

by Srdja Trifkovic

## State of the Union: An Empire, Not a Republic

President Bush's recent State of the Union Address was an historic occasion. His speechwriting staff went through nearly 30 drafts and finally presented him (and the rest of us) with a mature ideological framework that reflects the balance of outlooks within the present administration. The preceding debate may have been the last chance for any remaining republicans (small "r") within the national-security team to raise their voices and insert certain qualifications into what has emerged as the "Bush doctrine," but this did not happen. The neoconservative policy of permanent global interventionism has triumphed.

In addition to "ridding the world of thousands of terrorists" in Afghanistan, the U.S. military had "saved a people from starvation and freed a country from brutal oppression." Its women "were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school, while now they are free, and take part in Afghanistan's new government," all of which is "a tribute to the spirit of the Afghan people, to the resolve of our coalition and to the might of the United States military."

The President was vague concerning the estimated number of terrorists still at large, but "our war against terror is only beginning" and will cover the whole world, because

Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning . . . tens of thousands of trained terrorists are still at large. These enemies view the entire world as a battlefield, and we must pursue them wherever they are . . . freedom is at risk and America and our allies must not, and will not, allow it.

The list of enemies also includes "regimes who seek chemical, biological

or nuclear weapons" and "at least a dozen countries" that offer refuge to "a terrorist underworld." Three countries in particular are "threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction": North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. These "constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world." America will have to act, and she welcomes friends and allies in that endeavor, "but some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: If they do not act, America will."

To handle the threat, the United States must "develop and deploy effective missile defenses to protect America and our allies from sudden attack." In addition, we will *preempt* any possible threat. President Bush "will not wait on events while dangers gather" and "peril draws closer and closer." The job may not be finished on our watch, he said, "yet it must be and it will be waged on our watch." This task is transcendently ordained: "History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight." All of this will require an enormous amount of money, more than anything spent on defense even at the height of the Cold War, but "while the price of freedom and security is high, it is never too high. Whatever it costs to defend our country, we will pay."

The President invited Americans to commit two years of their life to the new USA Freedom Corps: "America will continue to depend on the eyes and ears of alert citizens . . . We want to be a Nation that serves goals larger than self." The final goal is "a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror," and America will "lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere." She will "always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity . . ." And "real" Islam is an ally in this bold endeavor: "Let the skeptics look to Islam's own rich history—with its centuries of learning, and tolerance, and progress."



All of this, according to President Bush, is to be based on a deeper understanding of the world and our purpose in it: "We've come to know truths that we will never question: Evil is real, and it must be opposed . . . Rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential."

What does all this mean?

Afghanistan has been saved from starvation and brutal oppression, and its women are free. That is wonderful, except that none of this was among the stated objectives of the military operation: to punish and neutralize those responsible for September 11. The embarrassing failure to capture or track Osama bin Laden (who was not mentioned once in the President's speech), his key aides, and their leading Taliban allies is now covered up by the allegedly splendid results of America's new role as the harbinger of progress and empowerer of the underprivileged around the world.

By throwing at his audience vastly different figures about the number of terrorists still at large, the President has created the impression that the actual numbers no longer matter. Precision is essential if you are planning a limited response calibrated to the magnitude of the threat, of course, but the numbers can become blurred if you are planning an unlimited and open-ended global campaign. Judging by President Bush's treatment of those numbers—which he magnified tenfold from one sentence to another—this is no longer a focused operation against a clearly defined threat. In practical terms, this means that the intelligence community now has a bureaucratic incentive to keep its estimates on the wild side. Once all measurable parameters give way to nebulae, and "terrorism" joins "poverty," "racism," "injustice," etc., in the repertoire of ills that will nev-

er be eradicated but must be fought, the fight will be perpetual.

