

FOREIGN POLICY: THE DECLINE OF AMERICAN INFLUENCE

By Congressman Mickey Edwards

Congressman Mickey Edwards of Oklahoma City was first elected to the United States House of Representatives in November 1976. He was the first Republican elected to represent Oklahoma's fifth district in 48 years. In 1978 he won by the largest margin received by any major office holder in Oklahoma with 80 percent of the vote.

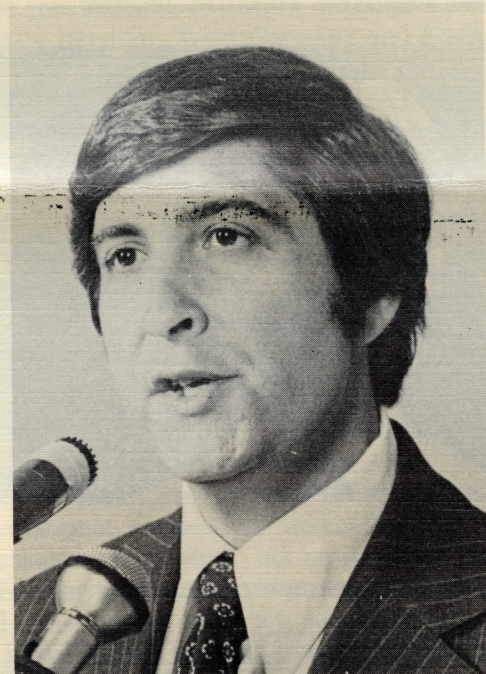
Congressman Edwards was one of two freshmen Republicans appointed to the Special Ad Hoc Committee on Energy and was elected by his colleagues to serve as President of the Republican Freshman 95th Congressional class.

He attended the University of Oklahoma and received a degree in journalism. He also has a Juris Doctor degree in law from Oklahoma City University, where he later served as a law professor. He was assistant city editor of the Oklahoma City Times, and was editor of Private Practice magazine. He is the author of the book Hazardous to Your Health, the Case Against National Health Insurance.

He has been the winner of three Freedoms Foundation Awards and in 1973 was named one of the Outstanding Young Men of America. He is a former trustee of the Heritage Foundation, and is currently Vice President of the American Conservative Union.

Congressman Edwards delivered this presentation at Hillsdale during the Center for Constructive Alternatives seminar on "Taiwan, China, SALT-II, Panama, Iran, the Middle East—Does the U.S. Have a Foreign Policy?"

I've spoken on a great many college campuses in the past ten years, from relatively small schools like this one to some of the major state universities, and yet no campus I've been on, with the exception of my own alma maters, has meant as much to me as Hillsdale does because of the unique commitment you've made here to teaching without the help of designers, planners, policy makers and curriculum writers from the



federal government. If ever the case has been convincingly made that teachers teach better than bureaucrats, it's been here at Hillsdale.

In fact, this is not my first experience with Hillsdale. Seven years ago I commissioned a special study by the Department of Economics and Business Administration at Hillsdale on the subject of health manpower distribution and I chose to use the scholars and researchers at Hillsdale because I needed a report that would have credibility, and I say this to illustrate to you that I've been aware of Hillsdale and its high standards for a long time.

With that in mind, let me turn to another area in which we ought to be able to expect the same kind of commitment to credibility, and that is in the area of our national foreign policy.

im·pri·mis (im-pri-mis) adv. In the first place. Middle English, from Latin *in primis*, among the first (things).

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Of course the first thing a government must do is determine what its foreign policy goals are going to be—to set some kind of overall policy to govern our relationships with other countries. In most cases it really comes down to America first, or Brazil first or India first, whatever country it happens to be, with the single most important element in foreign policy being to watch out for your own national self-interest.

Well, if there has ever been a country that seems to be uniquely oblivious to its own national self-interest, this is it. I mean, who can argue that you're acting in your own self-interest when you give away the Panama Canal and keep New York City instead?

10,000 marines; what would you do? She thought a minute, and then said: "Would you mind repeating the question? I don't see the problem."

