

Scoundrels and Outlaws

By Tom Barry

It is the time of scoundrels and outlaws.

Not since the 1950s has the political rhetoric about the fight between American good and foreign-bred evil reached such a feverish pitch. As in the 1950s, much of this is fear-mongering and sabre-rattling designed to spur American popular support for the military-industrial complex, as well as to quash progressive dissent at home. The scoundrels in Washington are playing on the fear of terrorism to advance their own ideological agenda at home and abroad.

America clearly needs new measures to protect itself against terrorist attacks—such as better intelligence and increased international cooperation to track down terrorist networks—but this imperative has been leveraged into a broader agenda that the right-wing has been promoting since the 1980s. This includes missile defense, dramatic increases in the military budget, assertions of U.S. military supremacy around the globe, reduced public access to government documents, and an outright dismissal of the constraints of international law and multilateralism. The “national security state” doctrine foisted on our third world partners during the cold war has been resurrected, and in the wake of the terrorist attacks is being applied to politics in America itself.

Bush’s global affairs agenda has left progressive citizen groups battered, dejected, and indignant. Meanwhile, the Democrats are playing it safe, standing “shoulder to shoulder” with Bush on foreign policy, according to Rep. Richard Gephardt.

In expanding the response to the September 11 attacks to include an array of new foreign policy and military initiatives, the Bush administration has shifted the post-9/11 focus from going after the perpetrators of the attacks to a new grand strategy to assert U.S. dominance. They—from Wolfowitz to Powell—are still

calling it anti-terrorism, but it’s really about the U.S. right to patrol the globe. We’re globocop—at least in places where the administration deems that U.S. interests are at stake.

Increasingly, exploiting popular support for the war against the Islamist terrorists, the administration has used national security as prop for other agendas—thereby trivializing the real need to address terrorist threats. During the Super Bowl, the administration told Americans that smoking marijuana was the equivalent of supporting terrorists. Seeing an opportunity to solidify support in agricultural states, President Bush told the Cattlemen’s Beef Association that agricultural subsidies were necessary because crop and cattle production was a national security issue. “The nation has got to eat,” Bush told the cattlemen. “It’s in our national security interests that we be able to feed ourselves. Thank goodness, we don’t have to rely on somebody else’s meat to make sure our people are healthy and well-fed.” He then goes on to promote increased agricultural subsidies to foster increased U.S. exports of cheap U.S. meat and grains—that have the effect of undermining the food security of importing nations.

It is scoundrel time in Washington, as the administration shamelessly exploits post-September 11 patriotism to advance a foreign policy that is unapologetically unilateralist and militaristic. In the process, the administration has trampled civil liberties at home, given authoritarian regimes abroad free rein to clamp down on dissidents, and created a global security framework increasingly characterized by confrontation, brinksmanship, and name-calling.

President Bush would have us believe that we are engaged in an apocalyptic battle between good and evil. But it’s more a clash of scoundrels and outlaws.

Outlaws Rule

International relations have undergone dramatic shifts since the late 1980s. Certainly the demise of the Soviet Union and the increased integration of markets, production, and financial flows are among the most defining factors in shaping this new era. The disintegration of traditional social and economic structures (which have been assaulted by globalization) and the rise in the number of weak or failing states (impacted by falling aid levels, the end of client state politics, and also by the forces of globalization) have created new operating room for outlaw bands of warlords, terrorists, and post-ideological guerrillas and paramilitary squads—many of whom rely on drugs and other contraband to finance their operations and support their members. Not to be overlooked are the international white-collar outlaws—the many transnational corporations, like Enron, whose wealth has given them the power to flout national and international law.

How to respond to the threat of these outlaw elements has become one of the major challenges of the post-cold war security environment. For many, the end of the superpower rivalry that

shaped international relations for the four decades following the end of World War II presented an opportunity to create a new world order, where international law and norms together with multilateral action would function to prevent or resolve international and intrastate conflicts. But this has proved too optimistic. The structural and financial weaknesses of the United Nations have not been overcome; rather than increasing in stature and influence, the UN (after some early successes in Central America) has been increasingly sidelined or proved itself ineffective in addressing emerging conflicts.

This debilitated state of the UN is compounded by the U.S. flouting of international laws, norms, and treaties. In effect, the U.S. asserts that it stands above the common good. If climate change rules adversely impact the U.S. economy, then the treaty is rejected. If an International Criminal Court would be able to stand in judgement of U.S. citizens, then we prefer a world without such a court. Similarly with international conventions that would regulate arms trade, nuclear proliferation, and the use of child soldiers. Military intervention by the U.S. around the globe doesn't require UN approval on the assump-

tion that U.S. interests are global—and thus we are always acting in self-defense.

The U.S. picks and chooses when and if it will respect international laws, norms, and trade rulings. It holds itself above international law—and increasingly above international opinion. Its arrogance and outlaw behavior greatly undermine the prospects for successful global governance, further weaken the UN, and contribute to a world where outlaws hold sway. At home, the scoundrel politics of the Bush administration seek to rally Americans in an open-ended war on U.S.-selected outlaws, terrorists, and rogues, using American patriotism and rage as a cover to pursue its conservative agendas. The rest of the world is alarmed at the way the Bush administration is riding roughshod in the international arena—outside of alliances and outside of international law. Americans, too, should wake from their patriotic delusions and begin challenging the scoundrel politics in Washington.

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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

A First Glance at Bush's Policy Toward Russia
Bush's Trade Policy: The NAFTA Express
What Can We Expect from the Penatagon?
The Bush Administration and Human Rights
Bush's Middle East Policy: Look to His Advisors
George W. Bush and the "Other" Europe
Republican Rule and the IFIs
The United Nations: Beating Around the Bush

And Many Others!

Profiles Include:

Richard Lee Armitage
Paul O'Neill
Richard N. Perle
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Condoleezza Rice
Donald Rumsfeld
George Schultz
Paul Wolfowitz
Ann Veneman
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