Sixty years ago, we had the original Axis, and it took the rest of the world five years to break it. Until 1989, we had the Evil Empire, and it took five decades of determined effort on the part of the Free World to bring it down. How exactly the latest blended metaphor applies to the three countries named by the President is unclear. They are certainly not allies: Iran and Iraq are eminently bad neighbors. Saddam Hussein is a secularist dictator who appeals to the Baathist variety of Arab nationalism. Iran, by contrast, upholds Islam as the basis of its ancient polity, but its Shiite leaders detest the Wahabi "heretics" of Al Qaeda and the Taliban. North Korea, on the other hand, is a neo-Stalinist hell on Earth whose minimal external alliances go only as far as Beijing. Thus, the "axis" was another rhetorical device that sought not to describe reality but to blur it.

North Korea, an irrelevant loser in the game of international politics, was included so that its medium-range rockets—developed in case of a conflict on the Korean peninsula, and theoretically capable of reaching the westernmost tip of Alaska, but not California—could justify President Bush's National Missile Defense program. Its inclusion on the most-wanted list is counterproductive; it could prompt North Korea to develop weapons of mass destruction that can be used against the 40,000 American soldiers in South Korea as a means of deterring a threatened attack.

Iraq, by contrast, seems to have been the intended next target for Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz and their think-tank and media cohorts in both parties from the beginning. Within days of September 11, Wolfowitz had argued that, even if Iraq had not been involved in the attacks, it simply did not matter: This was a good time to settle the score with Saddam once and for all. A week later, in an open letter to the President, Bill Kristol and two-dozen neoconservative leading lights argued that, "even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power"—regardless of whether it is in the interest of the United States to do so. The war-on-terror blanket has enabled them to impose their agenda and preclude further debate.

The inclusion of Iran in the "axis" is

unexpected and dangerous. Iran supports Hamas and Hezbollah, but those organizations are Israeli and Palestinian—not *American*—problems, unless every armed and dangerous fanatic everywhere is an American problem.

If the logic of the "axis of evil" is applied and Iraq is attacked, America's remaining Arab friends will display extreme *timidity*, even hostility. Should they also fear armed retribution in view of the President's warning? Osama bin Laden's real objective all along may have been to provoke a cataclysmic war that can only benefit those who desire the destruction of the remnants of Western civilization. What if the "timidity" about starting an all-out War of Civilizations spreads to our European allies, who have already expressed amazement at the implications of President Bush's speech? Perhaps they had better watch their step, as well: Mr. Wolfowitz has already warned them that the United States is ready to act outside traditional alliances in its fight against terror and that it would take a "dim view" of anyone who tried to sit on the fence. "Nations cannot afford to act like those neutral nations 60 years ago," he told a 43-nation security conference in Munich on February 2.

The logic of justifying the missile-defense project by pointing to September 11 has never been explained. On that day, death did not come by means of an ICBM, and the real and present threat that remains with us does not include a rogue missile. A \$100-billion shield will do nothing to protect American cities from nuclear or biological weapons smuggled across the Rio Grande. It may even render such attacks more likely by forcing any possible aggressor to consider alternatives to a method of delivery that leaves a clear "signature" and which may be countered by the antimissile shield. In practical terms, America's true safety is not to be found in antimissile missiles, but in tightly controlled borders and a well-equipped military capable of defending its territory.

Vice President Dick Cheney has announced that the United States is considering military or other action against "forty to fifty countries" and warned that the new war may last "fifty years or more." Bush advisor Richard Perle explained that there will be "no stages" and that not even a pretense of some international "coalition" is needed:

This is total war . . . If we just let

our vision of the world go forth, and we embrace it entirely, and we don't try to piece together clever diplomacy but just wage a total war, our children will sing great songs about us years from now.

Less than a week after the President's speech, Paul Wolfowitz declared that "The best defense is a good offense . . . Our approach has to aim at prevention and not merely punishment. We are at war."

Bill Clinton invented the "Kosovo genocide" in order to justify the bombing of Serbia and to cajole NATO into giving him the mantle of multilateralist legitimacy. The war against terror eliminates the need for similar constructs in the future. The vision presented by President Bush hinges on the continuing technological and military superiority of the United States, not on its moral authority or political magnetism. This mindset—especially when it comes from a presumably "conservative" Republican team—dims any lingering hope that America is still a republic.

