

The Logic of the Irrational: Bush's Inaugural Address and the Global Strategy of American imperialism

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However personally insignificant the man himself, the inaugural address delivered Thursday by President George Bush is a major political statement and must be taken with deadly seriousness. As an expression of the global strategy of the United States, the speech presages a massive escalation of military operations all over the world.

The address was not written by Bush—who would be hard put to construct a single grammatical sentence—but by a team of high-level professional advisers, led by Michael Gerson, who gave careful thought to what the president would and would not say.

Among the most glaring omissions from the inaugural address, which has been noted by many commentators, was any explicit reference to Iraq. The obvious, though only partial, reason is that Bush's speechwriters considered it ill-advised to call attention to the disastrous consequences of the US invasion of that country. More striking, however, was Bush's failure to make any reference whatsoever to the cause for which the invasion of Iraq was supposedly undertaken—the “war on terror.” Neither that phrase, nor the words “terrorism” or “terror,” were uttered even once by President Bush.

This is an extraordinary omission given the fact that the global struggle against “terror” has been invoked endlessly as the principal justification for virtually every action undertaken by the Bush administration. Above all, the imperatives of the anti-terror crusade were invoked to legitimize the invasion of Iraq and the prospect of further “preventive” wars against Iran and North Korea.

When Bush went before Congress three years ago, on January 29, 2002, to deliver his State of the Union address, he denounced these three states “and their terrorist allies” as “an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.” Bush declared, “By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.”

The subsequent failure to discover either weapons of mass destruction or links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda terrorists made it all too clear that the war had been justified on the basis of lies that concealed the real reason for the invasion of Iraq—the pursuit of global hegemony and world domination by the United States.

The lesson drawn by the Bush administration from the world-wide exposure of its criminal

deceit was that the United States should not justify the next round of military actions by claiming it faces any specific, concrete, physical threat from Iran or any other country targeted for military attack. Such claims of imminent or even potential physical danger to the security of the United States lead only, as far as the Bush administration is concerned, to annoying and time-wasting demands for verification.

It is for this reason the inaugural address dropped all reference to “terror” and “terrorism,” and invoked as the new justification for war something far more abstract and ethereal: the struggle against “tyranny” and for “liberty” and “freedom.”

In the key passage of his address, Bush declared: “We have seen our vulnerability—and we have seen its deepest source. For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny—prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder—violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat.”

It is this “mortal threat” posed by “tyranny” that the United States must now fight “by force of arms when necessary.”

Of course, this rationale for war rests on a glaring political and psychological absurdity. Bush made no attempt to explain why people living in “whole regions of the world” which “simmer in resentment and tyranny” should despise the United States and pose a threat to Americans. The only rational explanation for this phenomenon is that they see the United States as an oppressor and enemy. Thus, the claim that the United States is engaged in a global crusade against tyranny is contradicted by Bush’s own description of the conditions which he invokes as a justification for war.

The crass absurdity of the argument is rooted not in the subjective intellectual limitations of Bush’s advisers—though they are certainly very limited men—but in the real contradiction between the needs and aspirations of the world’s masses and the brutal objectives of America’s global policies.

As a matter of practical policy, the morphing of the struggle against terror into the struggle against tyranny has immediate and profound consequences: it both lowers the threshold for American military action and vastly expands the range of its targets.

The redefinition of the Bush Doctrine of preventive war no longer requires that the United States be endangered because one or another state has, and plans to use at some point in the future, a weapon of mass destruction or some other form of terror against the US. Rather, it is enough for the United States to identify whatever country it chooses as a “tyranny” where violence is, in various unseen and mysterious ways, gathering and multiplying.

Precisely what does the Bush administration have in mind as it embarks upon its second term?

The answer to this question is suggested by a column by Charles Krauthammer of the Washington Post, which appeared the day after Bush’s inaugural. The timing, of course, is not accidental. Krauthammer’s column, like so many other editorials and columns welcoming the inaugural address, marked the beginning of a campaign to massage and manipulate public opinion in accordance with the agenda of the second Bush administration.

The old war on terror that preoccupied Bush during his first term, Krauthammer explains, is receding in importance. New dangers loom. "The bad news is a development more troubling than most observers recognize: signs of the emergence, for the first time since the fall of the Soviet empire, of an anti-American bloc anchored by Great Powers." What is Krauthammer talking about?

"It is no accident that Russia has begun hinting at making common cause with China. This is potentially ominous because of China's rising power and its status as the leading have-not nation, the Germany of the 21st century. In December, during the week of the rerun Ukrainian election that finally brought the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko to power, Russia made two significant moves toward China. First was the announcement of intensified economic cooperation in developing Russia's vast energy resources. More ominous was the Russian defense minister's Dec. 27 announcement of, 'for the first time in history,' large joint military exercises on Chinese territory.

"China in turn is developing relationships with such virulently anti-American rogue states as Iran. Add such various self-styled, anti-imperialist flotsam as Syria, North Korea, Cuba and Hugo Chavez's Venezuela, and you have the beginning of a significant 'anti-hegemonic' bloc-aimed at us."

The list of American enemies is truly endless! Billions of people, on continents all over the globe, are new targets for American "liberation" from "tyranny." The struggle can never end, for, as Krauthammer proclaims at the conclusion of his column, "There is no rest for the weary."

If all this sounds insane, it is because it is. But like the contradictions to which I have already referred, the insanity is lodged not in the brains of people like Bush, Krauthammer and the hoards of editorial writers who showered praise on the inaugural address, but rather in the very nature of the American imperial project.

The Bush administration has now begun a second term whose policies and deeds will result in even more bloodshed, human misery and tragedy than the first. As it heads over the abyss, the question is: how much of the country and the world will it take with it?

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