
Is the Bush Doctrine Dead?

Norman Podhoretz

IN RECENT months, we have been bombarded with reports of the death of the Bush Doctrine. Of course, there have been many such reports since the doctrine was first promulgated at the start of what I persist in calling World War IV (the cold war being World War III). Almost all of them were written by the realists and liberal internationalists within the old foreign-policy establishment, and they all turned out to resemble the reports of Mark Twain's death—which, he famously said, had been “greatly exaggerated.” Nothing daunted by this, the critics and enemies of Bush are now at it yet again. This time, however, their ranks have been swollen by a number of traditional conservatives who were never comfortable with the doctrine bearing his name and who have now moved from discomfort to outright opposition.

But what is genuinely new, and more surprising, is the entry into this picture of a significant number of my fellow neoconservatives. As the Bush Doctrine's greatest enthusiasts, they would be much happier if they could go on pointing to signs of life, but so disillusioned have they become that a British journalist can say that, to them, “the words ‘Rice’ and ‘Bush’ have all but become the Beltway equivalent of barnyard expletives.” No wonder that they

have now taken to composing obituary notices of their own.

Are we then to conclude that the latest reports of the death of the Bush Doctrine are not “greatly,” if indeed at all, exaggerated, and that it has at long last really been put to rest?

So misrepresented has the Bush Doctrine been that the only way to begin answering that question is to remind ourselves of what it actually says (and does not say); and the best way to do that is by going back to the speech in which it was originally enunciated: the President's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001.

IN ANALYZING that speech shortly after it was delivered, I found that the new doctrine was built on three pillars. The first was a categorical rejection of the kind of relativism (“One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter”) that had previously prevailed in the discussion of terrorism, and a correlative insistence on using such unambiguously moral categories as right and wrong, good and evil, in describing the “great harm” we had suffered only nine days earlier. But, the President went on, out of that harm, and “in our grief and anger, we have found our mission and our moment.”

In spelling out the nature of that mission and moment, Bush gave the lie to those who would later claim that the idea of planting the seeds of democracy in Iraq was a hastily contrived ex-post-

NORMAN PODHORETZ is the editor-at-large of COMMENTARY and the author of ten books, the most recent of which is *The Norman Podhoretz Reader*, edited by Thomas L. Jeffers (2004). His essays on the Bush Doctrine can be found at www.commentarymagazine.com.

facto rationalization to cover for the failure to find weapons of mass destruction there. Indeed, the plain truth is that, far from being an afterthought, the idea of democratization was there from the very beginning and could even be said to represent the animating or foundational principle of the entire doctrine:

The advance of human freedom, the great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time, now depends on us. Our nation, this generation, . . . will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage.

The second pillar on which the Bush Doctrine stood was a new conception of terrorism that would, along with the “mission” emerging out of the rubble of 9/11, serve as a further justification for going first into Afghanistan and then into Iraq. Under the old understanding, terrorists were lone individuals who could best be dealt with by the criminal-justice system. Bush, by dramatic contrast, now asserted that they should be regarded as the irregular troops of the nation states that harbored and supported them. From this it followed that 9/11 constituted a declaration of war on the United States, and that the proper response was to rely not on cops and lawyers and judges but on soldiers and sailors and marines.

Again giving the lie to those who would later accuse him of misleading the American people as to why he had led us into Iraq, the President said that

Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them. Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.

Furthermore, this war that we were about to fight would be

a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. . . . From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.

In thus promising to “pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism,” the President touched on the third pillar on which the Bush

Doctrine was built: the determination to take preemptive action against an anticipated attack. But it was only three months later, in his State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, that he made this determination fully explicit:

I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons.

HERE IT is important to note what, for better or worse, the President did *not* say. He did not say—as almost everyone imagines he did—that he would act unilaterally, or that he would pay no attention to the opinions of our allies, or that he would ignore the UN. Nor did he say—as would later mendaciously be charged in the relentless campaign to prove that he had “hyped” the danger posed by Saddam Hussein—that the threat had to be “imminent” before preemptive action could legitimately be taken. Nor did he use that word a few months later when, in the next major address he devoted to the Bush Doctrine, he restated the same point:

If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. . . . [T]he war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge.

The reason it was now necessary to act in this way, the President explained, was that the strategy we had adopted toward the Soviet Union during the cold war (or World War III in my accounting) could not possibly work “in the world we have entered”—a world in which

unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons or missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.

Having thus set the foundation for a new American policy in the broader Middle East, the President was left with the problem of how it could and should be applied to the narrower Middle East—that is, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. In October 2001, only a month after 9/11, George W. Bush had become the first American President to come out openly for the establishment of a Palestinian state as the only path to a resolution of that conflict. But by June of 2002, he had also arrived at the realization of a glaring contra-

diction between his own doctrine and his support for the creation of a Palestinian state that would, as things then stood, inevitably be run by terrorists like Yasir Arafat and his henchmen. He therefore added a number of conditions to his previously unqualified endorsement of Palestinian statehood:

Today, Palestinian authorities are encouraging, not opposing, terrorism. This is unacceptable. And the United States will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure.

This, he added, required the election of “new leaders,” who would embark on building

entirely new political and economic institutions based on democracy, market economics, and action against terrorism.

And because he recognized that the Palestinians were “pawns in the Middle East conflict”—by which he clearly meant the war the Arab/Muslim world had been waging against Israel for “decades”—he broadened his demands to cover that world as well:

I’ve said in the past that nations are either with us or against us in the war on terror. To be counted on the side of peace, nations must act. Every leader actually committed to peace will end incitement to violence in official media and publicly denounce homicide bombs. Every nation actually committed to peace will stop the flow of money, equipment, and recruits to terrorist groups seeking the destruction of Israel, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizballah. Every nation committed to peace must block the shipment of Iranian supplies to these groups and oppose regimes that promote terror, like Iraq. And Syria must choose the right side in the war on terror by closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations.

With these portentous words, Bush eliminated the contradiction between waging a war on terror in the broader Middle East and supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state run by terrorists in the narrower. The comment I made about this statement shortly after it was issued still seems right to me:

With the inconsistency thus removed and the resultant shakiness repaired by the addition of this fourth pillar to undergird it, the Bush Doctrine was now firm, coherent, and complete.

IF WE go by the President’s speeches, as well as by his unscripted remarks at press conferences and other venues, there is not the slightest indication that today he is any less wedded than he was at the start to any of the four commitments that together constitute the substance of the Bush Doctrine.

