

**Presentation to West Suburban Faith-based Peace Coalition**  
**September 8, 2006**  
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We are in a titanic struggle in this nation. It is political, religious, scientific, spiritual -- it is a struggle about our identity as Americans -- it may well be a struggle for the soul of this nation. And for those who say nations don't have souls -- what I mean is that profound principle of life that animates our very being as Americans and as faithful people.

I want to define that struggle and say a few things we can do about it.

But first, I want to start with some good news. We're winning. In the battle for public opinion we now have the majority of Americans believing that the war in Iraq was a mistake and that the nation is headed in the wrong direction. It took 20,000 U.S. deaths and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese deaths before public opinion turned against the Vietnam War -- and that was with a draft. We did it at less than 2,000 U.S. military deaths without a draft. We are up against a Pentagon that spends \$1.2 billion a day, a good portion of which is designed for PR and propaganda. We are winning against a president that has a bully pulpit and once enjoyed a 90% approval rate. We are winning the struggle for public opinion in the wake of one of the greatest tragedies in American history, that is as we speak being used once again for fear mongering. .

Our challenge, however, is to turn that public opinion into actions and to look toward the long-term policy changes of this nation. That is why we need to understand the underlying ideological and political struggles going on.

**Christian and political fundamentalism has seized the reins of power in this country.**

Fundamentalism – rigid, righteous, purist, authoritarian, male-dominated – sees the world in absolute black and white terms – and their goal of life more and more is to be raptured up to heaven. In fact, the more hellish the world becomes, the better – the sooner – will come the rapture.

That type of faith is other worldly, individualistic, special, city-on-a-hill mentality. The fundamentalist Christians only lets in the pure, the saved, the believer. No openness to new information or revelation – it has all been said and said literally.

This nation is in the grips of a political and religious fundamentalism that is a rigid, chosen nation, holier-than-thou mentality. Fundamentalists believe that the United States of America is the righteous remnant, so being righteous whatever we do is therefore right.

Bill Moyers says the delusional is no longer marginal. It has come in from the fringe, to sit in the seat of power in the Oval Office and in Congress. For the first time in our history, ideology and theology hold a monopoly of power in Washington. Theocracy – just like in Jesus' day now rules.

A 55% majority of Americans believe in "the Rapture," that before the world ends the religiously faithful will be saved and taken to Heaven; and (36%) say the Bible's book of Revelation is a "true prophesy" that predicts the end of the world as it will happen. True believers will be lifted out of their clothes and transported to heaven, where, seated next to the right hand of God, they will watch their political and religious opponents suffer plagues of boils, sores, locusts and frogs.

Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* writes, "Before they seize power and establish a world according to their doctrines, totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself... **The force possessed by totalitarianism lies in its ability to shut the masses off from the real world.**" Think Fox News, think our mass media, think a literal interpretation of the Bible, think Bush's recent speeches.

Now I want to say that these are decent, generous, even kind people – but that does not make them less delusional or less dangerous when they have their hand on the trigger of nuclear winter.

Fundamentalist Christianity is really a form of Puritanism – that austere, patriarchal, rigid, humorless brand of Christianity that believed they were the chosen people and anyone or anything that got in their way could and should be cut down. Which explains the genocide of the native population.

In 1636 the Puritans massacred a village of women and children and ended up wiping out the whole Pequot nation. Immediately after the massacre Connecticut sent thirty men to

*maintain our right that God by  
Conquest hath given to us.*

The Puritans interpreted the victory as God's sign that this land that they called the New Canaan was theirs. Two generations later Puritan scion Cotton Mather wrote of that day:

*...in a little more than one hour,  
five or six hundred of these barbarians  
were dismissed from a world that was  
burdened with them.*

Do you see reflected in that early Puritan mentality, the same ideological strains that underlie our foreign policy today?

George Bush and his allies have criticized us who are “reality-based.” They say that while we are trying to understand reality they have moved on and created their own new reality, which we try to catch up with and understand. And when that reality is not what they want, they simply say whatever they want – they lie and lie again until a certain percentage of the population takes it as truth. So Dick Cheney months ago can say that the Iraq insurgency is on its last throes. Just a few weeks ago week the Iraqi leaders said it was the deadliest month for Iraqis since the war began and the White House said the violence has decreased slightly.

