

The lunatics are running the asylum

Jim Fetzer

According to the latest news from the front, which is no longer Afghanistan but now Washington, D.C., our nation's ostensible "leader" has decided that the United States of America should adopt a "first strike" policy ("Bush creates 'first hit' policy for national defense", *Duluth News Tribune*, 17 June 2002). This means that, instead of waiting for another nation to strike us before we strike them, we are going to reserve unto ourselves the right to strike them even before they strike us, if that would be in the interest of the United States.

Abandoning the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty as "old fashioned" in a new world that appears to be increasingly dominated by terrorists, who presumably have as their objective the destruction of democracy and freedom in this country, we are going to strike first at any country that has developed "weapons of mass destruction", as the phrase has it, which includes the capacity for conducting different forms of nuclear, bacterial, and chemical warfare.

Of course, since Israel, China, India, Pakistan, Canada, Germany, France, Russia and the United Kingdom possess "weapons of mass destruction" of various kinds, this "new doctrine" may not be quite as simple to implement as it may sound at first blush. Unless we are prepared to make first strikes against these countries--many of which have been our allies and none of which have displayed overt aggression against us in recent times--the whole matter depends upon subjective judgments.

Subjective judgments, of course, are notoriously variable, where any one person at two different times or any two persons at the same time, given the very same evidence and choice of action options, can arrive at wholly different conclusions. That, after all, is what makes them "subjective". Presumably, the decision makers will have the benefit of the nation's intelligence agencies, which sounds fine until you remember that the CIA was unable to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union, much less the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

That means what we are really talking about is making "first strikes" against those countries that may have developed "weapons of mass destruction" that WE THINK intend to use them against us. These countries presumably include those that have been identified as "the axis of evil", Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. The absence of evidence that any of these countries have active plans to attack the United States has not affected this conception.

According to the latest news, the President of the United States has authorized the use of covert actions against Iraq in an ongoing effort to change its leadership from Saddam Hussein. This appears to be more a matter of tying up loose ends from his father's administration than any dictate of national security. Even administration officials have admitted in the past that there are no indications that Iraq has been engaging in acts of terrorism for at least the last ten years.

The situations in Iran and North Korea are similar. Until the "axis of evil" speech, North Korea was on the verge of engaging, not in acts of terrorism, but in acts of negotiation with South Korea in an effort to reduce, not increase, tensions on the Korean peninsula. And moderate leaders in Iran have been attempting, with no help from the United States, to promote more democratic policies in international affairs. That's what makes them "moderate".

Bush has been trying to shift responsibility for 9/11 to Saddam, but without a lot of success. After demonizing Osama bin Laden, after all, it appears to be stretching credulity to the breaking point to now claim that the real culprit all along was Saddam, not least of all because, if that is correct, then what have we been doing in Afghanistan? If what Bush has been hinting is true, then we must have been bombing the wrong target. And if that has been the case here, what assurance is there that we won't be bombing the wrong targets in the future?

Not the least of the problems with this new policy, moreover, is that terrorists do not need states to conduct their operations. Their networks can be scattered around the globe without the necessity for official sponsorship. This means that, instead of waiting for another nation OR GROUP to strike us before we strike them,

we are going to reserve unto ourselves the right to strike them even before they strike us, if that would be in the interest of the United States.

Other countries, however, have interests besides the United States. One might speculate that it would be in the interest of other countries to have the capacity to defend themselves from aggression by other nations, including, alas!, the United States. How could any country, including those belonging to the "axis of evil", possibly be acting in its own national interest if it did not develop nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons with which to defend itself?

Otherwise, they are subject to subordination by other, more powerful, countries, which just happen to include the United States. This appears to be the Catch-22 of the so-called "Bush doctrine". If a country has the capability to defend itself from aggression, including aggression by the United States, which must include nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, then it is a prime target for a first strike by the United States. So other countries must subordinate themselves to the United States or risk annihilation by the United States.

A somewhat more democratic and egalitarian conception would embrace the recognition that every nation has the right to defend itself against military aggression by other nations, including the United States. That other nations are entitled to possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, as long as the United States possesses them, should not be a debatable proposition. It is one thing to possess them and something entirely different to use them.

Codoleezza Rice, the President's National Security Advisor, has suggested that JFK was adopting a "first strike" policy during the Cuban missile crisis, even while she observes that he rejected advise to launch a direct attack upon Soviet missile silos under construction. "They settled on a strategy that actually was pre-emptive", she said, "but didn't use military force to do it", which, she adds, "thereby preserved the possibility for the Soviets to back down".

But Condoleezza Rice appears to be missing the big picture here. The construction of missile sites on the island of Cuba was the event that initiated a response from

the United States. There was nothing "pre-emptive" about it, other than taking steps to insure that more missiles did not reach Cuba. A naval blockade, moreover, is an exercise of military force, which means that she does not understand her own example, not a valuable trait in a national security advisor.