Well, I get the feeling that the President doesn't see the problem, and yet if our foreign policy is to reflect a concern with our self-interest, with our self-defense, with alliances and the control of strategic points around the world, then I think we have a great many problems indeed.

For a great many years now, since Arthur Vandenberg sat in the United States Senate, the United States has pursued a completely bipartisan foreign policy.



I should be serious rather than telling jokes, but the truth is, it comes out the same either way. I'm reminded of the story about the time during World War II when the United States was organizing an international nurses corps to serve near the front lines. It was a very dangerous assignment and it was important that the women who were selected be intelligent and resourceful and courageous. So the government selected a team of professors to find some way to evaluate the women who applied and, like all professors, they came up with a hypothetical problem; they asked each applicant this question: suppose you found yourself stranded on a desert island, the only woman, with 10,000 marines, what would you do?

The first woman who came in was a young British girl, and they asked her the question. She didn't even hesitate, responding, "I'd take out my revolver and shoot myself; that's the only proper thing I could do."

The second woman who came in was an American, and they asked her the same question, and she said: "Well, I certainly wouldn't shoot myself; I'd pick out the bravest, strongest, handsomest, richest marine, and I'd marry him, and I'd be happy, and he'd be happy, and he'd protect me from the rest."

The last girl who came in was French, and they asked her the same question: suppose you found yourself suddenly stranded alone on a desert island with

There were no Republican foreign policies or Democratic foreign policies—just American policies, and whether we agreed with them or not, for the most part we all stood behind them because in our face to the world we are not two parties but one country.

And yet now, for the first time in a great many years, the party that is not in the White House has concluded reluctantly that for the sake of the country it now has to abandon that tradition of bipartisan support. In a position paper issued this year, the Republican Party said, in a landmark statement: "The time has come when Republicans must balance their responsibility as citizens with their tradition of bipartisanship." Former Senator Bill Brock, the Republican National Chairman, said: "We have all watched American foreign policy deteriorate in its effectiveness, coordination and international impact during the past two years with first amusement, then concern and now a deep anxiety."

I think it's fair to say that that is what has happened around the world. The world isn't laughing any more, and it's no longer viewing with concern—which is something we seem to do a lot; now the world is watching with great anxiety to see whether this Administration really does have the ability to survive in a complex and interdependent world.

For more than 200 years the United States steadily increased its leadership in world affairs. From a small

nation among giants, America slowly grew to a position of near-equality with most of the European powers, and then, after World War I, to a new role as a giant in its own right—one of the half-dozen major world powers. Since World War II, the United States has been the undisputed leader of the free world, and one of two world superpowers.

There have been periods since of American dominance and of American retreat into isolationism—but the United States has had whatever power it wished to have. If we were gone from the center role on the world stage it was because we wanted to be, not because leadership was not ours to take.

in our intercontinental air force.

We continue to be on the defensive in foreign trade, so badly outmaneuvered not only by the OPEC cartel of oil exporters, but also by Japanese steel subsidies, by foreign shippers of textiles, leather, rubber goods and television sets, that there has arisen in the United States a strong protectionist sentiment that calls for withdrawal from international trade and a vigorous protection of American industry.

And the dollar—victimized by a national debt of more than \$800 billion, accrued federal obligations of more than \$10 trillion, and an inflation rate that may



Now, however, for the first time in 60 years, American influence in the world is diminishing—*rapidly* diminishing, in fact—*not* because we have chosen to be less influential, but because we are losing the ability to command the respect of other nations.

There are a number of different aspects to an international policy—diplomacy, strength of arms, international trade, the strength of the currency—and in every one of those areas there has been a rapid loss of American influence and power—and thus a loss of this country's ability to play a role in world events to help preserve the peace and to keep the free world free.

In terms of national defense, I think there is a recognition that the original SALT treaty, combined with a number of military decisions since that time, has left the United States militarily in a position of a rough, and somewhat shaky, equality at best, and a frightening inferiority at worst. For example, the Russians today have the greatest naval force in the history of the world, while the United States has been effectively reduced to a one-ocean navy, with actual or threatened loss of access to critical seaports around the world, and the highest desertion rate in the history of the navy. The Russians have a substantial advantage in missile power, and, in the air, an intercontinental bomber, the Backfire, which is far superior to our old and outdated B-52s, which at this point are still the central element

end up over 10 percent a year—grows weaker and weaker, except for occasional resuscitation, against the yen, the deutschmark and other foreign currencies.

