

U.S. Presidential Candidates George W. Bush and John Kerry: Comparing Campaign Platforms on Various Security Issues.

ARMS CONTROL & SECURITY LETTERS # 9(153), September 2004

Boldirev

© PIR CENTER

This article contains an analysis of the positions of the candidates for the post of President of the United States George W. Bush and John Kerry on national security issues, deploying missile defenses, the Iraq conflict, priorities for military development, relations with Russian and nonproliferation.

Unlike in many recent elections, national and international security issues are likely to play an important role in the 2004 U.S. presidential elections. The war in Iraq and the war on terrorism have focused America's attention on security, and thus have become key political battlegrounds between George W. Bush and John Kerry. This article will compare some of their stances on various security issues, including: nonproliferation; North Korea and Iran; the development of the military; intelligence; Iraq and Afghanistan; the international community in general; and Russia specifically.

National Security

Both candidates have laid out their basic national security platforms. Bush's plan (which can largely be seen in the 2002 *National Security Strategy*) rests on three pillars, while Kerry's has four basic tenets. There are similarities between the two plans, both call for strengthening international cooperation and employing the power of American values and beliefs. Both candidates have also named terrorism, nonproliferation, and the spread of democracy as key foreign policy challenges facing the United States.

Besides differences in tone, perhaps the most significant difference between Bush's and Kerry's basic national security platforms is Kerry's explicit statement about making America less dependant on Middle Eastern oil. While both Kerry and Bush have laid out energy programs, only Kerry has placed it among his basic national security platform priorities.

Nonproliferation

Both candidates have made nonproliferation a serious issue. Kerry has gone so far as to say, "As president, my number one security goal will be to prevent terrorists from gaining weapons of mass murder." In the last year, both candidates have laid out their proposals for preventing WMD proliferation and strengthening the existing nonproliferation regimes.

Again, there are many similarities between Bush's and Kerry's positions on nonproliferation. Both candidates call for the expansion of the Proliferation Security Initiative, started by President Bush in 2002, and for preventing the further spread of enrichment and reprocessing technologies. They both also call for strengthening international proliferation controls and for expanding efforts to secure weapons and materials around the globe.

There are, however, important differences as well. While both call for expanding efforts to secure weapons and materials, both in the former Soviet Union (FSU) and around the world,

Kerry puts an aggressive four-year timeline both on completing the security upgrades to FSU sites and to conducting a Global Cleanout of weapons-usable nuclear materials around the world.

Fuel Cycle & Export Controls

In terms of the nuclear fuel cycle and strengthening nuclear export controls, both Bush and Kerry want to prevent the further spread of enrichment and reprocessing technologies by supporting the suspension of the export of all enrichment and reprocessing technologies to countries that do not already possess them. But there are also differences between the two approaches.

Bush calls on the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) to not export enrichment or reprocessing technologies to countries that do not already have them, as well as for NSG enforcement of the IAEA Additional Protocol by refusing all nuclear exports to countries that have not signed it. Kerry, on the other hand, calls for the creation of a “consortium of states that would guarantee fuel supply and removal of spent fuel to states that agree not to have enrichment or reprocessing facilities of their own.” Neither candidate, however, has spent very much time explaining exactly how they will get the international community, and especially countries with developing nuclear capabilities, to agree to these limitations.

Nonproliferation Treaties

On other, nonproliferation-related issues the contrasts between Bush and Kerry are starker. President Bush has supported the development and possible testing of new types of nuclear weapons, especially low-yield ‘bunker-busters’, while Kerry has opposed any new nuclear weapons development. Kerry has supported the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) that would put a permanent halt to nuclear weapons testing, while Bush has opposed the treaty (which was a major initiative of the Clinton Administration). Kerry has also supported the Fissile Materials Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) that would halt the further production of weapons-grade nuclear materials. This treaty was put under review by the Bush Administration, and recently, the State Department announced that it would support the FMCT, but without an inspection regime. Bush has also opposed new modifications to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) that would include an inspections regime – fearing that it would not be effective and could harm American business interests; Kerry has supported strengthening the BWC.

