



A New Style for a New Mandate

By David Frum

Having won an electoral mandate, President George W. Bush now must restore bipartisanship to U.S. foreign policy in order to realize the goal of a Middle East transformed by freedom and democracy.

From almost the very second that the state of Ohio was awarded to President Bush, he and his party have been solemnly warned that they must “reach out” to their Democratic opponents.

Much of this advice is beyond absurd. Elections are how democracies decide things. The 2004 vote was an unusually unambiguous one: as one contributor to the fiercely anti-Bush British newspaper, the *Guardian*, put it, “If this doesn’t add up to a mandate, it’s hard to know what the word means.” In Latin, *mandatum* refers to an order or assignment given by a superior officer to a junior. The same really is true of our English “mandate.” The mandate is not a grant of power to the president; it is a commission of trust from the people. President Bush has not merely the right to pursue conservative domestic economic and social policies; he has the duty to do so.

Partisanship in Foreign Policy

But there is one sphere of public life where “reaching out” would not betray the president’s constituents—where, indeed, it is an essential part of his duty. That is the sphere of foreign policy. As commander in chief, the president bears the responsibility for waging and winning the nation’s wars. The ferocious partisan dissension that has broken out at home over the war

on terror dangerously subtracts from the nation’s war-fighting effectiveness.

Partisan warfare at home has given credibility and confidence to America’s enemies abroad. It should have been sobering to everyone, Democrat and Republican alike, to hear Osama bin Laden alluding to scenes from *Fahrenheit 9/11* in his pre-election videotape. Most Democrats privately have little use for Michael Moore’s conspiracy-mongering. But in their anger at President Bush, Democrats who really should know better (plus, of course, President Carter) have legitimized Mr. Moore’s work—and that of other anti-American haters.

Partisan disunity has damaged America’s alliances. It ought to have disturbed even Democrats to hear Europeans whispering that their willingness to support America in Iraq would vary according to the outcome of the presidential election. Instead, some Democrats responded by agreeing that the Europeans were justified in their attitude—inviting European governments to take sides in an American election in hope that they, not U.S. voters, could choose the president with whom they would cooperate.

Hyper-partisanship has weakened America’s own war-fighting strength. In every war, there will be mistakes, often very grave ones. It is essential to acknowledge mistakes and learn from them. But in this war, the Bush administration knew that

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any attempt to identify and fix errors would be savagely exploited by domestic opponents. Burdened by that knowledge, the administration has often succumbed to denial and intransigence when learning and improvement were most called for. The administration has won an election. But the anger left behind by the election risks making losers of us all.

Restoring Bipartisan Foreign Policy

So what to do?

At home, normal politics should continue—as it did even during World War II, when Republicans and Democrats differed over issues from union power to farm policy. President Bush has plans to reform Social Security and taxation and to nominate conservative judges. Democrats will do everything they can to stop him. That is the way the game is played.

But in this war on terror, we have to get Republicans and Democrats back on the same team. And graceful as were the concession and victory statements by John Kerry and President Bush, words alone will not get anyone very far. There are, however, some actions that might help President Bush introduce some useful bipartisanship to American foreign policy.

Listen. For months after 9/11, President Bush met once a week with the majority and minority leaders in both the House and Senate. The meetings ceased in the spring of 2002, after a series of goading remarks by then Senate majority leader Tom Daschle—apparently he felt that the Democrats had more to lose politically than to gain from standing so close to the president. It is time to revive these regular, informal conversations, this time with the majority and ranking members of the House and Senate committees that deal with the war: Armed Services, Foreign Relations, and Intelligence.

Meetings like this are more than just a courtesy. These powerful, independent congressional figures can tell the president things that his direct subordinates might fail to communicate. The case of former counterterrorism adviser Richard Clarke is a warning: you do not have to admire the role that Mr. Clarke has played since leaving the administration to be concerned that he was unable to lay his views before the president while he worked in the administration. The more conduits there are for information to reach the president, the better the president and the nation will be served.

Learn. On 9/11, the United States was plunged into a new era for which it was radically unprepared. Ever since, the U.S. government has been improvising as it goes. Sometimes the improvisation has been very successful, as it was with the new military tactics used in the Afghan campaign. Sometimes the improvisation has led us into real trouble—as the lack of clear and accepted rules for the treatment of captured terrorists did at Abu Ghraib.

Americans have a big job of institution-building and rule-writing ahead of them. Writing these rules deep inside the administration and then applying them at the discretion of the executive practically invites the courts to review and rewrite them—a job that courts are not well suited to do. Much of the Patriot Act expires next year. It would be a terrible thing for the whole country if a successor law ended up being enacted on a party-line vote.

President Bush should be convening national commissions that include respected Democratic lawyers and elected officials—people like former solicitor general Walter Dellinger—to propose a comprehensive set of laws and rules to govern the war on terror at home and overseas.

In the same spirit, the president has long believed that America needs a new energy policy. In 2001, his administration produced a comprehensive plan that went nowhere. What the president might find, however, is that there are component pieces of his plan—federalization of the regulation of electricity, research into new technologies—that could appeal to both Democrats and Republicans. He would do well to find ways to put Democrats in charge of those individual items.

Finally, there is one crucial battleground of this war where even the administration's staunchest supporters must concede failure: public diplomacy. The Bush administration has careened from disaster to disaster in this area. Republicans should not be too proud to admit that we may have something to learn here from Democrats—including that supreme Democratic communicator, former President Clinton. Unlike his vice president, the former president has behaved in impressively statesmanlike ways since 9/11. Now that President Bush has established his administration on a rock-solid political footing—winning a larger proportion of the vote than Mr. Clinton ever managed to do—he is superbly well placed to make use without qualm of Mr. Clinton's great persuasive gifts on the world stage.

Hire. Mr. Bush is being advised from many quarters to put Democrats in his cabinet. This is not very helpful: there is a Democrat there now, Norm Mineta, and what good did that do in quelling Democratic anger this year? For that matter, how much did it benefit Bill Clinton to name Republican Senator William Cohen as his secretary of defense in 1996?

The only president to have derived political benefit from naming members of the opposing party to his cabinet was Franklin Roosevelt in 1940, when he named Henry Stimson secretary of war and Frank Knox secretary of the Navy. But Roosevelt was accepting a tough bargain: bidding for an unprecedented and shocking third presidential term, he tried to allay Republican fears by handing operational control over the pending war in Europe to the leading GOP foreign-policy figure of the day and over the pending war in the Pacific to the most recent Republican nominee for vice president. It would be as if George W. Bush made Richard Holbrooke secretary of state and John Edwards secretary of defense. Nothing remotely resembling that is called for in 2004.

On the other hand, there are a lot of qualified and capable younger Democrats well below cabinet-grade

who are now facing a total of eight years in the foreign-policy wilderness. Many of these people have foreign-policy views surprisingly congruent with those of President Bush—more congruent than the views of some of those venerable registered Republicans who are now telling Mr. Bush to abandon the foreign policy on which he just got reelected.

Focus on the Goal— Victory

Ronald Reagan transformed American foreign policy in the 1980s by looking past party labels. George W. Bush has an even greater opportunity to build a new consensus on national security. To do so, though, he must instruct his personnel office that the first question it needs to ask foreign-policy candidates is not “What did you do to re-elect George Bush?” but “What can you do to realize George Bush’s foreign-policy vision of a Middle East transformed?”

Bipartisanship is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end: not mushy centrism, but victory in the conflict that defines our era.