

Bush uses 9/11 commemoration to campaign for Iraq war

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The speech given by President Bush Monday night, marking five years since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, was a combination of cynicism and desperation. Cynical, because after suggesting in advance that he would not give a political speech, Bush crudely sought to win support for the war in Iraq by citing the memory of those who died on September 11, 2001. Desperate, because a substantial majority of the American people rejects the “big lie” that 9/11 justified the Iraq war and is increasingly repelled by it.

Bush’s 15-minute address was essentially a rehash of the four speeches he has made over the two weeks leading up to the anniversary, leaving out the explicit denunciations of critics of the Iraq war, but including language that was deliberately provocative, especially given his repeated calls for “national unity.” For Bush, such unity means the subordination of the American people to himself, the “decider in chief,” and his vision of war without end.

As in every Bush speech, the banal commingles with the non sequitur and the outright lie. Bush began by declaring that on September 11, in the midst of the terrorist atrocity, “we also witnessed something distinctly American: ordinary citizens rising to the occasion and responding with extraordinary acts of courage.”

Why is this “distinctly American”? Are the citizens of London, Madrid, and Mumbai—or for that matter, the victims of Israeli bombing in Lebanon and Gaza or American bombing in Iraq—any less selfless and heroic in their efforts to rescue loved ones?

Such nationalistic bombast is a staple of US political speeches, stultifying the audience with flattery that the speaker hopes will rub off on himself. But Bush’s performance on 9/11, from his freeze-up in front of Florida school children to his cowardly base-hopping on Air Force One, involved no “extraordinary acts of courage.”

Bush then proceeded to outline an apocalyptic vision of endless warfare, a struggle which he said was only in its “early hours” and was “the calling of our generation.” One can only assume that in his view, the thousands of American

dead will inevitably become tens and even hundreds of thousands, while the hundreds of thousands killed by US military action in Iraq and Afghanistan will become millions, as war engulfs new countries and extends over decades.

At one point he cited the example of previous US wars, costing the deaths “of thousands of good men in a single battle.” This was a message to the American public to prepare to endure such bloodletting in the future.

The bulk of the speech was an attempt to connect the September 11 attacks with the decision to go to war in Iraq, an effort made nearly impossible by the collapse of all the links once asserted by the Bush administration, and now revealed as lies: no ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda (recent reports indicate that Hussein had actually approved the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi); no connection between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks; no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

“I am often asked why we’re in Iraq when Saddam Hussein was not responsible for the 9/11 attacks,” Bush said, an admission that condemns as lies the contrary suggestions by Vice President Cheney and other administration spokesmen. Bush could not answer this obvious question, except to assert, without offering any evidence, that “the regime of Saddam Hussein was a clear threat.”

Based on this method, a US president could target virtually any country in the world for military attack and occupation, on the basis of claims that it constituted an actual, eventual or potential threat. The logic is a program of world conquest.

Bush’s speech was not an effort to convince anyone in the listening audience. The arguments were perfunctory, the delivery half-hearted. Its real purpose was to intimidate opponents of the war in Iraq by suggesting they were giving aid and comfort to terrorists.

“Whatever mistakes have been made in Iraq,” he said, “the worst mistake would be to think that if we pulled out, the terrorists would leave us alone.” The circular character of this argument is worth pointing out. It is only the Bush administration, together with its Democratic and Republican

collaborators in Congress, who claim that the war in Iraq is a struggle against terrorism, rather than an effort by the world's strongest imperialist power to seize control of huge oil reserves and a key strategic position.

Despite Bush's constant invocations of "freedom" in the course of his remarks, his conception of freedom was remarkably selective. "From Kabul to Baghdad to Beirut, there are brave men and women risking their lives each day for the same freedoms that we enjoy," he said.

Aside from the peculiar reference to Beirut—whose people have most recently risked their lives fleeing American-made bombs and missiles delivered by Israel—there was no reference to those who are courageously opposing such US-backed dictatorships as that of Mubarak in Egypt, the Saudi monarchy, the Moroccan monarchy, or the various petty despots of the Persian Gulf.

As for "democracy," the US has refused to recognize the Hamas government in the West Bank and Gaza, brought to power by the democratic vote of the Palestinian people, while supporting the oppression and violence of the Israeli occupation forces.

The double-standard on freedom and democracy is most apparent, however, in the attitude of the administration towards opposition to the war in Iraq, which it treats as tantamount to treason.

Bush's speech came one day after Vice President Cheney appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" interview program and denounced opponents of the war in strident terms. US allies "want to know whether or not if they stick their heads up, the United States, in fact, is going to be there to complete the mission," Cheney said, adding, "And those doubts are encouraged, obviously, when they see the kind of debate that we've had in the United States. Suggestions, for example, that we should withdraw US forces from Iraq simply feed into that whole notion, validates the strategy of the terrorists."

Ohio Republican congressman John Boehner, the House majority leader, escalated the witch-hunting rhetoric after congressional Democrats voiced tepid criticisms of Bush's speech. "I wonder if they're more interested in protecting the rights of terrorists than protecting the American people," he said at a news conference. "They certainly don't want to take the terrorists on and defeat them."

This McCarthy-style smear suggests the depths to which the Bush administration and the congressional Republicans intend to descend over the next eight weeks, in the final stretch of the 2006 election campaign.

The Democratic response to Bush's speech combined mealy-mouthed criticism of the administration's incompetence in waging the war in Iraq with full support for the strategic goal of the US military intervention in the

Middle East and Central Asia.

Congressional Democratic leaders complained about Bush's decision to make a pro-war speech on September 11. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada said that Bush was "more consumed by staying the course in Iraq and playing election-year politics" than with commemorating the dead of 9/11.

"The American people deserved better last night," Reid said in a statement released by his Senate office. "They deserved a chance to reclaim that sense of unity, purpose and patriotism that swept through our country five years ago."

Reid went on to make the main argument of the Democrats in the fall elections—that the administration's conduct of the war in Iraq has made the intervention a diversion from broader US strategic goals. "The longer we are bogged down in the streets of Baghdad," he said, "the easier it is for Al Qaeda and its affiliates to reconstitute in places like Afghanistan and Somalia."

The 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, Senator John Kerry, last week called for an increase of 5,000 troops in the US force in Afghanistan, where the puppet regime of President Hamid Karzai is visibly losing control. Kerry's position was echoed by former President Bill Clinton, addressing a Jewish group at a Washington hotel. Clinton called for a renewed US focus on Afghanistan, declaring, "We need more troops. We can't practice hit-and-run democracy."

Such comments demonstrate that the Democratic Party represents not an opposition to the war in Iraq or the Bush administration's foreign policy of militarism and aggression, but a second line of defense for that policy. The Democrats seek to defend the same imperialist interests while promising to be more competent and effective.



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