A good benchmark is his Second Inaugural Address, delivered on January 20, 2005. During the campaign that would end by giving him the opportunity to deliver this address, and in spite of the political considerations that might have led him to play it safe, Bush kept reaffirming his belief in the soundness of his doctrine and his determination to stick by all of its interrelated parts. Over and over again he declared that, if reelected, he would go on working for the spread of liberty throughout the broader Middle East; that he would not relent in the war against terrorism (whose main front was now Iraq); that he would continue reserving the right to strike preemptively against mounting threats; and that he would steadfastly refuse to support the establishment of a Palestinian state unless and until its leaders renounced terrorism and began pursuing democratic reform.

Nevertheless, immediately after he was reelected on these promises, it was widely predicted that he would retreat from them in his second term, and that he would do so whether he liked it or not. Some said that, because of setbacks in Iraq, he would lose the political support he needed to push the Bush Doctrine any farther. Others posited a political “law” under which second-term Presidents were always forced to moderate their policies. And still others foresaw a clash with an obdurate reality that would kill off the Bush Doctrine by exposing it as a utopian fantasy.

With all this ringing in his ears, Bush defiantly took the oath of office for a second time with a restatement of the doctrine bearing his name that was even more eloquent, more forceful, and more unequivocal than the great series of speeches in which he had originally promulgated it three years earlier.

On the rejection of moral relativism:

We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: the moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right. . . . We have confidence because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul.

On the new conception of terrorism and the political roots of the assault we suffered on 9/11:

We have seen our vulnerability—and we have seen its deepest source. For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny—prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder—violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat.

On the spread of democracy as the answer to terrorism:

There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom. . . . America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. . . . So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture.

On the nature and length of the war that was declared on us on 9/11, and what winning it will ultimately mean:

This is not primarily the task of arms, though we will defend ourselves and our friends by force of arms when necessary. . . . The great objective of ending tyranny is the concentrated work of generations.

On the determination to take preemptive action:

My most solemn duty is to protect this nation and its people against further attacks and emerging threats.

So much for the idea that Bush was preparing to back away from the first three pillars of the Bush Doctrine. And what about the fourth? Framed in loftily abstract terms, the Second Inaugural contained no reference to Israel or the Palestinians. (Nor were Iraq and Afghanistan mentioned by name.) A few weeks earlier, however, Bush had already made it clear that the fourth pillar of his doctrine was still firmly in place. He did this during a post-election visit to Canada, where he once again conditioned his support for the establishment of a Palestinian state on the willingness of the Palestinians to renounce terrorism and embark on democratic reform:

Achieving peace in the Holy Land is not just a matter of pressuring one side or the other on the shape of a border or the site of a settlement. This approach has been tried before, without success. As we negotiate the details of

peace, we must look to the heart of the matter, which is the need for a Palestinian democracy.

AS I WRITE, Bush's second term has entered its nineteenth month, and on innumerable occasions during that time he has ringingly reaffirmed his commitment to the doctrine bearing his name. On what basis, then, is it being claimed all over the place that he no longer believes either in its soundness or its viability?

According to the most widely discussed elaboration of this claim, the *Time* cover story entitled "The End of Cowboy Diplomacy" (July 17, 2006), the first indication that Bush has undergone a change of mind and a change of heart is "a modulation of tone." As an example, *Time* points to a press conference with the British Prime Minister Tony Blair in which "Bush swore off the Wild West rhetoric of getting enemies 'dead or alive,' conceding that 'in certain parts of the world, it was misinterpreted.'" "Equally revealing" to *Time* was

Bush's response to the North Korean missile test. Under the old Bush Doctrine, defiance by a dictator like Kim Jong Il would have merited threats of punitive U.S. action—or at least a tongue lashing. Instead, the administration has mainly been talking up multilateralism.

Time then quotes a Princeton political scientist who ascribes this putative change to "doctrinal flameout." Or, in *Time's* own jazzy formulation, "cowboy diplomacy, RIP."

The problem with this analysis is that it stems from a false premise about the Bush Doctrine and about its author. To say again what—judging from the persistence of the false premise—cannot be said too often, the "unilateralist vision of American power and how to use it" that *Time* identifies as a "plank" of the Bush Doctrine has never been any such thing. Not once in any of the speeches in which the President spelled out his new doctrine did he explicitly declare, or even imply, that it prescribed a course of "going it alone," or that it precluded seeking allies in the war against terrorism, or that it included (once more in *Time's* own words)

the idea that the U.S. could carry out a strategy as ambitious as reshaping the Middle East . . . without a degree of international legitimacy and cooperation to back it up.

On the contrary. Witness the National Security Strategy of 2002, which elaborated on the various points the President had made in his post-9/11 speeches up till then:

We are also guided by the conviction that no nation can build a safer, better world alone. Alliances and multilateral institutions can multiply the strength of freedom-loving nations. The United States is committed to lasting institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of American States, and NATO as well as other longstanding alliances. Coalitions of the willing can augment these permanent institutions. In all cases, international obligations are to be taken seriously. They are not to be undertaken symbolically to rally support for an ideal without furthering its attainment.

And again:

There is little of lasting consequence that the United States can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of its allies and friends in Canada and Europe. Europe is also the seat of two of the strongest and most able international institutions in the world: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which has, since its inception, been the fulcrum of transatlantic and inter-European security, and the European Union (EU), our partner in opening world trade.

AS IT was at the beginning, when “cowboy diplomacy” was allegedly riding high, so it was two years later when the President delivered his State of the Union Address of 2004:

As we debate at home, we must never ignore the vital contributions of our international partners, or dismiss their sacrifices. From the beginning, America has sought international support for our operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we have gained much support.

And so it also was the following year, in his Second Inaugural:

[A]ll the allies of the United States can know: we honor your friendship, we rely on your counsel, and we depend on your help.

To this incontrovertible statement Bush attached a caveat:

There is a difference, however, between leading a coalition of many nations, and submitting to the objections of a few. America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country.

In a saner political climate this caveat would be regarded as self-evident. For who can really believe

that any nation, let alone a nation as powerful as the United States, would hand over to other countries, whether acting on their own or through a collective like the UN, the power to decide what it should or should not do in defense of its own security? In the case at issue, doing so would have meant bowing to the wishes of France and Germany and to the UN Security Council. The folly of such a course is something else that would be regarded as self-evident in a saner political climate. But, reminded by the *Time* cover story that it is not self-evident, Peter Wehner, a member of the President’s staff, took the trouble to explain:

Should nations be paralyzed from acting unless they receive the support of the Security Council? How many nations need to support an action before it is considered sufficiently multilateral and therefore justifiable? Ten? Fifty? One hundred and fifty? And what happens if a nation, perhaps for reasons of corruption or bad motivation, seeks to prevent a particular action from being taken?

