

Alberto Gonzales and the Coup Against Democracy

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The name of Alberto Gonzales is rapidly becoming synonymous with all that has gone wrong under the Bush administration. Repeated media discussions of the US Secretary of State in the most contentious tones have served to lay the blame for all the ailments that infected American democracy under Bush squarely on one man's shoulders.

President Bush himself, Gonzales' loyal boss, friend and the hand behind all the stunts and tricks that Gonzales so indefatigably performed to defend and justify the unjustifiable, remains immune to any meaningful criticism.

Bush is well known for his habit of awarding sensitive posts to old friends, as if the prime objective of the president of the United States is to protect the administration's secrets and rubber stamp whatever compulsive policies he and his self-serving neoconservative associates concoct. Although appointed to the post in February 2005, Gonzales has been a member of Bush's team for years; he served as Bush's General Counsel from 1994 to 1997, when the president was governor of Texas. Then, he served as Secretary of State for Texas for two years, before going on to join the state's Supreme Court. Finally he worked with Bush again for five consecutive years as White House Counsel. Considering the president's reputation of favouritism and staunch loyalty to those faithful to him, Gonzales' ascension to the 80th Attorney General of the United States, replacing John Ashcroft, only seemed a natural progression.

True, Bush's loyalty cannot be contested; however, it is really the only attitude that can be expected of him towards individuals with too much knowledge of sensitive matters that he wouldn't desire to become public. Gonzales' successful, albeit illegal, efforts to help Governor Bush be excused from jury duty in 1996 (made possible by the convenient overlooking of the 1976 misdemeanour drunk driving case) is merely the tip of the iceberg. While the latter was exposed during the 2000 presidential campaign, there are many facts which can easily be deduced to fall in the realm of 'known unknowns', to borrow a favourite term of former Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

While the Bush administration had innumerable spin doctors, Gonzales was the man who knew the law well and thus knew how to manipulate it well. He played a major role in abusing the same laws that he once vowed to safeguard; the total politicization of the Justice Department and the dismissal of the

eight attorneys who had the courage to question the constitutionality of the administration's conduct in December 2006.

Perhaps Gonzales' unwarranted acts have generated a lot more attention in the last a few months as both Democrats and Republicans are in need of a punching bag, where Bush and

Cheney have proved untouchable. Another reason could be that Gonzales' past legal concoctions were justified as part of the administration's 'war on terror': so what if Gonzales had to circumvent

national and international law – repeatedly and unabashedly – to 'save American lives'?

And circumvent the law Gonzales most certainly did. Starting with the drafting of Executive Order 13233 in November 1, 2001, which restricted the Freedom of Information Act, and thus access to records of former presidents – to his arguments that effectively cancelled Article III of the Geneva

Convention, denying suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban militants held in Camp X-Ray the right to be treated as combatants – to his re-interpretation of the principles of the Geneva Convention that made possible the case for the torture and humiliation of Iraqis and others. Gonzales' role in the Bush administration's war on democracy at home, and his imperial war abroad, is unquestionable.

Gonzales is still around precisely because of this role, not inspite of it.

Gonzales' July 24 appearance before the Senate's Judiciary Committee was a disgrace by any standards. Even Republican members of the committee rightly doubted the man's integrity, and the testimony made by a Gonzales subordinate, FBI Director Robert Mueller, contradicted his boss' own accounts. Members of both parties are now up in arms; Republicans fear that Gonzales' sinking reputation will harm their political positions further, and Democrats, not daring to take on the President himself, are instead

confronting a man who was merely responsible for providing the legal wrapping for the administration's illegal acts.

Tom Raum, an analyst with the Associated Press, reasoned that Bush continues to stand by discredited Gonzales because his advisors "are mindful of the fact that it could be next to impossible to win Senate confirmation this late in his term for any possible replacement." Indeed, the department's No. 2, Deputy Attorney General Paul J. McNulty has just resigned; his decision is attributed to his role in the dismissal of the dissenting attorneys; another, William Mercer, withdrew his nomination for the department's third-highest job in June, knowing fully that his nomination would be rejected by the Senate, according to the New York Times' Philip Shenon and Jim Rutenberg. They quote Rich Galen, a GOP consultant: "There is a body of thought among Republicans that gives Gonzales great credit for drawing fire and putting up with it so the others in the Bush Cabinet can do their jobs. Because, if Gonzales is gone, they (Democrats) will just look for a new guy to go after."

Whether or not Democrats find their "new guy", the horrific violations of international human rights and of the US constitution will continue unabated, further ravaging the standing of the oldest Republic, and turning into shreds a democratic system that was once a torch of hope to aspiring democracies everywhere.

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