

June 10, 1994

INNOCENTS ABROAD: HOW THE WORLD VIEWS CLINTON'S FOREIGN POLICY

By Lawrence T. DiRita
Deputy Director of Foreign Policy and Defense Studies

This month marks the fiftieth anniversary of the American-led invasion of Hitler's Europe. The Normandy landings turned the tide of World War II and linked American leadership to the future of Europe more closely than ever before. After the Allied victory in Europe, as many as a half-million Americans remained behind to guarantee that the bloody defeat of fascism was not invalidated by capitulation to Soviet communism. By 1991, American leadership had led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, a victory no less complete than that over Nazi Germany nearly half a century earlier.

American leadership overcame similar challenges in Asia. Next year will see observances of the fiftieth anniversary of the defeat of Imperial Japan and the establishment of stability and prosperity in Asia. The United States since World War II has been trusted throughout Asia with maintaining the balance of power, and resolute American leadership has turned once bitter enemies into the closest economic and strategic partners.

But as President Clinton returns from Europe, where he presided over the Normandy anniversary celebrations, Americans are uneasy about his ability to sustain the global leadership that the event recalled. In a recent poll, 53 percent of those questioned disapproved of his handling of foreign policy generally; only thirteen percent believe he even has a clear foreign policy.¹

This doubt stems from the confused and often contradictory nature of the Clinton Administration's foreign policy. In Haiti, for example, the President first promised to end the Bush policy of returning refugees to Haiti, then reversed himself and adopted the identical policy. He reversed himself again later by bowing to liberal pressure to tighten sanctions and even to threaten invasion. More recently, President Clinton decided to extend most-favored nation trade benefits to the People's Republic of China (PRC), but only after having accused former President Bush of "coddling" the "dictators" in Beijing with the same policy.

FYI#17 6/94

1 ABC/Washington Post Poll May 12-15, 1994. Cited in Cord Meyer, "Foreign Policy Achilles Heel," *The Washington Times*, May 20, 1994.

These policy reversals and vacillations are symptomatic of a President without a clear foreign policy vision. This lack of leadership already is having an effect on how the world views the credibility and prestige of the United States. The overseas media coverage of American foreign policy has become increasingly negative, often hostile, as the Clinton Administration continues to drift in its relations with the world. Whether it is the recent tribal warfare in Rwanda or the nuclear stand-off on the Korean Peninsula, U.S. policies increasingly are portrayed in the foreign press as indecisive, incompetent, inconsistent, and shapeless.

This negative coverage is in marked contrast to that which George Bush received during the Persian Gulf War. Typical was the front page comment in Germany's *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, noting that

[t]he Gulf War means that the Americans have finally come to terms with the Vietnam trauma. The U.S. armed forces have shown that they can win...[T]he United States proved to be a reliable partner who does not dodge a critical situation...[and] emerges strengthened out of this conflict. The President showed initiative, leadership, strength, and stamina.²

Such optimism about U.S. leadership abroad is not readily found today. Consider a recent editorial in France's leading daily, *Le Monde*. Regarding the current crisis in the former Yugoslavia, the paper acknowledged that

...since World War II, Europe has never appealed so forcefully to the United States. And never has it had to deplore such a noncommittal and inconsistent policy by the United States.³

What follows are excerpts from a variety of sources that typify the foreign press's coverage of Clinton's foreign policy. Their opinions should be disturbing for Americans. They show a growing contempt and disrespect for a country that only two years ago was the awe and envy of the world.⁴

Tucker Bailey conducted research for this publication.

2 "Bush's Victory" *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, March 1, 1991. As cited in United States Information Agency (USIA) *Foreign Media Reaction Daily Digest*, March 1, 1991, p. 4.

3 "U.S. Inconsistencies" *Le Monde*, May 15-16, 1994, p. 1. As cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) WEU-94-095, May 17, 1994.

4 Most of the comments have been circulated in the United States Information Agency's *Foreign Media Reaction Daily Digest*. Those quotes drawn from the Daily Digest are marked by an asterisk. All others are drawn from the original source or as indicated.