President Johnson allegedly considered a pre-emptive first strike against China in an effort to prevent its acquisition of nuclear weapons. But the acquisition of nukes by China has not led to their use against the United States--or any other country, for that matter. Indeed, as history records, the only nation that has ever used nuclear weapons against another nation is the United States. The country most countries should fear the most is the one country that has actually used them.

The point of MAD (mutually assured destruction) was that any country that used nuclear weapons first would know the retaliatory force that would be launched against them would almost certainly annihilate that country, which turns out to be a pretty good reason not to strike first. If the United States is now reserving unto itself the right to decide when to attack, even though another country has not struck first, the consequences can only be destabilizing.

MAD meant that there was no point in striking first, because it could only bring about your own destruction. If a first strike option now becomes the policy of the United States, there is no longer any point to restraint; on the contrary, the option of striking us before we strike them has to be uppermost in the minds of anyone with nuclear, chemical, or biological capacity. Once the United States learns that you have that ability, after all, you are at risk. Use it or lose it!

Not only is a first strike policy inherently destabilizing, but it forfeits the moral posture of America in the eyes of the world. Suppose this new doctrine were applied historically to the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor. Surely, it could be argued that the "Hirohito doctrine"--that Japan reserved unto itself the right to decide when to attack any country that could threaten Japan, even though it had not struck first--more than justified its own first strike!

The United States, after all, had the capacity to wage war against Japan, even up to the use of nuclear weapons, as history records. So what is there about the Bush doctrine that distinguishes it from the Hirohito doctrine? Merely that time have changed and that, when the United States stands as the world's only superpower, it can do pretty much whatever it wants, bombing other countries and changing their governments to accommodate its national interest.

Reserving unto ourselves the right to attack other countries and to change their governments to make them more accommodating violates the most fundamental principles of international law. Is this freedom? Isn't it virtually inconceivable that a President should scrap treaties that have the force of Constitutional law without seeking the authority of the United States Senate, whose concurrence is necessary for ratifying them? Is this democracy?

The President of the United States has embarked on a series of actions that threaten the welfare of the world's population, which includes, in case you hadn't noticed, that of the United States. We are supposed to be a republic with a government of laws, not of men. But this administration has turned the Constitution on its head and treated this man--who appears completely unfit (intellectually, emotionally, and morally) for the position he occupies, not by democratic process but Supreme Court fiat--as though he were king.

The situation is quite absurd. In a new world that appears to be increasingly dominated by terrorists, who presumably have as their objective the destruction of democracy and freedom in this country, we are going to strike first at any country that has developed "weapons of mass destruction" whenever that is in the interest of the United States. Yet, in adopting this policy, we are sacrificing freedom and democracy, not just in this country, but between nations as well.

As though we needed other indications that the lunatics are running the asylum, this same article reports that, since 9/11, Bush has authorized more spending on groups opposed to Saddam "with a focus on intelligence-gathering and on the infiltration of US Special Forces and CIA operatives". Unless these entities are

composed of Iraqis or other persons of Middle Eastern descent, however, they are going to stick out like a sore thumb against the local population. At least Saddam won't know they are coming unless he reads the local newspapers.

The latest order also "authorizes these forces to kill Saddam if they are acting in self-defense", which is not supposed to violate our own lawful prohibitions against the assassination of foreign leaders. Without suggesting our government indulges in word-play to justify whatever it wants with regard to foreign policy, how would it be possible for an invading force of foreign nationals (our Special Forces in Iraq) to kill the leader of that sovereign nation in self-defense? Do they really expect Saddam to show up and try to kill them himself?

This pathetic exercise in sophistry is meant to mislead and confuse the unwary, which is the American public. What is required for the intelligent conduct of operations against a wily terrorist adversary, distributed among independent cells, is courageous individuals who know the language and who belong in the environment and can infiltrate those cells, which takes years, tact, and skill to develop. Lacking the ability to conduct intelligence operations properly, we simply change the subject. Our actions are clearly corrupt.

No doubt, the administration would argue, if pressed, that, since Saddam is the leader of a nation that threatens the United States, killing him would be an act of self-defense. This involves stretching and twisting the meaning of words and violating our own nation's constraints upon assassination, but who cares? Bush and his minions have always found the words to convince the American people that white is black, that false is true, and that bad is good. Why should they play it straight when they can simply lie and lie again?

Our national interest in recent times has increasingly revolved about promoting the profits of transnational corporations. Can anyone stop us? Not only are our actions violations of international law, they are surely unconstitutional as well.

This man, who might well be called the First Moron, is placing the well-being of 260,000,000 Americans in jeopardy without so much as a Congressional debate.

There is nothing new about military imperialism and world domination. I just didn't expect them to be practiced by the United States.

Jim Fetzer, a former Marine Corps officer, has become increasingly disillusioned with the Bush administration, which, he believes, is the most corrupt in our nation's history. He fears for the future of his country and for the well-being of the world.