

Bush at UN Threatens 'Brutal Regimes'

by William Jones

Not since Nikita Khrushchov gave his unforgettable shoe-thumping performance in 1960, has the United Nations General Assembly been subject to such a rant as that by President George W. Bush in his speech to the United Nations on Sept. 26.

While the President's remarks at this year's General Assembly were clearly aimed at garnering support for tightening the noose around the neck of Iran, he mentioned Iran only once in his speech. Bush allowed French President Nicholas Sarkozy, his new replacement for British Prime Minister Tony Blair (who traditionally carried the water in these fora), to take the offensive. In comments to the press on Sept. 25, Sarkozy declared that an Iranian nuclear weapon would be "unacceptable."

What Bush did in his speech, to the surprise of many of those who had come to hear him, was to significantly expand his "axis of evil" list (now redubbed by him as "brutal regimes"), from three to eight: Burma (Myanmar), Syria, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Cuba, and Belarus.

Hypocritically quoting the UN Charter on Human Rights, the "Decider-in-Chief," who brought us the horrors of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, now demanded that the General Assembly rally to support *his* "human rights agenda," otherwise known as "regime change."

"This great institution must work for great purposes," Bush pontificated, "to free people from tyranny and violence, hunger and disease, illiteracy and ignorance, and poverty and despair." Assembly members looked on, some with astonishment, others with a sense of amusement over the irony of the moment. "Every member of the United Nations must join in this mission of liberation." Bush said.

He continued in the same vein: "All civilized nations must work together to stop them [i.e., "brutal regimes"] by sharing intelligence about their networks, and choking their—off their finances, and bringing to justice their operatives." While his primary goal was to sway the UN Security Council in support of tighter sanctions, his words also carried a warning tone for those who might not want to join Bush's crusade.

Bush announced that he was prepared to bring "peaceful change" to Burma by tightening economic sanctions on its leaders and their families, and supporting the efforts of "humanitarian groups"—that is, those "non-partisan" instruments of change, the non-governmental organizations that

have become so effective in overthrowing governments in the recent "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine.

There was also the element of the absurd in Bush's metamorphosis as he called for a reform (really, the abolition) of the UN Human Rights Council, a real bugaboo for the Administration because it has consistently condemned Israeli military incursions in Gaza and into Lebanon, operations for which the United States had given the green light.

But behind all the bluster there was a more immediate goal Bush hopes to achieve: to ratchet up the pressure on Iran from the UN Security Council in order to "turn the screws" on them, all the time trying to build a consensus among U.S. military circles for an attack on Iran.

Bush continued his ravings the next day at a forum called by Sarkozy on the situation in Darfur. With some back-handed praise for the deployment of some 7,000 UN forces to Darfur, Bush complained that this was simply not enough.

During Bush's UN speech, the Cuban delegation walked out of the Assembly Hall, while the Sudanese appeared somewhat bemused by Bush's rhetoric, obviously fully aware of the fact that the U.S. President had included them among the "brutal regimes." The Myanmar delegation didn't seem to pay much attention to Bush's comments, perhaps because, as one commentator wryly noted, the country has long since changed its name, so perhaps the delegates were not aware that Bush was talking about them.

Other speakers, however, responded in their own way to Bush's ravings. South Africa's Thabo Mbeki noted the way the difference between the "dominant" and the "dominated" nations reflected itself in the international institutions. "Because the nations of the world are defined by the dominant and the dominated, the dominant have also become the decision makers in the important global forums, including at this seat of global governance," Mbeki said. "Naturally the dominant and the powerful very often respond positively to agreed programs if these would advance their own narrow interests."

Argentina's Néstor Kirchner, who called for the creation of a new financial system, pointed out that one "model" does not necessarily fit all countries. He noted further that Argentina had opposed Bush's Iraq War and expressed support for the UN Human Rights Council.

Most anticipated, however, was the speech of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who in his somewhat meandering speech, interspersed with apocalyptic references, presented a critique of how the UN Security Council had been consistently hijacked to the agenda of unnamed "arrogant powers." While the U.S. delegation had walked out before the Iranian President spoke, and Sarkozy had conveniently arranged a press conference to coincide with Ahmadinejad's speech, most delegates were intent on hearing from him. The warm reception Ahmadinejad received by delegates both before and after his speech was less a sign of support for him, than of disdain for Bush's attempts to browbeat the General Assembly into submission.