Osama bin Laden and George Bush need each other. Each is the demon for the other to play to their fundamentalist bases. And each are playing their role to a T.

The problem, of course, is that Iraqis, Lebanese, Afghans are paying the price..

In recent months the numbers of Iraqi casualties - both civilians and security forces - has soared by 51 per cent. The average number of attacks of all types now stands at around 800 a week – that is 4 times the number of attacks in January of this year.

A recent Pentagon report said in the period since the establishment of an Iraqi government in mid-May and 11 August, Iraqi civilian and security personnel have been killed at a rate of around 120 a day. This is an increase from around 80 a day between mid-February to mid-May. Two years ago the number stood at 30 a day.

In July over 3,500 Iraqis were killed – a September 11<sup>th</sup> month in a series of 9/11 months.

So how do we counter this “delusional” and fundamentalist takeover of our nation? We counter it by consistently educating people about the reality of Iraq and the foreign policy debacle that we are in.

One way is to keep representing the human cost of war.

If America were Iraq, What would it be Like?

What would America look like if it were in Iraq's current situation? The population of the US is more than 11 times that of Iraq, so a lot of statistics would have to be multiplied by that number.

Violence kills 300 Iraqis in 3 days, proportionally equivalent to 3,300 Americans. What if 3,300 Americans had died in car bombings, grenade and rocket attacks, machine gun spray, and aerial bombardment in the last three days? That is a number greater than the deaths on September 11, and if America were Iraq, it would be an ongoing, weekly or monthly toll.

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## The Evening News

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This evening the death toll continues with major attacks continuing in the Northeast cities of Boston, Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore. The White House and government buildings near the Mall remain under mortar fire. Employees at the State Department, White House, and Pentagon consider it too dangerous to leave their compounds for visits to the suburban enclaves of Crystal City and Alexandria.

Reporters for all foreign major television and print media remain trapped in five-star hotels in Washington, DC and New York, unable to safely move more than a few blocks, and dependent on stringers to know what is happening in Oklahoma City and St. Louis. Eyewitness accounts and visits to the Midwest take place only when reporters travel embedded with Army or National Guard units.

Guerrilla forces control the heartland.

Every city in the US has experienced a crime wave, with thousands of murders, kidnappings, burglaries, and carjackings. An estimated 275,000 guerrillas control Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, Denver and Omaha. Local police and federal troops are unable to enter the cities. The head of security for Washington, DC was recently assassinated.

In the last two years, the Secretary of State (Condoleeza Rice), the President (George W. Bush), and the Attorney General (Alberto Gonzales) were also assassinated.

The occupation Air Force continues to bomb Billings, Montana; Flint, Michigan; Watts in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Anacostia in Washington, DC, and other urban areas, attempting to target "safe houses" of "criminal gangs". Hospital sources report that the majority of those killed are civilians.

The response

When the National Council of Churches called for a popular march of civil resistance, tens of thousands of believers converged on the National Cathedral to stop the occupation forces from demolishing the historic church in an effort to pursue Christian militia armies.

Commercial air traffic has come to a virtual standstill since the start of occupation. Major roads are extremely dangerous, especially Interstate 95 from Richmond to Washington, D.C., and then I-95 and I-91 up to Boston.

New York City has only four hours of electricity a day. Unpredictable service forces factories to regularly grind to a halt and air conditioning to fail in the middle of the

summer from Houston to Miami. The Alaska pipeline is bombed and disabled monthly. Unemployment hovers around 40 percent.

Several months ago, municipal elections were cancelled and the new president quietly installed friends in the statehouses as governors. Two appointed governors - in Montana and Wyoming - are assassinated soon after taking office and several others resigned after their children were taken hostage by guerrillas.

16.5 million people have been displaced by the violence becoming internal refugees, and many others have fled across the Mexico and Canada borders.

\* Inspired by Juan Cole

Another delusion being hyped by Bush and the team is Islamic fascism. They don't have to define it – the word itself feels like a sledgehammer of violence.

So let's offer the reality. What is fascism? Former Columbia University Professor Robert O. Paxton defines fascism's essence as:

\* "1. a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond reach of traditional solutions; [George Bush saying we are in a "struggle for civilization"] 2. belief one's group is the victim, justifying any action without legal or moral limits; [the Bush administration constantly playing how we were attacked on 9/11] 3. need for authority by a natural leader above the law, relying on the superiority of his instincts; [George Bush calling himself the "decider" and saying that the executive branch is above the law] 4. right of the chosen people to dominate others without legal or moral restraint; [first strike aggressive warfare justified] 5. anti-liberal.

