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A Checklist on Vital National Issues

## **Ten Principles of a Conservative Foreign Policy**

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*By Burton Yale Pines*



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# TEN PRINCIPLES OF A CONSERVATIVE FOREIGN POLICY

By Burton Yale Pines

The American-led victory in the Persian Gulf was more than a military victory. It was a triumph of America's determination to punish an international aggressor.

But for all that, it was also a policy conducted *ad hoc*. It lacked, for the most part, a clear or convincing statement of what part the massive American response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait plays in America's emerging role in the post-Cold War world. Thus our victory in the Gulf gives us little guidance on how American foreign policy should be conducted elsewhere. And this lack of guidance is what permits the pathetic fumbling of U.S. policy in Iraq in the weeks since the military triumph.

The problem with *ad hoc* foreign policy is not that it guarantees unwise actions. The problem is that without the guidance of underlying principles, it is a lottery, depending for its success on lucky gut instincts, lucky timing and other good fortune — particularly the good fortune of public support.

This was not changed by the war in the Gulf, for despite the heroism and sacrifices and fine generalship, the war offered little guidance for future American responses to international trouble. To the contrary, the Bush Administration's Gulf actions may set the dangerous precedents of requiring United Nations approval for American actions abroad and of America continuing to bear most of the burden in lives and money for actions that mainly benefit nations (as Japan and those in Western Europe) that can well afford to contribute more.

Instead of operating *ad hoc*, George Bush must construct a coherent foreign policy that wins American public support. It must state what the United States needs and seeks from the world and what actions are required for this.

Public support for foreign policy is not something mobilized afresh for each foreign adventure, as it was for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Rather, public support is a reservoir from which Washington can draw. It is created by coaxing and nurturing public understanding of American foreign policy's broad outlines and goals. By 1947, for example, Americans understood that Moscow had become a global threat which the United States had to counter. Americans then were ready to back Truman's unprecedented emergency aid to Greece and Turkey and America's unprecedented membership in NATO. The same

understanding allowed the United States throughout the Cold War to aid scores of nations, fight in Korea and Vietnam, and help Third World anticommunist freedom fighters.

Successive administrations engaged the nation abroad in a way that was understood by the public as being, by and large, a piece of a broad, coherent policy of waging the Cold War. To simplify greatly, this policy assumed that what hurt Moscow was good; what helped Moscow was bad; power vacuums were dangerous because Moscow would fill them; and unattached Third World countries had to be wooed (with aid or weapons or both) before they were lured into the Moscow camp.

This Cold War, at least as it was known for four decades, is now over, although Washington-Moscow tensions remain and could grow. What America needs now, and what the Bush Administration has yet to offer, is a new, coherent American foreign policy, capable of winning long-term popular backing.

Such a policy can be built on ten conservative principles.

## **PRINCIPLE #1: FOREIGN POLICY IS DOMESTIC POLICY**

This does not mean that domestic politics should drive foreign policy. It does mean that the sole reason for expending American lives and other resources in dealing with nations is to secure and improve the lives of the American people. As such, foreign policy is not an end in itself. Nor is it an excuse for crusades or for missionary expeditions, as virtuous as conducting these may make some Americans feel. Advised John Foster Dulles in 1958: "There is nothing mysterious about the goals of United States foreign policy. It seeks to defend and advance the interests of the United States."

These interests are advanced only by measures creating a global environment in which Americans gain the greatest possible degree of liberty, freedom and opportunity. Policies failing to serve these purposes are not in the national interest.

## **PRINCIPLE #2: MORALITY IS NOT THE GOAL OF FOREIGN POLICY**

Advancing human rights or advancing democracy are not, by themselves, legitimate foreign policy goals unless these actions directly protect Americans from threats or directly advance American interests. If they do not, it is unjust for Washington to tax Americans or put American lives at risk in pursuit of such policies. Typically, of course, human rights and morality are advanced around the globe as the happy by-product of specific American policies.

