

Bush or Kerry: the danger is the same

A myth equal to the fable of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction is gaining strength on both sides of the Atlantic. It is that John Kerry offers a world-view different from that of George W Bush. Watch this big lie grow as Kerry is crowned the Democratic candidate and the "anyone but Bush" movement becomes a liberal cause celebre.

While the rise to power of the Bush gang, the neoconservatives, belatedly preoccupied the American media, the message of their equivalents in the Democratic Party has been of little interest. Yet the similarities are compelling. Shortly before Bush's "election" in 2000, the Project for the New American Century, the neoconservative pressure group, published an ideological blueprint for "maintaining global US pre-eminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests". Every one of its recommendations for aggression and conquest was adopted by the administration.

One year later, the Progressive Policy Institute, an arm of the Democratic Leadership Council, published a 19-page manifesto for the "New Democrats", who include all the principal Democratic Party candidates, and especially John Kerry. This called for "the bold exercise of American power" at the heart of "a new Democratic strategy, grounded in the party's tradition of muscular internationalism". Such a strategy would "keep Americans safer than the Republicans' go-it-alone policy, which has alienated our natural allies and overstretched our resources. We aim to rebuild the moral foundation of US global leadership ..."

What is the difference from the vainglorious claptrap of Bush? Apart from euphemisms, there is none. All the Democratic presidential candidates supported the invasion of Iraq, bar one: Howard Dean. Kerry not only voted for the invasion, but expressed his disappointment that it had not gone according to

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plan. He told Rolling Stone magazine: “Did I expect George Bush to fuck it up as badly as he did? I don’t think anybody did.” Neither Kerry nor any of the other candidates has called for an end to the bloody and illegal occupation; on the contrary, all of them have demanded more troops for Iraq. Kerry has called for another “40,000 active service troops”. He has supported Bush’s continuing bloody assault on Afghanistan, and the administration’s plans to “return Latin America to American leadership” by subverting democracy in Venezuela.

Above all, he has not in any way challenged the notion of American military supremacy throughout the world that has pushed the number of US bases to more than 750. Nor has he alluded to the Pentagon’s coup d’etat in Washington and its stated goal of “full spectrum dominance”. As for Bush’s “pre-emptive” policy of attacking other countries, that’s fine, too. Even the most liberal of the Democratic bunch, Howard Dean, said he was prepared to use “our brave and remarkable armed forces” against any “imminent threat”. That’s how Bush himself put it.

What the New Democrats object to is the Bush gang’s outspokenness – its crude honesty, if you like – in stating its plans openly, and not from behind the usual veil or in the usual specious code of imperial liberalism and its “moral authority”. New Democrats of Kerry’s sort are all for the American empire; understandably, they would prefer that those words remained unsaid. “Progressive internationalism” is far more acceptable.

Just as the plans of the Bush gang were written by the neoconservatives, so John Kerry in his campaign book, *A Call to Service*, lifts almost word for word the New Democrats’ warmongering manifesto. “The time has come,” he writes, “to revive a bold vision of progressive internationalism” along with a “tradition” that honours “the tough-minded strategy of international engagement and leadership forged by Wilson and Roosevelt... and championed by Truman and Kennedy in the cold war”. Almost identical thoughts appear on page three of the New Democrats’ manifesto:

As Democrats, we are proud of our party’s tradition of tough-minded internationalism and strong record in defending America. Presidents Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D Roosevelt and Harry Truman led the United States to victory in two world wars... [Truman’s policies] eventually triumphed in the cold war. President Kennedy epitomised America’s commitment to “the survival and success of liberty”.

Mark the historical lies in that statement: the “victory” of the US with its brief intervention in the First World War; the airbrushing of the decisive role of the

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Soviet Union in the Second World War; the American elite's non-existent "triumph" over internally triggered events that brought down the Soviet Union; and John F Kennedy's famous devotion to "liberty" that oversaw the deaths of some three million people in Indo-China.

"Perhaps the most repulsive section of [his] book," writes Mark Hand, editor of Press Action, the American media monitoring group, "is where Kerry discusses the Vietnam war and the anti-war movement." Self-promoted as a war hero, Kerry briefly joined the protest movement on his return from Vietnam. In this twin capacity, he writes: "I say to both conservative and liberal misinterpretations of that war that it's time to get over it and recognise it as an exception, not as a ruling example of the US military engagements of the 20th century."

