

Showing George the Door

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Consortium News - Robert Parry - George W. Bush had a point when he disparaged the Baker-Hamilton commission's plan for gradual troop withdrawals from Iraq by saying "this business about graceful exit just simply has no realism to it whatsoever." It's now obvious that there can be no exit from Iraq - graceful or otherwise - as long as Bush remains President.

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Time for Bush to Go!

Robert Parry

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Despite wishful thinking about Bush "making a 180" and taking to heart the bipartisan Iraq Study Group's 79 recommendations, the President is making it abundantly clear that he has no intention to reverse course, negotiate with his Muslim adversaries or pull American combat troops out of Iraq.

Bush continues to present the Iraq War and the broader conflict in the Middle East as an existential battle between good and evil, a scrap between black hats and white hats, not a political struggle that can be resolved through respectful negotiations and mutual concessions.

In Bush's view, the only resolution is for troublesome Muslims to submit to his terms. But that is a possibility receding with the speed of water being pulled out to sea before the surge of a fast-approaching tsunami. In this case, there is a tidal wave of anti-Americanism about to crash across the Middle East.

While the Democratic congressional election victory and the scathing assessment from the Iraq Study Group may have shifted the political ground in Washington, Bush refuses to let go of his

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uncompromising vision of an ideological struggle? requiring a near-endless war against Muslim militants abroad and elimination of constitutional liberties at home.

Tough Talk

At a joint news conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Dec. 7 ? just a day after the release of the Iraq Study Group?s report ? Bush jumped back into his stump-speech rhetoric demanding ?victory in Iraq? as the only acceptable result for ?the civilized world.?

"I believe we?ll prevail," Bush said. "Not only do I know how important it is to prevail, I believe we will prevail. I understand how hard it is to prevail. But I also want the American people to understand that if we were to fail ? and one way to assure failure is just to quit, is not to adjust, and say it?s just not worth it ? if we were to fail, that failed policy will come to hurt generations of Americans in the future. ?

"I believe we?re in an ideological struggle between forces that are reasonable and want to live in peace, and radicals and extremists. And when you throw into the mix radical Shia and radical Sunni trying to gain power and topple moderate governments, with energy which they could use to blackmail Great Britain or America, or anybody else who doesn?t kowtow to them, and a nuclear weapon in the hands of a government that is ? would be using that nuclear weapon to blackmail to achieve political objectives ? historians will look back and say, how come Bush and Blair couldn?t see the threat?

"That?s what they?ll be asking. And I want to tell you, I see the threat and I believe it is up to our governments to help lead the forces of moderation to prevail. It?s in our interests.?"

Along with his grim vision of an open-ended global war, Bush added his usual mix of false history and faulty logic to fan the fears of Americans.

Back, for instance, was Bush?s old canard about how the 9/11 attacks ended American complacency that the two oceans protected the country from attack, a belief that actually disappeared more than a half century ago with the advent of Soviet nuclear missiles. Bush said:

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"One of the things that has changed for American foreign policy is a threat overseas can now come home to hurt us, and September the 11th should be a wake-up call for the American people to understand what happens if there is violence and safe havens in a part of the world. And what happens is people can die here at home.?"

Bush also continued to posit how his favored Middle East forces are pro-democratic and his enemies are anti-democratic, though the evidence actually is that the popular wave sweeping across the Middle East is one of intense anti-Americanism.

The surviving pro-American regimes are dwindling to a handful of dictatorships and monarchies ? the likes of Egypt and Saudi Arabia ? while opinion polls in every Muslim country reveal intense opposition to Bush and his policies.

Bush also left out other inconvenient facts, such as that the Hamas leadership in Palestine won parliamentary elections; that elections in Iraq deepened the sectarian divide by putting hardline Shiites in charge; that polls show most Iraqis want U.S. forces to leave; that Hezbollah has emerged as a potent and popular force in Lebanon, able to mount massive political demonstrations; that Iranians elected Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as their president and broadly support Iran?s nuclear program.

And, oh yes, the Iraq War was not started by Islamic militants who hate peace but by George W. Bush.

In other words, Bush still insists on living in a world of ideology and made-up facts, not one of reality and pragmatism. Bush has fixed in his mind what his neoconservative advisers sold him on in 2001 ? and he can?t break with that.

?It?s Bad in Iraq?

At the press conference, Bush?s only concession to reality was to agree pugnaciously to a question about the Iraq Study Group?s assessment that the situation in Iraq is ?grave and deteriorating.?"

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Glaring at the questioner, Bush replied with anger and sarcasm: "It's bad in Iraq. Does that help?"

Regarding the Iraq Study Group's key recommendation for negotiations with Iran and Syria, Bush spiked that idea by continuing to lay down preconditions that he knows the two countries won't accept, basically that they accept his goals for the region's future.

