

To fawning applause from Canada's elite

Bush pledges to wage unending war

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In a speech that George W. Bush's aides touted as a dry-run for the message he will deliver to Europe, the US president reasserted before a Canadian audience Wednesday Washington's "right" to flout international law and wage "pre-emptive wars."

"Defence alone is not a sufficient strategy," declared Bush. "There's only one way to deal with enemies who plot in secret and set out to murder the innocent and the unsuspecting. We must take the fight to them."

Failure to do so, said Bush, would bequeath to "our children and grandchildren ... a nightmare world of danger," where the Middle East could be "dominated by dictators and mullahs who build weapons of mass destruction and harbour terrorists." Later he added, "To remain on the defensive is the surest way to bring the war to Canada."

To be sure, Bush did speak of Washington's desire for multilateral alliances and institutions. He named fostering effective international co-operation to be, along with an unrelenting global war on terrorism and promoting "democracy in the broader Middle East," one of the three "great" foreign policy "goals" of his second term. But the president made clear that such alliances would be on the US's terms. Washington may invoke international law in seeking to justify belligerence against states that run afoul of its wishes; the US will not, however, submit to it.

Repeating the arguments he, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other US government officials made in justifying their war of aggression against Iraq, Bush declared, "My country is determined to work as far as possible within the framework of international organizations....The success of multilateralism is measured not merely by following a process, but by achieving results. The objective of the UN and other institutions must be collective security, not endless debate."

Bush's speech—which was delivered to a hand-picked audience in the provincial town of Halifax, because Bush's handlers feared that the massive popular hostility toward him might find an echo in Canada's parliament—was the highlight of the first state visit Bush has made to Canada in his four years as president.

The US and Canada are the world's largest trading partners and for more than 60 years close military allies. Incoming US presidents have frequently made Ottawa the site of their first foreign foray. But relations between Canada and the US deteriorated during Bush's first term. Jean Chrétien, Canada's Liberal Prime Minister from 1993 to last December, was scorned by Bush and his entourage as an ally of Bill Clinton. But what

enraged the Bush administration was Chrétien's eleventh-hour decision to cancel plans to have Canada's military join the US-led invasion of Iraq. Chrétien, who headed the most right-wing Canadian government since the Great Depression, meanwhile, found it politically useful to distance himself from a US president rightfully loathed by much of the Canadian population as a bully and militarist, beholden to big business and a patron of the Christian fundamentalist right.

Paul Martin, who succeeded Chrétien as Canada's prime minister a year ago this month, won the backing of Canada's corporate elite for his campaign to push Chrétien into retirement, at least in part because of a promise to mend fences with Washington. (Chrétien's anti-American-tinged Canadian nationalism had come to be seen by Canadian big business as imperilling Canada's all-important trade relationship with the US.)

True to his word, Martin has moved on a series of issues to demonstrate to the Bush administration that his government is eager for closer cooperation. He established a new ministry modelled after the US Homeland Security Department, worked with the US to force Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile, announced plans to beef up Canada's military, and has pledged Canada's readiness to help in "state-building" in Iraq. Last month, Martin threw an MP out of the Liberal caucus after she defied his specific orders that Liberal parliamentarians refrain from publicly criticizing the US president.

The Bush administration, for its part, decided that a quick post-election visit to Canada would be useful in striking something of a different tone in international relations and thereby pressing some of the major European powers to come to the US's help in Iraq. "A new term in office," Bush told his Halifax audience, "is an important opportunity to reach out to our friends."

But while Bush peppered his speech with references to multilateralism and the US's desire for allies, he also made clear throughout his visit that he continues to carry a big stick.

Bush made repeated veiled references to the deep-rooted opposition in Canada to the US and invasion of Iraq, but only to emphasize his disdain.

With Prime Minister Martin, who at least publicly has never dissented from Chrétien's decision to keep Canada out of the Iraq invasion, standing beside him, Bush declared, "I made some decisions, obviously that some Canadians didn't agree with, like removing Saddam Hussein. But I'm the kind of fella who does what I think is right and will continue to do what I think is right."

