

Gingrich on the Campaign Trail?

By Jim Lobe | September 19, 2006

Nearly two years before the 2008 presidential election, Newt Gingrich, the former Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, is trying desperately to grab the national spotlight by declaring that he would be a lot tougher than George W. Bush in prosecuting what he calls “World War III.”

In the latest in a series of recent presentations and writings, last week in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) Gingrich called for, among other things:

NATO to “clear out any Taliban forces” in Waziristan if Pakistan fails to do so.

Washington to “take whatever steps are necessary” to force Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia to stop the flow of weapons, money, and people into Iraq.

The United States to help “organize every dissident group in Iran” with the goal of replacing the regime, failing which, “We certainly have to be prepared to use military force.”

The “end” of the North Korean regime if it ships nuclear weapons or material.

Congress to immediately pass legislation “that recognizes that we are entering World War III and serves notice that the United States will use all its resources to defeat our enemies—not accommodate, understand, or negotiate with them, but defeat them.”

Gingrich’s remarks, which earned a rave review in the neo-conservative *Weekly Standard*, came in the context of early jockeying in the 2008 presidential primary, and that is what makes them notable. The leading—albeit unannounced—Republican candidates include Gingrich, as well as Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN), Sen. George Allen (R-VA), and Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney.

Of these, McCain, the neoconservative favorite until his defeat by Bush in the 2000 Republican presidential primaries, is the most popular. Both McCain and Giuliani are popular with the electorate as a whole. However, McCain’s occasionally maverick ways—such as his support for reductions of greenhouse gas emissions and his efforts to ban torture and other abuse against terrorist suspects—have created tensions with the right-wing core of the party.

According to the latest polls, Gingrich, who is widely credited with masterminding the stunning 1994 Republican

landslide that gave the party control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years, ranks third behind Giuliani and McCain. Gingrich appears to be making steady progress among the Republican faithful, who have, according to pollster Frank Luntz, forgotten the many controversies he generated during his four-year tenure as Speaker.

After taking responsibility for Republican losses in Congress in 1998, Gingrich resigned as Speaker and as a representative, but he has remained politically active as a senior fellow at AEI, an advisory board member of the pro-Israel Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, and a member of the Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld’s Defense Policy Board (DPB).

In all of these capacities, he, along with fellow DPB members Richard Perle and James Woolsey, has been an outspoken champion of hardline administration hawks and a constant critic of the State Department, which he has accused of disloyalty to the Bush agenda.

Indeed, in mid-April, 2003, just one week after U.S. forces had consolidated control of Baghdad after the invasion, he gave a speech in which he charged that the department was undermining Washington’s military victory by endorsing a high-level dialogue with Syria and the “Road Map” developed by the Quartet (United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations) for reviving peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

His remarks, which were delivered at AEI, were so extreme that they provoked blunt-speaking Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to give *USA Today* one of the most memorable early quotes of the war: “It’s clear that Mr. Gingrich is off his meds and out of therapy.”

Although both more Churchillian and alarmist in tone, Gingrich’s recent AEI speech (titled “Lessons from the First Five Years of War: Where Do We Go From Here?”) was very much in the same vein in that it included attacks on the State Department, the news media, and even Harvard University. Harvard’s recent hosting of former Iranian

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President Mohammed Khatami should be “openly compared to hosting [Nazi propaganda chief Josef Goebbels or SS commander Heinrich Himmler in 1937,” Gingrich spumed.

While praising Bush for his “courage and determination” in pursuing his war on terror, Gingrich implicitly criticized the president for failing to communicate what he sees as the potentially cataclysmic threats posed by “an emerging anti-American coalition” consisting of al-Qaida, Iran, Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia and not doing enough to counter them.

Bush’s “strategies are not wrong, but they are failing,” Gingrich said, in part because “they do not define the scale of the emerging World War III, between the West and the forces of Islam, and so they do not outline how difficult the challenge is and how big the effort will have to be.”

“... We have vastly more to do than we have even begun to imagine,” he stressed, larding his text with quotes by Iranian officials, “Islamic Fascists,” and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Gingrich warned against “appeasement” and “utopian elites [who] suffer from ... denial of near-psychotic proportions.”

Gingrich’s solutions were classic neoconservative. To counter such threats, Gingrich says the United States must begin at home by gaining “absolute control of our borders” and “decisive port security,” adopting a “one war” model in which everything in a country is “done in a coordinated, integrated manner with the same precision and drive in the civilian as in the military agencies.” There must be major increases in the military and intelligence budgets, and the United States must develop a “strategic energy policy which is explicitly aimed at making the Persian Gulf and the dictatorships less wealthy and less important.”

In Afghanistan, NATO should remove “any Taliban” in Pakistan if Islamabad cannot get the job done. According to Gingrich, NATO should also provide a major economic aid program to reduce the Afghan economy’s dependence on heroin production that would not be based on what he sees

as “hopelessly obsolete” State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) rules.

In Iraq, Gingrich wants to revitalize the economy by asking U.S. corporations to buy “modest amounts of light manufacturing from Iraq” and by creating a new U.S. agency, other than USAID, to administer expanded public works programs. He called for improving security by doubling the size of the Iraqi military and police forces in order to get a “much larger forces-to-bad-guys ratio than we currently have planned,” and wants also to put Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia “on notice” against any interference in Iraq.

In Iran, which he described as “a dictatorship dedicated to Islamic Fascism and ... a mortal threat to our survival,” Gingrich called for a regime-change via support for all dissidents and diplomatic and economic sanctions and military force, if necessary. “This strategy means no more visas for Iranian leaders” and for UN sanctions against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for “threatening to wipe Israel from the face of the earth.”

“If we do not stand up against a holocaust-denying, genocide-proposing, publicly self-defined enemy of the United States, why should we expect anyone else to do so?” he asked.

Washington must also pursue regime change in Pyongyang, according to Gingrich, who declared that in his view, “Any effort by North Korea to ship nuclear weapons or material anywhere will be a casus belli and will lead to the end of the regime.”

It was “vintage Gingrich: brassy, confrontational, direct, polarizing, articulate, harsh disarming, and charismatic,” wrote the *Standard’s* Matthew Continetti. “His rivals should take note. The first speech of the 2008 presidential campaign was delivered on the fifth anniversary of September 11, 2001.”

Jim Lobe is a Right Web contributing writer and the Washington bureau chief of the Inter Press Service, which published an earlier version of this article.

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