

Katrina, foreign policy tied to one another

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
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So much has already been written concerning the aftermath of the devastating Hurricane Katrina. The racism, classism and the incompetence of the Bush administration have been displayed for the entire world to see. The response of much of the world has been one of sadness matched with horror.

Few of us here in the USA have paid much attention to how the rest of the world has been viewing the Bush administration's response to this disaster. To a great extent, this is understandable given that we are trying to figure out what to make of it ourselves. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note a few things.

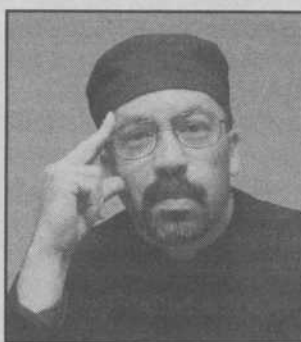
For one, there was an almost instantaneous international response of concrete support for the victims of the tragedy. Countries from Sri Lanka to Cuba have offered assistance to the Bush administration in responding to the disaster. It is particularly remarkable that prior to the Bush administration mobilizing any significant support for the Gulf Coast victims, the Cuban government extended an extraordinary offer of doctors and medicines. Cuba has a great deal of experience with hurricanes and one of the reasons for their early response to Katrina was their recognition of the immense danger of the spread of disease in the aftermath of the hurricane. This assistance

was offered, it should be noted, by the Cubans despite the rabid hostility that the Bush administration has toward the Havana government of President Castro.

Yet, despite offers of help, the Bush administration has been, at best, sluggish in its response. Bush's spokespersons, in a very convoluted fashion, acknowledged that the Cubans had made the offer, but could never seem to explain the U.S. response. For the U.S. to accept the Cuban offer might call into question the aggressive posture that the Bush administration has taken toward overthrowing the internationally recognized government of the Cuban people.

Thus, instead of accepting the badly needed assistance in the midst of the greatest natural catastrophe in the U.S. in the last 100 years, the Bush administration would rather play politics with the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Other countries have found themselves wondering, as well, when will the Bush administration reply to their offers; what is taking the administration so long to respond to the extended hand of support? It is as if the Bush administration is ashamed to accept the



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support of others. It is also as if they fail to appreciate the urgency of the situation on the Gulf Coast, reminding all of us of the sources of the outrage expressed by rapper Kanye West at the NBC Katrina Fundraiser in the aftermath of the storm.

In addition to shock and sadness, the reaction of the global public includes outrage at the failure of the Bush administration to offer a timely and substantive response to the catastrophe.

This contrasts with both the rapid international response to the 2004 tsunami catastrophe in Asia (where the Bush administration was, once again, quite slow in responding), as well as contrasts with the speed and magnitude of the Bush administration's illegal war and occupation of Iraq. Thus, for many of the world's peoples, the Iraq war and the Katrina disaster are very much linked. For us here in the U.S., there should also be a link that is drawn.

At the cost of nearly \$1 billion a week, the U.S. continues its occupation of Iraq. We are fast approaching the 2,000 mark in terms of the number of U.S. troops killed in this senseless and illegal war. The Iraqi dead num-

ber at least in the tens of thousands, but for some reason, no one seems to want to or is able to keep an accurate count. Resources and technology abound for the Iraq occupation, yet, in New Orleans, there was not even an air drop of supplies to the stranded survivors at the Superdome or on the freeway overpasses that had been turned into islands in a toxic lake.

The global press has increasingly been asking questions about the priorities of the Bush administration, and so should we. How can a sane person rationalize allowing thousands to remain stranded for days without food and water, and, indeed, without hope, while it continues to pound the drum about Iraq and homeland security? Is not protecting the people of this country against the ravages of nature about homeland security?

Once again, the credibility of the Bush administration, and I dare say, the credibility of the USA, has taken another nosedive in the court of global public opinion. From reading the headlines of newspapers from across the planet, it is clear that we are being asked a simple question: It appears that there is a light on in the White House, but is anyone at home?

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Reid

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old appeals court judge and former lawyer in two Republican administrations, to succeed the late William H. Rehnquist.

Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., announced he will vote for confirmation, and Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., edged toward an endorsement, as well. Roberts also commands overwhelming if not unanimous support among the Senate's 55 Republicans.

"After reviewing Judge John Roberts' credentials and meeting with him privately, I have found that he meets my criteria for judges. And that is: only the brightest, most objective minds shall serve on the bench," said Baucus, who added the decision was not an easy one.

"I've not seen anything that would cause me to vote against" Roberts, said Nelson, who is seeking reelection next year in Repub-

lican Nebraska and often crosses party lines to support Bush's legislative proposals.

