

Everybody's Big Brothers

By Neil Abercrombie

Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld— two of the last three men in America who want to believe the war in Iraq is not only necessary but going well— have claimed that opponents of continued U.S. involvement are not just wrong, but actually “appeasing” the enemy by raising objections to administration policies in Iraq.

If they didn't occupy two of the most powerful positions in our nation's government, their fulminations could have been dismissed as the deluded ranting of people increasingly unmoored from reality. However, when such comments come from the Vice President of the United States and the U.S. Secretary of Defense, it is incumbent on responsible leaders to speak out.

To begin with, consider who is speaking for the President: the same two who said there were WMD in Iraq, U.S. troops would be welcomed with flowers, Iraq is not a guerilla war, and the insurgency was in its last throes— more than year ago. Their predictive track record alone should make the public skeptical.

More specifically, both men have made three main points to advance their political agenda in the face of the facts on the ground. The first is the scale of the threat posed by al Qaeda, which they have compared to Nazi Germany. The idea that a loosely connected group of individuals motivated by religious fervor, some living in caves in Afghanistan, would be comparable to the threat to the world posed by Nazi Germany – a nation (in 1939) of 80 million people with a large, highly trained, superbly equipped military and enormous industrial capacity motivated by strident nationalism – is historically absurd. And, worse it misses the essential goal of al Qaeda regarding Islam and unbelievers.

Like other terrorist groups before it, al Qaeda is clearly capable of appalling acts of violence against innocent people, but al Qaeda's object is less to “take over a country” as Dick Cheney warns than to drive out occupiers whom they deem unbelievers. Before 9/11, the Taliban ran Afghanistan, not Osama bin Laden. In Iraq, the people killing our troops are Iraqis or Muslim sympathizers whose affiliation is sectarian in origin. Our occupation is creating this terrorist response. Al Qaeda is the beneficiary by default.

Cheney and Rumsfeld claimed that any strategy to get U.S. troops out of the middle of this sectarian war would somehow “embolden” terrorists and be a “defeat” for the United States. This from two of the people most responsible for sending U.S. troops into Iraq who now haven't the slightest idea how to get them out. It is the occupation itself which feeds the insurgency. The only defeat in sight is for the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive war as the first response to political challenges.

No responsible person wants our troops to leave behind a legacy of anarchy or a return to despotism. But U.S. military action at this stage only prevents the Iraqis from determining their own political fate. To date, we have sacrificed the lives of more than 2,700 American men and women and spent almost \$500 billion dollars to further the Bush doctrine. The result is that to achieve Bush's vision of "victory," U. S. forces will have to permanently occupy Iraq, like a colony. The American people do not share this appetite for an endless overseas military adventure in Iraq masked as a central element in overcoming terrorism.

Citing terrorism, Cheney and Rumsfeld also asserted that administration policies are above question because "the nation is at war;" that dissenting from U.S. policy in Iraq fails to support the Commander in Chief and is therefore unpatriotic. They are wrong. Patriotism requires a full and open discussion about Iraq, and unfortunately, it's about three and a half years late. A half century ago, legendary news reporter Edward R. Morrow said, "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. When the loyal opposition dies, I think the soul of America dies with it."

The truth is the Bush Administration has made no effort beyond accusatory rhetoric to truly mobilize the nation for their war. They have continued to call for more tax cuts while letting our military's readiness deteriorate. They have repeatedly refused to expand the size of the Army and Marines because it would admit to a devastating underestimate of the troop strength needed to sustain an attack and the subsequent occupation of Iraq. U.S. troops went two full years without adequate body armor and armored Humvees. The administration and Congressional Republicans have consistently resisted any kind of "full mobilization" because it might jeopardize their domestic agenda of tax cuts for the ultra wealthy and shameless corporate welfare.

Simply put, the voluntary military of this nation is at war, but most of the American people are not. And this administration has been completely unwilling to ask for the public sacrifice required to fully support its own misguided policies.

Richard Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld have a clear agenda: frighten the American people by hyping the threat to preclude any rational assessment, and condemn those who oppose them rather than encourage a debate on the wisdom of the deluded path they have chosen for our nation. They seek to avoid any sort of accountability for the profound strategic error of invading and occupying Iraq by blending it with the terrible events of 9/11. They are shamelessly willing to use both the death of innocents on 9/11 and the selfless sacrifice of our troops in the years that followed to justify the utter failure of the Bush doctrine.

It was sadly predictable that as the November election nears, the Bush Administration would resort to labeling anyone who opposes their policies as unpatriotic. But references to Nazi Germany and equating dissent on Iraq with the "appeasement" of terrorism are sure signs of the desperate nature of their political failure.

If historical references are in order, I suggest George Orwell's *1984* may be far more on point. According to Cheney and Rumsfeld "War is Peace"- endless war with an enemy to be named periodically; "Ignorance is Strength"- draw false conclusions, posture false choices and make false connections.

In conflating criticism of the Iraq war with appeasement of Hitler, Mr. Rumsfeld noted we are witnessing "the rising threat of a new type of fascism." We are indeed! Big Brothers Cheney and Rumsfeld need only look in the mirror to see its face.

Rep. Neil Abercrombie represents the 1st District of Hawaii. He is Ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces.