

Nov 04, 2016 by [Mark Dillen](#)

## The Last Details <sup>[1]</sup>

Today's press conference by President Bush was his last and — by all appearances — his most unscripted. Here was the 43rd President at turns dismissive, angry, jocular, self-deprecating and defensive in describing his eight years in office. What stood out, however, in relation to America's image, was Bush's rambling, disputatious monologue when asked about America's "moral standing:"

I strongly disagree with the assessment that our moral standing has been damaged. It may be damaged amongst some of the elite, but people still understand America stands for freedom, that America is a country that provides such great hope.

You go to Africa, you ask Africans about America's generosity and compassion; go to India, and ask about, you know, America's — their view of America. Go to China and ask. Now, no question parts of Europe have said that we shouldn't have gone to war in Iraq without a mandate, but those are a few countries. Most countries in Europe listened to what 1441 said, which is disclose, disarm or face serious consequences.

Most people take those words seriously. Now, some countries didn't — even though they might have voted for the resolution. I disagree with this assessment that, you know, people view America in a dim light. I just don't agree with that. And I understand that Gitmo has created controversies. But when it came time for those countries that were criticizing America to take some of those — some of those detainees, they weren't willing to help out. And so, you know, I just disagree with the assessment...

I'll remind — listen, I tell people, yes, you can try to be popular. In certain quarters in Europe, you can be popular by blaming every Middle Eastern problem on Israel. Or you can be popular by joining the International Criminal Court. I guess I could have been popular by accepting Kyoto, which I felt was a flawed treaty, and proposed something different and more constructive.

And in terms of the decisions that I had made to protect the homeland, I wouldn't worry about popularity. What I would worry about is the Constitution of the United States, and putting plans in place that makes it easier to find out what the enemy is thinking, because all these debates will matter not if there's another attack on the homeland. The question won't be, you know, were you critical of this plan or not; the question is going to be, why didn't you do something?

Do you remember what it was like right after September the 11th around here? In press conferences and opinion pieces and in stories — that sometimes were news stories and sometimes opinion pieces — people were saying, how come they didn't see it, how come they didn't connect the dots? Do you remember what the environment was like in Washington? I do. When people were hauled up in front of Congress and members of

Congress were asking questions about, how come you didn't know this, that, or the other? And then we start putting policy in place — legal policy in place to connect the dots, and all of a sudden people were saying, how come you're connecting the dots?

And so...I've heard all that. I've heard all that. My view is, is that most people around the world, they respect America. And some of them doesn't like me, I understand that — some of the writers and the, you know, opiners and all that. That's fine, that's part of the deal. But I'm more concerned about the country and our — how people view the United States. They view us as strong, compassionate people who care deeply about the universality of freedom.

Essentially, then, President Bush believes that only “a few countries in Europe” — “some of the elite” — were strongly opposed to his policies, but that Africa, India and China — “most people around the world” — were at least sympathetic. This so overstates the results of most international opinion surveys (Pew, Gallup, etc.) as to be embarrassing. Just as important, his answer fails to distinguish between the many in the world who remained sympathetic to American values while sharply criticizing the conduct of Bush's foreign policy. There are, finally, many outside and within the United States who did indeed grant America extra latitude in dealing with the threat of international terrorism following 9/11. But the excesses that followed went far beyond what most publics were prepared to tolerate. Being prepared to do the right thing when it's unpopular is laudatory, but Bush today insinuated that his policies were both right and popular. On both counts, that's a mistaken notion.

*Published in Foreign Policy Association's Blog: "  
=<http://publicdiplomacy.foreignpolicyblogs.com/>" title=Public Diplomacy and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election">Public Diplomacy and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election", co-hosted by the USC Center on Public Diplomacy.*

---