

Bush threatens to militarily “confront” Iran

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29 August 2007

In his second foreign policy speech in less than a week, President Bush Tuesday portrayed the ongoing US military occupation in Iraq as part of a broader regional struggle to defend vital US interests against “radicals and extremists.”

Contained in this speech was the explicit threat of widening the US war in the Middle East, directed in the first instance against Iran.

“Either the forces of extremism succeed or the forces of freedom succeed,” Bush said. “Either our enemies advance their interests in Iraq, or we advance our interests.”

The immediate purpose of Bush’s back-to-back speeches—the first delivered last Wednesday to the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in Kansas City and the second to the American Legion convention in Reno, Nevada—is to intimidate the massive popular opposition to the Iraq war and set the stage for the report on the Iraq “surge” that Gen. David Petraeus and US Ambassador Ryan Crocker are to deliver to Congress next month.

That this presentation has been scheduled for September 11—the sixth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington—is hardly a coincidence. It will unquestionably be packaged as part of a fresh propaganda campaign aimed at frightening the American people with the supposedly ubiquitous threat of terror.

This was prefigured in Bush’s own speech. Once again he mouthed the absurd and threadbare lie that 160,000 US troops are in Iraq to battle Al Qaeda—incessantly and falsely described as “the same people who attacked us on 9/11”—for the supposed purpose of preventing fresh attacks on the US.

“We will fight them over there so we do not have to face them in the United States of America,” he told the veterans’ group. That there was no one in Iraq identifying himself as Al Qaeda before the US carried out its unprovoked invasion of the country in March 2003 is only one of the inconvenient facts evaded by the White House propaganda surge.

Coming closer than usual—although still obliquely—to

acknowledging the real motives underlying the Iraq war, Bush stated, “America has enduring and vital interests in the region.” He continued: “Throughout our history, the American people have had strong links with this region—through ties of commerce and education and faith. *Long before oil and gas were discovered in the Middle East* the region was a key source of trade. It is the home to three of the world’s great religions. It remains a strategic crossroads for the world.” [Emphasis added].

Warning of the dire consequences that would supposedly unfold should Washington fail in its attempt to quell the resistance and establish its colonial-style domination over Iraq, the US president said, “Extremists would control a key part of the world’s energy supply, could blackmail and sabotage the global economy. They could use billions of dollars of oil revenues to buy weapons and pursue their deadly ambitions.”

Here Bush is merely accusing those who are resisting the American occupation of pursuing the essential aims of US imperialism and the dominant right-wing layers within the American ruling elite that he himself represents. They are attempting to establish by means of military aggression unchallenged American control over the key oil-producing regions of the Middle East and Central Asia in order to assert US hegemony over the global economy and place Washington in a position to dictate terms to its rivals in Asia and Europe, which are more dependent upon the energy reserves in these regions than is the US.

In his potted version of the dirty colonial war being fought by US forces in Iraq, Bush portrayed the struggle as being against two “strains of radicalism”—Sunni extremism, which he identified with Al Qaeda, and Shia extremism, which he identified with Iran.

Bush accused the former of attempting to create “a violent and radical caliphate that spans from Spain to Indonesia,” a delusional vision that only the right-wing ideologues in Washington grant the slightest credibility.

The supposed threat from the other radical “strain,” however, was presented in far more immediate and concrete terms.

“Shia extremism,” Bush charged, is “supported and embodied by the regime that sits in Tehran.” He described the Iranian government as “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism,” while claiming that it threatened the region with “a nuclear holocaust.”

Bush repeated the unsubstantiated charges that American forces are coming under increasing attack from Iranian-supplied weapons and that Iranian Revolutionary Guard elements are training and arming Iraqi “extremist groups.”

Such claims are unsupported by the US military’s own reports from Iraq. The Pentagon recently acknowledged that since the escalation of the US intervention last February, it has recorded a 50 percent increase in the number of detainees it is holding—soaring from 16,000 to 24,500. Yet, it has identified only 280 “foreign fighters,” none of whom are Iranian.

Moreover, according to the statistics reported in the *New York Times* last week, 85 percent of those detained are Sunni, with the remaining Shia detainees drawn largely from supporters of the Sadrists Mahdi Army, which is openly hostile to Teheran.

The statistics provided by the Pentagon’s Task Force 134, which runs US detention operations in Iraq, contradict the entire thesis advanced by Bush that the war in Iraq is an “ideological struggle” against Islamist extremism. Only a relative handful of those detained identify with Al Qaeda, while the military’s spokesman for the detention operation describes the vast majority of them as “angry men” who “don’t have jobs.”

In other words, the resistance is motivated neither by supposed Sunni extremist visions of a caliphate nor Shia extremist agitation from Teheran, but by overwhelming hostility to the carnage and devastating destruction wrought by the US invasion and occupation upon every facet of Iraqi society.

Bush made claims in his speech as to the supposed success of his “surge” in ameliorating these conditions that can only be described as patent lies.

“Our new strategy is also showing results in places where it matters most—the cities and neighborhoods where ordinary Iraqis live,” he said. “In these areas, Iraqis are increasingly reaching accommodations with each other, with the coalition, and with the government in Baghdad.”

Every report coming out of occupied Iraq refutes these phony assertions. Among the most recent is a survey conducted by the Associated Press showing that the average daily Iraqi death toll that it has documented through its reporting has nearly doubled since the surge

began, climbing from 33 to 62. The news agency acknowledged that these numbers are a gross underestimation of the real carnage, as “many killings go unreported or uncounted.” Also not included in the numbers were those classified as “insurgents” killed by the US military and its puppet forces.

Similarly, the Iraqi Red Crescent has documented a doubling of the number of displaced civilians since the beginning of the year—roughly since the US military escalation began—climbing from under 450,000 to over 1.1 million as of July 31.

Bush followed his allegations against Iran with an unmistakable threat. Iran, he said, “... cannot escape responsibility for aiding attacks against coalition forces and the murder of innocent Iraqis. The Iranian regime must halt these actions. And until it does, I will take actions necessary to protect our troops. I have authorized our military commanders in Iraq to confront Tehran’s murderous activities.”

The implication is clear. The debacle confronting the American occupation of Iraq is driving the government in Washington not towards a withdrawal of US forces, but rather towards an even bloodier military adventure.

The charges of alleged Iranian terrorism and weapons constitute a direct echo of the pretexts used four-and-a-half years ago to prepare the war of aggression against Iraq. There is every reason to believe that the world is on the brink of another eruption of US militarism.



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