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**The Devil in Dick Cheney
African World
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It is fairly unusual for the immediate past President or Vice President of the United States to attack the standing Administration. Some pundits describe it as a violation of protocol. That is not of particular relevance to this commentary.

Dick Cheney's attack against the Administration needs to be understood at both the political / psychological level as well as at the level of new right-wing politics in the era of Obama. At the psychological level, think about a barking dog. In a contest with other dogs, the one that considers itself the top dog must insist on getting the last bark before any silence is tolerated. Cheney wants the last bark. He simply cannot help himself. This has been true throughout the eight years of the Bush / Cheney administration. When compromise or even silence would have been the proper and more diplomatic course, one could count on Cheney to open his mouth. He could also always be counted upon to twist the facts in such a calm, yet decisive way, that one could not help but wonder about the truth.

In Cheney's recent attack dog appearance in defense of torture it was fascinating to watch him become the defender of the Central Intelligence Agency. One does not have to be a great historian to remember that Cheney was a constant opponent and degrader of the CIA, but when it was convenient, Cheney was able to flip the script and become the defender of his former adversaries. It was also interesting to watch Cheney suggest, despite ALL evidence to the contrary, that President Obama does not wish to talk about terrorists.

Let's add to this Cheney's slight of hand when it came to attacking former Secretary of

State Colin Powell. When asked about Powell's political affiliations, Cheney - very calmly - suggested that he did not even know that Powell still considered himself a Republican. Unless Cheney has morphed from an attack dog into Rip Van Winkle he would have to have known that Powell remains a Republican, but clearly the facts do not matter here. The objective is the sound-bite, the insult and the impression left in the minds of the listener.

Yet the devil's horns do not emerge simply because of Cheney as an unprincipled debater. The significance of Cheney's emergence as the 2009 rabid attack dog revolves around right-wing strategy. From almost the moment of Obama's election, but certainly following his Inauguration, the right-wing has been engaged in an interesting effort at a combination of destabilization along with obfuscation. An interesting example was the way that the right-wing attempted to portray - about 30 minutes after Obama was inaugurated - the economic crisis as now being an Obama crisis. They have systematically worked to twist the actual facts and play to fears, particularly the fears of the white electorate.

Cheney's appearance is aimed at strengthening the stamina of what could be called the "revanchist Right," that is the revenge-seeking Right; the Right that is absolutely furious not only that they lost the 2008 elections, but that they lost to a Black man. The revanchist Right is that segment of the political Right (which actually overlaps different right-wing political tendencies) that supported the unilateralism of the Bush / Cheney administration against the notion of any sort of multi-lateral imperial world domination (more akin to the politics of Clinton and Obama).

Cheney is extremely good at ignoring facts. Actually, Cheney goes beyond ignoring facts; he disputes them or dismisses them entirely. Cheney will never admit that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. He will never cease to imply an alleged Iraqi connection with 11 September 2001. Whether he believes any of these myths is secondary to the political purposes that these myths serve. In each case Cheney has moved to strengthen the authoritarianism of the State; in fact, to shift the democratic capitalist state into a more neo-liberal authoritarian capitalist state. Cheney knows that the key to such a shift is playing upon the fears of the populace generally, and the white, conservative populace in particular.

The matter of torture, then, becomes an excellent tactic in the efforts towards greater authoritarianism. Cheney can argue that the methods used by the USA against alleged terrorists stopped further assaults. The problem is that this cannot ever be proven any more than one can prove the existence of vampires by suggesting that one's consumption of garlic has kept vampires away. The point is that any number of factors can account for the fact that, at least until today, there has not been a further attack on the scale of 11 September 2001.

Cheney's aim is to strengthen the irrationalism on the part of the political Right. He ignores why governments have established treaties over the centuries regarding the treatment of prisoners of war, for example. The treatment of prisoners of war and the issue of torture have little to do with high-minded morals. Rather it revolves around the question of how one's own will be treated as prisoners by any enemy should they be captured as well as whether barbaric treatment can be used to isolate an opponent. The classic example of this, of course, was Hitler's failure to use chemical weapons

during World War II, which was certainly not about moralism, but concerned the potential for various forms of blow-back - literally and figuratively.


Cheney's 'horns' should not be dismissed as representing the anger of a dysfunctional and evil personality. The demonism represented by Cheney is not mainly personal. Rather it represents the efforts of a segment of the Right to save itself from annihilation and to regain the upper hand. Appealing to fear and prejudice has often been a useful instrument to accomplish this. After all, the extreme political Right never has to be constrained by the truth.


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