

HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS BEFORE THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES January 26, 2005

What If (It was all a Big Mistake)? America's policy of foreign intervention, while still debated in the early 20th century, is today accepted as conventional wisdom by both political parties. But what if the overall policy is a colossal mistake, a major error in judgment? Not just bad judgment regarding when and where to impose ourselves, but the entire premise that we have a moral right to meddle in the affairs of others? Think of the untold harm done by years of fighting-- hundreds of thousands of American casualties, hundreds of thousands of foreign civilian casualties, and unbelievable human and economic costs. What if it was all needlessly borne by the American people? If we do conclude that grave foreign policy errors have been made, a very serious question must be asked: What would it take to change our policy to one more compatible with a true republic's goal of peace, commerce, and friendship with all nations? Is it not possible that Washington's admonition to avoid entangling alliances is sound advice even today? In medicine mistakes are made-- man is fallible. Misdiagnoses are made, incorrect treatments are given, and experimental trials of medicines are advocated. A good physician understands the imperfections in medical care, advises close follow-ups, and double-checks the diagnosis, treatment, and medication. Adjustments are made to assure the best results. But what if a doctor never checks the success or failure of a treatment, or ignores bad results and assumes his omnipotence-- refusing to concede that the initial course of treatment was a mistake? Let me assure you, the results would not be good. Litigation and the loss of reputation in the medical community place restraints on this type of bullheaded behavior.

Sadly, though, when governments, politicians, and bureaucrats make mistakes and refuse to reexamine them, there is little the victims can do to correct things. Since the bully pulpit and the media propaganda machine are instrumental in government cover-ups and deception, the final truth emerges slowly, and only after much suffering. The arrogance of some politicians, regulators, and diplomats actually causes them to become even more aggressive and more determined to prove themselves right, to prove their power is *not to be messed with* by never admitting a mistake. Truly, power corrupts!

The unwillingness to ever reconsider our policy of foreign intervention, despite obvious failures and shortcomings over the last 50 years, has brought great harm to our country and our liberty. Historically, financial realities are the ultimate check on nations bent on empire. Economic laws ultimately prevail over bad judgment. But tragically, the greater the wealth of a country, the longer the flawed policy lasts. We'll probably not be any different.

We are still a wealthy nation, and our currency is still trusted by the world, yet we are vulnerable to some harsh realities about our true wealth and the burden of our future commitments. Overwhelming debt and the precarious nature of the dollar should serve to restrain our determined leaders, yet they show little concern for deficits. Rest assured, though, the limitations of our endless foreign adventurism and spending will become apparent to everyone at some point in time.

Since 9/11, a lot of energy and money have gone into efforts ostensibly designed to make us safer. Many laws have been passed and many dollars have been spent. Whether or not we're better off is another question. Today we occupy two countries in the Middle East. We have suffered over 20,000 casualties, and caused possibly 100,000 civilian casualties in Iraq. We have spent over \$200 billion in these occupations, as well as hundreds of billions of dollars here at home hoping to be safer. We've created the Department of Homeland Security, passed the Patriot Act, and created a new super CIA agency.

Our government now is permitted to monitor the Internet, to read our mail, to search us without proper search warrants, to develop a national ID card, and to investigate what people are reading in libraries. Ironically, illegal aliens flow into our country and qualify for driving licenses and welfare benefits with little restraint.

These issues are discussed, but nothing has been as highly visible to us as the authoritarianism we accept at the airport. The creation of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has intruded on the privacy of all airline travelers, and there is little evidence that we are safer for it. Driven by fear, we have succumbed to the age-old temptation to sacrifice liberty on the pretense of obtaining security. Love of security, unfortunately, all too often vanquishes love of liberty.

Unchecked fear of another 9/11-type attack constantly preoccupies our leaders and most of our citizens, and drives the legislative attack on our civil liberties. It's frightening to see us doing to ourselves what even bin Laden never dreamed he could accomplish with his suicide bombers.

We don't understand the difference between a vague threat of terrorism and the danger of a guerilla war. One prompts us to expand and nationalize domestic law enforcement while limiting the freedoms of all Americans. The other deals with understanding terrorists like bin Laden, who declared war against us in 1998. Not understanding the difference makes it virtually impossible to deal with the real threats. We are obsessed with passing new laws to make our country safe from a terrorist attack. This confusion about the cause of the 9/11 attacks, the fear they

engendered, and the willingness to sacrifice liberty prompts many to declare their satisfaction with the inconveniences and even humiliation at our nation's airports.

There are always those in government who are anxious to increase its power and authority over the people. Strict adherence to personal privacy annoys those who promote a centralized state.

