

Sen. Jesse Helms Gets A New Lease on Life

by William Jones

The irascible old curmudgeon, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has most often been taken to be a harmless old fool, who, given his age, would soon be retiring from the political scene. During the Clinton Administration, Helms served primarily as a “grenade-thrower” against Clinton’s foreign policy initiatives, one who was capable of throwing up roadblocks to Clinton proposals, but was rarely able to derail them entirely. With the inauguration of George W. Bush on Jan. 20, Helms—and his insane agenda—have received a new lease on life.

The Senator himself was given the opportunity to lay out that agenda on Jan. 11 at the American Enterprise Institute, the conservative think-tank from which President Bush may be choosing many of his middle- and lower-echelon officials. Helms spoke to a generally sympathetic crowd, including former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who emerged from his forced retirement (in opprobrium). Helms made clear that the perennial rumors of his own “demise” were greatly exaggerated. He began by outlining some of the measures that he had succeeded in pushing through Congress during the last eight years: the Helms-Burton sanctions against Cuba, the National Missile Defense Act, and the UN reform legislation. “And that is just the legislation that we succeeded in forcing through an unwilling White House!” Helms exclaimed. “The number of important measures that the outgoing Clinton Administration succeeded in stopping is simply staggering.” With a grin, Helms added, “A week from Saturday, on Jan. 20, all that will change.”

Helms paid some *pro forma* homage to “bipartisanship,” especially important with the 50-50 split in the U.S. Senate. Then he went to his major point: “But we cannot, and must not, ignore the fact that something has changed in Washington. . . . For the first time in five decades, Republicans will control the White House, the Senate, and the House of Representatives. And that means Republicans can have an unprecedented opportunity to set the policy agenda—especially in the realm of foreign affairs. We must, and we will, seize that opportunity.”

‘Faith-Based’ Counterinsurgency

He then proceeded to describe the “Helms agenda” for the next four years. The Senator, who has long been an opponent of foreign aid, now wishes to breathe life into a new type of foreign assistance. In the spirit of Bush’s “compassionate conservatism,” Helms would like to replace the Federally financed aid organizations, such as the U.S. Agency for Inter-

national Development (AID), with private, “faith-based” alternatives, that have been so praised by the incoming President. Helms pointed to the South Carolina-based “Samaritan’s Purse,” a charity run by Billy Graham’s son, Franklin. Samaritan’s Purse is “currently in southern Sudan, where a brutal civil war is tearing a nation apart,” Helms said. “Samaritan’s Purse runs hospitals and clinics which—despite repeated bombings by government forces—provide desperately needed medical and surgical services to the suffering Sudanese people.” (In fact, the U.S. has been backing a British-run insurgency against a legitimate government, leading to thousands of deaths.)

Instead of Federally employed AID workers, Helms would send down cadres of fundamentalist Christians to “assist” the people. As in southern Sudan, these non-governmental organizations would run their own low-level counterinsurgency operations against legitimate governments, using the pretext of “humanitarian concerns” to rally support for a particular side in a conflict. Such operations reached their high-point with the establishment of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations, or “quangos,” under Executive Order 12333 during the Reagan-Bush Administration. “My dear friends,” Helms told the hundred or so co-thinkers who had gathered, “these are the ‘armies of compassion’ that President Bush is talking about. And I put it to you: If we can deploy those ‘armies of compassion’ across America, then we can and must deploy them across the world.”

A ‘Blue Team’ Agenda

Helms also shared his thoughts on how the United States would deal with the People’s Republic of China, which he continues to refer to as “the Beijing dictatorship.” “The military balance of power of the past 20 years is quickly shifting in Beijing’s favor,” Helms said, reflecting the propaganda line of the self-styled “Blue Team” China-bashers at the Pentagon and in the Republican congressional staff offices, who are intent on maintaining the ideology—and the hefty defense budgets—of the Cold War era. “Because of the Clinton Administration’s neglect, Taiwan’s self-defense capabilities are not keeping up with Beijing’s rapid military modernization,” Helms claimed. “It is imperative that we act quickly to reverse the decline. . . . Okay, we must engage China. But Beijing also must be made to understand that its avenues to destructive behavior are closed off, and that Taiwan will have the means to defend itself.” The annual congressional evaluation of Taiwan’s defense needs, under the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act, will occur in April or May, providing grist to the mill of the Blue Team ideologues for a “Taiwan debate.”

Helms said, “Our challenge in the start of this new millennium—and the start of this new administration—must be to consolidate the democratic advances of the last ten years, while increasing the pressure on those who still refuse to accept the principle that sovereign legitimacy comes from the consent of the governed.”

Assisting that new “light” in Helms’s “democratic fir-

mament,” is Mexico’s President Vicente Fox, a number-one priority for Helms. “President Fox and President Bush already share a constructive vision for dealing with the problems that challenge both of their countries. Working together, we can secure our border, discourage illegal immigration, and strengthen our nation’s second-largest trading partner by helping President Fox rejuvenate Mexico’s economy.”

An Aging Cold Warrior

And, what to do about Fidel Castro—who is threatening to outlive Helms? The Clinton Administration, with the help of Vatican diplomacy, made some efforts to end the Cold War-era embargo against the island enclave, but without success. “With the Bush election,” Helms crowed, “the opponents of the Cuban embargo are about to run into a brick wall on the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.” It has not gone unnoticed by the Senator, nor by the incoming President, that Bush made a significant showing in Florida only thanks to the support given him by the Cuban refugees centered in Miami. Payback time may now be near. “With the embargo finally off the table, the Bush Administration has a golden opportunity to develop a new Cuba policy. The model for such a new Cuba policy should be the successful policies that the Reagan-Bush Administration used in the 1980s to undermine Communism in Poland,” Helms said. “Come Jan. 20, I intend to work with the Bush Administration to do for the people of Cuba what

the United States did for the people of Poland 20 years ago. . . . And I will make a prediction here today: Before his term is up, President Bush will visit Havana—to attend the inauguration of the new democratically elected President of Cuba.”

As for Iraq, another issue which will be on the front-burner for the Bushmen, Helms’s message is simply: Saddam Hussein must go! “Nothing will change in Iraq until Saddam Hussein is removed from power,” Helms said. “I look forward to working with President Bush to implement effectively the Iraq Liberation Act [and] help the people of Iraq get rid of Saddam Hussein.”

Regarding Eastern Europe and Russia, Helms demands NATO membership for the Baltic states in 2002. “With the collapse of Communism, those nations finally achieved their rightful independence from Russian occupation and domination. Yet Russia still looms menacingly over these countries. In looking at the current Russian government, one gets the distinct impression that the Russian leadership considers Baltic independence to be a temporary phenomenon. That is an impression that the Russians cannot be allowed to long entertain.”

Anyone listening to the words of the “gentleman from North Carolina,” would do well heed the words of the ancient Greek playwright: “Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad.” Because the Helms foreign policy agenda is the type of madness that leads to wars.

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