

Iraq: A Tale of Two Speeches.

By Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) | November 5, 2005

Insist on yourself; never imitate.

September 29, 2005 found General John Abizaid, Commander of U.S. Central Command, testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee. With him were the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the top U.S. general in Iraq. The overall subject was the “war on terror” with its three subsets: global (including al-Qaida) jihad and the fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. General Abizaid's opening remarks emphasized his considered view (he is, like T.E. Lawrence, a hands-on student of the Middle East) of the underlying connections among these topics.

One week later-October 6, President Bush spoke mid-morning to an audience at the National Endowment for Democracy. His topic was the “war on terror.” As this was by far the shorter of the two (when the questioning by committee members is included) and more readily available, I perused it first.

The president's speech was a curious mixture. There were old themes and shop-worn mantras. By word count in the 40-minute address, the president vilified tyrants, tyranny, and autocrats a dozen times and commended democracy, democratic processes, and liberty 13 times. The president's long-standing favorite concept, freedom, garnered 26 references but was outstripped by terror, terrorism, and terrorist at 30 repetitions.

Uncharacteristically, the usual uncompromisingly stark Manichean division of individuals and countries into good and evil was muted. Instead, the president spent a significant amount of time describing the ideology (14) of violence (11) being preached by al-Qaida and practiced by radicalized (21) and fanatical (4) militant extremists (24) who regard the West in general and the United States in particular as their enemy (24). Bush also tries to draw a parallel between the Cold War battle with communism-”won” (7) by the West-and al-Qaida's Islamo-fascism, both of which, in due time, are destined to be rejected because neither offers a vision (7) of human

progress (7). And again he spoke of sacrifice (6) but only in general terms.

The penny dropped a few days later when I finally read through the transcript of the September 29 Senate hearing. Here, without question, was the president's source, as the following illustrates (with commentary on selected issues).

TOPIC:	
Al-Qaida as Regional and Iraqi Threat	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>I want to talk briefly today about the al-Qaida threat as the main threat that we face in a region beset with many difficulties, and while al-Qaida does not represent the main part of the insurgency in Iraq, it is certainly present in Iraq.</i>	<i>The terrorists regard Iraq as the central front in their war against humanity. And we must recognize Iraq as the central front in our war on terror.</i>
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>Al-Qaida has struck in Saudi Arabia, in Egypt, in Spain, in London, in Washington, in New York. Its global reach and its ability to inflict damage should not be underestimated.</i>	<i>Yet the evil ... has reappeared on other days, in other places-in Mombasa, and Casablanca, and Riyadh, and Jakarta, and Istanbul, and Madrid, and Beslan, and Taba, and Netanya, and Baghdad, and elsewhere.</i>



TOPIC:	
Al-Qaida and 9/11	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>Al-Qaida and associated extremists are the main enemy to peace and stability in the region. The enemy that brought us 9/11 continues to represent one of the greatest dangers to this nation.</i>	<i>[W]e were not in Iraq on September the 11th, 2001- and al-Qaida attacked us anyway.</i>
Commentary:	
<i>Abizaid is careful not to connect Iraq under Saddam Hussein with 9/11. He does speak of the regional presence of al-Qaida prior to 9/11 and of their current activity in Iraq. Bush skirts the rhetorical borderline by implying that the absence of U.S. forces in Iraq somehow contributed to al-Qaida's freedom to act.</i>	

TOPIC:	
Militant Ideology of Murder and Suicide- Rejected	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>First, this enemy is driven by a militant ideology that celebrates murder and suicide. In the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan, we saw how this ideology oppressed the masses and covered a nation in darkness-no music; executions in soccer stadiums; women sequestered; works of art destroyed.</i>	<i>Yet while the killers choose their victims indiscriminately, their attacks serve a clear and focused ideology, a set of beliefs and goals that are evil, but not insane.</i>
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>The good news, however, is that the vast majority of people in the Middle East and Central Asia and the Horn of Africa don't buy this perverted view of Islam. They want to ... lead a better life. They want to lead a more prosperous life.</i>	<i>The time has come for all responsible Islamic leaders to join in denouncing an ideology that exploits Islam for political ends, and defiles a noble faith.</i>

TOPIC:	
Communism, Fascism, and Islamo-fascism	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>But the grip of this ideology should not be underestimated. Communism and fascism started with relatively few but deeply committed adherents, and the hate preached by al-Qaida resonates with some misguided people who believe that al-Qaida represents a true Islamic alternative. It does not.</i>	<i>The murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century. Yet, in many ways, this fight resembles the struggle against communism in the last century.</i>

TOPIC:	
Role of Communications	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>Second, the enemy is empowered by modern communications, expertly using the virtual world for planning, recruiting, fundraising, indoctrination, and exploiting the mass media.</i>	<i>And they exploit modern technology to multiply their destructive power. Instead of attending faraway training camps, recruits can now access online training libraries.</i>

