

First Light: Representative John Murtha instigates Historical Upheaval

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Global Research, November 26, 2005

themoscowtimes.com/ 26 November 2005

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Last week, America's troubled sleep was shattered by a trumpet blast of truth sounding deep in Washington's corridors of power, where the rule of the Lie has held sway for so long. This intrusion of reality into the bloodstained fantasyland of the Bush Regime comes late in the day for the moribund Republic — perhaps too late — but it has struck a mighty blow against the Lie's adherents, driving them into spasms of hysterical panic, like rats exposed suddenly to the light.

The unlikely instigator of this historic upheaval was U.S. Representative John Murtha, the 73-year-old conservative Democrat and war hawk, one of many "opposition" leaders who once strongly backed President George W. Bush's murderous folly in Iraq. Murtha, a Vietnam vet, has been a stalwart of the military-industrial complex for decades, supporting U.S. wars around the world and showering legislative largess on the weapons industry — which has obligingly kicked back lobbying contracts to his kin and friends, The Los Angeles Times reports.

But a penchant for typical backroom grease is not necessarily incompatible with political courage. And Murtha showed plenty of the latter when he rocked Washington with a truly revolutionary act in these degraded times: stating the obvious. Calling Bush's war "a flawed policy wrapped in an illusion," Murtha said U.S. forces should "redeploy" out of Iraq immediately; otherwise, Iraqis will never feel free, the insurgency will grow, terrorism will spread and the United States will sink further into debt and dishonor, putting the nation's very survival at stake.

This riot of understatement has been self-evident to most sentient beings for a long time; that it is now sinking into the occluded consciousness of Potomac power players is a turning point of genuine significance. Although Murtha was immediately assaulted in one of the most raucous displays of bile ever seen in Congress — with Bushist attack dogs labeling the war-wounded Pentagon patron a coward, traitor and terrorist-appeaser — his about-face has brought the so-called "extremist" antiwar position of swift withdrawal squarely into the political mainstream, and it won't go away now. And why should it? After all, it just happens to be the position of a majority of the American people, as poll after poll reveals.

None of this means the Bush nightmare is over, of course; not by the longest shot. This gang will grow ever more vicious as their support crumbles; in fact, it's a good bet that the worst is yet to come. The Bushists know that they have prison sentences hanging over their heads if they ever lose their grip on power. They will either do "whatever it takes" to keep holding the whip hand — in which case we are in for political and social strife the likes of which America has not seen since the Civil War — or, at the very least, they will make things bad

enough that the nation's power elite will negotiate a settlement, as in Richard Nixon's day: We won't prosecute you if you'll just go away. In any case, it won't be pleasant.

So no false hopes of a new day dawning. Let's not forget what happened after the "new dawn" after Nixon's departure: Six years later, Ronald Reagan was in office with an even worse crew — a lunatic fringe of aggressive militarists, hard-right ideologues and religious extremists allied with rapacious corporate elitists, all bent on destroying the idea of a common good beyond the bottom line. This poison has gone deep into the American bloodstream, and its virulence has been increased a thousandfold by the current regime. Bush's exit won't cure the body politic of this wasting disease.

Nor will it halt the voracious system of dominance and empire that has driven U.S. foreign policy — under Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives — for the past 60 years, covering the earth with more than 700 military bases while waging ceaseless war, directly and by proxy. Indeed, war profiteering has become essential to the wealth and power of the elite, and is now deeply embedded in the U.S. economy as a whole. Bush accelerated this all-devouring engine into overdrive; but he didn't create it, and his departure won't derail it.

Thus, even if the Bush Regime collapses entirely, we will still face an uphill battle against "Bushism" and all the long-term currents it represents. We must also guard against something even worse rising in its place. For the Bush years have shown how fragile American democracy is, how relatively little it takes for a predatory faction to seize the state and manipulate the public, cow the opposition, intimidate the press and use violence in pursuit of loot and power. The template is there now, and it's entirely conceivable, perhaps inevitable, that some new would-be dictator — more competent, more subtle, more adroit than the ludicrous klutz from Crawford — will use it to create a more efficient and durable instrument of domination.

Still, the immediate task at hand — ending the bloody war crime in Iraq and restoring some vestige of legality and reality to American politics — is a tall enough order. So we should take heart from events like Murtha's declaration and Bush's freefall in the polls. There has been a shift in the political landscape, which provides cautious but credible grounds for hope of some measure of change. Not a false triumphalism, for there is never any final "triumph" in human affairs; there is only the continual, never-ending task of trying to rise above our worst instincts. But for the first time in years, the sun of possibility has broken through the stinking murk of the Bush Imperium.

Annotations

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