The reality is that our own nation has tendencies toward a Christian fundamentalist form of fascism. And Islamic fascism is a made-up term designed to create this delusional but seeming coherent world of enemies.

So what enemies does Bush see that he really will confront? Here they are (see [juancole.com](http://juancole.com)):

1. North Korea.

2. Syria, population 19 million. Poor, militarily weak. Gross Domestic Product of \$26 bn. {Pentagon spends that in two weeks} State ideology, secular Baath Socialist Arab Nationalism, an ideology founded by Arab Christians and which has nothing much to do with Islam. Would make peace with Israel and the US in exchange for the return of the Golan Heights and an equitable resolution of the plight of the Palestinians.

2. The 1.3 million Shiites of southern Lebanon and the slums of south Beirut (or what used to be the slums of south Beirut), who largely support the Hizbullah Party-

Militia. They only organized a militia after the Israelis kept invading and brutally occupying them.

3. The 6 million Sunni Arabs of north, central and western Iraq. Many are secular Iraqi nationalists.

4. Iran. Population 69 million. GDP per capital \$2,825. Only some 15-20 percent support their religious, populist government. Weak air force and navy. Iran has not launched a war on a neighbor since the late 1700s.

5. Pushtun guerrillas in southern Afghanistan who don't like foreign troops in their country

6. Al-Qaeda and similar tiny terrorist organizations around the world. Often consist of cells of 4-8 persons not in direct contact with traditional al-Qaeda.

As Juan Cole say, "This isn't a coherent enemy, certainly not an Islamic fascist one. It is a laundry list of places Bush would like to control because they have oil or gas, or are key to its development, or have other strategic benefits for the US and/or its regional allies, especially Israel."

Nor is it plausible that "al-Qaeda" could take over Iraq! The United States couldn't take over Iraq. The Shiites and Kurds would never put up with it. Bush doesn't need to stay in Iraq to fight al-Qaeda there. If Bush weren't in Iraq, neither would al-Qaeda be. There less than 1,000 such foreign fighters, anyway.

5,000 al-Qaeda members, probably no more than a few hundred of them actually dangerous to the United States, just cannot justify all Bush's aggressive policies. Military might is ironically a form of weakness. The United States has had to rely on armaments because of failed diplomacy, inability to pull together a meaningful coalition, and hatred for U.S. policies spreading throughout the world.

Christian and Political fundamentalism needs an enemy. Bush is creating this "Islamic Fascist" myth, which neither describes reality nor makes logical sense, but sounds scary enough to rally a nation to more war.

As University of Michigan professor Juan Cole would say, "What is really going on is a struggle for control of the Strategic Ellipse, which just happens demographically to be mostly Muslim. Bush has to demonize the Muslim world in order to justify his swooping down on the Strategic Ellipse. If demons occupy it, obviously they have to be cleared out in favor of Christian fundamentalists or at least Texas oilmen."

Iraq Oil Reserves are 112.5 billion barrels, about 11% of the world total. Experts believe that Iraq has potential reserves substantially above 200 billion barrels – or maybe over 400 billion barrels – worth conservatively \$3.12 trillion.

Iran holds the world's second highest amount of natural gas reserves as well as 15% of the Persian Gulf's oil exports.

The US in 2005 produced over 7 million barrels of petroleum a day, but consumes all of it, and then imports two times that from abroad (using nearly 22 million barrels a day in 2005).

George Bush has called his policies the Long War – In other words, permanent war. Only one Christian response is possible to the “Long War,” and that is the Long March Toward a New Earth. I want to stop here and recognize that to some march might sound too militaristic or too political. I could have said “pilgrimage” or “journey.” I feel compelled to use the word “March” because it rings militant to our ears. Militant is defined as: *“extremely active in the defense or support of a cause.”* Isn't that what Isaiah did – defend the farmers and poor from being pushed off the land? March implies being “extremely active,” rebellious and defiant – taking the streets for the people. It implies strength and mass and movement forward.

