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Navigation

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Home

Stepping Back From Imperialism: Redirecting American Foreign Policy

by Senator Mike Gravel

The United States is the largest economic unit in the world. Responsible stewardship of our economy requires that we maintain our superpower status, not only in terms of military capability, but in equally important areas such as the strength and solvency of our economy, the educational and physical health of our population, and a firm commitment to our moral principles and spiritual values. Strength in all these areas is vital to maintain our superpower status.

Unfortunately, we fail in most areas, even though our political leadership consistently--particularly presidential candidates -- boasts of America's exceptionalism by repeatedly declaring that we are the greatest nation on earth. "We're No.1," they say. Such extreme boastfulness from an individual would seem aberrant; the same psychological judgment applies to nations. Aberrant behavior in an individual or in an organized group of individuals clouds their perception of reality.

No. 1? Hardly! In most important categories, the United States is not even in the top 10 anymore. Not even close. Data from 2004 shows that:

In **education**, the United States ranks 49 in literacy, and 28 out of 40 developed countries in mathematical literacy. Europe surpassed us a decade ago as the largest producer of scientific literature. Yet in 2004 Congress cut funds to the National Science Foundation, resulting in the issuance of 1000 fewer research grants. Foreign applications to American graduate schools declined 28%, while increasing substantially in Europe. Graduate school students from China dropped 56%, from India 51%, and from South Korea 28%. However, the most devastating statistic for our nation's future is the fact that 30% of America's children do not finish high school.

We fare no better with **healthcare**. The World Health Organization ranked the U.S. 37 for overall health performance and 54 for healthcare fairness. Yet the United

States spends more per capita for healthcare than any other nation in the world. The U.S. and South Africa are the only two developed nations in the world that do not provide healthcare for all their citizens. The U.S. now ranks 22 in childhood poverty, or second to last among developed nations; only Mexico ranks lower. The United States is 41st in the world for infant mortality; Cuba scores higher. Women are 70% more likely to die in childbirth in America than in Europe.

Even the **economic arena** has problems. In the 1980s the U.S. ranked last in the growth rate of total compensation to its workforce among the 20 most developed countries in the world. In the 1990s the U.S. average compensation grew only slightly, at an annual rate of about 0.1%. Of the Global Fortune 500 companies, 61 of the 140 biggest companies are European, while only 50 are American. Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea hold 40% of our government debt as of June 2004.

The reality is, the United States is No. 1 only in weaponry, consumer spending, government and personal debt, in the number of people we have in prison and, I would say, in delusion.

Those who seek national leadership positions must tell Americans the truth. Americans can handle the truth. Having reliable information is the only way to dispel the fear-based culture that our leaders have drugged us with for the last 60 years, concealing reality.

We are a moral and fair-minded people. As a nation, we must put aside our arrogance and demand that our leaders work together with other nations and peoples, treating them as equals. There is no other way to reverse the environmental threat of global warming, a threat more real than nuclear proliferation. In the global village, the United States produces the most pollution and supplies the largest amount of weaponry, facts that our leadership ignores. We have a failure of leadership--a leadership that fails to face reality.

Defense and foreign policy are totally intertwined.

Politicians are averse to dealing critically with the military establishment and our defense policies for fear of having their patriotism questioned. We should be guided by President Eisenhower's warning that an inordinate emphasis on military

power breeds a culture of militarism that threatens other vital areas of our society; and that eventually, an inordinate emphasis on military power will guarantee our collapse as a great nation and as a democracy. Unfortunately, no president since Dwight Eisenhower has even dared to acknowledge the problem.

Political leaders continually cast our self-proclaimed global leadership in triumphal moral terms in order to affirm a responsibility to bring freedom and liberty to the peoples of the world--but typically only if our economic interests are involved.

The U.S. as the mightiest nation in the world claims the right to police the world, but the cost of this declared right is a bloated defense budget and a defense industry that knows no limits. Our militarized economy is both a direct cost to American taxpayers and an indirect cost in the loss of funding for education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Some around the world are beginning to ask: who polices the policeman?

Consider the triumphalism in the American version of the end of the Cold War. We boast that America "won" the Cold War; of course, we do this with selective memory about the human cost--collateral damage--we caused by destabilizing the governments of the Congo, Iran, Lebanon, Chile, Vietnam and a number of Central American nations--none of which threatened our security. To claim that we "won" the Cold War implies that we knew what was going on in the Soviet Union at the time. In fact, our political leadership was busy revving up our military expenditures in response to the exaggerated threat of the Soviet Union. All the while, the Soviet Union was actually experiencing a political and social meltdown. Our leaders and our intelligence community were clueless.

