

Bush lays out his “vision” for the Middle East

US imperialism’s rendezvous with disaster

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With its scare stories about weapons of mass destruction and allegations of Baghdad-terrorist ties having failed to stem worldwide opposition to a war against Iraq, the Bush administration this week unveiled a new pretense for aggression. War, it claimed in typical Orwellian fashion, is the only means of achieving peace, and US military occupation is the road to democracy in the Middle East.

In a speech delivered Wednesday before the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a right-wing Washington think tank, George W. Bush presented what administration officials described as his “vision” for a “liberated” Iraq within a revamped Middle East.

The speech appeared to have been hastily organized to take advantage of a ready-made audience for Bush’s neocolonialist designs. The American Enterprise Institute has sent 20 of its “resident scholars” into leading positions in the Bush administration. Its ranks include Lynne Cheney, the vice president’s wife and a prominent right-wing ideologue, and Richard Perle, who heads the Defense Policy Board and is a leading architect of the Iraq war plan.

The AEI’s former executive vice president is John Bolton, now Bush’s undersecretary of state for arms control and international security. Bolton led Washington’s withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty and spearheaded the US repudiation of the International Criminal Court.

Closely aligned with the policies of the right-wing Likud Party in Israel, the AEI has long advocated turning the “war on terrorism” into a campaign for “regime change” throughout the Middle East. It, the Israeli government and leading figures within the Bush administration all subscribe to a new “domino theory,” according to which a US war against Iraq will inaugurate a transformation of the Middle East. According to this improbable thesis, the shock of Iraq’s decimation will lead to one regime after another falling, to be replaced by made-in-the-USA “democracies.”

Bush spoke on the same day that Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki told the House Armed Services Committee that a successful war of conquest in Iraq will require the indefinite occupation of the country by “several hundred thousand soldiers.” While administration officials have claimed that the military could withdraw, handing over the reins of power to a US-backed regime in Baghdad within two years, even the more optimistic military analysts predict that US military rule will continue for at least five years.

The government has provided no estimates of what such a protracted and massive military occupation will cost. Outlays for the war itself have been pegged at anywhere between \$60 billion and \$95 billion.

In part, Bush’s speech was aimed at answering critics’ charges that he has done nothing to prepare the American public for the costs of his war policy in both human life and economic sacrifice, and has failed to spell out any clear plans for what will follow a US military conquest of Iraq.

The speech did little on either score. Rather, it put forward a “vision” that managed to combine unmitigated imperialist arrogance with a breathtaking underestimation of the crisis that the US war will create.

“Iraqi lives and freedom matter greatly to us,” Bush told his black-tied

audience of Washington insiders. To prove it, he is preparing to launch a military campaign that will send at least 800 cruise missiles slamming into Baghdad and other heavily populated areas in the first 48 hours. If by killing thousands of Iraqis and turning hundreds of thousands more into destitute refugees Washington is able to break the country’s will, it will impose a US general as its ruler.

Bush’s absurd claim that this is the first step on the road to democracy and prosperity is belied by a long record of US interventions all over the globe. Where have Washington’s military actions played such a benevolent role? In Haiti, where US troops left behind a wrecked economy and a kleptocracy in power? Or Kuwait, which the US “liberated” in 1991 in order to hand the territory back to a royal family that denies minimal democratic rights? Or Kosovo, where the drug-running Kosova Liberation Army has, under UN auspices, terrorized and expelled the Serb minority and set up a gangster regime? Or Afghanistan, where US troops are still fighting and the country is divided between tyrannical warlords?

Those setting policy in the Bush administration know full well that the methods to be used in ruling Iraq will be anything but democratic. US military intelligence and the CIA are making frantic efforts to determine which officials and military officers within the Ba’athist regime of Saddam Hussein—the same regime they denounce as a ruthless tyranny—can be kept on to serve as partners in repressing oppositional and centrifugal forces. In the north of the country, Washington has invited Turkish troops in to suppress any attempt by the Kurdish minority to assert its longstanding desire for national independence.

Whatever the initial outcome of the US invasion—with a massive loss of life among Iraqi civilians certain and a catastrophe for American troops not excluded—the US military will subsequently find itself in the middle of a seething cauldron of political, ethnic and religious divisions. US military force will ultimately have to be used to suppress Shi’ite revolts in the south, Kurdish upheavals in the north and countless other conflicts.

Bush’s prediction that such a spectacle will “serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region” borders on lunacy. On the contrary, the US intervention will be seen throughout the region for what it is—a predatory war aimed at seizing control of strategic territory and vital oil wealth as part of a bid to impose a Pax Americana throughout the world.

Who gave Washington the task of liberating the Iraqis, or indeed the peoples of the region as a whole? While Bush spoke of it as an American “duty,” for the masses of Iraq and the Arab world in general, such proclamations echo the “white man’s burden” rhetoric from the heyday of European colonialism.

According to the “vision” shared by Bush and his cohorts, these peoples will simply turn their backs on the protracted and bitter struggle waged by their fathers and grandfathers to cast off the yoke of foreign domination. This was a struggle in which hundreds of thousands gave their lives, from the Iraqi battles against British colonialism in the 1920s to the Algerian

liberation war against the French that continued until 1962. Despite the cruel disappointments of national independence under the rule of the Arab bourgeoisie, it is impossible that the Arab masses will identify “freedom” with US domination.

