

PREFACE

The State of the United States

GEORGE W. BUSH'S "STATE OF THE UNION" SPEECH OF 2004 WAS NOT IN praise of "America" as claimed; it was about imperialism abroad — what President Putin in the context of the political crisis in the Ukraine describes as "the United States seeking to establish an international dictatorship of international affairs" — and quasi-fascism at home. It was a speech in praise of conquests of failed or rogue states in the Third World (Afghanistan and Iraq), a celebration of force as an instrument of political blackmail (Libya) and a declaration of new imperial impositions in the entire Middle East. The speech reiterated the most retrograde elements of the Bush doctrine: unilateral use of force, preventive war and the supremacy of US imperial dictates over the national sovereignty of enemies and allies. The smiling president glorifying US imperial conquests while his sycophants and partisans packing the Congress cheered was a kind of "Nuremberg lite" — a choreographed scenario to exalt the accomplishments of the imperial president.

The emperor denied any imperial intentions even as he defended imperial conquests and projected new military expeditions. His speech went beyond "triumphalism" and mendacity. It was based on a surreal vision that places the US at the centre of a divine universe in which the "Chosen People" of the US will exterminate their enemies and forcibly enlighten their reluctant allies.

Bush spoke as a millenarian, slaying devils ("terrorists") with a righteous sword (or cluster bombs), as an ordained and anointed disciple of God. Between triumphalism and celebration, however, the emperor sowed fear of enemy violence to justify the imperialist mission. This mission is complemented by paranoia: "terrorism" is everywhere, hidden and disguised, an evil force which at any moment could reproduce September 11.

The imperial ideology of triumphalism was juxtaposed with permanent vulnerability — celebration with fear. However, the illogical, contradictory and totally dissembling nature of the "State of the Union" discourse does not matter. We are all too familiar with ideology in its various guises, especially one so transparent as a discourse on freedom and peace brought about by smart bombs, missiles and the military apparatus of an imperial power seeking world domination. What matters is power. Trium-

phalist rhetoric was used to capture domestic resources (inflated military budgets and soldiers) to continue a vicious colonial war, and paranoia was used to justify the concentration of freedom-restricting dictatorial powers (via the Patriot Act) to repress, silence and cower the anti-war opposition. (Under Section 501 of Patriot II, a US citizen engaging in lawful activity can be picked off the streets or from home and taken to a secret military tribunal with no access to or notification of a lawyer, the press or family. This would be considered justified if an agent “inferred from the conduct” suspicious intentions of that citizen.)

Nothing mundane or factual was allowed to interfere with the construction of this glorious vision of world empire. There was no mention of the hundreds of US soldiers killed, the thousands maimed or dismembered, the scores of suicides or the thousands of mentally disturbed. Bush did not mention the US dead and wounded, not merely because it wouldn't have served the purpose of exalting empire, but because it would have demonstrated that US soldiers are vulnerable (and not God's chosen and protected “supermen”) and that the colonized people were effectively resisting the “invincible military machine.”

Bush and his inner circle know full well, in their less exalted moments, that each victory for the Iraqi resistance and each US casualty erodes his electoral support and undermines Rumsfeld's “will to power.” Defeats in Iraq make a mockery of the Pentagon-Zionist-militarist vision of unlimited wars in the Middle East. The militarist-Zionist millenarian vision of successive military conquests (after Iraq, Syria, Iran and others) has been shattered by the battles in the suburbs of Baghdad, the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators in Basra and the landmines planted everywhere.

The Iraqi resistance has put the lie to the racist image held by Arab haters in the Pentagon and their colleagues in Israel: Arabs are neither cowed by US military power nor incapable of organizing resistance; it is the US soldiers in the hundreds who are resigning from the military, and it is the US government that is desperately begging for mercenaries from Central America to replace demoralized US forces.

Bush's report on the “State of the Empire” necessarily included a sweeping panegyric about the domestic social and economic successes of his regime. The empire was built of “guns and butter,” or so his message was supposed to convey. But here the story was less credible, even to the most backward and chauvinistic sector of the US public.

Most people knew that three million US workers had lost their jobs over the previous three years. Most Americans know full well that private health and pharmaceutical plans are failing and that Bush's policies have increased the vulnerability of everyone but the very rich. It is precisely because Bush knew that over 60 percent of the US public rejected his social policies that he emphasized the need to extend the fascist and

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repressive Patriot Act, with its clauses enabling the president to suspend all democratic rights.