The Cold War was not "won" by anybody. The Soviet Union experienced the final implosion of a bankrupt economic theory that had been maintained by tyranny for 70 years, inflicting untold pain and suffering on an unfortunate people. If credit is to be bestowed on individuals, then the lion's share of the credit for ending the Cold War must go to Mikhail Gorbachev. The Polish Solidarity movement and the Pope deserve credit, and to a much lesser extent, Ronald Reagan, who observed Gorbachev's initiatives without aggressive interference.

President Reagan could have done more, but our hawks didn't believe that the Soviet Union was coming apart; they thought it was a ruse.

This is but one example of how we treat and conduct our foreign relations with other countries and color our history, thus enhancing our national delusion. But worse, this phony triumphalism stirs up our jingoistic emotions. As a result, national hubris requires that our leaders always assert the primacy of our national interests above other nations; in many cases, these interests trump morality. Granted, most nations have arrogant beliefs. Unfortunately, the structure of nation-states, without superior global authority or without national leadership committed to maintaining an informed constituency, mandates a culture of selfishness.

The preeminent threat in the affairs of nations is nuclear proliferation. The self-appointed leadership role the United States attempts to play is in many respects counterproductive. Threats of force merely accelerate nuclear proliferation. Sanctions are even less effective. Our present dilemma with North Korea and Iran, where we have had sanctions for more than 50 years and 26 years respectively, demonstrates the futility of this policy.

Sanctions do not work; they merely punish the innocent and strengthen the power of political leaders and tyrants, who are then able to deflect attention from domestic failures to a hatred of the sanctioners. In most cases, sanctions are immoral, as demonstrated by the decade-long sanctions against Iraq, costing the lives of more than 500,000 children for lack of medicine, and due to bad water and inadequate healthcare. This loss of innocent life was rationalized as "collateral damage." I doubt Saddam Hussein missed a meal while our sanctions crippled their economy.

Again, selective amnesia confuses our foreign policy. We forget the reasons why we and the four other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council--the original nuclear club--have nuclear devices. We have nukes in order to deter our enemies from attacking us. Nukes are considered a deterrence. Obviously, the right to deter one's enemies is the right of all nations. We must distinguish between nuclear deterrence and nuclear aggression. To my knowledge, no

nation has ever threatened the U.S. with nuclear aggression. I cannot say the same for the U.S.: our government has never disavowed a nuclear first-strike policy.

Nuclear proliferation problems go back to our first uses of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the Second World War, we played a charade with the Soviet Union over control of the nuclear genie. This was followed by the one-upsmanship of atomic and hydrogen bomb detonations by both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

Great Britain, with our help, quickly developed their own nuclear program. We were not so accommodating with the French. Our leaders were very critical of President de Gaulle's nuclear "Force de Frappe" at the time. The acrimony between us rose to such a level that de Gaulle kicked NATO out of France.

It may be difficult to accept, but it is entirely rational for the Soviet Union and China to view their nuclear capability as deterrence to a possible first-strike by the U.S.

Is deterrence necessary for our enemies? They think so! A number of American officials called for first strikes against the Soviet Union when we had a nuclear monopoly. Several American presidents have made nuclear threats to the Soviet Union, China, North Vietnam and North Korea. A nuclear first-strike against the Soviet Union was always on the table and discussed openly by General Curtis LeMay and other military leaders during the Cold War. It was such common knowledge that several movies were made about the subject.

The United States had nuclear bombs and nuclear artillery stationed in South Korea until 1991. The Pentagon's Global Strike plans, including CONPLAN 8022, refers to first-strike possibilities against Iran and North Korea. Just recently military and CIA officers leaked plans to use nukes to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities before they could build a bomb. These quiet patriots leaked the plans to the public in hopes of thwarting the Bush Administration's next pre-emptive war. We are still spending taxpayer dollars trying to destabilize the regimes of North Korea and Iran. These plans may be secret from the American people, but they're not secret from those regimes the President demonizes as "evil."

The nuclear arms race was the central issue of the Cold War, with the proliferation of nuclear devices on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The competition escalated: there existed enough nuclear devices to destroy the planet a thousand times over. This policy was aptly termed "mutual assured destruction"--MAD. This supposedly-rational policy actually assured both sides that there would be no victor in a thermal nuclear war.

The logic of MAD was not lost on observers around the world. If a nation felt threatened by a superior force, it had no choice--if it could afford the price--but to acquire a nuclear capability. Israel, India and Pakistan developed their nuclear capability in secret, failing to acknowledge or sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Both North Korea and Iran are signators, but abrogated their continued commitment to the treaty, as is their right under international law, when we threatened force and increased sanctions.

