

# Gore issues warning over “Big Brother” regime in US

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In his second major speech in three months, former vice president Al Gore criticized the Bush administration’s “war on terrorism,” accusing the White House of exploiting the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to assume quasi-dictatorial powers.

The one-hour speech, delivered November 9 in Washington DC, was cosponsored by MoveOn.org, a liberal Democratic activist group, and the American Constitution Society. Gore spoke before an audience of 3,000. The speech was also broadcast live on C-Span and over the Internet.

No less significant than the speech itself was the failure of the mass media to give it any serious attention. Major broadcast outlets ignored it, while, for the most part, it was buried in leading US dailies. No major national newspaper bothered to publish editorial comment on the issues raised by Gore.

The virtual silence of the media is extraordinary given both the content of Gore’s remarks and the identity of the speaker. The former vice president won the popular vote in the 2000 election and was denied the presidency only by a politically rigged decision of a five-member majority of the US Supreme Court. He remains the nominal head of the Democratic Party.

No less deafening was the silence that greeted Gore’s speech from the top echelons of his own party. No member of the Democratic congressional leadership commented on his charges.

“Where civil liberties are concerned, they [the Bush administration] have taken us much farther down the road toward an intrusive ‘Big Brother’ style government—toward the dangers prophesized by George Orwell in his book *1984*—than anyone ever thought would be possible in the United States of America,” said Gore.

The administration, he added, “has opted to rule by secrecy and unquestioned authority,” while carrying out “assaults on our core democratic principles.”

The former vice president recounted the sweeping attacks on basic rights that have been carried out by the administration. “For the first time in our history, American citizens have been seized by the executive branch of government and put in prison without being charged with a crime, without having the right to a trial, without being able to see a lawyer and without even being able to contact their families,” said Gore.

He continued: “President Bush is claiming the unilateral right to do that to any American citizen he believes is an ‘enemy combatant.’ Those are the magic words. If the President alone decides that those two words accurately describe someone, then that person can be immediately locked up and held incommunicado for as long as the President wants, with no court having the right to determine whether the facts actually justify his imprisonment.”

Gore went on to cite the unprecedented powers of search and seizure assumed by the administration and codified in the USA Patriot Act. The government, he noted, now has “the right to monitor every web site you go to on the Internet, keep a list of everyone you send email to or receive email from and everyone who you call on the telephone or who calls you—and they don’t even have to show probable cause that you’ve done anything wrong.”

Moreover, he pointed out, “federal agents ... can secretly enter your home with no warning—whether you are there or not—and they can wait for months before telling you they were there. And it doesn’t have to have any relationship to terrorism whatsoever.”

He further pointed to new federal powers to monitor attorney-client conversations and demand library records of any citizen to see what he or she is reading. He condemned the mass round-up two years ago of over 1,200 immigrants from Arab and Islamic countries for no more than minor visa violations. While, with few exceptions, no terrorism charges were brought, many of those who were jailed suffered vicious persecution and abuse while in custody.

In conclusion, Gore argued that “this administration has attempted to compromise the most precious rights that America has stood for all over the world for more than 200 years: due process, equal treatment under the law, the dignity of the individual, freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, freedom from promiscuous government surveillance.”

The subtext of the former vice president’s speech was the Bush administration’s exploitation of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to further its political aims and carry out its assault on democratic rights, as well as its policy of keeping the facts surrounding the 9/11 attacks shrouded in secrecy. This aspect of Gore’s presentation was subjected to a near total blackout by the media.

The Bush administration, Gore noted, has stonewalled the national commission formed to investigate September 11, prompting the panel’s Republican leadership to issue subpoenas seeking to pry information from the Pentagon and the Federal Aviation Administration, while threatening to do the same to the Bush White House. Similarly, he said, “the White House is also refusing to respond to repeated bipartisan congressional requests for information about 9/11.”

He pointed to a Republican-orchestrated provocation over a leaked Democratic memo that was used to shut down the Senate Intelligence Committee last week. Gore commented: “Apparently the President is anxious to keep the Congress from seeing what are said to have been clear, strong and explicit warnings directly to him a few weeks before 9/11 that terrorists were planning to hijack commercial airliners and

use them to attack us.”

