

Onward Christian Soldiers

By Tom Barry, Interhemispheric Resource Center

President Bush went to Capitol Hill to tell the American people and their representatives that the U.S. is committed to protecting “the civilized world against unprecedented dangers.” These threats issue from “an axis of evil” that spans the globe. Riding on his popularity as commander-in-chief, Bush framed his State of the Union address as a new vision for U.S. foreign policy.

The war on terrorism has shifted to new targets. Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, the early focus of the U.S.-led antiterrorism campaign, were not even mentioned by the president. “Our cause is just, and it continues,” declared Bush. Continuing from Afghanistan, the war on terrorism advances to Somalia and the Philippines. Eliminating militant Islamist groups is not the only objective of the new world war. Bush is also targeting those nations with chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons that didn’t endorse the U.S. war on terrorism. Topping the new enemies list, as outlined by Bush, are Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Wars take money, as well as conviction. No problem. As the president noted, his new budget includes the largest increase in military spending in two decades.

Are U.S. policymakers ready to pursue world war against evil? Apparently so. The applause for this aggressive new view of U.S. foreign and military policy rose enthusiastically from both sides of the aisle during the State of the Union address. Afterward, in his televised response to the president, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt assured Americans that Democrats stood “shoulder-to-shoulder” with the administration in its global military campaign. Such support is not limited to political elites. Opinions polls show significant support for taking military action against countries like Iraq and Somalia.

The drumbeat of war has revived the traditional bipartisan unity in foreign policy. For four decades, the core imperative of U.S. foreign policy was anticommunism. The collapse of what Ronald Reagan called the “Evil Empire” left U.S. foreign and military policy in shambles. There was no enemy against which U.S. policymakers could mobilize public opinion and fortify our military/industrial complex. Without a war to fight—even a cold one—Democrats and Republicans began to bicker openly about the proper U.S. role in global affairs. Remember last summer when Sen. Tom Daschle took Bush to task for being “isolationist.”

Yes, September 11 changed a great deal in U.S. politics. But 9-11 didn’t create bipartisan unity on U.S. foreign and military policy; it merely revived a sagging tradition. Antiterrorism has now conveniently replaced anticommunism as its motor. As in the cold war, we can be assured that it is a blessed and righteous war. “It is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom’s fight,” declared Bush, reminding us that “God is near” as the U.S. government sets forth to root out evil the world round.

A rapture of patriotism, triumphalism, and militarism has seized America. But, as Bush delivered his call for more war, not everyone was clapping. Listening closely, you could hear the hissing. Looking around, you could see the dissension and disgust. No, not on Capitol Hill, but around the world where Bush is counting on “our allies” to join America’s expanded crusade. His description of the U.S. commitment to use “freedom’s power” to bring peace and prosperity to the entire world may ring true for many Americans. But for much of the rest of the world, any new assertion of U.S. might and right is greeted with skepticism.

The president talked of his concern for the proliferation of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, yet the U.S. political leadership has long resisted international campaigns to control or abolish these weapons of mass destruction. The hypocrisy of U.S. foreign policy, its exceptionalism from the rules and norms of international conduct undermine the credibility of the U.S. as a trusted global leader. Bush's appeal to "freedom's power" and to "free markets and free trade" will be understood by most of the world not as an exercise in benign leadership but as yet another attempt to assert U.S. military, economic, and ideological dominance.

This week at the World Social Forum in Brazil, tens of thousands of activists will be speaking for the world's disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Bush's promise to spread freedom and prosperity in the wake of his global war will be rejected, and rightly so, as imperial drivel. In Porto Alegre, as elsewhere, there will be great sympathy for the American victims of terror. But it will also be noted that U.S.-led globalization strategies, such as those embraced by Argentina, are leading to economic

and social disintegration the world over—and widening a global divide.

It's a divide marked not only by economic polarization driven by the Washington Consensus on economic policy, but also by a fissure in worldviews—a consciousness divide. Increasingly, there's a rejection of the vision of Pax Americana that's ascendant in Washington. While Bush and team revel in their plans to assert U.S. supremacy—corporate, cultural, and military—throughout the globe, others fear the birth of a world order where multilateralism has been tossed aside, where militarism and U.S. unilateralism define the new world order.

At the World Social Forum, questions will be raised about whether another \$48 billion in the U.S. military budget will increase global peace and security—or whether this new U.S. military spending will, as it has in the past, fan the flames of war between and within states. The world does indeed face unprecedented dangers. But on the other side of the deepening international divide between economic status and worldviews, terrorism is just one of the many new threats to international peace, stability, and development. For the most part, the other dangers are not ones

that can be met with U.S. firepower and weapons superiority. President Bush would have gone a long way toward narrowing the global divide if he had moved beyond the platitudes about America's commitment to freedom to assert a new U.S. commitment to rein in corporate power, join the campaign to end world hunger, build democratic means of global governance, and confront the pressing challenge of climate change.

Like Gephardt, many Americans stand shoulder-to-shoulder as the nation marches forward—intervening wherever it chooses, spending whatever it takes, and blithely accepting the collateral damage. But the U.S. government may soon find that its allies are few, that popular support for the new jingoism is shallow, that victories will be few, and that evil often dwells within. "History," said Bush, called America to action. But if we embrace militarism, as the president advises, history will not judge us kindly.

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Who's Who in the Bush Administration

<http://www.fpif.org/republicanrule/index.html>

Essays Include:

Robert Cutler
Karen Hansen-Kuhn
Chris Hellman
Neil Hicks
Chris Toensing
Tomas Valasek
Carol Welch
Ian Williams

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Bush's Trade Policy: The NAFTA Express
What Can We Expect from the Pentagon?
The Bush Administration and Human Rights
Bush's Middle East Policy: Look to His Advisors
George W. Bush and the "Other" Europe
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And Many Others!

Profiles Include:

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