When honey changes pots, according to Chinese folk wisdom, fingers get licked. When hundreds of public billions are about to go into private hands, we should ask "*cui bono*?" The day the New York Stock Exchange reopened after September 11, the few advancers were the giant military contractors Aliant Tech Systems, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and the biggest supplier of them all, Lockheed Martin, whose shares jumped by a staggering one third. The Bush administration spent the previous nine months of 2001 promising to "transform" the U.S. military by canceling or cutting back obsolete systems to forge a quicker, more mobile force. But defense budgets for this year and next, supplemented by the President's largesse, have managed to retain each and every major Cold War-inspired weapons program that was in the pipeline when Bush first took office. This includes weapons ill suited to the "war on terror," such as nuclear attack submarines, heavy destroyers, the 70-ton Crusader artillery system, and the F-22 fighter plane (at \$200 million each). The defense budget of \$343 billion has nothing to do with Osama bin Laden. The increase was sought before the attack, to pay for equipment even the Pentagon did not request, such as Boeing's 100 tanker jets at a cost of \$26 billion. This is not a war on terror;

this is pork for weapons contractors, military bureaucrats, and members of Congress.

The shock of September 11 provided an opportunity for America to rediscover that external security is inseparable from the preservation of her identity and liberty at home. President Bush echoed the neoconservative call for "citizen involvement," which is tantamount to militarization of the populace and its seduction into the imperial enterprise. It is indeed desirable to have informed, responsible, and willing citizens participating in the effort to protect the nation at home and present its best image abroad, but this should be done only in accordance with the true spirit of "citizen-soldiers." President Bush's plea for participation is coupled with further centralization of authority and decisionmaking, which inculcates passivity. He offers "citizen participation" of the kind we witnessed all too often in 20th-century Europe, where not only are the ideological assumptions of the rulers beyond critique or reproach,

but any expression of doubt is evidence of bad faith. People are encouraged to "participate," but they are no longer expected to make a meaningful contribution.

The President's "non-negotiable demands of human dignity" mean permanent war for permanent peace. It is light years away from candidate Bush's response in the second televised debate with Al Gore (October 2000), when he warned the Vice President that it is not America's role to patrol the planet and arrange other peoples' lives: "One way for us to end up being viewed as the ugly American is for us to go around the world saying, 'We do it this way, so should you.'"

What does the President understand to be the "real Islam?" He may be disingenuous here, because *Islam as such*, and not some allegedly aberrant form of it, is the chief identifiable threat to America's global security in the coming century and, in the long run, to the survival of our civilization. On the other hand, U.S. foreign policy must avoid creating condi-

tions for *specifically anti-American* Islamic hostility. At the same time, Islam should be denied its foothold inside America, and the omission of a moratorium on immigration is the most regrettable missing link in the President's antiterrorist strategy.

The State of the Union Address shows that the President and his national security team have not grasped the main lesson of the tragedy of September 11: that the threat to the lives of ordinary Americans will continue as long as the United States remains committed to the unrestrained projection of its power everywhere in the world. Instead of realizing that the threat to America exists because of the policy of global hegemony, the administration now seems to be telling us that hegemony will be confirmed as the divinely ordained, morally mandated, open-ended, and self-justifying mission of America for decades to come. If that is so, then the terrorist threat will also be unlimited and permanent.

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## Empty Streets

*Alfred Nicol*

I went out on a holiday  
In Berkeley, once, alone.  
Most everyone had gone away.  
The sidewalks were my own.

And I had nowhere left to go—  
I'd put the world behind me.  
I hid out in the open so  
That nobody would find me.

The sun, even, had other plans  
And did not come to shine.  
My shadow was another man's.  
These shadows all were mine.

And I was happy, in a way,  
My world was just this size.  
There was no clutter in the grey  
For me to organize.

*I am alone. I am alone —  
Who says this suits me well?  
The voice I heard was not my own,  
But no one else could tell.*