

USA
24.07.04

How George Bush cha

THE PRESIDENT AND HIS MERRY MEN ARE fond of repeating the mantra "September 11th has changed everything". In the last three years this cardinal belief has shaped President Bush's reconstituted vision of the world and of the United States and his mission at this time in history. It has also determined every policy initiative that has come out of the White House in the last three years.

As we approach the coming presidential elections and sit in judgment on his first term to determine whether he deserves another, we must understand as profoundly as possible "What really has September 11th changed?"

What is included in "everything" that the President insists has changed? Has his faith changed? Is democracy not still the best form of government? Is freedom not still a desirable virtue? Is not America still the world's only superpower by far? Didn't people hate, envy and fear the United States before September 11th? Was not terrorism a threat before September 11th? Didn't Al Qaeda exist, threaten and attack America before September 11th?

Really what has September 11th changed? To my mind nothing much has changed except America.

What September 11th has done is to give the Bush administration a *carte blanche* to act recklessly while responding to the fears and opportunities that presented themselves. Fear nurtured by the White House and an understandably heightened sense of patriotism in most Americans have combined to empower the Bush administration far beyond their mandate. They have used the

"everything has changed" slogan as a justification for significant departures from the political and moral traditions of this nation. As far as America is concerned, the mantra has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The "everything has changed" slogan recognises that American foreign policy and security establishment needs an overhaul. Policy errors had spawned anti-American terrorism and failed to arrest its growth and potential to harm the nation. Security and intelligence lapses had allowed the homeland to be attacked as never before. Agreed. Foreign and defence policy as well as the institutional set up that facilitates it need an overhaul. Everyone understands this and recognises it.

But what we do not understand is how does September 11th warrant a fundamental normative transformation of America?

I invite this nation, as it sits in judgment over the Bush Administrations' performance, to recognise how American identity has been changed? Was it necessary? Has this "new America" enhanced our security?

Before September 11th the United States was clearly the leader of the free world. Today it is the single most important cause behind the growing cleavage in the free world. The transatlantic divide is becoming wider and Europe and the United States are moving apart with each new initiative that comes out of this White House. US withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol and the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, its uncritical support for the extreme right wing government of Ariel Sharon in

VIEW



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Ugly America

Israel, and its disregard for the opinion and interests of its allies in invading Iraq have forced the European Union to become a reluctant balancer of US extremism in global politics. Experts of US-Europe relations have expressed serious concern over the future of US-Europe alliance.

Before September 11th the United States was recognised as one of the leading advocates of international law and human rights. Unfortunately the policies of this administration have projected the United States as a major threat to international law and respect for human rights. President Bush withdrew the United States from the International Criminal Court raising questions about accountability of US conduct overseas. An issue that has attracted international censure after the exposure of US soldiers torturing Iraqis at Abu Ghraib. US disregard for international norms was apparent when it refused to adhere to the Geneva Conventions norms on how to treat prisoners of war, captured in Afghanistan and housed in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to escape legal accountability from domestic courts. This was also underscored when it failed to get UN sanction for the invasion of Iraq.

The most recent annual report of Amnesty International accused the United States of damaging justice and making the world a dangerous place by violating rights at home, turning a blind eye to violations abroad and using pre-emptive military force where and when it chooses.

The recklessness that seems to typify the policies of this White House can also be seen in its fiscal policies. Republicans take pride in their party as one

that is "fiscally conservative and responsible"; but since George W. Bush captured the White House the US economy has gone from a surplus of \$240 billion to a deficit of \$521 billion, the trade deficit this year has reached an all time high of \$46 billion and the job deficit remains at 1.1 million. How can we afford this specially since now we are responsible for three nations — the US, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Yes, Mr. President, a lot has changed since September 11th. The United States is a debt nation, feared and loathed worldwide. We are now competing with rogue nations in breaking international norms and violating human rights conventions. A quick glimpse at the Patriot Act will suggest that you have annulled the Bill of Rights — the crown jewel in the American constitution — and to top it all we have overspent at the rate of \$250 billion for each year you have been President.

You have changed America, but has that made it safer? Since September 11th over a thousand Americans have been killed overseas. We now fear Bin Laden and Zarqawi. Your own people tell us, Qaeda is still capable of great harm and new groups have emerged. Anti-Americanism has increased manifold and our allies have decreased in great numbers.

Your policies have made America uglier without making it safer. Thank You, but no thank you. Surely you must miss your ranch in Crawford, Texas; it's time to ride into the sunset cowboy.

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