

Ramblings

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A Divided Electorate Has Given Us No Mandate for the Future

If nothing else, what remains clear about the election of 2000 is that the American electorate is sharply divided and the new administration and Congress have received no mandate for the future.

The near-equal congressional outcome, for example, settled nothing. Democrats claim that their issues were dominant, but they failed to capture the House of Representatives. Republican insistence that the election was a vindication of their anti-Clinton crusade was undercut by the defeat of two House impeachment managers: Rep. Jim Rogan of California and Bill McCollum, who lost Florida's senate seat. The Republicans lost ground in the U.S. Senate, which is now equally divided.

What voters said about policy remains very much in question. About one in five voters said they chose Governor Bush as a slap at Clinton. Beyond this, Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, who ran on a platform further left than that of the Democrats, polled 96,698 votes in Florida. If even a fraction of these votes had gone to Vice President Gore, Florida would have been in Gore's column beyond any question.

Some commentators point out that there is no longer a conservative majority in the U.S. and that most Americans support an increasingly activist role for government, particularly in areas such as Social Security and Medicare. The voters seemed to say no to school vouchers and yes to gun control. Well-funded school voucher initiatives in Michigan and California lost by large margins. Voters in Oregon and Colorado easily passed measures to require background checks on weapons purchases at gun shows.

Conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, who had been confident of a decisive Republican victory, acknowledged that the election results meant his confidence might have been misplaced. "Maybe there are fewer of us than I thought," he said on his radio program, which reaches 22 million people a week.

John Podhoretz, a conservative columnist, declared:

Painful though it is for me to admit it, the three-decade electoral trend toward conservatism and the Republican Party . . . is now definitively at an end. If you add up the Gore and Nader votes . . . the candidates of the

left outpolled George W. Bush by three percentage points, about 3 million votes. Ever since 1968, when Richard Nixon and George Wallace combined for fifty-seven per cent of the vote and turned American politics on its head, the Right has been convinced that it is the truest, deepest voice of the people. In every national election until this one, there's been reason to believe in the accuracy of that conviction. . . . To be sure, the country has shifted rightward to a significant degree, but the shift is now so ingrained that the Democratic Party has subsumed it as well. . . . Most democratic politicians now speak in support of welfare reform, a balanced budget and the crusade against pop-culture sleaze. Most talk tough on crime. . . . By shifting to the right, the party has paradoxically given itself room to inch leftward again.

The activist constituencies within the Democratic Party—minorities, gays, public-employee unions—now have the passion and drive that the conservatives had in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Mr. Podhoretz argues that

The Nixon-Reagan coalition lasted before the tectonic plates began to shift during the 1960s. We're in a new political age, and the new rules are being written as we speak. My conservative brethren had better get used to it. There are fewer of us, and more of them.

The division of the electorate is no longer based primarily on such traditional criteria as income and education. A new set of patterns of party loyalty appears to be rising, based more on subtle social and moral matters. Increasingly, intensity of religious conviction, and the differing outlooks of men and women, married and single voters, small town residents and urban city dwellers, separate Republicans from Democrats.

Americans are not divided "over foreign policy, management of the economy, crime, welfare or other traditional issues that used to separate left and right," argues Professor Francis Fukuyama of George Mason University.

Both candidates tried to grab hold of the electorate through tried and true political appeals that had worked in earlier elections. But the real issues in American politics have become cultural ones that can only indirectly be addressed through politics and public policy. As a result, people had to vote their intuitions as to how the candidates stood on them, with many evidently not making up their minds until they stepped into the voting booth.

Public opinion is increasingly difficult to gauge. Sociologist Alan Wolfe, for example, has found that middle-class Americans are intensely concerned about "moral decline," but just as steadfastly opposed to people who were "judgmental."

This is also true with regard to the role of government. Americans will say that they believe in limited government, balanced budgets and tax cuts but will, at the same time, call for a new prescription drug program, and increased spending on

Social Security and Medicare. And Republicans, who promise to cut back government if elected, have not even tried to eliminate the Departments of Education and Energy, which they promised to dismantle if elected. In fact, government has grown larger under Republican as well as Democratic administrations, although at a somewhat slower pace.