But when I use the word “March” today, in addition to the militancy, I want it to resonate with the sentiment of that great Jewish theologian and spiritual guide Abraham Heschel. Heschel said that as he was marching across Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama – when he was marching just weeks after the Selma police had brutally beaten marchers in 1965 on what was called “Bloody Sunday” – he said: *“I feel like my feet are praying.”*

The Long March Toward the New Earth is defiantly spiritual, militantly prayerful. If that seems contradictory to us, we only have to turn to our South African sisters and brothers.

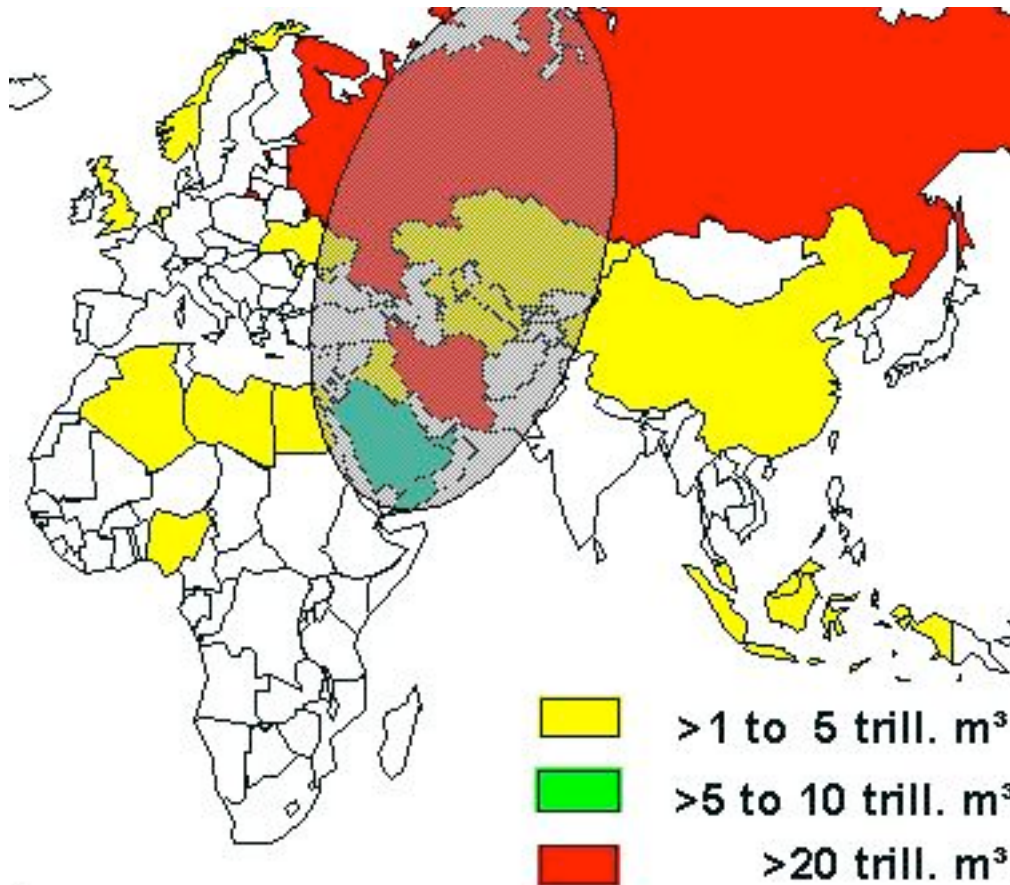
One tactic they used to defeat Apartheid was the *toyi toyi* – part dance, part march it consisted of hopping and jumping, high stepping and drumming of the feet and lifting the arms up and down. It looked as if they were carrying weapons – but their real weapons were their spirits moving their bodies in a common rhythm, a kind of unity of purpose that actually intimidated armed soldiers and riot police.

In this Long March there will be a thousand things to do. At times you will be asked to carry the banner at the front of the march. At other times, we will ask you to help hold up those who are lifting that banner. At still other times, you might find yourself in the back or on the side of the road, binding up the wounds and lifting the spirits of those who are weary or in pain, for this is a difficult march.

We could well be heading into one of those history changing moments best summed up by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney

History says, Don't hope  
on this side of the grave.  
But then, once in a lifetime

the longed for tidal wave  
of justice can rise up,  
and hope and history rhyme.



### Strategic ellipse

with about 70 % of world oil reserves  
and about 65 % of world natural gas reserves