State of the Union speech: Bush declares war on the world

The Editorial Board
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The State of the Union speech given by George W. Bush Tuesday night was among the most menacing and belligerent in American history. The US president outlined a program of limitless and perpetual warfare, on every continent, and against any regime that stands in the way of the rapacious American ruling class.

Bush threatened to attack Iran, Iraq and North Korea—mentioning the three countries by name. Despite his apocalyptic warnings about "thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes," these countries had nothing to do with the September 11 terrorist attacks, a fact acknowledged even by the US government.

Instead Bush outlined a new rationale for military action, claiming that Iran, Iraq and North Korea were seeking to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. He declared, "By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger."

"States like these," he said, "and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world."

Despite Bush's attempt to resurrect the rhetoric of World War II in his reference to the "axis of evil," it is the US government and Bush himself who are following in the footsteps of the Nazis. One would have to go back to the diatribes of Adolf Hitler to find comparable bellicosity in the public declarations of a major world power, and comparable cynicism in the lies and provocations employed as justifications for military aggression.

The comparison is an apt one, because like Hitler and the Nazis, American militarism has embarked on a campaign of world conquest and world domination. The State of the Union speech was a declaration of the unbridled appetites of the military and of the most ruthless, corrupt and criminal sections of the American ruling elite, who find their direct representative in George W. Bush.

Like Hitler, Bush presents an upside-down view of the world in which small and weak states are mortal threats to the most powerful and heavily armed. In 1938-39, Hitler demonized first Czechoslovakia and then Poland as threats to the national security of Germany, before invading and laying waste to each. In 2002, Bush targets North Korea, Iran and Iraq, declaring, "The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."

In reality, these countries have only two things in common—desperate poverty, and longstanding victimization by US imperialism. As for the "world's most dangerous regime," its identity should be obvious: it is the government of the United States, a country whose military budget exceeds that of the next nine powers combined, a country which has, in the course of the past 12 years, invaded, occupied or attacked a litany of smaller nations: Panama, Haiti, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and now Afghanistan.

There are specific reasons for the selection of the three regimes which Bush named on Tuesday night. North Korea has long been a focus of obsessive hostility on the part of the extreme right elements that make up Bush's political base, as one of the last remnants of the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet bloc. Iraq, the most likely target among the Arab oil-producing countries, represents unfinished business from the regime of Bush's father, whose failure to conquer Baghdad and install an American-backed stooge regime has long rankled in Washington. Iran has been in conflict with the United States since the revolution of 1978-79 that overthrew the US-backed dictatorship of the Shah.

But there are two overriding strategic concerns which contribute to the targeting of these three countries for American military action—oil, and the preparations for a US war against China, the power which Washington views as its main competitor for influence in north and east Asia.

The Middle East and Central Asia possess, between them, more than two thirds of the world's reserves of oil and natural gas. The US attacked Afghanistan as the first step in a campaign to establish its military position in Central Asia. Iran has come into direct conflict with this drive by pursuing its own interests in the Persian-speaking regions of western

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Afghanistan. Iran and Iraq are themselves the second and third largest oil producers in the region, following only Saudi Arabia.

From a military standpoint, the network of bases and access rights which the US has established since September 11 resembles more and more a noose tightening around China: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, India, the Philippines, and now the saber-rattling on the Korean peninsula.

As the British daily the *Guardian* noted Wednesday, "Every twist in the war on terrorism seems to leave a new Pentagon outpost in the Asia-Pacific region, from the former USSR to the Philippines. One of the lasting consequences of the war could be what amounts to a military encirclement of China." The newspaper cited the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review which, without naming China, warned of the danger that "a military competitor with a formidable resource base will emerge in the region," and called for a policy that "places a premium on securing additional access and infrastructure agreements."

The scale of US military ambitions is demonstrated by the gargantuan increase in the Pentagon budget that Bush proposed, a staggering $48 billion, an *increase* larger than the *total* military budget of any other country. And his call for every American to sacrifice two years in public service clearly suggests the logic of this program of unbridled militarism—the restoration of compulsory military service for the new generation of American youth.

The policy of international brigandage on which the US has embarked is the expression, in the final analysis, of insoluble social conflicts within its own borders. How else to understand the frenzied urgency of the drive to war: as Bush told Congress Tuesday night, "time is not on our side. I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer."

There are real dangers confronting American imperialism, but they do not arise from small bands of terrorists or the governments of weak and impoverished countries on the other side of the world. These dangers stem from the deepening crisis of world capitalism, and in the ever-intensifying contradictions within the United States between the ultra-wealthy elite, and the vast majority of working people.

Bush admitted that the US economy has entered a recession, but he had no remedy for the growth of unemployment, poverty and social deprivation, only proposing an extension of his program of cutting taxes for the wealthy and big business. He made only passing reference in the State of the Union speech to social needs such as education and health care, and his budget to be released next week will funnel nearly all new spending to the military and "homeland security."

The State of the Union speech came in the shadow of the collapse of Enron, the seventh largest US company and one which has the closest political ties to Bush and the Republican Party, as well as a series of other corporate bankruptcies: Kmart, Global Crossing, Sunbeam, the entire steel industry. But Bush could propose nothing on the question of jobs and living standards except more government handouts to the corporations.

Bush's domestic policy centers on internal repression, building up the police and military at home. While the "war on terrorism" is the pretext, the real purpose is to prepare to deal with massive social upheavals through the use of force. A government installed, not by a vote of the people, but by a 5-4 majority on the US Supreme Court, the Bush administration more and more rests on the army and the police and dispenses with the trappings of democracy.

Despite the glorification of Bush by a cowed and cynical media, and the prostration of the Democratic Party, this administration is isolated and deeply frightened of any genuine opposition. As for the polls and claims of pundits that Bush is wildly popular with the American people, these are merely instruments of political intimidation. In factories and offices, or working class neighborhoods, the general reaction to Bush is one of indifference, suspicion or contempt. The war in Afghanistan is hardly talked about or felt among the broad masses of the American people.

This is no ground for complacency. Opposition will inevitably emerge to the Bush administration and American capitalism, but to be effective it must be based on the development of political consciousness among masses of working people.

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