

**Hard Choices for America's Future:
Strategic Opportunities for a New Century
Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
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As the shock of 9-11 begins to wear off, one unanticipated consequence now emerging is a fuller appreciation of why foreign policy matters. Before 9-11, few Americans believed that what happens beyond our borders affects their lives. We were a nation focused on ourselves, constantly looking in the mirror, but rarely out the window.

But on September 11, our perspective abruptly changed. Suddenly foreign policy became something that affected our economic security as well as our personal security. Before September 11, only a few of us were discussing the real threats we face, and how to defend against them. Even fewer were discussing anything even remotely resembling a multi-year, multi-billion dollar commitment to homeland defense. A few weeks later, a half dozen letters made threats of biological or chemical weapons, or a deadly vial in a backpack, much more real.

We were forced to come face to face with our worst fears. We saw the kind of death and destruction that could be wielded by religious fundamentalism, anti-Americanism and terrorists fueled by blind hatred.

And we learned that we should not leap forward with answers before we're sure we've asked the right questions - like whether or not to invest in missile defense when a more imminent threat was transnational terrorism.

Now we are faced with the hard choices about what we need to do and how to do it.

The good news is we are the world's only superpower. The bad news is we're the world's only superpower. All too often nations expect us to make their problems our highest priority.

So, while we can't be all things to all people, we should not shrink back from our unavoidable responsibility to bear the burden of international leadership. If 9-11 was a wake-up call to the American people, it was also a wake-up call to the unilateralists in the Bush Administration.

George Bush came into office disdainful of engagement with the world. He spoke of "nation-building" as an unacceptable option.

When he became President he pulled back from treaties on nuclear testing, on germ warfare, on environmental protection, and announced his intention to withdraw unilaterally from the ABM Treaty.

Less than a year after he was elected, when the first plane hit the World Trade Center, the notion of unilateralism was put to the test. To his credit, he realized it was time to reach out to allies and embrace new partners.

I commend him for this. Epiphanies, I believe, are veto-proof. We can only hope they're permanent as well.

The response has been positive. NATO soldiers flew surveillance flights over the eastern seaboard of the United States.

Musharraf made the strategic decision to align Pakistan with the West.

Putin provided us with intelligence on Afghanistan. He helped secure our presence in the Central Asian republics, and countries around the world joined with common purpose in a common struggle.

Today we must ask if President Bush is going to maximize the strategic opportunities we now have to shape the next fifty years as the Cold War shaped the last fifty, and make long-term engagement one of the strategic weapons in his diplomatic arsenal.

U.S. foreign policy must recognize that many of the new threats we face will require multilateral responses.

But no one, least of all the enemies of the United States, should have any doubt that another attack on this nation would lead to our use of overwhelming force, in concert with others or alone, and with the full weight of American power and resolve.

But more and more, from law enforcement to intelligence, we have to work closely with international partners. The reason is obvious: Al Qaeda is neither limited nor deterred by national boundaries.

Isolation is not an option. Unilateralism is not an option.

We must be engaged -- the question is how.

Let me be clear. I don't believe engagement is simply supporting treaties on biological weapons, or the environment, or even the ABM Treaty, although these are important, if not critical, symbols of our intentions.

America's engagement around the world is a long-term investment in our security, and should be at the core of our foreign policy.

The first real test of post- 9-11 engagement is to stay the course in Afghanistan.

After twenty-three years of almost constant war, the country is in total chaos. Food and water are scarce. Kabul is a moonscape. Devastated. Destroyed.

Not, primarily, by American bombs but by years of war, failed regimes and struggles among armed warlords.

Our military personnel call it: "the other end of ground zero..."

And yet after four days in Kabul, I was surprised at the deep pool of goodwill from a nation so often portrayed as bitterly resentful of any foreign presence.

The Afghan people want us to stay. They need our help. They need security. They know the difference between those who come as enemies and those who come as liberators.

