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A Whopper of an Inaugural Address **by Sheldon Richman**

We have come to understand that when the typical politician speaks, he ought not to be believed. Nevertheless, in his inaugural address last week President Bush achieved depths of incredibility deserving of a place in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Leave aside that his speech was preceded by his sworn promise to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution.” We already know what he thinks of that oath.

Four sentences into his speech Bush told an amazing whopper. “For a half century, America defended our own freedom by standing watch on distant borders. After the shipwreck of communism came years of relative quiet, years of repose, years of sabbatical — and then there came a day of fire.” One has to wonder what country he is talking about. Does he seriously believe that after World War II the U.S. government was a spectator to world events?

Or by “distant borders” does he mean borders distant from the United States? That would be closer to the truth.

In fact, since World War II U.S. presidents have meddled in every region of the world, overtly and covertly, propping up any dictator, no matter how savage, claiming to be “anti-communist.” Do the names Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, Shah Reza Pahlavi of Iran, General Rafael Molino Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, just to name a few, ring a bell? All were put into power or supported by U.S. administrations. All brought untold misery to the people under their boot heels. The idea that the United States stood on the sidelines during the Cold War and after is laughable, but I guess that is all ancient history. Bush might believe it. But can his speechwriters possibly think it’s true?

As the *Washington Post* pointed out recently, the government’s penchant for allying with unsavory regimes continues to this day, even as the president proclaims his global crusade for what he calls freedom. The *Post* reporters pointed out, “Some of the administration’s allies in the war against terrorism — including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Uzbekistan — are ranked by the State Department as among the worst human rights abusers. The president has proudly proclaimed his friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin while remaining largely silent

about Putin's dismantling of democratic institutions in the past four years. The administration, eager to enlist China as an ally in the effort to restrain North Korea's nuclear ambitions, has played down human rights concerns there, as well."

The *Post* has also noted that a Human Rights Watch report charges that torture and other mistreatment of prisoners occur routinely in Iraq. According to the report, interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's regime "appears to be actively taking part, or is at least complicit, in these grave violations of fundamental human rights." This is the model regime of which the Bush administration boasts so proudly.

Another clue to what's going on is Libya. The administration touts Col. Muammar Qaddafi's decision to give up his quest for weapons of mass destruction. But notice there is no talk of changing that dictatorial regime.

If you believe that the U.S. government has been a passive bystander since 1945, I guess you would think the attacks on 9/11 came out of the blue. But people who've been paying attention know how bogus that claim is. American presidents and their military and espionage forces have been key players in the Middle East for many decades. The criteria they used for picking sides had nothing to do with democracy. As a result, tyrants were long on the U.S. payroll and the Palestinians' legitimate grievances were ignored. The 9/11 attacks were monstrously criminal, but they were not unexpected.

The centerpiece of Bush's speech was this: "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands." With that masterful rhetorical stroke, he pulled an Orwell and changed history, specifically, the rationale for the invasion of Iraq.

Few Americans will notice that the provocative crusade will make us less safe, not more. And, oh yes, it will violate the president's oath to preserve the Constitution.

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