Good questions all, especially the first and the last.¹ And yet I would maintain that the charge of unilateralism (like its inseparable companion, “the rush to war”) has never been anything more than a respectable-sounding cover for an effort by the French and the Germans (and their fellow travelers in the United States itself) to tie the American Gulliver down. Nor can these charges have been made in good faith when Bush, far from “rushing to war” or using it as “the weapon of first resort,” spent eight long months in a diplomatic gavotte aimed at rounding up support for a possible use of force against Saddam Hussein, and when he also repeatedly pleaded with the Security Council to stop ignoring the Iraqi tyrant’s defiance of its own long string of resolutions. It was only after the futility of all this became unmistakably obvious to anyone with eyes to see that Bush resorted to military action. And not even then did he act unilaterally: in addition to Britain, a “coalition of the willing” composed of no fewer than 49 other nations joined in the invasion.

¹ As a government official, Wehner is forced to be circumspect. But commenting on what has been learned about the Oil-for-Food scandal, Claudia Rosett, the great expert on this subject, spells things out: “It is unlikely that any of this would have come to light had not the U.S., over UN protests, toppled Saddam in 2003. Congressional investigations have since found that the UN program opened the floodgates for anywhere from \$10 billion to \$17 billion in graft, scams, and smuggling, some of which went to pay for Saddam’s palaces, weapons, and rewards for the families of Palestinian suicide bombers.” And some of it, as Rosett has shown elsewhere, also went to French business interests.

In short, the fact that the President has lately been talking a lot about diplomacy and entering into multilateral negotiations has no bearing on the question of whether the Bush Doctrine is dead, since it never ruled these out in the first place. As for the nuclear ambitions of North Korea and Iran, the administration's instrument of choice—again for better or worse, and again including the period of alleged cowboy diplomacy—has all along been multilateral diplomacy.

UNLIKE UNILATERALISM, the right of preemption is a real and not a mythical “plank” of the Bush Doctrine. This one, *Time* tells us, has been discredited by our “travails in Iraq,” which is turning out to be “not only the first but also the last laboratory for preventive war.” About that we shall see in the next two years, but for now there is no sign that the President has changed his mind about preemption as a last-resort response to a gathering threat. If he had, why would he steadfastly refuse to rule it out against Iran by repeating whenever asked that “all options are open”?

So, too, with the third “plank” or pillar of the Bush Doctrine (the one that I put first). In *Time*'s account, the “goal to spread democracy as a defense against terrorism” has also been undermined, not so much by Iraq as by “the complexity of global politics.” The consequence has been a “dimming of the administration's commitment to the ideals of its . . . freedom agenda.” As evidence, *Time* cites the administration's failure to put more pressure for democratic reform on Egypt, Russia, and China, and also the fact that some of the elections it has sponsored “are producing governments more hospitable to extremism, not less.”

Yet whatever these cases may demonstrate about the *implementation* of the “freedom agenda” (to which I will come in due course), it is impossible to believe that Bush can already have lost or even retreated from the faith in it that he expressed so powerfully in his Second Inaugural only eighteen months ago and unequivocally restated in his State of the Union message as recently as January of this year:

Abroad, our nation is committed to an historic, long-term goal—we seek the end of tyranny in our world. Some dismiss that goal as misguided idealism. In reality, the future security of America depends on it. On September the 11th, 2001, we found that problems originating in a failed and oppressive state 7,000 miles away could bring murder and destruction to our country. Dictatorships shelter terrorists,

and feed resentment and radicalism, and seek weapons of mass destruction. Democracies replace resentment with hope, respect the rights of their citizens and their neighbors, and join the fight against terror.

Which brings us again to the fourth plank or pillar of the Bush Doctrine—its conception of how Israel and the Palestinians fit into the larger war on Islamist terrorism. As *Time* sees it, “Exhibit A” of the “dimming of the administration's commitment to its . . . freedom agenda” is that Bush responded to the victory of Hamas (“a group,” the magazine adds noncommittally, that “the U.S. and Europe classify as a terrorist organization”) by leading “an international ban on aid to the democratically elected Palestinian government.” But surely this response shows the reverse of a dimming commitment to the Bush Doctrine. Surely it shows rather that Bush remains true to his promise that, to repeat,

the United States will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure.

And surely it also makes nonsense of the endlessly chanted mantra that Bush “simplistically” regards elections as the be-all and end-all of democratization, let alone that he thinks the victorious party in a free election has, by virtue of that fact alone, a claim on American support even if it engages in terrorism. As he put it in his State of the Union address of 2006:

Ultimately, the only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by offering the hopeful alternative of political freedom and peaceful change. So the United States of America supports democratic reform across the broader Middle East. Elections are vital, but they are only the beginning. Raising up a democracy requires the rule of law, and protection of minorities, and strong, accountable institutions that last longer than a single vote.

AS AGAINST *Time*, which is under the impression that Bush no longer believes in his own doctrine, Philip Gordon of the Brookings Institution, in an article in *Foreign Affairs* (“The End of the Bush Revolution,” July-August 2006), at least recognizes that “the President and most of his team still hold to the basic tenets of the Bush Doctrine.” But Gordon—as befits a fellow of one bastion of the old foreign-policy establishment writing in the

magazine of its traditional headquarters at the Council on Foreign Relations—contends that “the budgetary, political, and diplomatic realities that the first Bush team tried to ignore have begun to set in.” The consequence is a “reversal of the Bush revolution” and the “return to realism” for which the old foreign-policy establishment has been yearning since 9/11.

In backing up this thesis, Gordon rehearses the by now familiar litany of alleged disasters—pretty much the same ones listed by *Time*—that have followed from Bush’s pursuit of a “transformative foreign policy”: failure in Iraq, a “decline in legitimacy and popularity abroad,” and a waning of political support at home. Faced with all this, Bush has had no choice but to adopt a more modest “tone and style” and to embrace (at long last) the kind of diplomacy he had previously scorned, with North Korea and Iran being the prime examples.

Unlike virtually all his colleagues within the foreign-policy establishment, who simply ignore the achievements that have been made under the aegis of the Bush Doctrine, Gordon acknowledges a few of them, including

successful elections in Iraq and Afghanistan, a revolution in Lebanon followed by Syrian withdrawal, nuclear disarmament in Libya, and steps toward democracy elsewhere in the world.

One might think that this record would give him pause; and one might also think that for the good of the country he would hope for more of the same. But no: what he most fears is “renewed progress in these areas.” Why? Because further progress

could give new force to the idea that a determined United States can transform the world and new arguments to those who believe that Bush should not waver in the promotion of his doctrine.

Better, in other words, for the United States to suffer defeat than for the Bush Doctrine to pull a Lazarus and then return to pursuing its hubristic goal of making the Middle East safe for America by making it safe for democracy.

