

Cheney bullies the American people: vote for Bush or else

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Terrorists will attack the American people if they should have the temerity to choose Kerry over Bush in the November 2 election, Vice President Dick Cheney declared Tuesday. He made the extraordinary threat at a campaign appearance in Des Moines, Iowa. “It’s absolutely essential that eight weeks from today, on November 2nd, we make the right choice, because if we make the wrong choice then the danger is that we’ll get hit again,” Cheney said, “and we’ll be hit in a way that will be devastating from the standpoint of the United States.”

There is more to Cheney’s comments than crude and obvious bullying of the American people, outrageous and provocative as that is. His statement points once again to the fact that the Bush administration aims to profit politically from new terrorist attacks on American targets, whether inside the United States or internationally. In the event of such an attack, any serious analysis must start by examining the likelihood that the attack was permitted or deliberately engineered by the US intelligence apparatus to insure Bush’s reelection.

Within hours, in response to criticism from leading Democrats and media inquiries, officials of the Bush-Cheney campaign were seeking to muddy the significance of the vice president’s remark. Cheney spokeswoman Anne Womack said Cheney “wasn’t trying to connect the dots” between a Kerry victory and a terrorist attack. “Whoever is elected in November faces the prospect of another terrorist attack,” she said. “The question is whether or not the right policies are in place to best protect our country. That’s what the vice president was saying.”

Bush refused to answer reporters’ questions about Cheney’s remarks, but White House spokesman Scott McClellan echoed Womack’s claim that the vice

president was not making threats, merely discussing “differences in how the two candidates approach the war on terrorism.” The White House subsequently issued a revised transcript of Cheney’s statement to try to soften its thrust.

But what Cheney said cannot be unsaid. He did no more than spell out in the bluntest terms the entire content of the Bush reelection campaign, which seeks to use the threat of terrorism to panic the American public to the point that they lose sight of the disastrous consequences of the invasion of Iraq and the steadily deteriorating economic and social conditions facing the vast majority of working people at home.

Cheney was following in the footsteps of the keynote speaker at the Republican convention, Democratic Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who gave a 20-minute harangue in the style of Joe McCarthy, equating all criticism of Bush’s policies with treason in wartime and declaring that he was supporting Bush because otherwise he feared for the physical survival of his own family.

Despite some media criticism of Miller’s comments, Bush has gone out of his way to associate himself with their hysterical tone and content. At a rally in Ohio on Labor Day weekend, Bush praised Miller’s address, saying, “He represents a lot of folks who understand that, with four more years, Dick Cheney and I will make this country safer...” Similar comments were included in Bush campaign appearances in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, West Virginia and Iowa, and Republican campaign aides said that Miller might appear side-by-side with Bush in future rallies.

There was a half-hearted response to Cheney by the Kerry-Edwards campaign. Senator John Edwards, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, issued the official rejoinder for the campaign. “Dick Cheney’s

scare tactics crossed the line today,” he declared. “What he said to the American people was that if you go to the polls in November and elect anyone other than us, then another terrorist attack occurs, it’s your fault. This is un-American.”

Edwards emphasized, however, his basic solidarity with Bush’s self-proclaimed “war on terror,” which has become the pretext for the entire reactionary agenda of the Bush administration, used to justify every domestic and foreign policy action. Edwards said, “Protecting America from vicious terrorists is not a Democratic or Republican issue, it’s an American issue and Dick Cheney and George Bush should know that. John Kerry and I will keep America safe, and we will not divide the American people to do it.”

Kerry, speaking later in Minnesota, said, “It is outrageous and shameful to make the war on terror an instrument of their politics. I defended this country when I was a young man, and they chose not to. And I will defend this country as president of the United States.”

This comment reiterates Kerry’s now stereotyped renunciation of the one positive feature in his own political history—his opposition to the Vietnam War as a leader of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. At that time, in 1970-71, when he helped expose the atrocities in Vietnam being ordered by US commanders and the Johnson and Nixon administrations, he flatly rejected claims that soldiers were fighting in Vietnam to defend the United States or the American people.

Moreover, in remarks Tuesday in Cincinnati, Kerry echoed the biggest lie of the Bush administration, its claim that the invasion and conquest of Iraq is part of a struggle against terrorism that began in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. Taking note of the milestone of the US death toll in Iraq passing 1,000, Kerry said those who died had sacrificed their lives “on behalf of freedom in the war on terror.”

The *New York Times* published an editorial Thursday describing Cheney’s remarks as “disgraceful.” In typically mealy-mouthed language, the *Times* said, “We’d have thought that both the Kerry and Bush camps would instinctively know that it would be appalling to suggest that terrorists were rooting for one side or another in this race. But Vice President Dick Cheney seemed to breach that unspoken barrier this week in Des Moines.”

Times bemoaned the fact that the Bush ~~selection~~ campaign is not guided by “innate good sense and prudence”—although why these virtues should be suddenly discovered in the fourth year of an administration characterized by recklessness and gangsterism it did not explain.

Neither the Democrats nor liberal media critics would go beyond tut-tutting at Cheney’s language and actually consider seriously the implications of his comments. The remarks in Des Moines are part of a broader pattern that suggests that the Bush administration is not prepared to accept an unfavorable outcome to the November 2 vote.

Bush administration officials began discussions during the summer on the possibility of postponing or even canceling the elections in the event of a new terrorist attack. These discussions have been put to one side, for the time being, coincident with Bush opening up a slight lead in the polls. Should poll numbers turn against the White House, the subject will no doubt come back on the agenda. In the meantime, contingency planning is under way in the Department of Homeland Security, the Justice Department and the Pentagon.



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