

Bush uses lies, fear-mongering to defend war in Iraq, police state measures at home

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20 December 2005

In his nationally televised address from the White House Oval Office Sunday night, George W. Bush reprised the barefaced lies, distortions and appeals to fear and political backwardness that characterized the last such speech delivered by the US president, announcing the onset of the unprovoked US “shock and awe” onslaught against Iraq 33 months ago.

This time around, however, Bush found himself compelled to argue against those who “conclude that the war is lost and not worth another dime or another day”—a description that applies to many millions of Americans. He was forced to acknowledge that the attempt to quell resistance to the US occupation has been “more difficult than we expected,” and, while touting the turnout in Sunday’s Iraqi parliamentary elections, he admitted that the vote “will not mean the end of violence.”

Despite fleeting acknowledgements of massive popular opposition to the war, the essential message was that the administration has no intention of bowing to public opinion and withdrawing US troops. Rather, it plans to continue the slaughter in Iraq indefinitely in pursuit of the geo-strategic aims that motivated the war in the first place.

The speech was sandwiched between Bush’s live radio address Saturday and a White House press conference Monday, both of which he used to defiantly defend his secret and illegal use of the National Security Agency to spy on US citizens, arguing for what amounts to dictatorial powers.

The media made much of Bush’s admissions about “difficulties” and “setbacks,” his claim to having heard those who “did not support my decision to send troops to Iraq” and what the *Washington Post* referred to as his “forthright statement” and “more humble tone.”

These trappings of the speech, like Bush’s elaborate hand gestures, were all crafted by his political handlers with the aim of deceiving a portion of the public. The essential content of the address was the defense of an illegal war based upon lies and an attempt to intimidate those who oppose it.

The essential framework of this defense was the same as that utilized to drag the American people into this war in the first place—the lie that the invasion of Iraq was a response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington and constituted an essential battle in the “global war on terror.”

The tragic events of September 11—and the Bush administration’s manifest failure to take any action to prevent them—have never been seriously investigated, much less explained. One thing is certain, however: They were seized upon by the administration as a pretext for carrying out a war planned years before, which was aimed at imposing US domination over the Persian Gulf in order to seize control of its oil resources and secure a decisive strategic advantage over US capitalism’s principal economic rivals.

Now Bush attempts to portray the war in Iraq as a confrontation between the US military and Al Qaeda terrorists who, if not defeated in Iraq, would soon be attacking the US. This is patent nonsense. The Pentagon and the CIA have repeatedly acknowledged that the resistance to the US

occupation is a matter of Iraqis fighting to throw foreign invaders out of their own country. Tens of thousands have been killed or imprisoned by the US military in Iraq, yet only a handful of so-called “foreign fighters” have been counted among them.

“We do not create terrorism by fighting the terrorists,” Bush declared in one of the more ignorant passages in his speech. “We invite terrorism by ignoring them. And we will defeat the terrorists by capturing and killing them abroad, removing their safe havens, and strengthening new allies like Iraq and Afghanistan in the fight we share.”

But Iraq was no “safe haven” for terrorists before the US invasion. The relation between the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda was one of mutual hostility. And, as far as Iraq today is concerned, the occupation, as US military officers readily acknowledge, is most certainly producing tens and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who are prepared to wage an armed struggle against American troops. Relatives of the innocent civilians killed at roadblocks and by bombing attacks, massacred in sieges like Fallujah or imprisoned and tortured in Abu Ghraib and other US concentration camps provide an inexhaustible source of recruits for the resistance.

Connected to the lie about the war in Iraq’s supposed connection to September 11 and terrorism is the assertion that the administration acted upon flawed intelligence. Bush acknowledged that the claims about “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq were false, only to dismiss this fact as irrelevant.

“Much of the intelligence turned out to be wrong. And as your president, I am responsible for the decision to go into Iraq,” he said. “Yet it was right to remove Saddam Hussein from power.”

The intelligence, however, was not merely “wrong,” it was deliberately fabricated in order to provide a phony justification for the war—Iraq’s non-existent weapons of mass destruction—and to terrorize the American people into accepting it.

In his speech, Bush tried to explain away the manufacturing of false intelligence by claiming that Saddam Hussein had “systematically concealed those programs and blocked the work of UN weapons inspectors,” and that “that many nations believed that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction.”

The reality is that the weapons inspectors did the job that they were assigned, destroying all of Iraq’s biological and chemical weapons stockpiles. As for other nations, the great majority viewed Iraq as posing no imminent threat, and therefore blocked the Bush administration’s attempts to get the UN to authorize an invasion. The UN weapons inspectors themselves refuted the claims made by Washington.

Bush insists that the fact the war was waged on the basis of lies is of no consequence because the happy result is that the US intervention is establishing a “constitutional democracy at the heart of the Middle East” that “will serve as a model of freedom” for the region. This is also a lie.