A slightly different view is taken by Charles A. Kupchan and Ray Takeyh, both of whom are affiliated with the Council on Foreign Relations and several other bastions of the old foreign-policy establishment as well. To them the Bush Doctrine, though on its death bed, still has enough life left in it to be blamed for the shooting war that broke out this past summer between Israel and the Islamists

of Hamas and Hizballah. As liberal internationalists, Kupchan and Takeyh are forced into the grudging allowance that the Bush administration may have been “seeking the right end in the Middle East—the pacification of the region through economic and political liberalization.” But its “ideological hubris and political incompetence have succeeded only in setting the region ablaze.” If, they contend, Bush had not “abandoned Clinton’s diplomatic efforts,” and if the administration had actively engaged with “the peace process,” it could have “sustained a process of reconciliation that kept an uneasy peace.”

This is an astonishing claim, since as everyone but the denizens of the old foreign-policy establishment recognizes, what was produced by that “process of reconciliation” between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs was not peace, whether uneasy or any other kind, but years of Palestinian terrorism and finally the war known as the second *intifada*. Moreover, as Jacob Weisberg demonstrates in a piece entitled “Don’t Blame Bush: The War in Lebanon Isn’t His Fault,” the Bush administration “missed no opportunity that ever actually existed to pursue a peace agreement.” Nor, he adds, would “less confrontational rhetoric and flying visits from Condi Rice . . . have yielded better results” than Bush’s policy of isolating rather than engaging with the “rogue regimes” (the Palestinian Authority, Syria, and Iran) that are really responsible for the shooting war between Israel and the Islamofascists of Hamas and Hizballah.

IT IS utterly inconceivable that the wish for an American defeat could ever find room in the mind or heart of a traditionalist conservative like the columnist George Will (though it could and has taken up comfortable residence in the thinking of rabid paleoconservatives like Patrick J. Buchanan). Even so, after many months of expressing his unhappiness with the Bush Doctrine mainly through hints and asides, Will’s exasperation with it has finally boiled over. This administration, he laments in a recent column, is

currently learning a lesson—one that conservatives should not have to learn on the job—about the limits of power to subdue an unruly world.

In preaching this lesson to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Will joins forces with the likes of Philip Gordon within the old foreign-policy establishment who have long since appropriated and adapted it to their own political and ideological

purposes (which are very far from Will's). Unlike the realists, however, but like the liberal internationalists, Will fears that enough life is left in the Bush Doctrine to continue doing damage. Hence he does not, as they do, see in the "ascendancy" of Rice one of the leading indicators of a retreat from, never mind a death blow to, the Bush Doctrine. To the contrary, he criticizes her for echoing the doctrine in seeming to consider "today's turmoil preferable to the Middle East's 'false stability' of the past 60 years," and accuses her of being stuck in the illusion that democratization is necessarily an antidote to terrorism.

Here Will comes perilously close to sounding like Brent Scowcroft, the elder Bush's National Security Adviser (whose political purposes as an enemy of Israel are even further from Will's than are those of the old foreign-policy establishment). Some months ago, in an argument with Rice, who is his former protégée, Scowcroft drew an invidious comparison between the turmoil her boss's policy was creating in the Middle East and the "50 years of peace" the old policy had brought us. Though I very much doubt that George Will himself would ever describe as "years of peace" a period during which some two dozen wars were fought, he does deride Rice's claim that the "stability" the Middle East enjoyed in those years was "false"; and with regard to democratization, he also seems to agree with Scowcroft's contention that "you cannot with one sweep of the hand or the mind cast off thousands of years of history."

Accordingly, I would give the same answer to Will that I once gave to Scowcroft:

But the despotisms in the Middle East are not thousands of years old, and they were not created by Allah or the Prophet Muhammad. All of them were established after World War I—that is, less than a century ago—by the British and the French. This being the case, there is nothing "utopian" about the idea that such regimes—planted with shallow roots by two Western powers—could be uprooted with the help of a third Western power and that a better political system could be put in their place. And, in fact, this is exactly what has been happening before our very eyes in Iraq.

This is not an answer, however, that would cut any ice with William F. Buckley, Jr., the other major traditionalist conservative who has, after much hesitation, decisively given up on the Bush Doctrine. The reason my argument would fall on deaf ears if directed at Buckley is that his own break with Bush's policies has not primarily been

driven by the apparent conflict between Bush's "ideological certitudes" and sound conservative principles. The main factor is what Buckley has become convinced is the failure of these policies to pass the acid test of Iraq. True, his indictment includes other putative failures of the Bush Doctrine to deliver the goods. Nor does he ignore the (to him unfortunate and definitely unconservative) role played by the evangelism of its "universalist aims." Yet I would guess that if he thought the effort to plant the seeds of democracy in Iraq was succeeding, he would not be telling us that the Bush Doctrine has for all practical purposes been killed off everywhere else as well.

I MUST CONFESS to being puzzled by the amazing spread of the idea that the Bush Doctrine has indeed failed the test of Iraq. After all, Iraq has been liberated from one of the worst tyrants in the Middle East; three elections have been held; a decent constitution has been written; a government is in place; and previously unimaginable liberties are being enjoyed. By what bizarre calculus does all this add up to failure? And by what even stranger logic is failure to be read into the fact that the forces opposed to democratization are fighting back with all their might?

Surely what makes more sense is the opposite interpretation of the terrible violence being perpetrated by the terrorists of the so-called "insurgency": that it is in itself a tribute to the enormous strides that have been made in democratizing the country. If this murderous collection of diehard Sunni Baathists and vengeful Shiite militias, together with their allies inside the government, agreed that democratization had already failed, would they be waging so desperate a campaign to defeat it? And if democratization in Iraq posed no threat to the other despotisms in the region, would those regimes be sending jihadists and material support to the "insurgency" there?

Perhaps, then, what the sectarian murderers and their foreign allies are trying to prevent is less the democratic project as such than the emergence of an Iraq which would be unified under the loose federal system prescribed by the constitution adopted last year? Perhaps what the Sunni "insurgency" is trying to do is prevent the Shiite majority from becoming dominant? Perhaps the Shiite militias are mainly engaged in reprisals for recent Sunni atrocities (not to mention being bent on revenge for the relentless oppression they suffered at the hands of the Sunnis under Saddam Hussein)? Perhaps all this is leading to a breakup of the country into three

separate entities, with a fully independent Kurdistan in the north, with the Sunnis ruling in Baghdad and its environs, and with the Shiites in power in the south?

The Israeli political theorist Shlomo Avineri and Clinton's ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith have long contended that such an outcome is the best that can be hoped for, and that in any event the vision of an Iraq unified under a democratic system is nothing more than a mirage. From this glum analysis it follows that the United States should scrap the Bush Doctrine and resign itself to a tripartite division as the least bad alternative to complete chaos and an all-out civil war.

This position (which in the latest variant proposed by Galbraith has been endorsed as "second best" by a disillusioned neoconservative in the person of David Frum) comes at us with all the trappings of what looks like a hard-headed assessment of the sectarian facts on the ground in Iraq. But in common with many such apparently hard-headed assessments of other facts on other grounds, it poses intractable problems of its own.² Worse yet, its plausibility depends on the ruling-out of the new possibilities that can materialize out of popular aspirations for something different, and something better.

