

Bush's London speech: A defense of aggression and lawlessness

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President Bush's speech Wednesday to a London audience, the highlight of his three-day state visit to Great Britain, was an uncompromising defense of the conquest of Iraq and Afghanistan. He made it clear the US would not hesitate to employ whatever level of violence was necessary to suppress the Iraqi resistance, and left no doubt that his administration remained opposed to ceding political control of the occupied country to the United Nations.

The US would maintain its occupation of Iraq—with Britain as a very junior partner—without regard to public opinion, either in Iraq, Britain, or America itself.

Bush made token references to multilateral institutions and to the UN, as a gesture in support of the beleaguered government of his closest ally, Prime Minister Tony Blair. But the essence of his remarks was that the United States would do as it pleases in foreign affairs—waging war, staging invasions and toppling governments without brooking interference from anyone.

The bulk of the speech rehashed remarks Bush delivered last week to the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, proclaiming a global US war for democracy. This vision of unchecked American domination was presented as the realization of “freedom” on a world scale. Bush’s apocalyptic language, with references to God, faith and religious belief, gave the address a messianic tone—rendering its lies all the more brazen and absurd.

As in every speech by Bush, whose speechwriters apparently assume that his audiences are as intellectually challenged as Bush himself, contradictions and non-sequiturs abounded. The basic premise—that Bush is a tribune of global democracy—overlooks the fact that he is an unelected president, selected not by American voters, but by the

far-right majority on the US Supreme Court, which intervened in the 2000 election to halt vote-counting in Florida and place Bush in the White House.

The US-British invasion of Iraq was itself a flagrant violation of democratic principles, since the decision to go to war and seize control of Iraq was made in defiance of public opinion worldwide. Bush allies like Blair in Britain, Aznar in Spain and Berlusconi in Italy gave their support to the war despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of their own people. Tens of millions around the world participated in demonstrations against the war, the largest global protests in history.

“In some cases,” Bush declared, “the measured use of force is all that protects us from a chaotic world ruled by force.” Who is it that distinguishes between the force that is “measured” and the force that represents chaos? Bush did not spell this out, but clearly in his view it is the president of the United States who makes that determination, no one else. He did not refer in his speech to international law, despite claims a year ago that the central issue in targeting the Iraqi regime was its alleged violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

He acknowledged what he called “good-faith disagreements in your country and mine over the course and timing of military action in Iraq,” but this bow to the right to dissent was purely for show. Now that the US and Britain are in control of Iraq, he proclaimed, there could be no legitimate argument against maintaining the occupation. “Whatever has come before, we now have only two options: to keep our word or to break our word,” he said.

In a potted review of the 20th century, Bush presented the United States as the consistent protagonist for democracy, skipping over nearly a

century of aggressive military intervention in Latin America to prop up pro-American dictatorships, as well as the Cold War alliances with such tyrants as the Shah of Iran, Suharto in Indonesia, Mobutu in the Congo and military rulers in many other countries.

He repeated one of the standard nostrums of US foreign policy, that “democratic governments do not shelter terrorist camps or attack their peaceful neighbors.” This commonplace is never challenged by the ignorant and servile US media, but it is flagrantly untrue.

Besides the bloody experience of World War I, waged by parliamentary governments on both sides of the trenches, there is the prime counter-example of the United States itself. In the course of the last century, democratic America has invaded or attacked Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Grenada and Panama—to speak only of neighbors—as well as waging war in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq, and sponsoring dozens of military coups and guerrilla insurgencies (including the Afghan mujaheddin from which the Al-Qaeda terrorists emerged).

Despite his paeans to democracy, Bush chose not to address the House of Commons, the proverbial “Mother of Parliaments,” because of concern that antiwar MPs might disrupt the speech or heckle him. Instead, he spoke before a carefully vetted audience assembled under the auspices of the Royal United Services Institute and the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Bush made only the most passing reference to the issue of weapons of mass destruction, and he did not allude to past claims that Iraq possessed huge stocks of chemical and biological weapons and an active nuclear weapons programs. This was the principal reason given to the American and British people to justify the war, but no such weapons have been found during the seven months of US-British occupation of Iraq.

Perhaps the most shameless lies came in Bush’s closing comments, in which he attempted, unsuccessfully, to square his doctrine of universal democracy with US policy in the Middle East, which consists largely of propping up oil sheiks and backing Israeli oppression of the Palestinians.

The US president expressed the hope that “the greater Middle East joins the democratic revolution that has

reached much of the world”—and then demanded that the European powers cut off relations with the only elected leader in any Arab country, Yasser Arafat.

He spoke of an “arc of reform from Morocco to Jordan to Qatar”—all countries ruled by more or less absolute monarchs, who are nonetheless classified as “reformist” by the US State Department because they are aligned with American foreign policy.

Even more bizarre was Bush’s denunciation of the region’s corrupt elites, since US policy—and the Bush family’s own personal financial interests—have long been intimately bound up with those elites, above all the Saudi princes.

Bush should be careful about targeting corruption and “old elites,” since his own government is the personification of the most criminal elements within the US ruling elite. His trip to London coincides with the final push in Washington for congressional passage of two pieces of legislation that could be entitled “the corrupt elites’ compensation acts.”

The energy bill, pushed through the House of Representatives Tuesday, will pump more than \$100 billion in tax breaks and government subsidies to oil, gas and coal companies and utility monopolies. The misnamed Medicare reform legislation will guarantee an estimated \$137 billion in windfall profits to the giant drug companies. Only two weeks before, the administration secured passage of the bill funding the US occupation of Iraq, which will funnel \$87 billion into the coffers of corporate America.



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