



## Where is the US Heading?<sup>±</sup>

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*In the US elections of November 2004 George Bush won by 3,6 million votes, unlike in 2000 when he lost the popular vote by 500 000 votes. Bush received the greatest number of votes by a president in the history of the United States of America; but he also received the greatest number of votes ever against a presidential candidate. This election ratifies the style of government of the last four years, and it signifies that the American people are responsible for the country having to suffer George Bush and his extreme right-wing agenda for another four years. In this text the author weighs the result of the elections and its possible impact on US foreign policy.*

During the last three years and also throughout the election campaign Bush's government has masterfully manipulated the fear of terrorism and the question of national security. This strategy generally favors the Republicans, seen by the public as the strongest party in terms of defense and military preparation. The real success lies in the fact they managed to make people forget or at least not take into account the failures in foreign policy and in the supposed "war against terrorism." Furthermore they played the moral card right in terms of issues like, abortion, stem cells experiments and homosexual marriage, which attract the large conservative population.

One factor which favors Bush and against which the democrats cannot compete, is the religious fervor surrounding these moral issues. The conservative evangelists represent one in five voters and around 40% of the base of George Bush's political support. The religious right counteracted youth opinion (Kerry got 15% more of the young people's vote than Bush). Indeed 60% of Bush's voters stated that they go to church once a week, WHILE 39% of those who voted for Kerry claimed to do so. Another factor not to be underestimated is ignorance: according to polls 40% of the country thinks Saddam Hussein was responsible for September 11, and approximately 20% believe there will be an end to the world relatively soon. Bush's followers forgave or forgot that the economy was not doing well, that the cuts in taxes have not helped most people and that the war in Iraq has been a disaster. But 22% of the population maintained that what matters are "moral values." Recently one family man from the mid-west admitted in *The New York Times* that he knew George Bush's re-election would not be economically advantageous to him and his family, but that he voted for Bush because "I can not stand the democrats position on unborns"<sup>1</sup>

The country is divided. In this sense, Ignacio Sotelo maintains, "the contrast between a US which is liberal, progressive, that has put itself at the forefront of science, faithful to the spirit of the enlightenment that inspired the first republic of modern times; and one which is capable of voting for Bush, and this is enough to define it." This polarization is reminiscent of the period during the Vietnam War. The difference is that in the late Sixties

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<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, 19 September 2004, p. A-1.

and Seventies the only thing dividing the country was the war. Now, meanwhile, there are several issues, both internal (such as moral questions related to abortion or homosexual rights) and of foreign policy, over which there is sharp confrontation. The thing that reveals the acuteness of this opposition is the fact that each side sees the other as immoral. Various observers have concluded that the extreme right, which since the elections possesses so much power, wants not simply to defeat the democrats but rather to eliminate them as a political rival so as to establish a one-party state. Possibly only a disaster, be it economic or of foreign policy, could open the eyes of some of Bush's followers and shift the political balance in favor of the democrats.

### Home policy

In terms of national policy, two things are being speculated concerning the second mandate of Bush's government. On the one hand, the handsome victory obtained by Bush in the last election will give him sufficient confidence and a golden opportunity to present himself as the country's unifier and not the hard-line spokesman of the Jurassic American right completely indifferent to a search for consensus on his domestic political agenda, as he demonstrated in his first term. In the 2000 campaign he promised to play this role but it never happened. Furthermore since he can not be re-elected in 2008, no longer is there the necessity for him to consent to the evangelist fundamentalists to assure their vote. On the other hand, given his very conservative personal preferences, his obstinate temperament and his belief that he achieved an overwhelming triumph (and of course with the blessing of God), he sees no real limits to pursuing a social program based on the morals of the most extremist elements in his party and looking back.

Although Bush spoke in conciliatory terms and implied he would resolve the country's divisions, his attitude in press conference after hearing the election results was notably more defiant. "In these elections I have gained political capital, and I now have all the intention to spend it on what I told people I would spend it on." By his temperament, religious convictions and now, in gratitude to evangelist and conservative voters, Bush is likely to attempt to fulfill the socio-moral agenda of the secular extreme-right and the Evangelist Christians.

