



Epitaph for the Bush Doctr

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Remember George W. Bush? He was the president who [warned in 2002](#) that Iran and North Korea were part of an "axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world." On his watch, he vowed, the United States would "not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."

Bush was the leader who [pledged at his second inauguration](#) to support "democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." He let it be known that the truculence of rogues and dictators would not be indulged. "Some," he said pointedly, "have unwisely chosen to test America's resolve -- and have found it firm."

Whatever became of him? That president who in the wake of Sept. 11 [posed a stark choice](#) to the sponsors of jihadist violence -- "You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists" -- where is he now? And, more important, where is the foreign policy he once stood for?

For some time now it has been apparent that the Bush Doctrine -- with the signal exception of Iraq -- didn't survive the Bush presidency. Notwithstanding the president's heartfelt words about supporting democratic reformers, for example, dissidents and freedom-seekers have largely been forgotten.

"When you stand for your liberty," Bush told the world's prisoners of conscience in 2005, "we will stand with you." Yet while the brave democrat [Ayman Nour](#) rots in an

Egyptian jail, Washington continues to send \$1.8 billion in aid each year to the [brutal regime of Hosni Mubarak](#). The administration restored [full diplomatic relations](#) with Moammar Khadafy's Libya, stopped designating it a sponsor of terror, and [even invited the Libyan foreign minister to the White House](#). But it has forsaken [Fathi el-Jahmi](#), Libya's foremost democratic dissident, who has spent years in Khadafy's dungeons for daring to advocate pluralism and free speech.

So it has gone, in one country after another. In Russia, in Saudi Arabia, in China, the Bush administration's commitment to liberty and democratic reform has subsided into little more than lip service. The principled "freedom agenda" Bush championed so ardently has evaporated. In its place is the old "realist" agenda he had sworn to overhaul: stability, business-as-usual, stand-by-your-(strong)man.

And what about those dangerous regimes that were seeking the world's most destructive weapons?

In a dispiriting [Weekly Standard cover story](#) on Condoleezza Rice's record as secretary of state, Stephen Hayes notes that six years after Bush vowed to keep Iran and North Korea from going nuclear, "North Korea is a nuclear power and Iran is either on the brink . . . or making substantial progress." Despite a "seemingly endless series of multilateral negotiations" aimed at neutralizing the two dictatorships, Pyongyang and Tehran have grown more, not less, provocative. "And in

each case," Hayes writes, "the State Department has gone out of its way to avoid dealing with these provocations lest they jeopardize our diplomacy."

The Bush Doctrine was clear: Any regime aiding terrorists or other enemies of the United States would pay a severe price. Yet when North Korea was caught providing nuclear technology to Syria, the State Department wanted the news kept secret -- for fear, writes Hayes, that public disclosure of North Korea's proliferation might ruin negotiations. When he asked Rice what price Iran has paid for arming and training the Iraqi insurgents who kill US troops, she replied vaguely that "there are lots of consequences" but mentioned only the capture of an Iranian paramilitary commander in Irbil 18 months ago. "Well," she said, when pressed on whether she would negotiate with Iran even as it foments terrorism, "we've said we would talk about everything, all right."

Back in 2000, Rice faulted the Clinton administration for being so obsessed with the trees of diplomacy that it repeatedly missed the forest of US national interest. "Multilateral agreements and institutions should not be ends in themselves," she wrote in [an essay for Foreign Affairs](#). Now, alas, she presides over an all-too-Clintonian foreign policy, one in which negotiations and agreements and deal-making outweigh actual improvement and change. From North Korea to the Palestinian Authority to the United Nations, the principles of the Bush

Doctrine have been forgotten. "We have gone," one State Department official sadly tells Hayes, "from a policy of preemption to a policy of

preemptive capitulation." Is that to be the epitaph of Bush's foreign policy?