

Bush threatens escalation of aggression against Cuba

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25 October 2007

When it comes to profaning the name of freedom, there have been few speeches given anywhere that could seriously compete with the diatribe on Cuba that President George W. Bush delivered at the State Department Wednesday.

Bush used the word 25 times in a brief address that called for the continued tightening of the 47-year-old US economic blockade of Cuba and implicitly promoted violent upheavals, a possible military coup and stepped-up US aggression against the island nation.

The speech was timed to fall between Cuba's recent municipal elections—the first held since the ailing Fidel Castro relinquished the reins of power—and next week's vote in the United General Assembly on a resolution condemning the trade embargo that the US has employed in an attempt to strangle Cuba's economy since shortly after the 1959 revolution. A similar resolution was passed by a vote of 183 to 4 last year, and this time Washington can expect to be similarly humiliated.

Once again Bush demonized the Cuban regime as one that has “denied their citizens basic rights,” “bought generations of misery,” and “offered Cubans rat-infested prisons and a police state.” Not content with these denunciations, Bush assured his audience of State Department flunkies and members of the Miami-based, right-wing Cuban exile mafia: “Cuba's regime no doubt has other horrors still unknown to the rest of the world. Once revealed, they will shock the conscience of humanity.”

The immediate question raised by the US president's speech is: who the hell is he to lecture anyone about democracy, freedom and human rights? If anything has “shocked the conscience of humanity” in the present period, it is an American president who came to power through the fraudulent overturning of an election, has

waged unprovoked wars of aggression—killing over a million people—rejected the most fundamental democratic rights, and defended the use of torture.

As for prisons in Cuba where innocent people are held without charges and subjected to brutality, Bush should certainly know whereof he speaks, as he has run one for nearly six years at Guantánamo Bay.

Deriding Cuba's economy, Bush declared, “Housing for many ordinary Cubans is in very poor condition, while the ruling class lives in mansions.” Apparently, this is the only country in the world where the American president has been able to detect the existence of a “ruling class,” as he presides over an American economy that has produced what is arguably the greatest polarization between wealth and poverty in the world.

The thrust of Bush's message, however, was one of violence. This is hardly a new element in US-Cuban relations, which has seen the abortive CIA-organized Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961, several hundred assassination attempts against Castro and innumerable terrorist attacks. The latter include the murder of 73 people in the 1976 bombing of a civilian aircraft by Luis Posada Carriles, the CIA-trained terrorist who is now being harbored by the Bush administration in violation of extradition treaties with Venezuela, where he is wanted for trial.

Bush's rhetoric invoked armed uprisings and violent repression. “The operative word in our future dealings with Cuba is not ‘stability,’” he said. “The operative word is ‘freedom,’” which in his Orwellian usage means bringing the island back under US domination by force.

He addressed himself directly to the Cuban military and security forces, declaring: “You've got to make a choice. Will you defend a disgraced and dying order by

using force against your own people? Or will you embrace your people's desire for change?"

For more than a year, since Fidel Castro formally relinquished power to a provisional government headed by his brother Raul Castro, Washington and the right-wing exile groups in Miami have been envisioning upheavals and the massive flight of exiles, neither of which have materialized. This political reality lent an air of desperation and seemingly irrational provocation to Bush's speech.

Pointing towards Washington's real aims, Bush announced his intention to set up an "international multibillion-dollar Freedom Fund for Cuba" to "help the Cuban people rebuild their economy and make the transition to democracy." The fund, he said, would be used to give loans to "Cuban entrepreneurs."

A precondition for this fund, he added, was the "restoration of ... basic freedoms." Principal among them was that the Cuban government end its "stranglehold on private economic activity."

The "restoration" that Washington seeks is the US semi-colonial domination of Cuba and its economy. It wants a return to the conditions that existed prior to the 1959 revolution, when three-quarters of the country's arable land as well as the lion's share of its industry and banking were all in American hands.

The growing indications that Cuba may be sitting on significant offshore oil reserves no doubt contribute to Washington's desires to restore the country to what it once referred to as its "backyard."

American capitalism's economic rivals are hardly likely to be lining up to contribute to Bush's proposed restoration fund. Europe, China, Canada and other countries have all concluded major trade and investment deals with Cuba—despite US attempts to impose punitive sanctions on foreign companies doing business there.

It is this fact—in addition to the immensely disproportionate role played by the anti-Castro Cuban exile groups in American politics—that underlies the Bush administration's opposition to any form of gradual political transition in Cuba and its support for a violent counterrevolution. It sees in such an upheaval a means of abrogating contracts and economic relations established between Havana and other major capitalist powers and restoring unchallenged American hegemony over the island.

Cuba's foreign minister, Felipe Perez Roque, described Bush's speech as "a call to violence" and an "irresponsible act" that indicated the American president's "level of frustration, of desperation and of personal hatred toward Cuba." He said that the Cuban people opposed the restoration of US domination and that the predictions of a US-backed popular revolt were a "fantasy" and "politically impossible."

On the eve of the speech, with its general line already all too predictable, Fidel Castro, 81, published his own short essay entitled "Bush, hunger and death."

Castro warned that Bush would "announce that he is adopting new measures to speed up the 'period of transition' in our country, which means the reconquest of Cuba by force."

He charged that the US president was "threatening humanity with a third world war, which this time would be with atomic weapons."

The question posed by Bush's provocative speech is whether, as part of this war, the administration in Washington is preparing to launch a "preemptive" attack on Cuba.



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