

High Crimes and Low Comedy in the Bush Imperium

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The kindling has been piled high, stuffed with tinder and doused with gasoline. The match has been lit. All it will take is the slightest flick of the wrist to set off the conflagration. We are now living in the interval, the few heartbeats left before the great flame ignites.

The heap of kindling has been a long time building, but in recent weeks, the work has intensified to a fever pitch. With relentless urgency, the American people are being habituated to the prospect of several interrelated upheavals — new war, new terror attacks — and the predetermined result of these events: the final, open establishment of presidential tyranny, a militarized “commander state” where executive power is beyond the law, and endless war endlessly prolongs the “emergency measures” of the authoritarian regime.

Making a virtue of necessity, the Bush administration has used the exposure of its illegal wiretap scheme to ratchet up the level of terrorist scaremongering, accelerate its drive toward a military attack on Iran and publicly proclaim its long-held covert doctrine of executive dictatorship. Of course, “commander rule” is already the de facto state of the union, as Attorney General Alberto Gonzales made clear to the Senate last week, when he refused to deny the notion that the president can contravene any law he chooses under his authority as commander-in-chief. And we have often detailed here the tyrannical powers that President George W. Bush has already bestowed upon himself without objection from the U.S. political establishment, including the power to jail anyone without charges, hold them indefinitely and have them tortured — or simply murder them in an “extrajudicial killing.” The scope of Bush’s claimed powers — arbitrary sway over the life and liberty of every person on earth — far surpasses that of the most megalomaniacal Roman emperor or totalitarian dictator.

But a militarist state must have war: to justify its draconian rule (and those \$550 billion “defense” budgets), to find new fields for dominion and swag, and to seal with blood its illegitimate compact with the people, seeking to make them complicit in its crimes, which are committed in their name, for their “security.” We see the latter clearly with the transgression in Iraq, where even mainstream opponents of the illegal war can be heard to cry: “Oh, it’s all so dreadful, but we’ve gone too far to turn back now, sacrificed too many lives; we’ve got to see it through.” This is, of course, just a pale echo of militarists’ own position, that dazed and hollow moral nullity induced by greed and murder, best expressed by the ancient Scottish “Commander-in-Chief,” Macbeth: “I am in blood stepp’d in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er.”

Fortunately for the militarists, Bush has promised war in abundance. Just this month, the Pentagon released its new strategy, heralding the newly dubbed “Long War” against

terrorism, where U.S. forces will be deployed, openly and covertly, “in dozens of countries simultaneously” for decades to come. The plan is designed to “ensure that no foreign power can dictate the terms of regional or global security” — except, of course, for the dictatorial foreign power emanating from the Potomac. This is the constitution of the new commander state: the eternal “emergency,” fomenting endless bloodshed, strife, atrocity — and reprisals, the terrorist blowback that is the essential lubricant for the war machine.

And a new terror strike on the “homeland” is inevitable. The ground for this attack has been carefully prepared — whether wittingly or unwittingly is irrelevant now. For whatever the Bush faction’s intentions, their actual policies have demonstrably and indisputably stoked the fires of Islamic extremism to new heights of virulence. Meanwhile, their manifest incompetence and callous disregard for the well-being of ordinary Americans — vividly displayed in the deadly bungling of the Katrina disaster and its corruption-riddled aftermath — have left American soil virtually undefended against any genuinely serious terrorist attack, i.e. one not carried out by half-wits telegraphing their punches over tapped phones.

For years, a vast infrastructure of authoritarian rule has been constructed behind the facade of ordinary political life — such as the series of “special authorities” signed by Bush and Pentagon warlord Donald Rumsfeld giving the military absolute power over the nation “in the event of a declared or perceived emergency,” The Washington Post reports. This dovetails with such open measures as the Patriot Act and the creation of Northcom, the first military command aimed at the “homeland,” which last fall conducted the massive “Granite Shadow” exercise, practicing “domestic military operations” with “unique rules of engagement regarding the use of lethal force,” the Post reports.

[These measures — and many others like them — are the fruit of long cultivation by the Bush Faction. In 1981, then Vice President George H.W. Bush and Colonel Oliver North spearheaded the creation of “a secret government, hidden in hardened bunkers, capable of waging war and controlling the civilian populace” without any input from Congress or the courts, as we reported in the Moscow Times and Counterpunch two years ago. See Deep Cover: Hidey Holes for the American Elite.]

This infrastructure is part of the context, the granite shadow looming behind many recent events, such as last month’s \$385 million open-ended contract awarded to Halliburton to build large-scale “detention and deportation” centers around the country, as Pacific News reports. It looms behind the “excitement” expressed by weapons-makers over Bush’s plans to build new atomic bombs on a production-line basis, the Oakland Tribune reports, including “low yield” nukes for use in attacks on non-nuclear nations. It looms over Rumsfeld’s frenzied push to build a new arsenal of “first-strike” intercontinental and space-based weapons to attack enemies — or perceived enemies — with “no warning,” as the Pentagon declared this month, UPI reports. You can even see it in the Air Force’s decision last week to allow top brass to press their politicized pseudo-Christianity on young cadets without restraint, as Reuters reports — more of the sinister melding of militarism and religious extremism that characterizes the Bushist philosophy.

And of course, the granite shadow overhangs the entire campaign to foment war fever against Iran, a grim replay of the “Attack Iraq” propaganda, complete with exaggerated threats, manipulated intelligence supplied by dubious exiles, lies about “pursuing diplomacy” while finalizing battle plans, as The Sunday Telegraph reports — and a complete disregard of the murderous quagmire that will ensue, including the rapid proliferation of nuclear weapons worldwide as countries scramble to protect themselves from the “first-

strike” triggermen of the Bush faction.

More war, more terror, more authoritarian rule: The fire next time is almost here.

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