

Mandela would have approved of Obama's Cu

GEORGE W Bush, author of the Iraq invasion and countless other disasters, this week emerged from self-imposed political exile to sound off about the supposed failures of the White House's current occupant.

To be fair to Dubya, for eight years he has wisely kept his counsel despite entreaties from his fellow Republicans to criticise his successor. Perhaps he's been too embarrassed by the mess he left.

Bush's wars led to needless loss of life. The US economy ground to a halt, plunging the world into a depression. In an attempt to strengthen the US's position in the world, Bush, ironically, left it decidedly weaker and poorer.

Barack Obama has got the economy back in harness. The motor industry has been revived. He has ended Bush's wars in Iraq and



Barney Mthombothi

Afghanistan and has resisted sending US soldiers to Libya and Syria. Warmongers interpret that as a sign of weakness. US foreign policy to them is to shoot at whoever has a bone to pick with the US.

No surprise, therefore, that what got Bush loquacious again was not Obama's domestic agenda, but his foreign policy. The shambles in the Middle East, Libya, Syria, the unravelling situation in Iraq and the

growing influence of Islamic State, which is seemingly taking over large swathes of these lands: all that he laid at the door of Obama.

Bush seems miffed that while he kept the genie firmly in the bottle, Obama has recklessly let it out; conveniently forgetting, of course, that it was his misguided Iraq escapade in search of the elusive weapons of mass destruction that was the genesis of the current chaos.

By removing Saddam Hussein, the Americans have made it possible for Iran, their nemesis, to normalise relations with Iraq.

Iran is, of course, at the centre of the current foreign policy controversy in Washington. The US, with other major powers, has at last negotiated the makings of a deal that could see Iran receive international blessings to develop its nuclear power for peaceful use, and the

eventual lifting of sanctions.

The imminent rapprochement with Iran has set the cat among the pigeons on Capitol Hill, with some Republicans keen to scupper the deal. But the alternative to a deal is war. Bush's intervention gives impetus to the "nuke 'em" brigade.

Powerful forces in the US, not unconnected to the armaments industry, like the idea of the US constantly reminding everybody who's the boss — at the point of a gun. There's money to be made in war. The fact that young Americans may come back home in body bags, wrapped in the obligatory US flag, is seen as a price worth paying.

Obama's inclination for negotiation is seen as a sign of weakness or appeasement. He doesn't understand "the idea of America", they say.

But a distinguished Republican

would probably agree with Obama's stance. Dwight Eisenhower, former supreme commander of allied forces in Europe in World War 2, warned, in his farewell speech as president some 40 years ago: "We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

No wonder Eisenhower's name rarely gets mentioned by those quick to agitate for war.

But while the right wing frets over Iran, it is Obama's outreach to Cuba that may prove a defining legacy of his foreign policy.

John F Kennedy often ranks among the best US presidents, but he made two decisions — on Cuba and Vietnam — that have had an enduring, and damaging, hold on the

US psyche. Eisenhower's anniversary event that Vietnam remembers who ramped Southeast Asian adventures had such public oppo-

The CIA invasion, Castro a took office Castro's power. He administr president

But the almost a ruinous That it b a small b Castro e

OPINION

Approved of Obama's Cuba overtures

...ce of Islamic State, ...ngly taking over large ...e lands: all that he ...e of Obama. ...miffed that while he ...firmly in the bottle, ...cklessly let it out; ...forgetting, of course, ...misguided Iraq ...arch of the elusive ...ss destruction that ...s of the current chaos. ...Saddam Hussein, the ...ve made it possible for ...esis, to normalise ...Iraq. ...urse, at the centre ...foreign policy ...Washington. The US, ...or powers, has at last ...makings of a deal that ...receive international ...velop its nuclear ...eful use, and the

eventual lifting of sanctions.

The imminent rapprochement with Iran has set the cat among the pigeons on Capitol Hill, with some Republicans keen to scupper the deal. But the alternative to a deal is war. Bush's intervention gives impetus to the "nuke 'em" brigade.

Powerful forces in the US, not unconnected to the armaments industry, like the idea of the US constantly reminding everybody who's the boss — at the point of a gun. There's money to be made in war. The fact that young Americans may come back home in body bags, wrapped in the obligatory US flag, is seen as a price worth paying.

Obama's inclination for negotiation is seen as a sign of weakness or appeasement. He doesn't understand "the idea of America", they say.

But a distinguished Republican

would probably agree with Obama's stance. Dwight Eisenhower, former supreme commander of allied forces in Europe in World War 2, warned, in his farewell speech as president some 40 years ago: "We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

No wonder Eisenhower's name rarely gets mentioned by those quick to agitate for war.

But while the right wing frets over Iran, it is Obama's outreach to Cuba that may prove a defining legacy of his foreign policy.

John F Kennedy often ranks among the best US presidents, but he made two decisions — on Cuba and Vietnam — that have had an enduring, and damaging, hold on the

US psyche. This week being the 40th anniversary of the fall of Saigon, an event that marked the end of the Vietnam War, it is worth remembering that it was Kennedy who ramped up US involvement in Southeast Asia. No military adventure since World War 2 has had such a deleterious effect on US public opinion.

The CIA-inspired Bay of Pigs invasion, launched to dislodge Fidel Castro a few months after Kennedy took office, only helped to solidify Castro's reputation and his hold on power. He has gone on to outlive the administrations of nine US presidents so far, an incredible feat.

But the US embargo, applied almost as a vengeful act, has had a ruinous impact on Cuban society. That it has persisted is in part due to a small but vocal group of anti-Castro émigrés based mainly in

Florida. The US has also found itself at odds with its allies, who cannot understand the rationale or wisdom of persisting with what is essentially a holdover from the Cold War.

South Africa may have had a hand in the thawing of US-Cuban relations. It was at Nelson Mandela's memorial service in December 2013 that Obama first shook hands with Raúl Castro, sending some Americans into a frenzy of disapproval.

A case perhaps of Madiba, the reconciler, working his magic even beyond the grave. Mandela, a friend of Cuba, would certainly have approved of Obama's overtures.

Comment on this: write to tellus@sundaytimes.co.za or SMS us at 33971

www.timeslive.co.za