FORMER CIA COUNTERTERRORISM HEAD: "THE US HAS SIMPLY BECOME IRRELEVANT IN THE MIDDLE EAST"

This column by Robert Grenier is stunning not because of its content—I agree with just about all of it—but because of who Grenier is. As the CIA's Iraq Mission Manager in 2002-2004 and then head of CIA's CounterTerrorism Center in 2004-2006, he had to have been intimately involved with many US efforts in the Middle East (including, undoubtedly, partnering with Hosni Mubarak's newly appointed Vice President, Omar Suleiman, on things like renditions and interrogation).

> Events in the Middle East have slipped away from us. Having long since opted in favour of political stability over the risks and uncertainties of democracy, having told ourselves that the people of the region are not ready to shoulder the burdens of freedom, having stressed that the necessary underpinnings of self-government go well beyond mere elections, suddenly the US has nothing it can credibly say as people take to the streets to try to seize control of their collective destiny.
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> All the US can do is "watch and respond", trying to make the best of what it transparently regards as a bad situation.
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> Our words betray us. US spokesmen stress the protesters' desire for jobs and for economic opportunity, as though that were the full extent of their aspirations. They entreat the wobbling,

> repressive governments in the region to "respect civil society", and the right of the people to protest peacefully, as though these thoroughly discredited autocrats were actually capable of reform.
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> They urge calm and restraint. **One listens in vain, however, for a ringing endorsement of freedom, or for a statement of encouragement to those willing to risk everything to assert their rights and their human dignity – values which the US nominally regards as universal**.
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> Yes, it must be acknowledged that the US has limited influence, even over regimes with which it is aligned and which benefit from US largess. And yes, a great power has competing practical interests – be those a desire for counter-terrorism assistance, or for promotion of regional peace – which it must balance, at least in the short term, against a more idealistic commitment to democracy and universal values.
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> But there are two things which must be stressed in this regard.
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> The first is the extent to which successive US administrations have consistently betrayed a lack of faith in the efficacy of America's democratic creed, the extent to which the US government has denied the essentially moderating influence of democratic accountability to the people, whether in Algeria in 1992 or in Palestine in 2006.
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> **The failure of the US to uphold its stated commitment to democratic values therefore goes beyond a simple surface hypocrisy, beyond the exigencies of great-power interests, to suggest a fundamental lack of belief in democracy**

> **as a means of promoting enlightened, long-term US interests in peace and stability**.
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> The second is the extent to which the US has simply become irrelevant in the Middle East. [my emphasis]

As you'll recall, Porter Goss and Jose Rodriguez fired Robert Grenier in early 2006, reportedly for being soft on torture. Grenier is also one of the CIA people who "remembered" details of the Plame leak after the fact, in July 2005, and testified at the Libby trial.

Not only does this column condemn many of the interventions in Pakistan, Iraq, and the Middle East generally in which Grenier was personally involved. But it suggests one reason behind his removal at the CTC may be a very American devotion to democracy.