Calling these countries "evil" and threatening them only reinforces their efforts to acquire a nuclear capability. They need nukes as a deterrence, which is the same logic that we have used for having nukes since the Second World War. There is no way, short of outright invasion--a preemptive war like Iraq--that will discourage these nations from becoming nuclear powers. To undertake a war to limit nuclear proliferation will not guarantee non-proliferation, but it could lead to a major and possibly global nuclear war.

Americans tend to forget certain events, even in recent history. In 1953 the United States criminally brought about a regime change in Iran because of oil, snuffing out Iran's burgeoning democracy and imposing a monarch. A grateful Shah bought our expensive weapons, thereby "laundering" our petrodollars. We may have forgotten our role in destroying their democracy, but the Iranians haven't. And nor would we in a similar situation.

A generation later, Iranians revolted against the Shah and installed religious extremists. At the time of the Shah's overthrow, our embassy employees in Tehran accidentally became the hostages of students, and later of the government, for more than a year--to our utter global embarrassment. After the American hostages' release, timed

mischievously to affect a presidential election, we proceeded to sanction Iran while at the same time illegally trading arms with them in a scandal known as Reagan's Irangate.

Our "Axis of Evil" enemies remember episodes in our history that Americans have long forgotten. Remember when a number of American military leaders publicly advocated a nuclear first-strike against the Soviet Union? Remember when President Nixon and Henry Kissinger employed the "Crazy Richard" strategy to intimidate North Vietnam? -- only to have the nuclear hair-trigger exercise effectively aim at the Soviet Union. Thank God, the Soviet leadership was sane enough not to react to this extreme provocation of a possible nuclear first-strike.

There are a number of examples where the sanity of our leaders can be questioned, just as we question the sanity of those "evil leaders" who now want nuclear deterrence. Just the fact that we spend more on defense than all of the rest of the world put together begs the question: why? Are we really intent on establishing an economic and cultural hegemony under the umbrella of our military might? Or are we Americans really that paranoid?

The critical problem with nuclear proliferation is that more and more nuclear bombs are added to the world's stockpile. There are already too many nuclear devices on earth today--regardless of who owns them. Americans must address this underlying problem, and we are in an advantageous position to do so--if we are prepared to chart a rational foreign policy.

With the end of the Cold War, the U.S. and Russia cautiously reduced their stockpiles. The Global Threat Reduction Initiative, funded by Congress, is destroying nuclear devices in the successor states of the Soviet Union. This vital initiative should be accelerated as our nation's top priority; it's the best opportunity we have to deny terrorists a nuclear bomb. These poorly-protected sites remain the best source for terrorists to obtain nukes, some of which are the size of a suitcase.

Paul Nitze, a highly regarded official in several presidential administrations, was one of the foremost architects of our national nuclear buildup. Shortly before his death, he questioned the need for maintaining thousands of nuclear

devices because there were no targets for them to be legitimately used against. He even pointed out that if we were nuked by terrorists, we would still not have viable targets upon which to unleash our nuclear arsenal. Even the Pentagon identifies only 115 of what they consider "real-world targets."

Recently, two former Secretaries of Defense suggested that we should stock our Trident submarines with conventional missile warheads for half their payload. Currently the payload is 100% nuclear. Just one Trident submarine could hold the world hostage. Let me repeat that: just one Trident submarine could hold the world hostage. We have nine of them on duty, roaming the oceans of the world. Additionally, the Bush Administration is building new, lower-yield nukes for conventional use that could spur a new arms race.

If we are to reverse the direction of nuclear proliferation, we must do something dramatic on our own, yet something that does not threaten our national security. I propose we cut the number of our nuclear devices from the more than 10,000 we have to a couple hundred. Such a unilateral action would establish the United States' credibility to then ask other nations, including our so-called "enemies," who would then feel less threatened, to join our efforts in ridding the world of unneeded and dangerous nukes. This would set the stage for us to convene a global conference to write a new nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

My proposal may appear radical and politically dangerous for a presidential candidate. I think not. After all, I am only trying to jumpstart what was agreed to in Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1970 and extended in 1995 by all five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council. The five permanent members of the Security (the U.S., Russia, China, Great Britain, and France) agreed to reduce and eventually eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

Though nuclear proliferation is far and away the most significant problem the world faces, there are several others that must be addressed for an effective American foreign policy.

The **Iraq war** commands our immediate attention. Iraq's nuclear threat, fraudulently presented to the American public by the Bush Administration, was designed to frighten us into

accepting a pre-emptive war. It worked. This colossal mistake is a replay of our Vietnam experience. "The best and the brightest" on the political Left led us into the swamps of Vietnam; "the neocons" on the political Right led us into the deserts of Iraq. Both are major stains on America's honor.

