

Bush marks six months since September 11 with war threats draped in platitudes

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The address delivered Monday by George W. Bush to mark the six-month anniversary of the September 11 terror attacks combined platitudes and lies. Speaking at a White House ceremony before a group of dignitaries and the relatives of some 300 victims, Bush defended the war in Afghanistan as “a just and vital cause” and promised further US military interventions.

There were suggestions in the media leading up to the speech that Bush might indicate the countries—aside from those where American forces are already operating—that his administration intended to target next in its open-ended “war on terrorism.” Bush would offer “a more detailed outline of the administration’s plans to stamp out the terrorist network,” according to a wire service story. Media pundits were hoping Bush would spell out his plans for an attack on Iraq.

As it turned out, the speech was largely a non-event. The staple of US government propaganda—that it is the standard-bearer of civilization, opposing forces of unspeakable evil—formed the core of Bush’s 20-minute address. “We face an enemy of ruthless ambition, unconstrained by law or morality,” he declared.

As is so often the case with American politicians, the claims made about their enemies are far more applicable to their own activities. There is no force in the world today more widely hated for its “ruthless ambition, unconstrained by law or morality” than the US government.

Washington has dispatched troops to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Yemen and the Philippines in the past six months alone. It has increased its role in Colombia, threatened North Korea, Iran and Iraq, and embarked on a course aimed at establishing world domination. More and more, the US is seen as a dangerous and arrogant bully by much of the world’s population.

In his speech Bush claimed, “Part of the cause was to liberate the Afghan people from terrorist occupation, and we did so.” Leaving aside the fact of tacit US support for the Taliban when it came to power in 1996 and Washington’s long-standing relations with Islamic fundamentalism—the CIA in the 1980s actively recruited Muslims from around the world to come to Afghanistan and join the US-backed force fighting Soviet troops and the pro-Moscow regime in Kabul—the notion that the

Afghan people have been in any sense “liberated” by the ongoing war is obscene.

As the *New York Times* noted in late December, “The United States-led military campaign that began on Oct. 7 has succeeded in eradicating most of the Taliban and Al Qaeda from Afghanistan, but it has returned to power nearly all of the same warlords who had misruled the country in the days before the Taliban.” This is one of many similar accounts appearing in the international media.

In his speech, Bush ominously announced the “second stage of the war on terror,” a worldwide campaign in which the US “encourages and expects governments everywhere to help remove the terrorist parasites that threaten their own countries and [the] peace of the world.” Why these unnamed countries would have to be “encouraged” by an external power, the US, to deal with serious threats to their own stability is something of a mystery. In any event, Bush praised the regimes in the Philippines, Georgia and Yemen for inviting US forces.

He continued: “Every nation in our coalition must take seriously the growing threat of terror on a catastrophic scale—terror armed with biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons.... Here is what we already know: some states that sponsor terror are seeking or already possess weapons of mass destruction; terrorist groups are hungry for these weapons, and would use them without a hint of conscience. And we know that these weapons, in the hands of terrorists, would unleash blackmail and chaos and chaos. These facts cannot be denied, and must be confronted.”

What facts? Bush has not mentioned a single fact, or even named a single country. He has simply uttered a series of vague and unsubstantiated allegations, on the basis of which the US arrogates to itself the right to go to war.

Here are some real facts: the American government is waging a brutal war in Central Asia in the course of which it has dropped every kind of bomb short of tactical nuclear weapons. As everyone in the world knows, the Pentagon is the greatest researcher, developer and user of “weapons of mass destruction.”

The US is the only country, for example, that is known to have produced weapons-grade anthrax in the past quarter-century. Washington’s targeting of seven nations for nuclear

attack, including countries that do not possess the atomic bomb, has been revealed only in the past few days. The US, of course, remains the only nation to have used atomic weapons, wiping out the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Bush continued: “Men with no respect for life must never be allowed to control the ultimate instruments of death.... We fight for lawful change against chaotic violence, for human choice against coercion and cruelty, and for the dignity and goodness of every life.”

Unfortunately for the people of the world, a man with “no respect for life” already controls a good many of the “ultimate instruments of death.” During his five-year governorship of Texas (1995-2000), George W. Bush presided over the execution of 152 death-row prisoners. Since occupying the White House he has continued the killing spree, only on a larger terrain: Central Asia.

According to the BBC, the state-operated information agency of Washington’s closest ally, the butchery in Afghanistan has already claimed the lives of 3,600 civilians, a larger number than those killed in the September 11 attacks. One has to assume, considering the source, that this is an underestimation. So much for the “dignity and goodness of every life.”

As for the fight for “lawful change against chaotic violence,” such a comment coming from a US official ought to provoke howls of laughter. Any history of American policy since the end of the nineteenth century would have to devote a great deal of attention to the countless efforts by Washington to remove or subvert governments it considered unfriendly, from intervention against the Russian Revolution in 1918 to innumerable operations in Latin America and the Caribbean, to the ongoing attempt to oust Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

There is no major power that violates international law with such flagrancy as the US. During the 1980s the CIA mined Sandino harbor in Nicaragua; when the International Court of Justice in The Hague found against the US, the Reagan administration simply ignored it. Washington is currently flouting the Geneva Convention in its treatment of Afghan War prisoners; it is preparing to violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which prohibits the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear powers.

Bush, the chief official of the most bellicose regime seen since the end of World War II, concluded his remarks on this note: “I see a peaceful world beyond the war on terror, and with courage and unity, we are building that world together.” Since Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has indicated that the “war on terrorism” might go on for decades, and Vice President Dick Cheney suggested it might last 50 years, Bush must be endowed with keen vision.

On Monday, Bush pulled back from the “axis of evil” rhetoric of his State of the Union address last January. Indeed, the word “evil” did not appear once. Nor did he make a single reference to Iraq or utter any specific threats, although the implication of his remarks about “weapons of mass

destruction” was clear enough.

The speech and the ceremony as a whole, rather dispirited and perfunctory, reflected, despite inflated claims of an 80 percent approval rating for Bush and 90 percent approval for the war, the administration’s own sense of growing popular concern and disaffection. Indeed, a poll published Monday in *USA Today* noted a drop in support for Bush’s long-term war plans, from 62 percent in November to 52 percent today.

The White House spectacle had, moreover, a large element of unreality. Everybody knew that the ceremony was little more than window dressing for the next US military assault—almost certainly against Iraq.

In CNN’s post-speech coverage, the commentators were quite frank about the goings-on. White House correspondent Major Garrett commented on the participation of the ambassadors from Turkey and South Korea: “South Korea is vital to whatever the United States does as it relates to North Korea, one of the nations mentioned by the president in his ‘axis of evil.’ And, of course, Turkey is crucial to whatever the United States may or may not do in Iraq.”

When asked about the presence of the Nigerian ambassador, retired General Wesley Clark, now a CNN military analyst, observed: “We have a huge interest in Nigeria. It’s a very large country, and it’s a very important source of oil.”

Asked more generally whether Bush had tipped his hand “as to where we might see the next front in this war going,” Clark replied that Iraq was “certainly up on the hit list.”

That Bush had nothing of any substance to tell the American people six months after September 11, except that they should get ready for more military violence, comes as no surprise. He cannot report the findings of an investigation into the attack, for the simple reason that no serious investigation has been conducted. The very day Bush made his speech at the White House, CNN reported that the FBI was essentially winding up its inquiries into the attack, that its “US leads have virtually dried up” and its “primary mission now is preventing another September 11.”



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