

Militarist speech on the carrier Lincoln

Bush promises unending war in Iraq and internationally

Bill Vann
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The speech that George Bush delivered on the USS Aircraft Carrier Abraham Lincoln Thursday night constituted a warning to the world that the carnage unleashed in Iraq is the only the beginning of worldwide eruption of US militarism.

Bush used the flight deck of the massive US warship to issue a threat to “friend and foe alike that our nation has a mission. We will answer threats to our security and we will defend the peace.” Having elaborated a doctrine of “preemptive war” and carried it out in an illegal attack on Iraq, the US president left no doubt that his administration intends to continue using the American military power to assert US financial, corporate and geopolitical interests around the globe.

Bush made his appearance aboard the aircraft carrier in a navy flight suit. It likely marked the first time that he was in such a get-up since the early 1970s, when he joined the Texas Air National Guard to avoid the threat of being drafted into the Vietnam War and then went AWOL to attend Harvard Business School.

There was something pathetic about Bush’s play-acting as “Top Gun.” Swaggering about in front of ill-paid enlisted men and women who are bound by military discipline to applaud him, he could not hide who he is: a vindictive little man concealing his ignorance and insecurity behind a gargantuan killing machine.

Inevitably, the media went into raptures about Bush’s appearance. One cable news commentator described him as a combination of “the commander-in-chief and a rock star.” Another said he looked “dashing.” All agreed it was an “historic occasion.”

The USS Lincoln was a fitting stage for the celebration of the one-sided slaughter in Iraq. The firepower of the carrier and its battle group was undoubtedly greater than the entire military arsenal of Iraq. Aircraft flying off of the Lincoln dropped nearly 1.2 million pounds of high explosives on Iraq, wiping out untold thousands of defenseless Iraqi soldiers and civilians alike and wrecking much of the country’s infrastructure.

Critics among the Democrats complained that Bush’s choice of a carrier flight deck to make his speech on Iraq was a transparent political stunt aimed at creating patriotic imagery that will be flogged for all its worth in the 2004 presidential election campaign.

The fact is, however, that the venue was nothing new. For months, the US president’s speeches have been delivered almost exclusively to military personnel and employees of major military arms contractors. His flight to the Abraham Lincoln was to be followed Friday with an appearance at United Defense Industry, the California manufacturer of the Bradley fighting vehicle.

Bush has exploited these captive audiences to promote a domestic political agenda consisting of tax cuts for the rich to be paid for through the gutting of social programs—including veterans’ benefits—while portraying this Robin-Hood-in-reverse agenda as an act of patriotism.

A government resting on the military

At the same time Bush’s choice of audiences exposes an essential characteristic of his administration. Representing a narrow strata and corrupt layer within the American ruling elite, in particular the oil industry, the military-industrial complex and Wall Street, this government has come to rest ever more firmly upon the military to compensate for its lack of any genuine popular base.

Bush’s strutting about in military uniform, saluting officers and enlisted men and gloating over the might of the American war machine is a thoroughly reactionary spectacle. The choice of an aircraft carrier rather than the US Congress or the White House as the forum for his speech, however, also exposes the very real threat that the turn toward military aggression abroad is being joined with the increasing militarization of the American government and threats to basic democratic rights at home.

Initially, White House sources had indicated that Bush would deliver a “victory” speech. There was back-tracking on this description, however, with a new explanation that his remarks would only herald the end of “major combat operations” in Iraq.

There were several reasons for this rhetorical shift. First, having launched an illegal war of aggression, the White House is loathe to make any statement that might subject its continuing military operations in Iraq and elsewhere to the obligations of international law.

By avoiding any claim that the war is over or victory is achieved, the Bush administration hopes to ward off demands that it respect the Geneva Conventions and other statutes binding it to the existing laws of war. It is holding more than 7,000 prisoners of war in Iraq, prisoners it would be obliged to release if the war were officially over. It is continuing a manhunt for officials of the toppled Iraqi regime, a practice that would become illegal once final victory is declared.

Declaring an end to the war would also strip away the ridiculous pretense being made by Washington that it represents something other

than an occupying power in Iraq—a legal term that also implies definite obligations under the Hague Convention. US officials prefer that its forces be referred to as “liberators,” a term that it hopes will cover up the fact that the US government has embarked upon a policy that is imperialist and colonialist in the classic definition of these terms.

In reality, of course, the killing is far from over. Pentagon officials acknowledge that there is no prospect of reducing the current number of US troops in Iraq—close to 140,000—for years to come. There is, in short, no “exit strategy,” but rather a plan for permanent colonial occupation.

