

Seven Days in May, 2009

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The past week has seen a series of incidents that suggest a mounting crisis within the American state machine. It is not yet possible to provide a full explanation of these events, but they testify to the extraordinary degree of political tension in official Washington.

On Friday, May 8, the head of the White House Military Office, former secretary of the army Louis Caldera, tendered his resignation, after an uproar provoked by the still-unexplained decision to have one of the two Boeing 747 jets at the disposal of the White House fly low over Manhattan escorted by an Air Force fighter jet.

The official explanation of the incident—that lower-level federal officials wanted to replenish their stock of photos of Air Force One passing over US landmarks like the Statue of Liberty—is incredible on its face. It is equally implausible that no one in the chain of command up to Caldera gave any thought to what effect such a fly-by, evoking memories of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, would have on the population of New York City.

On Monday, May 11, the Pentagon announced that the commander of US forces in Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, had been replaced [See: "Pentagon changes Afghanistan commander as military's crisis deepens"]. Whatever the disputes within the military hierarchy over the tactics and methods to be employed in escalating the war in Afghanistan, the summary dismissal of McKiernan is without recent precedent, and undoubtedly will spark bitter recriminations within the Pentagon.

The denunciations of the Obama administration by former vice president Dick Cheney, Sunday on the CBS News program "Face the Nation," and Tuesday on Fox News, are equally remarkable.

In the four months since he and Bush left office, Cheney has dispensed with the usual norms of

American political life, which call for the outgoing top officials of the executive branch to show deference to their successors. Instead, he has mounted a series of full-throated attacks on the incoming Obama administration's policies, particularly in relation the use of torture and other anti-democratic methods employed by the Bush administration in the "war on terror."

On Sunday, Cheney came close to accusing Obama of violating his oath of office and betraying the United States of America, denouncing the White House announcement that the Guantánamo Bay detention camp would be closed, and Obama's release of Justice Department memos from 2002 and 2005 that provided legalistic justifications for torture.

Citing these decisions, Cheney said: "That whole complex of things is what I find deeply disturbing, and I think to the extent that those policies were responsible for saving lives, that the administration is now trying to cancel those policies or end them, terminate them, then I think it's fair to argue—and I do argue—that that means in the future we're not going to have the same safeguards we've had for the last eight years."

Two questions should be posed here: What does Cheney know? And who does he speak for?

The invocation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks became the all-purpose justification for the policies elaborated by Bush and Cheney in the name of the "war on terror": wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; the creation of a worldwide network of secret prisons and torture chambers; the establishment of a US concentration camp at Guantánamo Bay; and the systematic violation of the democratic rights of the American people, through the creation of a vast apparatus of domestic spying.

There has never been a serious investigation of the 9/11 attacks, nor in particular of the role played by US intelligence agencies, which had penetrated the Al

Qaeda organization and were engaged in surveillance of many of the alleged participants at the time of the attacks. In harping on the dangers of a new 9/11, Cheney may well be speaking in the expectation—or with actual foreknowledge—of some new “terrorist” provocation being engineered by sections of the American state, with or without the knowledge of the Obama White House.

As for who Cheney speaks for, it is not the conservative “base” of the Republican Party, as the uncritical media coverage suggests. This is a man with the closest ties to the military-intelligence apparatus—former secretary of defense during the first Bush administration, de facto chief of the “war on terror” in the second.

It was Cheney who oversaw the Continuity of Government exercises after 9/11 that established a secret government in the proverbial “undisclosed, secure location” where he spent much of his time. His staff supervised the drafting of the infamous “torture memos” that Obama released last month under court order, and Cheney directly participated in and led the “principals” meetings where specific torture techniques were discussed and ratified by top US officials.

Cheney’s attacks on the Obama administration clearly demonstrate the contempt for the American people and their democratic rights which characterizes the American financial oligarchy. At one point in his appearance on CBS Sunday, he told interviewer Bob Schieffer, “What we’ve seen happen with respect to the Obama administration as they came to power is they have moved to take down a lot of those policies we put in place that kept the nation safe for nearly eight years from a follow-on terrorist attack like 9/11. Dealing with prisoner interrogation, for example, or the terrorist surveillance program. *They campaigned against these policies across the country*, and then they came in now, and they have tried, very hard, to undertake actions that I just fundamentally disagree with.” [Emphasis added.]

Cheney grossly exaggerates the actual change in policies by Obama. But it is noteworthy that he expresses particular bitterness over the fact that, to even a limited extent in the course of the 2008 presidential campaign, the American people sought to express their opposition to the anti-democratic policies of the Bush-Cheney administration.

The evident hostility of the former vice president to the American people having any influence over national security policy is symptomatic of the attitude that prevails within the entire military-intelligence apparatus, which regards American elections in the same light as elections held overseas: political events to be manipulated, disregarded or suppressed, depending on the worldwide interests of American imperialism.

One right-wing publication, *National Review*, perhaps inadvertently, called attention to the ominous implications of the Cheney campaign, in a column noting that “the whole presentation gives off a serious Seven Days in May vibe.”

Seven Days in May was a best-selling novel of 1962 on the theme of a military coup in the United States. Its authors were familiar with conflict between the Pentagon and the new administration of President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated one year after the book’s publication.

Under conditions of global economic meltdown, two failed wars by American imperialism, and a deepening conflict within the American state, the stage is being set for new political provocations and eruptions of anti-democratic violence from the US military-intelligence apparatus.

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