It's no surprise to learn that many of the new laws passed in the aftermath of 9/11 had been proposed long before that date. The attacks merely provided an excuse to do many things previously proposed by dedicated statisticians.

All too often government acts perversely, professing to advance liberty while actually doing the opposite. Dozens of new bills passed since 9/11 promise to protect our freedoms and our security. In time we will realize there is little chance our security will be enhanced or our liberties protected.

The powerful and intrusive TSA certainly will not solve our problems. Without a full discussion, greater understanding, and ultimately a change in the foreign policy that incites those who declared war against us, no amount of pat-downs at airports will suffice. Imagine the harm done, the staggering costs, and the loss of liberty if the next 20 years pass and airplanes are never employed by terrorists. Even if there is a possibility that airplanes will be used to terrorize us, TSA's bullying will do little to prevent it. Patting down old women and little kids in airports cannot possibly make us safer!

TSA cannot protect us from another attack and it is not the solution. It serves only to make us all more obedient and complacent toward government intrusions into our lives.

The airport mess has been compounded by other problems, which we fail to recognize. Most assume the government has the greatest responsibility for making private aircraft travel safe. But this assumption only ignores mistakes made before 9/11, when the government taught us to not resist, taught us that airline personnel could not carry guns, and that the government would be in charge of security. Airline owners became complacent and dependent upon the government.

After 9/11 we moved in the wrong direction by allowing total government control and a political takeover by the TSA-- which was completely contrary to the proposition that private owners have the ultimate responsibility to protect their customers.

Discrimination laws passed during the last 40 years ostensibly fuel the Transportation Secretary's near obsession with avoiding the appearance of discrimination toward young Muslim males. Instead TSA seemingly targets white children and old women. We have failed to recognize that a safety policy by a private airline is quite a different thing from government agents blindly obeying anti-discrimination laws.

Governments do not have a right to use blanket discrimination, such as that which led to incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II. However, local law-enforcement agencies should be able to target their searches if the description of a suspect is narrowed by sex, race, or religion.

We are dealing with an entirely different matter when it comes to safety on airplanes. The federal government should not be involved in local law enforcement, and has no right to discriminate. Airlines, on the other hand, should be permitted to do whatever is necessary to provide safety. Private firms-- long denied the right-- should have a right to discriminate. Fine restaurants, for example, can require that shoes and shirts be worn for service in their establishments. The logic of this remaining property right should permit more sensible security checks at airports. The airlines should be responsible for the safety of their property, and liable for it as well. This is not only the responsibility of the airlines, but it is a civil right that has long been denied them and other private companies.

The present situation requires the government to punish some by targeting those individuals who clearly offer no threat. Any airline that tries to make travel safer and happens to question a larger number of young Muslim males than the government deems appropriate can be assessed huge fines. To add insult to injury, the fines collected from airlines are used for forced sensitivity training of pilots who do their very best, under the circumstances, to make flying safer by restricting the travel of some individuals. We have embarked on a process that serves no logical purpose. While airline safety suffers, personal liberty is diminished and costs skyrocket.

If we're willing to consider a different foreign policy, we should ask ourselves a few questions:

1. □ *What if* the policies of foreign intervention, entangling alliances, policing the world, nation building, and spreading our values through force are deeply flawed?
2. □ *What if* it is true that Saddam Hussein never had weapons of mass destruction?
3. □ *What if* it is true that Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were never allies?
4. □ *What if* it is true that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein did nothing to enhance our national security?
5. *What if* our current policy in the Middle East leads to the overthrow of our client oil states in the region?
6. □ *What if* the American people really knew that more than 20,000 American troops have suffered serious casualties or died in the Iraq war, and 9% of our forces already have been made incapable of returning to battle?
7. □ *What if* it turns out there are many more guerrilla fighters in Iraq than our government admits?
8. □ *What if* there really have been 100,000 civilian Iraqi casualties, as some claim, and what is an acceptable price for “doing good?”
9. □ *What if* Rumsfeld is replaced for the wrong reasons, and things become worse under a Defense Secretary who demands more troops and an expansion of the war?
10. *What if* we discover that, when they do vote, the overwhelming majority of Iraqis support Islamic (Sharia) law over western secular law, and want our troops removed?

11. *What if* those who correctly warned of the disaster awaiting us in Iraq are never asked for their opinion of what should be done now?

12. *What if* the only solution for Iraq is to divide the country into three separate regions, recognizing the principle of self-determination while rejecting the artificial boundaries created in 1918 by non-Iraqis?

13. *What if* it turns out radical Muslims don't hate us for our freedoms, but rather for our policies in the Middle East that directly affected Arabs and Muslims?

