

Why I Won't Vote For George Bush

by

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(Questions, rational comments and challenges are welcome)

I'm a retired business executive, an engineer and a lifelong Republican. I voted for George Bush in the last Presidential Election; I will not vote for him in the next one. I'm convinced that the course to which he is stubbornly committed has increased terrorism and will produce economic, environmental and political disasters for us in the very near future, probably within the next 5 years.

John Kerry has not inspired me thus far, but at least I have some hope that he can re-evaluate his position and change our course. I have no hope that George Bush is either willing to change course or is capable of doing so, regardless of the evidence. He has said more than once that his key decisions, like invading Iraq and cutting taxes, are faith-based rather than fact-based.

I'm not suggesting that George Bush acts with malice or that everything he does is wrong. As far as I know he is acting in good faith based on his view of the world. I'm simply convinced that his understanding is too simplistic and that many of his critical actions regarding terrorism and the economy feel good in the short term but are actually counter-productive. What follows are a few specifics.

Response to Terrorist attacks

I supported George Bush's initial response to the 9/11 attacks: deliberate and systematic action to take out Al Qaeda and the Taliban government that harbored it in Afghanistan. That was a necessary, useful and justifiable step in a battle to protect ourselves. It had the political and moral support of our allies and the majority of the rest of the world. He also opened a door to Pakistan and obtained from them the maximum cooperation we could realistically expect in our battle against terrorism.

I did not support most of the Patriot Act, George Bush's initial resistance to a 9/11 Commission, or his administration's indefinite jailing of suspected terrorists or terrorist sympathizers without due process. If we are willing to abandon our legal system or public scrutiny when threatened, then we are kidding ourselves about what we stand for.

Our obsession with terrorism is seductive; it enables us to self-righteously convert "them" while ignoring the urgent need to convert ourselves.

I see in the tragedy of 9/11 a haunting congruence between the World Trade Center and our country. The WTC buildings did not collapse as a direct result of the planes' impacts; our country will not collapse as a direct result of terrorist attacks. The twin towers demolished themselves when heat from the fires on their upper floors critically weakened their infrastructures. The fires raged for more than 30 minutes before each of the two buildings collapsed. It was the buildings' own (centralized and hierarchical) potential energies, systematically created during their 10 year construction process which became the chaotic kinetic energy which destroyed them and killed over 2700 people.

Our nation has been constructed like the World Trade Center. It is hierarchical and centralized. Its infrastructures are physical and mental. They include our political, legal, economic and belief systems. These infrastructures have been erected over the last three centuries to contain and control the physical and mental energies that keep our civilization working.

Since 9/11, we have seen the fires of fear burn and soften our beliefs about openness, trust and equality before the law. We have seen our political reaction take shape as a war to eliminate all terrorists at home and abroad and as a fight against an "axis of evil." Public expectations and political reactions, particularly those of the Bush administration, have already weakened the social and personal infrastructures upon which our democracy rests. Enormous budget deficits, record trade deficits and massive borrowings by the federal government and by homeowners have likewise weakened our economic infrastructure.

We must respond effectively to terrorist threats and to economic problems, but in a way that

doesn't self destruct our civilization. Our obsession with terrorism is seductive; it enables us to self-righteously convert "them" while ignoring the urgent need to convert ourselves.

Afghanistan

I don't agree with Bush's lack of follow through in Afghanistan. He hasn't finished the job of dismantling Al Qaeda or the Taliban. His administration used proxies to fight our enemies instead of paying the price ourselves. Proxies always have their own motives and objectives, so that Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders escaped (frequently through negotiations and bribery) to fight another day. There still are too few US troops and other resources in place to insure the capture of Al Qaeda or Taliban leadership, or to adequately pacify Afghanistan so that its people can develop a stable and peaceful government. Consequently, Afghanistan is at serious risk of reverting back to an extremist state and a training ground for terrorists.

Iraq

Instead of seeing Afghanistan through to success, Bush chose to open a second front in Iraq. He overplayed his hand in several ways:

1. He lost the moral support of the majority of mankind by attacking Iraq without provocation and without any direct connection to the 9/11 terrorists.
2. He alienated allies who are essential to a successful campaign against terror.
3. He believed he could "save" Iraq for democracy by conquering it. The idea that one person or nation can "save" another is a pernicious idea that comes from arrogance on the part of the "saver" and humiliates the intended "savee". In fact, it was a key idea behind the Crusades and much of the slaughter between Catholics and Protestants during and after the Reformation.
4. He used poorly vetted intelligence to justify invading Iraq. As a former CEO, I know this from experience: when a leader lets it be known what the "right" answer is, bureaucratic subordinates will only deliver evidence that supports that answer.

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5. He used enough troops to win the battle but not enough troops or basic planning to secure the peace.

6. While our troops are tied down in Iraq (which may be for years) we are vulnerable to other major threats like Iran or North Korea. Our nation is like a boxer who has thrown his left jab... and is stuck in place: off-balance, with his fist extended, his jaw thrust out and his belly exposed.

Bush received plenty of warnings from military and civilian experts on all these issues. He chose to ignore them and to listen to those who told him what he already believed; a handful of neo-Conservatives: in his cabinet Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and a bureaucratic CIA chief George ("it's a slam dunk") Tenet; in the Pentagon Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and their self-serving Iraqi source Ahmed Chalabi; and our UN Ambassador John Negroponte. The best face I can put on it is that Bush seems to have been guided by simplistic religious idealism, gross ignorance of history, gross ignorance of regional politics, wishful thinking and Texas hubris.

Israel and the Palestinians

A significant stimulus for Islamic terrorists is the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. Bush has done nothing to resolve this issue and in the final analysis it must be resolved by the participants. However, like most previous presidents, both Democrat and Republican, he has sided with Israel. His pre-emptive actions in Iraq gave Israel a green light to use more force on the Palestinians, to build a ghetto forming wall and to avoid correcting their own injustices.

Although I fully support Israel's right to exist in peace and to defend itself, I do not support the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. For a detailed map of who controls which areas on the West Bank, go to www.mideastweb.org/map_israel_settlements.htm

Israeli land-grabs, and related access roads and zones of control, have gone on for decades and continue to this very day. They have not only effectively stolen over half the land from the Palestinians and broken their homeland into tiny disconnected regions, like Indian reservations, they have also shattered their economy, humiliated them and stolen precious water. As a result they have condemned millions of Palestinian, men, women and children to unemployment, contaminated water, poor health and early deaths. If I was unemployed and my children were dying because others had stolen my land and potable water, I might take drastic action. I suspect you might too.

The Israeli settlements are a continuing provocation that belies any pretenses about one side being right and the other wrong. Long ago we should have taken a stand that they be removed or else our support of Israel would cease. Our lopsided support of Israel is one fodder for the terrorism we now face. If Israel cannot correct the gross injustices it foists on the Palestinians then we have no business guaranteeing its survival.

There could be a link between our support of Israel and our attack on Iraq. Saddam Hussein was supporting one terrorist organization, Hamas, by paying princely sums to Palestinian families of suicide bombers in Israel. Eliminating Saddam was in the best interests of Israel whether or not it was in the best interests of the United States.

Religion, Politics, and Extremism

There are two books I wish George Bush and his cabinet had read: "*The True Believer: thoughts on the nature of mass movements*" by Eric Hoffer and "*The Battle for God: a history of fundamentalism*" by Karen Armstrong. [1] [2]

The *True Believer* is a study of mass movements led by fanatics. It makes some relevant points that relate to winning the war on terrorism. They include the following:

1. In the history of civilization there have been many successful movements without a God, but none without a devil. A devil, a hated enemy, is the unifying force of mass movements. If you're the devil you must remember that the fanatic needs you.
2. Fanatics divide people into two groups: those who are with them and those who are against them. Those who are against them are

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the devil's minions, much like "an axis of evil." There is no middle ground.

3. When we're the fanatics' "devil," we have three choices as to how to respond. Two of them have never worked in recorded history. One of them has worked, sometimes. The first choice, which never works, is to threaten and to initiate fights (such as our foray into Iraq). This plays into the hands of the fanatics because we are acting like the devil and reinforcing their unifying beliefs about us. The second choice, which never works, is to turn the other cheek (our failure to react to earlier provocations). The reason this doesn't work is that hatred ultimately springs from a sense of inferiority (which is heightened by humiliation). When we accept their attacks passively, we inflame their sense of inferiority and increase their hatred. The third choice, which works sometimes but not always, is to clearly and non-threateningly define what we will defend, and then act swiftly and firmly when attacked (as we did partially in Afghanistan).

4. A fanatic on the extreme right and one on the extreme left are blood brothers. Extremists can easily change causes, but they are very unlikely to become moderates. For example: prior to WWII Nazis easily recruited Communists and vice versa.