But advancing human rights and morality should not be the reason for the policy. At the times when they have been, they have fathered disaster. Jimmy Carter's disregard for American interests in Iran and his obsession with human rights, for instance, undercut the Shah and opened the door for the repressive ayatollahs. Similar Carter policies allowed the Sandinistas to take over Nicaragua.

By contrast, a wise appreciation of national interests allowed Washington warmly to support Chile, Indonesia, South Korea and Taiwan despite their authoritarian and at times even harsh regimes.

Relegating human rights and morality to minor goals does not prevent America from rhetorically championing them nor even from supporting them with token grants from the National Endowment for Democracy or similar government agencies. Nor, of course, does this prevent individuals, churches, corporations and voluntary organizations from crusading for democracy and human rights in Burma, China, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the host of other repressive lands. Nor, most important, does it dim the beacon of the American model. Said Dulles: America shows "men everywhere the way to a better and more abundant life." It was this that Ronald Reagan had in mind when he repeatedly reminded America that it remains a City upon a Hill and a Zion in the Wilderness. Yet neither Dulles nor Reagan made the mistake of exporting this idealism at the expense of America's security or other interests.

### **PRINCIPLE #3: AMBITIOUS FOREIGN POLICY POSES DOMESTIC DANGERS**

The big government required to conduct an ambitious foreign policy threatens individual liberty. George Washington's warning against foreign involvement was intended mainly to protect the new, weak nation from a powerful internal central authority. Indeed, today's mammoth federal government is the product not so much of the New Deal but of the massive power assembled in Washington to wage World War II and the Cold War.

The huge Pentagon, of course, has preserved America's freedom; the problem is that the Pentagon's size legitimizes the vast centralization of power and gigantic bureaucracies required to run the huge domestic programs started by Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. Thus while conservatives accepted the large Pentagon needed to wage the Cold War, with Soviet power now waning, conservatives would welcome a dramatically smaller Pentagon and State Department. Only when national interests directly are at stake should foreign policy be permitted to expand government.

### **PRINCIPLE #4: DEAL WITH WORLD REALITY**

This should seem self-evident. Yet real world conditions are ignored by those who imply that the U.S. can withdraw into a Fortress America and by those who sagely counsel (wrongly) that, for the first time in history, military power counts for far less than economic might, and that unprecedented global economic interdependence makes independent national action almost impossible.

The would-be isolationists seem blind to the dangers still posed by the world to America. Whether it is denying America access to natural resources,

interdicting trade routes and sealanes, endangering Americans abroad, or igniting brushfires that could flare into major wars, such potential actions require some American involvement – even selective intervention -- in the world.

Blinder still to world reality are those, like former presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, co-authors of the 1988 tract, *American Agenda*, who dismiss the efficacy of military power. It should not have taken America's lightning response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait to prove the obvious: the ability to flex military muscle is still the measure of a great nation.

## **PRINCIPLE #5: SPECIFIC POLICIES FOR SPECIFIC PROBLEMS REPLACE GLOBAL FOREIGN POLICY**

With no Soviet global threat, America no longer needs a global foreign policy. No longer must Washington concern itself with just about every nation just about everywhere. No longer must Washington embrace and aid Third World dictators simply because they act anti-Soviet. No longer must Washington automatically worry when a country adopts a communist economic and totalitarian political system. If Angola, or Egypt, or Peru, or the Philippines, or Poland, or Zaire, other nations choose to cripple themselves, it is their problem. It becomes America's problem only if it threatens America.

This allows Washington to construct a calculus for dealing with nations. Such a calculus obviously would take account of such factors as a nation's traditional friendship with America, its economic value to America and, of course, its potential for endangering American interests. How a nation ranks in this calculus would determine, by and large, the kind of attention it receives from Washington.