Gore went on to note that there existed “a great deal of specific information ... prior to 9/11 that probably could have been used to prevent the tragedy.” He cited a recent analysis based on data collected by a software company that was funded by a CIA-connected firm.

The study found that two of the alleged hijackers—Nawaq Alhamzi and Khalid Al-Midhar—bought their airline tickets using their real names, both of which were on a State Department/Immigration and Naturalization Service watch list. Both men had been under CIA surveillance while attending an Al Qaeda meeting in Malaysia before entering the US and both were wanted by the FBI as suspected terrorists.

If their names had been checked against the watch list, they would have provided information—common addresses, phone numbers and frequent flyer numbers—linking them to virtually all of the other hijackers.

Gore pointed out that, while on the terrorist watch list, the two men “rented an apartment in San Diego under their own names and were listed, again under their own names, in the San Diego phone book while the FBI was searching for them.”

The former vice president neglected to mention a few other salient facts: that the two men—both Saudi nationals—were met upon their arrival in the US by a Saudi government intelligence agent, and that they were staying in San Diego in the apartment of the FBI’s main informant on the activities of Islamic groups. Others among the alleged hijackers bought one-way tickets with cash, a practice that is supposed to trigger a rigorous security check.

Gore implied that the Bush administration is concealing information that could implicate it in criminal negligence, if not direct complicity, in allowing the 9/11 attacks to take place. That such charges from the former vice president are treated as a second-rate news item is testimony to the advanced state of putrefaction and corruption in the US media and the pervasive decay of democratic institutions in the US.

Having uncritically accepted the official version of events surrounding September 11 as well as the justifications for the police-state measures enacted in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the media is incapable of dealing with the substance of Gore’s remarks.

Every section of the political establishment is implicated in the police-state measures described by Gore, including the party that he nominally leads. When the USA Patriot Act was passed in 2001, the Senate, then controlled by the Democrats, approved it with virtually no debate and only a single dissenting vote.

Moreover, the Orwellian practices introduced under Bush were in large measure prepared by statutes initiated by the Clinton administration, including the 1996 Antiterrorism Act, which cleared the way for secret courts and mass deportations.

In a speech delivered in August—also organized by MoveOn.org—Gore made the case that Bush had systematically lied to the American people in order to drag them into a war in Iraq, and that the administration was ruling by undemocratic and unconstitutional means in order to benefit a small but powerful financial oligarchy.

Significantly, the former vice president failed to raise the 2000 election in either speech. This is hardly an oversight. In the past, Gore has suggested that to revisit the way in which Bush was selected as president through a suppression of the vote and an extra-constitutional decision by a right-wing majority on the Supreme Court would represent a “distraction” from the political issues confronting the

American people.

The pretense that the origins of the present government in the theft of an election have nothing to do with its assault on democratic rights and its illegal war in Iraq is both preposterous and self-serving. Gore bears personal responsibility for the conditions that he decries. His passive acceptance of the theft of the 2000 election and his avoidance ever since of any direct challenge to the legitimacy of the Bush presidency have served as an indispensable political prop of the present administration.

This was not merely a matter of political cowardice, but rather the bowing of a veteran big business politician to the will of decisive sections of the American financial and corporate elite that had decided in favor of Bush and were prepared to carry out whatever measures were necessary to put him in the White House.

Gore’s reemergence in the run-up to the 2004 election as one of the most caustic critics of the administration is a measure of the crisis gripping both the Democrats and the US political establishment as a whole. No doubt, Gore’s speeches are aimed at convincing those layers that are most hostile to the Bush administration that the Democratic Party, despite its complicity in the administration’s policies, offers some alternative. He may well be using these appearances as the springboard for a possible eleventh-hour bid for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In the end, however, he is speaking for the same big business interests that have backed him throughout his political career as the scion of a Tennessee political dynasty and leading figure in the right-wing Democratic Leadership Council. It is hardly an accident that the day after Gore delivered his speech, George Soros, one of the world’s richest men, joined with a partner in donating \$5 million to MoveOn.org, the group that cosponsored the former vice president’s appearance in Washington.

Within these ruling circles, there is fear that mounting hostility to the war in Iraq and the reactionary social policies and police-state methods at home could erupt, posing a fundamental challenge to the two-party system. Gore’s left posturing is aimed at containing any such movement within the confines of the Democratic Party.



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