

Bush administration renews “preemptive war” strategy

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The National Security Strategy document released Thursday by the White House reaffirms the prerogative of the United States to take “preemptive” actions to counter possible threats from alleged enemies.

When it was first unveiled in September 2002, the Bush administration’s doctrine of “preemptive war” was generally seen as an attempt to justify the impending invasion of Iraq—a country that posed absolutely no real or foreseeable, let alone imminent, threat to the United States. The doctrine was widely condemned outside the United States as advancing a policy for which there exists no foundation in international law.

In issuing this updated version of the National Security Strategy, the Bush administration has made it clear that there will be no retreat from the doctrine of preemptive war; the United States reserves to itself the right to attack, at any time, any country that it considers a threat, or merely a potential threat, even if that country has not taken any overt hostile action.

Invoking “long-standing principles of self-defense,” the Bush administration declares that the United States does not “rule out the use of force before attacks occur, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack.”

The document states: “To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively in exercising our inherent right of self-defense.”

The Bush administration never addresses the fundamental legal contradiction in its doctrine: how can the United States invoke self-defense as grounds for a military strike against another country in the absence of not only an overtly hostile act, but even of clear evidence that an attack against the United States is imminent or, at a minimum, actually being planned.

As always, the White House raises the specter of weapons of mass destruction to justify preemptive war. “When the consequences of an attack with WMD are potentially so devastating, we cannot afford to stand idly by as grave dangers materialize. This is the principle and logic of preemption. The place of preemption in our national security strategy remains the same.”

Four years ago, this doctrine was unveiled to target Iraq. Now, the most likely target of a preemptive attack is Iran, which, according to the document, confronts the United States with its greatest challenge.

The Bush administration repeats its claim that Iran is concealing its efforts to develop nuclear weapons. However, it goes on to state that “the United States has broader concerns regarding Iran” that go beyond “these nuclear issues.” The Bush administration repeats its familiar litany of complaints: “The Iranian regime sponsors terrorism; threatens Israel, seeks to thwart Middle East peace; disrupts democracy in Iraq; and denies the aspirations of its people for freedom.” The document continues: “The nuclear issue and our other concerns can ultimately be resolved only if the Iranian regime makes the strategic decision to change these policies, open up its political system, and afford freedom to its people. This is the ultimate goal of US policy.”

In other words, the so-called Iranian nuclear threat is a mere pretext: the real issue is that the existing Iranian government is in the way of American global strategic interests. What the Bush administration wants is not a cessation of nuclear development, but a “regime change” in Tehran that would reestablish the pre-revolution status quo, i.e., the existence of a puppet government that would restore Iran to the US-client state status that existed prior to the overthrow of the

Shah Reza Pahlavi.

Behind all the rhetoric of freedom and democracy, the document makes clear that the strategic goal of the United States is hegemony and domination. The Bush administration takes it as a matter of course that the world must be rearranged in a manner that suits the United States. Every other country and region must simply fall in line.

The Latin American people are warned that they must reject the “deceptive appeal of anti-free market populism” with which the regime of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez is identified. Russia is warned that it should not attempt to take advantage of its “geography and power” to undercut American influence in regions “of vital importance to us: the broader Middle East, South and Central Asia, and East Asia.” In another passage, the document proclaims that “Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high priority of this administration.” And, finally, the White House declares that “China’s leaders must realize” that they cannot hold on “to old ways of thinking” if it wishes to avoid a collision with the United States.

The establishment of American hegemony is identified with the unfettered triumph of the capitalist market economy, which the document describes as “the single most effective economic system and the greatest antidote to poverty.”

This is written at a time when the global rates of mass poverty, the direct result of the subordination of the world’s population to the profit imperatives of the capitalist market, stand at unprecedented levels.

There is an element of madness in the document released by the White House. Its collection of lies and logical non-sequiturs is employed in the service of a world-view that is as paranoid as it is reactionary.

President Bush opens this document with an introduction that proclaims that “America is at war.” He fails to mention, however, that the war that he is waging was never declared; that the congressional resolution which his administration invokes as justification for its military operations was procured on the basis of fraud and deceit.

Bush goes on to state that the strategy unveiled in the document “reflects our most solemn obligation: to protect the security of the American people.”

That, as a matter of law, is false; the presidential oath

of office requires that he “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.” This is not a small error. Any military or fascist dictator would agree, without hesitation, that his “most solemn obligation” is to protect the people’s “security”—preferably without the intrusion of legal restraints.



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