"In this one passage," writes Hand, "Kerry seeks to justify the millions of people slaughtered by the US military and its surrogates during the 20th century [and] suggests that concern about US war crimes in Vietnam is no longer necessary... Kerry and his colleagues in the 'progressive internationalist' movement are as gung-ho as their counterparts in the White House... Come November, who will get your vote? Coke or Pepsi?"

The "anyone but Bush" movement objects to the Coke-Pepsi analogy, and Ralph Nader is the current source of their ire. In Britain, seven years ago, similar derision was heaped upon those who pointed out the similarities between Tony Blair and his heroine Margaret Thatcher – similarities which have since been proven. "It's a nice and convenient myth that liberals are the peacemakers and conservatives the warmongers," wrote the Guardian commentator Hywel Williams. "But the imperialism of the liberal may be more dangerous because of its open-ended nature – its conviction that it represents a superior form of life."

Like the Blairites, John Kerry and his fellow New Democrats come from a tradition of liberalism that has built and defended empires as "moral" enterprises. That the Democratic Party has left a longer trail of blood, theft and subjugation than the Republicans is heresy to the liberal crusaders, whose murderous history always requires, it seems, a noble mantle.

As the New Democrats' manifesto rightly points out, the Democrats' "tough-minded internationalism" began with Woodrow Wilson, a Christian megalomaniac who believed that America had been chosen by God "to show the way to the nations of this world, how they shall walk in the paths of liberty". In his wonderful new book, *The Sorrows of Empire* (Verso), Chalmers Johnson writes: 'With Woodrow Wilson, the intellectual foundations of American

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imperialism were set in place. Theodore Roosevelt... had represented a European-driven, militaristic vision of imperialism backed by nothing more substantial than the notion that the manifest destiny of the United States was to govern racially inferior Latin Americans and east Asians. Wilson laid over that his own hyper-idealistic, sentimental and ahistorical idea [of American world dominance]. It was a political project no less ambitious and no less passionately held than the vision of world communism launched at almost the same time by the leaders of the Bolshevik revolution.”

It was the Wilsonian Democratic administration of Harry Truman, following the Second World War, that created the militaristic “national security state” and the architecture of the cold war: the CIA, the Pentagon and the National Security Council. As the only head of state to use atomic weapons, Truman authorised troops to intervene anywhere “to defend free enterprise”. In 1945, his administration set up the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as agents of US economic imperialism. Later, using the “moral” language of Woodrow Wilson, John F Kennedy invaded Vietnam and unleashed the US special forces as death squads; they now operate on every continent.

Bush has been a beneficiary of this. His neoconservatives derive not from traditional Republican Party roots, but from the hawk’s wings of the Democratic Party – such as the trade union establishment, the AFL-CIO (known as the “AFL-CIA”), which received millions of dollars to subvert unions and political parties throughout the world, and the weapons industry, built and nurtured by the Democratic senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson. Paul Wolfowitz, Bush’s leading fanatic, began his Washington political life working for Jackson. In 1972 an aberration, George McGovern, faced Richard Nixon as the Democrats’ anti-war candidate. Virtually abandoned by the party and its powerful backers, McGovern was crushed.

Bill Clinton, hero of the Blairites, learned the lesson of this. The myths spun around Clinton’s “golden era of liberalism” are, in retrospect, laughable. Savour this obsequious front-page piece by the Guardian’s chief political correspondent, reporting Clinton’s speech to the Labour Party conference in 2002: “Bill Clinton yesterday used a mesmerising oration... in a subtle and delicately balanced address [that] captured the imagination of delegates in Blackpool’s Winter Gardens... Observers also described the speech as one of the most impressive and moving in the history of party conferences. The trade and industry secretary, Patricia Hewitt, described it as “absolutely brilliant”.

An accompanying editorial gushed: “In an intimate, almost conversational

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tone, speaking only from notes, Bill Clinton delivered the speech of a true political master... If one were reviewing it, five stars would not be enough... What a speech. What a pro. And what a loss to the leadership of America and the world.”

No idolatry was enough. At the Hay-on-Wye literary festival, the leader of “the third way” and of “progressive internationalism” received a long line of media and Blair people who hailed him as a lost leader, “a champion of the centre left”.

