Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld speeches: A new drumbeat for war

The Editorial Board
2 September 2006

In a coordinated series of speeches this week, the top officials of the Bush administration have begun a public campaign to smear and intimidate opponents of the war in Iraq while laying the political groundwork for dragging the American people into a new and even more terrible war—this time against Iran.

Speeches by Vice President Dick Cheney at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska and by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at an American Legion convention in Utah sounded the themes initially, and were followed by an address by President Bush to the American Legion convention Thursday. Bush is scheduled to make four more speeches in this campaign, culminating in an address to the United Nations General Assembly September 19.

The American media has largely dismissed the speeches as a recycling of old arguments, dictated by White House concern that the November 7 mid-term elections will cost the Republican Party control of the House and possibly the Senate. There is no doubt a powerful whiff of desperation, even panic, in the unrestrained fearmongering of the administration. But there is more to it than short-term electoral tactics.

There is little reason to believe that the hysterical language and potted historical comparisons are really intended to shift the American people from their by now well-established opposition to the war in Iraq. If anything, the evident ludicrousness of the arguments and their bullying presentation will only alienate public opinion even further: who would entrust the lives of their sons and daughters to leaders who have so clearly lost their bearings?

The Bush administration is seeking, not to convince the American people, but to browbeat and intimidate them—to de-legitimize any critique of the Iraq war which goes beyond the Democratic Party's quibbling over tactics and competence or challenges the fundamental premises of American imperialism's effort to conquer and reorganize the Middle East.

In keeping with the Bush doctrine of preventive war, the current offensive against antiwar opinion serves the purpose of preemptively attacking all those who might oppose the next war on Bush's calendar, a war against Iran, a country three times the size and population of Iraq, with a thousand-year history of resistance to foreign domination and occupation.

In that context, the rollout of a pro-war media campaign during the month of August has an ominous precedent. It was in August 2002 that Cheney delivered the first speech threatening war against Iraq to a similar venue: a veterans' convention. Although the Bush administration went through the motions of a debate at the United Nations and in Congress, as well as the passage of resolutions demanding Iraq comply with US demands, Bush and Cheney had already decided to go to war with Iraq several months before Cheney's speech.

The pattern is clear, and warning must be made: it is quite possible that the Bush administration has already made its decision for war with Iran. As Bush remarked during his speech to the American Legion, demanding Iran comply with US demands to scrap its nuclear energy program: "It is time for Iran to make its choice. We've made our choice."

The Bush administration has been updating contingency plans for air strikes against Iran. According to an article in the August 10 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine by James Bamford, an investigative journalist and author, Rumsfeld in November of 2003 "approved a plan known as CONPLAN-8022-02, which for the first time established a preemptive-strike capability against Iran. That was followed in 2004 by a top-secret 'Interim Global Strike Alert Order' that put the military on a state of readiness to launch an airborne and missile attack against Iran, should Bush issue the command."

The most noticeable new element in the speeches of Cheney, Rumsfeld and Bush is the attempt to make a direct amalgam between the various nationalist, Islamic and terrorist groups which are now in conflict with US foreign policy and 20th century fascism. This was spelled out most explicitly in Rumsfeld's speech, which portrayed opponents of the current war in Iraq as the political and moral equivalents of Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister of the mid-1930s who advocated a policy of appeasement toward Hitler.

Such analogies rely on the abysmal lack of historical knowledge fostered by the US educational system, the mass media, and both major US political parties. Rumsfeld is standing reality on its head. German fascism was the regime of an imperialist state, the most powerful and industrially advanced country in Europe, with a ruling class that aspired to dominate the continent and ultimately the world. The Islamic jihadist elements originate in countries long historically oppressed by imperialism, first as colonies of Britain, France and other European powers, then as either clients or targets of the United States, the dominant imperialist power in the world.

The country that today most clearly exemplifies the foreign policy aims and methods of Nazi Germany is Bush's United States. The hallmarks of the world crisis of the 1930s have indeed reemerged in 2006: rampant militarism, with powerful nations invading and occupying smaller and weaker ones; brazen defiance of international law by big powers that feel themselves able to use military force with impunity; the adoption of the method of the "Big Lie," employing propaganda broadcast through the mass media to manipulate popular consciousness; the creation of a pervasive atmosphere of fear, to justify domestic repression and violence against minorities that are singled out for demonization; the use of state-engineered or manipulated provocations (the Reichstag Fire, 9/11) to stampede public opinion behind the use of dictatorial methods.

Despite all the differences in political methods and historical conditions, there is one overriding similarity between Hitler's Germany and Bush's America. In both cases, the capitalist ruling elite has entrusted power to a reckless and unstable regime whose goal is to upset the existing structure of international relations and reshape it to serve its own national purposes. Hitler's "Drang nach Osten" (drive to the east) has its counterpart in Bush's drive to the Middle East: what began as an invasion of Afghanistan, allegedly in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11,

© World Socialist Web Site

2001 has become an American effort to subdue the entire region, from the Mediterranean Coast to the furthest reaches of Central Asia, and assure American domination of its vast oil and gas resources.

That there is an element of madness in such a policy does not mean that Bush & Co. will not attempt to carry it out. Hitler's policy was certainly mad, and deliberately plunged German imperialism into the two-front war which all previous German rulers had sought to avoid. Bush likewise spurns the counsel of the foreign policy mandarins, not only of previous Democratic presidents, but of his own father's administration.

