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Like Father, Like Son—John Kerry’s Dangerous Worldview

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Even a superficial look at Kerry’s record indicates that the confusion goes far beyond nuance. If anything, Kerry’s record and his governing philosophy throughout his public life point to a general reluctance to use force under any circumstances. When he accuses President George W. Bush of acting “recklessly” and without due respect for world opinion in invading Iraq, he insists that he would be willing to take similar military action, but only if a multi-national front involving a host of allies could be assembled. But this claim is undermined by Kerry’s vote against the first Gulf War in 1991, when President George H.W. Bush put together precisely the kind of multi-national coalition Kerry claims to demand.

A general reluctance to use force under almost any circumstance has marked Kerry’s approach to governing, and can be traced back to his days at prep school and as a student at Yale University. Beyond this, his worldview can be traced directly back to his diplomat father.

Richard J. Kerry was a career diplomat in the U.S. State Department, serving through World War II and the Cold War. As a mid-level diplomat, the elder Kerry represented American interests in various European cities, even as young John attended boarding schools in Switzerland and the United States.

Richard Kerry’s understanding of foreign policy and diplomacy was not generally available to the public until 1990, when he released *Star-Spangled Mirror*, his treatise on American foreign policy.

Reading this book is like reading John Kerry’s mind. In this case, Richard Kerry is truly the father of his son, for Senator John Kerry echoes many of the themes articulated in *Star-Spangled Mirror*, and these themes have emerged as key issues in the 2004 presidential campaign.

During the Cold War, Richard Kerry became a major critic of America’s dominant foreign policy establishment, though this was hidden from public view during his years of public service. In *Star-Spangled Mirror*, he offered a critique of American idealism as a driving force in foreign policy. As he explained, “Americans are inclined to see the world and foreign affairs in black and white.” As a nation, we are prone to see our view of the world as driven by a desire for the application of universal principles like liberty, justice, and representative democracy. Richard Kerry saw this as naive and dangerous. In his view, many nations of the world should be seen as inhospitable to democracy, and unready for liberty.

As he laid out his diplomatic approach and view of the world, Richard Kerry distanced himself from hard-line anti-

Communists like Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Dulles's diplomatic war against "godless Communism" was lamented as evidence of the late Secretary of State's "intensely moralistic outlook."

Echoes of Richard Kerry's understanding of the world can be heard in virtually every comment made by his son on topics related to foreign policy. When Senator John Kerry attacks President George W. Bush for his identification of an "axis of evil," one hears the refrain of Richard Kerry's critique of "excessive moralism." When Richard Kerry dismissed John Foster Dulles' "ample moralism" by rejecting his statement that "neutralism is immoral," we can hear John Kerry's dismissal of President Bush's public statement to the world, "you are either with us or with the terrorists."

During the Cold War, Richard Kerry saw the United States as potentially more dangerous and destabilizing than the Soviet Union. "The assumptions that Marxist governments outside the Soviet orbit are under Soviet control, and that conflict and disorder are produced by Soviet intrigue are," he argued, "essential to maintain the moral distinction Americans make between their own power and that of their adversary, the division of the world in accordance with that distinction, and the illusion that those who are not captives of the evil power will adhere to our preferred beliefs. It might be disproportionate to say that if the Soviets did not exist we would have to invent them, but we certainly have invented a part of their intentions and activities which is essential to our political faith."

Looking at one of the most dangerous moments of the Cold War, Richard Kerry appears to miss the point entirely. "There is a substantial argument that the Cuban missile crisis did not involve a nuclear confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union," he stated. Overlooking the fact that he provides no evidence for such a "substantial argument," we certainly know now that the Cuban missile crisis did involve a nuclear confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. When Richard Kerry tries to argue for a significant difference between a "nuclear confrontation" and "a confrontation of nuclear powers," we see precisely the kind of confusing "nuance" that characterizes the foreign policy views of his son. When Richard Kerry sneers at former Secretary of State Dean Rusk's statement, "There we were eyeball to eyeball, and the other fellow blinked," as "an overly dramatic expression of a mind strongly inclined to express itself in absolutes," we can hear Senator John Kerry condescendingly dismissing President Bush's view of the world as absolutist and unilateral.

