

## The Next Four Years: A Political Forecast

By Tom Barry, Laura Carlsen, and John Gershman | November 10, 2004

*(This policy briefing is the first of a series of post-election reports planned by the IRC program staff. It will be followed by regional reports, covering topics such as the current state and the future of U.S.-Latin America/Caribbean and of U.S.-Asia relations. We are also preparing a prescriptive policy report as the IRC's contribution to an incipient public discussion about the type of principles and reforms necessary to steer U.S. foreign, security, and economic policy agendas off their current dangerous course. This forthcoming policy blueprint will recommend pragmatic reforms that not only will better serve U.S. national interests and security but will also help restore respect for the United States as a responsible global leader and partner.)*

Candidate George W. Bush during the 2000 campaign outlined a policy agenda that was largely in keeping with the moderate conservatism and foreign policy realism of his father's administration. In practice, the first GW Bush administration pursued a radical policy agenda that aimed to rid both domestic and foreign policy of all liberal policy frameworks.

In economic policy, the administration rejected the notions of a social democratic management of capitalism in favor of policies that catered to the short-and medium-term interests of Corporate America. In social policy, the views of the social conservatives and the Religious Right became the Bush presidency's favored framework for interpreting social ills. The Bush White House joined the culture war on the side of those who believe that fundamentalist Judeo-Christian values should guide U.S. domestic and foreign policy. The liberal principle upholding the separation of church and state was rejected in favor of rhetoric and policy initiatives that brought religion not only into the public sphere but also directly into government.

In foreign policy, the first GW Bush administration broke with candidate Bush's promise to consult more closely with allies and adopt a more humble posture in international affairs. Instead, the administration took immediate aim at an array of international treaties that were regarded as constraints on U.S. military options and on U.S. corporate interests. The Bush foreign policy team has not argued that multilateralism needs reforming to ensure its effectiveness. Rather, an aggressive anti-multilateralism aimed at international treaties and international forums it does not control is an imperative of its ideological commitment to U.S. supremacy.

The assault on all vestiges of political liberalism—from multilateralism to the effective dismantling of the New Deal reforms of the 1930s and the New Politics reforms of the 1960s and early 1970s—will continue but at an accelerated pace during the second Bush administration. The four main pressure groups that have united behind the Bush administration include on the ideological side, the



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Religious Right and the neoconservatives; and on the material side, the elites of Corporate America and the militarists of the military-industrial complex. Although each pressure group fields its own specialized policy institutes, all four sectors are represented in the leading right-wing think tanks and foundations, such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

The radical policy agenda of the Bush administration is the product of the rise of the New Right, the neoconservatives, and the Cold Warrior coalition of the 1970s that birthed the “Reagan Revolution.” These radicals believe that the so-called Reagan Revolution, while making

important gains in shifting political discourse to the right, did not fulfill its promise. The political operatives, ideologues, and strategists that circle President Bush will during the second GW Bush administration aim to deal a final blow to the “liberal establishment.” The administration, appealing to its much-ballyhooed electoral “mandate,”

will take aim at all the manifestations of “liberalism” both in domestic policy and in the conduct of U.S. foreign and military policy.

This policy agenda will not only advance radical reforms that aim to sweep aside all vestiges of the liberal reforms of the 1930s-1940s period, but it will also aim to rid the U.S. government bureaucracy and

the judicial system of all those who oppose this agenda. And it will take aim at centrists, liberals, and progressives in nongovernmental organizations for their purportedly anti-patriotic, partisan positions. At the same time, the U.S. government will pursue a dual agenda with respect to inter-governmental institutions and mechanisms:

undermining their ability to constrain U.S. power, while supporting the increased presence and influence of NGO consultants and pressure groups that affirm the Bush administration’s agenda within these multilateral forums.

