

The Bush Revolution

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Having crushed the resistance in Falluja, President Bush is now trying to do the same at the State Department and the C.I.A.

Colin Powell may have "resigned," but don't kid yourself - the White House didn't want him. Mr. Powell's own statement said that he and Mr. Bush "came to the mutual agreement that it would be appropriate for me to leave at this time."

The real winner in this foreign policy wrestling match is Dick Cheney. One of his former aides, Stephen Hadley, will now be the national security adviser, and Condoleezza Rice was run over so many times by Mr. Cheney in the first term that she'll be docile at State.

In a conversation with the British foreign secretary, Jack Straw, Mr. Powell once referred in frustration to Mr. Cheney, Don Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz as "[expletive] crazies," according to a recent British biography of Tony Blair. Mr. Powell had a point, but they're getting the last laugh.

The central question of President Bush's second term is this: Will he shaft his Christian-right supporters, since he doesn't need them any more, and try to secure his legacy with moderate policies that might unite the country? Or, with no re-election to worry about, will he pursue revolutionary changes on the right? To me, it looks increasingly like the latter.

Many liberals are still enraged at Mr. Powell for misleading the world about Iraqi W.M.D. in his U.N. speech. Fair enough. But wait six months, and they'll fervently wish they had him back. The reality is that Mr. Powell was a voice of reason in foreign policy discussions ranging from Pakistan to Venezuela. Without him, foreign relations would have been even more catastrophic.

On North Korea, Iraq and Europe, Mr. Powell was like the man in the circus who follows the elephants, cleaning up their messes. Yet his even more useful role in the administration was not sensible diplomacy. It was his willingness to disagree, to offer another viewpoint. He pushed back.

Condoleezza Rice is smart, diligent and honest, but she has zero record of pushing back. And that's what Mr. Bush needs - somebody besides Laura who will tell him when he's about to do something stupid.

He needs lots of those somebodies in the intelligence community, whose crucial role is not so much to steal secrets abroad but to resist political pressures at home and offer unwelcome analyses. That will be much less likely now that heads are rolling down the corridors of the C.I.A.'s directorate of operations.

It's fair to replace Mr. Powell, a political appointee, but the spies being pushed out at Langley are career professionals. The intelligence community's best assets aren't those spying for us in foreign capitals, but the thousands of Americans at the C.I.A., the D.I.A., the N.S.A. and the rest of the alphabet soup of spookdom. Their morale - already bad - will suffer a further dive, along with their effectiveness.

So what should we expect in a second term?

A squeeze on North Korea The hawks have been impatient with what they see as the coddling of North Korea, and unless there is progress soon, there will be a push to get tougher and apply sanctions.

A continued embrace of Ariel Sharon With Mr. Powell out, there will be no one in the administration pushing Mr. Bush toward a more balanced policy. Tony Blair will try, but he's too far away.

A collision with Iran When Iran's new agreement with Europe on curbing its nuclear programs falls apart, the U.S. will resume its push for regime change in Iran (ironically, pushing for regime change in Iran and Cuba is what keeps those regimes in power). Then the U.S. will discuss whether to look the other way as Israel launches airstrikes on Iranian nuclear sites.

Dithering on Darfur Mr. Powell traveled to Darfur, proclaimed the slaughter there to be genocide and quietly pushed within the administration to get some action. I wish he had done much more, but, by contrast, the White House has been lackadaisical.

A litmus test of foreign policy prospects will be whether John Bolton, a genial raptor among the doves at State, is promoted to be its deputy secretary. For liberals who have been wavering on whether to move to New Zealand, that would be a sign to head for the airport.