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Kerry: An Echo, Not a Choice **by Sheldon Richman**

In 1964 an incumbent president, Lyndon Johnson, was faced by a challenger, Barry Goldwater, who offered “a choice, not an echo.”

In 2004 an incumbent president, George W. Bush, is faced by a challenger, John Kerry, who offers an echo, not a choice — a mere variation on a theme.

That’s too bad, because the theme is old and stale and entirely inappropriate for what is supposed to be a constitutional republic that honors individual liberty.

The theme is that the U.S. government should be the world’s policeman. Bush and Kerry would no more call for American withdrawal from this role than they would advocate dismantling of the Education or Interior Department. Their only difference is in style and rhetoric.

Kerry tried to capture the difference in a speech the other day. “There was a time, not so long ago, when the might of our alliances was a driving force in the survival and success of freedom — in two world wars, in the long years of the Cold War — then from the Gulf War to Bosnia and Kosovo. America led instead of going it alone,” he said. He called for “a return to the principle that guided us in peril and victory through the past century — alliances matter, and the United States must lead them. Never has this been more true than in the war on terrorism.”

So Bush’s flaw, according to Kerry, is not aspiring to global domination, but “going it alone.” Kerry will feel free to intervene anywhere in the world — as long as he can drag someone else along. “In addition to our military might, we must deploy all that is in America’s arsenal — our diplomacy, our intelligence system, our economic power, and the appeal of our values and ideas.” The last two items are thrown in as distractions. If by “our economic power” Kerry means the ability of Americans to produce goods and services the people of the world wish to buy, all he needs to do as president is stand aside. This is not something in “America’s arsenal” for him to “deploy.” The same goes for “our values and ideas.” Those things are exported by example and along with our goods and services. What have they to do with alliances or any other government activity?

As I say, those are distractions. What Kerry really cares about is military might, diplomacy, and the intelligence system — in other words, the hardware of government intervention and imperialism. He is fully a believer in projecting American power abroad. He seeks only to make it more palatable to the American people by making sure that some of the casualties have foreign-sounding names.

Kerry of course has to make the electorate think that Bush would rather pursue foreign adventurism alone. The problem for Kerry is that Bush has every reason to involve allies and has tried mightily to do so. He was unable to because his case for war against Iraq was so weak. Now he is desperately trying to get the UN and NATO into Iraq. It's hard to see how Kerry would have been more successful at getting France, Germany, and Russia to go along with the war. His insistence that he would have succeeded is all he's got going for him. It's not much.

In one respect there is no difference between Kerry and Bush at all. Kerry shows no interest in questioning the U.S. government's long-standing objectives in the Middle East, which are offensive to many people there. Like Bush, he believes America is disliked for irrational reasons. "Today, we are waging a global war against a terrorist movement committed to our destruction," he said. Thus, he said, "we must take the fight to the enemy on every continent — and enlist other countries in that cause."

Instead of examining the sources of animosity against the United States — its support for corrupt and brutal Arab regimes and unconditional backing of Israel — Kerry, like Bush, would prefer to fight a global war against an amorphous, decentralized adversary called "terror." That is a path not to eventual peace, but rather to perpetual war.

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