Missile Defense

Another major nuclear and nonproliferation-related issue on which Bush and Kerry have diverging views is on missile defense. Bush has been a strong proponent of missile defense, just recently signing a 2005 defense bill that included \$10 billion for missile defense. He has also pushed for the deployment of missile defense components as early as possible.

Kerry, on the other hand, has taken a much more skeptical view of missile defense. While he has supported investment in missile defense, he does not see it as the priority that the Bush Administration does. He has supported neither the high spending levels nor the early deployment dates put forward by the Bush Administration, claiming that missile defense is taking away from spending on the war on terror and other security priorities.

Iran & North Korea

Kerry and Bush have also had significant differences over Iran and North Korea as specific cases for nonproliferation policy.

On North Korea, Kerry has come out for continuing the Six-Party Talks started by the Bush Administration (which include the U.S., Russia, Japan, China, South Korea, and North Korea), but also for conducting direct, bilateral negotiations with the North Koreans if that will help lead to disarmament. The Bush Administration has so far refused to deal with North Korea bilaterally, preferring to keep the issue at the regional/multilateral level.

Kerry has said he plans to “call Iran’s bluff” by creating an international group of states that would offer Iran nuclear fuel supplies and that would take spent fuel out of the country. If Iran refused, then its weapons-related intentions would be exposed. He also calls for supporting IAEA efforts to gauge the extent of Iran’s nuclear program, while urging Iran to verifiably renounce enrichment and reprocessing technologies. If this effort should fail, Kerry calls for putting the issue before the U.N. Security Council. It is this fuel-supply consortium that represents the main difference between Kerry’s policies and Bush’s. The Bush Administration has also supported the IAEA investigations, and has called for much stronger “compliance enforcement” for strengthening the NPT and preventing covert weapons programs under the guise of peaceful nuclear development.

Military Development

There are also differences between the candidates in their approaches to the further development of the U.S. military. In his national security campaign issue brief, Bush not only laid out the three basic pillars of his national security strategy, but also the basic programs and policies he would use to implement it, most of which had to do with the military. In a campaign fact sheet of his own, Kerry laid out his plan for the improving the U.S. military.

On certain basic (and popular) policies Bush and Kerry are on the same page. Both candidates agree on the need to improve training and to continue the ‘transformation’ already underway in the U.S. military and on the need to provide further social support for soldiers and their families in the form of better pay and housing.

Bush made the further development of missile defense one of his military priorities, which is something Kerry obviously has not done. Bush also put more emphasis on increasing the defense budget and the further development of specific high-tech weapons systems, such as: stealthy ships; long-range missiles; unmanned vehicles; and ‘bunker-busters’.

Kerry has put more emphasis on expanding the size of the military (by about 40,000), and especially on increasing the special and non-traditional forces. He wants to double the size of the Special Forces as well as increase the number of psychological operations (PSYOP) and civil affairs personnel. He also has proposed re-orienting the National Guard toward homeland security functions, while maintaining their traditional combat capabilities. Technologically, his plan is focused more on information-oriented concepts (such as “network-centric warfare”) and the development of counter-proliferation units specially trained to deal with WMD threats.

Re-Basing American Forces Abroad

In a speech before the annual conference of the Veterans of Foreign Wars on August 16th, President Bush announced his plans for the largest restructuring of American overseas troop deployment since the end of the Korean War. This plan includes rebasing a large number of heavy forces from Europe back to the United States, as well as shifting troops to other bases, including in Eastern Europe. It also involves pulling up to 12,000 troops out of South Korea. Bush argues that this restructuring will make the U.S. military posture more flexible and would

allow some 60,000 to 70,000 uniformed personnel and about 100,000 family members and civilian personnel to return to the U.S.

