

Bush at Fort Bragg—fear-mongering, lies and desperation

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President Bush's speech before a captive audience of 740 troops at Fort Bragg, North Carolina Tuesday night was a repellant spectacle. It combined the pack of lies that the country has heard over and over again for nearly four years with appeals to backwardness, ignorance and fear, all intended to quash the mounting popular opposition to the war in Iraq.

Filled with non sequiturs and self-contradictory arguments, the speech asserted yet again that the unprovoked US invasion and occupation of Iraq were in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, and that Iraq remained the frontline in the "global war on terror."

Is it really necessary to answer these bogus claims yet again? These were the arguments the administration attempted to sell to the American people before the invasion, manufacturing phony intelligence about meetings between Iraqi agents and Al Qaeda that were debunked well before the first troops were sent in.

Once again Bush employed the injunction that we not forget "the lessons of September 11." But what are those lessons? No Iraqis were involved in the 9/11 attack, and there was no link between the organizers of that crime and the regime in Baghdad. If there is anything to be learned, it is that the Bush administration seized upon the hijack-bombings—or allowed them to take place—as a pretext for executing longstanding plans to conquer Iraq and its vast oil wealth.

The central justification given when the war was launched—the alleged threat from Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction"—went entirely unmentioned in Bush's half-hour address.

Bush now casts the war and the continuing occupation of Iraq as a struggle for freedom and democracy. But his speech testified to the disintegration of democratic processes within the United States itself.

He appeared before massed troops, under discipline to sit through his lies and stupidities. He addressed the nation not from the Oval Office, as a democratically elected leader, but from Fort Bragg, so as to project the image of a war-time "commander-in-chief." Under Bush, this designation has been transformed from an affirmation of civilian control over the military to a byword for militarism and an imperial presidency answerable neither to the law nor the populace.

The basic assumption of those who wrote the speech was that

the American people are nothing but fools who can be endlessly manipulated. In an attempt to dissuade the majority of Americans from their well-founded conclusion that the war should never have been launched and withdrawal should begin, Bush claimed "we have made significant progress" over the past year.

He chose the date of his speech to coincide with the first anniversary of what was proclaimed the "handover of sovereignty" to an Iraqi regime headed by a former CIA agent. This was but one of numerous "turning points" that produced only growing resistance and carnage. Since that date, more than 900 US troops have been killed, along with uncounted thousands of Iraqi civilians.

The number of daily attacks and the number of US troops killed over the past month both stand at nearly double what they were a year ago. For the Iraqi people themselves, the conditions of life are worse now than they were a year ago. Violence is endemic, with the US occupation forces and their Iraqi puppets controlling nothing outside of Baghdad's heavily fortified "Green Zone."

Less power is being generated today than a year ago, with most people having electricity for only six to eight hours a day. Clean water and adequate sanitary facilities are lacking, producing widespread illness, particularly among children. And at least 40 percent of the population remains unemployed.

Added to these horrendous conditions is the oppression of foreign occupation, with Iraqis deprived of all essential democratic rights—including the right of life itself—by an all-powerful US military force. There is no "sovereignty" under conditions in which 140,000 American troops are deployed in Iraq.

These are the conditions that have given rise to mass resistance which the American military has proven powerless to stop.

Bush's attempt to dismiss this resistance as the work of "foreign fighters" and "ruthless killers converging on Iraq" is ridiculous. The American military now runs a vast prison system in Iraq, holding well over 10,000 so-called "security detainees." Out of these, barely a few hundred are non-Iraqis.

As for the "foreign fighters," Bush noted that they "have come from Saudi Arabia and Syria, Iran, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Libya." These are countries whose people share with the Iraqis

common language, culture and history of anti-colonial struggle. If they are “foreigners,” what are the US troops?

