



Needed: A Positive, Better Funded U.S. Foreign Policy
by David Hitchcock

In his first diplomatic steps, President Bush is off to a good start. But underlying initial cordiality lies a host of complaints and anxiety over U.S. foreign policy. The overseas media image of the U.S. that George W. Bush has inherited is not a very favorable one. Traditional admiration abroad for U.S. ideals, openness, and innovation may remain; but as the world's only economic, military, and high-tech superpower, America seems now to trigger irritation and resentment from countries who either feel left behind or who are increasingly aware that they no longer control their own destiny in the face of overwhelming American pre-eminence.

To some degree, criticism of "Number One" is inevitable - it goes with the territory. But as others see us, the U.S. too often presses for behavior from which it then claims exemption. We call attention to human rights abuses, but are unlikely to ratify the Treaty for an International Criminal Court; we agree that land mines have injured or killed thousands of innocent victims but wont (because of Korea) sign the treaty outlawing them; we are eager to promote democracy and help supervise foreign elections, but permit serious voting confusion at home. U.S. scientists report mounting evidence of global warming, but to key Congressional leaders, the Kyoto Protocol (to reduce pollution) would be "dead on arrival," if submitted for ratification.

In his inaugural address, President Bush spoke of the need for America to show "purpose without arrogance," a "concern for civility" and "service to one another." "America at its best is compassionate," and "when we see that wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side." In fact, he declared, "no insignificant person was ever born." Inspiring words. Whether they fully apply to the international community as well could be clarified in the President's State of the Union address. Meanwhile, the President's assurance that "America remains engaged in the world" was undoubtedly well-received by nations who would join in the fight against drugs and new forms of narco, cyber, and biological terrorism; against aggression, against dictators, and against rogue states.

But what people abroad may wish to hear more of is what we are for as a nation, how we will contribute our talents, energy, and resources to human betterment - not alone but with others. U.S. officials often speak of "national interests" and "the U.S. agenda." But they should be able to define our interests and agenda broadly enough to embrace some of the concerns of other countries on which our own survival may depend. If U.S. foreign policy is to garner general international support, and at least grudging acceptance where we differ with other countries, it must reflect ideals and purposes that others can share and sign on to. If we stress that the U.S. will be a partner to narrow the widening gap between haves and have-nots, and battle disease, pollution,

hunger and ignorance together, we may find far greater respect for our leadership.

Such an approach to diplomacy would certainly be welcomed in Asia. The Asia Foundation's just-published report, *America's Role in Asia - Asian Views*, is replete with urgings by a distinguished Asian panel for a U.S. role in the region that would be less unilateral, more sensitive, patient, cooperative and, at the policy formulation stage, more consultative. The Panel would welcome a more attentive, fully engaged U.S. in Asia, but warns against heavy-handedness; "engagement should not become interference."

The *Asian Views* report also recommends that U.S. policy-makers take into account more actively the opinions and experience of the growing number of Asian "civil society," non-governmental organizations, and encourage expanded exchanges with their American counterparts on societal issues of common concern.

The days of the U.S. as teacher and preacher for all to follow are over. A diplomacy that highlights a new sense of compassion, humility, generosity, and a desire to listen and cooperate with others, could become a hallmark of the Bush Administration - abroad as well as at home.

In the Reagan years, U.S. diplomacy gave a central role to communication. Learning what other countries thought about the U.S. was a vital part of foreign policy making, and efforts to reach out to opinion makers in other countries received additional resources. Now the budget in constant dollars for public diplomacy, subsumed within the Department of State, is less than the U.S. spent for this purpose in 1985.

Indeed, the Department's funds for all diplomacy - about one percent of our national budget - are about twenty percent less than twenty years ago. The gains for the State Department and public diplomacy from the 1980s were reversed over the past eight years. American foreign aid has fallen from 0.2 to 0.1 percent of the country's gross national product, placing the U.S., proportionate to the size of its economy, in eighth place among major donors.

A truly engaged United States with a more positive diplomacy, with the resources Secretary Powell is urgently asking for, and a new determination to work consultatively with others could be within reach. It would be tragic if the stirring inaugural words of George W. Bush end up as nice rhetoric, for lack of sufficient means to carry them out through diplomacy, our first - and cheapest - form of defense.

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