



# WHAT THE PRESIDENT DOESN'T WANT TO HEAR [BUT LET'S HOPE HE'S LISTENING]

**M**ore than most Americans, I watch America from the outside looking in. On any given day, I'm likely to be in a village in Africa or a megacity in Asia, discussing America's latest move in Iraq with a farmer or policy maker or teacher or businessman. I catch the editorials of the *Kenya Daily*, the *Folha de São Paulo*, or the *Bangkok Post* when I board the plane in the evening, and *The Wall Street Journal* when I arrive back home in the morning. Is this really the same planet? I constantly ask myself. ¶ My constant wonderment is at how a world so united by instant communications, global markets, global brands, and international travel has become so divided in outlook, needs, hopes, and fears. Why, I'm asked daily, is the United States inflaming the distrust of a world that yearns for partnership with us? Why, at the start of our third millennium, are we fighting the crusades of the second millennium? The great contest between Christendom and Islam may have made sense in A.D. 1005, but not A.D. 2005. ¶ President John F. Kennedy had it right when he found solace and a hope for world peace in the fact that "we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures. And we are all mortal." America urgently needs to regain this sense of common destiny with the rest of the world. We need a foreign policy that addresses our fragile planet's shared risks—climate change, energy crisis, economic vulnerability, emerging infectious diseases, nuclear proliferation—rather than the us-versus-them mentality that has led us to fight, die, and kill in the alleyways of Fallujah. ¶ In the middle of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the standoff that brought us to the brink of global annihilation, Kennedy famously received two contradictory messages from the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev. The hostile message would have led us to war and likely self-destruction. The conciliatory one offered a path to peaceful res-

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*35 CENTS of every \$100 of our national income would help Africans replenish their soil, pave roads, fight disease, and extend electricity grids. Hundreds of millions could join the world economy. 35 cents.*

olution. Kennedy chose to ignore the former and act on the latter. The world, in the end, was spared catastrophe. This was a foreign policy based on our hopes, not our fears. It was predicated on the notion that the other side, too, harbored hopes for survival. It was the correct instinct.

Kennedy's response was more than uplifting; it was smart—a wise reading of a common human nature that bridged the cold-war divide. We need the same today. The world is not actually populated by millions of Islamic extremists and terrorists who hate us for our freedom, yet if we continue to act that way, we could probably create such a world. Rather, the world is populated by 6.4 billion people (to be about 9 billion by mid-century) who, just like us, want dignity in their lives, prospects for their family's survival, and betterment for their children. And more than ever, each country's foreign policy, including our own, needs to become an instrument of global cooperation to address our common challenges. The partners who will help make the world safe for our children are halfway around the planet.

## America in the Mirror

AMERICA HAS A SELF-IMAGE PROBLEM, or maybe two. We imagine ourselves to be unique in the world—anointed by God, the “indispensable country,” the “sole superpower.” We also imagine ourselves to be at imminent risk of being toppled from that exalted position. We are at the top of the world, we tell ourselves, but precariously so. September 11 proved our vulnerability. We therefore needed to respond, quickly and forcefully, to maintain our unrivaled position at the top of the heap.

This viewpoint is all wrong. The U.S., surprising to say, is not the indispensable country. Traveling abroad brings home the point. We are 293 million people in a sea of 6.4 billion people. Those people are not stage props but living, breathing humanity going about its business.

There are ninety-eight cities in China of more than a million people. I've visited many of them, most of which I had never even heard of before arriving. Almost all of them boast significant industry and a vibrant commercial and cultural life. Standing in the central plaza of one of these vast, pulsating cities, you realize that the world does not revolve around the U.S. Rather, we are just part of a global drama. Yes, our economy is the largest in the world, our science-and-technology sector is first in the world, and our military is the most powerful in the world. But these “largests” and “firsts” and “mosts” need to be put in a realistic perspective. The U.S. economy is about 21 percent of the world's total. But that share is shrinking over time, down from 27 percent in 1950. The reason is not that the U.S. is failing but that other countries are succeeding in mobilizing market economic forces and science and technology to get ahead. That's all to the good. The world is escaping poverty and joining the U.S. in prosperity. Our economic uniqueness is vastly overblown.

