

SURRENDER AS REALISM

WEEKLY STANDARD EDITORIAL, 12/04/06
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FOREIGN POLICY realism is ascendant these days, we are told. This would be encouraging if true, because our foreign policy must indeed be realistic. But what passes for "realism" today has very little to do with reality. Indeed, if you look at some of the "realist" proposals on the table, "realism" has come to be a kind of code word for surrendering American interests and American allies, as well as American principles, in the Middle East.

Thus, the "realists" advise us to seek Syria's help in Iraq even as the Syrian government engages in a concerted campaign of assassinating every Lebanese political leader who opposes the return of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon. Presumably, the "realist" position is that we should give Lebanon back to Syria, or at least turn a blind eye to its murderous efforts to regain control there, as an incentive to Syria to help us in Iraq, where Syria is also engaged in supporting terrorists. "Realism" is letting dictators get away with terror and murder-and, in particular, letting them get away with the murder of our friends.

The "realists" advise seeking Iranian help in Iraq as well. They are coy about suggesting what the United States could give Tehran as an inducement for such assistance, but the implications of their position are clear. After all, the Bush administration has already offered to talk to Iran, provided the Iranians agree to suspend enrichment of uranium. That has also been the position of the Europeans. The Iranians have refused.

So the "realists" are adapting to the reality of Iranian intransigence. They are in effect suggesting that the administration drop its long-standing position and begin negotiating with Iran despite the Iranian regime's refusal to agree to the common U.S.-European demand. What the realists have in mind, then, is that the United States should turn a blind eye to Iran's nuclear weapons program, in exchange for Iran's help in easing our retreat from Iraq. Who cares if this would destroy U.S. credibility, weaken those in Europe who are trying to be strong, undermine the effort to prevent Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, and lead to

a cascade of additional nuclear states in the region. It would at least make possible further "realistic" accommodations to these new and deadly realities.

The "realists" also advise putting pressure on Israel to deal in a more forthcoming way with the Hamas-dominated Palestinian government. Israel should be induced to make concessions despite the ongoing violence and the refusal of Hamas to ratify even Yasser Arafat's acceptance of Israel's right to exist. Thus, in order to conciliate Arab dictators and radicals, Washington should retreat from long-standing principle and hand a dramatic victory to the forces of violence and extremism in Palestine.

So let's add up the "realist" proposals: We must retreat from Iraq, and thus abandon all those Iraqis Shiite, Sunni, Kurd, and others-who have depended on the United States for safety and the promise of a better future. We must abandon our allies in Lebanon and the very idea of an independent Lebanon in order to win Syria's support for our retreat from Iraq. We must abandon our opposition to Iran's nuclear program in order to convince Iran to help us abandon Iraq. And we must pressure our ally, Israel, to accommodate a violent Hamas in order to gain radical Arab support for our retreat from Iraq.

This is what passes for realism these days. But of course this is not realism. It is capitulation. Were the United States to adopt this approach every time we faced a difficult set of problems, were we to attempt to satisfy our adversaries' every whim in order to win their acquiescence, we would rapidly cease to play any significant role in the world. We would be neither feared nor respected-nor, of course, would we be any better liked. Our retreat would win us no friends and lose us no adversaries.

What our adversaries in the Middle East want from us is very simple: They want us out. Unless we are prepared to withdraw, not just from Iraq but from the entire region, and from elsewhere as well, we had better start figuring out how to pursue effectively-realistically our interests and goals. This is true American realism. All the rest is a fancy way of justifying surrender.

-Robert Kagan and William Kristal