Now how do all these things fit together? I think Asia is a good case in point.

The United States today finds itself in a rapidly diminishing position of influence in the Far East for a combination of all these reasons. American reactive protectionism threatens new tariffs against Japanese exports; the American dollar cannot keep up with the yen; American troops have been pulled out of Taiwan and in the face of a large-scale military buildup in North Korea, we are apparently going to pull our troops out of South Korea as well. There is a power vacuum in Asia, and it is being filled by the Asians themselves. New trade agreements are being drawn up between Tokyo, Hanoi, Peking, North Korea and the islands of southeast Asia.

Around the world, our alliances are less firm or are being dissolved. In the early 1950s there was a worldwide network of free nations pledged to mutual security, NATO, SEATO, CENTO—but now SEATO and CENTO are gone, and according to our own military experts NATO could not hold Europe for a week in the face of a Russian attack.

So with that background, let's look at some of the

things that have happened recently.

There's no question that the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty has been the high-water mark of the Carter Administration's foreign policy. This very real accomplishment is due in very large part to the personal efforts of President Carter and it is a major achievement.

There are, of course, a number of questions remaining. A lasting peace is not assured. The Congress will undoubtedly approve the \$5 billion price tag on the treaty, although many of us believe the cost will actually be much more than that. But what about the other problems? Will the bilateral agreements between Israel and the United States cause Egypt to take a harder line with respect to further negotiations on the future of the West Bank? Will the economic and diplomatic boycotts of Egypt by the other Arab states undercut Sadat and the chances of peace?

While President Carter basks in what he has accomplished, I think we have to take a hard look at some basic errors in the Carter Administration's approach to foreign policy.

For some time after the Vietnam war, the public attitude in this country was decidedly isolationist. Foreign policy problems were perceived as insoluble—at least if they required even the hint of military aid or military intervention. But the world has not been content to leave our interests alone simply because we did not wish to defend them. The events in China, Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, Iran, Afghanistan and even the SALT II talks have renewed the public's concern about foreign affairs. The Administration's handling of foreign policy has caused a great deal of concern.

First of all, the Administration has failed to clearly explain its foreign policy goals. The Administration's statements on foreign policy have been confusing at best. If they're not confusing the Russians, they're certainly confusing us. For example, last year the President, in his address to the graduating class at the Naval Academy, said, "Our long term objectives must be to convince the Soviet Union of the advantages of cooperation and the costs of disruptive behavior."

"The *costs* of disruptive behavior." What *costs*?

What has the President done to convince the Russians they should withdraw their support of the Cuban expeditionary forces in Africa? Or that we will not tolerate cheating on SALT I? The President has clearly threatened the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union clearly sees he has not had the will to carry out his threat. Anyone who has ever played poker knows you can't continually bluff without at some time also playing some winning hands. Otherwise, your bluffs will be called and you'll lose. One can't continually bluff in foreign policy either. Either the President should not have suggested he would exact a price for Russian adventurism, or he should have taken some action when

that adventurism took place. As Congressman Robert Michel, the House Republican Whip, has pointed out, the President can't just talk tough and then conveniently forget what he's said.

On New Year's Eve in 1977 the President toasted the Shah of Iran for his "great leadership," calling Iran "an island of stability" and referring to the "respect and admiration and love which your people give to you." Thirteen months later the Shah was in exile, our oil imports were reduced to zero, our embassy was overrun, crucial electronic monitoring bases were lost, top secret military equipment was compromised, and the stability of the entire Middle East is now in jeopardy.

Far too often the Administration has given out contradictory signals, confusing friends and enemies alike. While the President was criticizing Cuban activity in Africa, U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young claimed that Cuban mercenaries were a "stabilizing influence" and the President never criticized, corrected or clarified Young's statement.