The truth is that Clinton was little different from Bush, a crypto-fascist. During the Clinton years, the principal welfare safety nets were taken away and poverty in America increased sharply; a multibillion-dollar missile “defence” system known as Star Wars II was instigated; the biggest war and arms budget in history was approved; biological weapons verification was rejected, along with a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, the establishment of an international criminal court and a worldwide ban on landmines. Contrary to a myth that places the blame on Bush, the Clinton administration in effect destroyed the movement to combat global warming.

In addition, Haiti and Afghanistan were invaded, the illegal blockade of Cuba was reinforced and Iraq was subjected to a medieval siege that claimed up to a million lives while the country was being attacked, on average, every third day: the longest Anglo-American bombing campaign in history. In the 1999 Clinton-led attack on Serbia, a “moral crusade”, public transport, non-military factories, food processing plants, hospitals, schools, museums, churches, heritage-listed monasteries and farms were bombed. “They ran out of military targets in the first couple of weeks,” said James Bissett, the Canadian former ambassador to Yugoslavia. “It was common knowledge that Nato went to stage three: civilian targets.” In their cruise missile attack on Sudan, Clinton’s generals targeted and destroyed a factory producing most of sub-Saharan Africa’s pharmaceutical supplies. The German ambassador to Sudan reported: “It is difficult to assess how many people in this poor country died as a consequence... but several tens of thousands seems a reasonable guess.”

Covered in euphemisms, such as “democracy-building” and “peacekeeping”, “humanitarian intervention” and “liberal intervention”, the Clintonites can boast a far more successful imperial record than Bush’s neo-cons, largely because Washington granted the Europeans a ceremonial role, and because Nato was “onside”. In a league table of death and destruction, Clinton beats Bush hands down.

A question that New Democrats like to ask is: “What would Al Gore have done

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if he had not been cheated of the presidency by Bush?” Gore’s top adviser was the arch-hawk Leon Fuerth, who said the US should “destroy the Iraqi regime, root and branch”. Joseph Lieberman, Gore’s running mate in 2000, helped to get Bush’s war resolution on Iraq through Congress. In 2002, Gore himself declared that an invasion of Iraq “was not essential in the short term” but “nevertheless, all Americans should acknowledge that Iraq does, indeed, pose a serious threat”. Like Blair, what Gore wanted was an “international coalition” to cover long-laid plans for the takeover of the Middle East. His complaint against Bush was that, by going it alone, Washington could “weaken our ability to lead the world in this new century”.

Collusion between the Bush and Gore camps was common. During the 2000 election, Richard Holbrooke, who probably would have become Gore’s secretary of state, conspired with Paul Wolfowitz to ensure their respective candidates said nothing about US policy towards Indonesia’s blood-soaked role in south-east Asia. “Paul and I have been in frequent touch,” said Holbrooke, “to make sure we keep [East Timor] out of the presidential campaign, where it would do no good to American or Indonesian interests.” The same can be said of Israel’s ruthless, illegal expansion, of which not a word was and is said: it is a crime with the full support of both Republicans and Democrats.

John Kerry supported the removal of millions of poor Americans from welfare rolls and backed extending the death penalty. The “hero” of a war that is documented as an atrocity launched his presidential campaign in front of a moored aircraft carrier. He has attacked Bush for not providing sufficient funding to the National Endowment for Democracy, which, wrote the historian William Blum, “was set up by the CIA, literally, and for 20 years has been destabilising governments, progressive movements, labour unions and anyone else on Washington’s hit list”. Like Bush – and all those who prepared the way for Bush, from Woodrow Wilson to Bill Clinton – Kerry promotes the mystical “values of American power” and what the writer Ariel Dorfman has called “the plague of victimhood... Nothing more dangerous: a giant who is afraid.”

People who are aware of such danger, yet support its proponents in a form they find agreeable, think they can have it both ways. They can’t. Michael Moore, the film-maker, should know this better than anyone; yet he backed the Nato bomber Wesley Clark as Democratic candidate. The effect of this is to reinforce the danger to all of us, because it says it is OK to bomb and kill, then to speak of peace. Like the Bush regime, the New Democrats fear truly opposing voices and popular movements: that is, genuine democracy, at home and abroad. The

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colonial theft of Iraq is a case in point. “If you move too fast,” says Noah Feldman, a former legal adviser to the US regime in Baghdad, “the wrong people could get elected.” Tony Blair has said as much in his inimitable way: “We can’t end up having an inquiry into whether the war [in Iraq] was right or wrong. That is something that we have got to decide. We are the politicians.” **JP**