Like the fascists of the 1930s and the fundamentalist religious right of more recent years, Bush declared war on non-traditional families, same-sex marriage, homosexuals and illegal immigrants (no amnesty for 10 million Mexicans) in order to mobilize his mass base of fundamentalist Christians.

Cloaked in the rhetoric of national security, Bush emphasized in his speech the central role of the police, (repressive) legislation and the military: no mention of the close to 80 percent unemployed in Iraq (or the 98 percent of Iraqis opposed to the war and US occupation), the bombing of villages in Afghanistan, the daily slaughter of Palestinians or the abusive police-state treatment of non-Europeans visiting the US who are presumed guilty (and are photographed and fingerprinted) and must prove their innocence.

Like emperors of bygone years, Bush is in total denial of the fragile domestic foundations of the empire, or of the massive transfer of state funds from the “republic” (domestic economy) to finance the empire, resulting in massive budget deficits which in 2004 climbed to over half a trillion dollars. Blinded by hubris or stupidity, or both, and by the dream of imperial economic expansion and world domination, he cannot see that the outflows of capital and the exports of overseas subsidiaries of US companies are creating a monstrous trade deficit and undermining the US currency.

Like his imperial predecessors, Bush believes that the “American people” must sacrifice for the greater good of his virtuous empire of freedom and peace. With the total support of the quasi-state, subservient and “self-censored” mass media, this message is spread in the US and throughout the world, but its reception in the rest of the world is rather different from that in the US. *Le Monde* reports that after Bush’s speech, 67 percent of its readers felt that the US represents a grave threat to world peace. The same opinions were expressed in other parts of the world (with the exception of Israel). In the United States fewer than 15 percent of the people actually listened to the speech, and apart from the convinced, few voiced any outward support. The day after the speech there was more interest in the Super Bowl football championship game two weeks away than in Bush’s oratory.

The US version of what historians have described as “fascism” is in some ways quite distinct from its antecedents. It buys votes with hundreds of millions of dollars of mass media propaganda; it does not coerce approval or overtly terrorize the population, but instead it sows paranoia and fear of “others” — the enemy within, without, anywhere and everywhere. There are no mass organizations and mass spectacles to mesmerize the population; instead there is frivolity and banal lies to alienate

voters and produce an abstention rate of over 50 percent. The US President was to be elected in 2004 by less than a quarter of the potential electorate, given a roughly one-half abstention rate and the exclusion of (10 million) “illegal” immigrants and the (four million) former prisoners. If this exclusionary electoral process is not sufficient to ensure an appropriate outcome, there can be voter fraud, exclusion and judicial interference.

Some might see this as “fascism lite,” but it holds the potential for the heavier version known to us through the history of the twentieth century. The former commander of the US invasion force in Iraq, General Tommy Franks (a close adviser to Bush) recently declared that if there is another “major attack” in the US, the Constitution should be suspended, martial law should be declared and military tribunals should be established to try suspects. Bush’s repeated defence of the Patriot Act echoes General Franks’ quasi-fascist pronouncements. In other words, any regime-instigated provocation could shift the fragile balance towards fascism as we know it.

Authoritarianism in pursuit of imperialism faces three fundamental obstacles at the moment: the forces of popular democracy, armed resistance, and the decline of the US republic. Members of the new world ruling class, the agents of transnational capitalism, who assemble and meet each year at the Swiss resort in Davos, Switzerland, are clearly troubled by the continuing decline of the dollar, the outcomes of inter-imperialist rivalry and “excessive” competition, the destabilizing effects of social inequality and poverty, the clash of civilizations, terrorism and other threats to the global order, and threats to the US and the global order. But the US and diverse national contingents of the world ruling class, assembling at Davos and at other such policy forums and summits, supported the US invasion of Iraq and refuse to recognize the connection between imperialist expansion and republican decay in the US.

The dilemma of the self-appointed neo-conservative guardians of the neo-liberal world order is the left’s opportunity. The greater the solidarity with the forces of resistance in Iraq and elsewhere that challenge and weaken the forces of imperialism, the greater the likelihood of success in refounding the democratic republic, building and strengthening mass revolutionary movements, and bringing about another world.