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## Specific Foreign Policy Implications:

The foreign, military, and economic policies of the second GW Bush administration will likely be felt throughout the world. No region or country will be unaffected by the new administration's pursuit of its agenda to restructure the global order in line with its sense of U.S. moral superiority and its confidence in U.S. military might. However, some of the main repercussions will probably include the following:

- The U.S. grand strategy to restructure the Middle East will remain central to U.S. foreign policy and will likely be pursued at a more rapid pace.
- Multilateralism will continue to erode both as a process and as a principle for resolving problems that threaten international security and progress. President Bush and his foreign policy advisers regard multilateral instruments of global governance mainly as a constraint to U.S. national interests, although occasionally they will opportunistically appeal to multilateral forums to endorse or support U.S. policies, especially if it serves to induce burden-sharing of U.S.-led initiatives.
- The occupation of Iraq will not lead to the democracy and freedom the White House predicts. It's unlikely that the new Bush administration will, at least in its first two years, admit its mistakes and end its military occupation, despite heavy costs and casualties and mounting opposition at home and abroad.
- Intelligence reform will not improve U.S. intelligence operations that track real threats to U.S. national security. The leading figures in the new foreign policy team, including the president himself, will likely continue to evaluate and manage intelligence operations not in terms of their accuracy but rather in terms of their coherence with U.S. national security doctrine, their support of the needs of the military-industrial complex, and their support of the administration's political and military agenda.
- The State Department and the CIA will become yet more subservient to both the Pentagon and the vice-president's office. Dissenting voices will be ignored or suppressed.
- As the U.S. budget crisis deepens, the administration will reduce funding for development and humanitarian assistance abroad unless it directly furthers U.S. foreign and military policy goals.
- The global divide between the U.S. government and other nations will deepen, and the coalitions that the U.S. builds will be with nations that are either ideologically aligned (such as Italy), are driven primarily by economic opportunism (such as Japan), share a sense of an Anglo-American world order (Great Britain, Australia), can be counted on to promote the U.S. agenda regionally (such as Colombia), are repressive nations that have become new dependencies in the war on terror (such as Pakistan and Uzbekistan), or are countries that appeal to imperial or hegemonic prerogatives in their regions (such as Israel and Russia).
- Countries targeted by the Bush administration and the neoconservatives as existing or potential threats to U.S. supremacy—Iran, North Korea, and China—will likely take active steps to develop an effective deterrent

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capacity against military strikes, thus leading to increased weapons proliferation and reduced willingness by nations to enter into arms control agreements.

- The Bush administration will remain committed to a foreign policy of regime change effected by a combination of military, political, and economic interventionism in such countries as Cuba and Syria.
- The new Bush administration will pursue a more aggressive energy policy to secure oil supplies in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and will intensify efforts to open up areas for drilling in the United States itself, such as the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge.
- U.S. trade deficit and budget deficits (and related unsustainable dollar values) will remain problems that will undermine the U.S. global position and increasingly threaten the fragile state of the international economy. Pressure from Europe and international financial institutions for the United States to restructure its economic policies will trigger intensifying friction internationally, leading to new pressure for the U.S. government to restructure its domestic economic policies by raising taxes, cutting spending, and increasing interest rates. Although the U.S. government proclaims its commitment to unilateralism and to protecting its global hegemonic position, the second GW Bush administration will be forced to come to terms with how dependent the U.S. economy is on the capital flows of foreign investors to sustain the unprecedented debt burden accumulated by Washington.
- Although the centrality of Israel-Palestine to tensions in the Middle East will manifest its reality, the Bush administration will not back away from its support for the hardliners in Israel, unless Israelis themselves chart a new political course.
- U.S. trade officials will intensify their campaign to establish bilateral and regional trade agreements, and the U.S. government will resist all trade and investment proposals that do not serve the direct interests of U.S. corporations. The Bush administration is not an adherent to free trade philosophy but rather sees “free trade” as an instrument that usually advances the interests of Corporate America. It’s likely that the economic unilateralism of the Bush White House will undermine the process of global economic governance embodied in institutions such as the World Trade Organization and forums such as the G7-8.
- Democrats and Republicans in Congress will remain united around a bipartisan agenda of promoting an American worldview through U.S. political aid (channeled to organizations and movements by the National Endowment for Democracy and U.S. Agency for International Development), propaganda, and public diplomacy. During the second GW Bush administration, the neoconservative policy framework of “democratic globalism” will serve as it has since the early 1980s—as the glue of a bipartisan foreign policy that provides a liberal rationale for military and political interventionism around the globe.