“I’ll consult with our friends and neighbors, but if I think it’s right to remove Saddam Hussein for the security of the United States, that’s the course of action I’ll take.”

To the surprise of Martin and his ministers, Bush twice publicly proclaimed his “hope” that Canada would formally join the US anti-ballistic missile defence program—a measure meant to give the US greater leeway in resorting to military action and that will in all likelihood provoke a new arms race and lead to the militarization of space.

If the media is to be believed, Bush’s scarcely veiled demand for Canada to formally participate in the US missile shield—Ottawa has already agreed that it can be administered by the joint US-Canada aerospace defence command (NORAD)—violated a promise from the Bush administration that he would not raise the issue during his visit.

Martin has indicated that he personally favors Canada’s participation in the missile defence program. But the issue is a delicate one for his government. His caucus is known to be divided and opinion polls show that majority of the Canadian public is opposed. Further complicating matters for Martin is his government’s minority position in the House of Commons. As the social-democratic New Democratic Party and the Quebec *indépendantiste* Bloc Québécois are opposed to missile defence, Martin would need to secure the support of the Official Opposition Conservatives to win passage of a motion in support of missile defence.

Bush repeatedly praised Martin and exchanged jokes with him in a carefully choreographed display meant to demonstrate that the two governments were putting the frictions of the previous four years behind them. But the US president also made a point of signalling his political affinity for the Conservative opposition, which like the US Republican Party combines the most rapacious sections of capital with the Christian fundamentalist right. Flouting traditional diplomatic protocol, Bush met privately with Conservative leader Stephen Harper for almost as long as he did with Martin. And, on Tuesday, while traversing Parliament Hill, Bush broke away from his handlers to chat with a knob of Conservative MPs, whom he exhorted to “hang in there.”

The Canadian corporate establishment—which believes that its most basic interests demand that Canada be part of the Fortress America that Washington is erecting—went into overdrive to signal its support for closer ties with a Bush-led USA. The *Globe and Mail*, the traditional voice of Canada banks and financial houses, proclaimed Bush’s visit the “cozy summit.”

This contrasts sharply with the reaction of the Canadian populace. Although the Bush-Martin summit was announced only two weeks before and it occurred in the middle of the workweek, more than ten thousand joined various protests in Ottawa, at least 7,000 marched in Halifax, and there were smaller protests in several other cities.

Bush as always travelled in a bubble, addressing hand-picked audiences and being whisked along streets from which the public had been expelled.

According to initial press reports, the summit was more about establishing a working relationship than about specific agreements. Martin and Bush, however, did sign an agreement promising a

“new partnership in North America.” While much of it is vaguely worded, the agreement pledges that the Martin Liberal government and the Bush administration will collaborate more closely on a vast array of issues, from fighting terrorism, and “making our businesses more competitive in the global marketplace,” to promoting “democracy in the Middle East.”

Thomas D’Aquino, the CEO of Canada’s most powerful business lobby group, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE), who is himself a keen advocate of a closer economic, military and geo-political partnership with the US, was quick to proclaim the agreement Bush and Martin signed a breakthrough.

He told the *Globe and Mail*, “To me, this was not pap...what this is to me is a confirmation of fact that the two sides are willing now to pursue in a more methodical way, in a clear framework, the move towards closer integration.”

According to D’Aquino, “some leadership and political momentum” has at last been given to the large number of bilateral discussion between government officials and business leaders in the two countries. “I think in the next three years, we will see, in significant terms, important things happening that take us beyond NAFTA.”

Speaking to a Liberal Party fundraiser Wednesday night that was attended by many corporate leaders, Martin touted the business opportunities that would flow their way as the result of his government’s closer relationship with the US.

Canada, said Martin, will be working with the Bush administration to promote “democracy” in such places as Iraq and the Ukraine, because “democracies” support “free markets.”

“This is going to open the world up to you...I think it’s going to open opportunities to us that we have rarely seen.”



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