Terrorism speech in Washington

Bush responds to political crisis with lies and new war threats

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President George W. Bush's speech Thursday on "the war on terror" constitutes a sobering measure of both his government's desperate political crisis and the threat that it will try to extricate itself from this crisis through escalating militarism.

The speech was a compendium of lies delivered with the aim of terrorizing the American people and rallying his extreme right-wing base. In remarks that at times bordered on lunacy, he invoked the unlikely bogeyman of an Al Qaeda terrorist network poised to "establish a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia."

Bush delivered his remarks to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the agency created by the Reagan administration in the 1980s to conduct political propaganda and subversion operations overseas previously carried out covertly by the CIA.

It was to this same audience that the US president proclaimed nearly two years ago a "forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East." Then he was predicting that the successful US imposition of "democracy" in Iraq would lead to a "global democratic revolution" that would topple regimes throughout the region.

In Thursday's address, Bush advanced the reverse of this domino theory, warning that unless the US military achieves unconditional victory, the result will be "Zarqawi and bin Laden in control of Iraq," and the spread of radical Islamist regimes internationally.

This latest assertion has no more credibility than the one advanced in 2003. It is indicative, however, of the growing desperation within US ruling circles over the debacle in Iraq and of the administration's decision to rely on fear as its main means of coercing the American people into submitting to its policies.

As if on cue Thursday, the authorities in New York City issued a terror alert for the city's subways, only hours after Bush's speech and just in time for the evening television news and scare headlines in the next day's papers. Almost as soon as the alert was announced, however, intelligence officials acknowledged that the threat was of "doubtful credibility." Friday saw Pennsylvania Station shut down because of the discovery of a "suspicious" soda bottle.

The aim of such alerts, like Bush's speech itself, is to instill fear, thereby keeping the public off balance and suppressing the growth of political opposition and social unrest.

The Bush administration has returned to the mantra of terrorism that it utilized in paving the way to the invasion of Iraq, when it claimed that Baghdad was developing weapons of mass destruction and preparing to hand them over to Al Qaeda terrorists.

It was lying then, and it is lying now, but under changed political conditions. The *New York Times* quoted an unnamed White House official as saying that Bush had given his speech "to remind Americans after 'a lot of distractions' in recent months, that the country was still under threat and had no choice but to remain in Iraq..."

What are these "distractions"? Opposition to the Bush government has never been greater, with polls showing barely 37 percent of the population supporting the administration and majorities believing that the war in Iraq was a mistake and that US troops should be withdrawn.

Moreover, the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe has exposed before millions the profound social crisis and class polarization that exist in the United States and the breakdown of governmental and social institutions under the impact of policies designed solely to advance the accumulation of wealth by the financial elite.

After all of the hysteria over terrorism and "homeland security" in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the response to this natural disaster demonstrated that the US government is even less prepared to deal with a catastrophe than it was four years ago. It did not take its own terror warnings seriously, except as a means of politically terrorizing the American people.

Meanwhile, there are signs of growing disaffection and outright opposition within the military itself.

Seven more American soldiers were killed in Iraq on the day that Bush delivered his speech, bringing the US military death toll to over 1,950. There are over 100 armed attacks daily, and the country remains in a state of economic and social paralysis. Many of those knowledgeable about Iraq warn that it is either on the brink of an ethno-religious civil war, or one has already begun. The upcoming referendum on a draft constitution—touted by Washington as another step toward democracy—is emerging as yet more fuel for this fire.

Bush disputed the obvious fact that the US occupation of Iraq has fed support for armed resistance and acts of terrorism both there and throughout the region. US commanders are not so sanguine, however, and have publicly suggested the need to reduce a US military presence that is seen by Iraqis as an oppressive occupation.

Bush's invocation of a supposedly ubiquitous terrorist threat is aimed at quashing such internal dissension and intimidating popular opposition. The tone of the speech echoed the kind of "red scare" hysteria of McCarthyism, though his arguments made even less sense than those of the fanatical anti-communists 50 years ago.

The speech equated the "global war on terror" with the Cold War against the Soviet Union and World War II, likening Osama bin Laden to Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler. Such assertions are absurd on their

face.

The Soviet Union was a superpower armed with nuclear weapons and covering one-sixth of the earth's surface.

