

Al Gore backs Bush's war plans

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In a speech February 12, his first major political address since the US Supreme Court stopped a vote count in Florida and handed the 2000 presidential election to George W. Bush, the Democratic presidential candidate, Al Gore, declared his full support to the Bush administration's plans for expanded warfare in the Middle East. Gore called for a "final reckoning" with Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

The former vice president spoke in New York City before a meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations, the think tank that publishes *Foreign Affairs* and has long exercised important influence on foreign policy, whether the occupant of the White House was a Democrat or Republican.

Gore specifically solidarized himself with the "axis of evil" rhetoric in Bush's State of the Union speech. Bush's bellicose language—particularly his singling out of Iraq, Iran and North Korea—has been widely denounced in Europe and criticized even by several congressional leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and Republican Senator Chuck Hagel.

"As far as I'm concerned, there really is something to be said for occasionally putting diplomacy aside and laying one's cards on the table," Gore said. "There is value in calling evil by its name. One should never underestimate the power of bold words coming from a president of the United States."

Gore made a bow to European criticisms of Bush's unilateralism, and presented himself as an advocate of a more inclusive style of foreign policy. He called for attention to underlying causes of global unrest, including poverty, ignorance, disease and political oppression, warning, "What we deal with now is today's manifestation of an anger welling up from deep layers of grievance shared by many millions of people."

But the basic thrust of his speech was to demonstrate

how far the Democratic Party's titular leader would go in identifying himself with the aggressive militarism that now dominates Washington. Gore declared, "I also support the president's stated goals in the next phases of the war against terrorism as he laid them out in the State of the Union." The 2000 Democratic presidential candidate thus backed the worldwide campaign of military force, covert provocations and diplomatic bullying that is being waged in the name of the "war on terrorism." He endorsed Bush's shift in the focus of this campaign from terrorist groups to governments allegedly engaged in the development of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons.

Gore said, "There is a clear case that one of these governments in particular represents a virulent threat in a class by itself: Iraq. As far as I am concerned, a final reckoning with that government should be on the table. To my way of thinking, the real question is not the principle of the thing, but of making sure that this time we will finish the matter on our terms."

The former vice president recalled that he was among a small group of Democratic senators who backed the first President Bush in his decision to dispatch a huge army to the Middle East and go to war against Iraq over Kuwait. His only criticism of the Persian Gulf War was that it did not go far enough and was ended with Saddam Hussein still in power.

Gore added, "So this time, if we resort to force, we must absolutely get it right. It must be an action set up carefully and on the basis of the most realistic concepts. Failure cannot be an option, which means that we must be prepared to go the limit. And wishful thinking based on best-case scenarios or excessively literal transfers of recent experience to different conditions would be a recipe for disaster."

This amounts to a rebuke to the more optimistic war planners in the White House and Pentagon, who have suggested that it would be possible to overthrow

Saddam Hussein with only 50,000 US troops, or perhaps no ground troops at all, using proxy forces and American air power on the Afghanistan model. Gore declared in advance his support for a much larger commitment of American forces against Iraq than was required to overthrow the Taliban.

Gore did not spell out what he meant when he said the US had to be prepared to “go the limit” against Iraq. Do his provocative and reckless words imply the destruction of Iraq as a functioning society, through saturation bombing? The invasion of the country and occupation of Baghdad by an American army? Or perhaps the use of nuclear weapons in the event that an air and ground attack should prove insufficient?

Gore also said that Iran was “a much more dangerous challenge” than Iraq in terms both of support for terrorism and development of weapons of mass destruction. He did not draw the conclusion that war with Iran was more necessary than war with Iraq, but strongly implied that such a war would be inevitable unless the Islamic fundamentalist regime in Teheran were overthrown from within.

The former vice president closed his half-hour speech with a paean to the virtues of bipartisanship and the need for national unity in defense of the interests of American imperialism. He suggested that the war against terrorism should be modeled on the Cold War, which he said was “won by the cumulative work of administrations from Harry S. Truman to George H.W. Bush.”

He concluded: “When all is said and done, I hope that when the people of our country next return the White House for a time to the Democratic Party, our leadership then will be big enough to salute the present administration for what it will have done that is wise and good. And to build upon it forthrightly.”

Gore’s speech underscores two fundamental facts: from the standpoint of foreign and military policy, to quote another leading Democrat, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, there is “no daylight whatsoever” between the Bush administration and the Democratic Party. Gore offers a no less reactionary and bloodthirsty program for using American military power to reshape the world.

From the standpoint of American politics, Gore’s remarks demonstrate the politically moribund and intellectually debased character of liberalism. As he did

during the election campaign, when he sought to ignore the right-wing campaign that led to Clinton’s impeachment, and as he did during the post-election crisis in Florida, Gore seeks to tranquilize the American people about the dangers to their democratic rights.

Far from his idyllic picture of two major parties peacefully alternating in control of the White House, it is clear that the ultra-right elements that dominate the Bush administration and the Republican Party are prepared to resort to criminal and illegal methods to hold onto power, regardless of the will of the people.

A movement within the United States against imperialist militarism and in defense of democratic rights must involve a political break with both the Democrats and Republicans, and the building of a new political party based on the interests of working people.



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