Bush's State of the Union speech: the war fever of a ruling elite in crisis

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The State of the Union speech delivered by George Bush to a joint session of Congress Tuesday night reflected a government in deep crisis. The war fever in the chamber and Bush's litany of lies and threats created the impression of a ruling elite that feels itself under siege and overwhelmed by economic contradictions it barely comprehends. Bush speaks for a regime that is going to war in the hope that it can somehow extricate itself from its crisis by means of military aggression and the seizure of Persian Gulf oil.

It was impossible to sit through Bush's hour-long tirade without wondering what George Orwell would have made of such contributions to *Newspeak* as Bush's description of the massive invasion force assembling on Iraq's borders as those "who will keep the peace."

Or such grotesque assurances to the Iraqi people as, "Your enemy is not surrounding your country; your enemy is ruling your country"; and the claim that an American military occupation of Iraq "will be the day of your liberation."

These words were spoken as the Pentagon leaked reports that the US will strike Iraq with up to 400 cruise missiles in the first 24 hours of war, in what is described as a "shock and awe" strategy aimed at terrorizing the country into submission. (*See* "US plans "shock and awe" blitzkrieg in Iraq")

Secretary of State Colin Powell, meanwhile, has dismissed charges that Washington is going to war in order to seize control of the country's vast oil reserves, insisting that it will only hold them in "trusteeship," a euphemism for colonialism that came into vogue in the aftermath of World War I.

Similarly, on the domestic side, Bush raised the issue of poverty in the US, and proposed to deal with the problem by further slashing taxes for the rich. He invoked the massive crisis of health care, and proposed measures to gut the Medicare program that serves senior citizens.

War is peace, occupation is liberation, and colonialism is freedom. Only the propaganda department of a regime every bit as depraved as the one depicted in Orwell's *1984* could have crafted the words read by Bush from his teleprompter.

The collection of gangsters and sadists who occupy the top echelons of both the Bush administration and Congress jumped to their feet to cheer the president's vow to unleash "the full force and might of the United States military" against an impoverished and oppressed country already severely ravaged by war and economic sanctions.

They whooped it up when Bush, in the language of a Mafia don, alluded to his government's success in rubbing out alleged terrorists. Touting the arrest of more than 3,000 suspects, most of them immigrants rounded up on minor immigration charges, Bush boasted, "Many others have met a different fate. Let's put it this way, they are no longer a problem to the United States."

Bush went on to announce the formation of a "Terrorist Threat Integration Center," merging functions of the CIA, FBI, the Pentagon and the new Homeland Security Department. The creation of this new super-spy agency tears to shreds Constitutional safeguards against government surveillance of American residents and citizens.

While White House officials had claimed the speech would make the case for war against Iraq, it did nothing of the kind. Bush reiterated a litany of alleged transgressions by the Iraqi regime that have all been heard—and refuted—before.

There were the unsubstantiated and politically implausible allegations of Iraqi ties to Al Qaeda, a movement whose Islamist hostility for secular nationalist movements like the Baathists in Iraq is well known. Bush again claimed that the Iraqi regime had purchased aluminum tubes "suitable for nuclear weapons production," an allegation already discounted by the International Atomic Energy Agency based on its inspections in Iraq.

In a cynical slight of hand, Bush presented UN charges that Iraq has failed to prove that all of its non-conventional weapons from the 1980s have been destroyed as proof that such weapons exist today—something even chief weapons inspector Hans Blix does not assert.

As a "moral" justification for war, the US president cited human rights reports detailing savage methods of torture used by the Iraqi regime's secret police. "If this is not evil then evil has no meaning," declared Bush. But the US administration's moral outrage over torture is relative. It all depends on who is doing it. All of the hideous methods mentioned by Bush have been catalogued for decades in human rights reports issued on the practices of US-backed dictatorships in Latin America and elsewhere.

Moreover, the US itself is presently using interrogation techniques described as torture against its own detainees, and sending some supposed terrorist suspects to the secret police of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, where methods paralleling those allegedly used by Iraq are employed. According to some reports, US intelligence agents participate directly in these torture sessions.

Finally, the speech included the ritualistic comparison of Saddam Hussein to Adolph Hitler. "Throughout the twentieth century, small groups of men seized control of great nations, built armies and arsenals, and set out to dominate the weak and intimidate the world," Bush declared, in what could serve as an apt description of his own trajectory since the theft of the 2000 election.

He continued: "Now in this century, the ideology of power and domination has appeared again....Once again we are called to defend

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the safety of our people and the hopes of all mankind."