Islam, Judaism and Christianity all have fundamentalist wings which have produced fanatics and terrorism. In her book *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong traces the development of these fundamentalist wings from biblical times to the present. She does so with deep respect for all three faiths, a thorough knowledge of world history and a compassion for the factors which produce fundamentalism and fanatics. Read this book and you'll understand the deep divisions between the Sunni's and Shias in Iraq and Iran. Their divisions are even deeper than those between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. The author also describes the source, viewpoints and evolution of the Wahabi sect that produced most of the 9/11 terrorists. She also lucidly explains the deep divisions between the various fundamental

sects of Judaism and of Christianity. These are issues that George Bush and his neo-Conservative supporters don't seem to understand at all.

What was clear to me from these books and from other study is this: fundamentalist Jews, Muslims and Christians are blood brothers who share a common belief that they have a unique personal relationship with God and to History and a common conviction that the rest of us are outside the one true fold and therefore both inferior and a threat to them. Of course the fundamentalists of each religion think the fundamentalists in other religions are also God's enemies. A few nights ago I heard former President Jimmy Carter, a devout Christian but not an extremist, describe the slippery slope of extremist thinking in much this way.

The conflict in the Middle East is primarily between Jewish fundamentalists, who are a large segment of the illegal settlers in Gaza and the West bank, and Islamic fundamentalists. Jewish fundamentalists are a minority in Israel, but a powerful one politically. They will not bend on the settlement issue and currently threaten civil war to maintain the settlements. In 1995, one of them assassinated a moderate Israeli premier, Itzhak Rabin, and derailed a real peace process. Islamic fundamentalists are a minority in Islam, but a powerful one spiritually.

Christian fundamentalists are a minority in Christianity, but an increasingly powerful political force in this country. Unfortunately, they are a substantial part of George Bush's political base and he is blatantly courting them and playing to their fears in this election. In fact, Bush has used phrases that suggest his bond to the extreme religious right of Christianity: such as "axis of evil," "crusade," "freedom's on the march" and "you're either with us or against us." Unfortunately these phrases only inflame old hatreds and increase the influence of fanatics in all three religions. It matters not whether he uses these phrases and related actions out of ignorance or with malice, they don't defuse terrorism, they inflame it.

Our actions in Iraq have broken a social system which maintained, however brutally, a civil security and regional stability which no longer exists. Since we "won the battle" we are responsible for that lack of security, as Colin Powell futilely advised the President before we attacked ("If we break it, we own it"). On top of

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that, our very presence, no matter how benign, humiliates the Iraqis. Humiliation breeds hatred and hatred produces irrational actions to rid themselves of the humiliation. We must continue to suffer casualties so long as we're there, or we must totally crush the spirit of some factions of the Iraqi people. Saddam Hussein was brutal enough to do the latter. Thankfully we are not, yet.

Character Assassination

George Bush has successfully used character assassination in all his political campaigns. He has usually done so through proxies. In 2000 he used it against John McCain in the primaries and against Al Gore in the campaign. In this campaign he is using character assassination against John Kerry. Character assassination is not consistent with the ethics of mainstream Christians. However, it is consistent with the practices of extremists whose opponents are devils and any actions against them are justified.

When Bush is challenged on issues, such as Iraq, budget deficit or national security, he or Dick Cheney or some other proxy responds with an attack on the challenger's patriotism for raising the issue. They use sarcasm, misrepresentations and half-truths. This type of response is beneath contempt. It reminds me of a legal maxim that surfaced during the O.J. Simpson trial: *If the facts are weak, attack the facts; if the facts are strong, attack the police.* It worked for O.J. and it seems to be working for Bush. Thus far, George Bush has failed to discuss any critical issue. He has merely reiterated a few canned phrases and attacked the messengers. I do not respect that.

The presidential debates have been sanitized by agreement between the Democratic and Republican parties. As in the 2000 debates, both George Bush and John Kerry stuck to a few canned phrases in response to fewer than 21 questions per debate asked by carefully selected people. They could not challenge each other directly or partake in a real give-and-take that might reveal what's behind their political masks. What a joke. Both parties should be ashamed of this charade. There hasn't been an honest debate since the league of women voters ran the show back in the 1980's. [3]

In the absence of real debates, character assassination is even more effective.

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Fossil Fuels and Globalization

Western Civilization is built on cheap and heavily subsidized fossil fuels. Last year the US consumed approximately 7 billion barrels of oil, 25% of total global production. 5 billion barrels was consumed for transportation. Our "strategic" oil reserve is roughly 0.7 billion barrels, less than a 35 day domestic supply! Our total known domestic reserves, including Alaska, are less than a 4 year domestic supply.