## **PRINCIPLE #6: RANK THE THREATS TO AMERICA**

Washington must be explicit in describing and ranking the dangers to America. Not all dangers warrant an American response. Those that do include:

### **◆◆ Soviet missiles**

Until it is dismantled, Moscow's arsenal of nuclear-tipped missiles remains the greatest threat to America. The most pressing task of U.S. foreign policy thus must be the elimination of this arsenal, whether it is controlled by the current Soviet state or successor regimes. The most pressing task of U.S. military policy, meanwhile, is to deter missile attack and, more important, to protect America with a strategic defense system should deterrence fail.

### ◆◆ **Third World missiles**

America and nations important to America gradually are coming within range of Iraqi, Brazilian, and other Third World missiles potentially armed with biological, chemical, and, even nuclear warheads. American policy thus must try to halt proliferation of missile technology and to penalize countries obtaining missiles. To deter attacks, Washington credibly must threaten devastating retaliation. Because this will not deter an irrational Third World leader, America must deploy an anti-missile defense system.

### ◆◆ **Threats to freedom of the seas**

As a maritime nation whose enormous trade is borne mainly by ships and whose ties with its allies are mainly by sea, America vigorously must conduct policies — as it has since the Founding Fathers — that keep open the globe's sealanes. This requires a Navy that can project decisive power on all oceans and against all coasts and that can move swiftly from ocean to ocean. For this, permanent American control of the Panama Canal is essential.

### ◆◆ **Domination of Europe by a hostile power**

America fought both World Wars and the Cold War to prevent Europe from being dominated by one nation. It correctly was feared that such a nation eventually would turn Europe's vast resources against America. Though today's Europe, with its democratic institutions and emerging unified market, is unthreatening, the potential for danger remains. It is uncertain, for example, how well some European democracies would weather severe economic setbacks. It is uncertain how Germany would respond to chaos in the Soviet Union and the Balkans. Uncertain too is whether Moscow, as center of a revamped U.S.S.R. or simply as the capital of Russia, again would try to extend its grasp westward. Thus the U.S. must remain involved in European security arrangements.

### ◆◆ **Domination of East Asia by a hostile power**

With its huge window to the Pacific and its historic interest in the Orient, America cannot afford East Asia to be controlled by one power. On one matter East Asian countries all seem to agree: only American diplomatic and military forces can preserve the equilibrium that allows East Asia to prosper. This, of course, benefits the U.S. enormously.

◆◆ **Terrorist attacks on Americans at home and abroad**

To fulfill government's most fundamental responsibility of protecting its citizens, Washington must have the diplomatic and military means to deter and punish terrorists who target Americans.

◆◆ **Economic blackmail**

Control by one or a group of nations of oil, or the other resources upon which modern economies depend, threatens American living standards. Protecting these standards, at reasonable cost, is a legitimate function of government. Also threatened by such control of vital resources is the stability of European and Asian democracies, also a matter of legitimate concern to America. As such, Washington must craft policies and take actions to prevent nations from blackmailing America through control of resources.

**PRINCIPLE #7: MEXICO, RUSSIA, ISRAEL, JAPAN AND CHINA  
MERIT SPECIAL TREATMENT**

So important to America are some countries that they warrant special policies and, often, special treatment.

◆◆ **MEXICO**

If there is a case for a U.S. "special relationship" with any country, it is with Mexico. Bordering the U.S. for nearly 2,000 miles, rich in resources and home to 88 million people, Mexico will affect the U.S. profoundly in the next century. An economically thriving and politically democratic Mexico can benefit the U.S. enormously, just as an impoverished and chaotic Mexico can create serious economic, social and even security problems for the U.S. Simply put, not only can the U.S. not afford an unstable Mexico, it cannot afford to squander the opportunity to help raise the Mexican economy to world-class levels. Central to this is the special economic link that would be created by a free trade area agreement. If extended to Canada, this would transform North America into the world's most powerful and dynamic economic unit. Central also to Washington's relations with Mexico are U.S. economic, security and diplomatic actions to prevent the unrest in Central America that would destabilize southern Mexico.