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## Reactions by Political Parties and Governments

The first GW Bush administration came to office in 2001 with the conviction that it needed to construct a new foreign and military policy that was shaped by the realities of a unipolar world. The second GW Bush administration, despite the setbacks in Iraq, will likely retain this basic worldview. However, there is the possibility that such a U.S. posture will spur the emergence of a more plurilateral world in which a regionally readjusted balance of political, economic, and diplomatic power offers a new, positive vision of cooperative international relations. Alternatively, stark divides in international affairs could give rise to more anarchic, competitive, and conflictive relations within and among nations.

- The Democratic Party will offer little or no leadership in national security matters, focusing instead on domestic policies and global economic issues that offer more potential for building constituencies and coalitions to oppose the White House. Thus, the Bush administration can count on reduced public and media interest in foreign policy.
- Other nations have thus far been reluctant to oppose U.S. global hegemony and political leadership. It's likely that a second GW Bush administration will spur a new resolve by foreign nations, large and small, to confront U.S. agendas that diverge from or intentionally undermine international law and multilateral rules. Gradually, we can expect a more unified and clearly articulated counter-agenda by countervailing blocs of nations that insist on the importance of international treaties, reassert the primacy of diplomacy in settling security issues, and forge a policy consensus around solutions that address the precarious state of the international economy and the impoverishment of many nations and communities. But U.S. military supremacy will remain uncontested in any new balance of power that emerges.
- There appears to be a political counter-current in Latin America (Venezuela, Brazil, and Uruguay) to the growing right-wing politics in the United States. Allies of the U.S. war in Iraq have lost some elections, (notably Spain) but some supporters have won (Howard in Australia, Arroyo in the Philippines), which suggests that while Europe is a center of opposition, that opposition, for ideological or opportunistic reasons, is not uniform.
- The Cancun Coalition that opposed Washington and the European Union in the World Trade Organization in 2003 has yet to demonstrate staying power as an alternative power bloc of developing countries in global trade negotiations.
- Planetary issues, particularly global climate change, could lead concerned governments and a restive transnational community of activists and citizens to coalesce into a force with the power and will to confront the Bush government. If this happens, the second Bush administration will have serious difficulties sweeping this issue aside.

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## Reactions by the Global Justice Movement

Citizen activism, spearheaded by progressive and liberal groups, has been hailed as the “other global superpower” and as the main source of innovative, constructive thinking about solutions to the pressing transnational security, development, governance, and environmental challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The tenuous sustainability of the two major transnational citizen movements—one opposing corporate-driven globalization, and the other opposing the U.S. war on Iraq—has created some skepticism about the real power and political coherence of these movements. Nonetheless, it’s likely that globally networked progressive and liberal citizen movements will eventually regroup and that they will benefit from their experiences in projecting and implementing their global agendas.

Although plagued by their own inconsistencies, differences, and short-term attention spans, transnational citizen organizing may again surge as a force that the second GW Bush administration cannot ignore—especially if this activism finds common ground with governments, political parties, community organizations, and business sectors that share concerns about the impacts of misdirected and misconstrued U.S. moral clarity and military might. In the short term, however, the global justice movement will need to come to terms with a number of shortcomings and obstacles before it can, either alone or in coalition, constitute a strong counterweight to the Bush administration’s reckless pursuit of U.S. hegemony.

- There is a dangerous likelihood that international political opposition to the second Bush government will become ever less visionary, less proactive, and more reactive. This trend was already evident during the first GW Bush administration, when the predominance of national security issues narrowed political discourse and sidelined efforts at envisioning new policy frameworks. This tendency will be even more pronounced now, as center-left forces find themselves in a more polarized and defensive situation—fighting desperately to hold on to the reforms in civil rights, women’s rights, social programs, environmental law, human rights, etc. that became a hallmark of an enlightened and more inclusive U.S. society. Moreover, this reactive, defensive response could lead to abandoning efforts begun over the past decade to develop constructive alternatives and set new agendas for the 21st century from the perspective of an internationally networked civil society.
- It would be a great loss if the myriad global citizen activist movements currently addressing development, security, justice, and environmental issues were to reframe their movements to exclusively address anti-American and anti-imperialist issues. Although such a response would serve to channel much of the indignation sparked by the arrogance and militarism of the U.S. government, the de-emphasis on creating viable national and international alternatives to dominant economic and political structures could seriously divert civil society movements that are promoting new agendas that address both traditional and nontraditional threats to peace, equity, development, and sustainability.

