

In speech on Iraq escalation, Bush promises more bloodshed, wider war

The Editorial Board
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President Bush's television address Wednesday night, announcing his dispatch of over 20,000 more American troops to Iraq, signaled that the bloodletting in that country will increase dramatically in the course of 2007, and that the Bush administration is likely to expand the war into Syria, Iran and other targets in the Middle East.

This decision to escalate the US military intervention is a direct repudiation of the results of the 2006 congressional elections, in which millions of American voters expressed their opposition to the war in Iraq by putting an end to Republican control of the Senate and House of Representatives.

The first wave of additional troops has already begun deploying to the region, and a total of six brigades will be ordered all together, five into the city of Baghdad and one into Anbar Province, center of the Sunni insurgency against the US occupation. Bush has also sent an additional aircraft carrier task force—equipped with hundreds of nuclear weapons—into the Persian Gulf.

Bush made several references to the likelihood of greater American and Iraqi casualties as a result of this military escalation. He used truly Orwellian language to present plans for a colossal bloodbath as a program for “reducing the violence in Baghdad.”

He blamed past failures of the US occupation forces on too few troops and “too many restrictions on the troops we did have.” In other words, a military campaign that has already produced torture and humiliation at Abu Ghraib, mass murder at Haditha, and the rape and murder of Iraqi schoolgirls will now “take the gloves off.”

Bush outlined plans for greatly increased military action in the Iraqi capital. Iraqi and American military forces will flood the city, “going door-to-door to gain

the trust of Baghdad residents.” What that means in practice was shown the day before the speech on Haifa Street in central Baghdad, when Shiite Iraqi soldiers and American troops rampaged through a Sunni neighborhood, killing at least 50 people and leveling entire city blocks.

Once the Sunni-populated areas of the city are subdued, the offensive will turn to the Shiite areas, especially the vast working-class area of eastern Baghdad known as Sadr City. US military forces have been barred from combat operations in that part of the capital, but now, Bush declared, “Iraqi and American forces will have a green light to enter these neighborhoods and Prime Minister Maliki has pledged that political or sectarian interference will not be tolerated.” The result will be the incineration of entire neighborhoods by US firepower, and a death toll among the Shiites that will exceed that under Saddam Hussein.

Increased violence in Iraq is only the beginning. Bush threatened both Iran and Syria with military action, suggesting that the deteriorating position for the US occupation regime in Iraq could be salvaged by widening the scope of the war.

In language that recalls the declarations of Richard Nixon in ordering the invasions of Cambodia and Laos during the Vietnam War, Bush claimed that Iran and Syria were actively aiding the Iraqi resistance, and he promised retaliation: “We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq.”

Bush insulted the intelligence of his television audience with another rehash of his false claims that the war on Iraq is aimed at destroying a terrorist threat to

the United States and represents a response to the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. And he sought once again to present the war as a high-minded struggle to establish democracy in the Middle East, when it is really an effort by the American ruling elite to seize control of a country with the world's third largest oil reserves and a critical strategic position.

"From Afghanistan to Lebanon to the Palestinian Territories, millions of ordinary people are sick of the violence," he said. "And they are looking at Iraq. They want to know: Will America withdraw and yield the future of that country to the extremists or will we stand with the Iraqis who have made the choice for freedom?"

Tens of millions of people in the Middle East, and the vast majority of the population of the entire world, oppose the US invasion and conquest of Iraq and understand it, quite correctly, as a reassertion of Western colonialism in a particularly crude and brutal form. According to a study by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, the US intervention in Iraq has already caused an estimated 655,000 deaths. But in Bush's truly demented, upside-down world, it is the Iraqi people fighting the US occupation who are "extremists who kill the innocent."

The falseness and cynicism of Bush's talk of freedom and democracy in Iraq and the Middle East is demonstrated by his attitude to democracy in the United States. He began his speech by hailing the holding of elections in Iraq in 2005, but made no reference at all to the US congressional elections only two months ago.

The vote November 7 amounted to an overwhelming popular rejection of Bush's Iraq policy, and if Bush himself had been on the ballot, he would have been swept out of office. By his silence on that subject, Bush made clear that he has no intention of allowing the American people to have any influence on his war policy—and he relies on the nominal opposition party, the Democrats, to make sure that popular antiwar sentiment finds no expression in official Washington.

The official Democratic Party response, delivered by Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois, was just as reactionary and dishonest as Bush's own address, and if possible, even cruder, verging on outright racism. According to Durbin, the US government has proceeded on the purest of motives. "We have

protected Iraq when no one else would," he exclaimed, describing an American intervention which has shattered Iraq as a functioning society and reduced much of the country to primitive conditions.

"America has given Iraqis so much," he continued, listing the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the writing of a new constitution and elections to a new government. Now it was time for Iraqis to take responsibility for themselves, he declared. "They must know every time they call 9-1-1, we're not going to send another 20,000 troops."

The Democratic "opposition" to Bush's policy in Iraq represents nothing more than an effort to sustain the US stranglehold on that country while appeasing the genuine popular revulsion against the war. In response to press questions after his response, Durbin reiterated that the Democrats would not cut off funding for the war and could not stop the escalation.

Asked whether voters opposed the war had a right to expect action, not just words, to bring the war to an end, Durbin replied, "The thought that we could stop this in its tracks is not practical."

The escalation of the war by the Bush administration and the collaboration of the Democrats underscore the central political issue facing American working people and all those opposed to the reactionary slaughter in Iraq. The struggle against the war can only go forward through a break with the US political establishment and both of the big business parties, and the building of a mass independent political movement based on the working class.

Working people must reject the official consensus of defending the interests of American imperialism, organize mass demonstrations against the war and for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, and demand the criminal prosecution of those responsible for launching and continuing this war of aggression.



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