## ◆◆ RUSSIA

The Russia that could emerge from a disintegrated Soviet Union would require Washington's special attention and creativity. With a population of at least 150 million, a vast territory and a huge arsenal, it would be the giant of Europe in every respect save economics. For the foreseeable future, with its nuclear arsenal, it will be the only nation literally capable of destroying much of the U.S. and of intimidating and devastating Western Europe. Moscow thus will remain Washington's essential partner in arms control and weapon non-proliferation efforts. It will remain the most important object of American efforts to implant respect for the sovereignty of other countries. It will become, as some Russian officials hint it is ready to be, the vital partner in creating a safer world by shifting the nuclear balance from offensive to defensive weapons. And, in the longer term, America and Russia could discover in each other — and build upon — the profound similarities noted more than a century ago by Alexis de Tocqueville.

## ◆◆ ISRAEL

Repeatedly having proven its friendship, dependability and gratitude to America, Israel merits Washington's continued special commitment. Israel's importance to America, in fact, has mounted because of the Arab world's increasing instability and in the wake of the Persian Gulf crisis.

## ◆◆ JAPAN

Were Japan simply an economic behemoth, it would warrant no more of Washington's attention than does the European Community. The problem, though discussion of it remains taboo, is that Japan's wealth and technology again could build a war machine which would threaten East Asia and, ultimately, America. It is America's particular responsibility to prevent this; no other nation can do so. The danger is not that Tokyo already is planning for the day when it can flex military muscle. The danger rather is that if Japan begins feeling threatened, it will act to protect itself by obtaining weapons that it so far has not had — aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and, perhaps, even nuclear missiles — and to develop the devastatingly accurate high-technology smart weapons. Such an arsenal will terrify all Asia. The special challenge for American policy is to maintain an East Asian environment in which Japan continues to feel secure and gives Japan no reason to expand its arsenal. Key to this is the continued stationing of U.S. military forces in Japan and elsewhere in Asia, something just

about all Asian nations (including China) support, as do some Soviet officials privately.

#### ◆◆ CHINA

It is not only its standing as the world's most populous nation that earns China special consideration by Washington. Because it borders Russia and is Asia's only potential geopolitical counterweight to Japan, China is a key element in any American formula to block potential Russian or Japanese expansion. Also raising China high in the calculus of American concerns is America's historic fascination with China. More than any other nation, it has attracted generations of American religious, economic and political missionaries who seem to have been "called" to serve China. Conservatives, too, have felt this "call," typically arguing that America's global destiny is fulfilled across the Pacific, not the Atlantic, and that at the heart of this is an intimate relationship with a pro-American China.

### **PRINCIPLE #8: EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR AMERICANS**

American living standards can be raised through specific foreign policies. Negotiating liberalized trade, for example, gives American consumers greater access to foreign goods and American producers greater access to foreign markets. International agreements on patents, copyrights and other intellectual property protects American inventors, writers and artists. A vastly restructured U.S. foreign aid program that requires recipient nations to adopt free market policies spurs Third World economic growth, which then creates new markets for American exports and new sources for American imports.

### **PRINCIPLE #9: GIVE NO NATION OR ORGANIZATION A VETO OVER AMERICAN ACTIONS**

Washington may find comforting approval of its actions by other nations. Yet making this a condition of such actions will paralyze U.S. foreign policy and could force America to act against its interests. A dangerous legacy of Bush's handling of the Persian Gulf crisis has been his refusal to act without first winning approval from the United Nations Security Council and from Moscow and Beijing. Neither the U.N. nor any nation should be allowed to veto U.S. actions.