In the case of foreign policy, a bipartisan consensus may be emerging. The 1990s were filled with old enmities and disorder. For five decades, U.S. strategy focused on “containing” the Soviet Union. Now, strategists identify two major trends: a technology- and communications-spurred drive to global economic integration and co-existence with political and tribal fragmentation that usually produces trouble. Global communications and individualized technologies, such as microcomputers, mean information moves in a blink. Even the rulers of North Korea have realized that they cannot isolate their people.

From the muddle of the 1990s, both Republicans and Democrats have identified “instability” as the “new enemy.” It makes sense to deter violence, create wealth and promote stability. The idea of “positive engagement” calls for proactive diplomacy that uses private enterprise, nongovernmental organizations, allied involvement and appropriate U.S. political and economic aid. It entails improving intelligence to identify conflicts.

The “positivists” advocate “tiered responses” to crises. Here is where differences between Republicans and Democrats crop up. The Clinton administration tended to turn to U.S. military forces. Republicans suggest they would be slower to raise U.S. involvement to the “military tier” unless vital interests were at stake.

There is agreement, however, that Washington must do a better job of using the military to signal clear commitment to deter violence. This means fast-moving forces armed with precision weapons. The new administration faces a number of important foreign policy issues: Saddam Hussein, Cuba, the Middle East, and the question of a missile defense. The voters have provided little indication of their preferences in any of these areas.

Some in Washington argue that the uncertain and confused results of the election represent a prescription for stalemate. On the other hand, in a society in which the divisions between parties are almost equal, and in which the policy differences are often more rhetorical than real, there is no reason that progress cannot be made in areas where consensus can be reached. In other areas, there are things far worse than an inactive government.

Attack on U.S.S. Cole Illustrates Lack of Preparedness for the Asymmetrical Warfare that Lies Ahead

The bombing attack on the *U.S.S. Cole* in Yemen, which killed seventeen U.S. sailors, may have been “a shot across the bow of America” warning terrorists can strike “at will anywhere they want,” states terrorism expert Peter Brown.

Commentator Fareed Zakaria refers to “the David problem.” He notes that,

The military calls it asymmetrical warfare. American military power is unprecedented in history. We spend more on defense than the next five great powers put together. An ongoing technological revolution will lengthen that lead over the next few decades. So what's a frustrated enemy to do? Strike Goliath with a slingshot. Use stealth, speed and sometimes suicide to draw blood—and media attention.

U.S. officials point out that globalization helps terrorists. Cold-war arsenals are for sale, as are the scientists who built them. Twenty years ago it would have been difficult and expensive to put together explosives that would blow a forty-by-forty foot hole in a modern destroyer. Today, such material can be obtained by mail order. The \$500 Global Positioning System that Hertz puts into its new rental cars can be used by terrorists to pinpoint targets. The computer networks used by the U.S. military can be penetrated. In Yemen, for example, it is likely that someone gained access to precise refueling and docking schedules of the *U.S.S. Cole*.

The fear in Washington is that terrorist groups will move to the use of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. In his new book, *Six Nightmares*, former national security adviser Anthony Lake reports that more fissible material has been stolen from the former Soviet Union than the U.S. was able to produce in the first three years of the Manhattan Project. Saddam Hussein's government has admitted to producing 2,245 gallon of anthrax, 5,125 gallons of botulinum toxin and four metric tons of chemical weapons during the 1990s. Each of these chemicals could kill billions of people. Smuggling this material into the U.S. would not be difficult.

The U.S. has spent a decade planning how to fight two regional wars simultaneously and has maintained NATO's capacity to deter a Russian invasion of Europe. It has spent \$60 billion researching a missile shield, but when it comes to the immediate threat of international terrorism, the U.S. remains unprepared, not bolstering its intelligence and covert operations and lacking good coordination between law enforcement and national security officials.

The kind of conflict facing the U.S. in the future, it is widely believed, will be an asymmetric struggle, between the U.S. and an enemy that looks and acts more like the Viet Cong than the old Soviet Army. In the wake of the Persian Gulf War and the Kosovo air campaign, it is unlikely that any country will attempt to fight a "symmetrical" war against the U.S. Instead, foes are more likely to make war by other means; the attack upon the *U.S.S. Cole* is an example of such asymmetry.