We need to acknowledge the mistake made by a messianic President. We need to take our troops out of Iraq immediately, and move aggressively toward a diplomatic solution to the dangerous situation the United States created. Once our troops are out of harm's way, we can focus our diplomacy on bringing the United Nations, the European and Asian communities, and regional players like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Israel into a process to help end the civil war in Iraq and establish stability in the region.

Some Democrats in Congress are pushing to set a date-certain for withdrawal. Let's use July 2007 as that date. This is cosmetic to look politically reasonable. We heard these same political nostrums about getting out of Vietnam. What will these leaders tell the parents, wives, husbands and children of soldiers killed during the months prior to July? The civil war will continue regardless of when we leave. That's the tragedy that was set in motion on October 11, 2002.

There are Americans who say that by leaving Iraq, we would be saying that our soldiers died in vain. But the only thing worse than soldiers dying in vain, is more soldiers dying in vain. The longer our presence sustains the violence, the more innocent civilians will die as well.

A number of generals, serving and retired, attribute our failure in Iraq to the incompetent prosecution of the war by the Pentagon. That argument is as specious now as it was when it was made by our military in Vietnam--"we could have won, but..." There is no "but." There is no competent way to correctly make a mistake. This pre-emptive war in Iraq is a mistake--period!

The inability of Americans to accept the guilt of the mistake of Vietnam--that so many soldiers died in vain--denies the nation the catharsis that would help alleviate the anguish and pain of our veterans, who only did their patriotic duty as they saw it. Let's hope the nation learns from that experience and owns up to the mistake of Iraq for the sake of our returning

veterans.

The linchpin to long-term stability in the Middle East is the settlement of the **Israeli-Palestinian impasse**. The U.S., along with its European and Asian allies, and regional players (to include Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Jordan under the auspices of the United Nations) must sponsor direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, including Hamas. The negotiations, with the goal of a two-state solution, must be scheduled as soon as possible. Sponsoring nations and organizations would guarantee the demilitarized borders of both parties, would guarantee Israel's right to survive and thrive, and would make a commitment to the Palestinians to raise their economic standards to that of Israel. An accomplishment of this magnitude would go a long way to defusing the radical Islamic confrontation with the West. For that reason alone, Americans must be prepared to spend whatever political capital is required to bring peace to the region.

Energy and environment are two sides of the same coin. But it is a global problem, not just an American problem. The U.S. should immediately sign the Kyoto protocol and seek its ratification by the Senate. This would be the beginning of our diplomatic efforts to work with China and India and all developing countries to address the pollution problems attendant to economic growth. Carbon energy should be taxed to provide the funding for a global effort led by the United States, with willing allies, to bring together the world's scientific and engineering communities to develop energy alternatives to significantly reduce the world's energy dependence on carbon.

Solving the Israeli- Palestinian problem and the energy problem will set the stage to crush **terrorism**, its advocates and its financiers. Characterizing the effort to control terrorism as a "war" is grossly misleading and leads us to believe that the only solution is a military one. It promotes a never-ending culture of war. A "war" on terror will be no more successful than the "war" on drugs, or the "war" on poverty.

Terrorism is fought best by thoughtful, honest intelligence and dogged police work, and by building economic opportunities for those who feel hopeless. The U.S. should lead an effort of

willing nations to create a global intelligence institution and a global police organization, similar to NATO. Terrorism is a global problem that requires a coordinated global response, not just with intelligence and police work, but with creative economic and humanitarian programs.

America has the respect of people the world over, not for our military might, but for our ability to implement our democratic ideals. I believe we can have a firm defense against the challenges our nation faces without building our country on a foundation of fear.

We have the opportunity to raise our democratic ideals to new heights by enacting legislation--**the National Initiative**--that will bring American voters into the operations of government as lawmakers. American voters could empower themselves to legislate on policies that affect their lives, in a partnership with their elected officials. The enactment of the National Initiative by American voters would forever change the paradigm of human governance, adding a new check--We, the People--to our system of Checks and Balances. Once again, the United States would become the arsenal of democratic ideas that will be emulated around the world. To learn more about the National Initiative please go to: www.nationalinitiative.us

In closing, I paraphrase another prescient statement by President Eisenhower: Someday the American people will want peace so badly that they will push the government aside and just seize it. Empowering Americans as lawmakers will make that possibility a reality.

Delivered on November 1, 2006 at the New Hampshire Politics Institute, St. Anselms College, Manchester, New Hampshire

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Dear Senator Gravel

Submitted by larryau on Mon, 2007-04-30 01:46.

Dear Senator Gravel,

I agree whole-heartedly with basically everthing that you had to say - especially on how the US should act as the world's (only) superpower: responsibly. I fully believe that what you have to offer to America... and to the world, is what it needs most desperately right now.

Regards,

Larry Au

<http://plubius.wordpress.com> wants Gravel for President!

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