HOW THE WORLD VIEWS CLINTON'S FOREIGN POLICY

FROM EUROPE

"Cornered By His Past"

"On foreign policy he is simply embarrassing. Some of his flailing is understandable. . . . But much of it is the result of lack of attention, time and care: and, not least, lack of spine."

The Economist (Britain), June 4, 1994

"Clinton Uninterested In Imperial Aspects Of His Job"

"Unfortunately, the White House is now inhabited by one of the most parochial and indecisive leaders in the history of the presidency. . . . All the signs are that President Clinton is uninterested in the imperial aspects of his job."

The Daily Telegraph (London), May 14, 1994.*

"Diplomatic Schizophrenia"

"It is hard to discern the guiding principles upon which any future [American] interventions would be undertaken. . . . As it stands, American policy apparently ascribes equal significance to the restoration of a flaky exponent of liberation theology to the presidency of Haiti as it does to the curtailment of North Korea's nuclear program. . . ."

The Daily Telegraph (London), May 9, 1994.*

"Clinton Needs A Coherent Foreign Policy"

"The problem for the administration is that Mr. Clinton's habit of talking tough and then retreating at the first sign of resistance is now so notorious that it is undermining his credibility from Port-au-Prince to Pyongyang. . . . To stay in the White House in 1996, Mr. Clinton needs to show he can formulate and implement a coherent foreign policy."

The Independent (London), May 5, 1994.*

"Is There A President In The White House?"

"Is there a president at the White House? More and more European and Asian leaders start to ask the question. . . . There is a long list of failures on the part of the president, who some days, does not spend more than a half hour on international affairs, but who has multiplied by 10 White House funds for polling. . . . The list begins with the withdrawal from Somalia. . . . The refusal to send American ground troops to Bosnia. . . . The officials at Port-au-Prince quickly figured how to profit from American indecisiveness in Somalia. . . . Same thing with Kim Il-sung, the old tyrant from North Korea, who trifled for 14 months with the calls from the United States. . . in order to keep secret his military nuclear programs. And while waiting for extension of the Most Favored Nation status, China refuses to assist the United States in this affair, because it is convinced of Clinton's immeasurable capability for ambivalence."

Liberation (Paris), May 3, 1994.*

"Clinton Foreign Policy A Disaster"

"Clinton, since his election, shows himself a real disaster in foreign policy matters. . . . He can only be proud of one success in this field: The. . . Rabin-Arafat handshake at the White House. For the rest, all the rest, the 'imperial republic'. . . accumulates humiliating failures. It gave up in Haiti in front of the rabble. It fled away from Somalia. It did not make a move concerning the drama in Rwanda. . . . The temporary rescue of the 'safe area' of Gorazde [in Bosnia] comes too late, after a series of retreats."

l'Express (France), April 29, 1994.*

"Why American Doesn't Lead"

"Eighteen months after his election, [President Clinton] still makes foreign policy like a governor of Arkansas. His pollster at his elbow, he tries to dispose of each new problem as swiftly and cheaply as he presumes Americans would like. . . . Since it lacks ideas of its own, the Clinton administration looks for guidance elsewhere. . . . Why does this happen, and go on happening?. . . Mr. Clinton does not care for foreign policy. . . . Mr. Clinton, bereft of instincts in foreign policy, needs to be coached by an expert to do the job the world requires of him. . . [E]xpert coaching requires what the president is not prepared to give: time, thought and application. . . . In times of crisis Americans have historically rallied round their president, even in support of policies that were neither cost- nor risk-free. They long to be led, and that could be Mr. Clinton's vital first step: lead America first, lead the world next."

The Economist (Britain), April 30, 1994.

"U.S. All-Or-Nothing Approach Counterproductive"

"The United States has a comply-or-else approach to foreign policy that is becoming. . . highly counterproductive. . . . It has reduced American public policy in Asia to a series of single issue obedience tests for other countries — human rights in China, nuclear bombs in North Korea, market openings in Japan, American bodies in Vietnam. It gives little room for maneuver, makes annual deadlines into almost automatic crises and walks into the arms of those regimes who need a foreign bogey for their own dim purposes."

The Guardian (London), May 18, 1994.

