

KOSOVO AND THE REPUBLICAN FUTURE

Republicans say they want to make foreign policy and national security a big issue in the 2000 campaign. But when Republican senators voted 38–16 against NATO airstrikes in Yugoslavia last week, they gravely damaged their ability to do so. As a result of that vote, and of the neo-isolationist arguments that leading Republicans made to support their position, Republican foreign policy is now mired in pathetic incoherence. Is this the party of Reagan or the party of Buchanan? Right now, it's hard to tell.

This is too bad, because Republicans are right to think that foreign policy offers them a big opportunity in 2000. Clinton's record is dismal; the world on his watch has become a much more dangerous place; and polls suggest the American people are figuring this out.

The list of Clinton foreign policy failures is surprisingly long. His policy of engagement toward China is, finally, widely understood to be little better than a policy of appeasement and venality. Covering up Chinese espionage; allowing sales of advanced military technology at the behest of big corporate donors; undermining Taiwan's security; frightening Japan; overlooking Chinese proliferation of nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea; ignoring Beijing's crackdowns on democracy activists; and now, apparently, agreeing to Chinese entry into the World Trade Organization ahead of Taiwan and on concessionary terms—all these failures of China policy amount to a grand albatross around the Clinton-Gore administration's neck.

No one has been paying much attention to Iraq lately. But that unfolding Clinton administration disaster is certain to rear its head again over the next year. Right now Saddam Hussein is busy building his weapons of mass destruction, unencumbered by international inspectors, unchallenged by a domestic opposition that the Clinton administration, despite paying lip service to the Iraq Liberation Act, refuses to support, and unharmed by the sporadic attacks which the United States has been carrying out in the no-fly zones. The sanctions regime is tottering. International

support for the "containment" of Saddam is evaporating. And the Clinton administration does not even pretend to have an answer.

In North Korea, things go from bad to worse. The Clinton administration has been reduced to paying huge bribes to Pyongyang for the privilege of visiting sites where the North Koreans once were building nuclear weapons but which they have long since cleaned out. One bribe will be followed by more—and with no prospect of actually stopping the North Koreans from building their weapons. Here again, the word that best describes Clinton administration policy is appeasement.

Meanwhile, the defense budget continues to decline in real dollars—despite Clinton administration efforts to use smoke and mirrors to claim that it is boosting spending. And anyone who believes the Clinton administration is actually committed to building a missile defense system—now more urgently needed than ever—must have been living on another planet for the past six years.

All these failures and more make a ripe target for a Republican party that is willing and able to offer a coherent alternative. But there's the rub. In theory, the outline of a Republican foreign policy platform for 2000 practically writes itself: The Clinton-Gore administration has appeased dictators from Baghdad to Beijing to Belgrade; it has elevated money over morality, and traded away national security for corporate interests and campaign contributions; it has weakened America's defenses, demoralized America's military, and undermined America's standing in the world through inconstant and incompetent leadership. A Republican president should restore American strength, reinvigorate American global leadership, and return American foreign policy to the strong moral and strategic foundations of the Reagan era.

This would be a powerful case for putting a Republican in the White House in 2001—but only if Republicans can plausibly make it. They won't be able to unless a few party leaders—and in particular key presidential candidates—repudiate much of the Republican

talk we've heard over the past couple of weeks. Do Republicans really want to present themselves as the party of callous indifference to human suffering, the party that defends the "sovereign" right of brutal thugs like Slobodan Milosevic to slaughter innocent women and children, the party that won't lift a finger against aggressive dictators, the party that doesn't give a fig about what happens in Europe and is willing to abandon U.S. leadership in NATO? Republicans have almost managed to make the feckless Clinton look like a champion of American moral leadership. That's quite an accomplishment.

The damage can, however, still be repaired. And the good news is that a few prominent Republicans have stepped forward to uphold the Reagan mantle. Bob Dole and Jeane Kirkpatrick have been arguing on both moral and strategic grounds that the United States must do what it takes to defeat Milosevic and defend the Kosovar Albanians. Republicans have every right to be critical of President Clinton—Steve Forbes, for example, is absolutely correct to say that "the bombing should have taken place six months ago, a year ago, two years ago." But Sen. John McCain struck the right note when he insisted on the Senate floor that Republicans "must not compound the administration's mistakes by committing our own."

As McCain argued, "That the president has so frequently and so utterly failed to preserve one of our most important strategic assets—our credibility—is not a reason to deny him his authority to lead NATO in this action. On the contrary, it is a reason for Congress to do what it can to restore our credibility. It is a reason for us to help convince Milosevic that the United States, the greatest force for good in history, will no longer stand by while he makes a mockery of the values for which so many Americans have willingly given their lives."

Instead of warning hysterically about the possibilities of failure in the current mission, Republicans should be supporting the military action, warning that the Clinton administration is likely to do too little, not

too much, and pressing for additional policies that will lead to victory. For example, Senators Jesse Helms, Richard Lugar, and others have introduced legislation to make the goal of American policy the removal of Milosevic from power and to provide some of the means necessary to accomplish that objective. Combined with a continuing air campaign, these efforts to undermine Milosevic stand a real chance of success. And, as Sen. Helms put it last week, Milosevic's ouster is the only real "exit strategy" in the Balkans.

Republicans should also push the administration to abandon its faith in any further "peace" agreements with Milosevic and to arm the Kosovars. Senators Mitch McConnell and Joseph Lieberman have introduced a bill that would provide \$25 million to arm the Kosovars. A policy that combines a vigorous air campaign with an arms supply to the Kosovars could replicate the successful strategy that brought peace to Bosnia. If one consequence of such a strategy is the independence of Kosovo, so be it. Whatever problems that may cause pale in comparison with letting Milosevic win.

The fundamental point is this: Once the United States and NATO are engaged, there is no acceptable alternative to success. We suspect the air campaign may be more successful than panicky critics are now forecasting; but if it doesn't do

the job, it is irresponsible to rule out the possibility of ground troops. In any case, now is the time for Republicans to show some courage. Behaving like McGovern Democrats is not just bad politics, damaging to Republican hopes in 2000. It reflects a fundamental failure to understand what is good for the country. Instead of voting against a U.S. peacekeeping force in Kosovo if one is eventually needed, as about 80 percent of House Republicans did recently, and instead of opposing the bombing campaign, as about 70 percent of Senate Republicans did last week, the GOP should be the party of American leadership and American victory.

—William Kristol and Robert Kagan, for the Editors



Slobodan Milosevic

Kent Lemon