

Bush White House embraces assassination

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“The Bush administration represents the coming to power of a criminal element in the American ruling class ... in its political methods, social base and foreign policy, the Bush administration is gangsterism personified.”

There may be some who interpreted this analysis made in the *World Socialist Web Site*’s September 9 statement “Oppose US war against Iraq! Build an international movement against imperialism!” as political hyperbole.

The statements of presidential spokesperson Ari Fleischer at the White House Tuesday should have clarified any such misconceptions. Speaking from a podium bearing the presidential seal, Fleischer publicly advocated political assassination as a means of realizing US foreign policy.

Asked about the estimated \$9 billion-a-month price tag for a war against Iraq, the presidential spokesman replied: “The cost of a one-way ticket is substantially less than that. The cost of one bullet, if the Iraqi people takes it on themselves, is substantially less than that.”

Repeatedly prodded by reporters over whether he was calling for the murder of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Fleischer did not budge from his statement, declaring only that “regime change” remained Bush’s objective and that there existed “many options” to carry that out.

The irony of a government that claims that it is preparing a war to enforce international law simultaneously appealing for the murder of a head of state was predictably lost on the media. Most newspapers passed over the statement without comment. CNN urged its viewers to respond to the question of whether assassination was “a good idea.”

Nor did anyone in the establishment media pose the obvious question of what kind of “regime change” the Bush administration is seeking if it can be brought about with “one bullet.” Clearly, the aim of the war

buildup against Iraq is not, as administration officials have improbably claimed, the “liberation” of the Iraqi people. Washington is fully prepared to accept a Saddam regime without Saddam, so long as it subordinates itself to US foreign policy and cedes control of Iraq’s oilfields to US companies.

Administration officials later claimed that Fleischer’s statement did not mean that the administration is lifting a 26-year-old prohibition on US intelligence agents assassinating foreign leaders. But the ban, they added, does not limit the activities of Iraqi opponents of the Saddam Hussein regime. The administration recently announced that the CIA is providing unspecified training to Iraqi “dissidents” on Washington’s payroll.

An executive order enacted by President Gerald Ford bars US officials from engaging in or conspiring to engage in assassinations. It also bars officials from “contracting out” these activities, i.e., soliciting or aiding others outside the government—such as the Iraqi dissidents—to carry out political murders. The order was enacted in response to the post-Watergate revelations that the CIA was operating as an international Murder Inc., staging multiple attempts on the life of Cuban President Fidel Castro, and participating in the successful assassination of Congolese nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba as well as numerous other murder plots.

Last year, the Bush administration revealed that the president had issued a new ruling—a so-called intelligence “finding”—that the ban did not prevent the military or the CIA from organizing the murders of Osama bin Laden and other alleged members of his Al Qaeda organization.

Fleischer’s statements indicate that the administration has in practice extended this exemption to include Hussein and perhaps other heads of state classified by the Bush administration as threats to US national security.

Well before the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, sections of the Republican Party were demanding the repeal of the assassination ban. In January 2001, Congressman Robert Barr introduced a bill entitled the “Terrorist Elimination Act of 2001” lifting most of the restrictions on the murder of foreign leaders.

Meanwhile, thinking among the right-wing ideologues in charge at the Pentagon was spelled out in the Autumn 2002 edition of *Parameters*, the magazine of the Army War College, which trains senior US military commanders. An article headlined “Can we put the leaders of the Axis of Evil in the crosshairs?” spells out various ways in which the White House can circumvent the assassination ban.

This includes ordering military actions aimed at killing a foreign leader—such as the 1986 US bombing of Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi’s residence that claimed the life of his young daughter—to the outright repeal of the executive order. In between, the article cites a Justice Department recommendation that the president may make an exception to the ban by declaring that the assassination of a given head of state is “important to national security interests.”

“Under the current circumstances, assassination may prove to be a more frequent and necessary means of countering the asymmetric threats our nation will continue to face,” the article continues. “The new world order created by the end of the Cold War and punctuated by the impressive victory of the 1991 Persian Gulf War finds the United States as the lone super power, unchallenged militarily.” It goes on to argue that murder is a justifiable weapon against leaders of “rogue states.”

“We cannot afford to overlook the possibility that a well-placed rifle shot, or properly targeted laser-guided weapon, just might preclude the need for massing our forces on the border of a hostile rogue nation,” the article concludes.

It advises, however, that the ban on assassinations be kept on the books. It would serve, the article states, as “a public statement that can be pointed to when our international critics decry the unilateralism of US foreign policy” and an argument that “the United States is not as savage as it may be perceived to be.”

It will take far more, however, than a 26-year-old order that in practice has been repudiated by the White

House to dispel a growing international perception that those directing US foreign policy are a criminal Mafia, prepared to use the methods of Murder Inc. to get whatever the American ruling elite wants.



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