Anthony Zinni, the recently retired Marine general whose last post was command of U.S. forces in the Mideast region, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee. He said that the sneak attack against the *Cole* was but an overture of things to come:

We will eventually see a weapon of mass destruction used in a terrorist act. We had better start thinking about how we're going to be prepared for that event. And that's inevitable, as this asymmetry continues.

Senator Max Cleland (D-GA), a disabled Vietnam veteran, declared: "That's a powerful statement, an incredible statement." If anything, General Zinni's words were softer than those of Secretary of Defense William Cohen who said:

The likelihood of an attack on American soil, using either a chemical or biological or, indeed, a nuclear weapon, is quite, not only possible, but probable.

Terrorism specialists believe that it is only a matter of time before weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are used. Yonah Alexander, director of the International Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, notes that

Short of an actual explosion, nuclear terrorists have a wide range of other tactics, including making a credible threat or hoax to use a nuclear weapon, holding a stolen nuclear weapon for blackmail, exploding a radiological device to spread nuclear waste, launching a rocket attack on a nuclear reactor, or bringing a reactor to meltdown. Thus, Chechens buried radioactive material in a Moscow park in 1995, and, last September, officials in Ukraine foiled a terrorist plot to overthrow the government and seize the operating nuclear reactor at Chernobyl. Indeed, thousands of nuclear weapons and hundreds of tons of nuclear materials stored in Russia are still at risk of being stolen or traded on the black market, even after an almost decade-long U.S.-financed effort . . . to tackle the nuclear security problem. To survive, unemployed former Soviet weapons scientists are being tempted to sell their skills for making nuclear weapons and delivery systems to interested rogue states such as Iran and Iraq, and to terrorist groups.

What are the lessons for the next administration in the White House? Yonah Alexander provides this assessment:

First, so long as groups and governments oppose our values, policies and actions, Americans will continue to be at risk at home and abroad. Second, it is a fiction to assume terrorism will continue on a conventional level on land, sea and air. Third, the probability of threats involving WMD, particularly nuclear terrorism, will greatly surpass anything experienced thus far. Fourth, we must place the threat of both conventional and unconventional terrorism as a top priority of the United States, ranking alongside such issues as strategic arms control and national missile defense. And fifth, international cooperation focusing on implementation of existing counter-terrorism multilateral agreements is crucial to long-term deterrence to terrorism.

The Clinton administration seemed to learn little about how to deal with terrorism. Some see an alarming parallel between the attack on the *U.S.S. Cole* and the attack on American forces in Somalia seven years ago, where eighteen

American soldiers died. “In both instances,” states David Hackworth, a retired colonel in the U.S. army and now a commentator on national security affairs,

. . . at the highest level—the White House, State Department, Pentagon, Intelligence Community and Central Command—the civilian and uniformed bureaucrats fouled up big time. Simply stated, the right hand didn’t know what the left hand was doing, basic security measures were ignored and people died. . . . Like our Rangers in Somalia, our sailors on the *Cole* who were fed into the fire like a gas-soaked log—even though intelligence had warned of an attack on a U.S. warship and State had closed its embassies in the region because of a danger alert just days before the *Cole* arrived. Central command not only ignored these reports—never upgrading its threat level from green to red as it shot up the thermostat—it failed to conduct basic security checks of harbor workers in Aden.

In Washington, an analyst at the Defense Intelligence Agency resigned in protest after the attack on the *U.S.S. Cole* because his warnings of pending terrorist acts in the Persian Gulf went unheeded. The DIA agent’s assessment was at least the second warning of terror attacks in the region that circulated inside the administration, but did not help the *Cole’s* crew avoid the terrorist suicide bombing. Senator John Warner (R-VA), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the *Cole* did not deploy small guard boats that could have thwarted the approaching suicide bombers.

The *Cole* attack was in many ways a good example of the challenges the U.S. faces. Milt Bearden, a former CIA official, and Larry Johnson, a former State Department counter-terrorism specialist, state that,

The Clinton administration has shot its bolt on the terrorist problem with small effect. . . . The new administration can start fresh with a more sharply defined set of goals . . . and bring the full, coordinated force of American legal, diplomatic, military and intelligence capabilities to bear on the problem.