Only yesterday we saw such aspirations vividly expressed in the flocking of millions of Iraqis to the polls, and all the world marveled at the sight. Now, because the enemies of these aspirations within Iraq and their foreign supporters are mounting a last-ditch campaign to blow them to smithereens, we are being told that it is useless to go on giving our support to what is clearly a lost cause. Shades of how George W. Bush's father treated the Shiites whom he had encouraged to rise up against Saddam Hussein at the tail end of the first Gulf War, only to sit by as many thousands of them were slaughtered by this merciless despot who had been left in power by the "realism" of American policy. (It was, incidentally, only because some of us had forgotten the bitterness this betrayal had planted in the Shiites of the South that we were surprised when they greeted our troops in 2003 with surly suspicion instead of cheers and flowers.)

Well, having through the Bush Doctrine repudiated his father's "realism" as, precisely, unrealistic, George W. Bush is hardly likely to welsh on the promises he in his own turn has made to the people of Iraq. And since most of them—Sunnis no less than Shiites—know very well that their lives literally depend on making the new system work, they have the greatest imaginable stake in fending

off the evil forces that are dedicated to destroying its chances.

IN OPPOSITION to Will and Buckley, and with at least the partial exception just noted of David Frum, my fellow neoconservatives are still heavily invested in the Bush Doctrine. But an increasing number of them also charge that it is being killed off—not by the obdurate realities of the Middle East; and not by any conceptual flaws; and not by its enemies at home and abroad, but rather by its author's loss of nerve in seeing it through. For the more aggressive remedy they prescribe, they have been cast out of the conservative community by no less an erstwhile political friend and ally than George Will himself. Neoconservatism, he has now concluded, is "a spectacularly misnamed radicalism"—a dirty word in Will's vocabulary. Though he thinks this administration richly deserves severe criticism, the kind it is getting from the neoconservatives is "so untethered from reality as to defy caricature."

What Will is referring to in this uncharacteristically fevered attack is a July 24 piece in the *Weekly Standard* by its editor William Kristol, advocating an immediate military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities. Going all the way, Kristol denounces the administration's delay in launching such a strike as a form of appeasement.

Now as it happens, there is a split among neoconservatives on the desirability of military action against Iran. For reasons of their own, some—including Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute—are just as opposed to such a course as is Will himself. They do not, however, agree with Will (who here again joins hands with the old foreign-policy establishment) that a nuclear Iran can just as successfully be contained as the Soviet Union was in World War III. As Eli Lake writes (*New York Sun*, August 1, 2006):

There are those of us who have long endorsed a plan to bolster Iran's opposition as an alternative to a war with Iran, and there are sound arguments that bombing Iran's nuclear infrastructure would scuttle the efforts of Persian democrats to rescue their country from the mullahs. But let's not pretend that Iran is not at war with America and Israel. If it was true

² Noah Feldman of NYU highlights one of them in a review of Galbraith's new book, *The End of Iraq*: "Galbraith frankly concedes there is no good solution for Baghdad, with its mix of Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds, which includes perhaps a quarter of the whole population of the country. 'No good solution' is code for massacres of the kind that have accompanied breakups from India-Pakistan in 1947 to Yugoslavia in the 1990's."

that Iran could be contained with a nuclear threat capability, then how does one explain its emboldened recklessness with regard to its proxies, Hizballah?

Moreover, the fervent commitment of this group of neoconservatives to the democratization of the entire Middle East must similarly strike Will as tainted by the sin of radicalism and as “untethered from reality.” So, at least, one is entitled to infer from another argument he makes against Rice:

America’s intervention was supposed to democratize Iraq which, by benign infection, would transform the region. . . . But elections have transformed Hamas into the government of the Palestinian territories, and elections have turned Hizballah into a significant faction in Lebanon’s parliament, from which it operates as a state within the state. And as a possible harbinger of future horrors, last year’s elections gave the Muslim Brotherhood 19 percent of the seats in Egypt’s parliament.

But listen to what the exiled Iranian columnist Amir Taheri has to say about this argument:

Disappointed by the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian election and the strong showing of the Muslim Brotherhood in last year’s polls in Egypt, some doubt the wisdom of pushing for elections in the Muslim world. . . . The holding of elections, however, is a clear admission that the principal basis for legitimacy is the will of the people as freely expressed through ballot boxes. In well-established democracies, this may sound trite; in Arab societies, it is a revolutionary idea.

And listen also to the corroborative testimony of Fouad Ajami of Johns Hopkins. Speaking with the authority of one born and raised in Lebanon who is also an eminent student of the history of the Middle East, Ajami flatly asserts that “while the ballot is not infallible,” it has “broken the pact with Arab tyranny.”

WHERE IRAN is concerned, those neoconservatives who oppose military action, and detect no possibility of even relatively free elections there, have instead placed their hopes in an internal insurrection that would topple the mullocracy and replace it with a democratic regime. They also keep insisting that the failure of this long-predicted insurrection to materialize is largely the fault of the Bush administration, whose own failure to do everything in its power to help the democratic op-

position is in their eyes a blatant betrayal of the Bush Doctrine.

On this account, Richard Perle, one of the most influential of the neoconservatives, is furious with the President (in whose administration he formerly served as chairman of the Defense Policy Board). “Why Did Bush Blink on Iran? (Ask Condi)” reads the headline of a piece he recently published in the *Washington Post*. Here Perle charges that Bush has “chosen to beat . . . an ignominious retreat” by yielding to the State Department’s wish “to join talks with Iran on its nuclear program.” In thereby betraying the promises of his own doctrine, Perle adds, the President has crushed the hopes that his “soaring speeches” had once aroused in the young democratic dissidents of Iran.

Other neoconservatives focus on what they see as other betrayals. In his column in the *Los Angeles Times* (July 12), Max Boot singles out Egypt as a prime example of “the downsizing of President Bush’s democracy-promoting agenda.” Joshua Muravchik of the American Enterprise Institute, in “A Democracy Policy in Ashes” (*Washington Post*, June 27), likewise concentrates on “the bitter disappointment that Egypt’s democrats feel over the apparent waning of the Bush administration’s ardor for their course.”³ Moving beyond Iran and Egypt, Michael Rubin, the editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*, begins a piece entitled “Fight for Mideast Democracy Failing” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 14) by offering examples of how, thanks to the Bush Doctrine, “democracy took root in what many once dismissed as infertile ground,” but ends by showing how, “in the face of Bush’s reversal,” democratic dissenters throughout the region, who were emboldened by the President’s pledge “to seek and support the growth of democratic movements,” are now being silenced and repressed once again, while “U.S. allies who once considered reform now abandon it.”

