

The Widening Crusade

Bush's War Plan Is Scarier Than He's Saying

by Sydney H. Schanberg

If some wishful Americans are still hoping President Bush will acknowledge that his imperial foreign policy has stumbled in Iraq and needs fixing or reining in, they should put aside those reveries. He's going all the way—and taking us with him.

The Israeli bombing raid on Syria October 5 was an expansion of the Bush policy, carried out by the Sharon government but with the implicit approval of Washington. The government in Iran, said to be seeking to develop a nuclear weapon, reportedly expects to be the next target.

No one who believes in democracy need feel any empathy toward the governments of Syria and Iran, for they assist the terrorist movement, yet if the Bush White House is going to use its preeminent military force to subdue and neutralize all “evildoers” and adversaries everywhere in the world, the American public should be told now. Such an undertaking would be virtually endless and would require the sacrifice of enormous blood and treasure.

With no guarantee of success. And no precedent in history for such a crusade having lasting effect.

People close to the president say that his conversion to evangelical Methodism, after a life of aimless carousing, markedly informs his policies, both foreign and domestic. In the soon-to-be-published *The Faith of George W. Bush* (Tarcher/Penguin), a sympathetic account of this religious journey, author Stephen Mansfield writes (in the advance proofs) that in the election year 2000, Bush told Texas preacher James Robison, one of his spiritual mentors: “I feel like God wants me to run for president. I can't explain it, but I sense my country is going to need me. . . . I know it won't be easy on me or my family, but God wants me to do it.”

Mansfield also reports: “Aides found him face down on the floor in prayer in the Oval Office. It became known that he refused to eat sweets while American troops were in Iraq, a partial fast seldom reported of an American president. And he framed America's challenges in nearly biblical language. Saddam Hussein is an evildoer. He has to go.” The author concludes: “. . . the Bush administration does deeply reflect its leader, and this means that policy, even in military matters, will be processed in terms of the personal, in terms of the moral, and in terms of a sense of divine purpose that propels the present to meet the challenges of its time.”

Some who read this article may choose to view it as the partisan perspective of a political liberal. But I have experienced wars—in India and Indochina—and have measured their results. And most of the men and women who are advocating the Bush Doctrine have not. You will find few generals among them. They are, instead, academics and think-tank people and born-again missionaries. One must not entertain any illusion that they are only opportunists in search of power, for most of them truly believe in their vision of a world crusade under the American flag. They are serious, and they now have power at the top.

I believe that last week's blitz of aggressive speeches and spin by the president and his chief counselors removed all doubt of his intentions.

“As long as George W. Bush is president of the United States,” Vice President Cheney told the friendly Heritage Foundation, “this country will not permit gathering threats to become certain tragedies.” The president himself must tell us now what this vow entails.

The public relations deluge by Bush, Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld

seemed to be aimed at denying any policy fumbles and insisting that the liberal press was ignoring the positive developments in Iraq.

Mr. Cheney, the president's usual attack dog, aimed his sharpest and most sneering words at those who offer dissent about the administration's foreign and economic policies. Perhaps seeking to stifle such criticism, he raised the specter of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction that "could bring devastation to our country on a scale we have never experienced. Instead of losing thousands of lives, we might lose tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of lives in a single day of horror." His implication was that Saddam Hussein in particular had presented this threat—when virtually all the available intelligence shows that Iraq's weapons programs had been crippled or drastically diminished by UN inspections and economic sanctions imposed after the first Gulf war in 1991.

But beyond all the distortions and exaggerations and falsehoods the Bush people engaged in to rally public support for the Iraq war, what I have never understood, from the 9-11 day of tragedy onward, is why this White House has not called on the American people to be part of the war effort, to make the sacrifices civilians have always made when this country is at war.

There has been no call for rationing or conservation of critical supplies, such as gasoline. There has been no call for obligatory national service in community aid projects or emergency services. As he sent 150,000 soldiers into battle and now asks them to remain in harm's way longer than expected, the president never raised even the possibility of reinstating the military draft, perhaps the most democratizing influence in the nation's history. Instead, he has cut taxes hugely, mostly for affluent Americans, saying this would put money into circulation and create jobs. Since Bush began the tax cutting two and a half years ago, 2.7 million jobs have disappeared.

All this I don't understand. If it's a crisis—and global terrorism surely is—then why hasn't the president acted accordingly? What he did do, when he sent out those first tax rebate checks, was to tell us to go shopping. Buy clothes for the kids, tires for the car—this would get the economy humming. How does that measure up as a thoughtful, farsighted fiscal plan?