How can the U.S., with its formidable power and worldwide responsibilities, increase its chances of foiling attacks like the one on the *Cole*? As the threat of asymmetrical warfare grows, few real answers have thus far been offered.

TV’s Election Night Performance Confirms Distrust in Media Objectivity

A Gallup Poll released in November indicates that journalists are held in increasingly low esteem. At the lowest end of the list of occupations which enjoy the trust of Americans are car salesmen, insurance brokers and newspaper reporters.

Many previous surveys have produced similar results. A *Los Angeles Times* poll found that 67 percent of respondents agreed with the statement,

The news media give more coverage to stories that support their own point of view than to those that don't.

A survey by the Roper Center shows the depth of public mistrust of the media. Eighty-two percent think reporters are insensitive to people's pain when covering disasters and accidents; 64 percent think the news is too sensationalized; 64 percent think reporters spend too much time offering their own opinions; 63 percent think the news is too manipulated by special interests; 60 percent think reporters too often quote sources whose names are not given in news stories.

A study released by the Committee of Concerned Journalists suggested a decline in journalistic standards, particularly a growing emphasis on disseminating the latest developments in a competitive story rather than determining their accuracy. White-hot competition generated by the increase in twenty-four-hour news channels and the proliferation of talk shows has led to a more tabloid style sensationalism and less fact-based reporting. "The media culture today is oriented around talking about the news rather than reporting it," said Tom Rosenstiel, a media critic and vice chairman of the committee.

The media's performance on election night in November, 2000 provides an example of why the distrust in journalists has been growing.

Washington Post columnist David Ignatius notes that,

The networks in the act of observing the election results changed them. That's the awful fact about Florida, and it cuts both ways. The Republicans are right that the networks' first mistaken forecast at 8 p.m. that Gore had won Florida deterred some GOP voters from going to the polls. And the Democrats are equally right that the networks' premature proclamation at a little after 2 a.m. of announcing that Bush had won Florida goaded Al Gore into offering a premature concession.

The networks claimed to have based their blunders on their polling and computer analyses. They all were looking at the same data from the Voter News Service (VNS) organization, a pool made up of representatives of the Associated Press, CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox News, which collects, tabulates and disseminates voter returns, exit-poll results and various electoral projections.

VNS was established by the networks in 1990 to conduct exit polls on Election Day. In reality, it was the networks, not VNS, which called Florida for Gore early in the evening, and for Bush in the early morning hours.

In the first instance, Florida was called for Gore by ABC, which decided in 1994 on its own to make election calls. It set up its own decision desk and staffed it with experts who reviewed the VNS exit poll results and incoming vote counts and then made their own predictions. It seems clear that ABC was more eager to be first—than to be correct.

In the second case, Bush was declared the winner not by VNS but by Fox News, also motivated by a desire to be first with less concern about being right. Ironically, Fox's decision to declare Bush the winner was made by John Ellis, who headed the call desk at Fox and happened to be Bush's cousin.

The presidential race was not the only contest that the electronic media called too soon. CNN, for example, declared Democrat Maria Cantwell the victor in the Washington state U.S. Senate race long before the results were clear. Republican incumbent Slade Gorton told supporters he would not concede—at least until 1 million outstanding absentee votes were counted.

Dependence on polls has proven questionable at best. Even internal campaign polls got it wrong. *The Washington Times* reported November 6 that, based upon its house polls, the Bush campaign was confident of a victory. Karl Rove, Bush's chief political strategist, reportedly had said his polls showed the Texas governor winning in the vicinity of 320 electoral votes. According to Rove, internal polls pointed to Bush polling 50 to 51 per cent versus 40 to 45 per cent for Gore.

We now know that VNS was plagued by a series of errors that distorted the Florida vote all during election night. According to an internal VNS investigation, we learn that its techniques were inherently risky. The group had no reliable way of estimating the number of Florida's absentee ballots in the presidential race, which were almost double what it had expected. In addition, VNS dramatically underestimated the number of Florida votes still uncounted at 2 a.m.

While CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN and Fox decided to project Vice President Gore and, six hours later, George W. Bush the Florida winner—and had to retract both calls—those decisions were based heavily on bad VNS data.

