

In wake of London arrests: Another attempt to terrorize the American people

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Before all but the sparsest details of the alleged terror plot to blow up trans-Atlantic flights have been revealed, the American people are being subjected once again to a campaign of fear-mongering and intimidation directed from the White House.

The aim of this propaganda drive, aided and abetted by the media, is to portray opposition to the war in Iraq and to the policies of the Bush administration in general as tantamount to collusion with or capitulation to terrorism and mass murder.

The administration did not even wait until the arrests were announced, but got a head-start in the form of a loathsome statement issued by Vice President Dick Cheney, who staged a rare teleconference with the media Wednesday to deliver his verdict on the Democratic primary defeat of incumbent Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut. The three-term senator and Democratic vice presidential candidate in 2000 lost to political newcomer Ned Lamont, who ran as a critic of the war in Iraq and attacked Lieberman for his vocal support for the war.

Cheney described the defeat suffered by Lieberman, who has been the most servile supporter of the administration's policies within the Democratic Party, as being "of concern," particularly "with respect to national efforts in the global war on terror."

"The thing that's partly disturbing about it," Cheney continued, "is the fact that the standpoint of our adversaries, if you will, in this conflict, and the Al Qaeda types, they clearly are betting on the proposition that ultimately they can break the will of the American people in terms of our ability to stay in the fight and complete the task."

The message was clear: the majority of Connecticut Democrats who went to the polls on Tuesday and voted for an antiwar candidate provided aid and comfort to Al Qaeda.

At the time Cheney issued this provocative slur, he, like Bush, was being kept apprised of the police investigation in Britain and knew that major raids and arrests, combined with a media furor over terrorism, were in the offing.

White House spokesman Tony Snow told the press the same day that the Democrats were raising "a white flag in the war on terror."

The exact same sentiments were echoed by Lieberman himself after the announcement of the British arrests. The senator, repudiated at the polls by the voters of his own party, is defying their verdict on his policies and running as an independent against Lamont. The support for Lamont, he declared, would be "taken as a tremendous victory by the same people who wanted to blow up these planes in this plot hatched in England."

In between the statements of Cheney and Lieberman came a bit of fear-mongering from President Bush—broadcast live on national television from an airport tarmac in Wisconsin. "This nation is at war with Islamic fascists who will use any means to destroy those of us who love freedom, to hurt our nation," he declared, adding, "The American people need to know we live in a dangerous world, but our government will do everything we can to protect our people from those dangers."

Little is as yet known about the identity and ideology of the suspects in the alleged British airline bombing plot. If there is anything that smacks of incipient fascism, however, it is the despicable statements made by Cheney and Lieberman.

In the early stages of Bush's "global war on terrorism," the US president made the infamous statement to the world, "either you are with us or against us." Now the same message is being delivered in unmistakable terms to the American people: political dissent and opposition—even of the mildest sort—to the administration's policies of war abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home represent support for terrorism.

The attempt by Cheney, Bush and Lieberman to paint their opponents as terrorist dupes and accomplices is patently aimed at diverting public attention from their own criminal roles in dragging the American people into an illegal and unprovoked war based upon lies. It is further aimed at distracting public opinion from the debacle which the imperialist adventure in Iraq has produced.

This is nothing new. During the last national election, in 2004, at approximately the same point in the election calendar, the public was subjected to another terror scare. "Code orange" alerts were declared in New York City, Washington and Newark, New Jersey and special weapons teams were deployed around major financial institutions in all three cities. It subsequently emerged that the so-called intelligence that prompted the alert was three to four years old, most of it gathered from open sources on the Internet. There was no substantiation of any imminent attack.

(At the time, it was Lieberman who attacked fellow Democrat Howard Dean for suggesting a political motive behind the announcement of the alleged threat. "No one in their right mind would think the president or the secretary of homeland security would raise an alert level and scare people for political reasons," he declared.)

What the nature of the evidence is in the present terror scare in Britain remains to be seen. People should, however, bear in mind that the record of British authorities in these matters is no better than that of their counterparts in America. Just last June there was a massive raid on a home in the Forest Gate section of east London, in which one man was shot and others physically assaulted before scores of cops in chemical weapons suits descended on the dwelling. No evidence was found and no one was ever charged.

