

U.S. must grow through its ideas

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THE JOURNAL
NEWS 1/29/03

In its handling of North Korea and Iraq, and their development of weapons of mass destruction, the Bush administration has failed to adequately define our new doctrine of pre-emptive strikes in terms of a consistent and predictable American foreign policy. President George W. Bush argues that Iraq is more likely to use a nuclear weapon and, thus, despite the more advanced Korean program, an American pre-emptive attack is justified there even without explicit United Nations approval.

The United States is easily capable of uncontested pre-eminent strikes by virtue of its overwhelming predominance in today's world. But this predominance derives its strength from our underlying beliefs, not our military might. One of our most important American tenets involves the rule of law, enforced without regard to ethnicity, power or politics. Internationally, there must be reciprocity and predictability in our promulgation of democracy and the rule of law. For example, we cannot preach about our system to other countries when we allow Americans to be detained without a trial, and monitor supposedly privileged conversations between a lawyer and client — two recent security measures enacted by the Bush administration.

All around the world, people

look to the United States because of our inner strength. That is why they buy American jeans, watch American movies, eat at American MacDonal'd's and even smoke American cigarettes. If our influence is to grow, we must retain our power of persuasion by the force of our ideas, not by the force of our military. People from all over the world have immigrated to the United States for a new start. Our country continues to offer unprecedented opportunities and hope for large numbers of people. But we are beginning to see a burgeoning resentment of the United States. We must nip this resentment in the bud by continuing to emphasize our ideas and not by falling into the trap of increasing reliance on our armed forces alone.

In accordance with our creed on the application of the rule of law, we must conduct foreign policy in a uniform manner. If Mr. Bush wants to hold both North Korea and Iraq responsible for breaking international agreements, we must treat them similarly. Otherwise, detractors will — and already have — exposed our hypocrisy, and thereby we harm our own ability to form alliances.

In addition, our foreign policy must be more adequately defined. We must justify our actions in terms that cannot be misinterpreted or used for propaganda by

other nations. For example, our pursuit of terrorism has been used by Russia for continued oppression in Chechnya. The difference between terrorism and freedom-fighters remains unclear, however, and the lack of clarification hurts us in the Arab world, too, where the Palestinian struggle remains a stumbling block in our attempt to create a coalition against Iraq.

The justification for pre-emptive strikes in the absence of United Nations action must also be fleshed out. Are weapons of mass destruction the sole reason to launch an attack?

What about territorial integrity? Could a struggle over borders be used to launch a war between India and Pakistan?

The hypothetical justifications are endless and a little bit frightening. The Bush administration needs to address them in a carefully delineated foreign-policy doctrine.

Without a consistent and predictable foreign policy, we will continue to react pell-mell to the crisis of the day. And that approach to foreign policy will lead to misunderstandings and unnecessary death.

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