



# Bush whacked in debate on moral authority

Paul Bibby

AMERICA is on the cusp of a critical moment in its political history, but is it already too late for the once-great nation to resurrect its place in the world?

The audience which packed into the city recital hall for the final IQ<sup>2</sup> debate of 2008 last night certainly thought so.

Having listened to some of Australia's foremost political thinkers in an absorbing debate about the superpower's fall from grace, a majority voted in support of the proposition that America has lost its moral authority.

Owen Harries from the Lowy Institute for International Policy summed up the feelings of many in the audience with a cutting four-word description of America's recent behaviour: "ar-

rogance, deceit, ruthlessness, incompetence".

"Americans have always prided themselves on being a 'can do' nation but the Bush Administration has shown a remarkable capacity to steal defeat from the jaws of victory," Professor Harries said.

"Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, the financial crisis are a stain that cannot be washed away."

Iraq was a recurring theme in the debate. The former NSW premier Bob Carr brandished pictures of the atrocities at Abu Ghraib prison and asked how such a government could be considered moral.

The former Labor leader's theatrics were the icing on the cake after the *Herald's* chief correspondent, Paul McGeough,

hammered the point home.

"America claimed that the war in Iraq was a defence of its ideals, but its conduct of that war was an abandonment of those ideals," McGeough said.

Speaking for the negative, Geoff Garrett, a political scientist at the US Studies Institute, turned the tables on Mr Carr, who had blamed America for the global financial crisis.

"I think it is a bit disingenuous to blame America and Wall Street for the financial crisis," Professor Garrett said.

"There were other institutions around the world that were doing much the same, including, Mr Carr, the Macquarie Group."

Mr Carr is a consultant to Macquarie Bank.

## intelligence<sup>2</sup>

### THE TOPIC: America has lost its moral authority

#### Affirmative

- "When Dick Cheney said America was going to the dark side it was not a figure of speech."

Paul McGeough

- "Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib will be terms of shame in American history for years to come."

Owen Harries

- "This is an administration of men who say, 'in Texas real men eat carbon'."

Bob Carr

#### Negative

- "How many other countries in the world are ready to elect a member of a minority as the head of its country?"

Geoff Garrett

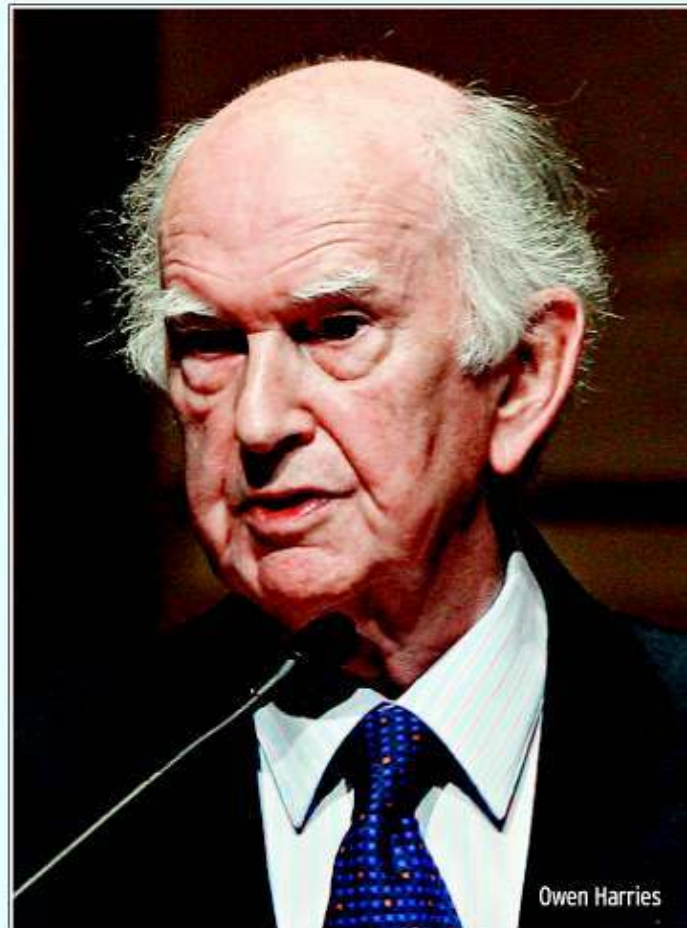
- "Does anyone want the defence of the free world to rest in the hands of the French?"

Mark Carnegie

- "Asia still really likes America."

Martine Letts

Affirmative	Audience vote before the debate	Negative
77%	10% undecided	13%
Affirmative	Vote after the debate	Negative
59%	4% undecided	37%



Owen Harries