Al Qaeda consists of at most a couple of thousand fanatics. Osama bin Laden controls no state and his movement has no credible chance of coming to power anywhere in the world—including Iraq. By toppling that country's government and destabilizing its society, Washington has provided Al Qaeda with a new, previously inaccessible field of operations as well as a source of recruits drawn from among the masses of Arabs outraged by the US invasion and occupation.

In prosecuting the "war on terror" and the "struggle for freedom" Bush declares that the enemy "extremists want to end American and Western influence in the broader Middle East.... Their tactic to meet this goal has been consistent for a quarter century: They hit us and expect us to run."

Why stop at a quarter century? Wasn't the struggle to "end Western influence in the broader Middle East" what the anti-colonial movement that emerged in the region in the aftermath of World War II was all about? Were not those the goals and tactics of the nationalist movements that drove the French out of Algeria and ejected the British from Egypt?

The US war in Iraq has nothing to do with democracy or terrorism; it is an attempt to recolonize the region in order to seize control of its oil resources and establish the strategic hegemony of US imperialism.

In making his case for the terror war, Bush strung together a series of disparate movements and presented them as all part of a global "Islamic radical" movement that the US military is supposedly confronting in Iraq.

He claimed that the US is threatened by "paramilitary insurgencies and separatist movements in places like Somalia, and the Philippines, and Pakistan, and Chechnya, and Kashmir, and Algeria."

Lumped together are clan warfare in Somalia, a small local gang in the Philippines, the more than half-century dispute over Kashmir and an Islamist political movement in Algeria that has been brutally repressed, at the cost of 150,000 lives. None of these movements—with widely different social bases and political objectives—have been linked to any acts of international terrorism.

To the extent Islamist fundamentalism has grown, it is largely with the support of the US government, which provided billions of dollars in arms and aid to Osama bin Laden and his Mujahedin allies to overthrow the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Washington likewise backed Islamist elements in Indonesia, where they led anticommunist pogroms that claimed one million lives in 1965, as well as in Chechnya and Bosnia, where they were seen as counterbalances to Russian and Serbian influence. Wherever such movements could be used as instruments in the pursuit of US strategic aims, they have gotten either overt or covert US support.

Bush's speech was characterized by his usual messianic tone, referring to the "war on terror" as a "calling" and declaring, "We will confront this mortal danger to all humanity." This type of language is directed to the administration's base among the evangelical Christian right and is part and parcel of an attempt to sell the war in Iraq as some kind of new crusade against Islam.

The great bulk of humanity, however, sees US imperialism itself as the greatest danger. After the deaths of over 100,000 Iraqis, the words that Bush used to describe those the US is supposedly fighting would widely be accepted as applying to the American president himself: "Throughout history, tyrants and would-be tyrants have always claimed that murder is justified to serve their grand vision. And they end up alienating decent people across the globe."

Among the more ominous and seemingly irrational sections of Bush's speech was an open threat against Syria and Iran, which he described as terrorism's "allies of convenience."

"State sponsors like Syria and Iran have a long history of collaboration with terrorists and they deserve no patience from the victims of terror," declared Bush. "The United States makes no distinction between those who commit acts of terror and those who support and harbor them, because they're equally guilty of murder."

This is an open justification for launching military attacks on both countries. Indeed, it is the same phony pretext used in the invasion of Iraq two-and-a-half years ago.

The regime in Damascus is secular and has ruthlessly repressed Syria's Islamic movement. It provided substantial intelligence assistance to Washington in the wake of September 11, and US intelligence agencies have sent suspects to be tortured in Syria under Washington's so-called extraordinary rendition program.

As for Iran, the government there has established close political ties with the Shia majority which dominates the Iraqi regime that the US is supporting. Teheran has backed the elections in Iraq as well as the draft constitution and is virulently opposed to the Al Qaeda movement, which has conducted sectarian terrorist attacks on the Iraqi Shia population.

Why the saber-rattling now against these two regimes? First of all, it makes clear that the US war in Iraq has nothing to do with combating terrorism. It is an attempt to impose US neo-colonial control. Leading elements within the administration and the ruling establishment have concluded from the deepening debacle in Iraq that this will prove impossible without widening the war.

Intensified militarism is, in the final analysis, the product of the deep crisis of American society itself, characterized by vast social inequality and an increasingly corrupt and parasitic corporate ruling stratum.

Bush's speech is a warning that this ruling elite is preparing even greater crimes and bloodshed. His diatribe provoked little critical analysis either from the Democratic Party or the mass media, neither of which provide any political expression to the growing popular opposition to the war and the administration's domestic policies.

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