

# Bush says US troops to remain in Iraq indefinitely

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At a White House press conference Tuesday morning President George W. Bush suggested that the US would continue the occupation of Iraq for years, if not decades, to come. Asked if there would be a day when there were no more American forces in that country, Bush replied that that would be “decided by future presidents and future governments of Iraq.”

Bush suggested that US troops would remain long after the end of his administration in January 2009, making it clear that the country is to be reduced to the status of a semi-colonial protectorate. Refusing to give a “timetable” for complete withdrawal, the president repeated his oft-made statement that US military commanders would decide when force levels would be reduced.

The president’s statement followed remarks made at a public appearance in Cleveland Monday and earlier on Tuesday in which he made clear that he would not bow to growing public demands for the withdrawal of US troops three years after the criminal invasion of Iraq. In his speech he reiterated his determination to go to war against Iran if it developed nuclear weapons or threatened Israel.

Bush’s brazenness is testimony to the fact that his administration confronts no serious opposition from the Democratic Party, which, in addition to its general cowardice, supports the geopolitical aim of establishing US control over the oil-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. With no one in the political establishment or the media calling him to account, Bush has declared that US forces will not leave Iraq and that the country will be turned into a permanent military base for the launching of future adventures in the name of the so-called war on terror.

Expressing his contempt for popular opinion, Bush presented the increasing support for withdrawal of US

troops as the product of a misguided response to “reports of killings and reprisals,” which suggest that civil war had broken out in Iraq. The American people, he claimed, were being unduly influenced by the bloody images they saw each night on their television screens.

He blamed the media for being unwitting accomplices of the terrorists, who, he said, were just waiting for America “to lose its nerve” and withdraw its troops. Rejecting recent poll numbers indicating growing public opposition to the war, Bush said, his job was to tell the people what he thought, and that he was determined to “win the war on terrorism.”

During the Cleveland speech Bush outlined his strategy of securing Iraq by pointing to the military operation by US and Iraqi forces to remove “insurgents” and “foreign terrorists” from Tal Afar, an oil-rich city of 200,000 near the Syrian border. In September 2005, 3,000 US troops and 5,000 Iraqi troops laid siege to Tal Afar, after ringing the city with an eight-foot high, 12-mile long dirt wall, forcibly relocating tens of thousands of inhabitants into makeshift housing outside of the city and raiding surrounding villages to cut off any support for anti-occupation forces.

During the days of bombing and block-by-block assaults of “Operation Restoring Rights,” hundreds were killed and Tal Afar, cut off from electricity and water, was reduced, according to one report, into a “phantom city.” Far from opposing sectarian conflicts during the operation, the US military command reportedly relied on Shiite and Kurdish forces to carry out the bloody repression against Sunni and Turkomen residents.

Such atrocities on the part of the US and its allies in Iraq are common occurrences. According to the *New*

*York Times*, police investigators in Salahaddin Province have accused American troops of executing 11 civilians, including several children during a raid March 15 on a house in Ishaqi, about 60 miles north of Baghdad, an Interior Ministry official said Monday. According to the investigators, the American troops lined up the civilians and shot them, then killed livestock and destroyed the house, the official said. A local police commander in Ishaqi told Knight-Ridder Newspapers, that an autopsy had detected bullet wounds in all the victims' heads.

Marking the third anniversary of the war, Bush shamelessly repeated the lies used to justify the March 2003 invasion.

At Tuesday's press conference veteran reporter Helen Thomas, who after noting that the claims of weapons of mass destruction and Iraq-terrorist ties "had turned out not to be true," asked the president, "Why did you really go to war?" She noted that long before September 11 he and other administration officials had set their sights on Iraq, and have since denied that the invasion had anything to do with "the quest for oil."

Bush replied piously, "To assume I wanted war is just flat wrong.... No president wants war. Everything that you have heard is that, but it's simply not true." He went on to claim that September 11 changed his "attitude about the defense of the country" and that "[o]ur foreign policy changed on that day"—both claims that have long been exposed as lies.

Confident that he would not face any further challenge from the rest of the press corps, Bush then rehashed the falsehoods that the war was waged to disarm Iraq and prevent it from being a safe-haven for future terrorist attacks against the US. After claiming that his efforts to find a peaceful resolution had failed, Bush said, "I had a difficult decision to make to remove [Saddam Hussein]. And we did. And the world is safer for it," he declared.

At a rare public appearance before a civilian—not military—audience at the City Club of Cleveland Monday, Bush was also challenged about the claims used to launch the war, as well as the massive cost of the war—\$251 billion or more than \$2,200 per US household—and his administration's illegal spying on US citizens.

The president replied nervously and, in many cases, incoherently to questions that expressed the mounting

popular opposition to the war. Assured, however, that he will face no serious opposition from the Democrats, Bush declared that the US would remain in Iraq until "victory" and threatened to launch future wars against Iran and other countries in the name of the 'war on terror.'



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