### Foreign Policy

The US's international perspective in 2004 is very different to the scenario dreamt of after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. The global peace longed for at the end of the Cold War has vanished only to be replaced by war, and terrorism has substituted communism as the main enemy.

Certain aspects of foreign policy will not change during Bush's second mandate. The US president's personality is one of certainties; he is the enemy of doubt and self-criticism. His inspiration for making decision comes from God himself. For him nuancing one's position based on new contingencies or ideas is equivalent to hesitation and weakness. These characteristics make it difficult for one to consider Bush capable of significantly changing the previous direction of his policies, characterized largely by his authoritarianism and concealment. For electoral aims, the effectiveness of a policy based on fear and the exploitation of terrorism and national security has been proven.

Therefore certain presumptions can be expected to continue in force: an idealism backed up by hegemonic thinking and based on faith and on the *realpolitik* of the neo-conservatives. The belief that we live in a black and white world where a Hobbesian battle between good and evil is taking place, and that the US's role is as champion of freedom and world democracy. Practical aspects of foreign policy, such as the militarization since September 11, can continue almost automatically considering the trajectory of the present budget, the disastrous conditions in Iraq and the previously cited tendencies in the Government's attitudes.

Furthermore, those responsible, not only for the general direction of his foreign policy but also for the errors and setbacks, will remain in their posts. George Bush, as he himself has declared, is almost incapable of sacking loyal members of his team when they commit errors. Examples of this are Condoleezza Rice, National Security Minister, WITH respect to the BOGUS information on the basis of which the US invaded Iraq; and Donald Rumsfeld, Defense

Secretary, for his role in the torture scandals in Abu Graib, Guantanamo and other places. Bush, it will be remembered, defended them for being "magnificent people" who were doing a "superb job".

Neither is it expected that this government will modify in any serious way its unilateralist positions with regard to the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court. In his first press conference Bush again emphasized his country's mission as liberator stating: "there is an opinion among some people who say it is a waste of time to try to promote free societies in certain parts of the world."<sup>2</sup> The military unilateralism adopted over the last three years still has no strong curb in Europe, partly because it does not want to assume the military load necessary at the moment. As the ex French Foreign Minister, De Villepin once said "if one wants to control force, one must possess force oneself."<sup>3</sup>

However it is unlikely that Bush, bogged down with Iraq, will carry out any similar "ventures". The chaos in Iraq and the Treasury's enormous deficit impose conditions and limits in the margin of action of the new Bush Administration. For these reasons one can expect a greater caution in foreign policy, while a lot of energy and determination will be dedicated to promoting the extreme-right agenda in domestic issues and in relation to the socio-moral controversies.

Unilateralism (and the idea that multilateralism is a sign of weakness) has created problems for Washington which will at least make the Executive rethink which measures to take with respect to military issues. It is obvious that in the long term the big problems of Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and terrorism will not be resolved without European cooperation. Nor will the concern about North Korea disappear without help from countries in that region. The previous unilateralism is therefore unsustainable. As Michel Barnier, French Foreign Minister said, "North Americans cannot construct, encourage and manage the world all by themselves."

Furthermore previous foreign policy has resulted in Washington losing the support of many of its allies, and has weakened its credibility in the rest of the world. At the same time, in deciding to unilaterally invade Iraq, they increased their vulnerability both inside and outside the US. They used resources, personnel and attention which could have been dedicated to more serious nuclear threats such as Iran and North Korea, to the search for Al Qaeda in Pakistan, now an ally, and to developing a real system of protecting internal security.

