

The New US Administration & Its Approach to Foreign Policy

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President Bush has announced Condoleezza Rice as the new Secretary of State in his second term. Her deputy at the National Security Council, Stephen Hadley, has been named as the new National Security Advisor. These two along with John R. Bolton, the Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs who serves as Senior Advisor to the President and the Secretary of State for Arms Control, Nonproliferation and Disarmament, represent the right wing of the foreign policy establishment. The Rice and Hadley appointments suggest that the President's effort is to fill crucial cabinet positions with people who 'know his mind', thus intending to extend his personal control over agencies he has suspected of impeding his foreign policy aims during his first term in office.

Announcing the first two appointments on November 16, 2004, President Bush confirmed that Rice would be taking office at a critical time when "we are a nation at war", indicating a certain nuance of the time period. Bush's second term is expected to be dogged by foreign policy challenges like the 'war against terrorism', war in Iraq, threats emanating from Iran and North Korea (proliferation issue), and the fractured trans-Atlantic relationship left over from his first term in office.

Bush's New Team

Colin Powell's resignation has removed a moderate voice from the top ranks of the administration. It is feared that this might signal a future 'aggressive' foreign policy. In an interview with the *Financial Times* after the elections Powell had stated that "the President is not going to trim his sails or pull back", meaning that it was unlikely that the Bush, in his second term, would want to alter, amend or curtail his earlier policies.¹ The 'doomsayers', believe that Bush's second term "is likely to produce military intervention overseas, along the lines of Iraq in 2003" and the 'skeptics', argue that the second presidential term "will turn out to be more cautious and less belligerent."²

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It seems that Rice, given her strong personal ties with President Bush, will speak directly for him and can take decisions in his name, something that 'Powell could never do'. She is closer to the President than any Secretary of State since Henry A. Kissinger who served Richard Nixon. Colin Powell's departure underlines the fact that in his second term, the President is seeking White House influence in the State Department since there is a history of both going different ways. With Rice as the new Secretary of State reflecting 'America's face to the world', the only real counterforce, in the persona of Colin Powell has disappeared. Clearly the Neoconservatives believe that Bush's second term victory confirms the essential righteousness of their global agenda, beginning with its decision to invade Iraq as part of the 'war on terrorism'.³

The other most important office has gone to Hadley, who is said to be close to Dick Cheney. John R. Bolton is another Cheney loyalist though it is not clear at time of writing this comment about the office he will assume. The second term's top ranks seem to be strengthening the hard-line coalition of aggressive nationalists, neo-conservatives and Christian Right that dominated policy-making post-9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon.

Major Issues

This section delves into four major areas of US concern and the probable position on each in the next four years of Bush presidency.

War against Terrorism

After the 9/11 attacks, Washington launched the 'war on terror' which began with the Al Qaida, but "it does not end there" as Bush proclaimed, adding with conviction that "it will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated."⁴ Although no terror attack has occurred in the US since 9/11, Osama bin Laden, the prime accused continues to remain elusive. Pakistan, the perpetrator of terrorism, as brought out by the 9/11 Commission Report ("Pakistan did not break with the Taliban until after 9/11, although it was harbouring bin Laden")⁵ and the US are trying to further strengthen mutual ties. This 'engagement' of Pakistan is a continuation of President Bush's earlier policy towards its 'frontline state'. While the highlights of the first term with respect to Pakistan was the famous Camp David visit of President Musharraf (June 2003), the major non-NATO ally (MNNA) status granted to Islamabad (June 2004); the beginning of the second term witnesses the US Congress approving a \$300 million military aid package for Pakistan (November 2004). This was the biggest military aid package to Pakistan since 9/11. Given their loyalty to President Bush, the new set of officials 'who know his mind' (emphasis added) will give their full cooperation to Washington's 'global war against terrorism'.

Middle East

It is expected that the main foreign policy focus in the second term is likely to be the Middle East. The unilateral strike against Iraq in 2003 had set the stage for the administration's future involvement with the region. The war against Saddam has been in keeping with the policy stand of the neocons dominating the Bush administration during the first term. Rice is criticised for what appeared to be her failures either to warn the President about flawed pre-war intelligence regarding Iraq's weapons programmes or having made less than consistent efforts to ascertain its accuracy.⁶ In one of her several statements supporting the 'unilateral war' against Iraq, she had commented in September 2003 that high strength aluminium tubes seized en route to Iraq were "only really suited for nuclear weapons programmes," though almost a year earlier, her staff had been told that the nation's foremost nuclear experts seriously doubted that the tubes were intended for nuclear weapons.

