

Death of a presidency

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Global Research, October 18, 2006

Planetary Movement and Global Research

18 October 2006

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)



Last week, those of us who live in England were permitted to see the controversial television film, *Death of a President*. The film had drawn a good deal of well-aimed criticism from many quarters because of its plotline and its blatant appeal to the deepest and most frightening instincts of humanity. In the film, the deeply unpopular president of America, George W. Bush, was to be assassinated and his assassin brought to justice through the miraculous powers of special effects.

The film was constructed out of archive footage, and it had a distinctively dramatic documentary feel. Clever in its conception and execution, perhaps, it was an experiment in testing the limits of the arts and contemporary taste. Revealing little about the causes of Bush's unprecedented levels of political unpopularity, the film focused on the inadequacies of the American system of justice that rushed to judgment to convict an innocent Muslim of the assassination. As it emerged, the convicted Muslim was innocent, and the actual assassin was revealed to be the Afro-American father of a US soldier who had been killed in Iraq. At the state funeral, the new president, Richard Cheney, read a moving tribute to the humanity and compassion of the fallen leader that was little more than a generic eulogy and contained zero content on his presidential achievements. It was difficult to escape the notion that the facts of existence matter little, while the consequences of living under a mushrooming government is engulfing every member of humanity in a macabre soap opera written on the winds of time.

In the same week while millions of Britons were witnessing the depressingly melodramatic *Death of a President*, it became abundantly clear that the presidency of George W. Bush had literally crashed into a brick wall and bounced backwards. Simultaneous political sea changes sweeping across America and the Middle East have dramatically pre-empted Bush's range of executive action. Both parallel political tides - those in the Middle East and America - are now running strongly against the Bush presidency.



In America, three out of four likely voters now believe that Bush has been overactive in policing the world - an astonishing statistic. That fact places Bush in a difficult political position. Now his presidency is seen as less effective in its core mission - national security - than his opponents, the Democrats. The Bush White House is tottering on its heels and threatening to collapse on its face.

In the Middle East, support for Israel and its sponsors in Bush's America, has collapsed in favor of Hizbullah and a constellation of Islamist movements from Hamas and Fatah to the

Mahdi Army and the Muslim Brotherhood. The situation is now critical and getting worse. If America were to launch a new war against Iran, the pro-American regimes currently holding the reins of power in Cairo, Amman and Riyadh would be placed under immediate siege. Swiftly, the Islamist factions would topple: Hosni Mubarak in Egypt; King Abdullah of Jordan and Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. In the aftermath, American companies would be unceremoniously ejected from the region, and the price of oil would soar into the stratosphere.

If America were to attack Iran, Israel would suffer immediate missile bombardment from Hizbullah, while Iran's missiles would strike against US military targets in Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and the American armada Bush is now assembling in the Persian Gulf. America's overwhelming military might has been placed in check by the military and political collapse of her client state - Israel.



In Israel the situation is moving swiftly from dire to disastrous. Confronted with rape charges, Moshe Kasav, the president of Israel, is now facing public scandal as he awaits indictment for a disgraceful sex crime. This is merely the latest Israeli scandal to reverberate through the Middle East weakening Bush's leverage on the most critical region for his beleaguered presidency. Like his predecessors, Netanyahu and Sharon, Ehud Olmert is now undergoing suspicion of financial corruption, and his government is teeter-tottering on the brink of collapse from their deepening unpopularity following their loss of the war with Hizbullah.

While Bush ordered the US Navy to move into position in the Persian Gulf to strike Iran in the closing days of his midterm campaign, North Korea distracted the world by detonating their first nuclear bomb. This outrage underlined the lengthening list of foreign policy failures now dangling like a chain of dead albatrosses around the necks of: George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice.

Last week, to respond to the maelstrom that is now perceived as a terminal crisis for his presidency, Bush took the immensely unpalatable option and submitted himself to the slings and arrows of one of his exceedingly rare press conferences. In the White House Rose Garden, Bush sought to defend his presidency from further erosion in the midst of the whirlwind of crises that could mushroom into a political earthquake in the midterm elections.



Hastily arranged to respond to the immediate threat posed by North Korea's detonation of a rudimentary nuclear device, Bush's presidential press conference unfolded as if it had been scripted like a garden-variety televisual farce. Impersonating a Hollywood caricature of himself, Bush swaggered into view and raised his voice to a shrill and threatening drawl while he rattled his metaphorical saber and brazenly threatened to wage war against the nuclear regime of Kim Jong-Il.

That was the presidential rhetoric. The strategic reality is stark - and starkly different. There is one and only one plausible US military response to the current situation: an immediate unilateral strike employing Tomahawk missiles. No other military response is tactically feasible. Aerial bombardment - shock and awe - would be condemned and counter-

productive and so would a nuclear strike. Those two options are not in the realm of political possibility. As for a multilateral military response, that option was swiftly deleted when the Chinese stated that they will support some mild form of sanction – but they will not countenance military intervention. The Pentagon now estimates up to 52,000 American corpses in a war with North Korea.