According to still other neoconservatives, it is not only in the Middle East that the administration, instead of carrying on with the struggle to “end tyranny in our world,” has inexplicably pulled down this pillar of the Bush Doctrine by adopting a new policy of “coddling despots” like the repressive leaders both of Russia and China. North Korea makes for a comparably strong argument that the third pillar—the pledge to move preemptively against gathering threats—has also been blasted out from under the Bush Doctrine. Thus Nicholas

³ I should note that both Muravchik and Boot have since indicated in different ways that their criticisms are not to be taken as a wholesale loss of faith in Bush’s dedication to his own doctrine.

Eberstadt, a neoconservative expert on that country, charges that Bush's policy toward the regime of Kim Jong Il is, if anything, worse than Clinton's:

Apparently unwilling to move against North Korea's nuclear challenges by itself, and evidently incapable of fashioning a practical response involving allies and others, the Bush administration's response to Pyongyang's atomic provocations is today principally characterized by renewed calls for additional rounds of toothless diplomacy.

Kenneth Adelman, yet another strong partisan of the Bush Doctrine, adds insult to injury by telling an interviewer that its day is done, and that the administration's handling of North Korea (and Iran) amounts to "the triumph of Kerryism."

TWO EXTRAORDINARY features mark the consensus that has formed on the death of the Bush Doctrine. One is that it embraces just about every group all along the ideological spectrum, critics and friends of Bush alike: the realists, the liberal internationalists, the traditionalist conservatives, the paleoconservatives, and the neoconservatives. The other extraordinary feature is that the only group that has refused to join in this unprecedented consensus is made up of Bush's enemies on the Left.

Take the inveterate Bush hater Fred Kaplan who, in the Left-liberal webzine *Slate*, argues that "reports of the death of 'cowboy diplomacy' are greatly exaggerated," and that while there has been a "moderating tone in Bush's rhetoric . . . his actual policies have barely changed." It is in *Slate*, too, that its editor Jacob Weisberg (the same Jacob Weisberg who has devoted himself to collecting "Bushisms" supposedly proving how stupid the President is and how adept at finding "new ways to harm our country") posted his article acknowledging Bush's persistent refusal to engage with "rogue regimes." Moving further to the Left, we come upon *Mother Jones*, where one Ehsan Ahrari also denies that "cowboy diplomacy" has really ended.

No doubt, both Ahrari and Kaplan would very much prefer to agree that Bush has abandoned his wicked ways, and to congratulate the Left on this great accomplishment. But the best they can do is concede that he is now "drifting" rather than pushing forcefully ahead (Kaplan) and to hope that Iran and North Korea will eventually force a real change in his overall approach (Ahrari). As for me, unaccustomed as I am to finding myself siding with my ideological enemies on the Left, I have no hon-

est choice but to admit that I think Fred Kaplan's analysis of where the Bush Doctrine now stands is closer to the mark than any of the others discussed above, including the ones offered by some of my fellow neoconservatives.

Of course, there are plenty of leftists around for whom the true "axis of evil" still does and always will consist of Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld. In my opinion such people are worthy of contempt, as are all those who, whether or not they admit it even to themselves, are rooting for an American defeat in World War IV. My own heart—it should go without saying—is with those neoconservatives who have been pressing for a more aggressive implementation of the Bush Doctrine. I even think that there is at least some merit in many, or perhaps even most, of the arguments they offer to explain why they have concluded that American foreign policy is no longer true to the doctrine's promises. Without denying that the President is still talking the talk, they contend that his actions demonstrate that he has ceased walking the walk; and it is by stacking those actions up against his own language that they seek to justify the charge of, at best, a loss of nerve and, at worst, an outright betrayal of the goals they formerly believed he meant to pursue and to which they themselves are as dedicated as ever.

Nevertheless, I think they are wrong—less wrong than the old foreign-policy establishment, which agrees with them that the President has abandoned his own doctrine, and is gleeful instead of angry about it, but still wrong.

TO BEGIN with, the neoconservatives who have given up on Bush or are in the process of doing so overlook one simple consideration: that he is a politician. This ridiculously obvious truth has been obscured by the fact that Bush so often sounds like an ideologue, or perhaps idealist would be a better word. But here an old Jewish joke applies that I used to tell in connection with the same mistake that was also made about Ronald Reagan.

"Why are you dressed like that?" asks the Jewish mother of her son when he visits her wearing the uniform of a naval officer. "Because, Mama," he explains, "I just bought a boat, and I'm the captain." To which, smiling fondly, she replies, "Well, by you you're a captain. And by me you're a captain. But by a captain are you a captain?" Which is to say that, like Ronald Reagan before him, George W. Bush may be an ideologue "by" most politicians (who believe in nothing much and are always ready to trade a principle for a political gain), but "by" an ideologue he's no ideologue.

In other words, while he is certainly driven by ideas and ideals to a far greater extent than are most politicians, in implementing these ideas and ideals he is still subject to the same pressures by which all other politicians are constrained: pressures coming at him that, as President, he can ignore only at the peril of totally alienating the support his policies need both at home and abroad if they are to be sustained. And what this, in turn, means is that prudential considerations inevitably come into play whenever a major decision has to be made.

There are utopians to whom pursuing a principled or idealistic policy necessarily precludes the prudential judgment that determines which fights to pick at a given moment and which to delay until the time is ripe, when to pause and when to advance, and which tactic is the right one to use in maneuvering on a particular front. There are also “realists” who take the necessity of prudential judgment as proof that a policy driven by ideals is altogether incapable of being executed and can only lead to disaster if its proponents are naïve enough to try putting it into practice.

In pointing this out, I am not suggesting that those of us who share Bush’s ideas and ideals, but who labor under neither utopian nor realist delusions, are barred from questioning the soundness of his prudential judgment in this or that instance. But I am suggesting that, by the same token, we have an intellectual responsibility to recognize and acknowledge that he has already taken those ideas and ideals much farther than might have been thought possible, especially given the ferocity of the opposition they have encountered from all sides and the difficulties they have also met with in the field. Indeed, it is a measure of his enormous political skills that—at a time in 2004 when things were not looking at all good for the Bush Doctrine’s prospects in Iraq—he succeeded in mobilizing enough support for its wildly controversial principles to run on them for a second term and win.

IN MAINTAINING that Bush has done more to implement those principles than might reasonably have been expected, I would recall to the stand two highly credible witnesses on whom I have frequently relied in the past. The first is the Lebanese radical Walid Jumblatt, who had always been violently anti-American, who had therefore opposed the invasion of Iraq, and who had even declared that the killing of American soldiers there was “legitimate and obligatory.” But as he watched a process of change beginning to take hold through-

out the Middle East, Jumblatt underwent a change of his own:

It’s strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq. I was cynical about Iraq. But when I saw the Iraqi people voting [in January 2005], 8 million of them, it was the start of a new Arab world.

