

Where are we going, my little one, my little one?

Jim Fetzer

Every American ought to pause and ask where we, as a country, are going. There have been times in our history when we experienced a certain moral clarity about the world and its affairs, which, alas!, appears to be lost amidst seemingly endless mind-numbing warnings of terrorist threats of one kind or another and the necessity to surrender our civil liberties for increased security. What was it about fascism and communism, for example, that made them so diametrically opposed to our own nation's principles?

There appear to be at least three basic issues that defined the differences between the totalitarian states and the democratic nations, which concerned, first, their tendencies toward world domination; second, their government by secrecy; and, third, their control through fear. Our sense of righteousness and moral superiority derived from our own opposition to these practices, which was rooted in our own traditions of Constitutional government, democratic procedure, and the rule of law. But things are now changing.

Consider, for example, the tendencies toward world domination exemplified by Nazis and Communists. Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini were demonized in part because of their willingness to engage in territorial aggression, changing governments at will, and the assassination of foreign leaders. They were condemned in part because of a blatant disregard for the principles of international law, for violating treaties, for substituting the rule of men for the rule of law. But are we as a nation currently doing any better?

The President of the United States makes a verbal attack upon Iran, Iraq, and North Korea--the "axis of evil"--the centerpiece of his State of the Union address and is met with nothing but praise. He subsequently declares the unilateral right of the United States to launch "preemptive attacks" upon other nations if we believe that they are

contemplating actions contrary to our own national interests. His Secretaries of State and of Defense actively campaign against the establishment of a World Criminal Court!

The notion that the US has the right to bring about "regime change" around the world when it suits our interests has taken a hold upon the imagination of Americans to the extent that we seldom ask whether such actions are even remotely in accordance with international law. We abrogate international agreements, including the Kyoto Accords and the ABM treaty, without consideration for their long-term consequences regarding global warming or their short-term implications for destabilizing the nuclear balance.

We are so preoccupied with threats to our safety that we do not bother to ask whether they might be more imaginary than real. Until the State of the Union speech, Iran had been tending toward more moderate domestic policies, North Korea had been exploring peace talks with South Korea, and Iraq had not engaged in acts of terrorism for at least ten years, according to our own experts! Yet George W. Bush would lump them together as potential targets of preemptory strikes and as obvious candidates for regime change.

This administration even discusses plans to introduce Special Forces into Iraq, which is a sovereign nation, and suggests that, were Saddam Hussein to be killed in the process, it would not violate the Congressional constraints on political assassinations of foreign leaders, because it would be done in self-defense. The invasion of a sovereign nation by military force and the execution of its leader are justified as acts of "self-defense"! We seem to have entered an arena where black is white, bad is good, and false is true.

We reserve unto ourselves the right to decide when our national interest is at stake, which increasingly appears to be related to the amount of oil that can be found there. From Afghanistan to Iraq and even Venezuela, the politics of oil trump the practice

of democracy. We have demonstrated willingness to engage in territorial aggression, to change governments at whim, and to assassinate foreign leaders. Precisely why we are entitled to a sense of moral superiority becomes increasingly difficult to surmise.

The administration's behavior at home has been at least equally appalling. Government by secrecy has reached a high plateau when the President of the United States can keep official documents and records out of the hands of historians and scholars at the stroke of a pen; when a "secret government" can be formed in the absence of consultation with even the highest ranking members of Congress; and when the nation's energy policy can be fashioned without allowing the public to simply know the names of those consulted!

The press, it appears, has no serious interest in keeping this nation free or in thinking about the propriety of the administration's actions. That George Bush and Dick Cheney should want to conceal the identity of those who are dictating the nation's policies with regard to energy should come as no surprise, since this is a government of, by, and for corporations, especially companies with names like "Enron", "Harken", and "Halliburton". Perhaps they don't need to tell us who runs the government because we already know.

That Bush should want to withhold records from the Reagan administration that would almost certainly reveal that his father was the point man on Iran-Contra, in which we, the United States, traded arms for hostages with Iran and influenced our own election may be likewise unsurprising. But surely every American ought to react with alarm at the creation of a secret government operating at "undisclosed locations", where we appear to be moving far beyond the practices of even most totalitarian governments.