Fossil fuels are also essential for fertilizers which we use to feed ourselves and the world. Fossil fuels are a finite resource that took millions of years for nature to develop. We now utterly depend on these fuels for the survival of Western Civilization and to avoid global famines. We have no alternatives in sight. Yet we are probably entering a new phase in oil production: a phase in which the availability of oil and natural gas will begin to fall. (For information on this from a responsible site managed by retired oil industry experts and Academics from the University of Upsala in Sweden please visit: www.peakoil.net) The rate at which oil is being discovered peaked some 30 years ago. Since then we have been consuming oil faster than we have been discovering it.

How much recoverable oil is there? No one knows. The reserve estimates for the USA are based on SEC regulations that have nothing to do with the facts. The reserves of OPEC are political estimates that have been arbitrarily increased (usually doubled from one year to the next) by country after country over the past 30 years so that their OPEC pumping quotas could be increased. (Annual quotas in OPEC are proportional to their estimated reserves!) Furthermore, 5% of global production comes from a single oil field in Saudi Arabia; a field in which secondary recovery techniques (water injection) have been used for decades to keep the flow up and consequently whose output will drop rapidly at some point in the near future. The Saudis have no idea how long this field can keep producing. Their responses to questions in this regard are much like those of

George Bush: how dare we question their assurances. These and other issues are thoroughly documented at Peakoil.net.

Increasing demands for fuel by other nations, China in particular, will vie with our own needs. Prices will go up significantly, steadily in the best case or with unstable spikes in the worst case. We need a strategic plan to avoid the worst case. That plan must involve conservation by all of us, draconian fuel taxes and a slow but steady change in life styles. Neither candidate has mentioned this, either out of ignorance or lack of courage. George Bush has had four years to prepare us, but has done nothing except hand out the aspirins of drilling in Alaska and developing a hydrogen economy.

Drilling in Alaska at best might add 16 billion barrels of oil; less than a 9 month's world supply at the current rate of consumption. Bush's Hydrogen economy is still an uncertain alternative, particularly for transportation. At this time, and for the foreseeable future, hydrogen generation requires fossil fuels, hydrogen storage in automobiles and trucks requires compression to 10,000 pounds per square inch, and fuel cells require substantial warm up times to become operative. Each hydrogen fueled vehicle will be a mobile bomb, fueled from energy stations that themselves have risk of wiping out entire neighborhoods. We may solve these problems and implement a nationwide solution, but not in the next 50 years; especially when George Bush has allocated well under \$1 billion for development of the Hydrogen Economy.

There is a direct tie between economic Globalization and cheap fossil fuels. Distant suppliers can't compete with local ones unless they have access to dirt cheap transportation. As fuel costs increase, transportation costs will increase, global trade must slow down and every nation will have to rebuild local industries and infrastructures that they are now demolishing. Unfortunately some of this infrastructure includes human skills that are not readily rebuilt.

In the long run the primary sustainable source of energy is solar energy. Microbes and plants convert solar energy to forms other living organisms can use for food. The atmosphere converts solar energy to wind and water vapor. We know how to directly convert solar energy to heat or to electricity. We know how to convert wind to electricity. We have done pathetically little to

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implement and improve this knowledge in the last 20 years, primarily because fossil fuels have been artificially cheap. We have wasted valuable time.

The Economy

Bush and the Republican Party have abandoned any sense of fiscal responsibility and substituted simplistic beliefs:

1. Lower taxes are intrinsically better.
2. What's good for the consumer is good for the country.
3. We can borrow our way out of an economic slowdown.

As a direct result of Bush's actions to cut taxes, promote consumption and increase spending, we are faced with these economic facts:

1. We have a current annual Federal deficit of over \$500 billion
2. We have a current annual trade deficit of over \$500 billion
3. We are annually borrowing an additional \$500 billion from foreigners to fund items 1 and 2.
4. Our accumulated net indebtedness to other nations is now over \$3 trillion.
5. We have unfunded future liabilities in Social Security, Medicare and other entitlements of over \$42 trillion.
6. The current net worth of the US is approximately \$42 trillion. [4]

One of the gravest threats to our future comes from the twin towers of *entitlement* and *debt*. Both Democrats and Republicans pander to beliefs that they can endlessly borrow to entitle their constituencies: gain without pain. The Democrats' approach is to increase benefits to the poor, sick and elderly without increasing taxes on individuals and by under-funding entitlements like Social Security and Medicare. The Republican form of pandering is to increase benefits (i.e. increase security through the war on terror and increase drug benefits for seniors) while reducing taxes on business and the wealthy and then borrowing the difference.

In effect both parties are loading the camel of government until it breaks; in addition, George

Bush is starving the camel. We, the public, want to believe these things are possible, so we passively go along and are ultimately responsible for the consequences.