On May 10, 1977, at a meeting of NATO ministers, the President said, "The threat facing the alliance has grown steadily in recent years." Twelve days later, at a major policy address at Notre Dame, the President said of the NATO alliance, "Historical trends have weakened its foundation. The unifying threat of conflict has become less intensive even though competition has become more intensive." Twelve days after the threat to NATO was growing, it was lessening.

These contradictions do not represent select classic misstatements, but a pattern that has haunted this Administration since day one. Some might characterize it as schizophrenic diplomacy, but I call it zero-risk diplomacy. Foreign policy losses can always be explained away as part of one obscure misfortune or another. But the important thing to this Administration, which appears to be more concerned with image than substance, is that it cannot be accused of foreign policy reversals because of some activist foreign policy strategy of its own.

We "deplore" aggression! We "deplore" human rights violations! Our foreign policy is reduced to mere lamentations. The confusion caused by this pattern has led to frustration. And frustration has led to anger. And anger has led to skepticism about the ability of the President to lead in foreign affairs.

A *New York Times-CBS* survey released last month showed only 30 percent of Americans approve of the way the President is handling foreign policy. When asked to compare the performance of recent presidents, the American people ranked Lyndon Johnson ahead of Jimmy Carter by three percent, Richard Nixon ahead by 25 percent and even Gerald Ford, the man who said Eastern Europe was not under Communist domination, ahead by 27 percent.

Clearly, foreign policy cannot be a series of unrelated events. It must have a theme, a continuity. But there is no continuity.

Even the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty was built upon the roller-coaster of the Camp David summit and before that the incredible invitation to the Soviet Union and the PLO to participate in an all-parties settlement.

President Carter has kept us out of war. Keeping us out of war is an accomplishment. But it's an accomplishment that was achieved because previous presidents provided for a strong national defense. Any nation that considered outright aggression against us was deterred by our military capabilities. This, rather than Jimmy Carter's strategic vision, has kept us out of war.

But what of the national defense under this Administration? The President has unilaterally cancelled the B-1 and halted development of the neutron bomb. Our naval shipbuilding program slides. The President kills a nuclear powered aircraft carrier at a time when the Soviet Union begins to build its first one and the total size of the Russian fleet increases. And now, the Administration is preparing to sign¹ a SALT II treaty that appears almost certain to give the Russians an even greater military advantage.

It's true that this is a tough, complex world we live in. The President's policy options are limited. But the pattern of confused and confusing policies, changing from day to day and from spokesman to spokesman, must end. Many of these crises clearly would not have occurred if, from the beginning of his Administration, the President had shown a resolute, consistent foreign policy with clearly defined goals. We are now reaping the whirlwind of indecision and inaction.

Our foreign policy must be guided by consistent principles, and I have a few to propose:

One. American self-interest is at the heart of our foreign policy.

Two. A human rights policy is only believable if it is consistent. Denouncing human rights violations in countries to which we grant favored-nation trade status and millions of foreign aid tax dollars discredits our claim that we are concerned about human rights and discredits the credibility of the President and his policies. Selective application of human rights principles is worse than no expression of concern about human rights. Our credibility in other areas of our foreign policy naturally suffers from these inconsistencies.

Three. All foreign policy spokesmen within the administration should speak the same language and follow the same tune. Those unelected spokesmen who march to the tune of a different drum should march out of the Administration.

Four. Major policy statements by the President should be clear of contradictions and impossible promises. One policy should not and cannot be all things to

all interests. Candidate Carter, on five occasions, said he would never relinquish actual control of the Panama Canal and Candidate Carter denounced Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's "secret diplomacy." Yet President Carter relinquished actual control of the Panama Canal and only six men in the Carter Administration conducted the secret negotiations that led to the recognition of the People's Republic of China and the dumping of the Republic of China.

These actions, when taken in the context of his previous promises to the contrary, have shattered the President's credibility at home and abroad. The Israeli press speculates on the depth of Carter's commitment to Israel's freedom. West Germany and South Korea begin the first government-to-government contacts with East Germany and North Korea. NATO ministers question the Administration's commitment to a real five percent increase in military expenditures for NATO. The President can only regain his credibility and America's credibility by guaranteeing that his rhetoric and performance are consistent.