We'll feel that more and more in the coming years. China's economy will overtake the U.S. economy in total size by around 2020, albeit with a per capita income around one fourth of ours, balanced by a population roughly four times

our own. By 2050, China's economy will be almost twice the size of the U.S. economy, with a per capita income that could equal half the U.S. level.

India, too, with its one billion people, is on the rise. It's reasonable to suppose that India's economy will eclipse the U.S. economy in total size by 2050. U.S. GDP might be a mere 12 percent of world GDP by mid-century.

If we're not really the indispensable power, we're also not really threatened with being knocked from the top of the perch. Our post-9/11 fears of terrorism have become a fixation wholly out of proportion to America's real vulnerability. Terrorism is real and frightening. We need improved intelligence and active efforts to destroy terrorist cells, and we must especially lock down and protect fissionable materials that could be used in a nuclear bomb. But, no, the world is not seething with armies out to destroy the United States. But preemptive war by the U.S. is the surest way to the self-fulfilling prophecy of a world united against us.

If we had any historical memory in this country, we'd recognize that our national vulnerability is to “overdo it” in reacting to foreign threats. A half century ago, we faced another real threat, Soviet aggression in Western Europe. We began with brilliant responses: NATO, the Marshall plan, the encouragement of the European Community (now the European Union). But then we seriously overdid it. Suddenly there was a communist threat wherever we turned. McCarthyism at home was matched by our entry into Vietnam abroad. We started thinking of foreigners not as real human beings but as only pawns in the Soviet game of domination. Those who said that the Vietnamese were fighting a war of liberation, not a war of communist aggression, were brushed aside as hopeless leftists and softies. A decade later, we had killed two million Vietnamese, lost fifty-eight thousand American lives, and lost a war, all for absolutely no reason but overblown, irrational fear of communism. Fear of terrorism could do the very same to us today.

## What We Need to Do

TAKE A TRIP TO AN AFRICAN VILLAGE and you'll see what I see over and over—an incredible dignity and beauty in the midst of suffering, hunger, and disease. Listen to foreign-policy “experts” in Washington and Africa's problems are simply its own making, a result of bloodlust and corruption. Actually visit Africa and you'll learn the truth: Hundreds of millions of people are living daily with a malaria infection that is killing them, an AIDS pandemic that they can't afford to control, soil exhausted of nutrients, and a lack of the most basic amenities—electricity, water, sanitation, roads in rural areas, motorized transport, and telecommunications.

The same is true of the places in the Andean highlands, Central Asia, and the Himalayas that I visit. These are crises of circumstance, not crises of corruption and ill will. We blame the poor for the mosquitoes that bite them and infect them with malaria. We mock their hunger, not realizing that their soil lacks the nitrogen needed to grow a decent crop.

I mention all of this because our first order of foreign-policy business as a rich country should be to help the poorest of the

poor, who live in conditions that you simply can't imagine until you see them, escape from an eighteenth-century trap of poverty using the available scientific tools of the twenty-first century. With almost no effort on our part, perhaps thirty-five cents out of every hundred dollars of our national income for a decade, we could save millions of people every year and, even better, put a whole continent on a path to self-sustaining economic growth; emergency aid would no longer be needed.

Why should we care? First and foremost, because most of us already do, out of simple humanity. We are hardwired to care, if we know and understand and are not overcome by fear. We will not turn our backs on those in desperate need once we understand that they are victims of fate and rainfall and disease, not victims of bad choices. But more than that, we should care because diseases that fulminate in Africa, like AIDS, spread throughout the world; because chronic hunger makes Africa a breeding ground for violent conflict, as in Darfur, and a staging ground for terror, as in Somalia; because a growing proportion of our energy needs will be met by West African oil in the next twenty years, if the region is stable and healthy enough to provide a reliable base for new investments.