Being an administration loyalist, Hadley, from the very beginning has supported Washington's unilateral action against Iraq. He validated the fact that Iraq was in possession of nuclear weapons and had links with the Al Qaida even when the CIA repeatedly pointed out that such a fact was not supported by hard evidence.⁷

Proliferation/Security

As the world's strongest nuclear and conventional power, the US intends to freeze weapons development and halt nuclear proliferation. In its quest for 'absolute national security', a US \$401.7 billion budget proposal for defence in 2005 is underway. In the meantime, Iran and North Korea are being identified as two major challenges to the administration. Both have failed to comply with their safeguards obligations and their unwillingness to respond to repeated calls by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The hawks in the regime are building a case of ominous disclosures about Iran's nuclear capabilities to make the case that Iran is a threat that must be confronted, either by economic sanctions, military action, or "regime change." Leading the charge for a tough line on Iran has been Bolton.⁸ Rice seems to be in a dilemma regarding plan of action against Iran. She is willing to try diplomacy, not certain that it will work and ready to look at other possibilities if it does not.⁹

In order to deal with North Korea, the Bush Administration established the six-party talks (August 2003) involving the US, China, Russia, Japan and South Korea to rein in Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme. China has the maximum influence over North Korea since it is its largest aid donor and most powerful neighbour. Hence, it is observed that China, a country often seen as an adversary by the US, has leveraged itself into being a significant player in non-proliferation concerns, an indication that the US' power to contain proliferation single-handedly is waning. In the case of North Korea, the Bush team may not press for a 'hardline' since US troops are stationed in South Korea. It is a possibility that Washington will resort to diplomacy in this case also because of the China factor.

As far as US security is concerned, the doctrine of pre-emption is much debated about in policy circles. Rice is one of the central architects of the controversial Bush Doctrine of pre-emptive strike against states thought to be a threat to the US.¹⁰ Hadley participated in the National Institute for Public Policy's study team that produced *Rationale and Requirements for US Nuclear Forces and Arms Control*, a study that called for the development of "mini"-nuclear weapons and served as a road map for Bush's *Nuclear Posture Review*. Prefiguring the preventive national security doctrine of the Bush administration, the report stated: "Under certain circumstances, very severe nuclear threats may be needed to deter any of these potential adversaries."¹¹ Bolton is also a staunch advocate of the revival of 'star wars' missile defense system and considers the 'CTBT dead' after the Senate voted not to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.¹²

Trans-Atlantic Relations

Since trans-Atlantic relations already seem fractured over the Iraq issue, probably a Kerry win could have revived the relationship. However, that does not mean that the current administration will further accentuate the divide. A day after winning the elections President Bush in a press briefing on November 4, 2004, emphasised his determination to reach out to a wider audience. His statement reveals his intention to work with 'friends and allies' over the next four years. After all, a reinvigorated trans-Atlantic relation to advance common interests and advance global challenges is in the interest of Washington. As long as Europe does not pose as a counterweight to the US, a united Europe can function as Washington's partner in the global arena.¹³

It is only but evident that the Bush loyalists will prefer to harp on the same policy direction as their leader. The team would never want it 'to go alone' where it can gain the support of allies since 'greater the cooperation' will ensure 'greater chances of limiting other problems across the Atlantic'.

Conclusion

The change of guard in the State Department probably indicates the emergence of a different cabinet, a 'true kitchen cabinet'. Condoleezza Rice along with Stephen Hadley and John Bolton led by President Bush may steer a foreign policy direction different from the first term. The second term faces challenges from Iran, North Korea apart from Iraq, which is basically a legacy inherited from the earlier term. Whether Iran or North Korea, it seems that the new team backed by the 'hardliners' may press for a 'coercive' policy towards the other two 'axis of evil' States. The other pressing agenda of the second term may be a stronger, more effective proliferation policy. The new team-mates seem to be strong advocates of Washington's pursuance of NMD, revival of 'star wars' and development of 'mini' nukes.

As far as US' policy towards India is concerned, no major overhaul may be expected, though many analysts are of the belief that Indo-US relations will further

improve with Condoleezza Rice as the new Secretary of State. The trajectory of future US foreign policy direction will reveal the strategic orientation of the new Bush administration comprising of the President himself along with his distinguished team-mates.

References/End Notes

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9. Ibid.
10. Supporting pre-emptive strike against Iraq, Rice had stated that 'we do not have to sit and wait for mushroom cloud', indicating that US must deal with threats before they hurt the American people, a concern demonstrated by President Bush several times. For details refer to Blix, Hans, *Disarming Iraq*. p. 148.
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