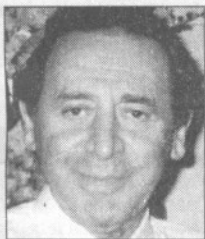


# US foreign policy — time to le



By Patrick Seale

*To improve his global standing for a second term, President Bush should consider sacking his chief speech writer for having produced 20 minutes of vacuous hypocritical bombast that has been ridiculed around the world*

**A**T the start of his second term, United States President George W Bush's difficulty is that he is burdened with a legacy of fundamental foreign policy errors.

Can he change course? His inauguration "freedom speech" on January 20 suggests either that he cannot or that he has no intention of doing so.

Bush's main ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, is more optimistic. In an interview with the Financial Times on January 26, he claimed to detect an "evolution" in American foreign policy.

On the Arab-Israeli conflict, he declared that "you will find in the next few weeks that there will again be a very clear direction set out

by America".

How could Bush signal a change? In an ideal world, he might do the following:

- Sack his chief speech-writer Michael Gerson for having produced 20 minutes of vacuous hypocritical bombast, which has aroused scorn and ridicule around the world.
- At this supremely important moment in the Arab-Israeli conflict, press Israel to help Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, by releasing Palestinian prisoners, removing checkpoints in the Occupied Territories and halting the construction of the illegal "apartheid" wall.
- Seek an urgent exit from Iraq after the January 30 elections and let Iraqis sort out their problems between themselves and with their neighbours.
- Make a major effort to mend America's deeply troubled relations with Arabs and Muslims.
- Give up the American pretension to dominate and change the world and accept multi-polarity in international affairs because it is a fact.
- Clearly, it would take a political tsunami in Washington for anything of the sort to be contemplated.

A list of the blunders Bush now has to contend with, in shorthand form, include the early error of his first administration not to grasp quickly enough that America was being challenged by a worldwide Islamist network, enraged by United States' actions and determined to strike back. At the head of the network was Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda.

There had been plenty of wake-up calls the attack on New York's World Trade Centre in 1993, the East African embassy bombings in August 1998, the holing of the USS Cole in Aden harbour in October 2000 which killed 17 US sailors. Obviously, there was a dangerous enemy out there. Richard Clark, Bill Clinton's National Coordinator for Counter-terrorism his

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To extricate himself from Bush needs to first persuade interests lie in living peacefully. Secondly, to achieve an honorable Washington needs to engage instead of threatening the administration must improve Islamic world to undermine

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"terrorism Czar" tried to warn the incoming Bush administration of the imminent danger from Al Qaeda and its affiliates. But Bush's top aides would not listen.

Within days of Bush's inauguration on January 20, 2001, Clark "urgently" requested a top-level meeting to approve an aggressive plan to go after Al Qaeda. But nothing happened. In the eight months from Bush's inauguration to

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# earn from a legacy of errors

September 11, 2001, Clark was not allowed to brief Bush on terrorism.

As he reveals in his book, *Against All Enemies*, in those long months Paul Wolfowitz, the Assistant Defence Secretary and a leading neo-conservative, argued that the main target should be "Iraqi terrorism", not Al Qaeda although America's intelligence agencies could

no fact or event could derail ... We invaded and occupied an oil-rich Arab country that posed no threat to us ...".

The real motivation for this illegal and fraudulent policy, Clark suggests, was "to improve Israel's strategic position" by eliminating a large hostile Arab country, and to reduce American dependency on Saudi oil by creating "another friendly source of oil".

Drunk with America's military power, would-be "imperialists" like Vice-President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Bush himself were easily persuaded that American prestige demanded that a crushing defeat be inflicted on a major Arab country, if only to warn others of their fate if they harboured terrorists.

The neo-cons and Bush himself described the Islamic militants in apocalyptic, religious terms as "the forces of darkness", as the emanation of "absolute evil".

Since there could be no dialogue with them, there was no need to look for the causes of their anger. The beauty of this argument was it freed the United States from any responsibility.

The fundamental error was America's refusal to recognise that the terrorist attacks were a response to American policies such as its blind support for Israel and its military presence in Arabia.

Instead, the neo-cons invented the theory that Islamist violence sprang from religious fundamentalism, from backward societies, from tyrannical regimes. It was a product not of American policies but of Arab and Muslim cul-

ture and religion.

In order to protect itself against further attacks, the United States had to reform Arab and Muslim societies, if necessary by force.

Bush's "freedom speech" of January 20 was a reworking of these themes. The whole thrust of his argument for spreading "freedom" to the world at large rested on the fallacy that tyranny breeds terrorism.

The United States was determined to bring "freedom" to Iraq, even if it meant smashing the country and killing tens of thousands of Iraqis. Who would be next?

The confusion between American and Israeli interests led Bush to be persuaded by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that both countries faced the same enemy international Islamic terror.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin, whose army had destroyed Chechnya in order to "restore order", leapt on the same bandwagon.

How can Bush extricate himself from this legacy of error? He needs to persuade Israel its best interests lie in living peaceably with its neighbours not in seeking to dominate them or occupy their land.

To seek an honourable exit from Iraq, he needs to engage with Iran and Syria, not to threaten them. He needs to recognise that attacking Iraq has made America less secure and has strengthened support for Islamic radicals.

He needs to improve American relations with the Islamic world in order to dry up support for Al Qaeda. Will the "evolution" in American foreign policy which Tony Blair claims to see embrace any of these objectives? **COURTESY GULF NEWS**

from his legacy of errors, persuade Israel that its best deal is to be made peaceably with its neighbours. An honourable exit from Iraq, a deal with Iran and Syria, and a new relationship with them. And finally, the end of America's blind support for Al Qaeda

find no evidence of Iraqi-sponsored terror against the United States.

The 9/11 attacks gave Wolfowitz and others like him, who had wanted to attack Iraq for much of the 1990s, the chance to switch the focus of America's response from Al Qaeda to Iraq.

"Iraq was portrayed as the most dangerous thing in national security", Clark wrote. "It was an idée fixe ... a decision already made and one that