Media reporter Howard Kurtz notes that,

This was more than just a media embarrassment. The calling of Florida for Gore gave many viewers the impression, especially after the vice president won Michigan and Pennsylvania, that he was on his way to the White House, a situation Republicans say may have discouraged some Bush voters from turning out. The later projection that Bush had won Florida fostered a national mind-set that he had been elected president, which Gore supporters say made their recount battle that much harder.

If VNS performed poorly in gathering data, the networks performed poorly in rushing to judgment with little basis for doing so. VNS editorial director Murray Edelman says that,

It would appear that calls are being made at the minimum acceptable tolerances for risk, with very little allowance for error. If we are to continue in this manner, our decision procedures must be redesigned.

The news culture in which the 2000 election took place is markedly different from the past. During the 1980s, as cable chipped away at the networks, a new breed of TV executive began to look with a colder eye at the major networks' news divisions, which in the past had been largely exempt from bottom-line profit-making considerations. The need for higher ratings led to increased pressure for the news divisions to produce sensational or dramatic new reports or interviews. This in turn led to the proliferation of "news-magazine" shows, which can be cheaply produced and draw in viewers seeking celebrities and exposés.

“Truth is no longer as interesting as gossip,” said Bill Kovach, curator of Harvard’s Nieman Foundation, a mid-career program for journalists.

Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel have written *Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media*, in which they claim that argument is overwhelming reporting, that the old professional culture that rewards the gathering and verification of information is being overwhelmed by cheaply produced commentary, chat and speculation. With so many channels and so much airtime to fill, there’s little time or money left for the truth.

The media performance on election night in November 2000 will be long remembered. Martin Plissner, a former executive political director of CBS News, who was for seven years a member of the VNS board of directors, declares that,

The second-guessing and the soul-searching over this miserable moment in the history of television, and indeed all news reporting, have only just begun.

Bush Has the Opportunity to Rebuild and Strengthen Our Defenses

George W. Bush’s selection of Donald Rumsfeld to serve as his defense secretary is a clear indication of the direction in which the new administration will move in the important area of rebuilding and strengthening our national defense after the Clinton era, during which it was permitted to seriously deteriorate.

Rumsfeld, who served as defense secretary in the Ford administration, has remained active in national security affairs, having chaired two congressionally-mandated blue-ribbon commissions: the 1998 panel on ballistic missile threat and the panel now completing its work on space power.

Frank Gaffney, Jr., president of the Center for Security Policy and a former Reagan administration Defense Department official, argues that,

It is no exaggeration to say that, thanks to Mr. Rumsfeld’s leadership, the debate on national missile defense has been wholly transformed by the bipartisan panel’s finding that—contrary to claims by the Clinton administration and its politicized intelligence community—the U.S. is indeed at risk of missile attack from rogue states like North Korea, Iran and Iraq, as well as from Russia and China. This was an extraordinary accomplishment . . . both for the commonsensical approach it took to the available evidence and for the virtually immediate turnaround it caused the CIA to make when its contention that such threats would not emerge for at least fifteen years became untenable.

In the wake of the Rumsfeld Commission’s report in July 1998, and its validation one month later by a long-range, three-stage missile launch over Japan by North Korea, the congress adopted by overwhelming majorities

legislation making it U.S. policy to deploy effective national missile defenses as soon as technologically possible. This creates a bipartisan basis for George W. Bush to fulfill his campaign promise to do just that.

The work of Mr. Rumsfeld on space power may prove no less important. In Frank Gaffney's view,

The United States' future security and economic competitiveness depend critically upon the nation's ability (1) to have ready, affordable access to and use of space and (2) to be able, if necessary, to deny potential adversaries the ability to exploit that strategic high ground against U.S. interests.

Defense experts say that Donald Rumsfeld's larger challenge is to help the Pentagon recover from a lost decade. While the U.S. defense establishment is unquestionably the world's most formidable—the only existing military force capable of projecting power globally, it is also a military that has largely been neglected during the eight years of the Clinton administration. Throughout the armed services are serious signs of deterioration and decay.