Some of the greatest US war crimes lie ahead as Washington attempts to suppress popular opposition to its imposition of a puppet regime to rule the Iraqi people in the interests of the US oil companies, banks and corporations. The massacres in the town of Fallujah that claimed the lives of at least 16 unarmed demonstrators in the course of barely 48 hours this week are a taste of things to come.

And finally, as Bush made clear in his speech, the war in Iraq is seen by Washington as just one battle in a worldwide campaign of military aggression to be carried out under the pretext of a global “war on terrorism.”

“Any outlaw regime that has ties to terrorist groups and seeks or possesses weapons of mass destruction ... will be confronted,” he declared, in what was widely seen as a direct threat to Syria and possibly Iran.

Lies to justify Iraq war

Inevitably, the speech was riddled with lies and distortions stemming from the fraudulent pretenses used by the US administration in launching the military aggression.

Bush claimed that with the destruction of the Iraqi regime, “We have removed an ally of Al Qaeda and cut off a source of terrorist funding.” Even the US Central Intelligence Agency dismissed the administration’s claims that Saddam Hussein was an ally of Al Qaeda. No evidence whatsoever was produced before the war substantiating such connections, and since occupying Iraq, US forces have yet to announce the capture of a single of the Al Qaeda operatives who were supposedly holed up in Baghdad.

Building on his unsupported claim of a link between Baghdad and Al Qaeda, Bush went on to exploit the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 as a justification for the invasion of Iraq as well as future interventions. The terrorists, he said, “declared war on the US and war is what they got.” But no Iraqi was involved in September 11 and none of the untold thousands of Iraqi civilians and soldiers killed in this war harmed any American.

“We have begun the search for hidden chemical and biological weapons, and already know of hundreds of sites that will be investigated,” Bush declared. He neglected to add the obvious: after six weeks in Iraq, the US military has found absolutely nothing.

Before the war, US officials from Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell on down claimed that American intelligence was monitoring scores of sites where weapons were kept and had hard evidence that chemical warheads had been deployed by the Iraqi military for use against US forces. Now with “major hostilities” declared at an end, not one of these sites has provided the evidence American officials insisted was there, and not one of the weapons allegedly placed in the

hands of the Iraqi military has been discovered, much less used against US troops.

In short, Bush’s statements on the carrier Lincoln served as yet one more reminder that the US president deliberately deceived the American people to carry out an illegal and unprovoked war against an essentially defenseless people.

The biggest lie of all, however, was contained in Bush’s description of US operations and intentions in Iraq.

“We thank all of the citizens of Iraq who welcomed our troops and joined in the liberation of their own country,” the president declared. “When Iraqi civilians looked into the faces of our service men and women, they saw strength and kindness and good will.”

What is he talking about? As everyone knows, Iraqis are demonstrating by the hundreds of thousands demanding that American troops get out of their country. Where they have the opportunity, they are shooting at them. Washington has succeeded in recruiting as its principal collaborators the convicted embezzler Ahmed Chalabi and other émigré swindlers.

Bush vowed that the US would “stand with the new leaders of Iraq as they establish a government of, by and for the Iraqi people.... The transition from dictatorship to democracy will take time, but it is worth every effort. Our coalition will stay until our work is done and then we will leave and we will leave behind a free Iraq.”

There is not an iota of concern in Washington for the desires or rights of the Iraqi people. What Washington seeks is a regime of stooges, run by the US military and for the US banks and corporations.

The very day Bush made his speech, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that the administration has drafted plans for the wholesale privatization of Iraq’s oil industry and other enterprises so that they can be taken over by US interests. Prominent US consulting firms have already been contracted to oversee this process. The real looting and rape of Iraq is set to begin. The only thing that Washington requires from an Iraqi regime is someone to sign the documents handing over the country’s wealth.

Given the real aims of the US war, Bush could as well have chosen the New York Stock Exchange as the carrier to deliver his triumphant address. It was in the interests of those who have made vast and largely illicit fortunes at the expense of society that this war was fought.

It was entirely fitting that as Bush was walking the deck of the Lincoln, seven top executives of the Enron Corporation, one of the administration’s principal corporate backers, were turning themselves in to authorities in Texas to face charges of fraud, conspiracy, money laundering and other crimes.

Together, these events reveal a social system that is able to sustain itself only through fraud and criminality at home and military aggression and colonialism abroad. It is a path that is leading American capitalism toward catastrophe and that must inevitably produce mass opposition among working people in the US and internationally.



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