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- Increased efforts by citizen activists to develop a global anti-war movement directed against U.S. wars and occupations could lead to resurgent anti-war activities directed against the Bush administration and its small circle of allies. But if accepted as a single focus, the energy and resources devoted to opposing war and imperialism will likely divert from efforts to propose new agendas that could lead to a more lasting peace. These include policy agendas to create equitable multilateral bodies, control transnational corporations, and to build a new and more multidimensional and forward-looking international community including governments, business, and civil society united around principles of sustainable development and constructive international engagement.
  - The quick dissipation of massive international campaigns to oppose the invasion of Iraq demonstrated that even vigorous and widespread protest cannot always overcome the combination of jingoism, nationalism, and powerlessness that sets in after military offensives. Veteran opponents of both liberal interventionism (Southeast Asia) and right-wing, neoconservative interventionism (Central America) will recall that these movements persisted for many years—more than a decade in the case of Vietnam—before the society as a whole recognized the folly and crime of such military interventionism.
  - A revived anti-war movement is unlikely to have any impact on the Bush administration unless it becomes a massive movement that includes heartland sectors in the United States (including Bush constituencies) and military units themselves. But since the mobilizations before the invasion of Iraq, the global anti-war movement has lost clout and credibility and limited its reach by ignoring the real need for aggressive police and military actions against international (primarily Islamic) terrorist networks.
  - Moreover, some leading actors in the anti-war movement, both in the United States and abroad, have further distanced the movement from the concerns and interests of the general public by framing it oftentimes in terms of solidarity with Iraqi militants, rather than standing on the principles of illegal war and destructive occupation. If a movement whose principal focus is the U.S. presence in Iraq is to help steer U.S. foreign and military policy off its radical, delusional course, it should frame itself as a peace movement concerned about all actors who rely primarily on militarist strategies to achieve their political ends. Signs of such an anti-occupation peace movement are already emerging.
  - Nonprofit policy organizations, foundations, and activist groups, especially those to the left of center, will likely face increased government scrutiny, harassment, repression, espionage, and funding cutbacks.
  - Rather than channeling multiple energies into a narrowly defensive posture, a renewed global citizen's movement must counter the Bush agenda with a cohesive alternative agenda. The Bush agenda has been forged by an uneasy but successful coalition of neoconservatives, social conservatives, economic libertarians, and militarists that have melded radical ideologies, theologies, and policies into a seemingly coherent plan of action for the nation and the world.

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- The center-left has nothing close to an alternative agenda that integrates cultural, security, ethical, economic, social, and political issues. Liberal and progressive forces have typically organized around single issues rather than an overall policy framework that unites domestic and foreign policy agendas around cross-cutting principles. This imbalance is by no means entirely due to the intellectual or political failings of center-left reformists. The forces of corporate globalization have decimated some of the main constituencies, notably organized labor, for the social democratic reform agendas that counter the power of capital with power of government and people. In a related development, transnational capital, reacting to the popular challenges of the 1960s and 1970s, became increasingly politically astute, not just in terms of campaign funding but also in funding an infrastructure of policy institutes, judicial reform networks, think tanks, and national coalitions that propagate the ideology of unrestrained profit-seeking and economic libertarianism, while at the same time equating individualism, materialism, and markets with traditional religious and ethic values.
  - In this context, if the right-wing radicals are to face major setbacks, they will be the consequence more of their own excesses and divisions than because of the philosophical cohesion of any alternative policy framework or the deeply rooted strength of a united center-left opposition. In that case, the setbacks experienced by the radical right will be only temporary.

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