Describing the enemy that the US occupation army confronts in Iraq, Bush declared: “They are waging a campaign of murder and destruction. And there is no limit to the innocent lives they are willing to take... men with blind hatred and armed with lethal weapons who are capable of any atrocity... they respect no laws of warfare or morality.”

He could well have been talking about his own government, which launched an illegal war of aggression that has claimed an estimated 100,000 Iraqi lives. It has used bombs, missiles and napalm against civilian targets, and reduced Fallujah, a city of 300,000, to ruins. On a daily basis it carries out raids, killing innocent civilians and detaining others.

To justify these crimes with a load of Manichaeian rubbish—presenting US imperialism’s dirty colonial war as a struggle for “good” against “evil”—is to appeal to everything that is backward, ignorant and fearful in America.

“We fight today because terrorists want to attack our country and kill our citizens, and Iraq is where they are making their stand,” Bush said. If Iraq is where people are “making their stand,” it is because it is their country, and they will never accept its conquest.

Bush made the unlikely claim that the bloody catastrophe in Iraq is inspiring people throughout the Middle East. If anything, the events there have provoked mass revulsion and outrage in the region. Bush sought to claim credit for elections in the Palestinian territories and in Lebanon, though votes in the former have been taking place for several years, and in the latter for decades.

There was, underlying the specious claims of progress and vows to “complete the mission,” a definite strain of desperation. Bush has often chosen to use soldiers as extras in his televised performances, but this time his audience was somber, interrupting his speech with restrained applause just once—and then at the prompting of a White House advance man. No doubt, back-to-back tours in Iraq and the prospect—enunciated by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld—of a dozen more years of fighting has dampened enthusiasm within the ranks.

The speech concluded with an appeal for American youth to consider a “military career”—a bit of hustling for the military that was prompted by a disastrous decline in recruitment, posing before the Pentagon the potential shipwreck of the all-volunteer army.

At the same time, Bush invoked the need for “sacrifice,” without ever spelling out what he meant. He suggested merely that Americans fly the flag on the 4th of July to show their support for the troops. Nowhere in his speech did he acknowledge that nearly 1,750 American soldiers have been killed in Iraq, or that his administration has expended approximately \$200 billion on the war.

The clear implication, however, was that the killing and

dying, and the squandering of vast sums will continue indefinitely. The speech constituted a warning. The American ruling elite is not about to accept another Vietnam. It has no intention of allowing popular opposition to force an end to the war.

This is not to deny the existence of divisions within the political establishment over the conduct of this war. The Democrats have emerged as the faction pushing for more decisive action and criticizing the administration for mismanaging the war effort. No less than the Republicans, they are committed to “completing the mission” in Iraq, i.e., subjugating its people by military force and assuring US hegemony over the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

The Democrats’ chief foreign policy spokesman Senator Joe Biden praised Bush for speaking to the American people on Iraq, declaring, “Unless we regain their support, we’re in real trouble.” He repeatedly warned that there are not enough US soldiers on the ground, and suggested that more force is needed to do the job.

While the mass media interrupted their prime time schedules to broadcast Bush’s speech, some commentators expressed concerns afterwards that the president had failed to supply any new arguments or policies to reverse the sharp decline in support for the war. This failure is not a matter of poor speechwriting. Like it or not, the administration confronts an objective reality in Iraq where everything it has asserted or predicted has been refuted by events.

In concluding his remarks, Bush declared, “When the history of this period is written, the liberation of Afghanistan and the liberation of Iraq will be remembered as great turning points in the story of freedom.” On the contrary, when the history of these events is written, the US interventions will be cited as turning points in the resurgence of naked imperialist aggression on a scale not witnessed since the fall of Germany’s Third Reich.

The decisive issue posed by the eruption of American militarism is the need for the building of a political movement against war, independent of the Democrats and Republicans and based on the American working people. Such a movement must begin with the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq. It must reject the entire fraud of the “war on terror,” and insist that all those who conspired to launch the war in Iraq be held responsible both politically and criminally.



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