Speaking before the same convention two days later, Senator Kerry attacked Bush's proposal. He was especially critical of the plan to remove troops from South Korea, saying, "Why are we unilaterally withdrawing 12,000 troops from the Korean Peninsula at the very time we are negotiating with North Korea – a country that *really* has nuclear weapons?" Retired Gen. Wesley Clark, working with the Kerry campaign, also questioned the utility of taking troops out of Europe at a time when the U.S. is trying to get increased NATO involvement in Iraq and the war on terror.

Intelligence

The intelligence failings around 9/11 and the Iraq war have highlighted the need for changes in the American intelligence system – and the recent release of the 9/11 Commission Report, which calls for significant changes to the intelligence system, has only increased this pressure. Both Bush and Kerry have made improving the U.S. intelligence system major elements of their campaigns. While Kerry quickly came out for the recommendations of the 9/11 Report, including the creation of an 'intelligence czar' who would oversee the entire intelligence community; Bush was more muted in his support, though he eventually stated that he would create an intelligence director – there is still debate about whether Bush's proposal will give the post the authority and access that the 9/11 Commission thinks it should have. Bush has stated a desire to move cautiously on intelligence reform, in order to ensure that its impact on current intelligence activities is limited.

Iraq & Afghanistan

The Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq has only become more of a political issue and debating point as the fighting and instability (and the U.S. casualties) have continued, and as expectations of finding the WMD, that were the main public reasoning for the war in the first place, dwindle. Bush has consistently defended the Iraq war and his Administration's reasons for fighting it. Kerry, who voted for the resolution granting the President the power to fight the war, has had a somewhat more difficult time laying out his position, while at the same time, he has used the Iraq war as a way to attack Bush's credibility and his national security credentials.

Bush has maintained his position about the war saying, "We did the right thing ... and the world is better off for it." Bush has also attacked Kerry's 'nuanced' view on Iraq, as well as his proposition that the U.S. begin pulling some troops out of Iraq next year, saying, "I know what I'm doing when it comes to winning this war, and I'm not going to be sending mixed signals."

The Kerry campaign has said that not only would Kerry have approached the war differently, but that he has a plan for 'winning the peace'. This plan has four basic elements: increasing NATO involvement in Iraqi security; further internationalizing the reconstruction effort; increasing training for Iraqi security forces; and working with allies to forgive Iraqi debt and support the new government. How he will go about convincing the international community, that has of yet proven reluctant to take on a significant role in Iraq, to go along with this plan, he is less specific on.

As long as Iraq continues to be battleground for U.S. troops, it will continue to be a political battleground in the campaign. While one can theorize how Kerry might have approached the war differently, how different either candidates' policies will be come 2005 is another matter. Neither Bush nor Kerry (nor any other American president) would likely sanction the immediate

withdrawal of American troops, and Bush would like to see NATO involved in Iraqi security, as well as further internationalization of the reconstruction effort just as much as Kerry. More likely areas for difference (which, unfortunately, the candidates have been less willing to discuss) are over issues such as the role given to the U.N. or NATO in managing Iraqi security as well as the working with the new Iraqi government.

On Afghanistan, Kerry has criticized Bush for not paying enough attention to rebuilding the country and ensuring its stable development. Kerry has offered a four-part plan for providing Afghanistan with the security, political, and economic resources it needs.” This plan includes: expanding NATO’s presence and area of operations; speeding up the disarmament of the warlords; accelerating the training of indigenous security and police forces; and going after the expanding opium trade.

The International Community

Many in the United States and around the world have accused the Bush Administration of acting unilaterally and ignoring world opinion, and even the opinion of traditional allies. While much of the world may see this election as being between unilateralism and internationalism, Bush and Kerry are not so far apart as some around the world may wish. This is not to say, however, that there are not significant differences between the two in how they have at least stated they plan to interact with the world and with international organizations, such as the United Nations.

In his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, Kerry said, “Let there be no mistake: I will never hesitate to use force when it is required. Any attack will be met with a swift and certain response. I will never give any nation or international institution a veto over our national security.” This is not the tagline that internationalists and multilateralists around the world may have been hoping for – but it is the reality of present-day American politics, no president (or presidential hopeful) can afford to be seen as irresolute in defending America.

