

George W. Bush inadvertently tells the truth about the Iraq War

Patrick Martin
19 May 2022

Speaking at his presidential center in Dallas Wednesday night, former President George W. Bush engaged in what is sometimes described as a “gaffe,” speaking a political truth by mistake. Condemning the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine, he attributed the Russian invasion to the “decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq.”

Realizing his mistake, he continued, “of the Ukraine,” then muttered, “Iraq too, anyway.” He shook his head as members of his well-heeled and friendly audience laughed, then joked about his age, 75, before returning to his remarks blasting Putin and hailing US military support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

A brief Twitter video of this key moment in his speech has gone viral, with more than 23 million people watching it on Thursday alone, and social media has been filled with sarcastic commentary and occasional declarations that Bush is a war criminal and guilty of the very same crimes that he attributes to Putin.

It is worse than that, however, far worse. As bad as the consequences of Putin’s reactionary invasion have been for the people of Ukraine, they pale by comparison to the systematic destruction of an entire society in Iraq, carried out twice over, first by Bush’s father and then by Bush himself.

The US bombing campaign against Iraq in January-February 1991, ordered by President George H. W. Bush, resulted in 110,000 sorties by US, British and other allied warplanes, which dropped nearly 90,000 tons of bombs on an essentially defenseless country. This is four times the total tonnage of bombs dropped by the Allied powers in all of World War II in all theaters of the war, deluging a country only slightly larger than Germany alone.

The combined effect of the bombing and the four-day ground assault—more of a mopping up operation than actual combat—was to reduce an Iraq military force of 620,000 to only 20,000 organized troops. At least 200,000 were killed outright, many on the notorious “Highway of Death” between Kuwait and the city of Basra in southern Iraq.

The four days of ground war were, in the words of the *Bulletin* newspaper, US forerunner of the *World Socialist Web Site*, “the bloodiest four days mankind has seen since August 6-9, 1945, when US imperialism incinerated hundreds of thousands of Japanese in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

A 2013 volume, *Genocide in Iraq, The Case Against the UN Security Council and Member States*, by Abdul Haq Al-Ani and Tarik Al-Ani (Clarity Press, UK) details the impact of the US

bombing during Desert Storm:

- Eighty-five percent of all power generation was destroyed, which left only two of Iraq’s 20 electricity generating plants functioning, generating less than four percent of the pre-war output of 9,000 megawatts.
- Almost half of Iraq’s 900,000 telephone lines had been destroyed, with 14 central exchanges irreparably damaged and 13 more put out of service indefinitely.
- Iraq’s eight major multipurpose dams were repeatedly hit and heavily damaged.
- Four of Iraq’s seven major water pumping stations were destroyed, and 31 municipal water and sewage facilities were hit with bombs and missiles, 20 in Baghdad alone.
- The bombing targets included 139 bridges, 26 in Basra alone.
- Iraq’s baby milk powder factory at Abu Ghraib, the only such factory in the whole region, was attacked three times—on January 20, 21 and 22, 1991.
- Grain silos and farms were attacked across the country, decimating over 30 percent of the sheep and cattle herds and destroying the country’s poultry production.
- The US bombed 28 civilian hospitals and 52 community health centers.
- A major hypodermic syringe facility in Hilla was destroyed by laser-guided rockets.
- A total of 676 schools were attacked, completely destroying 38 of them, eight of which were university facilities.
- In Baghdad alone 25 mosques were bombed, with another 31 mosques bombed elsewhere in the country.

This was not war against Saddam Hussein and his armed forces over the occupation of Kuwait. It was war against the Iraqi people as a whole, against the entire country and its ability to survive as a functioning society.

This was followed by 12 years of economic sanctions so severe that an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children died prematurely because of malnutrition, diseases caused by the destruction of water and sanitation systems, and the impact of the bombing and blockade on health care, particularly the lack of access to medicine.

Then came the 2003 invasion of Iraq by George W. Bush, in which more Iraqi soldiers were annihilated, more civilian targets were bombed, particularly in cities like Baghdad, and whatever infrastructure had been rebuilt since 1991 was destroyed a second time.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party

opposed the Iraq war from the very beginning, condemning the support for the war, not only by the Bush administration and the Republican right, but by the bulk of the Democratic Party. It was the leading Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, then-Senator Joe Biden, who played a central role in pushing through the Authorization for the Use of Military Force that provided a congressional rubber stamp for the illegal invasion.

