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Kerry Hits Nail on Head

By Marjorie Cohn

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We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire.

-George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, Jan. 20, 2004

The [President] doth protest too much, methinks.

-William Shakespeare, Hamlet (III, ii, 239)

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John Kerry cut to the heart of the matter when he said during Thursday's debate with George W. Bush that, "a critical component of success in Iraq is being able to convince the Iraqis and the Arab world that the United States doesn't have long-term designs on it." Kerry cited the U.S. construction of 14 military bases in Iraq that are said to have "a rather permanent concept to them."

Building these bases belies Bush's protestations that he has "no ambitions of empire."

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In fact, the neoconservative cabal that drives Bush's foreign policy has long advocated a strategy premised on worldwide U.S. military dominance. Their blueprint for aggressive war first appeared twelve years before George W. Bush tried to reassure the American people that his war on Iraq was not an imperialist endeavor.

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Under the direction of Paul Wolfowitz, a 1992 draft of the Pentagon Defense Planning Guidance on post-Cold War Strategy explained, "We must maintain the mechanism for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role." The draft went on, "Our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in [the Middle East and Southwest Asia] to preserve U.S. and Western



access to the region's oil." The neocons reiterated this policy in the September 2000 document of the Project for the New American Century, *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*.

Bush and his minions began plotting how to remove Saddam Hussein from power as soon as Bush removed his hand from the Bible after Chief William Rehnquist swore him in as President, according to both former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill and former Anti-Terrorism Czar Richard Clarke. This was 8 months before the September 11 attacks - the date the "war on terror" officially began.

After the U.S. attacked Iraq, Wolfowitz admitted to Vanity Fair in 2003 that weapons-of-mass-destruction was the agreed-upon "bureaucratic excuse" for seizing that country. He also said it would allow the U.S. to pull its troops out of Saudi Arabia and base them in Iraq.

It is not surprising that Iraqis and people throughout the Arab and Muslim world see the United States as an imperialist invader and occupier.

On the day of the Bush-Kerry foreign policy debate, 41 Iraqis were killed in car bombings, 34 of them children taking candy from U.S. troops. According to Farnaz Fassihi, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal, based in Baghdad, insurgents now attack Americans 87 times a day. She describes the situation as "a raging barbaric guerilla war" where the numbers of dead are "so shocking" that the ministry of health has stopped disclosing them. "The genie of terrorism, chaos and mayhem has been unleashed onto this country as a result of American mistakes and it can't be put back into a bottle," Fassihi wrote in an email to friends.

Yes, as Kerry said, Bush made "a colossal error of judgment" when he invaded Iraq.

"I will make a flat statement," Kerry declared during the debate. "The United States of America has no long-term designs on staying in Iraq." With that promise, John Kerry turned the policy of Team Bush on its head.

Kerry was also right on when, responding to Bush's debate mantra that Kerry sends mixed messages, the Senator said: "You talk about mixed messages. We're telling other people, 'You can't have nuclear weapons,' but we're pursuing a new nuclear weapon that we might

even contemplate using."

Indeed, the Bush administration's 2002 Nuclear Posture Review expands options for the preemptive use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states. It identifies Russia, China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Libya as potential targets for U.S. nuclear weapons. Is it any wonder that countries like Iran and North Korea are trying to obtain nuclear weapons?

Also in 2002, Bush withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which had been concluded between the United States and Russia in 1972. This was the first formal unilateral withdrawal of a major power from a nuclear arms control treaty after it had been put into effect.

Kerry pledged that as President, "I'm going to shut that program [to pursue a new tactical nuclear weapon] down, and we're going to make it clear to the world we're serious about containing nuclear proliferation."

The debate transformed the dynamic of the campaign. John Kerry continues to have his work cut out for him. But one thing is certain. Four more years of Bush presidency will produce increasing danger to the United States and the entire globe.

*Marjorie Cohn, a contributing editor to **truthout**, is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, executive vice president of the National Lawyers Guild, and the U.S. representative to the executive committee of the American Association of Jurists.*

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