

# Bush's campaign on Iraq: more lies in defense of war

The Editorial Board  
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The campaign launched by the Bush administration this week to boost public support for the war in Iraq is both reactionary and desperate. Reactionary, because it entails an escalation of the lies spewed forth to conceal the predatory aims of American imperialism in its conquest of Iraq. Desperate, because the White House imagines that official propaganda can offset the impact of the daily bloodshed in Iraq on American public opinion.

Bush devoted his Saturday radio address to Iraq, followed by an appearance Monday before the convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) in Salt Lake City, Utah and a speech Wednesday to a National Guard assembly in Idaho.

In both his Saturday radio address and his speech Monday to the VFW, Bush reiterated the principal theme of his "war on terror." The United States was engaged in the "first war of the 21st century," he said, one which began with the attacks of September 11, 2001 and will continue until "total victory" over the terrorists.

For nearly four years the White House has used the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon as an all-purpose justification for military aggression abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home, but the "big lie" of 9/11 has become more and more threadbare. Bush has long since dropped the claims, voiced incessantly before the invasion of Iraq, that Saddam Hussein was in league with Al Qaeda, and that he might supply terrorists with weapons of mass destruction to use against American targets.

No WMD have ever been found in Iraq, nor was there ever any evidence of significant collaboration between the Iraqi leader, a secular nationalist, and the Islamic fundamentalists, bitter enemies for decades in the politics of the Middle East. Bush made no reference to either issue in his speeches this week.

Instead, he told the VFW, "this is a different kind of war. Our enemies are not organized into battalions, or commanded by governments." This ignores the inconvenient reality that in both Afghanistan and Iraq it was precisely battalions and governments that were the target of the US invasions. The American military overthrew the Taliban regime of Mullah Omar and the Baathist dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, destroying their organized military forces and occupying their countries.

In neither country was the war actually directed against terrorists. In the case of Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden and the bulk of his followers escaped into neighboring Pakistan. In the case of Iraq, there were no terrorists active until after the US invasion and occupation triggered an insurgent movement among sections of the Iraqi population.

In both cases, terrorism was only the pretext for carrying out a program of conquest and occupation of territories of major strategic value: Iraq, possessor of the second largest oil reserves in the world, occupying a central position in the Middle East; and Afghanistan, whose invasion brought American military forces in strength into Central Asia, a rising source of oil and gas.

Neo-conservative ideologues of the Republican right advocated the

projection of US military power into Central Asia and the Middle East long before 9/11. They argued that the United States should seize the opportunity for successful military aggression opened up by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

After Iraqi WMD proved to be non-existent, the Bush administration shifted its justification for the invasion to its alleged mission to establish democracy in Iraq. In his speech to the VFW, Bush portrayed all resistance to the US occupation of Iraq as opposition to democracy. "Terrorists like bin Laden and his ally, Zarqawi," he said, "are trying to turn Iraq into what Afghanistan was under the Taliban, a place where women are beaten, religious and ethnic minorities are executed, and terrorists have sanctuary to plot attacks against free people."

These words actually describe what American occupation has created in Iraq. Only it is the Iraqi puppet of the US occupiers, the transitional government in Baghdad, which is attacking women and religious and ethnic minorities.

According to a lengthy account published August 21 in the *Washington Post*, "Shiite and Kurdish militias, often operating as part of Iraqi government security forces, have carried out a wave of abductions, assassinations and other acts of intimidation, consolidating their control over territory across northern and southern Iraq and deepening the country's divide along ethnic and sectarian lines, according to political leaders, families of the victims, human rights activists and Iraqi officials... In Basra in the south, dominated by the Shiites, and Mosul in the north, ruled by the Kurds, as well as cities and villages around them, many residents have said they are powerless before the growing sway of the militias, which instill a climate of fear that many see as redolent of the era of former president Saddam Hussein."

The *Post* report described "dozens of assassinations" in Basra, Iraq's Shiite-ruled second-largest city, many of them carried out by men wearing police uniforms, and a network of secret prisons in northern Iraq where the two ruling Kurdish parties "incarcerate hundreds of Sunni Arabs, Turkmens and other minorities abducted and secretly transferred from Mosul, Iraq's third-largest city."

As for the status of women, the draft constitution tentatively agreed to by the Shiite and Kurdish party leaders—and hailed by the Bush administration—represents a drastic regression, subordinating women to the rule of the Islamic fundamentalist clergy, who will decide family and property disputes in religious courts based upon "sharia," Islamic religious law severely unfavorable to women.

According to the *Post*, a fervent editorial supporter of the Iraq war, "The draft constitution submitted Monday stipulates that Iraq is an Islamic state and that no law can contradict the principles of Islam, negotiators confirmed. Opponents have charged that the latter provision would subject Iraqis to rule by religious edicts of individual clerics or sects. The opponents also said women would lose gains they made during Hussein's rule, when they were guaranteed equal rights under civil law in matters including marriage, divorce and inheritance."