In a series of articles in May 2007, the WSWS summed up the devastation inflicted by the US conquest and occupation of Iraq, branding it “sociocide,” the deliberate destruction of an entire society, and pointing out that under both Bush and his father, American imperialism had carried out crimes of the type previously associated only with fascist regimes. We wrote:

Iraq, once among the most advanced countries of the region, has been reduced, in terms of basic economic and social indices, to the level of the poorest countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

What is involved is the systematic destruction of an entire society through the unleashing of violence and criminality on a scale not seen since Hitler’s armies ravaged Europe in the Second World War.

Less than a third of the population nationwide has access to clean drinking water, and just 19 percent have a functioning sewage system. Both the water and sewage systems were damaged heavily by US bombardments in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the 2003 invasion...

On average, Iraqis receive only eight hours of electricity a day, with even worse conditions in Baghdad, where most of the capital’s seven million people get only six hours or less of service daily.

We noted the 150 percent increase in the infant mortality rate from 1990 to 2005. Half of all Iraq’s children were suffering from malnutrition; only one-third were attending school. Half of Iraq’s doctors had fled the country. Per capita GDP was half that of 1980, and Iraq’s state-owned industries had been privatized and shut down, with the loss of half a million jobs, by an ideologically motivated campaign of the Iraq occupation authority set up by the US in Baghdad. The WSWS concluded:

The premeditated destruction of an entire society carried out on the basis of lies and in pursuit of the financial and geo-strategic interests of America’s ruling elite constitutes a war crime of historic proportions, punishable under the same statutes and on the basis of the same principles as those used to condemn leading figures of Germany’s Third Reich at Nuremberg.

Those responsible for launching the war in Iraq consist not merely of the right-wing Republican cabal grouped around Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz. They include also the Democrats who enabled this war, the heads of US energy conglomerates and finance houses that hoped

to profit from it and the chiefs of the media monopolies that promoted it. All of these layers, constituting the political establishment and financial aristocracy of the United States, are guilty of the same fundamental crime for which the Nazis were prosecuted nearly 60 years ago: the plotting and waging of a war of aggression. It is from this principal crime that all the multiple crimes and horrors inflicted upon the Iraqi people have flowed.

It is not a matter of justifying Putin’s reactionary attack on Ukraine to point out that the war he launched has produced nothing like the level of destruction inflicted by the US in Iraq. This may be a significant factor in the limited military gains of the war, at least so far. Also, Ukraine is being heavily armed by all the NATO powers, while Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, certainly in 2003, was completely isolated and without allies.

In 1991, Bush’s father decided to limit the war to the ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. He rejected suggestions from some aides to send US forces northward all the way to Baghdad and oust Saddam Hussein, considering it too risky, because Iraq was then allied to the Soviet Union. The senior Bush did not want to do anything that might interrupt the ongoing disintegration of the USSR, which was a far higher priority for Washington. By 2003, no such restraint existed on the aggressive operations of American imperialism.

While the American and European corporate media howls for war crimes charges against Putin and denounces the war in Ukraine as “genocide,” the architects of immeasurably greater crimes in Iraq enjoy comfortable retirements, speaking engagements, lucrative consulting jobs and high-level state and media positions. Bush, Cheney and Tony Blair are only the first names on a long and ghastly list.

The scale of the killing and destruction carried out by the United States in Iraq dwarfs a thousand-fold what Russia has done in Ukraine.

Three decades of unending war in the Middle East and Central Asia, in which the Iraq War stands out for its blatant illegality and homicidal brutality, have developed into a direct conflict of the US and NATO powers against Russia. Having killed 1 million people in Iraq, the strategists of American imperialism are contemplating and discussing a world war that would involve the deaths of tens of millions.

The working class, as it enters into struggle throughout the world, must connect the fight against inequality and exploitation to the fight against war. It will hold accountable all those responsible for the crimes of imperialism, past and present.



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