As though any more evidence were needed, the administration has been apprehending, incarcerating, and interrogating persons, some of whom are American citizens, whom it charges with vague acts as nonmilitary combatants while denying them the right to legal

representation. Indeed, neither the number nor the names of these prisoners are being made available to the public under the guise of undefined threats to "national security". We are abusing and blatantly violating our most fundamental principles of due process.

Not only do we appear to be practicing world domination abroad and government by secrecy at home but this administration increasingly attempts to control the people through the exercise of fear. We have been treated to the "M&M" approach of color-coding levels of threat, even when no specific targets have been specified. The FBI itself has acknowledged that 90% of these warnings were predicated upon rumors and were not justifiable. But they have the effect of increasing levels of anxiety.

The administration has shown a remarkable lack of interest in the causes of 9/11. After all, if we actually knew why the United States was being subjected to attack, it might help us to understand what we can do about it. But that has not been the approach of Bush and Cheney, who have actively opposed inquiries by Congress. In the past, blue-ribbon commissions have been created--by FDR within 11 days of the attack on Pearl Harbor, by LBJ within 7 days of the assassination of JFK. But not here.

Indeed, the day that Arlene Specter, R-PA, reported that the administration did not merely have "vague warnings" or a "series of dots" that needed to be corrected, but actual "blue prints" of the terrorists' plans to attack the World Trade Center, Bush announced his plan for reorganizing the government by the creation of a new Office of Homeland Security. This sweeping change would bring together a large number of functions from the Secret Service to the Coast Guard, but not the FBI or the CIA.

Anyone who actually thinks that agency-shuffling is going to enhance government efficiency does not understand the desperation of the situation we will be in. Coping

with terrorism requires timely actions based upon current information. This entity by design will have no intelligence capability of its own but will be dependent upon the FBI and the CIA for its information. These agencies, by the way, are the same agencies that failed to predict these terrorist attacks or the fall of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, they have been notoriously territorial and unwilling to share information between themselves! By the time the FBI and CIA have figured it out and decided whether or not they are going to share information with each other, much less the Office of Homeland Security, the terrorist attacks they are ostensibly attempting to prevent may have already taken place. Certainly, there is at least as much reason to expect this outcome as any alternative. But the situation is really much worse.

Bush wants the 170,000 employees who would staff this new office to have no civil service protection so they are vulnerable to being hired and fired at will. He claims that this will enhance efficiency, but his true motives appear to be far more sinister. Without civil service protection, those who work in these offices will be vulnerable to threats of firing if they do not cooperate their bosses, even to the extent to having to implement policies with which they disagree and consider to be illegal or immoral.

This is control by intimidation. Bush has shown his hand by specifically asking that "whistle-blower" protections be weakened for this new department. He has asked for the authority to shift funding from one branch to another, thereby usurping the role of the legislative branch in making funding determinations. Bush's "Office of Homeland Security" would become the core of a new "Office of National Security", as we make our way toward a more complete realization of our new fascist state.

Whistle-blowing requires great moral courage and the assumption of responsibility for your actions. It deserves to be encouraged. Bush, however, has taken precisely

the opposite tack, even to the extent of threatening to veto the entire bill if it does not incorporate the specific provisions he desires. That, I believe, would be a good idea, just as the demise of the Attorney General's plan to create a citizen network of spies has temporarily restrained our headlong rush toward totalitarian government.

I am not the only one to believe that Bush and his cronies are taking advantage of a national catastrophe to promote a reckless agenda that encompasses territorial aggression, governmental secrecy, and control through fear under the banner of patriotism. But it appears increasingly difficult to identify exactly what it is that differentiates the United States from the fascist and communist nations we have historically opposed. When we look in the mirror, we may find the enemy is us.

Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, believes that this will go down as the most corrupt administration in the nation's history. He has never felt so apprehensive about the future of our country as he does today.