The previous July, there was the execution-style slaying of

Brazilian immigrant Jean Charles de Menezes, an innocent worker whom police commanders attempted to portray as a terrorist suspect.

And in 2003, there was the so-called “ricin terror plot,” involving a supposed Al Qaeda laboratory in north London manufacturing “weapons of mass destruction” out of castor beans. The case collapsed, as it emerged that there existed no terror plot, no weapons, and no means of making them.

The full story about the present terror scare has yet to emerge. That the political conditions for such attacks exist, and that they have been exacerbated by the US occupation of Iraq and Washington’s unconditional support for Israel’s assault on Lebanon is undeniable. But given their track records, there is no reason to accept uncritically the claims of the US and British governments, and every reason to demand that their assertions be substantiated with facts.

The attempt by Cheney, Lieberman and others to exploit the news from London is an exercise in unbridled cynicism. Within the Republican camp the news of the allegedly thwarted plot was greeted with undisguised glee.

“Weeks before September 11, this is going to play big,” one White House official told the Agence France Press news agency. He added that that some Democratic candidates won’t “look as appealing” in light of these events.

The *Wall Street Journal*, whose editorial pages generally reflect most accurately the views within the right-wing circles that dominate the White House, seized upon the alleged plot as a justification for every crime carried out by the Bush administration, from wars of aggression, to abductions and torture, to illegal spying.

“The real lesson of yesterday’s antiterror success in Britain,” the *Journal* concluded, “is that the threat remains potent, and that the US government needs to be using every legal tool to defeat it.” The methods cited by the newspaper, however are patently illegal.

Millions of Americans have already drawn their own conclusions from the continuous invocation of terrorism to justify such crimes. The skepticism toward the government’s claims and distrust of its motives found expression in an opinion poll conducted in May by Zogby International, which found that 42 percent of the public believes the Bush administration has conducted a cover-up of the facts of the September 11, 2001 attacks—an event which the administration has exploited endlessly as a pretext for its policies.

The basic political context for the political attacks surrounding the Lieberman defeat and the suggestions that sections of the

Democratic Party are terrorist sympathizers is the embrace by both parties of the perspective of a never-ending war on terrorism. This is the bipartisan axis of American foreign policy. The disputes between the Democrats and Republicans are largely over the best tactics for prosecuting the so-called war.

Such is the case with the current “antiwar” Democratic politician par excellence, Ned Lamont, the victor in the Connecticut primary. He does not call for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, but rather a “strategy to win,” involving the redeployment of US forces in the region in a manner consistent with Washington’s strategic goal of dominating the Middle East’s oil wealth.

Both parties have supported the sweeping changes in the structure and power of domestic security forces sanctioned by the USA Patriot Act, which, along with the Homeland Security Department, the Northern Command, military commissions and vast domestic spying programs, has erected the scaffolding of an American police state.

The Democrats have increasingly tailored their attacks on the administration’s Iraq policy in such a way as to underscore their support for the “war on terrorism,” deriding the open-ended occupation of Iraq as a distraction from the “real” war on terrorism, with some advocating that US forces be redeployed to Afghanistan, which is also spinning out of control, others calling for tougher measures against Iran and North Korea, and virtually all demanding greater resources for domestic security.

In the end, both of these parties represent a narrow financial elite, whose interests are diametrically opposed to those of the working people who comprise the vast majority of the population. The colossal social gap dividing this ruling stratum from the rest of the people leaves no room for genuine democracy in America, and gives rise to the poisonous policies of militarism abroad and police repression at home.

The struggle to end war and the conditions of poverty and oppression that ultimately breed terrorism, and to defend democratic rights, can be carried forward only through a decisive break with the Democratic Party and the entire two-party system. What is required is the independent political mobilization of the working class based upon a socialist and internationalist program that seeks to unite workers in the US with workers in the Middle East and all over the world in a common fight against the profit system.

It is to advance this perspective and program and to lay the foundations for the emergence of a new, independent mass movement of working people that the Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the 2006 elections.

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