The second of my two witnesses is the Egyptian democratic activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim, who had also opposed the invasion of Iraq but who later had to admit that it had

unfrozen the Middle East, just as Napoleon’s 1798 expedition did. Elections in Iraq force the theocrats and autocrats to put democracy on the agenda, even if only to fight against us [reformers]. Look, neither Napoleon nor President Bush could impregnate the region with political change. But they were able to be midwives.

Since these statements were made, the theocrats and the autocrats have, just as Ibrahim predicted, fought back, and the successes they have scored have understandably distressed Max Boot, Joshua Muravchik, Michael Ledeen, Michael Rubin, Richard Perle, and other like-minded neoconservatives. Beyond being distressed, they are also angry at George W. Bush for doing things that they believe helped trigger these setbacks and for failing to do the things that could reverse them.

Yet to me it is by no means self-evident that the course urged upon Bush by his neoconservative critics in this or that instance has—all factors considered—necessarily been right or viable. Paul Mirengoff of the blog *Power Line*, taking account of the role of prudential judgment in a variety of countries with differing circumstances, does a good job of defending Bush’s record in this area against his neoconservative critics:

In each instance, the administration tilts toward democracy, with the degree of the tilt dictated by its perception of our ability to control events and the viability of the status quo. . . . In short, the administration’s policy in the Middle East is to attempt to promote democracy to just the extent that doing so makes sense in light of facts on the ground. Since these facts vary from situation to situation, so too do the manifestations of our policy.

Besides, as a glance at the the website of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) reveals, the reformist impulse aroused by the Bush Doctrine is still very much alive throughout the re-

gion. Which tells us that not all those committed to reform have lost heart, as, according to Muravchik and Boot, some have done in Egypt (and not even everyone there, as recent demonstrations attest).

BUT EVEN if it could be shown that the disillusioned neoconservatives' judgment of "the facts on the ground" has been right in every instance, the really tremendous fact—the overriding fact—would remain that it is entirely thanks to the Bush Doctrine that the Middle East has been "unfrozen." And even if its author should for one reason or another prove unable to advance the process of political change that his policies have set into motion, there will be no return to the old arrangements and the old ways—no return, to repeat the words of Fouad Ajami, "to the old pact with tyranny."

Furthermore, as the President has demonstrated in his response to the Israeli counterattack against the terrorists of Hamas in Gaza and the terrorists of Hizballah in Lebanon, there will be no relapse into the old moral equivalence between Israel and the forces striving to destroy it. As he has also demonstrated in the same response, he is holding firm to the fourth pillar of the Bush doctrine by emphasizing that Israel's struggle is yet another front in the global struggle against terrorism, which is to say World War IV. In his own words:

[We] must recognize that Lebanon is the latest flashpoint in a broader struggle between freedom and terror that is unfolding across the region.

Not only that, but by openly identifying Hizballah as a creature of Iran and Syria, he has demonstrated that he has not forgotten what he had come to realize early on: that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians cannot be understood in isolation from the larger context of the war that the Arab/Muslim world has been waging to wipe the Jewish state off the map, literally since the day it was born.

Indeed, so firmly has Bush held on to the fourth pillar of his doctrine that gloomy second thoughts have arisen about the "end of cowboy diplomacy." Thus, when Condoleezza Rice, at a meeting in Rome this past July, refused to buckle to the European demand that Israel be forced into an immediate cease-fire, the *New York Times* reported that in

the space of one hour, . . . the view around the world that the United States may now be more willing to play nice with others may have been undone. Once again, it seemed, the United

States had reverted to its my-way-or-the-high-way approach.

Yet not even this is enough to satisfy a devoted friend of Israel like Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Policy. In "Cross Hairs" (*New York Sun*, August 1, 2006), Gaffney looks at the diplomatic maneuvering of the Bush administration in buying the Israelis more time and translates it into an insistence that they "negotiate with and try to appease [Islamofascist totalitarians] when they are in the Islamofascists' cross hairs." But this interpretation simply ignores the steadfastness of Bush and his people in refusing, against enormous pressure, to endorse a cease-fire except under the very conditions that the Israelis themselves proposed. Nor does Gaffney seem to notice that Bush was tacitly encouraging the Israelis to use the additional time he was buying them to be more, not less, aggressive in the fight against Hizballah. On this point, Shmuel Rosner, the Washington correspondent of the liberal Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, asks and answers the right question:

How much longer will the administration be willing to toe a line that it considers justified, but whose positive outcomes are late in coming? A senior diplomat said yesterday that this will depend on the degree to which the U.S. "trusts in Israel's ability to win the battle."⁴

AND WHAT of the charge that the President has refused to extend the Bush Doctrine to Russia and China, in spite of its pledge to "end tyranny everywhere in our world"? My answer is that everyone knows, or should know—just as everyone knew about the targets of analogous promises made by Franklin D. Roosevelt in World War II and John F. Kennedy in World War III—that the primary and immediate focus of the Bush Doctrine is on the tyrannies in the Middle East, and not on every despotic regime on the face of the earth. And just as everyone understood during World War II that defeating the evil regime in Germany justified an alliance with the equally evil regime in the So-

⁴ Just as this article was going to press, a draft was released of the cease-fire resolution jointly hammered out by the United States and France (!) for presentation to the UN Security Council. In the highly unlikely event that it is adopted in its present form, it could create serious problems for Israel in the long run, and according to the analysis of Israel's former ambassador to the UN, Dore Gold, "it only partially addresses Israel's concerns." But for now, and whether adopted or not, its practical effect will indeed be to buy the IDF more time—enough, it is hoped, to finish clearing Hizballah out of the buffer zone that is being established in the south of Lebanon. Whether that buffer zone will be wide enough is another question, and one for the Israelis to decide.

viet Union, so it ought to be clear that our de-facto alliance with Pakistan, a hotbed of Islamist radicalism, is necessary to the successful prosecution of the war against Islamofascism throughout the Middle East.

And Iran? Andrew McCarthy of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies goes so far as to blame Tehran's decision to unleash its proxy Hizballah against Israel on the

American abandonment of the Bush Doctrine in favor of offering the kitchen sink to the mul-lahs in a surely futile plea that they drop their nuclear ambitions.⁵

To be sure, there is no denying that Bush's dealings with Iran seem to belie one of his most forceful early statements about such negotiations:

We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. We cannot put our faith in the word of tyrants, who solemnly sign non-proliferation treaties, and then systematically break them.

