Is America Safe?

The Honorable Dan Quayle
Former Vice President of the United States

DAN QUAYLE was elected in 1988 as the 44th Vice President of the United States, having previously represented Indiana in both the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. His legislative accomplishments included provisions to protect the independence of American working families, and as chairman of the Bush Administration’s Council on Competitiveness he worked to reduce the regulatory burden on the business community. As Vice President, Mr. Quayle was also the first national leader to criticize Hollywood’s glamorization of single motherhood. His three books, Standing Firm, The American Family, and Worth Fighting For, champion the same principles of freedom and morality that animated his two decades of public service.

Former Vice President Dan Quayle warned of an alarming decline in military readiness and misplaced foreign policy priorities in an address delivered at Hillsdale College’s Shavano Institute for National Leadership seminar, “Heroes for a New Generation and a New Century,” held May 22-23 in Dallas, Texas.

In one of the more memorable moments of the 1996 presidential campaign, PBS newsman Jim Lehrer, moderating a “town hall” debate in San Diego, impromptu the audience to ask a question about national defense and foreign policy. Finally, a gentleman raised his hand. “I have a national defense question: I want to know what the two presidential candidates are going to do for defense jobs in California.” That’s as far we got on the subject in that campaign, despite the fact that the number-one challenge, responsibility, and priority of the President is to protect our country.

A President who is not focused on foreign policy and national security is not doing his job as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. This issue may not win many elections, but it is the most important requirement of any occupant of the White House. If the President makes mistakes on budgets, education, or health care, they can be corrected by Congress, another law, or another appointment. This is not the case with a fundamental mistake in foreign policy. Consider Lyndon Johnson’s “no-win” campaign in Vietnam. America paid for that miscalculation for more than a generation. Prior to Operation Desert Storm, President Bush and I repeatedly promised, “This will not be another Vietnam.”

In the 1990s, we were still haunted by the 1960s. That’s how important foreign policy is.

The Fading Promise of the Early ’90s

IN HIS 1980 campaign against President Carter, Ronald Reagan asked, “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” The urgent question twenty years later is, “Is America safer today than it was eight years ago?”

When George Bush and I left office in January of 1993, things were going America’s way and the world was safe. The Soviet Union was no more. Russia had a freely elected president. The Berlin
Wall had fallen. Germany was reunited. The yoke of Communism had been lifted off the backs of eastern and central Europe; after 40 years they were free again. The evil system of apartheid had been eliminated in South Africa. Freedom and democracy were advancing worldwide, and particularly in our hemisphere. The very first event that I attended outside this country as Vice President was the inauguration of Carlos Andres Perez as president of Venezuela. Democracy had come to that country for the first time in a long time. In short, we left the Clinton administration with the most favorable foreign policy cards of any administration in American history. But one by one it has fritted them away.

Today, nations like Iran, Iraq, and North Korea are seeking weapons of mass destruction. They already have ballistic missile capability, which, when married with chemical or nuclear weapons, will have the capacity to unleash terrifying devastation. North Korea has fired a three-stage ballistic missile that has the range to hit Alaska's Prudhoe Bay, where we in the U.S. get 25 percent of our oil. China is trying to intimidate Taiwan. India and Pakistan, which both have atomic weapons, recently fought over the territory of Kashmir. While in Thailand several months ago, I met the commander of the Pacific fleet, who stated that his biggest concern was Indian-Pakistani relations.

Isn't this a lesson in political history? Totalitarian leaders like Kim Jong II in North Korea, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Fidel Castro in Cuba, can survive. Authoritarian leaders don't. Democratic leaders clearly don't. Consider the principals of the Gulf War: George Bush, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Francois Mitterrand, Helmut Kohl, and Mikhail Gorbachev—the allied leaders of Desert Storm—are gone, but Saddam Hussein is still there, pursuing weapons of mass destruction.

What has the Clinton administration done about any of this? Is anybody minding the store with the diplomacy, knowledge, and courage to do what is right? Even in our own hemisphere democracy is being turned back. Haiti and Colombia have suffered setbacks. Drugs are more prevalent and their exportation proceeding at a greater rate than ever before. In Peru, President Alberto Fujimori has questioned whether he is committed to democratic principles. And then we had the debacle of Elian Gonzalez, in which our Justice Department simply capitulated to Fidel Castro. I am committed to the family, and I believe that mothers and fathers should raise their children; but this mother brought her son to this country, with the father's knowledge, and gave her life so that her son could live in freedom. The father didn't even plan to come to the United States until Castro got involved. Elian returned to Cuba a puppet and a hero of Fidel Castro, and heroes in a revolution are raised not by their fathers, but by the state. For our Justice Department to arrange such an outcome was both shameful and tragic.

Missing the Big Picture: Russia and China

THE TWO biggest foreign policy challenges facing the United States are Russia and China. The Clinton administration has preferred to deal with smaller ones, such as the invasion of Haiti, the national security significance of which escaped me and a lot of people whose foreign policy expertise I respect. Whereas our administration went into
we pursue the most effective defensive capability: space-based defense, which offers the advantage of shooting down missiles in "boost phase"—on the way up. Russian President Vladimir Putin campaigned on an anti-American, anti-NATO, anti-civil rights platform and won. Why are we permitting him to hold American defense policy hostage?

U.S. policy toward China has suffered from similar negligence. When Jim Sasser lost his Senate seat in the 1994 election, Bill Clinton appointed him ambassador to China even though he had never been there. This wasn't foreign policy; it was a full-employment program for fellow partisans. The Chinese viewed this as a slight and treated American interests accordingly. While on Chinese soil the President became the first American official ever to endorse the "three-no policy" against Taiwan: no independence, no membership in international organizations, and no two Chinas. It was left to the late Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, who went to Beijing later, to enumerate the fourth "no" that President Clinton neglected: no use of military force in resolving the Taiwan issue.

I don’t think the U.S. should encourage Taiwan to declare independence, but we should encourage the two sides to negotiate without the threat of military force from the People’s Republic of China. Taiwan has 20 million people. It has the thirteenth-largest economy in the world. It has democratically elected leaders. It is a de facto country, and we need to make sure that the issue is resolved peacefully. But that requires leadership, diplomacy, courage, understanding, and a President with a skilled foreign policy team.

(continued on pg. 5)