"Adams and the Alliance"

"The disgraceful decision by President Clinton to grant a visa to one of the world's leading terrorists [Irish Republican Army Leader Gerry Adams]. . . speaks volumes for the manner in which Mr. Clinton chooses to conduct American foreign policy and the sorry consequences it has had for the Anglo-American relationship. . . . The fact that [the decision] meant slighting America's closest ally and plunging the special relationship into its worst crisis since Suez counted for naught. The harsh fact for Britain is that in Mr. Clinton's Washington that relationship does indeed increasingly count for nothing. This is an administration which, when it thinks of foreign policy (and that it does rarely), thinks of Asia."

The Sunday Times (London), February 6, 1994
(Cited in FBIS-WEU-94-032-A).

"Contradictions"

"A [CNN] news conference of contradictions. . . . 'Clinton without a clue' was. . . the most prevalent impression the president left behind. . . . What he announced was questionable and soft as putty, while failing to address some things at all. . . . He took shelter in generalities and remained vague and was thus not able to refute criticism of his lack of foreign policy concepts."

Sueddeutsche Zeitung (Munich), May 5, 1994.*

"Sounded Good, But Left One Wondering"

"[The news conference left one] wondering after it was all over whether [President Clinton] is really in possession of the foreign policy map he had talked about and what he actually said in concrete terms."

Frankfurter Allgemeine, (Frankfurt), May 5, 1994.*

"Sounds Like Roosevelt, Draws Back Like Carter"

"Mr. Clinton, who likes to talk like Franklin Roosevelt, often draws back like Jimmy Carter when it is a matter of getting going. . . . The Americans don't want their children killed in far-away wars, but they want the United States to keep its role of leader of the free world. Clinton refuses to use his political capital for the management of foreign crises."

Le Figaro (Paris), May 5, 1994.*

"Waiting For President's Foreign Policy"

"The mystery of American foreign policy under Clinton's leadership is increasing with each appearance where the president tries to dispel the shadows. . . . After this [news conference], frustrated Americans and the embarrassed world are still waiting for the president's foreign policy."

Liberation (Paris), May 5, 1994.*

"Clinton Did Not Exorcise Ghosts of Nixon, Bush"

"Clinton. . . did not succeed in exorcising the ghosts of two of his predecessors, Nixon and Bush. The former was, to the very end, a severe critic of the White House's international strategy. The latter, the winner of the Gulf War, is living proof that the United States is still capable of imposing peace and defeating the enemies of the new world order."

La Repubblica (Rome), May 5, 1995.*

"No Consistent Or Comprehensible Foreign Policy"

"Washington has not been able to create a consistent and comprehensible foreign policy. The results of its wavering are visible to everybody in places like Mogadishu, Gorazde and Port-au-Prince. None of these places alone harmed vital U.S. interests but together they did. A great power's credibility and prestige have been wasted without any concrete results."

Helsinging Sanomat (Helsinki), May 10, 1994.*

"Indecisiveness, Inconsistency Of U.S. Policy"

"With Bosnia, Haiti, Somalia, and North Korea, American policy has been revealing its indecisiveness and inconsistency for more than a year. . . ."

Dnevnik (Slovenia), May 14, 1994.*

"Words And Action"

"The surprising element in the U.S. position is its irresolution, the apparent gap between words and action. . . . [I]f the United States still wants to be taken seriously, it must take itself at its word. The catalogue of sins that Japan has been confronted with for many years quite obviously does not have the expected effect. Trade delegate Mickey Kantor has a reputation for being tough. Maybe toughness is only a disguise for a lack of concept, a lacking conclusive policy."

Handelsblatt (Duesseldorf), February 17, 1994
(Cited in FBIS-WEU-94-036).

"Clinton's Shapeless Foreign Policy"

"For Clinton, his policy on China is only one aspect of a generally shapeless foreign policy. At the [November 1993 APEC] summit conference in Seattle, Clinton attached more importance to the Asian-Pacific region than to relations with Europe. Now he is in a clinch with the Japanese and waging a war of words with Singapore. Indonesia has warned the United States not to try and interfere in its policy on labor unions and Malaysians are cool. Under pressure from senators and congressmen in his own party, Clinton is now forced to rap China on the knuckles without causing a revolt among the U.S. business world. . . . In this helpless situation, honesty would be refreshing."

