

A Criminal War of Lies: Why the US is really in Iraq

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These past weeks have witnessed a new government propaganda offensive on Iraq. Bush has given a series of headline-grabbing speeches and this past week U.S. Commander Gen. David Petraeus and U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker's report to Congress on the state of Iraq dominated the news. The Democrats offered their meek objections and amendments. And the net result seems to be that the U.S. military occupation of Iraq will continue, with well over 100,000 troops, for the foreseeable future.

The official terms of the so-called "debate" have been whether or not the Bush administration's "surge"—i.e., its escalation since January of this year—is "working." But the limits of this "debate" have served to conceal a fundamental truth: this war, the occupation and the "surge" are thoroughly unjust—"working" or not.

An Unjust And Horrific War—Based on Lies

From the beginning, Bush has used one lie after another to sell this war. "Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, even nuclear weapons." Lie. "Iraq was connected to 9/11." Lie. "Iraqis will welcome American soldiers as 'liberators.'" Lie. Deliberate, conscious lies.

Not bad intelligence. Not good intentions gone wrong. Lies. In just one of many examples, Sidney Blumenthal recently revealed in Salon.com that, "On September 18, 2002, CIA director George Tenet briefed President Bush in the Oval Office on top-secret intelligence that Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction, according to two former senior CIA officers." Bush went to war anyway.

This revelation makes clear, yet again, that the war wasn't a "mistake"—it was a crime. The U.S. government knew full well that Iraq posed no direct military threat to the U.S. or its neighbors, so the invasion constituted a war of aggression, the "supreme" crime according to the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal that judged the Nazis.

Now Bush claims, in part, that the U.S. is staying in Iraq to prevent "mass killings on a horrific scale," while condemning Iran for "the murder of innocent Iraqis." But it is the U.S. invasion itself, and the continuing direct actions of the U.S. military, that have led to "mass killings on a horrific scale" and the "murder of innocent Iraqis."

A study by Johns Hopkins University published in the British medical journal Lancet estimated that some 655,000 Iraqis had died as a result of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. That was two years ago, and the death toll continues. About 4.4 million Iraqis—out of a prewar population of 26 million—have fled to escape violence, half fleeing Iraq totally, with another 60,000 fleeing each month.

And the U.S. escalation—aka "surge"—has made things even worse: The Associated Press

reports the death toll for Iraqi civilians is double what it was a year ago. In August, civilian deaths rose to their second highest level this year—at least 1, 809. The number of prisoners in U.S.-run jails in Iraq has also increased by fifty-percent under the so-called surge. The U.S. military is now holding some 24,500 prisoners—up from 16,000 earlier this year.

Bush's true colors came out when he bragged on a recent trip to Australia that "we're kicking ass." Bush and the other U.S. politicians could not care less about the hundreds of thousands of human beings who have already died on account of their actions, or of the millions made homeless and destitute.

The Real Causes of the War

Bush told the American Legion on August 28: "It's a noble cause. It is a just cause. It is a necessary cause." And he declared: "America has enduring and vital interests in the [Middle East] region...It remains a strategic crossroads for the world..."

What is this "noble cause"? And more to the point what are the "enduring and vital interests" Bush is talking about? For starters, the Middle East contains some 60 percent of world oil reserves. For the imperialists, oil is both a critical source of profit and a strategic weapon to control the global economy and other countries which depend on oil. Control of this region is essential to global domination. This is why the U.S. has 170,000 troops and an armada of ships and military bases in the region, why it spends so much to build up the settler-colonial state of Israel and reactionary Arab tyrannies like Saudi Arabia, and why it is today threatening war on Iran.

This U.S. control has meant decades of terrible oppression for hundreds of millions of people. But every major candidate of both parties subscribes to the basic assumption that the U.S. must and should dominate this region and its people. This is at the heart of why the Democrats' opposition is so half-hearted and "around the edges." They are imperialist politicians representing imperialist interests.

