

Bush calls for permanent US military occupation of Iraq in nationally televised address

By Barry Grey
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President Bush's nationally televised speech, delivered Thursday evening from the Oval Office, was the low point of a week of lies and absurdities designed to justify the United States' bloody colonial war in Iraq. The ugly farce began with the congressional testimony Monday and Tuesday of Gen. David Petraeus, the top US commander in Iraq, and US Ambassador Ryan Crocker.

Bush cited their fraudulent assessment of the "success" of the military "surge" to outline a perspective for continuing the American occupation of Iraq and transforming the country into a permanent American protectorate, whose vast oil resources will be exploited by US oil companies, and whose territory will be used as a staging ground for military attacks on Iran and a strategic base for American domination of the Middle East.

Bush was, as usual, shameless in his piling up of lie upon lie, beginning with his portrayal of a gradual reduction in the 30,000 additional combat troops sent to Iraq in the military escalation he announced last January as a "new phase" in the war that could see a significant decline in fighting and troop levels. As is well known, the phasing out of the surge is dictated by the lack of additional forces to replace troops whose tours of duty will be coming to an end.

Once again, Bush portrayed the US occupation as a struggle for "freedom" against "terrorists and extremists," denying that the real enemy of US imperialism is the broad mass of the Iraqi people, who form the backbone of the popular resistance to the hated American occupiers.

The surge, he said, was aimed at "securing the Iraqi population" and bridging "sectarian divides." In fact,

recent studies have shown that the number of Iraqis fleeing their homes has doubled since the surge began, and the country has become far more polarized along sectarian lines, with ethnic cleansing of neighborhoods in Baghdad and elsewhere proceeding at an accelerated pace.

Bush spoke of peace and security breaking out in regions, such as Anbar and Diyala, which have been "cleared"—a euphemism for bloody repression and military violence. He gave an absurd picture of an almost idyllic Baghdad, with schools and markets reopening and sectarian violence receding. In fact, large parts of Baghdad have been turned into virtual concentration camps, enclosed by high concrete walls, patrolled by US armored vehicles, and kept under permanent curfew.

The so-called "security" of the Iraqi people has taken the form of tens of thousands of additional people rousted from their homes and thrown into prisons. So hellish is the situation that a recent poll of Iraqis reported 79 percent favoring the withdrawal of US troops and 59 percent supporting violent attacks against them.

Bush again warned that the withdrawal of American troops would result in a "humanitarian nightmare," an apt description of the social destruction and human horror that US is perpetrating every day it remains in the country.

At times Bush's pronouncements seemed delirious, as when he thanked the "36 nations who have troops on the ground in Iraq."

Perhaps the greatest absurdity is the claim, made by Petraeus and Crocker and repeated by Bush, that Sunni Anbar province proves the success of the surge and

vindicates the US strategy in Iraq. In fact, the US has achieved a fragile peace with Sunni sheiks in the province by bribing them with tens of millions of dollars in “reconstruction” funds.

If anything, the turn to an alliance with Sunni forces is more a sign of desperation and perplexity than of strategic foresight. Less than a year ago, US strategy in Iraq was based on an alliance with Shia sectarian forces, who continue to dominate the puppet government in Baghdad. When that policy collapsed, the US turned to its opposite, laying the basis for a further division of the country along sectarian lines and an intensification of civil warfare.

Just how stable the US position in Anbar really is was demonstrated by the assassination only hours before Bush’s speech of the Sunni sheik who had led the tribal leaders aligned with the US, and with whom Bush had met ten days previously.

The heart of Bush’s speech was an allusion to the perspective of permanent US military and political control over Iraq. Iraqi leaders, Bush said, “understand that their success will require US political, economic and security engagement that extends beyond my presidency. These Iraqi leaders have asked for an enduring relationship with America.”

The speech was punctuated by threats against Iran, pointing to the growing danger that the war cabal in Washington will expand the conflict, with incalculable and tragic consequences. Bush spoke of “Iranian-backed militants” and “the destructive ambitions of Iran,” and declared that the “efforts by Iran and Syria to undermine [the Iraqi] government must end.”

The fact that Bush feels himself in a position to even make such a speech is due, above all, to the cowardice and complicity of the Democratic Party. Ten months after congressional elections in which the electorate voted against the Bush administration and the war and brought the Democratic Party into power in both houses of Congress, troop levels are substantially higher and all talk within the political establishment of an early end to the war has virtually ceased.

In his speech, Bush made a calculated appeal to the Democrats, knowing that their opposition to the war is fraudulent and that sections of the congressional Democrats are looking for a way to back the administration. Addressing “members of the United

States Congress,” he said, “Let us come together on a policy of strength in the Middle East. I thank you for providing crucial funds and resources for our military. And I ask you to join me in supporting the recommendations General Petraeus has made and the troop levels he has asked for.”

In the Democratic response, Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed failed to even mention the November 2006 elections. He spoke of “redefining” and “changing” the US mission in Iraq, not ending it. This is in line with the decision of the Democratic congressional leadership to drop any demand for deadlines or timetables for withdrawing troops.

As one CNN commentator aptly noted, the actual difference between the Bush administration and the Democrats comes down to whether troop levels by the end of the current administration should be 130,000 or 100,000.

The Democratic Party, which provided Bush with the votes he needed for congressional authorization of the war, has supported every request for war funding, and is preparing to support another \$190 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Democrats have worked deliberately and systematically since gaining control of Congress to divert, contain and exhaust popular opposition to the war.

On the eve of Bush’s speech, the Democratic-controlled Senate Appropriations Committee approved a \$459.6 billion Pentagon funding bill, including a \$40 billion increase in military programs. Combined with the \$190 billion in supplemental war funds, the total military budget for the new fiscal year will be \$650 billion—an 11 percent increase over current levels and, in real terms, far higher than total defense spending at the height of the Vietnam War.

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