

At White House press conference, Bush escalates war threats against Iran

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At a White House press conference Wednesday morning, President George Bush laid out the administration's pretext for military action against Iran. He did so while making clear that the administration is proceeding with its military escalation in Iraq in defiance of popular opposition and the likely passage in the House of Representatives of a Democratic-sponsored non-binding resolution criticizing the increased troop deployment.

Bush's remarks on Iran, which came in the question-and-answer period following his opening statement, centered on US allegations that Iran has been supplying elements of the Iraqi resistance with explosive weapons used against US soldiers. At a press briefing held in Baghdad on Sunday, unnamed US officials accused "the highest level of the Iranian government" of supplying the weapons. Without offering evidence, the officials claimed that roadside bombs which they displayed to reporters had been smuggled into Iraq under the direction of the Quds Force, a special unit of Iran's Islamic Republican Guard.

Two days later, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Peter Pace, contradicted the claims of the unnamed officers, stating that there was no evidence of high-level Iranian involvement.

Bush's press conference was intended to shore up the administration's war propaganda against Iran in the aftermath of Pace's statement. Answering a question about his reaction to Pace's remarks, Bush insisted, "What we do know is that the Quds force was instrumental in providing these deadly IEDs [improvised explosive devices] to networks inside of Iraq. We know that. We also know that the Quds force is part of the Iranian government."

On the question of whether top officials in the Iranian government knew about this alleged activity, Bush

acknowledged that the US government had no proof. But he argued that the question was irrelevant, saying, "Either they knew or they didn't know, and what matters is that [the weapons are] there. What's worse, that the government knew or the government didn't know?" Later in the press conference Bush repeated the same rhetorical question verbatim.

Bush continued, "When we find the networks that are enabling these weapons to end up in Iraq, we will deal with them. If we find agents who are moving these devices into Iraq, we will deal with them. I have put out the command to our troops—I mean, to the people who are commanders—that we'll protect the soldiers of the United States and innocent people in Iraq and will continue doing so."

Twice in the course of the question-and-answer period Bush repeated the same rationale for military action against Iran: that such action would be a "defensive" response to Iranian-backed attacks on US troops in Iraq. He suggested no limitations either on the type of military actions contemplated or their location, implicitly leaving open a direct attack within the borders of Iran.

Asked specifically if there was a danger that US retaliation could lead to full-scale war with Iran, Bush refused to rule out such an outcome.

His statements marked a shift from those made the previous day by White House Press Secretary Tony Snow, who declared, "We're not going to war with [Iran]. Let me make that clear. So anybody who is trying to use this as 'the administration trying to lay the predicate for a war with Iran'—no, we're committed to diplomacy with Iran. But we are also committed to protecting our forces."

Bush was twice asked what reason the American people had to believe the intelligence presented against

Iran, given the bogus claims of weapons of mass destruction and Iraq-Al Qaeda ties used to justify the invasion of Iraq. NBC News correspondent David Gregory asked: “Critics say that you are using the same quality of intelligence about Iran that you used to make the case for war in Iraq—specifically about WMD—that turned out to be wrong, and that you are doing that to make a case for war against Iran. Is that the case?”

Bush sidestepped the question and repeated his claims of Iranian involvement: “The idea that somehow we’re manufacturing the idea that the Iranians are providing IEDs is preposterous . . . My job is to protect our troops. And when we find devices that are in that country that are hurting our troops, we’re going to do something about it, pure and simple.”

In his opening remarks, Bush focused on the military escalation in Iraq, noting, “The operation to secure Baghdad is going to take time, and there will be violence.” He mentioned, almost as a footnote, the agreement that had been announced between the US and North Korea the previous day regarding that country’s nuclear weapons program.

In defending his Iraq policy, Bush alluded to the dishonest and hypocritical character of the Democratic Party’s opposition. The Democrats are posing as critics of the war while assuring the US ruling elite that, whatever tactical differences they may have with Bush’s policy, they remain committed to defeating the Iraqi resistance and upholding the interests of American imperialism in Iraq and the Middle East.

Bush noted that the US Senate last month voted unanimously to approve the nomination of General David Petraeus as commander of US forces in Iraq, knowing that Patraeus had been chosen by the administration for the specific purpose of overseeing the troop “surge” and counter-insurgency operation in Baghdad.

He pointed out that the resolution currently being debated in the House of Representatives “disapproving” of the administration’s escalation is non-binding. He then said, “Soon Congress is going to be able to vote on a piece of legislation that is binding, a bill providing emergency funding for our troops.”

With these words Bush, in keeping with the general political thrust of supporters of his war policy—including the former Democratic vice presidential candidate Senator Joseph Lieberman—was

calling the Democrats’ bluff. Knowing that the Democrats are desperate to demonstrate their “support for the troops” and avoid any action reducing or ending war funding, he was exposing the two-faced character of their position in advance of next month’s vote on the war spending bill.



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