## Iraq

Iraq has probably been the culminating point in the authoritarian and unilateralist tendencies of the Bush Administration. It is the image and expression of his concept of "war against terrorism", with all its distortions. The war which the right expected to win in three weeks, is not only still continuing one and a half years later, but it is also becoming more and more destructive in terms of lives, infrastructure and resources and, in the last extreme, for Washington's own political goals. Things have deteriorated so badly that *The New York Times* recently reported that a reserve unit of the United States military had refused to hand over a dispatch of fuel to Taji, north of Baghdad, because they considered it a "suicide mission". In October 2004, the ex director of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), George Tenet, admitted that the war in Iraq had been an error. But Bush, like Kerry as candidate in the campaign, had NO adequate plan for solving the security problem within the country and preparing a withdrawal of American troops.

All the public justifications for the war in Iraq by George Bush have vanished, weapons of mass destruction, connections with Al Qaeda and September 11, or the imminent threat to US national security. In view of the military and political setbacks on the horizon, the liberation of Iraqis from the chains of tyranny can also be considered questionable. And to recover the credibility OF the American Government and its Armed Forces after September 11, is becoming more and more improbable given the deteriorating situation in Iraq. But the neo-conservatives who devised the project are still holding on tight to their geopolitical justifications (which are a much less well known) that were behind the otherwise inexplicable

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<sup>2</sup> *El País*, 5 November 2004, p.10.

<sup>3</sup> *US Today*, 5 November 2004, p.11 A.

precipitation towards war: to use Iraq as a departure point for politically reconfiguring the Middle East in order to make it more compatible with Western political goals.

## Iran

Washington's policies have not been very coherent and in the midst of the disastrous occupation of Iraq is emerging an Iran which is feeling stronger and could look for the opportunity to use this strength. The present situation is favorable for Iran to adopt a more energetic international posture. Some of these factors are of a structural nature, like its petrol reserves and its influence on the Shiite majority in Iraq. Others are circumstantial factors: firstly, the Taliban, fundamentalist rivals of Iran's religious leaders, have been eliminated in Afghanistan. Secondly, Iraq, its rival in the Persian Gulf, is now a State without leaders and in disintegration. Thirdly, in view of what happened in Iraq, Iran may have come to the conclusion that not having nuclear weapons is more dangerous for its security than having them. With the US trapped in an occupation of Iraq that is becoming more and more unpopular and violent, Iran can defend the advancement of its nuclear program.

Its nuclear ambitions and flirtation with an escalating weapons program have converted Iran into a serious regional power to be reckoned with. There is another reason for considering it more dangerous than Saddam's non-nuclear Iraq: internally it is less stable and its international conduct could be less predictable. According to many observers, the hostile politics and unsubtle diplomatic threats of the US in the context of Iraq, forebodes another grave error by the US with respect to paying enough attention to Iran and making its threats credible.

American observers are beginning to agree that Bush's government did not capitalize on the diplomatic opening after September 11, when Iran not only backed many aspects of America's war on terrorism, including the overthrowing of the Taliban regime, but also the moderates were on the up. Four months later, when Bush included the country in his "axis of evil", he weakened the reformists (with consequences that can be observed today) and destroyed all hope of rebuilding diplomatic relations between Iran and the US. Today, U.S. neo-conservatives still maintain the strategy of regime change in Iran but their tactics and instruments are more limited than two years ago.

The experience of establishing control in Iraq, by far the weakest of the three States of the "axis of evil", should give food for thought to anyone aspiring to plan future Pentagon military operations. Furthermore, given the results in Iraq and the evidence that the societies of the allied countries Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and also an unstable Afghanistan, may represent a greater threat in the proliferating of world terrorism, it would now be more difficult to convince American public opinion that attacking these countries would help the fight against terrorism. If a year and a half ago the possibility of applying the doctrine of a preemptive attack to Iran and North Korea (the third member of the "axis of evil") in the immediate future was a remote one, it is now unthinkable given this change in circumstances.