"If people come to the table to discuss Iraq, they need to come understanding their responsibilities to not fund terrorists, to help this young democracy survive, to help with the economics of the country," Bush said. "And if people are not committed, if Syria and Iran is not committed to that concept, then they shouldn't bother to show up."

So, Bush left little ambiguity about his intent toward the central recommendations from former Secretary of State James Baker, former Rep. Lee Hamilton and the eight other members of the Iraq Study Group, evenly split between Republicans and Democrats. Bush has no intention of implementing their comprehensive plan.

Bush appears not to have budged one inch from his longstanding hostility toward any questioning of his war judgments. He is determined to keep U.S. troops in Iraq regardless of the will of the American people or anyone else.

"I will not withdraw even if Laura and Barney are the only ones supporting me," Bush told key Republicans, referring to his wife and his dog, in an anecdote that author Bob Woodward described in an Oct. 1 interview with CBS News' "60 Minutes."

Bush also still has the support of Blair, who is widely derided in Great Britain as "Bush's poodle." At the press conference, Blair did nothing to shake that reputation, thanking Bush "for the clarity of your vision about the mission that we're engaged in."

But Blair is expected to step down as Prime Minister sometime in spring 2007, depriving Bush of his most enthusiastic booster among the "coalition of the willing" that joined the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

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Looming Crisis

As Bush's circle of support grows tighter and tighter ? while he remains obstinate in implementing his vision of near-endless war against Muslim militants ? the U.S. political system will confront a crisis of historic magnitude.

The current conventional wisdom is that the United States has no choice but to stagger forward with Bush in command for the next two years, absorbing the loss of hundreds or thousands of more dead American soldiers and watching the bloody civil war in Iraq possibly spread across the region.

After all, the thinking goes, if Bush will rebuff James Baker ? the Bush Family fixer who secured the White House for Bush by blocking the Florida recount in 2000 ? who will Bush listen to?

Bush has now ousted at least three Cabinet secretaries who voiced objections to his strategy on Iraq: Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and ? most recently ? Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who was fired on Nov. 8, two days after writing a memo suggesting a drawdown of U.S. forces.

Rumsfeld also committed the unpardonable sin of questioning Bush's lofty rhetoric about transforming Iraq and the Middle East. The outgoing Defense Secretary said the administration should ?recast the U.S. military mission and the U.S. goals (how we talk about them) ? go minimalist.? [NYT, Dec. 3, 2006]

Beyond ousting Cabinet secretaries who disagree, Bush also disparages lower-ranking officials who dissent on Iraq, calling them defeatists or casting them as political enemies. Before Election 2004, Bush and his supporters frequently lashed out at CIA and other intelligence analysts who described worsening problems in Iraq.

Bush's anger carried over past the election, according to an account by Salon.com's Sidney Blumenthal. In December 2004, Col. Derek Harvey, the Defense Intelligence Agency's senior intelligence officer for Iraq, informed Bush that the Iraqi insurgency was ?robust? and growing,

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prompting Bush to turn to his aides and ask, 'Is this guy a Democrat??' Blumenthal reported. [Salon.com, Dec. 7, 2006]

So, given Bush's rhetoric and actions, there is little reason to believe that he intends to reverse course. If anything, he will continue toying with notions about expanding the conflict by bombing Iran's nuclear facilities or seeking escalation of political confrontations with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.

That means that by 2009, whoever becomes the next President will face a likely conflagration in the Middle East, with the real possibility that Bush will have enflamed Islamic radicalism so much that the region's few pro-U.S. pillars — such as the Saudi royal family or the Egyptian dictatorship — will be tottering if not already fallen.

Disruptions of Middle East oil supplies could wreak havoc on the U.S. and world economies. Plus, Bush might end up precipitating just the grim vision that he has long articulated — an interminable world war pitting the West against large segments of the planet's one billion Muslims.

Faced with this looming catastrophe, the congressional Democrats may have no choice but to reconsider what incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and others have ruled off the table, — the impeachment of President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney.

Indeed, Bush's cavalier dismissal of the key Baker-Hamilton recommendations creates a possible framework for a bipartisan impeachment effort.

A less confrontational approach could be Republican and Democratic pressure on Bush and Cheney to agree to sequential resignations, replacing Cheney first with a new Vice President who would then assume the presidency upon Bush's resignation.

As unlikely — and extreme — as these scenarios may sound, the future of the American Republic may demand nothing less.

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If Bush cannot come to grips with reality ? and adopt a less ideological approach toward the Middle East ? there may be no realistic choice but for the American people and their elected representatives to make clear that it?s time for him to go.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq*, can be ordered at secrecyandprivilege.com. It's also available at Amazon.com, as is his 1999 book, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth.'*

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