A Fourth of July lesson: Bush hails US war to crush Iraqi independence

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6 July 2007

The Fourth of July speech delivered by George W. Bush Wednesday amounted to an inadvertent self-exposure. Addressing a military audience in West Virginia, the president invoked the example of the American Revolution, when ordinary farmers "dropped pitchforks and took up muskets to fight" for their independence, "taking on the most powerful empire in the world."

It apparently did not occur to Bush, or his White House speechwriters, that any reference to the Revolutionary War was more than problematic for an imperialist power waging a brutal colonial war. It would suggest a parallel between today's insurgents in Iraq and the ragtag colonials of 1776 who waged guerrilla warfare against the British monarchy, then "the most powerful empire in the world."

It is George III, not George Washington, who is the model for Bush's limited mentality, cruelty and pigheadedness, and whose abuses of power and attacks on democratic rights were set down by the rebels in that bill of complaints known as the Declaration of Independence, an indictment that today applies with even greater force to the Bush administration's policies in both occupied Iraq and the United States (see "The July 4th holiday and the state of American democracy").

It was George III, not George Washington, who unleashed an army of mercenaries to subdue the population of a country that rejected his rule. This week it was reported that the Bush administration now deploys more private contractors—modern mercenaries—in Iraq than American soldiers. It does so for some of the same reasons as the British monarch: to offset the lack of popular enthusiasm for the war, and to disguise, to the extent possible, the mounting death toll among the forces of the colonial power.

As has become customary for the Bush administration, the president delivered his speech in the only setting where he can appear without risking public humiliation, a military audience, this one assembled at an Air National Guard base in Martinsburg, West Virginia. (Press accounts noted, however, that even here there appeared to be signs of disaffection, with hundreds of empty seats in the cavernous hangar)

Bush recalled that the first Fourth of July celebration "took place in a midst of a war—a bloody and difficult struggle that would not end for six more years..." This was perhaps a suggestion of how much longer the war in Iraq could continue, and Bush declared that there would be far more bloodletting—"more sacrifice," as he described it.

Bush reiterated his determination to continue the war regardless of the massive popular opposition and the crumbling support for the current "surge" of troops, even among congressional Republicans. The day after his speech, another prominent Republican senator, Pete Domenici of New Mexico, said he had concluded that a change in tactics in Iraq was required, including a reduction in the US military presence.

Much of Bush's speech was a rehash of the long-discredited lies used to instigate the war. "In this war, we face dangerous enemies who have attacked us here at home," he declared. But no Iraqis attacked the United States on September 11, 2001—the airplane hijackers were mainly from Saudi Arabia, whose reactionary monarchy is a staunch ally of American imperialism.

"If we were to quit Iraq before the job is done, the terrorists we are fighting would not declare victory and lay down their arms," Bush continued, "they would follow us here, home." This is an empty threat which regularly goes unchallenged in the American media.

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How, exactly, would Iraqi insurgents, fighting in their own neighborhoods and countryside, using relatively primitive weapons and without access to air and sea power or intercontinental ballistic missiles, "follow" US forces home?

The insurgents are fighting US forces, not because they wish to establish Iraqi dominion over New York, Chicago or Los Angeles, but because American military forces have been sent ten thousand miles from home to invade and occupy Iraq, killing hundreds of thousands of people and installing a semi-colonial stooge regime that is to give US oil companies control over the country's vast energy reserves.

Bush mentioned the real material reasons for the US occupation in the next sentence of his speech, again touching on a subject his speechwriters would have been better advised to avoid. Referring again to the supposed army of terrorists (although all observers, including the Pentagon, agree that Al Qaeda is only a tiny fraction of the armed resistance to the US occupation), Bush said, "If we were to allow them to gain control of Iraq, they would have control of a nation with massive oil reserves—which they could use to fund new attacks and extort economic blackmail on those who didn't kowtow to their wishes."

"Control of a nation with massive oil reserves", "economic blackmail on those who didn't kowtow to their wishes"—these are certainly prime motivations for the fighting in Iraq, but on the part of the American invaders. A central purpose of the war, from the standpoint of official Washington, is to establish US domination over the oil resources of the Middle East.

While Bush, Cheney & Co. have always vociferously denied it, one of their closest allies in Iraq, the Australian government, was blurting out the truth about the war at almost the same time Bush delivered his speech in Martinsburg. Australian Defense Minister Brendan Nelson, in comments to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, admitted the central role of oil in the continuation of the war.

"Obviously the Middle East itself, not only Iraq but the entire region, is an important supplier of energy, oil in particular, to the rest of the world," he said. "Australians and all of us need to think what would happen if there were a premature withdrawal from Iraq."

In recent weeks, the major focus of the Bush administration and its allies has been to bully the Iraqi parliament into adopting legislation that will open the way to privatizing Iraq's oil reserves and bringing in American and British firms to exploit these resources. In pursuit of such riches, American imperialism is quite willing to override any obstacles thrown up by the nominally democratic institutions it has created in Baghdad.

Bush closed his speech by referring to the example of the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence in inspiring struggles for democratic rights around the world. "We believe in the universality of liberty," he claimed, although his administration has done more to undermine and destroy democratic rights in the United States than any in US history, repudiating such foundation principles as the right of *habeas corpus*

People around the world "who live in tyranny and yearn for freedom still place their hopes in the United States of America," he claimed. Actually, as the most recent international opinion polls show, the United States of America is regarded by the vast majority of the people on the planet as the world's greatest threat to peace, democracy and independence. At least as regards the Bush administration, that opinion is shared by a growing majority of the American people as well.

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