

Selling to America

By Danny Schechter

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It was the night of a new moon, the bad moon rising, a cosmic sign, I am told, for negative forces of metaphysical energy. It was the night that the Empire struck back. It was the night that America's Republican Guard and its cocky Commander in Chief declared war one more time. This time it was a two-front war – war on the Democrats as well as on them evil terrorists, who are always out there and seemingly ready to pounce.

America this evening is a nation called to great responsibilities. And we are rising to meet them.

With smirks and coded phrases aimed at the religious right, the POTUS laid down the gauntlet to Kerry, Clark, Dean and Edwards – who sound almost like a law firm in a courtroom of public opinion dominated by an incumbent. The TV networks did their bit by focusing their cameras on the scripted show, mostly on Republican cheers. They ignored the silence on the other side of the aisle save for a few shots of a bloated Ted Kennedy grimacing and a grinning Hillary applauding. The Chamber was stuffed with soldiers and client Iraqis as “props” whose faces would be shown to reinforce the speech with well-rehearsed camera moves at all the right moments. All the Presidents do this – but he did it very well.

Bush was selling – and so was the coverage. What did we expect?

The momentum of freedom in our world is unmistakable - and it is not carried forward by our power alone. We can trust in that greater power who guides the unfolding of the years. And in all that is to come, we can know that his purposes are just and true.

We watched the consigliariat – our Gang of Four – smile and applaud: Rummy, Powell, Cheney and Condi, along with the nominally apolitical uniformed military brass standing up for their Commander in Chief as he hit the applause line about needing no “permission slip” to invade, oops, “defend” America.

The speech was relentless, hitting every right-wing note, which Bush knew would drive the Democrats crazy and rouse his faithful, all wrapped up in the soft language of America This and America That. It was all there, with no pretense of consensus-building or compromise or conciliation. It was Essence of Bush.

The Patriot Act: Pass it, he demanded. Social Security: Privatize it, he urged in as many

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words. Give money to religious groups or buy up agencies in minority communities with prisoner reentry programs. Keep healthcare private. Stop gay marriage. Make the Tax cuts permanent.

Damn all torpedoes! Full speed ahead on the agenda!

It was, said Ted Koppel, “all about throwing red meat” to his right-wing base. All the buzzwords were there; most of the analysis I heard was superficial and lacked specificity.

The genuflection towards the flag was pervasive, as was the pandering to the soldiers whose benefits he’s cut and service he’s lengthened. There was only one note of protest – on the Patriot Act – but it was soon and quickly drowned out.

Amidst the sneaky smirks and the tough language, there was that “my way or the highway” approach, still replete with defense of claims about WMDs and “the most destructive weapons” in the hands of dangerous regimes. The spirit of “you are either with us or against us” lives on.

He was emboldened. Bush the Stumbler was gone. THE SPEECH was robustly delivered, smooth as silk. He was well-trained and rehearsed. Let’s hear it for the speech training unit and that new but invisible teleprompter.

And having come this far, we sense that we live in a time set apart

The Democratic response was wimpy and tepid, riddled with more patriotic posturing than hard-nosed critiquing. The lesson of Iowa seems to be “Be nice or risk alienating the electorate.” The Bullies seem to be winning among those who prize manners above passion.

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*His latest book is *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception*. Read a preview at <http://www.coldtype.net/danbook.html>.*