

More “Washington whispers” about possible pre-election terrorist attack

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Two more pieces published in the press in recent days point to a continuing discussion within the political elite in the US about the electoral consequences of a pre-election terrorist attack. Top officials and analysts speak as if an attack were probable if not certain, and indicate the major concern in Washington is how such an attack would affect the outcome of the elections.

In the “Washington Whispers” section of this week’s *US News & World Report*, columnist Paul Bedard reports: “White House officials say they’ve got a ‘working premise’ about terrorism and the presidential election: It’s going to happen.” Bedard quotes a top administration official as asserting, “We assume an attack will happen leading up to the election,” and that it will happen in Washington, D.C.

Bedard continues by noting, “Unclear is the political impact, though most Bushies think the nation would rally around the president.” He quotes another official who has been involved in recent terrorism response drills: “I can tell you one thing, we won’t be like Spain.” Earlier this year, Spain’s conservative government was ousted by voters after the deadly train bombings in Madrid on the eve of a national election.

The US government has been carrying out terrorism response drills involving the first tests of the revised “continuity of government” plans developed by the administration after the September 11 attacks.

In a piece published May 20 entitled “Beware of any stretch-run surprises,” *Wall Street Journal* columnist Albert Hunt writes that the November elections could hinge on “unanticipated events.” First on the list of such events is a terrorist attack. Hunt notes: “The Bush administration and outside terrorist experts repeatedly have cautioned that another attack on the homeland is likely. The White House, politically, has it both ways: taking credit for avoiding any assault since 9/11, while

at the same time warning that another is likely.”

There is a more sinister subtext to Hunt’s column in the suggestion that the Bush administration would like to “have it both ways” in another manner: it would like to benefit politically by presenting itself as the strongest force against terrorism, while preparing to politically exploit any future terrorist attack. He quotes Charles Black—a Republican strategist and close confidante of President George W. Bush—as stating that “my instinct is there likely will be a rally around [the incumbent] effect” in the event of another attack.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously warned (See: “Washington weighs terror’s impact on presidential vote”), the widespread talk in Washington about a possible terrorist attack and its political consequences should be taken as a serious threat to the American people.

There is an obvious question raised by these discussions: Are top officials in the Bush administration planning to allow such an attack in order to reap political advantage?

Anyone who would dismiss this possibility as an outlandish conspiracy theory underestimates both the depth of the administration’s crisis and the criminality of those who set its policy.

This is a government that came to office by means of theft and intimidation, gaining power only through the intervention of the Supreme Court on an explicitly anti-democratic basis.

As the WSWWS noted at the time: “The very methods employed by the Bush campaign and its allies on the Supreme Court...reveal the nature of the policies the new administration intends to carry out. Bush speaks for the most ruthless and avaricious sections of the ruling class—those who demand the removal of all legal, political and moral limitations on the exploitation of the

working class, the realization of profit and the accumulation of personal wealth” (“Supreme Court overrides US voters: a ruling that will live in infamy”).

Since coming to power, the administration has turned to unbridled militarism for the purpose of advancing the interests of the American ruling elite on a world scale. It has declared its complete contempt for international law and constitutional rights, launching an illegal war of aggression against a largely defenseless country. Since the war in Iraq began nearly a year ago, the government has waged a brutal occupation, the true nature of which is being exposed before the world with the seemingly unending stream of photographs showing US troops torturing Iraqi civilians.

The administration has invoked the attacks of September 11, 2001, to justify every one of its reactionary policies: massive tax handouts to the richest section of the population, the attack on basic democratic rights, and the wars of plunder in Afghanistan and Iraq. The government lied to the American people about its reasons for going to war, and it lied to the American people about what it knew before September 11 about the threat of a terrorist attack.

The ongoing investigation by the September 11 commission has uncovered more evidence of foreknowledge by individuals within the Bush administration and the US intelligence agencies. This evidence includes an August 2001 Presidential Daily Briefing warning about planes being used as weapons and Al Qaeda’s surveillance of federal buildings in Manhattan. The commission, however, has failed to ask the obvious question: Given that the administration had this information and given that the attacks have been critical in advancing the policy of the most reactionary sections of the American ruling class, were they in fact allowed or engineered by high-level officials to create a pretext for a preconceived domestic and foreign policy agenda?

What worked once may work again. This is a government composed of indictable war criminals who would think nothing of sacrificing the lives of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people in pursuit of its agenda. Indeed, such sacrifices have already been made and will be made again.

It is also an administration that confronts an intractable crisis. The revelations of torture of Iraqi

prisoners have been met with worldwide revulsion. The administration’s Iraq policy is in shambles as the US occupation confronts the opposition of the vast majority of the Iraqi people. Support within the United States for the Bush administration is at an all-time low, even according to opinion polls that generally overestimate Bush’s popularity.

On the economic front, the government faces the prospect of rising inflation spurred by escalating gasoline prices over the coming months. There is nothing more dangerous for the ruling elite than a political debacle combined with an economic crisis. And there is nothing more dangerous for the American people than a ruling class in panic.

A string of recent elections around the world has revealed the deepening hostility of ordinary people to the policies of war and social reaction. It began with Spain, but was mirrored in elections in South Korea—where voters threw out the party that attempted to impeach a popular and more anti-American president—and then in India, where the right-wing Hindu-chauvinist BJP government was dealt a surprise defeat last week.

The social divisions reflected in these developments find their expression in the United States as well. As in Spain, South Korea and India, popular hostility to the government has yet to find any truly independent political articulation, while the deepening crisis of US policy in Iraq has generated enormous divisions within the American ruling class.

How will the Bush administration and the section of the ruling class that it represents—the most criminal and ruthless section—respond? A terrorist attack—engineered or allowed by the government—can by no means be ruled out.

The quoted Washington official’s statement warning that the US “won’t be like Spain” can be interpreted in two ways. Either the Bush administration is determined to manipulate a terror attack to benefit the Republican Party in the elections, or it may use such an attack to call off the elections altogether.



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