Andrew J. Bacevich, a retired Army officer and professor of international relations at Boston University, points out that,

In the decade since the Persian Gulf War, the combat readiness of American forces—as measured by equipment availability rates, crew manning, and training standards—has slid gently but steadily downward. Exacerbating the erosion in readiness is the fact that major weapons systems forming the backbone of the U.S. arsenal, more than a few of them tracing their origins to Mr. Rumsfeld's previous term as defense secretary a quarter century ago, are becoming increasingly long in the tooth. The Clinton administration's response to this problem has been to unveil ever more utopian schemes for "transforming" the armed forces in order to achieve "Full Spectrum Dominance." But action has trailed appreciably behind rhetoric: The military that exists today is still by and large the force developed to fend off the Warsaw Pact, reduced in size by one-third.

There are other serious problems facing the military. There has been an erosion of the military professional ethic and the willingness of young people to serve. Within the officer corps, there is evidence of demoralization, cynicism and disdain for senior leaders, both military and civilian. The attrition of younger officers has now reached a post-Cold War high. Paralleling this problem is the growing difficulty that the services face in filling their annual quota of new recruits without compromising enlistment standards. Many point to a gap between the role that has traditionally inspired soldiers to serve—warriors respected for defending their country—and that which is increasingly

their role—members of a global constabulary promoting peace and order abroad who are unwilling pawns buffeted by the culture war at home. In this regard, says Professor Bacevich,

Mr. Rumsfeld's challenge is a two-fold one. First, he must articulate for soldiers a clear and credible sense of purpose, reflecting a realistic appreciation of post-cold war threats, existing or potential, and sensible criteria for the use of force—both sorely lacking in the Clinton era. . . . Second, Mr. Rumsfeld must find ways of insulating the military from the intrusions of radical feminists, gay rights advocates, and any other activists who fancy the armed services as a handy vehicle through which to advance a worthy cause. He must reaffirm the principle that the very nature of their responsibilities make soldiers different from the rest of us—and that those differences are critical to military effectiveness and lend to military life the peculiar savor that inspires people to join in the first place.

With a defense budget of \$310 billion for next year, U.S. military spending exceeds the combined total of the next ten countries, including China and Russia. However, research and development of new weapons systems has lagged, force levels have declined and overseas deployments have risen fourfold. While the Cold War may be over, U.S. armed forces have never been busier. In the decade since the fall of the Iron Curtain, nearly sixty small-scale wars have erupted around the globe. And although the U.S. has intervened in few of them, Army deployments have skyrocketed from one every four years to one every fourteen weeks. All the service chiefs complain that this has eroded military readiness. Last year the Army's 10th Mountain Division received a readiness rating of C-4. In other words, it was deemed unfit for combat.

Four-star general John Hendrix, head of the key Forces Command, says this is proof that the Army needs a bigger budget and more manpower. He recently said 60,000 troops should be added, putting Army strength above 500,000 again, to keep pace with growing global missions like peacekeeping and humanitarian aid.

The question of whether to build a system to defend the U.S. against missile attacks will be heatedly debated in the Congress. In theory, everyone on the Bush team and a majority in Congress agree that the U.S. should go ahead with a defense system. A resolution calling for deploying a system "as soon as is technologically feasible" passed the House 317 to 105 in 1999. That resolution, however, was largely symbolic. Indeed, by last spring more than 90 congressional Democrats urged President Clinton to delay a decision on starting to build a system. Now, by picking Donald Rumsfeld to be his defense secretary, Mr. Bush appears to have chosen a Pentagon chief who will be a champion of the missile-defense fast-track.

Reporting on a recent conversation with Rumsfeld, columnist Georgie Anne Geyer reports:

The answer to the missile threat can no longer be absolute, he told me . . . because the technology is too dispersed. But one can stop the most egregious technology transfers, stay ahead of the technology and delay the delivery of the latest to others, and, above all, build a missile defense system in this country. These answers to this problem are so different from those of the Clinton administration that they define clearly what Donald Rumsfeld will do in his second term as defense secretary. The Clinton administration relied on international treaties, which historically have been easily sidestepped, ignored or just broken. But the Rumsfeld style is to use military might, not to punish unless all else fails, but to deter. This is the key to most of the policy planning to this Republican administration-elect.

The Bush administration it seems clear, will be moving in a new direction in the area of national defense. Its emphasis on national strength—and on a missile defense—will be a welcome reversal of the policies of the Clinton years. Ω

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