Reid had successfully urged fellow Democrats to refrain from taking positions on the appointment until after the completion of last week's confirmation hearings and the regular Tuesday closed-door meeting of the rank-and-file.

"This is a very close question for me. But I must resolve my doubts in favor of the American people whose rights would be in jeopardy if John Roberts turned out to be the wrong person for the job," he said.

Referring to publicly released memos that date to Robert's tenure as a Reagan administration lawyer, Reid said they showed the young attorney "played a significant role in shaping and advancing the Republican agenda to roll back civil rights protections."

"No one suggests that

John Roberts was motivated by bigotry or animosity toward minorities or women," Reid added.

"But these memos lead one to question whether he truly appreciated the history of the civil rights struggle. He wrote about discrimination as an abstract concept, not as a flesh and blood reality for countless of his fellow citizens."

Reid also said Roberts followed a "disingenuous strategy" at the confirmation hearings of suggesting that the views in the memos were not his own.

Democrats have tried without success to persuade the administration to release documents from Roberts' tenure as principal deputy solicitor general, a senior Justice Department job he held in the administration of

the first President Bush.

"The failure of the White House to produce relevant documents is reason enough for any senator to oppose this nomination. The administration cannot treat the Senate with such disrespect without some consequences," Reid said.

Reid's remarks pleased leaders of women's organizations and civil rights groups who outlined the case against Roberts at a closed door meeting with the Democratic leader last week. According to participants in the meeting, they also said they wanted to run up as many votes against Roberts as possible, in part, to try and show Bush he would be risking a fierce fight if he named a more conservative nominee than Roberts to replace Sandra Day O'Connor.

Roberts

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...In terms of strategizing, we don't even know whether we will have to take a position or not," Shaw said.

Meanwhile, veteran civil rights leaders — in a strategy of their own — took the front lines last week, appearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee to oppose Roberts.

"The stakes are higher than ever. We cannot afford to elevate an individual to such a powerful, lifetime position, whose record demonstrates such a strong desire to

reverse the hard-won civil rights gains that so many sacrificed so much to achieve," said U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) before the committee.

"We cannot afford to go back. We must go forward to the creation of one America."

Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, a coalition of more than 180 socially active groups, said, "The test is whether Judge Roberts has demonstrated [that] he is committed to the fundamen-

For his part, Reid urged the president to proceed slowly on filling O'Connor's seat, adding, "I don't think he needs to do it in the next couple of weeks, that's for sure."

Beyond that, Reid said he would view it as a "poke in the eye with a sharp stick" if Bush were to nominate any of the 10 appeals court nominees that Democrats blocked in recent years, including some who were later confirmed.

He declined to say whether Attorney General Alberto Gonzales falls into the same category.

One White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said at least some of the contenders on the president's list fall into the category that would draw Reid's ire.

Dana Perino, White House deputy press secretary, suggested Reid was changing the standard for judging nominees to the Supreme Court.

"In confirming recent nominees like Ginsburg, Breyer and Scalia, senators based their decisions on the qualifications of the nominee, not on whether or not the person doing the nominating was in their same party. The public does not want to see the Supreme Court become an extension of partisan politics," Perino said.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was confirmed on a vote of 96-3 in 1993; the 1994 vote on Stephen Breyer was 87-9 and Antonin Scalia was confirmed 98-0 in 1987. Rehnquist was confirmed as chief justice in 1986 on a vote of 65-33.

Clingman

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we must do to protect ourselves from utter devastation and total dependence?

As I pray for my brothers and sisters in New Orleans, I also pray the rest of us will do what must be done. Take charge of our resources; educate our children and build our communities. Believe me, brothers and sisters, the handwriting on the wall is not a forgery. Read it and heed it.

May God bless the people of the Gulf Coast, and may He also bless those who are assisting them.

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tal principles on which our country was founded and whether his vision of America matches the expectations of mainstream Americans. Judge Roberts has failed this test."

LDF Senior Staff Attorney Leslie Proll said fighting is they key strategy. She noted how Senate Democrats stopped two consecutive Nixon nominees to the high court, Harold Carswell and Clement Haynesworth.

"They were both defeated because the civil rights community rose up," said Proll,

who lobbies on Capitol Hill.

But this case is different. Some Democrats may support Roberts.

Even liberal Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein (Calif.) and Charles E. Schumer (N.Y.) have said they are undecided about their Roberts vote.

"It's going to be impossible to defeat him unless he turns out to be an ax murderer, and there's been no evidence of that presented," Berry scoffs. "It's up to the civil rights groups to make the best case they can make."