

Bush returns to West Point to defend doctrine of aggressive war

Bill Van Auken
11 December 2008

President George W. Bush made a farewell appearance Tuesday at the US Military Academy at West Point, New York, delivering an unrepentant defense of the doctrine of preventive war that he unveiled there six-and-a-half years ago.

When Bush spoke to West Point's graduating class of 2002, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that his remarks signaled "a historic shift in US foreign policy that is pregnant with catastrophic implications for the people of the United States and the entire world." The doctrine of "preemptive"—or, more accurately, aggressive—war that he outlined, the WSWS said, represented the "culmination of a protracted turn by the US ruling elite toward reliance on military force as the solution to all challenges it confronts on the world arena." (See "Bush speaks at West Point: from containment to 'rollback'")

In the intervening years, these warnings have been fully confirmed. Since Bush spoke to the Army's newly minted officers in 2002, at least 70 West Point graduates have been killed in the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan along with more than 4,750 other members of the US military.

For the countries where they were sent to fight, the doctrine produced catastrophes of historic proportions. In Iraq, the death toll has risen to well over a million. An estimated 2 million more have been wounded and at least 4 million have been forced to flee the country or turned into internal refugees. In short, nearly six years of war and occupation have left more than 20 percent of the nation's pre-war population dead, maimed, expelled or homeless.

In Afghanistan, air strikes and ground operations, along with displacement, hunger and disease resulting from the war, have claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians while the disintegration of society under the impact of foreign occupation has left the country's population facing a humanitarian catastrophe.

At home, Bush's war policies have turned him into the

most reviled president in US history with a popularity rating that has plumbed depths not even reached by Richard Nixon at the height of the Watergate crisis.

Yet, according to Bush's speech Tuesday, the entire strategy has proved an immense success and constitutes his proud legacy.

He boasted of having "reshaped our approach to national security," declaring that his administration had given "our national security professionals vital new tools like the Patriot Act and the ability to monitor terrorist communications." These "tools" include torture, extraordinary rendition and secret prisons, the loathsome practices that turned the US into an international pariah. They also encompassed wholesale and illegal domestic spying and other methods associated with a police state.

Praising the results of his wars of aggression, Bush claimed to have "liberated 25 million Afghans," but was forced to admit that more than seven years after the US invasion that "the battle is difficult." This is an understatement, given reports that insurgents control up to 70 percent of the country.

In relation to Iraq, he repeated the phony pretexts advanced by his administration six years ago, describing it as a "country that combined support for terror" with "the development of weapons of mass destruction." Gone was the expression of "regret" he voiced barely a week ago in an ABC television interview about the "failure of intelligence" concerning Iraq's supposed weapons programs. In the end, the legacy and the defense of lies used to drag the American people into war are indivisible.

Claiming again to have "liberated 25 million Iraqis," Bush grudgingly acknowledged that "The battle in Iraq has been longer and more difficult than expected." The passive voice begs the question: expected by whom? For the likes of Vice President Cheney and other right-wing ideologues in his administration who assured the American people that US troops would be "welcomed as

liberators," this was no doubt the case. But all those with serious knowledge of the region understood full well that Washington's attempt to recolonize Iraq could only unleash a bloodbath.

Likewise, Bush touted his administration's drive to create an anti-ballistic missile system and establish missile defense sites in the Czech Republic and Poland along with its program to build up "the reliability and effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent." These are policies that are paving the way to a military confrontation with Russia that could end in nuclear war.

Bush also looked to the future and to Pakistan, where, he seemed to be warning, the West Point cadets may soon find themselves in combat.

"One of the most important challenges we will face, and you will face, in the years ahead is helping our partners assert control over ungoverned spaces," said Bush. "This problem is most pronounced in Pakistan, where areas along the Afghanistan border are home to Taliban and to Al Qaeda fighters."

He added pointedly, "We have made it clear to Pakistan—and to all our partners—that we will do what is necessary to protect American troops and the American people."

The implications of this remark—coming in the wake of a series of US missile attacks on Pakistani targets, many of them claiming the lives of civilians—were unmistakable. Washington is preparing to launch still another war of aggression to subdue the inhabitants of "ungoverned spaces."

While he did not utter his name, Bush's concluding remarks were clearly directed to the incoming administration of President-elect Barack Obama, urging a continuation and deepening of the policies associated with the Bush Doctrine.

"With all the actions we've taken these past eight years, we've laid a solid foundation on which future Presidents and future military leaders can build," he said.

Bush continued, "In the years ahead, our nation must continue developing the capabilities to take the fight to our enemies across the world. We must stay on the offensive."

Given the events of the last eight years, the Bush Doctrine deserves to be thrown on the scrap heap of history together with the doctrines of aggressive war propagated by Nazi Germany 70 years ago. He and other leading figures in his administration deserve to be tried for war crimes as well as crimes against the US Constitution.

What then is to explain his seeming confidence in claiming vindication for his appalling record?

No doubt it is a well-founded conviction that under the incoming Obama administration, the Bush Doctrine—whatever tactical modifications may be made—will remain essentially intact as the foundation for US imperialist policy on a global scale.

With his retention of Bush's Defense Secretary Robert Gates, his pledge to keep tens of thousands of troops as a "residual force" in Iraq, and his vows to expand the US intervention in Afghanistan and carry out cross-border attacks against Pakistan, the Democratic president-elect has provided ample indications that his administration will be characterized far more by continuity than by the "change" he promised in the course of the election campaign.

In the final analysis, Washington's turn towards militarism and aggression is driven not so much by the right-wing ideology of Bush & Co. as by the insoluble crisis of American capitalism, which will only deepen under an Obama administration. Unable to resolve the fundamental economic and social contradictions underlying this crisis, US imperialism will continue seeking to offset its historic decline with the use of military force.

Settling accounts with the Bush Doctrine and holding accountable those responsible for the wars of aggression, torture and repression of the last eight years will not be realized with Barack Obama entering the White House. These tasks require the building of an independent movement of working people armed with a socialist program to end war by putting an end to the capitalist profit system itself.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact