

Bush's New Strategy: Unilateralism Run Amock

by Carl Osgood

While charges of unilateralism in foreign policy have been dogging the Bush Administration since long before Sept. 11, George Bush's strategic policy took a further turn in that direction with the speech he made at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York on June 1.

There, Bush declared, "Deterrence . . . means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies." He said that while homeland defense and missile defense are part of stronger security, "the war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action."

Bush added that terror cells in 60 countries must be uncovered and that "we must oppose proliferation and confront regimes that sponsor terror, as each case requires." He told the graduating cadets, "We will send you, our soldiers, where you're needed."

Many Afghanistans

As is often the case, Bush's speech also contained an element of contradiction. On the one hand, he was expressing a doctrine that rejects the idea of national sovereignty, and arrogating to the United States some kind of absolute, world imperial authority under the banner of the war on terrorism. On the other, he told his West Point audience, that "we also have an historic opportunity to preserve peace. We have our best chance since the rise of the modern nation-state in the 17th Century, to build a world where the great powers compete in peace instead of war."

Of course, the notion of "great powers," itself evokes an element of 19th-Century geopolitics, as if the "great powers" have the right to determine the destiny of the rest of the world.

Bush's West Point speech was followed by increasingly bellicose statements from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who departed, a few days later, on a ten-day trip to a NATO defense ministers' meeting in Brussels, and then to Estonia, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Subcontinent.

Rumsfeld brought with him to Brussels, among other things, a demand that NATO remake itself into an expedi-

tionary force. At a press conference following the Brussels meetings, he said, "If a terrorist can attack at any time, in any place, and using any technique, and it's physically impossible to defend in every place, at every time against every technique, then one needs to calibrate the definition of 'defensive.' Because, literally, the only way to defend against individuals or groups or organizations or countries that have weapons of mass destruction and are bent on using them against you . . . is to take the effort to find those global networks and to deal with them as the United States did in Afghanistan."

By definition, this means turning NATO from the defensive alliance it was founded as, into an expeditionary warfare force, deploying to fight primarily outside the region of its member states. The restructuring of NATO military forces demanded by the United States reflects this. This restructuring includes, as one senior defense official reported after the ministers' meeting, enhancing "the Alliance's mobility capabilities and its ability to sustain its forces out of area." This includes expanding airlift and sealift capabilities, logistics support, and air-to-air refueling.

Not far from anyone's mind in these discussions is, of course, Iraq. What does President Bush's new doctrine mean for U.S. policy toward Iraq? Since Iraq is the chief bogeyman for U.S. policy, will the United States soon launch a preemptive attack on Iraq? Rumsfeld is coy when asked that question, but he's made no secret of his attitude toward that country. In a stop-over in London while on his way to Brussels, Rumsfeld declared that Iraq has had a "sizable appetite" for weapons of mass destruction, that materials for Iraq's WMD programs have been "flowing" into the country and that Saddam Hussein "is an individual that has used chemical weapons on his own people."

When specifically asked about moves toward reconciliation between Iraq and Kuwait, Rumsfeld said, while in Kuwait on June 9, "It would be like the lion inviting the chicken into an embrace." He denied, however, that his swing through the Gulf had anything to do with gathering support for the overthrow of the Iraqi regime.

Preemptive Strikes With Nukes?


All this talk about preemptive attacks, whether against Iraq or against any of the other 50 or 60 countries that supposedly harbor al-Qaeda terrorist cells, is making some people nervous. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.), speaking to reporters on June 10, did not express much disagreement with the preemptive strike doctrine itself. What made him nervous was the inclusion of nuclear weapons in that doctrine. Levin warned that any change in nuclear weapons doctrine, whether it is toward first use, or the development of new weapons, such as the earth penetrators that the Defense Department is seeking, "whatever those decisions are, they have reverberations throughout the world."

He also expressed doubt that Iraq is quite the threat that Rumsfeld has painted it to be. In Levin's view, Saddam Hussein will use weapons of mass destruction, if he has them, if the United States attacks Iraq. He said that Hussein's major goal "is his own survival," so that makes it unlikely that he would use such weapons if he is not attacked. Levin's qualification of "if he has them" is an indicator that the view that Iraq has nuclear, chemical and biological weapons is not universal in Washington.

Levin is not alone, by any means, in his concerns, as was reported by *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen on June 11. Cohen reported on a speech delivered by *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol, who, in Cohen's words "announced a vast U.S. foreign policy agenda, beginning with a war against Iraq and ending with replacing the monarchy in Saudi Arabia." His mostly European audience "at first gasped and then reacted with irritation." Cohen reported that most of Europe, in fact, sees Bush "as a unilateralist, the President who came into office determined to abrogate this treaty or that and who, either in word or manner, considered Europeans to be wimps." And further, they view Kristol as a "virtual spokesman" for the Bush Administration. Whether or not that view is correct, it is clear that when Bush makes a major foreign policy speech, as the West Point speech was billed, it has consequences in the real world.

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