In the same section of the speech, however, Kerry also talked about the need to rebuild alliances and restore America’s respect and leadership in the world. How exactly Kerry’s ‘strong alliances for a post 9/11 world’ and Bush’s ‘era of good relations among the world’s great powers’ will differ is not totally clear, though Kerry has pledged to rely more heavily on diplomacy, make the United Nations a “full partner” and to more actively pursue collective security arrangements.

Russia

The good personal relationship between Presidents Bush and Putin is well known, and has played an important role in improving U.S.-Russian relations. The signing of the Moscow Treaty further reducing both countries nuclear arsenals was an important initiative for Bush. And though Russia was opposed to the war in Iraq, Russian cooperation, or at least acquiescence, to the U.S. presence in Central Asia supporting the war in Afghanistan as well as Russia’s recent membership in the Proliferation Security Initiative have been important signs of continued good will between the two leaders.

Kerry has stated that his first priority in U.S.-Russian relations would be in improving nonproliferation cooperation. Not only does he have an enhanced, four-year timeline for securing nuclear weapons and materials, but he has also stated a desire to push past certain bureaucratic obstacles (namely the liability issue) that have hobbled many recent nonproliferation efforts. A second policy priority, but definitely behind nonproliferation, would be the Clinton-era priorities of rule of law, human rights, developing democracy and respecting

the freedom of the press. Energy would be the final platform of Kerry's Russia policy; much like the Bush Administration, he sees Russia as a valuable ally for diversifying U.S. energy supplies away from the Middle East.

Conclusion

The 2004 U.S. Presidential elections are the first in recent years where security and foreign policy will likely play major roles. Both Bush and Kerry have made security one of their main platforms. On many issues the candidates have differing positions, but they also share some common positions and themes.

Though the Iraq war has been incredibly divisive politically, in America and around the world, and though Kerry and Bush continue to trade attacks over whose policies on Iraq are better – in the end, there are not many significant differences to the candidates' approaches to the conflict as it stands today (no matter how differently they may theoretically have approached the situation from the beginning). As President, Kerry is not likely to pull out of Iraq all together; and while he says that he will further internationalize the presence there – Bush has been trying to do just that, and with little success.

Both candidates also support continued military transformation, but while President Bush has been a strong proponent of missile defense, Kerry calls for the expansion of the military, and especially of the Special Forces and other specialized units.

Nonproliferation has been an important issue for both men as well. Bush and Kerry both support tougher export control regulations, especially concerning enrichment and reprocessing technologies, as well as expanding the role of the Proliferation Security Initiative. Kerry supports both the CTBT and the FMCT, which the Bush Administration has either opposed or put under review and limitation. Kerry has also opposed the research or development of new, low-yield nuclear weapons, another Bush Administration initiative. Kerry has also called for significantly speeding up operations to secure nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union and around the world.

In terms of the international community, Kerry has tried to portray himself as more internationalist. He has suggested that he would give the U.N a bigger role in Iraq and in other issues as well. He has also, however, tried to portray himself as a strong leader who will act in America's best interests, including acting unilaterally if necessary. This duality can be seen in his campaign slogan, "Stronger at Home, Respected in the World." While the Bush Administration has tended towards 'coalitions of the willing' instead of traditional multilateral institutions, he has also stated that promoting international cooperation is a cornerstone of his foreign policy.

Michael Boldirev – an independent expert

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is published every month (except for January and August). It is dedicated to the problems of WMD proliferation, megaterrorism, arms control, nuclear energy, military technical cooperation, and global security. Statements of fact and opinion expressed in this newsletter are responsibility of authors alone and do not imply the endorsement of the PIR Center. This newsletter and all the information herein is a subject to the copyright and may be reprinted fully or in part only with written compliance from the PIR Center. The publication of this newsletter is supported by the Ploughshares Fund.

