

# Outreach insights . . . and shortfalls

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America has had almost 2,400 soldiers killed in action due to this recent campaign in Iraq. Accordingly, President George W. Bush will likely see a heightening of dissatisfaction and protests among the American public. Ironically, he has no one to blame but himself for his dismal approval ratings.

The president has underestimated the intelligence and understanding of our citizens. In today's era, while Americans are slow to react on occasion, they are much more sophisticated in defense and foreign affairs matters as a result of increased education and media exposure. However, the average American is unaware of all the intricacies and detailed information that our president is using to make his foreign policy decisions. He has not provided the public with necessary components extracted from intelligence gathering.

Mr. Bush has asked his constituents for their trust and patience, but has been plagued by the perception that he is too secretive, thus creating the suspicion of malicious actions. This has strained his relationship with the public. The president has not necessarily created bad foreign policy, but he has certainly failed in putting out the right word to Americans.

In the complex world in which we live, nation-states are involved in both overt and secretive security, social, economic and political alliances. Not having the knowledge of all these various alliances makes it difficult to fully comprehend the reasoning behind our diplomatic interactions between countries.

For too long, Americans have been blind to the fact that key countries, namely China and Russia, are involved in alliances and agreements that are hostile to the interests of the United States. For instance, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao have met five times since last April. This brings to mind what Sun Tzu said: "One who does not know the plans of the enemy cannot forge preparatory alliances." In much the same vein, one who does not know the depth of enemy's alliances cannot forge or support proper plans. One can safely assume that these two competing powers are continuing to plot against us because of their past and current actions.

If Americans were better aware of these numerous alliances and secret agreements, then we as a nation would be better prepared to stand up to these alliances with broader citizen support. We are unable to fight an enemy we cannot see due to a lack of facts. Americans have a predilection toward peace, stability and isolationism. They cannot be blamed for their opinions when they are not exposed to the necessary information.

In Washington, knowledge is power. Government institutions, especially intelligence agencies, safeguard critical information that is often vital to shedding light on American policy. Heightened secrecy, which is often unnecessary, ironically acts to weaken our security. In the words of G.A. Keyworth II, former adviser to President Reagan, "The price of protecting information is so high that classification becomes a handicap."

When agents and intelligence methods are not at risk, declassification would allow the American public to see the reasoning behind strategy. Strategic policies do not work when the majority of Americans are apprehensive about them, and when their children's lives are expended for a nebulous cause. As we

observed in Vietnam and are now starting to see in Iraq, the strongest military in the world is handicapped when the nation's citizens are not fully supportive of its actions.

There needs to be a higher threshold for secrecy. Congress and the American public, and even our American-grown businesses, need access to a database that details all the various alliances and machinations that each country engages in, particularly the interactions that are hostile to America. An expanded system similar to The Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook would give Congress, our citizens and of course, our media, a much-needed resource for understanding our foreign policy and making informed decisions.

The current lack of timely and truthful information is perhaps this administration's greatest downfall. For example, recent revelations showed that the Russians helped Saddam Hussein in 1990 and again in 2003, resulting in mistakes that probably cost increased American casualties.

In the case of nuclear proliferation, if Americans understood the extent of the danger, they would actively support counterproliferation measures as a necessary tool of self-defense in the 21st century.

Paramount is winning the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens. If Americans are united behind a president's decisions, hostile elements will be reluctant to challenge us.

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