

**FLETCHER FORUM OF
WORLD AFFAIRS**

VOLUME 29

2005

THE FLETCHER FORUM

of WORLD AFFAIRS

THE FLETCHER SCHOOL, TUFTS UNIVERSITY WINTER 2005 VOL. 29:1 \$11.00 USA

Public attention in the United States to matters of foreign policy and national security has surged in the aftermath of September 11. The Bush administration has made drastic choices in the name of homeland defense—including the declaration of a war on terrorism with no certain end, the toppling of the Taliban in Afghanistan as part of the ongoing search for Osama bin Laden, and a preemptive military strike against Iraq, made on the basis of flawed intelligence about the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Each has led to intense media scrutiny and debate; passionate opinions about U.S. actions vis-à-vis the rest of the world have become increasingly commonplace.

As such, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* begins with two interviews about one hotly-debated item on the U.S. foreign policy agenda: the preemptive use of force. **JOHN R. BOLTON**, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, and **ASHTON CARTER**, Ford Foundation Professor of Science and International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, offer their opinions on the proper role of preemption in light of problems that include the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the possibility of terrorist attacks, and the potential use of biological and chemical weapons.

Placing the spotlight on national security has led not only to heated debate about foreign policy but also domestic affairs. Many worry that the war on terrorism has led to the erosion of civil liberties and abuse of civil rights. However, a piece by **STEVEN R. SHAPIRO**, head of the American Civil Liberties Union, presents an optimistic point of view: he discusses three recent cases in which the U.S. Supreme Court, normally more deferential to the executive branch during wartime, asserted its powers.

This issue of *The Forum* also devotes attention to developments in East Asia. **PATRICK SCHENA** explores the difficulties China will tackle as it attempts to modernize its banking system; **LYLE GOLDSTEIN** examines China's role as a leader for the newly independent states of Central Asia. These matters are particularly germane as China continues to develop and urbanize with unparalleled momentum. **RICHARD CRONIN** discusses the implications of the North Korean nuclear program for Japan and the United States; he also considers its effect on the diplomatic relationship between the two nations.

Latin America's problems—and some potential solutions—have also found their way to *The Forum*, beginning with a piece by **LEONARDO VIVAS** and **JUAN PABLO LUPI** on current political turmoil in Venezuela. They examine the presidency of Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez as a unique political phenomenon, rather than as yet another iteration of traditional Latin American presidential politics. **RICH KLEIN** and **THOMAS F. MCLARTY, III** contend that regional economic problems would diminish if Latin America's potential as an oil producer were fully exploited. Given growing global dependence on petroleum, the possibility of a large-scale alternative to Middle Eastern oil is especially intriguing.

The articles in this issue of *The Fletcher Forum* will no doubt provide more questions than answers about the problems confronting our increasingly complex world. Regardless, we at *The Forum* hope that your reading will foster meaningful discussion of the issues we have chosen to feature and shed some light on the challenges ahead.

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