Ending extreme global poverty is, ironically, perhaps the most straightforward of our true foreign-policy challenges and the one we should commit to first, given its urgency. But other real foreign-policy challenges are harder, equally serious, and yet hardly recognized in our terror-obsessed daily debates and preoccupations. Stand in one of those bulging, bursting, bustling Chinese cities and you'll know immediately why. Even before you see anything, you are likely to feel the burning in your eyes and throat from coal particulates in the air. China is the leading user of coal and, after the U.S., already emits the second-largest amount of carbon dioxide into the air, the main cause of long-term man-made climate change. And China's energy needs are booming along with its economy. Within twenty years China is likely to be the world's leading energy user and the largest single emitter of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide.

American strategists are well aware of China's growing energy needs and at least somewhat aware of China's growing contribution to long-term climate change. They know that China and other rising powers will be contesting the U.S. for increasingly scarce oil and gas deposits in the thousand-mile radius around Baghdad, the region that includes the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. The great game for oil has begun, only it's not a game. Iraqi oil may or may not be the sole reason for our having launched the Iraq war, but there should be no doubt: Were it not for Iraq's oil and America's preoccupation with energy security, America would not be at war in Iraq today.

So here is a foreign-policy challenge much larger and more consequential than terrorism: creating a global energy system in the twenty-first century that does not lead us to war, economic disaster, or devastating climate change. A global energy crisis is closing in on us from three sides: a diminishing supply of oil and gas relative to an expanding world economy, a growing concentration of that oil and gas in the world's most explosive region (not a coincidence, since the upheavals are caused by the oil itself), and an unprecedented environmental

crisis resulting from the world's massive use of fossil fuels in the first place. Will we blow ourselves up in the fight for scarce oil? Will we suffer economic calamities from \$200-per-barrel oil in twenty years? Or will we destabilize our climate because we'll be "successful" enough to keep burning fossil fuels at a growing rate for the next half century?

Iraq was supposed to deliver \$10-per-barrel oil, and an easy victory was to be followed by a flood of new oil supplies. Instead, we now have \$45-per-barrel oil and Iraqi pipelines blown up on a weekly basis. Cooperation, not war, will be the key to getting through the tightening energy fix.

What should we do? We must embrace international cooperation on energy and the environment, such as the Kyoto treaty, rather than mock it. We're so intent on not having others tell us what to do with our SUVs that we are neglecting the fact that China and India will soon be changing our climate more than we are changing theirs. Yes, we are nationalistic in rejecting our responsibilities to others. But soon we will be nationalistic in demanding that other nations curb the very same behavior we refuse to now. But why should others act on our behalf in the future when we make light of their welfare now?

There is, in fact, a very complicated fifty-year window of opportunity to overhaul our energy system. We will need to transition from oil and gas to other fuels. Partly we'll need to move from oil to coal, but with technologies that burn the coal cleanly and safely dispose of the carbon dioxide produced at the coal plant. And eventually we'll need to make the vital long-term transition to renewable energy sources such as solar power, but decades of research remain until scientific advances bring down the costs of the cleaner and more plentiful alternatives to fossil fuel.

Here are two immediate steps that we should take on what will be a long and tricky path. At the G8 summit this summer, the U.S. should agree with other countries to establish the basic principle of preventing carbon in the atmosphere from reaching double the preindustrial levels, a threshold that scientists believe to be a huge risk for the planet to cross. Yet that's the extreme danger zone we'll reach by mid-century if we don't make a midcourse correction now. The summit should also launch a massive R&D effort, with India, China, Europe, and others included, aimed at finding new technologies to save on energy use, make coal environmentally safe, and develop truly renewable sources by mid to late century. I've regularly and recently discussed the idea of such a global technology effort with leaders in China, India, and Europe, and with CEOs of major companies around the world. There is startling interest everywhere but Washington, D.C. The Iraq war is our failed energy policy. Global cooperation on science and technology, underpinned by treaties, must become the successful alternative.

But more than anything else, what we need is not so much a checklist of policies but a new mind-set. We need to view others as our hope, not our enemy. We should remember each day that there are six billion non-Americans who rise to work, struggle to feed and clothe and educate their children, and look to us as needed partners, indeed friends, in a shared yearning for security and survival. ■