

GREAT DECISIONS

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Let's talk about US Policy in Iraq. Do you support the draw down and how do you envision the US presence in Iraq over the next year?

I support the draw down. The American presence over the next year will be diminishing. And so will US influence. That's a fact of life.

The US role in Iraq will depend very largely on the US role in the Middle East.

The United States is drawn and determined in moving the peace process along, the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It will reduce a very major Arab grievance even hostility towards the US. And that includes Iraq.

Similarly, the US is engaged in serious negotiations with Iran which points perhaps to some resolution of the issue. The Shiite issues in Iraq will be somewhat less hostile to the US. Although it is a mistake I hastily add to view the Iraqi Shiites as some how or other allied or agents of Iran during the Iraqi-Iranian war most Iraqi Sunni or Shiite fought well for Iraq. The United States is seen as a constructive force in the region the problems in Iraq would be more manageable if it is not that will of course complicate the problems that in any case will surface.

There has been some movement on negotiations with Iran. How do you see these discussions moving forward in 2010 and what are some of the challenges to these discussions?

I think that we have to be patient. If we were serious about negotiating we should not start then but talking about more sanctions, options not being left off the table which of course is an indirect way of the use of force - abusing the Iranian state as a terrorist state and so forth. Some people, even in the administration have been doing that. I think it's a mistake because it plays into the hands of the hardliners. In Iran it also plays into the hardliners here and elsewhere who do not wish American Iranian negotiations to move forward...not to say

successful. So I we're serious we have to be patient. And if we're patient this issue may we worked out.

In any case, the facts of life are that one, Iran is there to stay, and Iran is an important historically refined serious country. It has a kind of fanatical regime which as even the TV showed the pictures from Tehran, is not really representative of the new Iran that's emerging. Iran is potentially an ally of the US on the principle that the neighbor of my neighbor is my ally. It is potentially the ally of Israel. It was for years.

So Iran, reducing it to some sort of devil with whom we have to engage in combat and whom the moment it gets its first nuclear weapon will somehow detonate it on Tel Aviv is an absurdity. We have to have a long view and think of the region as a whole. What reduces our presence? What increase the ability of the US being bogged down for many years to come in large seething regional conflict? What is the long range danger to Israel and then act intelligently on that basis and not be manipulated to over reactions or moves either calculated to or in any case contributing to the collapse of a serious negotiating effort.

In Afghanistan, what tools does the US have in terms of its foreign policy that it can exert in these post conflict situations?

Well first of all I don't think we can generalize that too much. Obviously situations need to be taken into account and even the specific tradition, patterns of conduct of the different people and so forth. Afghanistan is a country that is notoriously xenophobic, composed of people who know how to fight, who fight with great courage and determination and generally speaking the people are not particularly friendly to foreigners with guns in their country. We have to take that into account. Somalia is different; the geography of Afghanistan is not very congenial to advanced modern troops.

Rather than military force, what tools can the US deploy?

Tools the US can deploy are American capabilities which are modernizing, socially productive, educational, social, health, welfare...these are all tools that we can use very effectively.

Sometimes we have to use military means especially if someone attacks us and given hospitality or safe haven to Al Qaeda is obviously something that we can not tolerate but even having said that I think the intelligent question to ask is, is the answer to that a full scale military occupation of the country? That is the case, then Al Qaeda needs to do is hide in two or three countries successfully and we'll be bogged down in two or three wars and then they'll go hide in the forth country. I'm oversimplifying this but the point Imp trying to make is they invade every country? We have to think intelligently about that too. Find out where they are but find out where they are and don't take guesses and kill a lot of bystanders. Then once you have found out, do what is necessary to terminate their threat. That doesn't mean that you have to

engage in nation building, peace building, modernization, democracy, institutionalization and all sorts of massive ambitious long term goals which if you're serious about pursuing you can probably pursue effectively at one or two major sized countries. But that's not the response to the terrorist threat.

In the past few years US-Russia relations have been turbulent. What is a coherent policy toward Russia look like as it continues to exert its power in the region?

One could write volumes on that but there is a simple formula.

Our task has to be to engage Russia in such a fashion that Russia itself sheds its imperial nostalgia.

The age of imperialism is over; Russia will not be a success if it dilutes itself from thinking it can construct its former empire. Our task is to deal with it in such a way that we absorb them while at the same time, help them to transform themselves. If you ask me how to do that than give me several hours and I'll read you a memorandum with options in it but it will have to be 50 pages long.

Should the US be worried about China's military power or see it as a partner in securing the region?

Well let me reverse the question, suppose you were Chinese, do you feel that China should be a partner in securing Latin America? In other words, where are the Chinese, where are we?

Is the China a threat to the US?

Well again reverse that. Is the American buildup a threat to China? If you want to be a responsible observer of the World scene you have to really make an effort to understand the relationship between parties and not view it through your own perspective.

So yes, American military presence in the Far East is no threat to china. But do the Chinese feel the same way? What about Chinese presence in the Western Hemisphere...is it a threat to us?

The moment they appear I bet you we would say yes. The point is, this is not a world in which we can dictate to everyone and we have to be able to find way for accommodating with their interests and with a sense of their own identity and role. And then I think you can start discussing this.

Could you give us a statement on the importance of education and understanding the world?

One of the main problems the President faces is shaping foreign policy. The consequence of America being a democracy is that he has to be very sensitive to the public level of world

understanding because our public determines what the President can and can not do and the public is woefully ignorant about world affairs, woefully. I would say that of the major democracies in the world, our public is probably in the least informed. Take a couple of examples of the recent geography poles they conducted recently, the level of public knowledge of geography. It is literally abysmal. High percentage of American adults couldn't find Iraq on the map. Couldn't find New York City on the map, high percentage couldn't locate the Pacific Ocean. How can Americans understand international political problems when they don't know where they're occurring? History, public opinion tests showed that many Americans couldn't identify two countries that America was fighting against in WWII. Our reporting on the world. Most people read local papers. They report if there is some excitement about a murder next door. Worse, many American look for their news on TV. Look what's happened to the major news broadcasts...it's a competition in trivia not major news. Right now I'll tell you who gives the best news but most Americans won't view it. BBC, that's probably not such a big surprise and lately, much to my own surprise, Al Jazeera which runs every day a very good half hour news program from around the world that's not propaganda, its just news. Americans don't watch that.

We also have a divided public opinion in this country, polarized. So the possibilities for intelligent bipartisanship are being reduced and in any case they are being interfered with by foreign lobbies that make it now a specialty of influencing particular congressman to pass laws imposing foreign policy decisions with the President or forbidding him in doing certain things. All of which are vastly handicaps. The ability for the US to conduct a steady intelligent foreign policy. That's a very serious problem.

A democracy in which decision makers which are the people who are often ignorant is also a very vulnerable democracy

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