In effect, George Bush says, believe in me and I will lead you out of darkness. But he doesn't tell us any details. And it's in the details where the true costs are buried—human costs and the cost to our notion of ourselves as helpers and sharers, not slayers. No one seems to be asking themselves: If in the end the crusade is victorious, what is it we will have won? The White House never asked that question in Vietnam either.

For those who would dispute the assertion that the Bush Doctrine is a global military-based policy and is not just about liberating the Iraqi people, it's crucial to look back to the policy's origins and examine its founding documents.

The Bush Doctrine did get its birth push from Iraq—specifically from the outcome of the 1991 Gulf war, when the U.S.-led military coalition forced Saddam Hussein's troops out of Kuwait but stopped short of toppling the dictator and his oppressive government. The president then was a different George Bush, the father of the current president. The father ordered the military not to move on Baghdad, saying that the UN resolution underpinning the allied coalition did not authorize a regime change. Dick Cheney was the first George Bush's Pentagon chief. He said nothing critical at the time, but apparently he came to regret the failure to get rid of the Baghdad dictator.

A few years later, in June 1997, a group of neoconservatives formed an entity called the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) and issued a Statement of Principles. "The history of the 20th Century," the statement said, "should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire." One of its formal principles called for a major increase in defense spending "to carry out our global responsibilities today." Others cited the "need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values" and

underscored “America’s unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity and our principles.” This, the statement said, constituted “a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity.”

Among the 25 signatories to the PNAC founding statement were Dick Cheney, I. Lewis Libby (Cheney’s chief of staff), Donald Rumsfeld (who was also defense secretary under President Ford), and Paul Wolfowitz (Rumsfeld’s No. 2 at the Pentagon, who was head of the Pentagon policy team in the first Bush presidency, reporting to Cheney, who was then defense secretary). Obviously, this fraternity has been marinating together for a long time. Other signers whose names might ring familiar were Elliot Abrams, Gary Bauer, William J. Bennett, Jeb Bush, and Norman Podhoretz.

Three years and several aggressive position papers later—in September 2000, just two months before George W. Bush, the son, was elected president—the PNAC put military flesh on its statement of principles with a detailed 81-page report, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses.” The report set several “core missions” for U.S. military forces, which included maintaining nuclear superiority, expanding the armed forces by 200,000 active-duty personnel, and “repositioning” those forces “to respond to 21st century strategic realities.”

The most startling mission is described as follows: “Fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theater wars.” The report depicts these potential wars as “large scale” and “spread across [the] globe.”

Another escalation proposed for the military by the PNAC is to “perform the ‘constabulary’ duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions.”

As for homeland security, the PNAC report says: “Develop and deploy global missile defenses to defend the American homeland and American allies, and to provide a secure basis for U.S. power projection around the world. Control the new ‘international commons’ of space and ‘cyberspace,’ and pave the way for the creation of a new military service—U.S. Space Forces—with the mission of space control.”

Perhaps the eeriest sentence in the report is found on page 51: “The process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor.”

Apparently for the neoconservative civilians who are running the Iraq campaign, 9-11 was that catalyzing event—for they are now operating at full speed toward multiple, simultaneous wars. The PNAC documents can be found online at newamericancentury.org.

In the end, the answers lie with this president—and later maybe with Congress and the American voters. Is he so committed to this imperial policy that he is unable to consider rethinking it? In short, is his mind closed? And if so, how many wars will he take us into?

These are not questions in a college debate, where the answers have no consequences. When a president’s closest advisers and military planners are patrons of a policy that speaks matter-of-factly of fighting multiple, simultaneous, large-scale wars across the globe, people have a right to be told about it.

In his new book, *Winning Modern Wars*, retired general Wesley Clark, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, offered a window into the Bush serial-war planning. He writes that serious planning for the Iraq war had already begun only two months after the 9-11 attack, and adds:

“As I went back through the Pentagon in November 2001, one of the senior military staff officers had time for a chat. Yes, we were still on track for going against Iraq, he said. But there was more. This was being discussed as part of a five-year campaign plan, he said, and there were a total of seven countries, beginning with Iraq, then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Iran, Somalia and Sudan. . . . I left the Pentagon that afternoon deeply concerned.”

A five-year military campaign. Seven countries. How far has the White House taken

this plan? And how long can the president keep the nation in the dark, emerging from his White House cocoon only to speak to us in slogans and the sterile language of pep rallies?