategic requirement is for the United States to reassert its moral authority in the world. And that will require a change in administration. This administration's style is a substance all on its own. It's not just what the president has done but how he's done it." Perhaps the most striking finding in the Pew polling is the extent to which American public opinion is out of sync with that of the rest of the world. Eighty-four percent of Americans think that post -- Saddam Hussein Iraq will ultimately be better off, compared with 67 percent of French and 41 percent of Turks. And 13 percent of Americans say that the United States is overreacting to terrorism, while 57 percent of French and 49 percent of Germans believe we are. Being out of sync doesn't mean we're wrong. But it does mean that the United States is neither communicating the rationale for its policies to the rest of the world nor understanding how these policies are viewed by others. The Bush administration has over-valued toughness and resolve, to the point where it has become all but impossible to look squarely at the way the world sees the United States and to respond with policies that take this reality into account.

To be the world's lone superpower is a dangerous thing. There will always be people who hate the United States, whether out of resentment or because they feel threatened by U.S. military, cultural, or political domination. And the more the United States flaunts its ability to throw its weight around unrestrained, the more others will feel threatened by it. Neoconservatives gambled that a world that feared us would rush to have the United States for a friend rather than an enemy. Academic realists, like the University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer, have long cautioned that a world that felt threatened was just as likely to seek to counterbalance U.S. power, whether by seeking to attain nuclear weapons (Iran), devising an independent, countervailing foreign policy (Europe), or unleashing violence against us (terrorist groups).

What's been called the "unipolar moment" is a perilous one for the United States. The Bush administration has seized it, with arrogance and disregard for world opinion, on the presumption that we did not need to persuade others so long as we outstripped them in strength. But the chaos in Iraq and the rise of global anti-Americanism, particularly in the very region from which our enemy draws its recruits, suggest otherwise.

The time is ripe for an administration that is ready to negotiate with the world rather than impose its will as it pleases. That's a requirement best met by a president who values diplomacy -- both the good old-fashioned kind and the kind that takes into account the new challenges of a new era.

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