In a fascinating foreword to a newly-released edition of *Star-Spangled Mirror*, Franklin Foer of *The New Republic* argues that John Kerry got his foreign policy directly from his father. Acknowledging some differences between father and son, Foer nevertheless points to the more important similarities between the two Kerrys. "It should be no surprise to hear John Kerry worry about European Allies and to strike such liberal internationalist notes," Foer remarks. "These ideas aren't just deeply felt; they're in his blood."

Foer cites *Newsweek*'s Evan Thomas' comments: "The Kerry dinner table was a nightly foreign-policy seminar. While other boys were eating TV dinners in front of the tube, [John] Kerry was discussing George Kennan's doctrine of containment."

A similar insight was offered by Douglas Brinkley, author of *Tour of Duty: John Kerry in the Vietnam War*. Brinkley told Foer, "So much of his foreign policy worldview comes straight from Richard Kerry." Brinkley even offered that foreign policy became a subject father and son could discuss even though the father was emotionally distant. "It allowed them to break through an emotional wall," Brinkley explains. "They talked about foreign policy the way most fathers and sons talk about football."

All this should help voters to put Kerry's various comments, actions, votes, and claims into proper context. This worldview explains how John Kerry could make his mark at Yale by attacking the Vietnam War as an exercise in American moralism. "It is misleading to mention right and wrong in this issue," Kerry announced in his 1966 Yale class oration, "for to every thinking man, the semantics of this contest often find the United States right in its wrongness and wrong in its rightness." Chalk that up to "nuance" once again.

In his Yale class address, John Kerry attacked the Johnson administration by noting, "Never in the last 20 years, has the government of the United States been as isolated as it is today." On the presidential campaign trail, Kerry isn't even digging up new material. He's just repeating his Yale class oration over and over again.

In 1971, John Kerry submitted an epilogue to an anti-Vietnam War book, *The New Soldier*, and expressed his worldview in this way: "We are asking America to turn from false glory, hollow victory, fabricated foreign threats, fear

which threatens us as a nation, shallow pride which feeds of fear.” Look at his campaign speeches today—same song, second verse.

John Kerry’s naive multilateralism was brought into frightening light in an October 20, 2004 article in The Washington Post. In an article written by reporters Helen Dewar and Tom Ricks, Kerry’s worldview is explained in these words: “Kerry’s belief in working with allies runs so deep that he has maintained that the loss of American life can be better justified if it occurs in the course of a mission with international support. In 1994, discussing the possibility of U.S. troops being killed in Bosnia, he said, ‘If you mean dying in the course of the United Nations effort, yes, it is worth that. If you mean dying American troops unilaterally going in with some false presumption that we can affect the outcome, the answer is unequivocally no.’”

Europe and the United States have been moving into different worldviews over the course of the last generation. As Robert Kagan argues, “It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world.” As Kagan explains, on the question of power, American and European views are moving in opposite directions. “Europe is turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation.”

John Kerry is right at home in this world, as was his father. Their worldview is shaped more by a European hesitation to use power until it is too late, than by an American determination to confront evil in its own terms.

The Christian Science Monitor recently reported that Democrats now “strongly” agree with Europeans on matters of foreign policy. The report was based in a survey conducted by the German Marshall Fund that founded amazing congruence between the views of American Democrats and Europeans. “While 69 percent of Republicans said they did not think a United Nations mandate would be necessary for future Iraq-style operations, 81 percent of Democrats said they thought it would be essential—as did 80 percent of Europeans.” As the report continued, “Democrats and Europeans also harbor the same sorts of doubts about whether military action is the most appropriate tool to fight terrorism.”

European newspapers have been trumpeting reports that Europeans would vastly prefer John Kerry as president. Now we know why. On the crucial issue of worldview and foreign policy, the Europeans see the reality—like father, like son.

