

Bush Speech Reveals Administrations Ongoing Deceptions on Iraq

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As popular domestic opposition to the administration's policies in Iraq reaches new highs, President George W. Bush's efforts to justify the ongoing war seem to have reached new lows. Indeed, in the president's nationally-televised June 28th speech from an Army base at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, he was clearly straining to defend his disastrous decision to invade and occupy that oil-rich Middle Eastern country.

Given that Americans from across the political spectrum have traditionally been wary of foreign military entanglements, both Republican and Democratic presidents have repeatedly tried to portray U.S. military intervention in far-away lands—no matter how weak the enemy or imperialistic the quest—as vital to the defense of the United States. President Bush has an advantage over every other U.S. president in his lifetime in that the United States was attacked under his watch. That Iraq had nothing to do with that tragedy is apparently beside the point.

In his address, President Bush spoke of the horror of 9/11 and subsequent attacks by al-Qaida and related groups elsewhere in the world. In stressing America's determination to defend itself against future attacks, he claimed that "Iraq is the latest battlefield in this war." Since none of the 9/11 hijackers, none of the al-Qaida leadership, and none of the money trail has been traced to Iraq, the only connection President Bush was honestly able to make was that, "Many terrorists who kill innocent men, women, and children on the streets of Baghdad are followers of the same murderous ideology that took the lives of our citizens." While this may indeed be true, it is important to recognize that there was virtually no terrorism nor were there organized groups affiliated with al-Qaida and like-minded Sunni Islamist extremists in Iraq until nearly two years *after* the 9/11 attacks on the United States, and the rise of such radical movements and the widespread use of terrorism in that country was a direct consequence of the U.S. invasion and the overthrow of Iraq's longstanding secular nationalist government.

Speaking of the Iraqi insurgency and Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida movement as a collective "them," President Bush declared that, "There is only one course of action against them: to defeat them before they attack us at home." Americans are killing and dying in Iraq, he insisted, "because terrorists want to attack our country and kill our citizens, and Iraq is where they are making their stand," as if the underground al-Qaida cells in Europe and the United States allegedly responsible for 9/11 thought it strategically sound to base their terrorist operations in Iraq.

The president also cited General John Vines, the Army commander in charge of U.S. military operations in Iraq, who claimed that "We either deal with terrorism and this extremism abroad, or we deal with it when it comes to us." This is essentially a repetition of the long-discredited line used to justify the war in Vietnam: "If we don't fight them over there, we will have to fight them here."

Despite this often-repeated phrase by both Republicans and Democrats in the White House, Capitol Hill, and the mainstream media during the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, not once in the thirty years since the National Liberation Front marched into Saigon has the United States had to fight the Vietnamese or any other Communists in our country.

Vietnamese stopped killing Americans when our troops got out of their country. Presumably, Iraqis would do the same. It is important to re-emphasize the fact that there was no large-scale terrorist violence in Iraq until *after* the United States invaded in March 2003 and the terrorist violence which followed came in reaction to that foreign invasion and occupation of their country.

Yet, turning the lessons of history upside-down, President Bush insisted that, “We will prevent al-Qaida and other foreign terrorists from turning Iraq into what Afghanistan was under the Taliban, a safe haven from which they could launch attacks on America and our friends.” In reality, the Taliban was able to take over Afghanistan as a result of the radicalization of key sectors of the population which occurred not because of an absence of a counter-insurgency campaign led by non-Muslim foreign military forces in their country but *because* of a counter-insurgency campaign led by a non-Muslim foreign military in their country.

Though foreign fighters are only a small percentage of the active resistance against U.S. forces in Iraq, President Bush overemphasized their presence in his speech, claiming “Some of the violence you see in Iraq is being carried out by ruthless killers who are converging on Iraq to fight the advance of peace and freedom,” citing military reports that U.S. forces had “killed or captured hundreds of foreign fighters in Iraq” who had come from various Islamic countries. While most of these foreign jihadists probably do subscribe to a kind of religious fascism, they did not come to Iraq to kill and die in order to “fight the advance of peace and freedom.”

Foreign fighters are in Iraq for the same reason many of the foreign fighters were in Afghanistan during the 1980s: to repel a foreign army which had invaded an Islamic country, overthrown its government, and set up a new regime that the foreign occupier hoped would be more compliant with its strategic and economic interests.

With Americans becoming increasingly skeptical of the overly-optimistic reports from the White House on the situation in Iraq, the Bush administration has desperately sought to link some positive developments elsewhere in the Middle East to its policies there, declaring “As Iraqis make progress toward a free society, the effects are being felt beyond Iraq’s borders.”

As one example, President Bush observed, “Before our coalition liberated Iraq, Libya was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons. Today the leader of Libya has given up his chemical and nuclear weapons programs.” In reality, the principal U.S. and British negotiators who arranged the Libyan disarmament agreement have explicitly stated that the successful conclusion of their two-year effort was totally unrelated to the invasion. Indeed, given that Saddam Hussein had also given up his chemical and nuclear weapons programs but was invaded anyway, how could the U.S. invasion of Iraq been an incentive to Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi to do the same?

President Bush went on to say how “Across the broader Middle East, people are claiming their freedom. In the last few months, we’ve witnessed elections in the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon. These elections are inspiring democratic reformers in places like Egypt and Saudi Arabia.” Those actually familiar with these countries, however, recognize that none of these events had anything to do with the U.S. invasion of Iraq or what has transpired subsequently. The elections in the Palestinian territories in January took place because their former president died and the Lebanese elections earlier in June similarly followed that country’s normal constitutional process which has been in place for many years prior to the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Meanwhile, leading reformers in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, who have been struggling for many years against their countries’ U.S.-backed dictatorships have been virtually unanimous in their contention that the U.S. invasion of Iraq has actually set back their efforts for greater democratic freedoms as it has strengthened the power and influence of Islamic radicals.

There is no easy answer to the ongoing violence and destruction in Iraq and what needs to happen to create a stable, prosperous, peaceful, and democratic Iraq. But President Bush did not propose a solution in his speech. And after the lies that got us into the Iraq War it should certainly be clear that the Bush administration cannot be trusted to bring peace and prosperity to Iraq.