

# The State of the Union speech: Bush repeats litany of lies on Iraq war

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The State of the Union speech Tuesday night was a typically choreographed affair in which George W. Bush appeared before a fawning audience and an uncritical media to deliver a stale rehash of the lies which the administration has employed to justify the war in Iraq and its attacks on democratic rights at home.

Nowhere in the Capitol chamber was there any expression of the mass popular opposition to the war in Iraq or the mounting concerns of American working people about the deepening social and economic crisis. Instead, Bush's audience consisted of the Washington establishment, the political representatives of the ruling financial aristocracy, a majority of them millionaires in their own right.

Those assembled to hear Bush included the Supreme Court, which first placed him in the White House after he lost the 2000 vote, with its right-wing majority reinforced by two new Bush nominees; the Congress, mired in corruption, with the Republicans applauding on command and prominent Democrats solidarizing themselves with the president as well; and the cabinet officers and Pentagon brass, executors and accomplices in the administration's program of military aggression abroad and police repression at home.

While Bush declared repeatedly during his speech that the war in Iraq, and the whole foreign policy of the administration, was aimed at advancing freedom and democracy, this claim was belied by the actions taken in the House gallery just minutes before the president arrived at the Capitol.

Antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan, invited to sit in the visitor's gallery by a Democratic congresswoman, was grabbed by Capitol police and arrested when she took off her coat to reveal an antiwar t-shirt. Sheehan was hauled away and booked on charges of demonstrating

inside the Capitol, an offense that could bring a year in prison. Her arrest served to eliminate from the venue any expression of the widespread popular opposition to the Bush administration.

In advance of the speech, White House officials repeatedly hinted to the media that Bush would outline a series of major domestic initiatives, on health care, energy policy and other issues. Instead, the first 30 minutes of the speech were devoted to a repetition of the litany of lies employed by the administration to justify the war in Iraq. When Bush finally turned to domestic policy, his proposals were perfunctory, largely small-scale, and clearly of little interest even to the speaker himself.

It is not possible, in the scope of an initial article, even to enumerate all the lies and distortions which comprised Bush's account of the war in Iraq and the so-called "war on terror." The central lie, of course, is the myth of 9/11, the claim that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were the driving force of Bush's decisions to conquer Afghanistan, invade Iraq, and proclaim the unfettered right of the US government to engage in torture, kidnapping, murder, illegal spying and the establishment of concentration camps.

The truth is that the terrorist attacks—whose real origins and connection to the operations of US intelligence agencies remain to be seriously investigated—were only the pretext for a program of military conquest, advocated by sections of the ultra-right for many years before 9/11. Their purpose was to strengthen the world position of American imperialism by seizing control of oil resources and key strategic positions in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

Bush did not attempt to defend the lies he used in 2003 to justify the invasion of Iraq—the long-disproven claims that Iraq was connected to the 9/11 attacks, that

Saddam Hussein possessed a huge arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, and that he might supply those weapons to Al Qaeda. Instead, he utilized a more recent concoction, rolled out by administration spokesmen over the past several months, centering on the claim that if the US were to withdraw from Iraq, Osama bin Laden and Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi would immediately come to power in Baghdad.

This was combined with the mindless argument that since so many American soldiers have already lost their lives in Iraq, more Americans and Iraqis must die to “finish the job.” Bush read from a letter by a soldier slain in Iraq and then led a standing ovation to the soldier’s family, seated in the gallery—not far from where Cindy Sheehan, the mother of another soldier-victim in Iraq, was hauled off to jail less than an hour before.

In another characteristic incident, Bush asserted, as he has repeatedly, that any decision on withdrawal of American troops from Iraq “will be made by military commanders, not by politicians in Washington DC.” Congressional Republicans gave a standing ovation to this remark, which amounts to a declaration that, in the war for “freedom” and “democracy” in Iraq, there is no room for such trifles as control over the military by the civilian authorities, and subordination of decisions on war and peace to the democratic will of the American people.

In all this parade of lies, the biggest lie of all is that, in today’s Washington, there exists an opposition party. Leading Democrats—the party’s 2004 presidential candidate, John Kerry; its 2008 frontrunner, Hillary Clinton—could be seen joining in the general ovations for Bush. Democratic congressmen and women clamored to shake his hand, be photographed, exchange a few words.

Whatever the Democrats say in criticism of Bush’s policies is insincere and hollow. The State of the Union speech came only a day after the collapse of Democratic opposition to the nomination of Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, and a few hours after the Senate rubberstamped the nomination of Bush’s chief economic adviser, Ben Bernanke, to head the Federal Reserve Board, replacing Alan Greenspan as the US central banker.

The endless capacity of the Democrats to abase themselves found pathetic expression in their official

response to Bush’s speech, which was delivered, not by any national leader of the party, but by the newly elected governor of Virginia, Timothy Kaine. The obscurity of the messenger was matched by the insipid and empty character of the message.

Kaine devoted exactly one sentence to foreign policy and the war in Iraq, in the course of which he declared that “every American” shares Bush’s goal of winning the war on terror and “supporting our troops.” The conservative Democrat began his remarks by invoking his previous career as a missionary—an olive branch to the religious right—and ended by suggesting that the very existence of an alternative to the party in power was undesirable. “The greatest need is for America to heal its partisan wounds and become one people,” he said.

Bush’s declarations that the “state of the union is strong” were nothing more than a ritualistic cover-up of the vast and growing social crisis in the United States. Neither Bush nor the Democrats offers any solutions for the great majority of working people who are struggling to survive amidst corporate downsizing, erosion of real wages, destructions of social programs and benefits, and the impact of catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina (to which Bush and Kaine each devoted a single sentence).

But the State of the Union speech did demonstrate the state of the capitalist ruling elite: corrupt and semi-criminal; incapable of honestly addressing any political issue; hostile to the slightest trace of democratic accountability. The political institutions through which the financial plutocracy rules this country are in a state of advanced disintegration.



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