Bush's presidential paralysis is more than readily apparent. Against his own strident diatribes, Bush has accepted the political reality of a nuclear North Korea. That he still opposes the enrichment of uranium in Tehran – like North Korea a charter member of Bush's Axis of Evil – proves his reflexive xenophobia for the obvious distinction between the two nations is that one is Communist East Asian and the other is a Muslim theocracy. Bush loathes both alien cultures, but he fears the alien religion of Islam more than he distrusts the godlessness of the Marxist regime of Kim Jong-Il. He is undone.

Bush's Rose Garden statement was rhetoric – not reality. It is really nothing more than a desperate man's attempt to draw some distinction between his deeply unpopular Republican Party with its hair-trigger approach to international affairs and the multilateralist diplomacy preferred by the mainstream Democratic opposition who are ascendant in the pre-election polls.



As for the question of predicting what course of action this rogue regime will actually follow over the next three weeks until the fateful midterm elections – all bets are now clearly off. The weaker the Republicans become in the polls, the more likely they are to risk a reckless pre-election military intervention – either against North Korea or against Iran. The repercussions of either would be catastrophic. North Korea is now known to be capable of nuclear war, and Iran has tens of thousands of dedicated suicide bombers awaiting their orders to march if Bush and Cheney attack them. Internationally, it is now well known that Bush and Cheney are amassing a massive arsenal of Tomahawk missiles in the Persian Gulf – precisely the tactical instrument that they would need if they chose to strike North Korea – a target that is over 7,000 sea miles from where the US Strike Force led by the Nimitz Class nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, USS Eisenhower, is now headed.

During his Rose Garden press conference, Bush was asked to comment on the latest study published in *The Lancet* about the massive carnage in US-occupied Iraq. The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore concluded that 655,000 lives have been lost in Iraq since the US-led invasion commenced in March, 2003. Fully 31% of these deaths can now be reliably attributed directly to the military operations of the American forces, but that

figure could be too conservative since fully 56% of the Iraqi dead died from gunshot wounds. Additionally, 27% of the Iraqi dead died from explosions, either car bombs or other explosions – ie. mines, stationary bombs or aerial bombardment. When confronted with the question of the 655,000 Iraqi corpses, Bush predictably swept it away with the rhetoric that the study was not “credible.” International experts are now calculating the number of innocent victims of the Bush-Blair war conservatively at 500,000. This is a staggering figure that the UN now regards as the deadliest international conflict of this century. Sadly, it represents only the first phase of the Islamic holocaust.



In the Middle East, the most respected political leader of the Shia in Lebanon, Nabih Berri, has warned that the conflict between Lebanon and Israel could break out again if the Israeli forces do not withdraw from the Shebaa Farms region of Lebanon as they are required to do by the terms of the Security Council Resolution 1701 – ie. the ceasefire agreement. “If Israel does not pull out, we will drive them out,” Mr Berri stated emphatically during a recent interview in Beirut. Accusing Israel of air, sea and land violations of the ceasefire agreement, Lebanese politicians of all parties are coalescing behind a tougher and more militant line. Working more closely now with the UN forces (UNIFIL) in the region, Lebanese intelligence is providing counter-intelligence information concerning the ongoing operations of Israeli security agents inside the borders of Lebanon. According to reports from the Lebanese capital, Israel continues to conduct intelligence operations inside the territories of Lebanon in violation of Resolution 1701- as well as the lingering military occupation of the Shebaa Farms.

The US controversy over the pre-emption of the freedom of speech of American academic Toby Judt has reached the international press and media. In addition, a new case of suppression has been discovered – that of the highly respected British author and publisher, Carmen Callil. In reports in the British press, Carmen Callil claims that she has been the victim of overt political repression in Bush’s America. Callil’s latest book concerns the plight of Jews in Vichy France, and it contains one paragraph that caused offense to people the author described as, “fundamentalist Jews.” The offensive paragraph lamented the helplessness of the Palestinian people. The concerted reaction of pro-Israel activists in New York led to the cancellation of Callil’s book launch at the French Embassy in Manhattan last week. An American Rabbi, Avi Weiss, and Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League have been criticized in the international media for their roles in the growing debate about the freedom of speech of intellectuals and experts to discuss the increasingly unpalatable policies of the government of Israel.

While Bush claims to be the father of a democratic revolution in the Middle East, the truth is actually quite different. Meaningful debate – the fountainhead of democracy – about the Middle East is routinely repressed in Bush’s America. In the Middle East, the situation is different. Debate about the course of events in the Middle East is robust in: Israel, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia where many are now waiting for the outcome of the midterm elections in the US.

The US midterm elections have morphed into a referendum on Bush and his outlandish policies: the war in Iraq; war with Iran; war with North Korea and his concerted attack on the US constitution and the Bill of Rights.

While the entire globe is rapt in attention, the Middle East has trained its eagle eyes on

Bush's America where they are beginning to discern the death throes of a presidency.



References

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