14. *What if* the invasion and occupation of Iraq actually distracted from pursuing and capturing Osama bin Laden?

15. *What if* we discover that democracy can't be spread with force of arms?

16. *What if* democracy is deeply flawed, and instead we should be talking about liberty, property rights, free markets, the rule of law, localized government, weak centralized government, and self-determination promoted through persuasion, not force?

17. *What if* Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda actually welcomed our invasion and occupation of Arab/Muslim Iraq as proof of their accusations against us, and it served as a magnificent recruiting tool for them?

18. *What if* our policy greatly increased and prolonged our vulnerability to terrorists and guerilla attacks both at home and abroad?

19. *What if* the Pentagon, as reported by its Defense Science Board, actually recognized the dangers of our policy before the invasion, and their warnings were ignored or denied?

20. *What if* the argument that by fighting over there, we won't have to fight here, is wrong, and the opposite is true?

21. *What if* we can never be safer by giving up some of our freedoms?

22. *What if* the principle of pre-emptive war is adopted by Russia, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and others, "justified" by current U.S. policy?

23. *What if* pre-emptive war and pre-emptive guilt stem from the same flawed policy of authoritarianism, though we fail to recognize it?

24. *What if* Pakistan is not a trustworthy ally, and turns on us when conditions deteriorate?

25. *What if* plans are being laid to provoke Syria and/or Iran into actions that would be used to justify a military response and pre-emptive war against them?

26. *What if* our policy of democratization of the Middle East fails, and ends up fueling a Russian-Chinese alliance that we regret-- an alliance not achieved even at the height of the Cold War?

27. *What if* the policy forbidding profiling at our borders and airports is deeply flawed?

28. *What if* presuming the guilt of a suspected terrorist without a trial leads to the total undermining of constitutional protections for American citizens when arrested?

29. *What if* we discover the army is too small to continue policies of pre-emption and nation-building? *What if* a military draft is the only way to mobilize enough troops?

30. *What if* the “stop-loss” program is actually an egregious violation of trust and a breach of contract between the government and soldiers? *What if* it actually is a backdoor draft, leading to unbridled cynicism and rebellion against a voluntary army and generating support for a draft of both men and women? Will lying to troops lead to rebellion and anger toward the political leadership running the war?

31. *What if* the Pentagon’s legal task-force opinion that the President is not bound by international or federal law regarding torture stands unchallenged, and sets a precedent which ultimately harms Americans, while totally disregarding the moral, practical, and legal arguments against such a policy?

32. *What if* the intelligence reform legislation-- which gives us bigger, more expensive bureaucracy-- doesn’t bolster our security, and distracts us from the real problem of revamping our interventionist foreign policy?

33. *What if* we suddenly discover we are the aggressors, and we are losing an unwinnable guerrilla war?

34. *What if* we discover, too late, that we can’t afford this war-- and that our policies have led to a dollar collapse, rampant inflation, high interest rates, and a severe economic downturn?

Why do I believe these are such important questions? Because the #1 function of the federal government-- to provide for national security-- has been severely undermined. On 9/11 we had a grand total of 14 aircraft in place to protect the entire U.S. mainland, all of which proved useless that day. We have an annual DOD budget of over \$400 billion, most of which is spent overseas in over 100 different countries. On 9/11 our Air Force was better positioned to protect Seoul, Tokyo, Berlin, and London than it was to protect Washington D.C. and New York City. Moreover, our ill-advised presence in the Middle East and our decade-long bombing of Iraq served only to incite the suicidal attacks of 9/11.

Before 9/11 our CIA ineptly pursued bin Laden, whom the Taliban was protecting. At the same time, the Taliban was receiving significant support from Pakistan-- our "trusted ally" that received millions of dollars from the United States. We allied ourselves with both bin Laden and Hussein in the 1980s, only to regret it in the 1990s. And it's safe to say we have used billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars in the last 50 years pursuing this contradictory, irrational, foolish, costly, and very dangerous foreign policy.

Policing the world, spreading democracy by force, nation building, and frequent bombing of countries that pose no threat to us-- while leaving the homeland and our borders unprotected-- result from a foreign policy that is contradictory and not in our self interest.

I hardly expect anyone in Washington to pay much attention to these concerns. If I'm completely wrong in my criticisms, nothing is lost except my time and energy expended in efforts to get others to reconsider our foreign policy.

But the bigger question is: □□□□□□

What if I'm right, or even partially right, and we urgently need to change course in our foreign policy for the sake of our national and economic security, yet no one pays attention?

For that a price will be paid. Is it not worth talking about?