## Israel

Israel is worried that the US is now bogged down in Iraq and is not giving enough attention to the rest of the problems in the region from Iran and Syria to the inextricable problem between Israel and Palestine. The deteriorating situation in Iraq and Iran's new regional influence has made Israel reconsider its enthusiasm for the invasion and the elimination of its old enemy Saddam Hussein. Many believe that one nightmare has been replaced by another. In the present instability of the Middle East a large number of Israelis consider Iran, with its radical Islamic politics and its longstanding dedication to the destruction of the Jewish State and the exportation of the "holy war", a dark and growing threat possibly worse than that which Iraq posed. Israel's security will surely be an important factor in any decision by Washington to withdraw troops from Iraq. Meanwhile, no change is expected in US policy towards Sharon's Government which in general, has consisted solely of not restraining the hard-handed politics used with the Palestinians.

## North Korea

The North Korean nuclear weapons crisis is a real military problem for the US, in contrast with Iraq, which was not a problem but has now been converted into the main one. In the last two years the Pyong-yang regime has revealed the existence of a program of enrichment of Uranium, which had remained secret. It also made preparations for reopening a nuclear reactor plant in Yongbyon in order to extract plutonium. In doing so the Treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other agreements with the US were violated. Experts estimate that at present they may possess eight nuclear bombs.

In spite of its obstinate rhetoric about the need to punish the possession of weapons of mass destruction, Washington's tactic is to put off negotiation with Kim Jong Il's regime. The U.S. has more than a hundred military bases 40000 troops (although the numbers are being drawn down to supplement forces needed in Iraq) at their disposal in South Korea. But this latter country is probably the democracy whose population has the strongest anti-American feeling in the world. Bush's Government has rejected simultaneous concessions, the South Korean Government's "Sunshine Policy," and a bilateral diplomacy in favor of six sided negotiations and first concessions to be made by North Korea. TIME is not on America's side: while as it ticks away North Korea is advancing its nuclear program.

### **Latin America: Colombia**

In Latin America the emphasis on military solutions and relations between armies are growing. This tendency is not expected to change in direction in the near future. In the last three years counter-terrorism has played the same central role, for relations between the US and the rest of the continent, as did anti-communism during the Cold War. Immediately after September 11 for example, the Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Colombia and declared that it no longer made any sense to continue maintaining the fight against drugs in Colombia separate from the fight against terrorism because as they are both threats to democracy, drug-dealers and terrorists are connected. Later, these limits were officially lifted, and American aid can now be used indistinctly for the anti-drug war and the battle against insurgents.

### **An Outline of a new foreign policy**

The US Budget is slanted towards military operations, but in countries with big socioeconomic problems aid is scarce and little attention is paid. This causes frustration, anxiety and terrorism in developing regions. The collateral damage from Washington's military unilateralism, a shoddy diplomacy and a militaristic foreign policy are reflected in an historic spreading of anti-Americanism far and wide across the planet, and an unprecedented antagonism towards the US from foreign leaders and the mass media. These repercussions, plus the actual costs for the US in blood and resources, are still to be calculated.

The US needs to focus again on the aspect of war that concerns nuclear weapons, specifically in countries violating the treaties on the non proliferation of nuclear weapons like Iran, Pakistan and North Korea. In the last year this threat has become more dangerous than Al Qaeda, on the one hand because US policy has created a sense of urgency among non allied countries, and on the other hand because it gave opportunities for these regimes thanks to the shift in attention and resources to Iraq.

It is therefore necessary to embark on a new foreign policy based not only on international policing and political cooperation, but also on development aid. A sophisticated economic program which attacks poverty, population displacement and alienation would help slow the growth of terrorism and fundamentalist fanaticism in the Muslim world. The US must rethink its supporting of some countries with authoritarian Muslim regimes; it must also help promote freer and more democratic policies in the Arab world. This would involve a new policy of cooperation with Europe and a strengthening of common values. In this way the US would gain credibility as an honest intermediary in a region where at the moment its presence is ill-fated, it is a hindrance to a negotiated solution to the problems in the Arab world and it is an absent member with regard to global socioeconomic problems.