

## The Militarist Camp in the United States

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George W. Bush has made it quite clear, quite rapidly, that his Administration will govern the United States as far to the right as it politically can. How far can it? To answer that, it is not enough to look at the balance of political forces between the Democrats and the Republicans. Most commentators seem to emphasise how closely the two parties are balanced at the moment in the United States Congress. This is the wrong way to look at it. The fact is that this is the first time in forty years and only the second time since 1932 that the Republican Party has controlled the Presidency and both Houses of Congress. Numbers of bills that the Republicans favoured in the last six years and for which they had the votes in Congress were either vetoed by Clinton or were withdrawn in the face of a threatened veto. The Republicans are today in a relatively strong position, despite the closeness of the presidential election and despite the narrow margins they have in the legislature.

The real political question to look at is potential struggles within the Republican Party. Thus far, Bush has been able to hold the factions together, but can this last? Throughout the post-1945 period, there have always been three quite different constituencies that have made up the Republican Party: the economic conservatives, the social conservatives, and the macho militarists. Of course, many individuals are all three, but most persons give priority to one of the three thrusts. And therein lies the problem for the Republicans.

The economic conservatives are mostly businessmen and their cadres plus high-earning professionals. Their priority at the moment is to reduce their tax burden and to resist any effort to force enterprises to internalise their costs (via ecological legislation). With amazing rapidity, Bush has indicated that he will fight very hard for everything this constituency wants. And they seem clearly to be his personal priority. He may not get everything he wants in tax

reduction. But he will probably get almost everything he wants in restricting environmental protection, since a large part of what is needed to be done requires the action of the Executive branch of government. He has already repealed a good deal of what Clinton tried to put into effect in the closing days of his Administration. And he has shut the door definitively on the Kyoto Protocol. To the Europeans (and Canadians) who are unanimously very upset, he has said unequivocally that the interests of US businessmen are his first concern.

The social conservatives have played an increasingly important role in Republican politics over the last 25 years, due to the mobilisation of the Christian Coalition. Bush has gone out of his way to make serious gestures to meet their demands. He has reinstated the ban on giving any money to any international organisation that indicates in any way that it favours abortions. He has appointed one of them as the Attorney-General, a key post. And he has in effect promised that his Supreme Court appointments would be ones they would favour. But he may not be able to get those appointments ratified. We shall see. However, in matters of new legislation, he has in effect told the social conservatives that they must do the work themselves to get the bills passed, and that, if they succeed, he promises to sign them. But it seems he is not going to spend too much of his own political ammunition in an effort to achieve these ends.

The joker in the pack is macho militarism. In a few short months, the Bush Administration has managed to take on the entire world. Whereas the Clinton Administration seemed to think that US interests were served by calming down conflicts across the world (to be sure, in ways that the US found comfortable), the Bush people seem almost to be stoking up the conflicts. They have said that a lot more has to be done about Saddam Hussein. They have withdrawn from mediating Israel/Palestine, and have shifted from a covertly pro-Israel position to an overtly pro-Israel, anti-Arafat position. They have flexed their muscles with the Canadians and the West Europeans by telling them in no uncertain terms that the United States will proceed with the new missile defence proposals, and have shown little interest in maintaining the old United States-Russian nuclear treaties, saying they are outdated. They have downgraded the Russians from being a potential ally to being again a potential enemy. They seem to be on the point of giving Taiwan the kind of arms they want and which the Chinese have made clear it is their priority for them not to get. As for easing anything on the Cuba embargo, forget it.

And of course, they seem determined to keep North Korea as an active enemy. This last posture has upset the European Union so much that they have sent a special delegation to North Korea, presumably to see if Europe could supply some of the financial assistance that the United States is clearly no longer ready to negotiate.

Romano Prodi, the President of the European Union Commission, has already accused the United States of failing to act like a 'world leader' because of its narrow nationalist attitudes on the question of global warming. Mr. Bush seems oblivious. In his Press Conference on March 29, there occurred the following extraordinary exchange:

Question: 'Mr. President, allies of the United States have complained that you haven't consulted them sufficiently on your stance with negotiations with North Korea, Kyoto Treaty, your deteriorating relations elsewhere. If you strictly read the international press, it looks like everyone's mad at us. Mr. President, how do you think that came to be? And what, if anything, do you plan to do about it?'

Answer: 'Well, I get a completely different picture, of course, when I sit down with the world leaders.'

Bush then went on to say on the carbon dioxide issue that 'we will not do anything that harms our economy, because first things first, are the people who live in America. That's my priority.'

Is it really true that Bush is unaware of the fact that everyone is mad at the United States, or does he not care? This is where the macho militarists come in. This group believes that power talks, and that if the United States doesn't act tough, it will lose everything -- its power, its wealth, its centrality in the world-system. They don't want to settle conflicts; they want to win conflicts. And if it requires a little military action here or there, they are ready and eager. The big question is, are the American people eager or even ready? And even more important for Bush, are the businessmen, who are his basic support group and the group to which he owes his loyalty, ready? Because, although military armaments generate a lot of profits (Shaw explained all this wonderfully in Major Barbara), it is also true that unnecessary wars interfere with capitalist profits in many different ways (Schumpeter always argued this). One of the major reasons why Clinton (and before him Bush the father) improved relations with China was the pressure of Republican businessmen, who wanted to invest and trade there. And it was Republican farm interests which pressed Clinton to ease the Cuban embargo. The militarist wing of the Republican Party runs against the grain of the economic conservative wing (or at least a part of it).

So the macho militarists may find arrayed against them not merely those they regard as their enemies (say, China and Russia) and the major United States allies but perhaps some major transnationals and other large US businesses. This may cause Bush to rein in the macho militarists, because if he doesn't they might escalate the provocations. Is Bush strong enough to do this?

Teddy Roosevelt, unabashed spokesman of United States imperialism, advised 'Speak softly and carry a big stick.' The Bush administration is not following this advice. They are speaking quite loudly indeed. But what is the size of their stick?