Yet, by all accounts, the vast majority of mankind—including most Americans—oppose a war against Iraq. The bulk of humanity correctly sees Bush's allegations of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as a cynical pretext for a war of conquest and plunder. The "ideology of power and domination" is broadly identified with the Bush administration's own policy of "preemptive war" and its attempt to use US military might to seize strategic resources and intimidate potential rivals.

There was an undercurrent throughout the State of the Union address of something akin to paranoia and a deep-going hostility to the rest of the world. The address included no attempt to win over erstwhile allies in Europe and Japan. Statements by Bush characterized by one Democratic senator as "blustering unilateralism" evoked frenzied cheers from the assembled officials.

Bush speaks for and personifies a ruling elite confronted by a desperate and systemic economic crisis for which it has no credible response. Ironically, as Washington tells the rest of the world to go to hell, the American economy is becoming ever more dependent on massive infusions of capital from Europe, Asia, Middle Eastern oil sheikdoms and elsewhere as a critical basis for the extravagant accumulation of wealth by the top layers of US society.

The US registered a record $40 billion trade deficit for the month of November, while the current accounts deficit is projected to rise to at least $500 billion this year. Only an orgy of borrowing from abroad—to the tune of more than $2 billion a day—keeps the dollar and the American economy afloat. A crisis of confidence in the US economy, already augured in the precipitous decline of the dollar over the past several weeks, threatens to staunch this massive flow of capital and send the economy into a tailspin.

In the beginning of his speech, Bush gave a cursory review of his administration's domestic agenda. Even in this address, traditionally an occasion for proclaiming the strength of "the union," the US president was compelled to touch on the social cancers created by capitalism in America. Among the signs of social decay Bush mentioned were growing unemployment and homelessness, drug addiction, tens of millions without health care, and such a vast prison population that a large part of the younger generation grows up without fathers.

The key "solution" that Bush offered—outside of "faith-based" private charity—was a massive tax cut for the rich. "End the unfair double taxation of dividends," was his battle cry, a policy that will give more cash to the top 1 percent of society than the bottom 95 percent combined.

The tax plan is expected to add $100 billion to the budget deficit next year, on top of this year's shortfall estimated at $200 billion. The inevitable corollary of this giveaway to the financial elite is savage attacks on what remains of social services and drastic increases in sales and property taxes that fall most heavily on working people.

Bush is equipped neither intellectually nor morally to grasp the ramifications of the actions he is proposing. The insoluble contradictions of the capitalist system are translated into the conception within the American ruling elite that it can defend its wealth only through military aggression. War is further seen as a means of diverting the attention of working people from the intractable social and economic crisis at home.

This outlook is not merely the ideology of Bush and his inner circle, as was made clear by the prostration of the Democratic Party. Prominent Democrats like Senators Hillary Clinton and Joseph Lieberman led the so-called opposition in standing ovations for Bush's harangue.

The Democratic leadership's disagreement with the administration's war policy is limited to the narrowest tactical differences, boiling down to waiting a few weeks more in the hopes of getting UN sanction for an invasion. The so-called "left" of the party, Senator Edward Kennedy, is reduced to an impotent appeal for a second vote authorizing Bush to use military force.

The Democratic Party represents and draws its essential personnel from the same wealthy layer as the Republicans. It cannot give voice to the pervasive unease and outright opposition of the majority of American working people toward the impending war.

Whatever the immediate outcome of a US invasion of Iraq, the course upon which US imperialism has embarked can end only in a catastrophe. A war in Iraq will fuel the outrage and resistance of hundreds of millions in the Middle East, Asia and Africa who have no intention of returning to the days of colonial-style oppression. In Iraq itself, the masses will never accept US occupation or the installation of a puppet regime. They will fight back, and US youth sent as cannon fodder for the American oil monopolies and corporate elite will pay with their lives.

The war will intensify the inter-imperialist antagonisms that have already emerged in the growing rift between Europe and America. To the extent that Washington succeeds in using its military might to seize control of Persian Gulf oil, it must provoke a renewed struggle for the control of raw materials, markets and strategic territories worldwide, paving the way toward a new world war.

At home, war will exacerbate social polarization as an ever-greater share of the national income is transferred to both the financial oligarchy and the military. The gross inequality imposed by a government of the rich—installed by Supreme Court fiat—must ultimately produce political upheavals in America itself.

This emerging movement of political opposition can successfully oppose the global eruption of American imperialism only by advancing a socialist alternative to war, repression and social inequality, and rooting itself in the unified struggle of the international working class. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party are committed to politically preparing such a movement.

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