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More Bush Freedom Hokum

by James Bovard

Perhaps no American president has praised freedom as often as George W. Bush. From his declarations that the United States was attacked because of freedom, to the names “Operation Enduring Freedom” and “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” to his proclamations of a “calling” from history to defend freedom, *freedom* quickly became the cloak draping all of Bush’s actions after 9/11.

This past July 24, President Bush celebrated “Captive Nations Week” by giving a speech on advancing his “freedom agenda.” The captive audience at the federal Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center was chock full of bureaucrats, so no hoots were heard and no dead cats were thrown on stage, despite the president’s absurdities. The bureaucrats were buttressed by many limousine loads of foreign diplomats, to add tone to the event.

American presidents have been verbally desecrating freedom for a long time, but Bush is accelerating the downward spiral. He told the audience,

Over the past seven years, we’ve spoken out against human-rights abuses by tyrannical regimes like those in Iran, Sudan, and Syria and Zimbabwe. We’ve spoken candidly about human rights with nations with whom we’ve got good relations, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia and China.

This is from a president whose foreign and military aid have bankrolled many of the world’s worst tyrannies — including Uzbekistan, where dissidents have been boiled alive.

Bush assured humanity,

I have a message for all those throughout the world who languish in tyranny: I know there are moments when it feels like you’re alone in your struggle. And you’re not alone. America hears you. Millions of our citizens stand with you, and hope still lives — even in bleak places and in dark moments.

Bush did not mention Guantanamo in this context, because presumably those people languishing in solitary confinement after years of torture are no longer recognized as human beings by the U.S. government — at least with respect to having any rights that U.S. interrogators need to respect. The detainees at the Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan are similarly without any rights that the U.S. government deigns to recognize.

Bush added,

Today I renew my call for the release of all prisoners of conscience around the world — including Ayman Nour of Egypt, Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, Oscar Biscet of Cuba, Riad Seif of Syria.

But what of the 20,000 Iraqis who are being held without charges in U.S. prison camps in Iraq? The Bush administration has fought the Iraqi government tooth and nail to retain its right to conduct mass roundups and lockups of Iraqis. Simply because the names of such detainees are unknown it is certain that they will never pop up in presidential speeches.

The only thing necessary is for U.S. officials to label someone a “suspect” — and then that person’s “conscience” becomes irrelevant.

Bush declared, “To protect America, we must defeat the ideology of hatred by spreading the hope of freedom.”

Bush has tried to spread the hope of freedom by attacking numerous countries and threatening to attack even more. But freedom cannot be forcibly exported without being subverted at home. Perpetual war will inevitably beget perpetual repression. It is impossible to destroy all the alleged enemies of freedom in the world without also destroying freedom in the United States. The amount of military power the United States would have to acquire and use — the number of preemptive attacks — the likelihood of terrorist counterattacks that would be exploited by American politicians for domestic crackdowns — the perpetual fear that would engulf the American public — all these would overwhelm the parchment barriers bequeathed by the Founding Fathers.

Bush’s crusade for freedom

Bush used his crusade for freedom to sanctify all his power grabs:

Since 9/11, we recognized that we’re at war and we must stop new attacks before they happen — not wait until after they happen. So we’re giving our intelligence and law enforcement and homeland-security professionals the tools they need to stop terrorists before they strike again.

It was unclear whether Bush was referring to the torture instruments the CIA and military interrogators have used in recent years or to the warrantless wiretap program that the National

Security Agency has conducted to track the phone calls of millions of Americans. But his “giving our professionals the tools they need” should chill anyone who has paid attention to the reports from the various secret U.S. prisons scattered around the globe since 9/11.

Bush is encouraging Americans to judge the actions of the federal government solely by his proclaimed goal — freedom — and not by what the government does. But the issue is not whether Bush personally loves or hates freedom. The issue is that he constantly invokes freedom in order to unleash government.

He declared, “We’ve seen that free societies don’t harbor terrorists, or launch unprovoked attacks on their neighbors.”

Since Iraq is not a neighbor, Bush’s unprovoked invasion of that nation does not count. But no matter how many foreign nations he attacked without reasonable provocations, he could repeat such claptrap and still be cheered by certain crowds in Washington.

He declared,

During the Cold War, the nations of Central and Eastern Europe were part of the Warsaw Pact alliance that was poised to attack Western Europe. Today, most of those nations are members of the NATO alliance, who are using their freedom to aid the rise of other young democracies.

It comes as no surprise that such rhetoric plays well with the foreign diplomats who throng in Washington and filch favors and aid for their countries. In reality, the expansion of NATO eastward is one of the greatest follies of the last two presidents. (Bill Clinton was as idiotic as Bush on this score.) It is as if NATO was not satisfied to see the Soviet Union withdraw its troops and abandon its foreign conquests. Instead, there seems to be a vested interest in taunting the Russian Bear. NATO should have been dissolved at the same time that the Warsaw Pact ended. Instead, it had to find new enemies to justify its existence — which was bad news for the women and children of Serbia (which NATO bombed for months in 1999).

Bush picked up the gauntlet — or at least the cant — of Franklin Roosevelt:

Combating hopelessness is in our moral interests — Americans believe that to whom much is given, much is required. So the challenge for America in the years ahead is to continue to help people in struggling nations achieve freedom from corruption, freedom from disease, freedom from poverty, freedom from hunger, and freedom from tyranny.

Why did the president not also promise to give all the world’s babies freedom from diaper rash? The notion that the United States can assure the world’s population “freedom from poverty” or “freedom from hunger” is pure rhetorical self-indulgence. It pretends that the wish — or maybe the whim — of the president of the United States is all that is necessary to change history. But

since the audience for his speech was stocked with flunkies, this absurdity slipped by without proper obnoxious retorts.

Foreign-aid follies

Bush bragged, “We’ve increased the budget for the National Endowment of Democracy by more than 150 percent since 2001.”

But this is simply meddling money for the U.S. government. The National Endowment for Democracy has given grants that helped finance coup efforts in Haiti and Venezuela and tampered with election results in many other nations. The endowment’s front groups massively intervened in Iraqi elections. The U.S. government often seems far more interested in fixing elections than in safeguarding democracy.

Bush hailed his reforms of foreign aid:

We’ve transformed the way we deliver aid by creating the Millennium Challenge Account [MCA], which is a new approach to foreign assistance, which offers support to developing nations that fight corruption, and govern justly, and open their economies, and invest in the health and education of their people. The challenge for future presidents and future Congresses will be to ensure that America’s generosity remains tied to the promotion of transparency and accountability and prosperity.

Once again, this is simply a sham masquerading as a panacea. Practically every president since Eisenhower has announced that he is was going to “fix” foreign aid. Instead, the boondoggles roll on. Bush’s MCA is a pipsqueak compared with other U.S. foreign-aid programs — which bankroll exactly the same type of behavior that the MCA is supposed to prevent. The U.S. government under Bush has bankrolled many of the most corrupt governments in the world, including Nigeria, Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Paraguay, Indonesia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Bush concluded his speech:

Even now, change is stirring in places like Havana and Damascus and Tehran. The people of these nations dream of a free future, hope for a free future, and believe that a free future will come. And it will. May God be with them in their struggle. America always will be.

Ironically, the only people America “always will be” with are those people in nations on Bush’s latest revised Enemies List.

Bush told the audience, “I love what our country represents.” Where else could a failed son of a one-term floundering president pull enough connections to make himself the most powerful person in the world? But Bush’s affection for the worship he receives is another sign of American political degeneracy.

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