

A global perspective on beating Bush

By Jeff Cohen & Norman Solomon
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The U.S.-centric nature of American politics often affects the U.S. left. It's hard to get out of USA mindsets long enough to grasp the global implications of decisions made here at home. Yet the effects of U.S. government policies are so enormous across the planet that some people have suggested – with more than a little justification – that every person on Earth should get to vote in U.S. presidential elections. On the international left, no one has more credibility as an unwavering opponent of U.S. foreign policy than Tariq Ali. Raised in Pakistan, he was a leader of Britain's Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the 1960s, and is now a prominent London-based writer and an editor at *New Left Review*. His recent books include "Bush in Babylon" and "The Clash of Fundamentalisms." As progressives in the United States try to make sense out of the current presidential campaign, Ali's perspective on the global significance of Bush's electoral fate deserves serious consideration.

"I travel a great deal, all the continents, and I think everywhere I go there is growing anger – and if one can just be totally blunt, real hatred of this administration – because of what it did in Iraq, the war it waged, the civilians it killed, the mess it's made, and its inability to understand even, the scale of what it's done," Ali said during an August 5 interview on WBAI Radio in New York. "And from that point of view, if the American population were to vote Bush out of office, I think the impact globally would be tremendous... People would say this guy took his country to war, surrounded by these neocons who developed bogus arguments and lies to go to war against Iraq, he lied to his people, he misused intelligence information, and the American people have voted him out. That in itself I think would have a tremendous impact on world public opinion."

Ali added: "A defeat for a warmonger government in Washington would be seen as a step forward. I don't go beyond that, but there is no doubt in my mind that it would have an impact globally."

Of course, John Kerry has been eagerly touting his own brand of militarism, a fact that's very much on the minds of U.S. progressives. Interviewing Ali on the radio broadcast, Left

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Business Observer editor Doug Henwood raised the point: “A lot of people in the American left in particular, such as it is, are saying that Kerry’s not much better, that Bush is really pretty much the same old thing, that he’s an imperialist and a warmonger just like all his predecessors and there’s not all that much difference, and Kerry – who opened his acceptance speech with a military salute – would be just pretty much more of the same. What do you say to that?”

“We’re talking about the government which took the United States to war,” Ali replied. “If Gore had been elected president, he would probably have gone to war on Afghanistan if a 9/11 had happened, but personally I doubt whether he would have gone to war on Iraq. This is very much a neocon agenda, dominated by the need to both get the oil, as we know, but also to appease the Israelis, who’ve been very keen on this war. This particular war in Iraq is very much something this particular administration went for. So a defeat of this administration would be a defeat of the war party.”

Speaking from an international perspective, Ali doesn’t hesitate to challenge the odd notion that worse could actually be better: “There is an argument ... going around in the American left, which I read, which is the following. It goes like this – ‘Yeah, but Bush has really united the world against the United States empire, and that’s a good thing.’ But I do not like arguments like that.”

Ali went on: “This is an argument you can have from the luxury of your sitting room or kitchen in the United States, but the fact is that this particular regime has taken the lives of at least 37,000 civilians in Iraq as a result of the war, not counting any members in the old army of Iraq. Thirty-seven thousand civilians have died, and for them it’s not an abstract question... So a defeat for Bush would certainly be greeted in many parts of the world as a small victory. This doesn’t mean that one has any illusions about Kerry. I certainly don’t... I’m pretty disgusted by the militarism at the Democratic convention.... But despite all that – and we know what the Democrats are, and we know the wars they’ve waged – our option at the moment is limited. Do we defeat a warmonger government or not? Do we try our best to do it?”

As Ali put it, “I think there is a lot to be done at the present time. And my own feeling is that a defeat for Bush would create a different atmosphere, let’s say in American political culture, to show it can be done. And it will make people much more critical...”

Tariq Ali’s analysis comes at a crucial time for the American left.

On the one hand, we’re being encouraged by liberals to pretend that the Kerry-Edwards ticket is some kind of progressive dream team – a fanciful notion that doesn’t become any more true no matter how many times it’s reiterated. On the other hand, there’s a dangerous ultra tendency to say that it’s no big deal whether we get four more years of Bush or four

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years of Kerry in the White House. Meanwhile, Ali has articulated a key question we must answer with our actions: “Do we defeat a warmonger government or not?”

Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon have co-authored three books together critically analyzing corporate media. Cohen was communications director of Kucinich for President in 2003. Solomon’s latest book is “Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn’t Tell You,” now available as a free download at coldtype.net