### **PRINCIPLE #10: STABILITY IS NOT THE GOAL OF FOREIGN POLICY**

There is no inherent virtue in stability. Instability, after all, at times topples evil regimes, as the conservative persistent call for a rollback of the Soviet empire recognized. At the same time conservatives cannot remain indifferent to the potential dangers of global instability. Whether stability thus is an

appropriate goal or guiding principle of policy depends on what is being stabilized and on the costs of destabilization. Only when instability specifically threatens American interests should ensuring stability be a U.S. aim – as when instability threatens the world’s energy supply, or when instability in Central or South America threatens Mexico or the Panama Canal, or when instability in Europe invites Germany or Russia to dominate the continent or when instability in Asia allows Japan or China to dominate the region. In each case it is not the instability itself that is to be countered, but the specific results of the instability. This means that Washington need not be a global policeman automatically rushing to calm unrest, aggression and other forms of instability everywhere.

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## CONCLUSION

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**F**rom these ten principles, America can shape its post-Cold War foreign policy. From these principles too it is obvious that we conservatives are reluctant internationalists. We know that America is less in need of a foreign policy than perhaps any other nation, for of all nations, America is least threatened by and better can endure crises anywhere in the world. We know too, having seen it confirmed, that interventionist foreign policy requires a more active and larger federal government than is good for the nation. This understanding contributes to our admirable conservative instinct for isolation. So does, of course, our conservative reflex to look inward, preferring to solve the problems in the family, community, school, church and synagogue before solving them in the world.

To be sure, some world problems require America’s attention. But the burden of proof is borne by those urging this attention and intervention. They very convincingly made the case for this during the Cold War. As a result, we conservatives overcame our global hesitations and enthusiastically championed and led the multi-front campaign against Moscow-led communism. But with the Soviet threat receding, conservatives rightly ask that Washington make anew the case why and where America should be involved actively in the world.

There is a case for this, but it explicitly must be made. George Bush must identify, as did Harry Truman in 1947, those dangers that the world poses to America. Unless Americans understand these dangers, they cannot be asked to risk their lives and property in pursuit of a foreign policy. The Bush Administration, in situation after situation, must provide the relevant answer to the haunting, compelling question posed by Pat Buchanan: If North Korea attacks South Korea, “Why should Americans be first to die?”

The old – and satisfying – answer to Buchanan was that the Demilitarized Zone dividing the Koreas is America’s first line of defense against international communism. A similar answer could have been given for a dozen other American troop deployments in a dozen other world hot spots. This answer no longer suffices. For a new answer to be credible it must convince Americans that our nation’s interests are at risk in Korea. In this case, they probably are; East Asia is too important to America for Korea to be united under communist and anti-American rule.

American interests similarly must – and can – be invoked to explain why we need activist policies to guarantee access to the Panama Canal, freedom of the seas, protection from missile attacks and so forth. But if arguments fail to convince, then Washington has no right to intervene with resources or force.

What this means is that instead of a global foreign policy, America can conduct specific policies for specific regions. Instead of a willingness for near-universal intervention, America can intervene selectively. Washington should find nothing wrong in declaring that some areas of the world are much more important to America than most others. Washington should find nothing wrong in saying that while it is unacceptable for a foreign power to control the Panama Canal or Cuba, America is not much affected by who controls Angola, or Cambodia, or even South Africa or if a South American country embraces socialism.

For a conservative the goal of foreign policy is not a successful crusade for democracy or for human rights or for spreading the American way of life. These are worthy ends for us as individuals and private organizations to pursue; they do not justify, however, the federal government deploying Americans in harms way or even spending taxpayer money on them.

For a conservative the only legitimate goal of American foreign policy is creation of a world environment in which America is left alone and at peace, in which America can trade and raise its living standards, in which Americans can expand their options and enrich their lives.

With the threats from fascist and Marxist totalitarian regimes now repelled, Americans no longer need to conduct a foreign policy that automatically imposes great costs, great risks and great distortions in the power relationship between the American people and their government. What replaces this can be a foreign policy based on conservative principles. This will create that reservoir of public understanding and support from which Washington confidently will be able to draw at those moments when America must risk its lives and resources abroad.



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