

George W. Bush's War Plan

by Lindy Davies

The President is required, by a 1986 law, to submit an annual statement on the National Security Strategy of the United States. The NSS that George W. Bush issued in September, 2002 was treated as big news, because it stated, for the first time, a policy of preventive — rather than merely pre-emptive — war. We should observe two things about this document, I think: 1) Because it was presented before all of the bumbling, hypocrisy and mayhem that came to characterize the Iraq war, it is fair to evaluate it apart from our feelings about those things; and 2) rather than signifying any truly radical new policy, the statement really represents an unusually blunt statement of long-held attitudes about the greatness and pre-eminence of the United States. The strategy assumes that America has rightfully earned its military superiority, and will, almost by definition, invade sovereign nations for their own good. How else, after all, could a country justify such heavyhanded unilateralism, in a world where societies and economies are growing ever-more interconnected? Presented alongside the visionary principles laid out, in the midst of world war, by Ralph Borsodi and Mildred Loomis, the National Security Strategy begins to sound like the last stand of a vision whose time is past.

For most of the twentieth century, the world was divided by a great struggle over ideas: destructive totalitarian visions versus freedom and equality.

Borsodi's principles were offered at the beginning, so to speak, of that great struggle, and gave warnings to both sides. The transcendence of nation-states in the interest of fundamental justice, he believed, was a far more basic issue than the mere clash of political ideologies that marked the Cold War — and now we can see that the United States, despite having emerged as king of the hill, is no more on the side of righteousness and truth than it ever was.

That great struggle is over.... America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few.... The United States of America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach. The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism — premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.... The events of September 11, 2001, fundamentally changed the context for relations between the United States and other main centers of global power, and opened vast, new opportunities.

So, we are fighting a secret enemy whose base cannot be identified, who could be anyone, anywhere. Because of the very nature of the threat,

intelligence operations must be secret. They must operate outside normal channels of due process, and leave no trace. Furthermore, the “war on terror” will go on as long as our leaders say it must — they cannot even tell us whether the threat is growing or fading. Today’s enemy is everywhere and nowhere. Indeed, it provides the military-industrial complex with vast opportunities.

The US national security strategy will be based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests.... Free markets and free trade are key priorities of our national security strategy.

Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.

What are the goals of rogue states and terrorists? Does Al-Qaida, for example, have the same agenda as North Korea? As Cuba? As *Hamas*? If our nation is, as this document says, in the business of spreading our values of freedom, justice and trade, why should we have so many enemies? Why should the world be so dangerous for us? The only possible answer — affirmed in speech after speech by the president — is that our enemies are evil, and that’s all we need to know about their goals. Yet that level of bald irrationality is hard to sustain in what is, after all, a serious document of national policy. Is it possible that the “terror” we’re making war against is really our own fear that US hegemony is unsustainable?

It is time to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength. We must build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge.... Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.

A key element of this military buildup is the re-establishment of a missile-defense program. No nation other than Russia currently has the capability to hit US territory with an ICBM — yet over Russia’s strenuous objections, the United States withdrew from the ABM treaty so that it could pursue this program. Now, that is a curious thing: given our doctrine of preventive war, why do we need missile defenses to shield us from missiles that we will destroy before they get built? The answer, suggests Charles V. Peña of the Cato Institute, is that we must prevent the missiles of our evil-axis enemies from harassing our military adventures abroad. In other words, we plan to rid our foreign policy of the outmoded notion of deterrence; we must not be deterred from anything we decide to do, anywhere in the world.

In exercising our leadership, we will respect the values, judgment, and interests of our friends and partners. Still, we will be prepared to act apart when our interests and unique responsibilities require... We will take the actions necessary to ensure that our efforts... are not impaired by the potential for investigations, inquiry, or prosecution by the International Criminal Court, whose jurisdiction does not extend to Americans and which we do not accept.

There is a feeling of incoherence about this document — in the righteous claims to be spreading peace and freedom and proper values — while facing a shadowy underworld of pitiless enemies — in such grave danger from the forces of terror that we cannot trust long-standing alliances and treaty commitments — standing up for the security of our homeland. These statements of unilateralism — to say the least — stand in shocking relief next to the calm vision of global justice presented by Borsodi and Loomis. Throughout the NSS document, while paying lip service to coalition-building and respectful dialogue, the US asserts its prerogative to go it alone — not just because it can (which nobody disputes) but because it *should*. Apparently the US sees itself as a missionary of the enlightened values of democracy, freedom, private property and modern finance.

It's worth mentioning that the military power the USA uses to secure the land within its own borders — not to mention its control over natural resources far and wide — is paid for by the taxpayers of the United States, while the benefits accrue to the landowners of the United States. Little wonder, then, that “homeownership” is seen as such a pillar of our society, and that Fannie Mae, that gigantic corporate facilitator of mortgage debt, proclaims itself to be in “the American dream business”. Over 66% of American families “own” their homes. That’s the best way to make sure that our national real estate machine is “too big to fail”. Unfortunately, though, we cannot export this model of “enlightened nationalism” — which depends on constant infusions of foreign resources — to those places whose resources we need to grab. In the end (which will probably, alas, be quite some time in coming), no “National Security Strategy” can succeed, unless it is based on fundamental economic justice. **GJ**