The war against Iraq will not trigger the falling dominoes envisioned by the cabal around Bush. Rather it will create the conditions for a violent uprising of masses of workers and oppressed in a new struggle against imperialist domination.

What are Bush’s credentials as an apostle of democracy? He came to power by using gangster methods to suppress votes in a national election and securing a ruling by a right-wing cabal on the Supreme Court to install him in the White House. His government has carried out an unprecedented attack on civil liberties, jailing people without charges or trial while vastly expanding police powers of search and surveillance. It presides over a system that imprisons a greater portion of the population than any other nation in the world, while continuing to carry out the barbaric practice of capital punishment.

Bush’s claim that the US conquest of Iraq will pave the way to a just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is even more incredible. His thesis is that a humiliating defeat for Iraq will so weaken and intimidate the Palestinian people that they will give up their struggle against Israeli occupation and “choose new leaders ... who strive for peace.” Until now, the US administration has rejected elections by the Palestinians on the grounds that they will not choose the leaders that Washington wants.

According to the US president, the struggle of the Palestinians will end once Baghdad can no longer serve as “a wealthy patron that pays for terrorist training and offers rewards to families of suicide bombers.” The arrogance and stupidity of this statement are breathtaking. Does Bush really believe that Palestinian youth go to Baghdad to learn how to blow themselves up, or that they do it to get Iraqi “rewards” for their families?

Nearly 2,300 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli troops and Zionist settlers since the intensification of the *intifada* in September 2000, the great majority unarmed civilians. The population of more than 3.5 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank is subjected to a permanent state of siege, locked in their homes on pain of death, prevented from moving freely by hundreds of roadblocks and barricades, and denied adequate food and medicine. The Bush administration is fully complicit in this naked repression. Yet in Bush’s “vision,” it is the Palestinians who must renounce “terror.”

“For its part,” Bush said, “the new government of Israel, as the terror threat is removed and security improves, will be expected to support the creation of a viable Palestinian state and to work as quickly as possible toward a final status agreement. As progress is made toward peace, settlement activity in the occupied territories must end.”

The “new government of Israel,” it should be pointed out, will support no such thing and Bush knows it. The most right-wing government in the country’s history, Sharon’s coalition rests on two semi-fascist parties, one based on the settlers in the occupied territories and the other promoting a policy of “transfer,” i.e., the expulsion of the Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza.

This Israeli regime has welcomed and encouraged a war against Iraq. It will use the US invasion as the pretext for launching its own intensified assault on the Palestinians. It enjoys the intimate collaboration of the Bush administration. Among the figures most directly involved in planning the war against Iraq are US officials who formerly functioned as advisors and lobbyists for the Israeli government and the Likud Party.

Richard Perle, for example, worked as an advisor to Benjamin Netanyahu, Likud’s rightist candidate in the 1996 election. Perle championed an end to peace talks with the Palestinians and the reconquest of Gaza and the West Bank by the Israeli military.

Working with him as an advisor to the Zionist right was Douglas Feith, now undersecretary of defense for policy. Feith wrote in 1997 that Israel’s

reoccupation of the territories was a necessary “detoxification,” adding that “the price in blood would be high,” but worth it.

Feith has now emerged as the Pentagon’s point-man for the “postwar reconstruction” of Iraq. Tapped for the top civilian job in the planned “office of reconstruction” for the occupied country is Michael Mobbs, another Pentagon bureaucrat who was formerly Feith’s law partner. The lucrative practice run by Feith when he was out of government had essentially one client, the Israeli military-industrial complex.

Last year, Mobbs was the author of a two-page sworn statement defending President Bush’s right to declare any US citizen an “enemy combatant” and jail them indefinitely without charges, a hearing, a lawyer or bail, much less a trial. The memo was submitted in the case of Yaser Esam Hamdi, a 21-year-old American-born Saudi captured in Afghanistan and held incommunicado in the Guantanamo, Cuba prison camp.

With such personnel, the claim that the aim in Iraq is to foster a democratic revival is preposterous. What is being prepared is a brutal colonial regime that will seek to utilize as much as possible the remnants of Saddam Hussein’s own repressive apparatus while subordinating it to the interests of the US and Israel. Its principal function will be to guarantee unrestricted US exploitation of Iraqi oil and the suppression of popular revolt.

What is most striking about Bush’s “vision,” however, is that it by no means ends with Iraq. With an invasion of that country, Washington is embarking on an open-ended campaign of military interventions that will bring it face to face with revolutionary explosions in the Middle East and throughout the world.

The threadbare claims that the war being launched by the Bush administration has anything to do with liberty, democracy or progress will likewise be exposed before masses of working people in the United States as they are forced to bear the costs of global militarism, both economically and in the deaths of loved ones sent off to fight.

The revolutionary currents ignited by the incendiaries in the White House will not be limited to the “Third World.” They will find a powerful expression within the imperialist centers, and nowhere more explosively than in the US itself.



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