

Andrew Barr

An Arsenal of Democracy

“We’re tired of being pushed around.” When William F. Buckley uttered these words in 1978 in a debate with then-governor Ronald Reagan on the Ratification of the Panama Treaties, he echoed the sentiments of many Americans who feared for the stability of the United States as a player on the world stage. Time and time again, our core values and ideas are questioned and endangered. It is only through a strong and unyielding foreign policy, along with great domestic support of that policy that we endure. Failures of diplomacy, the mismanagement of the military and economy, as well as the polarization of the American public, do nothing but break down an otherwise formidable foreign policy and cause an otherwise powerful nation to be brought to its knees.

The widespread opposition to Operation Enduring Freedom has, as war opposition did during the Vietnam and Korean conflicts, proved to ultimately stymie the war effort. As we saw in Vietnam and in Korea, the strength behind a foreign policy lies first and foremost in the people, and without the support of the populace, our foreign objective, military or otherwise, is doomed to fail. With this in mind, it is imperative that the policy makers, legislators, and military leaders rally the public behind the United States role in the Global War on Terror. It is only through strength and unity that we can help stabilize regions in which peace has been long vacant.

While we must never underestimate the importance of our military, we must also not forsake the art of diplomacy as a means to resolve conflict and build international ties. Much of the progress that has been made in the Middle East, many of the gains that have been made in communities from Kadhimain to Mazar-i-Sharif have been made as a result of talks between regional leaders and U.S. and international liaisons. In the failure of diplomacy, however, we must not be afraid to turn to the military and other forces as means to accomplishing our objectives. Too often we rely on talks and negotiations, hoping to do avoid the horror of war, only to wait too long and find ourselves embroiled in a conflict far worse than imagined.

Recently, there has been increased public emphasis on domestic economic issues, with a corresponding decrease in attention to foreign policy and security. The danger here, of course, is that we can become so consumed with internal issues – unemployment, health care, and financial regulation – that we lose sight of our critical role in world affairs. Excessive internalizing leads only to isolationism and neglect of a global perspective and strategy. In an increasingly shrinking world, such neglect can only lead to future international problems that will dwarf and exacerbate current domestic issues.

It is essential, therefore, that as a nation, we maintain an unwavering focus on our global role, a role characterized by strategic diplomacy through power. It is only then that we can truly safeguard against being unsuspecting victims of rogue governments, terrorist networks and others how would do us harm. As our national history clearly reveals, we as an American people have no tolerance for “being pushed around.” Let us not forget our heritage, let us not forget our proud history, one of defending democracy, coming to the aid of the weak and destitute, and above all serving as a “city on a hill,” a shining example of freedom and social and economic equality for the rest of the world.