

Box A: Narrow Issues, Prosaic Policies

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The 2004 "Election"

■ **On foreign policy matters**, Senator Kerry has basically accepted most of the Bush Administration's core strategies, while questioning its competence, honesty, tactics, and techniques. This is true not only of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also most other trouble-spots, including Iran, North Korea, Israel and Palestine, the Sudan, Cuba, Venezuela, Taiwan, Syria, and Haiti.

Even now, the "liberal" Senator continues to support the Iraq War. As late as August 2004, he stated that, even knowing what he knows now, he would *still* vote to give the President authority to invade Iraq. He accuses the Bush Administration of entering Iraq prematurely, with too few troops and too little international support. He does not propose to withdraw US troops anytime soon; indeed, occasionally he has said that the number of troops needs to be increased. Apparently he hopes to do this by attracting more troops from allies like Germany and France, or perhaps from other Arab countries. The fact that these countries have already refused to commit more troops to Iraq is not specifically addressed. In other words, it is not really clear precisely how Kerry's approach would differ from Bush's on the margin.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Kerry has basically echoed President Bush's approval of Sharon's "Security Wall" and plans for unilateral separation. Evidently Kerry also shares the Bush Administration's determination to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons – though once again, he has not said how his approach would really differ from the President's.

Kerry's muscular approach may help him appeal to undecided voters in the middle. But many observers on the Right and Left alike doubt that tactical changes alone -- working more closely with allies, appointing a new "intelligence czar," being more cautious about WMDs -- can really fix what is fundamentally wrong with US foreign policy. Meanwhile, the millions of anti-war Democrats no doubt feel somewhat disenfranchised -- this year's Democratic Convention might easily have been mistaken for an American Legion meeting, as if it were an act of patriotism for young Americans to die like lemmings in pointless foreign wars, rather than resist them vigorously.

■ **On the domestic front**, there are clearer battle lines between Bush and Kerry on issues like tax cuts for the "wealthy" and health insurance, and to a lesser extent, abortion rights and gay marriage. With both the US House and Senate likely to remain evenly divided, however, such policy disagreements may not make much practical difference. Meanwhile, many other issues go by the boards:

- Neither major party has offered credible, politically feasible proposals for reducing the current budget or addressing the looming crises in Social Security and Medicare finances.
- Neither has been willing to propose abandoning the costly "war on drugs," which continues to consume \$40 to \$60 billion a year without any clear benefits.

- Both parties are wringing their hands about the jobs that are being lost to outsourcing and the growing influx of illegal immigrants, but neither has any bold solutions. Neither party has proposed reducing subsidies to US farmers in politically-sensitive states like Iowa and Minnesota, whose exports have been a key factor driving poor Mexican farmers out of business and over the border.
- Both parties have found it convenient to talk about “fair trade” in industrial states like Ohio and Michigan that have suffered job losses, but neither party has been willing to propose more controls on the worldwide trend toward free trade, wide-open capital and labor markets, and globalization.
- Both parties favor “energy independence,” but neither party wants to offend US auto workers and car owners by proposing stiff energy taxes and fuel efficiency standards. Indeed, both parties have promised increased ethanol subsidies to Iowa corn farmers – a byproduct of which is increased corn production and exports, pushing still more jobless Mexican campesinos over our border.
- Neither party has been willing to contemplate the fundamental changes in the US economy – still by far the world’s largest polluter – that will be needed to get a grip on global warming. After all, that might make the task of restoring job growth, reducing deficits, and fixing the Social Security system even more formidable.
- This time around the Democratic nominee is trying hard to “shut up” about socially-polarizing issues like gun control, prayer in the schools, illegal immigration, abortion rights, and gay marriage. The Right has made this difficult by putting gay marriage on the ballot in several BG states. Kerry is trying to make use of the stem cell research issue, one of the first “social wedge” issues where Democrats appear to have an advantage.