Five. The President is going to have to adopt a bipartisan approach in the creation of foreign policy if he wants bipartisan support, both within and outside of Congress, in defense of that policy. Eleventh hour cries for bipartisan support of a Presidential *fait accompli* in foreign affairs just won't do any more. If these principles are not adopted by the President, I believe future international events will make the 1980 Presidential elections a referendum, not on inflation, but on foreign policy and our survival in tomorrow's world.

That's not an exaggeration. A look around the world makes it very clear that we are talking about survival. The loss of American influence and power is a very real threat to this country and its security.

I oppose the Panama Canal treaties, but whether one was opposed to them or not, the current very open disagreements about the treaty between this country and Panama make the potential loss of access to the Canal a very real possibility—and that has to be taken in the context of other developments as well.

Consider just the important question of who controls the vital waterways of the world, the sea lanes that military experts call the chokepoints. If we lose guaranteed first priority access to the Panama Canal, which is what the treaty clearly provides, that must be taken in the context of our loss of the important seaport at Angola, with its important location on the South Atlantic; a new government in South Africa, which will control the southern tip of Africa; and leftist governments in Tanzania and Mozambique, on the other side of Africa.

Afghanistan is now a Marxist state and the Shah is gone from Iran; with the consent of Afghanistan and Iran—or with the consent of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has now shifted its top Ambassador from Washington to Moscow, the Russians, for the first time in

recent history, would have direct access to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean—a major goal of the Soviet Navy for decades.

Vietnam is a Soviet ally, and now there are Soviet ships at Camranh Bay, giving the Russians access to a key seaport on the South China Sea.

And then there is the Red Sea, and at the top of the Red Sea, the Suez Canal.

As a result of our policy in Iran—our support of the Shah and Bhaktiar and the Ayatollah and Bazargan—other countries in the Mideast are beginning to question how reliable an ally the United States is. Syria and Iraq are already friends of the Soviets. Saudi Arabia, which controls the eastern bank of the Red Sea, is now making overtures to the Russians again for the first time in years and the principal American ally in the Saudi government is slipping from power. And now even King Hussein, in Jordan, is calling for the Russians to get involved in the Middle East.

At the mouth of the Red Sea, on the east, are two little countries we've pretty well ignored in the past, South Yemen and North Yemen, and now South Yemen is a Russian ally and is using Russian MIGs to attack our allies in North Yemen. If South Yemen pursues that war, wins it, the united pro-Russian Yemen would be bigger than Saudi Arabia and would control the principal work force for the Saudi oil fields as well as controlling the entrance to the Red Sea. On the other side of the Red Sea are Ethiopia and Somalia. Ethiopia already has a pro-Soviet government and has been waging war on Somalia—and Somalia, seeing the reliability of American support, is now making its own

overtures to Russia so the Soviet Union today threatens all of the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

Russian and Cuban adventurism is not conducted on a random policy of going wherever some whim seems to dictate; it's a consistent policy that threatens loss not only of Africa and the Mideast, but of all the major sea lanes in the world.

In the last two years the United States has not only lost influence and allies, it has rapidly lost its ability to shape the direction in which the world is moving. And the result is a very real danger not only to the security of our allies, to Taiwan and Israel and the NATO countries, but to ourselves as well.

The foreign policy of this country must be challenged and changed. We must stop the deterioration of our military strength; we must stop negotiating disarmament treaties which disarm us without equally disarming our enemies; we must develop a policy that will stop the Russian and Cuban advances in the Middle East and Africa; we must re-establish a presence in the Pacific; we must strengthen our intelligence gathering capabilities, our trade policies and the value of the dollar in relation to the currencies of other countries.

Those are the basic and immediate changes that must be made if we are to have a foreign policy that will ensure our ability to survive as a free people in an armed world.

¹ The treaty was signed shortly after Congressman Edwards gave this paper at Hillsdale—Ed.

Thomas Sowell to Speak

Thomas Sowell, Professor of Economics at the University of California at Los Angeles, will deliver the Ludwig von Mises Distinguished Visiting Lecture Series presentation on the Hillsdale campus October 25, at 8:00 p.m. His address will be open to the public and free of charge.