

## 'Axis of evil' haunts Bush

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A SOMEWHAT subdued George W. Bush delivered his sixth State of the Union address last week.

It is in some ways significant as Bush is a lame duck (Republican) president facing for the first time a Democratic Congress in 12 years.

No doubt, it is among the toughest yet since the days of Richard Nixon in 1974, what with Senator Hillary Clinton's well-timed announcement about her interest in the 2008 presidential race.

All said and done, it could not match the arrogance with which he delivered the 2002 address, five years ago, on Jan 29, 2002.

It was then that the term "axis of evil" was introduced to describe countries accused of sponsoring what he called "terrorism".



At least one of them was supposedly harbouring "weapons of mass destruction" which led to an illegal "war" barely a year after that.

Since then, "axis of evil" has become a convenient label applied to countries that fall out of favour with Uncle Sam.

Tracing back the origin of the infamous term leads to some interesting notion of how the US posture for the Middle East was created.

An excerpt of the 2002 speech says: "States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world."

"By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred."

Reportedly, the original phrase chosen was "axis of hatred", but was substituted with "axis of evil" to suit the "theological language" used by the president since the 9/11 tragedy.

Indeed, such language has been closely identified with the president, especially his allegedly favourite psalm, Psalm 27, talking about being under attack by evildoers, as explained by his former speechwriter in an Internet interview posted by PBS in 2004.

It was in response to an instruction "to provide a justification for a war" (in particular with Iraq). The speechwriter coined the phrase "axis of hatred" based on some Second World War nostalgia.

This was later changed to "axis of evil" so as to make it sound more "theological". This was confirmed by the former speechwriter.

This incident took place in the course of refinement of the address, which he thought was a "huge" improvement.

As early as 2003, an editor and founder of the evangelical magazine, Sojourners, noted (PBS, Nov 13, 2003) that the use of religious language and hymnology in the president's speeches is "often misused or often put in a different context and the meaning changed".

It was revealed that at one point, when faced with the dilemma of how to describe who the terrorists were, and what they were, Malaysia was unjustifiably implicated.

According to the president's former speechwriter, the president could not use the label "Middle Eastern terrorists, because many of them were from Malaysia, which is not part of the Middle East".

"So he needed a phrase that conveyed his feelings about them and his intentions without locking himself into any specific diagnosis of them."

So Malaysia was fortunate enough not to be drawn into Bush's "axis of evil".

Author Vernon Coleman (2002), in his book *Rogue Nation*, showed that the US is no different than so-called "rogue states" because it has the biggest stocks of weapons of mass destruction, and is the nation most likely to use those weapons (as in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945).

The 2006 Angus Reid World Poll conducted in November for *Maclean's*, a Canadian magazine, found that Bush is not among today's most admired leaders.

So five years on, the "axis of evil" seems to have taken a life of its own, engulfing the US president along with it.

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