Let me give you two more examples of what I mean. I met with the Minister of Education and asked him what he needed most urgently. I expected to hear about rebuilding shattered schoolhouses, or the need for desks, books, pencils, and soon. But he looked me in the eye and said, "Security. Without it, nothing can be built."

When we went to the old Soviet Embassy, we met with some of the 20,000 refugees from the Shomali Plain living in absolute squalor with little water, little food, and no hope.

But even the prospect of escaping those conditions to return home could not overcome their fear. The Shomali plain, a vast and fertile agricultural area just north of Kabul, was the breadbasket of the nation before the Taliban turned it into an arid sea of dust.

All they wanted was to go back to their farms, but the refugees told us they couldn't because they had no assurance their families would be safe if they tried to return.

Security is the basic issue in Afghanistan.

If Chairman Karzai is to govern effectively, the first things he needs are a military, a police force, and an infusion of economic assistance. And he needs them now.

Tokyo was a start, but more will have to be done, and the United States will have to take the lead. If we don't, no one else will.

And like it or not, our leadership role must include soldiers on the ground. If others step forward, fine, but whatever it takes, we should do it. History will judge us harshly if we allow the hope of a liberated Afghanistan to evaporate because we failed to stay the course.

A robust multi-national force helping the nascent Afghan government extend authority to all its borders is a wise investment by the West and our regional allies in Central Asia.

President Bush's aversion to even the rudimentary elements of establishing order and stability -- because it might put him on the road to "nation building"-- must be outweighed by our national security need to prevent Afghanistan from backsliding into a lawless safe haven for anti-American terrorists.

This means a continued engagement in Afghanistan until we can transition from a multi-national to an Afghan force. But first things first.

Pockets of Al Qaeda and Taliban still need to be rooted out. Incidents of firefights and even major battles continue throughout the country.

Just last week the Kabul government suffered a setback with the reversal at Gardez.

At a Kandahar hospital there was a shootout where Taliban with grenades strapped to their chests had been holed up for six weeks.

Their leader, Mullah Omar, is still at large. No one knows where Osama bin Laden is hiding, if he's alive. Their top lieutenants are still on the run. Others have been killed or fled to other countries. And we have to finish the job before we talk about what comes next.

But we can't seem to talk about what comes next without talking about Iraq. It's obvious we must end the reign of Saddam Hussein. It would be unrealistic, if not downright foolish, to believe we can claim victory in the war on terrorism if Saddam is still in power.

But rather than talking about it now, let me in the interest of time, save my thoughts about Saddam for the Q&A at the end of my remarks.

Clearly, whatever strategic decision we make on what comes next - it will require hard choices.

Engagement in Afghanistan, engagement with allies and friends around the world, waging war on terrorism, and homeland defense will take more than our will and resolve. It will take a huge increase in the level of spending. But most of all it will require us to prioritize, something many in elected office find it hard to do. Our job in Washington is to debate what comes first, to determine priorities.

Some people are calling the new budget a "guns and butter" budget, while this morning's Post calls it a "War Budget". Either way, without the squandered 400 billion dollar surplus we were projected to have by 2004, we've got more than a numbers problem. We've got a priorities problem.

Let me focus for a few moments just on the guns side of the equation. I agree with the President, and have argued for some time, that an increase in conventional military spending is necessary to prepare the nation for the next generation of challenges.

Let's look at the top six modernization programs. The cost estimates today begin at a minimum of 350 billion dollars.

339 F-22s to replace an aging F-15s fleet will cost \$ 62 billion. 2912 Joint Strike Fighters to replace aging F-16s, A-10s, and F-14s will cost about \$223 billion. 30 new C-17s will cost \$6 billion.

A thousand Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicles to move Marines from water to land at high speed will cost \$14.9 billion. And one more aircraft carrier will have a price tag of about \$6.5 to \$7.5 billion.

And let's not forget about national missile defense estimates by the Congressional Budget Office that an effective mid-course intercept system alone would cost more than \$50 billion. And that estimate leaves out the cost of defending our allies, which the President insists he also wants to do.