General-Anzeiger (Bonn), May 18, 1994.*

"Clinton Administration's Problems In Asia"

"The administration's problems [in Asia], as in other aspects of its foreign policy, stem from a failure to grasp the possibilities and limits of American power. . . .As Mr. Clinton is discovering, cost-free economic levers can be as hard to find as peril-free military ones. Asian leaders are resisting the idea that access to American markets requires them to dance to Washington's political tune. . . . The problem lies not with the objectives — human rights, open markets, non-proliferation — but with the means chosen."

The Times (London), April 5, 1994.*

"Clinton Policy In Yugoslavia Idiotic"

"With its strident calls for air strikes, the U.S. administration asserts that it wants to reinforce the UN's credibility. Far from it: Washington's policy is to use the UN as a justification for policies already decided by the president and his bumbling entourage. . . . Most American commentators are now saying publicly what some notable U.S. ambassadors privately admit: that Clinton's policy in Yugoslavia is idiotic."

The Independent (London), May 6, 1994.*

"U.S. Inconsistencies"

"Is there such a thing as a U.S. policy on Bosnia? Judging from the Geneva meeting on Friday, 13 May, the answer can only be negative. While the United States agreed to the approach advocated by the Europeans with respect to the Bosnian crisis, it was once more with plenty of reservations and unresolved contradictions."

Le Monde (Paris), May 15-16, 1994.
(Cited in FBIS-WEU-94-095).

"Europe After Clinton"

". . . [A] large number of people, not counting saxophone lovers, . . . are beginning to find the presidential tone a little thin. Perhaps too many people. And everybody is already wondering: Who will pay for the U.S. President's ulterior motives or errors of analysis? President Clinton's behavior on the Bosnian issue has not allayed these fears; quite the reverse."

Liberation (Paris), January 18, 1994
(Cited in FBIS-WEU-94-012).

"Clinton's New-Found Resolve Greeted With Skepticism"

"[President Clinton's] new-found resolve [over Haiti] has, however, been greeted at best with skepticism, at worst with Newsweek's contemptuous dismissal of his threats as tough talk amounting to no more than 'the policy equivalent of a one night stand.' So low is the president's credibility in foreign affairs. . . Mr. Clinton has blamed the UN in Somalia and the Europeans in Bosnia; if he has to order the Marines to Haiti, he will have no one to blame but his secretary of state and himself."

The Times (London), May 5, 1994.*

"Rwandans Dying Because U.S. Messed Up In Somalia"

"Retrospectively, Washington is trying to present its intervention in Somalia as some UN foul-up, in which it unfortunately became entangled. . . . But the Somalia intervention was made in the USA. . . . Washington cut and ran. Now the Clinton administration is trying to delay troops being sent by other nations to the worst man-made disaster since the Second World War. Rwandans are dying because the United States messed up in Somalia."

The Times (London), May 18, 1994.*

"Clinton Unwilling To Assume Global Leadership Of U.S."

"[President Clinton's] attempts to master the many crisis areas with the help of the UN show a deep misunderstanding of [its] role. . . . [W]hen things get serious, the UN has to be led into action by the United States, as happened in the Gulf War."

Wirtschaftswoche (Austria), April 29, 1994.*

"Clinton's Lack Of Will"

"The United States has retreated from President Clinton's fiery rhetoric of last July — when he vowed the destruction of North Korea if it used a nuclear device — to actions that suggest that almost any deal is worthwhile. Having declared then that no inducements would be offered to Pyongyang until it fulfilled its international obligations, the Administration is now offering a string of concessions. In so doing, it has undermined the International Atomic Energy Agency's insistence on regular "challenge" inspections of undeclared sites."

The Daily Telegraph (London), January 11, 1994
(Cited in FBIS-WEU-94-007).

FROM LATIN AMERICA

"Is Clinton Not Interested In Foreign Policy?"

