

Bush tells Washington Post he is not accountable for Iraq war lies

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In an interview published Sunday with the *Washington Post*, President George W. Bush defended his administration against charges that the rationale for its war with Iraq had proven false, and claimed that the 2004 presidential election constituted an endorsement of his war policies by the American people.

Bush spoke a few days after the *Post* revealed that the US military had halted all efforts to search Iraq for weapons of mass destruction—the principal pretext for the unprovoked US invasion of March 2003. After more than 18 months of fruitless effort, in which no evidence of biological, chemical or nuclear weapons was found, the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) was disbanded last month and its 1,000-strong cadre of weapons experts and military intelligence personnel redeployed to fight the anti-US insurgency.

ISG leader Charles Duelfer is in Washington, preparing his final accounting, which will not differ greatly from the preliminary report issued in October, in which he concluded that Iraq had dismantled its weapons of mass destruction after the 1991 Persian Gulf War and never reconstituted them.

Meanwhile, the National Intelligence Council, the center for analysis for 16 US military and civilian intelligence-gathering organizations, has issued a report on global threats to US security noting that Al Qaeda's presence in Iraq is far stronger today than it was before the US invasion that overthrew the regime of Saddam Hussein. Alleged ties between the Iraqi Ba'athist regime and Osama bin Laden were the other main pretext for the US invasion, but no evidence has been found to substantiate this claim either.

Two *Post* reporters asked Bush about the refutation of his prewar claims about Iraq. The exchange went as follows:

Post: In Iraq, there's been a steady stream of surprises. We weren't welcomed as liberators, as Vice President Cheney had talked about. We haven't found the weapons of mass destruction as predicted. The postwar process hasn't gone as well as some had hoped. Why hasn't anyone been held accountable, either through firings or demotions, for what some people see as mistakes or misjudgments?

Bush: Well, we had an accountability moment, and that's called the 2004 election. And the American people listened to different assessments made about what was taking place in Iraq, and they looked at the two candidates, and chose me, for

which I'm grateful.

With these remarks, Bush grossly distorts the real content of the 2004 election campaign, and provides a revealing glimpse of his hostility to elementary democratic principles.

The 2004 election campaign did not offer the American people a real choice on Iraq, since the candidates nominated by the two big business parties—which exercise a virtual monopoly over official political life—both supported the war. The Democrat, Kerry, voted in the Senate in October 2002 to give Bush the authority to go to war, endorsed the subsequent conquest of Iraq, and called for the US occupation to continue more or less indefinitely.

While attempting from time to time to profit politically from antiwar sentiment, Kerry's criticisms of Bush were always made from the standpoint of putting himself forward as a more effective commander-in-chief, who regarded military victory in Iraq over the popular insurgency as essential to the interests of American imperialism. In one of the presidential debates, Kerry declared explicitly that his policy in Iraq was "not about leaving, but about winning."

Kerry was installed as the Democratic nominee through a well-organized blitz by the media and the party establishment in January 2004 to derail then-frontrunner Howard Dean, regarded as too closely aligned with antiwar sentiment. From the time he became the acknowledged frontrunner, Kerry worked persistently to prevent the election from becoming a referendum on the war. The Democrats turned the nominating convention into a celebration of militarism, with generals and Vietnam veterans mounting the platform for repeated tributes to Kerry's war record.

The result: there was no choice between the two bourgeois candidates when it came to the war in Iraq. The antiwar majority in the United States was politically disenfranchised.

Bush's claim that the 2004 election constitutes a mandate for the war reveals his contempt for any genuine democratic debate or popular control over government policy. Moreover, the claim that November 2, 2004 was his "moment of accountability" suggests a conception of the presidency that has more in common with an elective dictatorship than a democracy.

According to Bush, there is only one day out of what may be

eight years in the White House when he can be held accountable to the American people. Every other day he acts with impunity, exercising the unreviewable and virtually unlimited powers of the “commander-in-chief.” (According to memos drafted under the supervision of Alberto Gonzales, his nominee for attorney general, these powers include the absolute right of the president to order actions that violate international law, such as the torture of POWs).

According to traditional constitutional norms in the United States, the president is not an absolute monarch restricted only by quadrennial elections and a two-term limit. He functions under a system of checks and balances, with two co-equal branches of government, legislative and judicial, exercising independent powers of their own. His role as commander-in-chief—of the armed forces only, not of the country or its people—signifies the supremacy of the civilian authority over the military, not the supremacy of the president over the population.

So complete is the decay of democratic norms in America that the description above, an ABC of civics classes three decades ago, is largely forgotten. The one bourgeois political figure who still occasionally cites such constitutional limitations on presidential power, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, is generally regarded in Washington as an octogenarian eccentric. The entire political establishment echoes the infamous declaration of former Democratic Vice President Al Gore after September 11, 2001, that Bush is his commander-in-chief too.

In the Washington of 2005, checks and balances are a thing of the past. The judicial branch, packed with right-wing loyalists, was responsible for elevating Bush into the White House in the first place. The Republican majority in Congress exercises no supervision or restraint over the Bush administration, while the Democratic minority goes along with only the mildest and most impotent of protests. The Bush administration pushes ahead with measures known to be widely unpopular, both in domestic and foreign policy, without regard to public opinion.

There is one final aspect to Bush’s remarks on “accountability.” It amounts to an attempt to saddle the American people with the responsibility for his own criminal actions. By Bush’s account, the American people decided on November 2, 2004 that the absence of weapons of mass destruction and the lack of any significant ties between Iraq and Al Qaeda did not matter. They embraced the conquest of Iraq anyway, and gave their support to an administration determined to continue the military occupation indefinitely.

One can, of course, deplore the fact that many ordinary working class and middle class Americans do not yet grasp the enormity of the crime committed by the Bush administration in March 2003 and continuing to this day. But it must be added that millions of Americans did seek to oppose the war, even before it began, joining with tens of millions around the world in massive demonstrations in February of 2003.

Millions continue to oppose the war, despite the incessant propaganda of the mass media and the entire US political establishment. In the wake of the election, opinion polls reveal a further growth of antiwar sentiment, with 58 percent opposing Bush’s handling of the war in Iraq, and a sizeable minority now supporting immediate withdrawal of all American troops. Large majorities agree that the pretexts given for the war—WMD and Iraq’s supposed ties to Al Qaeda—were bogus.

Even among those who have been confused by the Bush administration’s presentation of the war in Iraq as a response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, there is growing opposition to the occupation and the continued death toll among both American soldiers and the Iraqi people.

The war in Iraq is a monstrous crime, and Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld & Co. must be held accountable. They do have co-conspirators, not among the working people of the United States, but in the American ruling class. Corporate America and the media and political establishment share the responsibility for a war in which nearly 1,400 Americans and tens of thousands of Iraqis have already died.

Those implicated in the war against the people of Iraq must be brought to justice in war crimes trials which will mete out the appropriate punishment, not only to those who took the lead in planning and organizing the war, but those who acted as its propaganda mouthpieces, those who served as its political enablers, and those whose corporations profited enormously and continue to profit from the war.

There is one essential precondition in the struggle to accomplish this: the American working class must break out of the political straitjacket of the two-party system, establish its political independence, and link its efforts to those of the working class throughout the world, in a common fight against imperialism and war.



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