With today's budget release calling for \$7.8 billion for missile defense for FY '03, the Administration is well on its way towards an expenditure in the hundreds of billions.

We haven't even gotten into President Bush's promise of pay raises for our men and women in uniform and other high-ticket items to enhance the quality of life for military families.

And we haven't gotten into what demands we'll encounter in combating the so-called Axis of Evil, three very bad actors, for whom we must devise very different approaches.

Today, with delivery of the President's little blue budget book, it's not too soon to begin prioritizing the most pressing threats to our security. In my book, not to mention that of the Joint Chiefs and the National Intelligence Estimate, terrorism with weapons of mass destruction - but without ICBMs - is the greatest threat we face.

There are many sources for these weapons, and it takes years to get or build them. But there's a shortcut, a place that has it all. It's "the candy store." Other people call it "Russia."

A year ago, Howard Baker and Lloyd Cutler issued a report on the state of Russia's nuclear materials. Baker testified to the Foreign Relations Committee regarding "the enormity of this danger." He said: "And the fact that we have not blown ourselves up so far is no guarantee that

we could not still; or that some rogue nation or rogue group has not yet successfully stolen a nuclear weapon does not mean that they cannot still do it if all you have is a padlock out there."

How shall we meet that threat, along with the threat that chemical or biological weapons might find their way from Russia to the rogues?

Senator Richard Lugar and I believe one way is to reduce Russia's Soviet-era debt, in return for Russia investing the proceeds in non-proliferation programs. We hold over \$3 billion in such debt, and our allies hold several times that. Debt reduction could help Russia secure its sensitive materials and technology - and avoid an expected payment crunch next year.

Baker and Cutler proposed spending 30 billion dollars over 8-to-10 years to secure Russia's nuclear materials and technology.

I would add another \$10 billion for our share of chemical weapons destruction in Russia, a few billion dollars to keep their chemical and biological weapons experts out of harm's way, and some more to track down and secure their missing radioactive materials that could be used to make a radiological "dirty bomb." That adds up to roughly \$ 45 billion - which is still less than the price of that mid-course intercept system to defend us against ICBM's. Does anyone doubt that our first priority must be to close Russia's candy store?

By the way, we haven't begun talking about things the American people believe ought to be very high priorities: Social Security, Medicare and a real prescription drug program.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope I'm not dating myself too much by recalling former Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen's famous words: "A billion here, a billion there...before you know it, you're talking about real money. I may not be a mathematician, folks, but this budget doesn't add up. You just can't fit ten pounds into a five pound bag.

No one could have imagined the tragedy of September 11, or the associated financial costs we're still incurring. But when our nation is challenged, that's when we're at our best. And our best means we must have the will to make the hard choices.

Now we need to prioritize, to determine how best to secure America's future. In my capacity as Chairman, I want the Foreign Relations Committee to reclaim its highest function and shine a bright light on the issues of the day. To discuss with experts how our national security concerns abroad are indivisible from the physical and economic security of the American people here at home.

Starting tomorrow with Secretary of State Cohn Powell we hope to lay out for the American people the difficult but inevitable choices we must make to ensure our continued well-being and prosperity.

We will be looking at a broad range of issues: How do we protect ourselves from weapons of mass destruction? What about nonproliferation? How do we take advantage of new opportunities to enhance key bilateral relationships?

What's next in the war on terrorism? What do we do about infectious disease, democratization, human rights?

Folks, in a twist of fate, we may be able to turn recent calamity into good luck. History may have given us the best chance we've had since the end of World War II to build a new framework for international affairs.

So far, the American people have been served well by the President and his Administration in the prosecution of the war on international terrorism, but the war is only five months old and the new patterns of cooperation and support are young and fragile. We should nourish them and help them flourish.

Today the doors to international cooperation and American leadership have opened, but if we slam them shut too often we will lose our chance to realign forces for decades to come - and we will be condemned to repeat our wars rather than move beyond them.

Thank you.