"Haiti is just one of the Clinton administration's many international policy failures. . . . The Haitian question may cost the head of another member of Clinton's foreign policy staff, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake. . . . But the Clinton administration's major foreign policy problem is the president himself, who does not like the subject and prefers to avoid it whenever possible."

Folha de Sao Paulo (Brazil), May 12, 1994.

"Does U.S. Have A President?"

"Haiti is at least one, among various cases in which, accused of the sin of omission or hesitancy in action, the Clinton administration gives reason to wonder whether there is a president of the United States."

O Globo (Brazil), May 14, 1994.

"Improvised Initiatives, With Polls In Hand"

"From Somalia to North Korea, American diplomacy has become. . . a succession of improvised initiatives, about-faces, empty threats and general confusion. From Haiti to China, the credibility of Washington's policy of defending democracy and human rights has evaporated. . . ."

O Estado de Sao Paulo (Brazil), May 2, 1994.

"Significant U.S. Step Backward On Peacekeeping"

"After a year of indecision, failures and moderate triumphs in maintaining peace in situations and places so dissimilar like Bosnia, Somalia and Haiti, the Clinton administration has just taken a significant step backward in its effort to build a multilateral structure of a military nature destined to resolve regional conflicts and protect democracy and human rights around the world."

El Cronista (Argentina), May 10, 1994.*

"U.S. Haitian Policy"

"President Clinton has done a number of flip-flops in the past year regarding policy on Haiti. If the regime in that country is not soon changed, he may very well have to do another."

Nassau Guardian (Bahamas), May 12, 1994.*

"The Empire Attacks And World Applauds"

"What is disconcerting, dangerous and incredible in the Haitian case is that the U.S. president has reached the decision [to consider using military force], possibly against his own wishes and without being sure that it is what suits best the interests of his own nation-empire. . . ."

La Razon (La Paz), May 5, 1994.

FROM ASIA

"Financial Markets Losing Faith In Clinton Economic Policy"

"The markets' declining confidence in the Clinton White House runs parallel to international loss of faith in the Clinton foreign policy and the erosion of public trust in the Clintons' personal lives — a trifecta captured in the Wall Street rumor this week of a new portfolio of 'White House bonds' to be issued by the U.S. Treasury: a Gore bond with no interest; a Stephanopoulos bond with no maturity; and a Clinton bond with no principle."

Australian Financial Review (Australia),
May 6, 1994.*

"U.S. East Asian Policy Failure"

"President Clinton himself has no experience in dealing with foreign policy. The senior State Department officials he relies on. . . are people who have been out of the foreign service too long or who are new to their job. They are out of touch with political reality and formulate impractical policy. Their inability to see the woods for the trees leads U.S. foreign policy to run into walls in China and Japan and on the Korean peninsula. The world situation has changed and U.S. influence has correspondingly been diminished."

Sin Chew Jit Poh (Malaysia), March 31, 1994.*

"Decline Of U.S. Status"

"The adjustment of [U.S. peacekeeping] policy transmits the message that the United States cannot solve various conflicts in the world. . . . Observers believe that the adjustment of. . . policy demonstrates the decline of the U.S. status. . . ."

People's Daily (Peoples' Republic of China),
May 10, 1994.*

"Leadership"

"[Mr. Nixon's] approach to government offers an example of Machiavellian intrigue. . . . But Mr. Nixon provided leadership, whatever its quality. And this is the one Nixon characteristic which the present incumbent in the White House, morally circumscribed and hedged in by principle, might usefully seek to emulate."

Business Times (Singapore), April 29, 1994.

"Hesitant"

"U.S. policy toward North Korea is similarly hesitant. At first it resolved that North Korea would not be allowed to possess nuclear arms. Recently the U.S. secretary of defense said North Korea will not be allowed to have 'significant' nuclear bombs. Different quarters wonder if this is a deviation from the earlier position. Similar questions are being asked about U.S. policy toward China and Haiti."

Ittefaq (Bangladesh), May 3, 1994. *

"The East Has The Numbers To Prevail In APEC"

"[The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum] can provide an international forum in which East Asia can isolate America when it oversteps the mark in flexing its bilateral muscle. . . . Isolated within APEC, the Clinton administration is also deeply divided internally on its China policy. The formula worked out last May by the Clinton team. . . is in deep trouble. . . . The Chinese must now be confident that they have called Mr. Clinton's bluff."