TOPIC:	
Test of Wills	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>Their main effort is not to defeat us militarily but to break our will by capturing the headlines, by making us think that we cannot help the people in the region help themselves against the extremist ideology. They know that propaganda and grabbing headlines are more important than military operations.</i>	<i>Against such an enemy, there is only one effective response: We will never back down, never give in, and never accept anything less than complete victory... In Iraq, there is no peace without victory. We will keep our nerve and will win that victory.</i>
Commentary:	
<i>Bush never really defines what constitutes "victory" or "winning."</i>	

TOPIC:	
Ruthless Intimidation	
Abizaid:	Bush:
These extremists are ruthless. Their depraved attacks and robust suicide bomber network intimidates entire communities and, indeed, intimidates entire countries. They are masters of intimidation [which] gives them power beyond their relatively small numbers.	With every random bombing and with every funeral of a child, it becomes more clear that the extremists are not patriots, or resistance fighters-they are at war with the Iraqi people, themselves. In fact, we're not facing a set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed. We're facing a radical ideology with inalterable objectives: to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world.
Commentary:	
The coalition as "liberators" must win "hearts and minds." Al-Qaida has no equivalent restraint on its actions.	
Abizaid:	Bush:
[B]ut they are not masters of the battlefield. They can kill innocents, but they can't win a single engagement against military forces properly deployed.	Working with these [strong] partners we're disrupting militant conspiracies, destroying their ability to make war ...
Commentary:	
Battlefield success is irrelevant if the conflict lasts-as Vietnam demonstrated.	
Abizaid:	Bush:
This ability to intimidate ... also gives them a chance, if we fail in our mission to prevent them from spreading their ideology, to gain more and more adherents and eventually gain an opportunity to achieve a safe haven, not unlike the one that they achieved in Afghanistan.	The fifth element of our strategy in the war on terror is to deny the militants future recruits by replacing hatred and resentment with democracy and hope across the broader Middle East.
Commentary:	
Hatred and resentment are countered by equality and respect before democracy and hope.	

TOPIC:	
Weapons of Mass Destruction	
Abizaid:	Bush:
Importantly, this enemy seeks to acquire weapons of mass destruction and will certainly use such weapons if they obtain them.	Second, we're determined to deny weapons of mass destruction to outlaw regimes, and to their terrorist allies who would use them without hesitation ... Evil men who want to use weapons against us are working in deadly earnest to gain them.

TOPIC:	
Al-Qaida Objectives: Jihad Against Legitimate Regimes	
Abizaid:	Bush:
Their objectives are very clear. They believe in a jihad, a jihad, first and foremost, to overthrow the legitimate regimes in the region. But in order to do that they have to first drive us from the region.	These extremists distort the idea of jihad into a call for terrorist murder against Christians and Jews and Hindus-and also against Muslims from other traditions who they regard as heretics. First, these extremists want to end American and Western influence in the broader Middle East.

TOPIC:	
The Islamic Caliphate	
Abizaid:	Bush:
The enemy will then try to create and expand a geographic safe haven in the region which they will call the caliphate ... They will try to reestablish a caliphate throughout the entire Muslim world and apply a very, very narrow form of Shari'a law ... not believed in or practiced anywhere in the Muslim world today.	This form of radicalism exploits Islam to serve a violent, political vision: the establishment, by terrorism and subversion and insurgency, of a totalitarian empire that denies all political and religious freedom. And expand a geographic safe haven in the region which they will call the "caliphate."
Commentary:	
In its day, was the original caliphate a legitimate regime? Who decides?	

TOPIC:	
Countries as Terrorist Bases and Internet	
Abizaid:	Bush:
As they expand to look for safe havens, they are moving into areas of the world such as the middle of Africa, the Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia.	Defeating a broad and adaptive network requires patience, constant pressure, and strong partners in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, beyond.
Abizaid:	Bush:
And they operate from bases of relative safety, especially within the virtual world, where they purvey their hatred through the Internet...	We know the vision of the radicals because they've openly stated it-in videos and audiotapes, and letters, and declarations, and web-sites.

TOPIC:	
Elements of National Power at Home and Abroad	
Abizaid:	Bush:
This type of enemy is a type of enemy that requires not only military pressure ... but it requires all elements of international and national power to put pressure throughout the network over time, in order to squeeze the ideology, allow the good people of the region to have the courage and the ability to stand against this type of an organization.	Our coalition, along with our Iraqi allies, is moving forward with a comprehensive, specific military plan. Area by area, city by city, we're conducting offensive operations to clear out enemy forces ... defeat its sources of strength, and ultimately in these areas, we're working for tangible improvements in the lives of Iraqi citizens. And we're aiding the rise of an elected government...

With-	
Abizaid:	Bush:
We must also enhance our own networks among our agencies ... to ensure that we're coordinating all of our instruments of national power in the fight against al-Qaida.	First, we're determined to prevent the attacks of terrorist networks before they occur. We're reorganizing our government to give this nation a broad and coordinated homeland defense. We're reforming our intelligence agencies ...

