



Eight Facts That Burnish Bush's Record

By David Frum

As George W. Bush nears the end of his presidency, his approval ratings are low. Despite the administration's perceived shortcomings, the bright spots that may burnish his legacy include his prescription drug program for the elderly, his response to September 11, and the U.S.-Indian security partnership.

With the U.S. economy in crisis, Bush's already slumping popularity levels have sagged even deeper. This summer, his own political party kept him away from its national convention in St. Paul. The president himself has been reduced to wistful hopes that history will somehow justify him.

At this low point, some counterbalance: 1) At the end of November, Indian commandos waged a deadly urban battle against Islamic terrorists. Those soldiers have almost certainly trained with U.S. Rangers or Marines—part of an intensifying U.S.-Indian security partnership that has been one of the most signal foreign policy successes of the Bush years. Otto von Bismarck is supposed to have said that the most important geopolitical fact of the twentieth century would be that the United States and Great Britain spoke the same language. Bush's strategic entente with India may well prove the most important geopolitical fact of the twenty-first century.

2) Last month, the Iraqi parliament approved a status-of-forces agreement authorizing the continuing presence of U.S. troops inside Iraq. The Iraq war is ending in political reconciliation within Iraq—and with hope of an ongoing alliance between Iraq and the United States. Since the 1960s, Iraq has been the most destabilizing state in the Arab world, ruled by a succession of radical anti-Western regimes. Bush leaves office with Iraq

ready at last to become a more normal country, at peace with itself and its neighbors.

3) Bush's hopes for a more democratic Middle East have not been realized. But here is what has been accomplished throughout the region: Libya has ended its nuclear program, paid damages for the Lockerbie bombing, and reoriented its regime to the West. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have toughened their banking rules, ending their old double game on terrorist financing. Hamas fundraising operations in North America have been rolled up: recently, a Texas court convicted the officials of the Holy Land Foundation—Hamas's main U.S. front group—of providing material support to terrorism. The second Palestinian intifada has been crushed, confronting the Palestinian leadership with the hard truth that their aspirations cannot be attained by violence.

4) There have been no new international terrorist attacks inside the United States since 9/11 and no Islamic terrorist attacks on a European ally since 2005.

5) Plan Colombia worked, and the Colombian insurgency has been weakened if not broken. Mexico has completed its second multiparty presidential election. The United States has resisted Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez's attempts to make himself a Castro-style martyr, putting the Chávez regime on the way to collapse due to its own economic incompetence.

6) Economic conservatives like me may not like it much, but for many millions of senior citizens,

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Bush's most important legacy is a national prescription drug program that relieves those over sixty-five of the fear that they cannot afford the medications they need.

7) Bush encouraged the nuclear power industry. There have been seventeen new nuclear license applications since 2007—opening the way to the first new reactors since the 1970s. U.S. oil consumption has dropped almost 10 percent since 2005. In September 2008, the most recent month for which figures are available, the United States consumed a little less than 534 million barrels of oil—the lowest amount used in any month since September 1996.

8) After 9/11, Bush passionately championed America's vast majority of law-abiding Muslims—and perhaps due to his leadership, the much-feared wave of hate crimes never occurred. According to surveys by Zogby International, only 6 percent of U.S. Muslims experienced any form of verbal abuse in the two months immediately

following 9/11. In all the United States, there were eighty-four incidents of anti-Islamic violence or intimidation in 2007. To put that in context, there were 1,039 incidents that year of antigay violence or intimidation. Bush was the first president to confer cabinet rank on a Muslim American, when he chose Zalmay Khalilzad as ambassador to the United Nations in 2007.

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Does this legacy qualify Bush for Mount Rushmore? Probably not. But it does promise the forty-third president a gentler treatment from history than he has received from his contemporaries.

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