

## **ORLANDO SENTINEL**

### **COMMENTARY**

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#### **"5 Foreign-policy Lessons in the Aftermath of September 11"**

**By Kenneth W. Stein**

Since Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait more than a decade ago, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 stand alone in shaping America's role in the world. In our responses to the terrorist attacks, stark realities shook our fiber. Lessons about foreign-policy-making, our allies, terrorism and the Middle East materialized. One year later, what have we so far discovered?

First, the attacks defined the Bush administration. Dramatically, they transformed the president's zeal and the American people's preference for solutions to domestic issues to a foreign-affairs agenda. Instead of being known for "compassionate conservatism" in government or as the education president, George W. Bush's presidency became identified with the war on terrorism, the "axis of evil," homeland security, "being with us or against us," and a doctrine of preemption. Welded together in a manner not seen perhaps since Pearl Harbor or the Challenger disaster, American patriotism prevailed.

Second, we have learned that the narrower the target of our political and military response, the longer domestic bipartisanship held and the stauncher was the steadfastness of our allies. When the international coalition was formed to destroy the Taliban and root out al-Qaeda, it endured. However, each time the objectives broadened in scope -- rebuilding Afghanistan, carrying out the war against terrorism, eradicating or limiting the spread of weapons of mass destruction, removing Saddam Hussein or attacking Iraq -- the more difficult it became to sustain domestic and foreign alignments. The broader the defined target the greater disagreements between allies, the greater the pressure to obtain sanction for further international action through the United Nations.

Third, our European allies prefer multilateralism. They abhor unilateralism. Against the Taliban and al-Qaeda they had no difficulty in letting America lead; they followed. Change the channel to Iraq, and the European Union deplores the American lead. With Middle Eastern countries, EU members have larger commercial interests, dire hydrocarbon needs and severe demographic (migration) issues that separate them in degrees from the United States. These issues impose

European restraint on American unilateralism. Without a smoking gun against Saddam in complicity with al-Qaeda, or unmistakable proof that he is stockpiling weapons of mass destruction, Washington's use of a pre-emptive doctrine -- "do unto others before they do unto you" -- is defined as reckless and warlike. Some Americans see this as another bout with European temerity and appeasement. Coalitions formed for international action emerge from protection of national interest, not from moral conviction.

Fourth, sources of terrorist acts are not due to the unresolved regional conflicts such as the Arab-Israel conflict. No one in his right mind believes that if there were a Palestinian state in all the West Bank and Gaza today, or even instead of Israel, terrorism spawned in the Middle East would abate. Causes for middle-class young men to perform terrorist acts are found in successive generations of lifelong frustrations: systemic autocratic rule and impenetrably hierarchical social systems, and from cultural environments that constrain individual expression. No less a critic of Yasser Arafat, Ariel Sharon and the American administration, Edward Said, the Palestinian professor at Columbia, wrote in June 2001 in *al-Ahram Weekly*: "So low has the [Arab] individual's status sunk that even one's basic right of citizenship, one's right to exist free of personal threat from the state, has all but vanished; our [Arab] rulers hold that no one is immune from their wrath and that citizens should maintain a permanent sense of fear and capitulation when it comes to authority, whether secular or religious."

Fifth, Arab and Muslim street antagonism to the United States ebbs and flows. When tickled by Arab/Muslim regimes, vocal attacks against the United States deflect attention from a virtually endless array of domestic shortcomings. While Bush's war on terrorism gave the Israelis a green light to put the Palestine Liberation Organization in a similar unacceptable category, his administration also advocated the establishment of a Palestinian state -- and this while American public attitudes toward Middle Easterners were at an all-time low.

The aftermath and response to Sept. 11 2001, showed that while multilateral action can take place, defense of parochial national interests limits a coalition's duration; a zeal to destroy political evil does not translate into staying power against other global dangers such as environmental degradation, the HIV spread and insidious demographic explosions worldwide.

Will this President Bush, unlike his father, be able to translate a foreign-policy success in the Middle East/Iraq into domestic electoral victories, or will Saddam Hussein outlive another Bush presidency?

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