After claiming for years that oil had nothing to do with the Iraq war, Bush now argues that if the U.S. wasn't in the Middle East, "Extremists would control a key part of the world's energy supply, could blackmail and sabotage the global economy. They could use billions of dollars of oil revenues to buy weapons and pursue their deadly ambitions."

Here Bush lets out a little bit of the truth—in the service of an even more profound lie. These "extremists" Bush attacks are the Islamic fundamentalists—those who claim that the key to liberation for these oppressed societies would be Islamic states under the control of religious law. Now this movement does NOT pose a real way out for the masses. Indeed it is itself reactionary. Where it has achieved power (e.g., Iran, or Afghanistan under the Taliban) it has enforced a suffocating control of political life, and the suppression of science and critical thinking, by religious authorities; the even deeper subjugation and oppression of women, and the feudal and capitalist economic and social relations in which peasants are subject to landowners and workers to capitalists. Its program represents the interests and position of outmoded class forces—feudal landowners, small-time capitalists dependent on but also strangled by imperialist penetration of the economy, etc. It has not led, and cannot lead, to liberation from imperialist domination of these economies but, at most, to a different form of rule and bigger cut of the plunder for a different group of exploiters.

Now these forces do at this point pose an obstacle to the needs of the U.S. to more deeply

penetrate the region and to forcibly restructure the societies there to ensure U.S. domination. But that is the problem Bush and the rest of the U.S. ruling class have with them. The U.S. rulers do not care one bit about the oppression of women—the U.S. supports governments that engage in similar oppression and is itself on a “mission” to deny women the right to abortion and birth control! And who is Bush to complain about “spending oil money on weapons”? Who gave the rulers of the U.S. the right to control world energy, spend billions on a monstrous military machine, and then use it to violently pursue its global ambitions? The class forces represented by Bush-imperialist monopoly capital—are no less outmoded than these “extremists” and are responsible by far for the greatest part of the untold suffering on a daily scale, along with horrendous aggression like the war in Iraq, that mark our world.

Knocking down these Islamic fundamentalist forces was in fact a big part of why the U.S. invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein’s regime. To be clear, Saddam Hussein’s regime was not Islamic fundamentalist. But the thinking behind the invasion was to begin by overrunning and occupying Iraq (which seemed at the time like it would be easy), and then to use Iraq as both an example and a jumping off point to forcibly restructure the whole region in the interests of U.S. imperialism, and smash any opposition whatsoever.

They Lied About the War... They’re Lying About the Occupation

The U.S. put together a regime of reactionary forces and calls them the democratic government of Iraq. The U.S. occupation has unleashed factional death squads which have ravaged the country with ethnic cleansing. They’ve tried to rewrite Iraqi laws to open its economy and oil wealth to U.S. capital. The U.S. has built massive military bases, some of which could be permanent and used to attack other countries. This is the reality behind Bush’s declaration that a “central objective” of U.S. strategy is to turn Iraq into “an ally in this war on terror,” and that “the future course of the Middle East will turn heavily on the outcome of the fight in Iraq,” and why he promises to stay for a “long term relationship.”

None of this is to say things would be fine in Iraq—or the region—the day U.S. forces left. Many forces—mostly reactionary at this point—have been uncorked by the imperialists’ very actions in Iraq. But the alternative—a continued U.S. occupation of Iraq with all the death and destruction that that entails, and a continued “war on terror” against other countries—is much, much worse. It would mean that the most oppressive power on earth would be even more dominant and in a much better position to proceed with still greater horrors carried out against others.

As September comes to a close, the picture is as sharp as the autumn air. The U.S. will continue to carry out its crimes in Iraq. The groundwork for a possible attack on Iran will be further laid (and such an attack could happen at any time). The Democrats will continue to channel people’s outrage into the dead end of the 2008 elections (and in the event of war against Iran, they have already pledged their support).

The time for massive political resistance is long overdue.

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