But it beggars belief that Bush decided to go along with the European approach to Iran because he suddenly discovered that there is wisdom in "hoping for the best" and putting "our faith in the word of tyrants." To me (*pace* Richard Perle), it has seemed more likely that he has once again been walking the last diplomatic mile, exactly as when he spent so many months and so much energy working to get the UN to endorse an invasion of Iraq. The purpose, now as then, is to expose the futility of diplomacy where the likes of Saddam Hussein and the Iranian mullocracy are concerned, and to show that the only alternative to accepting the threats they pose is military action.

Robert Kagan—a neoconservative who has not given up on Bush—puts this well in describing the negotiations as "giving futility its chance." Kagan also entertains the possibility that the negotiations are not merely a ploy on Bush's part, and that his "ideal outcome really would be a diplomatic solution in which Iran voluntarily and verifiably abandoned its [nuclear] program." However that may be, once having played out the diplomatic string, Bush will be in a strong political position to say, along with Senator John McCain, that the only thing worse than bombing Iran would be allowing Iran to build a nuclear bomb—and not just to endorse that assessment but to act on it.

The problem of North Korea is different. Precisely because the Clinton administration's diplomatic strategy failed to prevent that country from

going nuclear, military action—difficult though possible in the case of Iran—is no longer an option against North Korea. The only remaining hope is that its neighbors, and especially China, will in their own interests force it to disarm by threatening to cut off the aid by which the Kim Jong Il regime remains afloat. This is clearly what Bush is trying to accomplish, and, thin as the prospect of success may be, it is hard to see what else he can do short of risking a nuclear war.

IN THINKING about George W. Bush's neoconservative critics, I am guided by the lesson I learned from the fate of my own very similar criticisms of Ronald Reagan: not the hagiographical Reagan celebrated in conservative song and story, but the real Reagan, the Reagan who both did and failed to do many things that his idolatrous admirers have chosen to forget.

The first critique I produced was published early in Reagan's first term. This was a long article for the *New York Times Magazine* to which its editors gave the ungainly title, "The Neoconservative Anguish Over Reagan's Foreign Policy."⁶ Two years later I wrote another long article, this one for *Foreign Affairs*, called "The Reagan Road to Détente." I also kept up a steady barrage of criticism in a syndicated column I was doing in those days.

It was as a passionate advocate of Reagan's declaratory policies that I repeatedly blasted him for one betrayal after another: for reacting tepidly to the suppression (yes, by the evil empire) of the anti-Communist Solidarity movement in Poland⁷; for cutting and running when Hizballah (yes, the same Hizballah with which Israel is now at war) blew up a barracks in Lebanon, killing 241 American servicemen; for trading arms for hostages with Iran (yes, the same mullocratic Iran we confront today); for entering into arms-control negotiations with the Soviet Union (yes, the same species of negotiation at which he had once scoffed as a dangerous delusion spawned by détente).

Rereading these pieces today, I am amazed to

⁵ McCarthy describes this alleged abandonment as "Bush Doctrine Out, Democracy Project In." But the "democracy project" is not a substitute for the Bush Doctrine. As I said above, it is its animating or foundational principle. McCarthy may think that the fight against terrorism ought to be given priority over democratization, and he may even be right. But he is wrong in ascribing this view to the Bush Doctrine.

⁶ A recent story in the *Washington Post* carried a remarkably similar headline: "Conservative Anger Grows Over Bush's Foreign Policy."

⁷ This was what prompted George Will, who was then also attacking from the hawkish Right, to say of the Reagan administration that it "loved commerce more than it loathed Communism."

discover that they were right in almost every detail even though they were dead wrong about the ultimate effect. For what these acts of Reagan's turned out to be was a series of prudential tactics within an overall strategy that in the end succeeded in attaining its great objective.

At the certain risk of offending worshipers of the hagiographical Reagan, some of whom are in the habit of using him as a stick with which to beat up on Bush, I confess that the betrayals of which the latter is being accused seem to me much less serious than those committed by his historical predecessor. Be that as it may, however, these supposed betrayals, too, ought to be regarded as prudential tactics within an overall strategy.

And there is another consideration that needs to be taken into account. By the time Reagan became President, we had been fighting World War III for 33 years; by contrast, World War IV started only after Bush entered the White House. In this respect, it is not Reagan to whom Bush should be compared, but Harry Truman.

In 1947, at a time when many denied that the Soviet Union was even a threat to us, Truman saw it as an aggressive totalitarian force, which was plunging us into another world war. If Truman had done nothing else than this, he would deserve to be ranked as a great President. But he did more: he also recognized that this new world war differed from the two that had preceded it, and could not be fought in the same ways, or in as brief a time.⁸ Out of these two recognitions flowed the Truman Doctrine, and out of that doctrine came the new strategy known as containment.

Consider the similarities with Bush. Even after 9/11, many pooh-pooed the threat of Islamofascism and, seeing its terrorist weaponry as merely a police matter, denied (and continue to deny) that we were even really at war, much less in a new world war. But Bush understood that Islamofascism was "the heir of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century"—an aggressive totalitarian force that, like Nazism and Communism before it, could only be defeated through a worldwide struggle. It was a struggle that, in its duration and in its mix of military and non-military means, would bear a greater resemblance to World War III than to

World War II. But it also carried novel features with which containment had not been designed to cope. Out of these twin understandings, Bush promulgated his own doctrine, and out of that doctrine came the new military strategy of preemption and the new political strategy of democratization.

SO FAR as the implementation of this new strategy goes, it is still early days—roughly comparable to 1952 in the history of the Truman Doctrine. As with the Truman Doctrine then, the Bush Doctrine has thus far acted only in the first few scenes of the first act of a five-act play. Like the Truman Doctrine, too, its performance has received very bad reviews. Yet we now know that the Truman Doctrine, despite being attacked by its Republican opponents as the "College of Cowardly Containment," was adopted by them when they took power behind Dwight D. Eisenhower. We also know now that, after many ups and downs and following a period of retreat in the 1970's, the policy of containment was updated and reinvigorated in the 1980's by Ronald Reagan (albeit without admitting that this was what he was doing). And we now know as well that it was by thus building on the sound foundation laid by the Truman Doctrine that Reagan delivered on its original promise.

It is my contention that the Bush Doctrine is no more dead today than the Truman Doctrine was cowardly in its own early career. Bolstered by that analogy, I feel safe in predicting that, like the Truman Doctrine in 1952, the Bush Doctrine will prove irreversible by the time its author leaves the White House in 2008. And encouraged by the precedent of Ronald Reagan, I feel almost as confident in predicting that, three or four decades into the future, and after the inevitable missteps and reversals, there will come a President who, like Reagan in relation to Truman in World War III, will bring World War IV to a victorious end by building on the noble doctrine that George W. Bush promulgated when that war first began.

—August 7, 2006

⁸ George F. Kennan, for example, estimated that winning it would take fifteen years (as against the four of World War I and the six of World War II). Instead it went on for 42.