The *New York Times* noted that US pressure was instrumental in ensuring that religious rather than secular law would govern family relations: "The tentative agreements on Islam were brokered by the American ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, according to a Kurdish negotiator who spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing the delicacy of the talks. The Kurdish leader said that in both cases, Mr. Khalilzad had sided with Shiite leaders in backing a more expansive role for Islam. That, the Kurd said, angered many of the secular-minded Iraqis who have been fighting for a stricter separation between Islam and the state."

The immediate cause of this hastily scheduled round of appearances was the presence of Cindy Sheehan outside Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas. Sheehan became an antiwar campaigner after her son Casey was killed on patrol in Baghdad last year. More than 1,000 people have flocked to Crawford to join Camp Casey, demanding Bush meet with Sheehan. As many as 60,000 people participated in evening vigils on August 17, in response to an appeal to support Sheehan's demand for immediate withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

While Republican Party spokesmen and right-wing media outlets like Fox News smear Sheehan and deride Camp Casey as a publicity stunt, Sheehan's efforts have won a powerful response among the wider public because they are rooted in the brutal reality of a war which has taken tens of thousands of lives, both Iraqi and American.

The US death toll in Iraq was 1,864 when Bush addressed the VFW, (2,087 when deaths in Afghanistan are added). More than 15,000 have been wounded, many of them horribly, and countless thousands have been damaged psychologically, like the "Marine of the Year" who lost control and fired a shotgun at partygoers last week in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

Nearly all of these US victims of the war are young men and women killed or maimed in the prime of their lives. Each of them is connected to dozens if not hundreds of family members, friends, and co-workers all over the United States. To this must be added the families and friends of the nearly 200,000 troops in and around the two war zones, held as hostages to be used as cannon fodder in the Bush administration's criminal war. The result is a collective trauma that already affects millions, mainly in the more impoverished sections of the working class where military service has been a traditional route to college education or technical skills.

Sheehan has touched a chord in public consciousness with her bitter attacks on Bush as a war criminal who should be held responsible for causing the death of her son. She voices what millions feel: anger at the arrogant lying of the Bush administration and at Bush's own personal indifference to the fate of the soldiers whom he ordered into Iraq. This is a president who has never attended the funeral of a soldier killed in his wars, and who mentioned the number of soldiers killed in Iraq for the first time in his speech Monday to the VFW, more than two years after the war began.

While Sheehan has become the focal point, antiwar sentiment is growing rapidly, even according to the opinion polls commissioned by the largely pro-war US media. Public support for Bush's conduct of the war in Iraq was down to 34 percent in one recent poll, and by a nearly two-to-one margin those polled said they now opposed Bush's decision to invade Iraq. The polarization over Iraq has reached an unprecedented level, with 80 percent of self-identified Republicans supporting the war, but only 12 percent of Democrats. (Among those with no party affiliation, only 36 percent supported the war.)

There is no reason to believe, however, that the Bush administration will be pressured by the growth of antiwar sentiment to pull back from its policy of military aggression. On the contrary, a government which took the country into war on the basis of out-and-out lies will have no compunction about using the most brutal and anti-democratic methods to continue on its chosen course—including the preparation of new wars, such as an attack on Iran, using that country's nuclear energy program as a

pretext.

Bush's war policy is sustained, not by popular support, but by the consensus of opinion in US ruling circles, including virtually all the leading figures in the Democratic Party, that winning the war in Iraq is a vital necessity for American imperialism. Having embarked on a course of military aggression aimed at seizing control of crucial energy resources, there is to be no turning back.

In both his radio speech and his address to the VFW, Bush made repeated references to World War II, comparing his "war on terror" to the struggle against Nazism. If comparisons are to be made to Nazi Germany, however, it is Bush who is aping the methods of Hitler, at least in foreign policy. Not since the Third Reich has a great power so brazenly trampled on international law, defied world public opinion, and sought to achieve its goals through the ruthless exercise of military force.

The eruption of American militarism has the most ominous implications, not only for the people of the countries targeted for US conquest, but for the working people of the United States as well. It was significant that Bush chose to devote much of his VFW speech, not to Iraq, but to demands for more repressive powers for the government at home, including renewal of the notorious USA Patriot Act. Rather than bringing democracy to the Middle East, the danger is that this program of military aggression will mean the end of democracy in the United States.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party call on all American working people to unite in a broad, grassroots campaign against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to demand the immediate withdrawal of all American and other foreign troops, the payment of reparations to those countries, and the prosecution and punishment as war criminals of all those responsible for planning and executing the program of military aggression.

This struggle cannot be waged through protest and pressure on the political establishment, or appeals to any section of the Democratic Party. It requires the building of a new, independent mass socialist party of the working people. And it must combine the struggle against war and militarism with the defense of the social and economic interests of working people at home: jobs, living standards, social services and democratic rights.



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