

When racism is rational

Contributed by Victor Tan Chen
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There's a great piece by Thomas Walkom in the Toronto Star about how the climate of fear that the Bush administration has exploited since the September 11 terrorist attacks is itself to blame for the hysteria over the sale of six ports to an Arab, state-owned company based in Dubai – a hysteria that Bush is struggling mightily now to control, in defiance of many members of his own party.

Irony is a constant in politics. Since Sept. 11, 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush has deliberately defined the world in the black-and-white, us-versus-them language of his war on terror. Now, the rhetorical demons he so assiduously promoted are coming back to bite.

The fears surrounding the port deal are misinformed, even "racist," Walkom says. There is no compelling security reason for blocking this firm from purchasing the ports:

The American president points out, correctly, that the arch-conservative and profoundly undemocratic U.A.E. government is a staunch U.S. ally.

His defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld notes "also correctly" that terrorists can come from anywhere, including the U.S. and Britain. Why condemn an entire nation because a few of its citizens made the wrong choice?

The editors of The Wall Street Journal, who find the entire episode distasteful, note that security at these ports will continue to be handled by the U.S. government.

The only effective difference is that profits made by running the ports will flow to princelings in Dubai rather than capitalists in the City of London.

But among Americans, none of this seems to matter. A citizenry whose fears have been so successfully exploited by this administration remains unconvinced.

Over the past five years, Bush has defined his presidency by his willingness "better yet, eagerness" to overturn or ignore laws that he feels stand in the way of "getting the terrorists." Now his fans must wonder why Bush has suddenly grown soft. How can he defend the rights of foreigners to do business while endangering the lives of Americans?

The criticism of the port deal may not be justified, but for the many millions of Americans whipped into an eschatological frenzy thanks to the constant terror alerts and Iraqi roadside bombings and bin Laden terror tapes, it makes perfect sense. In the America that Bush built, racism is indeed rational.

"Victor Tan Chen