

The Bush administration repudiates international law

The Editorial Board
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The 15-minute speech delivered Monday night by President Bush, which all but declared war against Iraq, consisted entirely of distortions, half-truths and outright lies.

A thorough refutation of this speech would require a line-by-line analysis, because there was not a single sentence that was based on an honest presentation of facts. Even his first sentence—“My fellow citizens, events in Iraq have now reached the final days of a decision”—was a lie. In fact, the decision to which he referred—the invasion of Iraq—was taken months ago.

Underlying Bush’s argument for war was a grotesquely false premise: that Resolution 1441 passed by the United Nations last November provided the United States with all the authorization it needed to go to war. In fact, nowhere in the resolution is authorization given for unilateral military action by any member of the Security Council.

At one point, referring to French President Chirac, Bush asserted that “some permanent members of the Security Council have publicly announced that they will veto any resolution that compels the disarmament of Iraq.”

This is a flagrant lie. What Chirac actually said was: “My position is that whatever the circumstances, France will vote no because it considers, this evening, that there is no reason to go to war to achieve the objective we have set, that is, the disarmament of Iraq.”

Only hours after he had concluded that it was necessary to withdraw an American resolution seeking authorization for war because it faced overwhelming defeat in the United Nations, Bush brazenly declared that “a broad coalition is now gathering to enforce the just demands of the world.” In reality, the United States and Britain faced nearly total isolation in the Security Council.

There should be no underestimation of the historical significance and political implications of the decision of the United States to unilaterally defy the Security Council, repudiate the entire framework of international law as it has evolved since the end of World War II, and launch an illegal war against Iraq.

Not since the 1930s, during the hey-day of the fascist regimes of Hitler and Mussolini, has the government of any major power so openly embraced war as an instrument of state policy as the Bush administration. In doing so, it has embarked upon a path that will, unless stopped, lead the world into a new epoch of imperialist barbarism and result in the deaths of hundreds of millions of people throughout the planet.

In announcing that war is imminent, President Bush justified a military onslaught against Iraq on the grounds that this country may present a danger to the United States at some indeterminate point in the future. “We are acting now because the risk of inaction would be far greater,” he stated. “In one year, or five years, the power of Iraq to inflict harm to free nations would be multiplied many times over.”

On the basis of this argument, almost any country in the world might be declared by the Bush administration to be a legitimate target. Today it is Iraq that is on the receiving end of American bombs. Tomorrow, it will be another country that the warmongering clique in Washington determines to be a *potential* threat to the United States—Iran, North Korea, China, Russia, Japan and, judging from President Bush’s most recent outbursts, Germany and France.

In what was the most remarkable passage in his brief televised speech, Bush flatly asserted that “The United States has the *sovereign authority* to use force in assuring its own national security.” The precise meaning of this statement is that the United States

rejects any international restraints on its use of military force to achieve its objectives.

In the 1930s the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy walked out of the League of Nations because they would not accept the subordination of their foreign policy objectives to any binding system of international law. Mussolini would not be deterred from invading Ethiopia, and Hitler would not allow the curtailment of his territorial ambitions. As one noted historian has explained, the foreign policy of German imperialism as practiced by Hitler “meant above all breaking all shackles of restraints, formal bonds, pacts or alliances, and the attainment of complete freedom of action, unrestricted by international law or treaty, in German power-political considerations.”[1]

This characterization of Nazi foreign policy applies fully to that of the United States today. With its decision to defy the Security Council and attack Iraq, the Bush administration has made clear that the global ambitions and appetites of American imperialism will no longer be contained within the framework of the United Nations and other institutions established at the conclusion of World War II.

In praising the Bush administration’s action, the *Wall Street Journal* has acknowledged that this action signifies not only the death of the United Nations, but also the end of whatever remained of the principles of a liberal internationalist and democratic world order proclaimed by President Woodrow Wilson nearly 85 years ago. “Wilson’s stubborn idealism has done damage enough. When the current lesson is digested, no President of the United States will ever again look for legitimacy to the likes of the UN or the League,” declared the *Journal* on March 17.

It is hardly an accident that this repudiation of international law has been carried out by an administration that came to power on the basis of an unprecedented conspiracy against democratic rights. In the final analysis, there exists a symbiotic relationship between domestic and foreign policy. The plans for global conquest are a projection onto the world stage of the same criminal and anti-democratic processes that characterize capitalist rule in the United States.

Notes:

1. Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, 2000), p. 139. In this passage, Mr. Kershaw is paraphrasing the

analysis of the German historian Martin Broszat.



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