TOPIC:	
New Hundred Years War	
Abizaid:	Bush:
You see here, the future fight will eventually exhaust the far enemy-which is us and our allies-overthrow the regimes of the region.	With greater economic and military and political power, the terrorists would be able to advance their stated agenda: to develop weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate Europe, to assault the American people, and to blackmail our government into isolation.

TOPIC:	
Organization and Locations	
Abizaid:	Bush:
And if you look at the geographic representation of al-Qaida and their associated movements and you see how distributed it is, you get the mistaken belief that it is not a global or borderless organization. It's not like IBM, a monolith that's centrally led from a central headquarters; it's much more like McDonald's, a franchise that is decentral-ized ...	Many militants are part of global, borderless terrorist organizations like al-Qaida, which spreads propaganda, and provides financing and technical assistance to local extremists, and conducts dramatic and brutal operations like September 11th.
Abizaid:	Bush:
They develop safe havens that are both geographic and ungoverned spaces and virtual within the Internet and within the mass media world. They have front companies. They buy off politicians. They develop facilitators and smugglers. They deal with financiers that move drug money around, as well as other illicit money. And they have sympathetic nongovernmental organizations that they sponsor to transfer some of their hateful ideology in very, very insidious ways around the region.	These radicals depend on front operations, such as corrupted charities, which direct money to terrorist activity. They're strengthened by those who aggressively fund the spread of radical, intolerant versions of Islam in unstable parts of the world. The militants are aided, as well, by elements of the Arab news media that incite hatred and anti-Semitism.

TOPIC:	
Stopping al-Qaida from Becoming Mainstream	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>We must help others in the region help themselves by promoting self-reliant partners who are willing to face the enemy from within their own countries and within their own borders.</i>	<i>As we do our part to confront radicalism, we know that the most vital work will be done within the Islamic world, itself. Everywhere we have engaged the fight against extremism, Muslim allies have stood up and joined the fight, becoming partners in a vital cause.</i>

There were differences, sometimes significant ones, between the two presentations.

General Abizaid, as USCENTCOM commander testifying before a congressional committee, perforce reported his evaluation of the performance of U.S. forces and the contribution of allies throughout the region. President Bush avoided details.

In some areas, the president and the general seemed to be “out of synch.”

TOPIC:	
United States as Shield for Development of the Instruments of National Power	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>In Iraq and Afghanistan, our forces provide the shield behind which legitimate and representative governments and economic development are taking root. It is so important for us to understand that it is a combination of military power, economic power, diplomatic power, and political power that will ultimately spell the end of al-Qaida's hateful ideology.</i>	<i>In fact, democratic federalism is the best hope for unifying a diverse population because a federal constitutional system respects the rights ... of all citizens while giving all minorities ... a stake and a voice in the future of their country.</i>
Commentary:	
<i>The president might be surprised to learn that the federal constitutional system he endorses is more like a confederal constitutional system, with the central government having weak powers.</i>	

Then the president tries to knock down a straw man of his own making. And in doing so, drops a reference that strongly points to the real reason for the March 2003 invasion.

TOPIC:	
U.S. troop drawdown-and why the United States entered Iraq	
Abizaid:	Bush:
<i>As Afghanistan and Iraq stabilize over time, you could see it possible, and indeed, beneficial, for [troop] strength to come down as, and only if, indigenous capabilities improve to the point that local nations can fight the fight themselves.</i>	<i>Some observers also claim that America would be better off by cutting our losses and leaving Iraq now ... Would the United States ... be more safe or less safe with ... bin Laden in control of Iraq, its people, and its resources.</i>
Commentary:	
<i>Bush implies that there are only two choices in Iraq: stay the [his] course-which will bring “victory”-or cut-and-run-which will bring disaster. He says nothing that might be interpreted as an acknowledgement of a responsibility to withdraw responsibly.</i>	

What remains are what the president said that he should not have uttered and what the general said that the president should have repeated.

The Messianic Complex

Bush regards September 11, 2001 as a “a turning point” in U.S. history, a day which the nation will forever “remember [for] the calling that came to us.”

Commentary: “Calling” traditionally refers to a religious awareness of or awakening to the power of the supernatural that is experienced as a summons to the spiritual. Abizaid is content to speak of a more mundane mission, albeit an intellectual one: to prevent the spread of terrorist ideology.

What next?

This is the general's translation of his intellectual mission into concrete objectives-how to implement the responsibility to withdraw responsibly:

“... We must stabilize Afghanistan, stabilize Iraq, continue to deter Syria and Iran, and protect the flow of oil vital to all the economies of the world and the peoples of the region.”

“We must make clear to the people of the region that we have no designs on their territory and resources. We must make clear that we fight with them, out of mutual respect and mutual self-benefit.”

Commentary: Eisenhower ran for the presidency pledging to go to Korea and bring that war to a close. Is there a precedent here for 2008?

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