First, the regime that is taking shape in Iraq—dominated by religious fundamentalists, torn by bitter sectarian divisions and ruling through the

use of death squads and torture chambers—is hardly a model of democracy or freedom for anyone. Secondly, the US secures its interests throughout the region through the closest alliances with despots and dictators, from Saudi Arabia to Egypt to Pakistan.

The rest of the speech consisted largely of jingoistic bluster and attempts at political intimidation. The president employed his usual cheap trick of portraying any attempt to end a dirty war that has claimed the lives of nearly 2,200 American soldiers as a betrayal of the troops.

“Our troops in the field, who bear the burden and make the sacrifice, do not believe that America has lost,” he said, adding, “We would undermine the morale of our troops by betraying the cause for which they have sacrificed.”

The morale of “our troops” found a more accurate expression during Vice President Dick Cheney’s lighting visit to Iraq on the same day Bush gave his speech. Addressing US troops, Cheney—whose trip was conducted in secrecy and under extraordinary military protection—assured them the resistance was in its “last throes.”

Press reports portrayed a sullen uniformed audience, however. Among those selected to address questions to the vice president was a Marine corporal who said to Cheney, “From our perspective, we don’t see much as far as gains” in the war. “I was wondering what it looks like from the big side of the mountain.”

Another Marine, asked the vice president, “Sir, what are the benefits of doing all this work to get Iraq on its feet?”

In its report on the meeting, the Associated Press provided a graphic illustration of the skepticism and outright hostility of many soldiers to the administration’s war: “When he [Cheney] delivered the applause line, ‘We’re in this fight to win. These colors don’t run,’ the only sound was a lone whistle.”

Bush likewise used his prime time speech to brand anyone who opposed his declared policy of war until victory as a “defeatist,” guilty of endangering “the security of our people.”

The speech had the desired effect upon the Democratic Party, whose leadership has made it clear that it has no intention of mounting a challenge to Bush over the war. Leading Democrats praised Bush for his supposed new-found conciliation and “candor.” A typical reaction was that of Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada, who said, “The president has reached out and spoken more directly than ever before about how we went to war and why it is important to achieve victory, a goal we all share.”

In an interview with the *Washington Post* published last Friday, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Democrat, California) made it clear that her declaration of support for a resolution put forward by Democratic Representative John Murtha of Pennsylvania calling for a US military withdrawal in six months did not signal a party position. Rather, she said, Democrats’ attitude toward the war would be a “matter of individual conscience.” In other words, the party will do all in its power to downplay the war, which is overwhelmingly opposed by Democratic voters, in the 2006 midterm elections. The last thing the party leadership wants is for the elections to become a referendum on the war.

Despite the Democrats’ support for the continuation of the war, the Bush administration is well aware that this bipartisan position is deeply unpopular among a vast section of the American population.

To counter this mass opposition, the administration has chosen to launch a campaign of fear-mongering coupled with calls for ever greater police state powers. This is the significance of its decision to go on the offensive over the revelations of the illegal domestic spying operation mounted by the National Security Agency under Bush’s orders.

In a one-hour press conference Monday that was dominated by the NSA revelations, Bush mentioned the September 11 attacks at least 15 times, claiming that after the terrorist attacks, the US was at war, and that he required extraordinary powers to protect the American people. He

insisted, essentially, that his constitutional role as “commander in chief” coupled with the Congressional resolution authorizing the use of military force against Al Qaeda gave him limitless power.

Earlier in the day, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, in defending the NSA spying operation, dismissed concerns over the legality of domestic espionage by pointing out that the US Supreme Court had already upheld the president’s power to declare US citizens “enemy combatants” and secretly detain them indefinitely without charges.

At the press conference, one reporter asked Bush, “If the global war on terror is going to last for decades, as has been forecast, does that mean that we’re going to see, therefore, a more or less permanent expansion of the unchecked power of the executive in American society?”

Bush responded angrily to what he termed “ascribing some kind of dictatorial position to the president.” As for checks on presidential power, he declared, there is the “check of people being sworn to uphold the law, for starters”—in other words, a government over whose activities there is no enforceable oversight and whose word is supposed to be accepted on faith by the people.

Bush reserved his greatest anger, however, for those in the Senate who, citing threats to civil liberties, blocked the reauthorization of provisions of the USA Patriot Act. “I want senators from New York or Los Angeles or Las Vegas to explain why these cities are safer” without the renewal of these measures, he said.

Speaking on Monday, Cheney made a similar criticism. Appearing on the ABC news program “Nightline,” he declared, “What I’m concerned about . . . is that as we get farther and farther from 9/11 . . . we seem to have people less and less committed to doing everything that’s necessary to defend the country.”

Taken together, these statements have an ominous significance. Desperate regimes take desperate measures. Facing mass opposition and besieged on all sides by revelations of criminal activities ranging from torture to secret prisons to illegal spying, the Bush administration is responding with a drumbeat of warnings that September 11 could happen again. The question is whether this administration is preparing to either engineer or allow such an attack as a means of suppressing domestic dissent and furthering its policies of militarism abroad and reaction at home.



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