

Bush, 9/11 and Iraq—a policy founded on deception

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President Bush's nationally televised speech on Iraq Sunday provoked a tepid reaction from the media. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* both chided the president for failing to make an explicit pledge to accept greater United Nations authority in Iraq as a means of winning "international support": i.e., cannon fodder from South Asia and money from "old Europe" to bail out a disaster-plagued occupation.

The response of the Democrats indicated that the White House will likely prevail in its bid for an additional \$87 billion to finance the continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—an amount equal to what the US military was squandering at the height of the Vietnam War. Senator Joseph Biden, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, praised Bush for what he claimed was a turn to multilateralism: "I think it took a big man to do that, and I plan on supporting him."

Studiously ignored in the commentary and analysis of the speech, however, was its most salient feature: Bush's arguments constituted a pack of lies from start to finish put together with the sole purpose of deceiving the American people as to the real nature of the intervention in Iraq.

The tone of the speech stood in stark contrast to the swaggering victory address Bush delivered on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln May 1. While then he spoke in terms of "accomplishment" and "victory," Sunday night's remarks, reflecting the catastrophe that has befallen US policy in Iraq, included repeated references to "sacrifice" and "burden." Bush's handlers obviously coached him to adopt a more somber demeanor, though his signature cynicism came through just as clearly.

What the two speeches shared in common, however, was their reliance on a lie that has served as the official justification for the Bush administration's policies—both foreign and domestic—for the past two years: that war abroad, attacks on democratic rights at home and the destruction of social conditions for millions of American workers are all the necessary byproduct of a global struggle against imminent terrorist threats.

In the illegal war against Iraq, this lie is expressed in the claim that the regime of Saddam Hussein bore responsibility for the September 11, 2001 attacks. Previously, this assertion was linked to charges that the Iraqi regime had massive stockpiles of chemical, biological and possibly even nuclear weapons, posing the threat that the next terrorist attack would be signaled by a "mushroom cloud." After five months of searches by thousands of US troops have failed to turn up a trace of such weapons, the administration has fallen back on exploiting the trauma of September 11.

Speaking from the White House Sunday night, Bush made no less than six references to the September 11 attacks, repeatedly asserting that the bloodshed in Iraq is necessary to prevent new terrorist actions. "Since America put out the fires of September 11, and mourned our dead, and went to war, history has taken a different turn," declared Bush. "We have carried the fight to the enemy. We are rolling back the terrorist threat to civilization, not on the fringes of its influence, but at the heart of its power."

Later he added: "We are fighting the enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan today so that we do not meet him again on our own streets, in our own cities," Bush declared.

There is no evidence whatsoever that the Iraqi regime had anything to do with September 11, and its relations with Al Qaeda were characterized by mutual hatred. The thousands of Iraqi civilians and many thousands, if not tens of thousands, more Iraqi soldiers killed by American missiles, bombs and shells bore no guilt for the 3,000 American lives lost two years ago.

Moreover, the plans to carry out wars of conquest against both Iraq and Afghanistan were in place well before September 2001, with the Bush administration seizing upon the attacks as a golden opportunity to carry out these plans. The motivation for these wars was neither terrorism nor weapons of mass destruction, but the pursuit of US global hegemony and the opportunity to seize control of vast energy supplies.

All of this is well known by the media. Yet the president is free to lie and exploit the trauma of September 11 to

promote what is quite literally a criminal policy. He has no fear that a servile American press corps will call him to account.

The administration is building new lies on top of old ones, attempting to exploit the misconceptions that it has itself created in the public mind in order to deceive the American people once again.

Bush's speech was delivered just days after the release of a *Washington Post* poll showing that 69 percent of the American people believe that the regime of Saddam Hussein had a hand in the September 11 attacks. The paper acknowledged that there was no evidence of such a link and quoted Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, one of the main architects of the war, as saying so.

Yet, the source of this misconception is no mystery. In the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq there was a constant drumbeat from the administration that just such links existed. As the AFP news agency noted: "On Sept. 25, 2002 Bush warned against the danger that 'al-Qaeda becomes an extension of Saddam's madness.' National Security Counselor Condoleezza Rice added that there 'clearly are contacts between al-Qaeda and Iraq.' The next day Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said there was 'bulletproof evidence' of an Al-Qaeda-Saddam link."

Now the administration is attempting to portray the daily attacks on US troops in Iraq as a positive development, claiming that it represents some kind of final battle between the US-sponsored "peace and progress" and the "terrorist threat to civilization."

Those on the ground in Iraq have been far more circumspect about the source of the attacks on US troops, as well as the recent string of massive car bombings. It is widely recognized that Iraqi workers and youth are joining the resistance movement not out of allegiance to Al Qaeda or Baathism, but because they are determined to free their country from foreign military domination. Demonstrations by many thousands of Iraqis demanding an end to occupation have likewise made it evident that those carrying out the attacks are able to do so because they enjoy the support and protection of broad layers of the population.

In essence, the administration is attempting to sell a bloody colonial war to the American public as a settling of accounts with the authors of September 11. Bush's portrayal of anyone who opposes US military occupation as a "terrorist" sets the stage politically for a brutal military crackdown that will claim many more Iraqi lives and ensure even broader support for those who resist.

While the lies of the White House about Iraq provide no insight into the dynamics of the escalating struggle there, they say a great deal about the state of affairs within the US itself. A government that is able to defend its policies before

the people only through falsification and deception is a regime of extreme crisis. And, to the extent that it is founded on these deliberate lies, whatever public support exists for the continuing Iraqi intervention is paper-thin.

More fundamentally, the domination of the lie as the currency of US political life calls into question the viability of American democracy itself. Underlying this practice is the vast gulf that separates the narrow strata of millionaires and billionaires that dominate both major political parties in the US, and the vast majority of working people who are, for all intents and purposes, politically disenfranchised.

In Iraq, Washington has carried out a criminal campaign of military aggression aimed at seizing wealth and natural resources to benefit a wealthy elite and increase the profits of a small group of politically connected corporations promised oil concessions and lucrative contracts. Yet it promotes this filthy enterprise to the public as a battle for democracy and freedom for which it should sacrifice the lives of its young and surrender increasingly scarce public monies to finance a gargantuan military budget.

A government that is prepared to lie on the scale that has been seen with the Bush administration in relation to Iraq is prepared to do anything. Nearly two years after the September 11 attacks, it continues to cloak the events of that day in a veil of official secrecy, insisting that to release even minimal information would compromise "national security."

There is ample evidence, assembled and published most recently in a column in the British *Guardian*—and rigorously blacked out by the US media—by former British cabinet member Michael Meacher that the administration had ample forewarning of the terrorist attacks and welcomed them as a means of pushing through its longstanding plans for war.

The question raised by Meacher—whether elements within the administration ordered a "stand-down" of US intelligence and the military to permit a terrorist action to take place and thereby provide the pretext for war—is one that must be fully investigated.

Such an inquiry becomes all the more essential as the administration continues to use lies about September 11 to promote a policy that can only spell catastrophe for both the Iraqi and American people.



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