Only one thing needs to happen to knock over our economic house of cards: other nations simply stop lending us more money and begin to use it themselves. China is approaching that point. We are not the first nation to be in this position. As of 1910 Argentina was one of the top 5 economies in the world with twice the per capita income of the USA. It had plenty of natural resources, educated people and a booming economy. It also had a huge debt that was the result of readily available loans from Europe, primarily Britain and France. By 1913 the Argentine economy began a steep downhill slide from which it hasn't recovered. [5]

We have got to suck it up and step back from this precipice. We need to conserve resources and save money. We need to balance our budgets and either pay for entitlements or reduce them. We need to operate at less than full employment, if for no other reason than to flush out the unrealistic expectations we have about what we are entitled to. What we don't need to do is this: drive down interest rates, encourage individuals, businesses and governments to borrow to the hilt and spend, spend, spend.

As the survivors of the Great Depression and WWII have died off, our savings rates have tanked and our balance of trade has gone from surpluses to deficits. That generation knew that personal savings were the only sources of entitlement, that personal debt was an invitation to lose everything, and that fighting a distant enemy required sacrifices from everyone. The baby boomers and their progeny have no clue because they've always had a healthy economy and have been able to fight foreign wars without interrupting the good life at home.

We may need a serious recession to re-adjust our collective expectations to a sustainable point. (In the book I'm writing *Plantations in the Jungle: lessons from nature on how to rescue civilization*, I elaborate further on the relationship between the economy and the collective expectations of people. One conclusion, demonstrated throughout nature, is this: *in a sustainable system, failure is not an option it is a necessity*. Our efforts to avoid unemployment at all costs will both increase the frequency and magnitude of overwhelming

economic disasters. For an Introduction to this book visit www.ew.com/Plantations.pdf)

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Environment and Science

The Bush administration has systematically dismantled environmental laws and used religious beliefs and political loyalty as litmus tests for selecting judicial, scientific and environmental managers. Most publicly he has repudiated the Kyoto agreement which attempted to deal with global warming. He is apparently unwilling to place any burdens on industry or the consumer in order to save the environment.

Environmentally, we are in deep trouble. Global warming is an immediate danger that threatens food and water supplies.[6] Carbon dioxide emissions from burning coal, oil, natural gas and forests to supply energy are the primary cause. Mileage improvements in our transportation fleet could significantly reduce these emissions. However, SUVs and light trucks skirt current regulations, waste gas and pollute. Consequently, we now have the poorest overall mileage and emission's performance in over 22 years. Bush's leadership on this issue can best be described as pathetic. However, he is not alone on this one, Democrats and Republicans alike have lost the political will to take necessary regulatory actions. Heavily subsidized, cheap oil has done the rest.

Here I will give just two other examples of environmental problems and point you to detailed information. I could easily cite 20 more.

We are over-fishing the oceans. We have already reduced the sustainable food supply we can acquire from the oceans by over 50%. We have used science to locate and take catches that are badly needed to replenish populations. We have thereby simply postponed a day of reckoning. We

may have already damaged the aquatic food chain beyond repair. I hope not. [7]

At the mouth of the Mississippi we have produced a zone of death covering more than 6000 square miles, larger than the state of New Jersey. The size of the dead zone has more than doubled since the early 1990s. This death zone, which stretches to Texas, once teeming with aquatic life, is the indirect result of Nitrogen runoff from farms in the Midwest ("Seventy percent of the Mississippi's nitrogen comes from a relatively small six-state area that is the heart of the nation's corn belt" [8] p 99) and Phosphorous runoff from industry. Nitrogen and Phosphorous are nutrients for algae which flourish, die and decompose thereby consuming nearly all the oxygen. This makes the water uninhabitable for fish, shellfish and other aquatic organisms. Similar, but smaller, zones of death exist around the world for similar reasons. Nitrogen runoff results from over-fertilization which slightly increases crop yields and is profitable because fertilizers are cheap and polluting costs the farmers nothing. Fertilizers are cheap because fossil fuels are cheap. About 50% of fertilizers become runoff. Ironically, much of the corn crop becomes corn syrup used as sweeteners in soft drinks and other cheap foods that contribute to our collective obesity!

The Bush administration has done little to deal with either of these issues. In fact its blind support of globalization and the related drive to produce more food for export has exacerbated these and many other problems.

Conclusion

Will John Kerry face all of these critical issues? I don't know; I suspect he won't. But at least there's a chance that he will face some of them and make fact-based rather than doctrine-based decisions. We too must face the fact that we have tough work to do and sacrifices to make. However, I know for sure that George Bush will stubbornly continue in the wrong direction, a direction which holds no hope for our country. I won't abandon all hope. I won't vote for George Bush; I must vote for John Kerry.

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