The substance of Bush's speech exposes the depths of intellectual degradation that characterize this administration. In considering its text even briefly, one must remark on the fact, not so much that Bush approved and delivered it, but that experienced speechwriters drafted it, and veteran political and foreign policy operatives reviewed it ahead of time as a declaration of policy by the president of the United States. Yet what emerged was a diatribe that was not only false, but obviously false, self-contradictory and absurd.

Take, for instance, the lumping together of all varieties of Muslim radicalism, Sunni and Shia, into what Bush called "a single movement, a worldwide network of radicals." Yet in Baghdad, under US occupation, the Sunni and Shia forces are concentrating their fire on each other rather on the United States in an increasingly bloody civil war. Differences of history, geography and culture are all dissolved into the term "terrorism," a concept which describes a specific tactic of violence, not an ideology, a tactic that has been employed by the US government much more than by its opponents.

Bush said that his war on terror is "the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century," pitting advocates of freedom and liberty against "the right of a self-appointed few to impose their fanatical views on all the rest." The last phrase would serve as an accurate description of the social and political base of the Bush administration itself, which rests on the support of fanatical Christian fundamentalists who demand, not just freedom to practice their religion—which they enjoy in abundance—but freedom to impose their medieval bigotry on everyone else in America.

Only a few days before Bush's speech, the woman who played a central role in placing him in the White House in 2000, former Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris, made national headlines by denouncing the separation of church and state as a pernicious lie fomented by the enemies of Christianity. "God is the one who chooses our rulers," she declared, in an interview during her campaign for the US Senate seat in Florida. "If you're not electing Christians then in essence you are going to legislate sin. They can legislate sin. They can say that abortion is all right. They can vote to sustain gay marriage."

Bush went on to claim that his foreign policy represented a "freedom agenda" for the establishment of democratic governments throughout the Middle East, conveniently ignoring that the strongest US allies in the region are the despotic regimes of Mubarak in Egypt, the Saudi ruling family and the various sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf.

"Governments accountable to the voters focus on building roads and schools, not weapons of mass destruction," he said, although he did not discuss how that truism could be applied to the United States, builder of the largest arsenal of weapons of mass destruction by far. Bush made this comment only two days after visiting hurricane-devastated New Orleans, the city which demonstrates that American democracy, that is, bourgeois democracy under the control of a financial oligarchy, is incapable of meeting the most basic social needs of the working people.

For sheer idiocy, it is hard to top the following paragraph from Bush's speech, referring to the crisis in Lebanon. "I appreciate the troops pledged by France and Italy and other allies for this important international deployment. Together, we're going to make it clear to the world that foreign forces and terrorists have no place in a free and democratic Lebanon."

Foreign forces have no place in Lebanon, and this is to be shown by the deployment of a massive occupation force consisting of thousands of troops from ... France and Italy!

There were a few moments of substance in Bush's speech. The warning of impending action against Iran has already been quoted. There was also his reference to the stooge regime of Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq, which Bush said the US would continue to support "as long as the new government continues to make the hard decisions necessary ..." These are political code words, demanding that the Maliki government support and assist on a crackdown against the Shiite militia of Moqtada al-Sadr, even though his own majority in parliament depends on al-Sadr's support.

Finally, Bush sought to justify his characterization of Iraq as the central battlefront in the war on terror by citing as his co-thinkers Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and other Al Qaeda leaders. Al Qaeda has repeatedly declared that Iraq is the focal point of its current efforts—although there was no significant Al Qaeda presence in Iraq until the US invasion and overthrow of Saddam Hussein made that possible. It is significant, however, that Bush could not cite a single other authority for his claim that the US invasion of Iraq was a setback for the terrorist groups.

Leading Democrats responded with professed outrage to Rumsfeld's suggestion that they were guilty of appeasing terrorists. Senator Charles Schumer of New York, chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, said, "We Democrats want to fight a very strong war on terror. No one has talked about appeasement." Senator Edward Kennedy, a purported opponent of the war in Iraq, said, "His dire warnings of the cost of failure in Iraq do nothing to make success more likely." Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid added, "Iraq is in crisis, our military is stretched thin, and terrorist groups and extremist regimes have been strengthened and emboldened across the Middle East and the world."

Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic Minority Leader who seems likely to become Speaker of the House after the November elections, echoed the Democratic senators' criticism that the war in Iraq has undermined US security interests worldwide. "The strain that the Iraq war has put on our military has crippled our ability to prosecute the war on terrorism and has dangerously limited our ability to respond to real challenges to our national security around the world.," she said.

Not one leading Democrat could state the simple truth that Bush's "war on terrorism" is false from beginning to end. It has made use of the tragedy of September 11—whose connection to the secret operations of US intelligence agencies still remains to be seriously investigated—to justify an open-ended campaign of violence abroad and state repression at home, including the establishment of concentration camps at Guantánamo Bay and other locations.

The series of speeches by Bush and his top aides have thus had one salutary effect: they have compelled the Democratic Party to demonstrate once more its role as the second party of American imperialism, one equally committed to the predatory project in the Middle East, while quibbling over the tactics and methods of the Bush administration.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site