

Blair joins Bush to defend Iraq occupation and back preemptive action vs. Iran

Chris Marsden
27 May 2006

President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair utilised their latest summit meeting to insist that the occupation of Iraq be maintained and the campaign of provocations against neighbouring Iran be stepped up.

The meeting demonstrated their contempt for the antiwar sentiment of the people of both the United States and Britain.

Bush's poll ratings have fallen to around 30 percent, while Blair is facing demands that he stand down as prime minister sooner than the two-year deadline he set for himself. Popular opposition to both leaders, centred on their decision to wage war against Iraq based on a tissue of lies, has deepened along with the military and political disaster facing the US and Britain in the occupied country.

Yet at their May 25 joint press conference, even while Bush admitted that "The war has affected [the] mentality of the country," the two demanded that the world line up behind the puppet regime in Baghdad and back an even more bloody drive to smash the popular insurgency.

Bush acknowledged in passing that a few "errors" had been made in Iraq, such as the failure to "find the weapons of mass destruction" and the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse. But while the press made a great deal of this orchestrated admission of "mistakes," it downplayed the central thrust of the press conference—the insistence that there would be no change in policy "as long as I'm standing here as the commander in chief, which is two-and-a-half more years."

Bush left it to Blair to do the rhetorical heavy lifting. One of the advantages for Blair in making a joint appearance with the US president is that it enables him to appear, by contrast, a master of English prose.

On this occasion Blair was even more bellicose than Bush. He stated that the main mistake made had been a failure to adequately confront the insurgency—"the very forces that are creating this violence and bloodshed and terrorism in Iraq ... in order to destroy the hope of that country and its people to achieve democracy, the rule of law and liberty."

This was now to be rectified. There will be no timetable for a military withdrawal, but instead efforts to strengthen the newly imposed government in Iraq. Blair declared, "The first thing that we need is a strong government in Baghdad that is prepared to enforce its writ throughout the country... what they

intend is to come down very hard on those people who want to create the circumstances where it's difficult for the Iraqi forces to be in control."

Moving on to Washington's plans for Iran, Bush told reporters that "one of the goals that Tony and I had was to convince others in the world that Iran, with a nuclear weapon, would be very dangerous, and therefore, we do have a common goal."

The US has secured the backing of France, Germany and Britain for diplomatic moves against Iran over the demand that Tehran dismantle its nuclear programme. But Bush wants to go much further. He said that he and Blair had "spent a lot of time upstairs talking about how to convince the Iranians that this coalition we put together is very serious... And we strategized about how do we convince other partners that the [United Nations] Security Council is the way to go if the Iranians won't suspend like the EU3 [Britain, Germany and France] has asked them to do."

His reference to the Security Council, together with calls for an "enhanced package of measures" against Iran, makes clear that Washington's ultimate goal is to secure UN authorisation for military action. Such an endorsement is even more important for Blair. He has tied British foreign policy to a military and diplomatic alliance with the US, but he fears that the Bush administration's readiness to act unilaterally could produce a political backlash in Europe, as occurred with the invasion of Iraq. His efforts continue to be dominated by an attempt to provide a legal justification for the US doctrine of pre-emptive war and to secure international support for US objectives.

To this end, Blair delivered a speech Friday at Georgetown University, setting out his proposals for "reconciliation in the international community" around a strategy of "progressive pre-emption" to combat terrorism and promote "democratic values." He called for changes in the remit of the Security Council to allow it to authorise pre-emptive intervention by member states, stressing, "We have to act, not react; we have to do so on the basis of prediction, not certainty; and such action will often, usually, indeed, be outside of our own territory."

He again urged an end to arguments "about the merits of removing Saddam," saying, "The war split the world. The

struggle of Iraqis for democracy should unite it.”

He then made a direct appeal for the leaders of the imperialist powers to stand firm against popular demands for an end to the occupation in the face of mounting bloodshed. “Here is where we have to change radically our mindset,” he continued. “At present, when we are shown pictures of carnage in Iraq, much of our own opinion sees that as a failure, as a reason for leaving. Surely it is a reason for persevering and succeeding.”

But securing Iraq was not enough, he warned. “I now think that we need a far more concentrated and concerted strategy across the whole region. The United States rightly began this with its Broader Middle East Initiative. However, the more I examine this issue, the more convinced I am that to protect our future, we need to help them to theirs. For example, I don’t believe we will be secure unless Iran changes.”

The statements made by both Bush and Blair were chilling in their implications, presaging new atrocities in Iraq and even greater crimes throughout the Middle East.

Their attempt to justify retroactively their decision to wage war on Baghdad as having given birth to democracy is a transparent lie. Blair’s essential argument is that whether or not one believes the war against Iraq was justified, and even if it has produced a disaster, it cannot be undone. One must accept it as an accomplished fact. It is time to forget the past and unite in the struggle to build “democracy.”

But if the war against Iraq was waged on the basis of false claims that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, then not only have those who organized it perpetrated a war crime for which they should be brought to justice, but the regime that has been set up on the basis of an illegal invasion is itself illegitimate.

The invasion was, in fact, a war of aggression, whose primary objective was the establishment of US hegemony over the Middle East and its oil resources. It was prepared through a deliberate campaign to deceive the American and British people.

Yet Blair now maintains that an occupation established through such illegal actions has produced democratic rule. In contrast, the insurgency is nothing more than “terrorism.” In the course of the May 25 press conference, Blair and Bush branded the opposition to foreign military occupation in Iraq as “terrorism” two dozen times. In similar fashion, they portrayed the forces opposing the government in Baghdad as representing the sole danger of sectarian violence.

This turns reality on its head. The insurgency is not the product of a handful of religious extremists, but mass popular opposition provoked by the war and neo-colonial occupation of Iraq. Equally, it is the occupation that is chiefly responsible for fuelling the sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shias that has developed in the absence of any genuinely democratic representation.

Far from representing a means of achieving national unity, the administration headed by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al

Maliki will only accelerate the descent into civil war. The government being lauded by Bush and Blair is, in fact, founded on the basis of sectarian divisions and is encouraging the dismemberment of Iraq along ethno-communal lines—a Kurdish enclave in the north and a carve-up of the remainder of the country between rival Sunni and Shia groups.

Maliki is the representative of a Shiite faction that is intent on securing dominance over Iraq through the brutal suppression of the largely Sunni-based insurgency. He has made clear that he wishes the Shia militias to be incorporated into the security apparatuses rather than disbanded.

As for US efforts to divide resistance to the occupation by bringing on board Sunni representatives, this serves only to bring an echo of the communal conflicts into the structures of the executive—so much so that the government has not been able even to agree who will occupy key security posts.

There is a clear parallel between the situations facing Bush and Blair. Both are reviled in their own country and internationally. Both head administrations that are widely seen to have been a disaster and are careening into an ever deeper crisis. They can nevertheless continue in office because they share another strange parallel.

Whilst disaffection with the governments headed by Bush and Blair is widespread within the ruling elites of both countries, there is broad agreement with their basic aims. The deteriorating situation in Iraq has provoked growing concern, but the Democrats in the US and the Conservative-led opposition in Britain supported the war and continue to defend the occupation. No one is prepared to countenance a withdrawal that might weaken America’s grip on the oil riches of the Middle East. Rather, the occupation must be secured at all costs, as preparations for war against Iran are advanced in order to consolidate Washington’s stranglehold on the region.

Equally, all factions within the ruling circles of both countries are determined ensure that the political opposition of broad masses of working people to militarism and war find no political outlet.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact