

BOOK REVIEW

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Memo to the President Elect: How We Can Restore America's Reputation and Leadership, by Madeleine Albright, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, January 2008, 336 pages, \$26.95.

America has seen brighter days, much brighter days. At a time when around 70% of the nation disagrees with the administration of President George W. Bush, as oil prices soar and wallets feel much less heavy, Americans are looking—no, pleading—for a solution. Currently, all eyes are on President-elect Barack Obama, in anticipation of whether he can deliver the much-needed changes he promised and restore America to the hegemon status that it once enjoyed. Yet, can Americans have faith in a new administration when the one that has ruled the U.S. for the past eight years has committed every wrong possible on the political arena, from a poorly executed war in the Middle East to the emergence of a recession? In her January 2008 book, “Memo to the President Elect: How We Can Restore America's Reputation and Leadership,” former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in an exuberant burst of optimism, reveals that we need not fear because she has the solutions that will aid the next administration in righting the wrongs of the Bush administration.

Albright begins by asserting that the most important tools to a president are diplomacy and psychology. She argues that one needs diplomacy in order to form lasting relations not only with our allies, but with our adversaries as well. Albright's central theme in the book is the need to change America's reputation abroad, and she suggests a variety of ways to achieve this. One of way is to make friends (lots of them) by tailoring speeches to impact both domestic and foreign audiences, because the actions we take within the country will ultimately have an impact on the rest of the world. Also, since we are American, the rest of the world is always watching us. In addition, Albright believes that the next president should seek to win over other nations by aiding them financially, so that they may be able to help us when the time comes.

Yet diplomacy is not only about saying the right words in the right manner or meeting with the right kinds of leaders. It is also about the kind of person the future president will be. Albright determines that the president will need be wise like Roosevelt, strong like Kennedy and opinionated like Reagan. With a wholesome mix of wittiness and tongue-in-cheek humor, Albright paints a picture of future prosperity and jubilation, as long as the man we choose can abide by the foundation she has laid out in her book, as well as stick to his morals.

Albright also suggests that the next American leader should have something that seems to have wandered to a far away domain in these past eight

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years: common sense. Hence, Albright's framework for success rests on a thorough analysis of wrongs committed not just by the recent Bush

administration, but by a myriad of others, including Kennedy, Lincoln and Johnson. Using this framework, Albright believes the next president can then tackle the rest of the world.

Albright then goes on to determine a plan of attack (no pun intended) for dealing with the Middle East, Asia, Russia and South Asia, as well as Iraq. This plan again highlights the use of soft power, such as diplomacy, sanctions and negotiations, to achieve a defined and set goal, something that has been missing during the Bush administration. In regards to the Middle East, Albright draws a plan that involves the U.S. not siding with any particular country or faction, but rather working with all individuals to reach an agreement. This means reversing Vice President Richard Cheney's protocols and actually interacting with the Palestinians and Hamas, rather than solely standing behind Israel. When working with these age-old conflicts, the next president should not, and cannot, expect an absolute victory, but rather small success and achievements—such as children being able to play on the streets without violence (p. 227).

When it comes to Iraq, Albright pessimistically (and maybe accurately) states that we really do not have any way to fix the mess we have spent two presidential terms creating. The only thing we can do now is “limit the damage” and create a segregated Iraq, or a number of “fiefdoms” as Albright calls them, where the Shiites live in the south, while the Kurds stay in the north and Sunnis fall somewhere “in between” (pp. 231-32). Yet this solution sounds like the beginning of a myriad of new problems that will involve the groups fighting amongst each other for different parts of Iraq as well as larger pieces of land. These groups may later begin to consider self-determination, since they are only joined together under the Iraqi flag (which is already banned by the Kurds) and a false pretense of being united Iraqis. This could cause further problems with the current government of Iraq, which may not allow self-determination—a phenomenon that will shrink the size of Iraq and its population, and possibly take away oil wealth from its already feeble economy.

Albright believes that with the right type and amount of diplomacy, restoring the image of America, and becoming the friendly face of the Middle East, the future president will be able to see a “federalized Iraq...Iran, free from UN sanctions, has reiterated its pledge not to build nuclear weapons...the Palestinians have a national unity government...negotiations with a more hopeful Israel are ongoing” (pp. 284-85). Her unprecedented idealism can be either touching or slightly delusional. How is one president at all capable of impacting the Middle East so significantly (whether he has tons of allies or none), when America has to rework its identity? We need to strengthen a crumbling economy, create jobs for the 6% of the nation that are unemployed, make healthcare more accessible, work on creating more sustainable energy sources, curb illegal

immigration, among many other problems. Eight years hardly seems enough to fix the problems on our plate, let alone those of the rest of the world.

This brings to the forefront Albright's focus on restoring our leadership in the eyes of the world, by helping others and paving the way for the world to follow. Yet, Americans need to be witness to this transformation in leadership. This cannot be done when everyone except Americans are being helped. Albright, by giving advice on the world, has forgotten to advise the next president on how to address the problems in his own backyard. No amount of diplomacy, sending aid to other countries who may help us when the time comes, or building formidable allies will help the problems spilling over the sides of America's melting pot.

Alongside the copious amounts of idealism in "Memo to the President Elect," Albright gives an experienced, not necessarily fresh, perspective on how to make wrongs right. She does this with the grandeur of a woman who has accomplished much through learning as well as making her own mistakes. She is confident about the potential of America and its future, and optimistic that we will survive. Considering the world we have lived in for the past eight years, this optimism is a fresh breath of air. It remains to be seen how the Obama administration will approach these challenges.