Australian Financial Review (Australia),
March 25, 1994.*

"U.S. Should Change Its Asian Policy"

"Clinton has not done anything worth praising during his interactions with the Asian countries; the reason is that it is wrong to use human rights and trade as the focus of foreign policy. The Clinton administration's Asian policy should change or else the United States will be incapable of handling the Asian situation."

Sing Tao Daily News (Hong Kong), April 3, 1994.

"Does U.S. President Want To Launch A Trade War?"

"The United States has not stopped linking human rights with economic issues and now it wants to link up the Chinese national enterprises. If Clinton is determined to launch a global trade war, the United States will be losing Asia and even the world."

Tin Tin Daily News (Hong Kong), April 6, 1994.*

"U.S. Must Curb Human Rights Bias"

"Washington was a paper tiger in its trade war with Japan. It will inevitably be a paper tiger one more time in its controversy over trade issues with China."

Nanyang Siang Pau (Malaysia), March 19, 1994.*

"Diplomacy By Ultimatum"

"The American 'diplomacy by ultimatum' does not seem to be working. It failed in Tokyo, it is failing in Pyongyang and the Chinese crisis is regarded within the U.S. itself as a fiasco of monumental proportions."

The Times Journal (Manila), March 30, 1994.*

"MFN Should Not Become A Political Weapon"

"From the facts that Beijing laughed at the human rights card played by Americans. . . , it is apparent that Washington's move to link 'human rights' with 'trade' is very unwise. . . . To view [the issue] from a practical point of view, 'MFN' is really not a very good political weapon."

The China Times (Taiwan), March 27 - April 2, 1994.*

"U.S. Foreign Policy: Driven By The Banks?"

"The United States will have won few friends with what is little short of outright bullying in the cases of China and Japan. In relation to China, the pretense that the United States is seriously concerned about the 'human rights' of Chinese citizens deceives no one. China has had at least half-a-million political prisoners for decades. . . . The United States has observed these permanent factors of Chinese society with equanimity for years. Why the sudden outbreak of moral concern?"

NewsWeekly (Australia), April 6, 1994.*

"U.S. Prestige Declining Over Human Rights Policy"

"The prestige of the United States. . . is declining rapidly over its human rights diplomacy. Even though the United States. . . continues to single out foreign countries as violators of human rights, it can hardly have it all its own way. The traditional U.S. diplomatic strategy of linking democratization and peace and security also seems to have come off its hinges. Developing countries have detected an opportunistic aspect of [the Clinton administration's] human rights diplomacy. . . ."

Nihon Keizai (Japan), April 5, 1994.*

"U.S. Policies On Labor Anger Asian Nations"

"U.S. policies are increasingly antagonizing Asian nations, with the latest U.S. move to link trade and labor standards in world trade accords bitterly opposed throughout the region. . . . Australia opposes the U.S. move."

The Australian (Australia), March 31, 1994.*

FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

"U.S. Schizophrenia"

"The problem is that America has 'schizophrenia.' On one hand, it hastens to send troops, and on the other it procrastinates. . . and even forbids others to exert an effort, a matter which encourages aggressors and raises questions about the reality of its foreign policy."

Al-Gomhouriya (Egypt), May 7, 1994.*

FROM AFRICA

"A Constant Flip-Flop"

"The dissolution of the previous bipolar political system following the collapse of the Soviet empire, did not automatically mean an ultimate American dominance and effective leadership as we expected or [were] made to believe. Nothing justifies this point more than the belated, albeit, abject failure by President Clinton to define his administration's foreign policy. . . ."

The Standard (Kenya), May 9, 1994.*

"China Will Be The Superpower Of The 21st Century"

"The fickleness of American leadership of a largely free world has hastened the appearance of the Chinese dragon on the world scene. And if care is not taken, China may yet emerge as the dominant superpower at the end of this very century."

*The Daily Times (Nigeria), April 6, 1994.**

