

In farewell speech, Bush insists “war on terror” must continue

Bill Van Auken
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In his final speech from the White House Thursday night, President George W. Bush defended his legacy of war, torture and domestic repression while vowing that the “war on terror,” the ideological mainspring of his administration, must go on.

Speaking just five days before he leaves office, Bush directed his remarks at justifying the criminal record of his eight years as president, while seeking to ensure that the main thrust of his policies will continue after the inauguration next Tuesday of President-elect Barack Obama.

As he has done so often over the past seven years, Bush attempted one last time to wrap himself in the bloody mantle of September 11 and claim that the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington were the driving force behind his administration’s decisions to invade Afghanistan, wage war on Iraq and arrogate to itself the right to torture, kidnap, murder, conduct illegal domestic spying and hold prisoners without charges or trials in US-run concentration camps.

Bush leaves office the most unpopular US president in history. He is hated around the world and reviled by the great majority of the American people not only for the wars of aggression and anti-democratic measures that have been the preoccupation of his administration, but also for his championing of economic policies that served to widen social inequality and pave the way to the eruption of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

An intellectual and moral cipher who was catapulted into the White House thanks to family connections and a stolen election, Bush’s name will be forever associated with the most shameful episodes in modern American history, from the torture of prisoners at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, to the abandonment of

the people of New Orleans in the wake of Katrina, to Wall Street’s plundering of the economy at the expense of millions of Americans’ jobs and homes.

Under these conditions, the tone of the president’s speech was as delusional as its content was dishonest.

Bush cast himself as the principal victim of September 11. “As the years passed, most Americans were able to return to life much as it had been before 9/11,” he declared. “But I never did. Every morning I received a briefing on the threats to our nation. And I vowed to do everything in my power to keep us safe.”

Bush declared that by invading Afghanistan and Iraq he had “taken the fight to the terrorists.” He once again claimed victory in these wars, describing Afghanistan, whose corrupt and isolated regime is unable to exert its rule outside of Kabul, as a “young democracy that is fighting terrorism.” As for Iraq, where America’s intervention has claimed the lives of over 1 million people and turned more than 4 million more into exiles and internal refugees, he claimed credit for forging “an Arab democracy at the heart of the Middle East ... a friend of the United States.”

He also claimed vindication for policies that have created the scaffolding of a police state in America, extolling the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security and measures to provide America’s security agencies with “new tools” to prosecute the war on terror. That such “tools” have involved the scrapping of bedrock democratic principles such as habeas corpus and ridden roughshod over constitutional rights against unlawful detention and unreasonable search and seizure was of no concern to the outgoing “commander-in-chief.”

Bush grudgingly acknowledged that there could be “legitimate debate” over the actions taken by his administration, but insisted that such debate could not

question the success of his policies. “America has gone more than seven years without another terrorist attack on our soil,” he proclaimed.

The reality is that the tragic events of September 11—and the Bush administration’s failure to prevent them—have never been seriously investigated, much less explained to the American people. Without an explanation of how these attacks—carried out by individuals who in several cases were under CIA surveillance—were allowed to unfold in the first place, it is impossible to claim that measures taken in their aftermath prevented new ones.

Only one thing is certain: The administration seized upon September 11 as its pretext for carrying out two military interventions that had been prepared and planned years before. Their aim was not the eradication of terrorists but rather US domination over Central Asia and the Persian Gulf to seize control of their oil resources and secure a decisive strategic advantage over US capitalism’s principal economic rivals.

Rather than such obvious geo-strategic interests, Bush insisted that the global explosion of American militarism was part of a worldwide struggle between “good and evil,” in which Washington was fulfilling the will of “Almighty God” by “leading the world toward a new age when freedom belongs to all nations.”

As for “evil,” the president proclaimed that “Murdering the innocent to advance an ideology is wrong every time, everywhere.” The remark came as the murderous assault on Gaza, which has killed or wounded over 6,000 Palestinians, the bulk of them civilians, neared the end of its third week. Throughout this campaign, Bush has defended Israel’s war, carried out with US-supplied weapons, uttering not a word of sympathy for its murdered victims.

Bush felt compelled to defend his administration’s massive bailout of Wall Street. “When challenges to our prosperity emerged, we rose to meet them,” he said, referring to the trillions of dollars in public moneys that Washington has placed at the disposal of the major US financial institutions. “All Americans are in this together,” he insisted, providing the standard rhetorical justification for imposing austerity measures on working people in order to salvage the fortunes of the financial elite.

He insisted that the country would return to “the path

of growth” and “show the world once again the resilience of America’s free enterprise system,” a rosy forecast belied by a continuous rise in layoffs and fall in manufacturing, sales and every other economic indicator, which together point to a systemic crisis of the capitalist system of a world-historic and revolutionary character.

In the end, however, the speech was one more attempt to terrorize the American people with the supposedly ubiquitous threat of terrorism.

“While our nation is safer than it was seven years ago,” he said, “the gravest threat to our people remains another terrorist attack... We must resist complacency. We must keep our resolve. And we must never let down our guard.”

The implication of this argument is clear. The “global war on terror” must go on, regardless of the change in administrations.

Bush, together with Cheney and other top officials in his administration, deserve by every legal, moral and political standard to be placed on trial for war crimes. Yet he delivered his last ignorant speech with an obvious sense of impunity. He no doubt is confident, and with good reason, that the incoming Democratic administration will not only refuse to pursue any investigation, much less prosecution, of administration officials for their crimes against the country and the Constitution, but will, in the end, maintain the essential framework through which Washington has carried out war abroad and social reaction and repression at home over the past eight years.



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