

## **Bush's "War on Terror": The Unraveling of a Fraud**

The invasion of Iraq is the worst policy mistake in US history, more disastrous even than the decision to invade Vietnam. It has inflamed anti-Americanism, spiked a rise in global terrorism, and destabilized the already volatile Middle East. Like the invasion of Viet Nam, justified by a fabricated attack on US ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, the rationale for waging war in Iraq was based on a deception, or rather, a series of monumental, unending lies.

The events of 9/11 implicated Bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and jihadists from Saudi Arabia and Egypt (although I find the "inside job" conspiracy theory compelling on many counts), yet the Bush administration used (if not fabricated) the terrorist attacks as the perfect pretext to invade Iraq. In a blatant grab for oil and geopolitical power, Bush & Co. – Vice President Dick Cheney, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, strategist Karl "Bush's Brain" Rove, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and assorted neo-conservatives – spread and endlessly repeated the Big Lie that 9/11 was the work of Saddam Hussein and Iraq not Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda.

Ignoring CIA reports to the contrary, Bush ordered his team to gather "evidence" that Iraq: (1) possessed weapons of mass destruction, (2) bought materials to make nuclear weapons, (3) provided direct support to Al Qaeda, (4) caused 9/11, and (5) is an epicenter and breeding ground of Islamic terrorism. Never mind that Hussein loathed Bin Laden and his brand of jihadism, the Masters of War confounded the facts and successfully manipulated media and public opinion for five years.

At the beginning of the invasion of Iraq, Bush & Co. assured the public that US forces would be greeted as "liberators" not occupiers, that the mission of dominating Iraq would be a "cakewalk" not a catastrophe, and that the stolen oil reserves would pay for the war costs, rather than US taxpayers funding a conflict that has now dragged on longer than World War II.

Since Bush declared "Mission Accomplished" in Iraq on May 1, 2003, we can weigh some of the major costs and toll of the war:

Over 100,000 dead Iraqi civilians and total chaos in Iraq  
3,000 dead US soldiers, over 22,000 wounded  
\$300 billion in total expenses, roughly \$5 billion a month  
Shredding of US credibility as a protector of human rights  
A crippled US Constitution

By November 2006, public approval ratings for Bush and his war reached their lowest point (31%). The public sent an overwhelming anti-war message to Bush in the Congressional elections, leading to Rumsfeld's long-overdue dismissal and charges of being a war criminal, and Papa Bush stepping in to dispatch the ideologues and appoint a new advisory council of "pragmatists." As the war spirals out of control, and Iraq

descends ever deeper into civil war, the neo-cons who championed the war have abandoned ship, and the “coalition of the willing” becomes ever-thinner and more unwilling. No one knows how to end a war that nonetheless must end; the Pentagon contemplates “one last push” and Bush – the pathetic failure he always was – still prattles on about “victory” amidst the rubble of total defeat.

### Deadly Deceit

The US “war on terror” is false and deceitful from every imaginable perspective. Here are six major reasons why.

1) *The very phrase and concept of “war on terror” is misconceived and oxymoronic.* Fighting a post-cold-war opponent with a cold-war paradigm, the US can’t win a battle it misunderstands from the start. Unlike a cold-war conflict, a post-cold-war conflict is not between competing nation states but rather between centralized nation states and predominantly non-state, decentralized guerilla groups (e.g., Al Qaeda and Hezbollah). Contemporary conflicts are not between secular nationalist ideologies but rather state politics and tribal, clan, and religious worldviews. One finds not a battle of two formidable opponents going tank-to-tank, but rather “asymmetrical warfare” where the outgunned, low-tech opponent uses irregular tactics, terrorism, and wages a protracted war of attrition. The US understood the terrain in Iraq about as well as the Russian military did in Afghanistan and Chechnya, misguided incursions that provoked extraordinary resistance. Similarly, the widespread neo-con use of the term “Islamofascism” is fundamentally misconceived due to the disanalogies between religious-inspired jihadists and secular armies such as the Nazis. In addition, “Islamofascism” lumps a host of different types of groups into one undifferentiated category, and hardly helps building bridges with Muslim communities.

2) *The war on terror was never fought in earnest.* Too busy playing golf, rigging the system for the benefit of their super-rich “base,” and scheming for control of Iraq’s oilfields, the Bush administration ignored numerous, stark warnings of an immediate terrorist threat to the nation. Beginning in January 2001, National Security Director Richard Clarke wrote memos to Condoleezza Rice and others that the Al Qaeda threat was urgent and requesting an immediate meeting of the National Security Council's Principals Committee. Rice responded by downgrading Clarke’s position and shutting him out of high-level meetings. Clarke later stated, “Frankly, I find it outrageous that the president is running for re-election on the grounds that he's done such great things about terrorism. He ignored it. He ignored terrorism for months, when maybe we could have done something to stop 9/11.” Moreover, in summer 2001, CIA Director George Tenet warning the President in daily briefings that a major Al Qaeda attack was immanent. Notoriously, one briefing sent to Rice read: “Al Qaeda plans to attack NYC.” Of course, Bush never caught Bin Laden, and in July 2006 the CIA actually closed down the secret unit created for his capture.

3) *The war on terror used terrorist “counterterrorism” methods.* The Bush administration has been sharply criticized by Human Rights Watch, numerous

governments, and surviving victims of its brutal policies. Despite their lies, denials, and tongue-in-cheek evasions, Bush & Co. wrote, approved, and applied torture policies against detainees, such as used in secret CIA prisons throughout Europe. From Abu Ghraib and Afghanistan to Guantánamo Bay and dungeons across Europe, the US has led a policy of wrongful detainment and torture that violated the Geneva Convention and other international human rights treaties. By waving the magic wand of “enemy combatant,” the Bush administration claims its political prisoners are too dangerous to warrant legal or moral protections, and thereby postures itself above international law, treaties, and moral standards. To further solidify its fascist powers, the Bush Administration pushed Congress to sign into law the Military Commissions Act in October 2006. This new law grants the US government carte blanche powers to deny habeas corpus rights and indefinitely detain any non-citizen suspected of being an enemy or threat to national interests. The Bush team has forfeited whatever moral credibility the US had in denouncing human rights abuses in China and elsewhere, and completely discredited the US mission to build “democracy” in Iraq and the Middle East.

4) *The war on terror is a front for the war on democracy.* The bogus war on terror has served as a highly-effective propaganda and bullying device to ram through Congress and the courts a pro-corporate, anti-environmental, authoritarian agenda. With catch-all phrases such as “enemy combatants” and “domestic terrorists,” the Bush administration has rounded up and tortured thousands of non-citizens (detaining them indefinitely in military tribunals without right to a fair trial) and surveilled, harassed, and imprisoned citizens who dare to challenge the government or corporate system it protects and represents. The massive police resources of the US state are being used far more to thwart domestic dissent than to improve homeland security. The Patriot Act is a massive assault on First and Fourth Amendment rights by endowing government with unprecedented powers of surveillance. The American Civil Liberties Union has obtained reams of documents showing that the Defense Department, FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, Department of Homeland Security, and local police forces throughout the nation have conducted widespread surveillance of the “threats” posed by anti-war, animal rights, and vegetarian organizations. Meanwhile, the airlines, railways, ports, chemical, and nuclear plants all remain completely vulnerable to attack.

5) *The war on terror is a misplaced priority.* The greatest “national security” threat every country faces is the catastrophic effects of global warming, and no national security is conceivable without environmental security. Greenhouse gas emissions, ozone thinning, desertification, rising sea levels, coral reef destruction, and increased intensity of weather events is caused by the reckless indifference of corporations and ruling elites to the environment that sustains all life. Rather than addressing the environmental crisis, Bush suppresses scientific research that provides evidence of global warming, and auctions the land to energy, timber, ranching, mining, and agribusiness industries. The environmental crisis is also a social and security crisis in the form of resource wars, environmental refugees, and greater nuclear warfare threats. Already, climate change has had a drastic impact on animals and is a key contributing factor to the annual death of hundreds of thousands of people in poor countries. The World Health Organization attributes 150,000 deaths each year to the effects of climate change. United Nations Secretary General Kofi

Annan has urged the world to take mediate and drastic action to stop the “all-encompassing threat” global warming poses to people, biodiversity, economies, and world peace. But Bush refuses to countenance the threat of global warming, and declines to join the 166 nations who have signed the Kyoto Protocol in a pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

6) *The war on terror has made the world less not more safe.* By diverting the effort to catch Bin Laden and corral the Taliban in Afghanistan to overthrowing Saddam Hussein and invading Iraq, the Bush administration has – in its infamous, bullying phrase – “cut and run” to fight terrorism on the wrong front. Bush & Co. have created a self-fulfilling prophesy by making Iraq a magnet for terrorists that it never was, although the conflicts raging on in Iraq mostly involve a civil war between Sunnis and Shiites. According to the US State Department, the “significant” terrorist attacks climbed from 175 in 2003 to 655 in 2004.

### The Politics of Fear

With Big Lies, hysterical warnings that we must fight terrorism in Iraq lest we fight it here, and evocations of mushroom clouds on the horizon, the Bush administration has exploited the threat of terrorism in order to bring about a Hobbesian state, with Bush as the Leviathan exercising dictatorial powers over Congress, the courts, US citizens, and the world at large. Trying to reassure Americans in the midst of the Great Depression, Harry Truman famously said that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Bush, in contrast, is peddling “fear itself” to advance corporate agendas and the goal of global Empire. The Bush administration created a color-coded terror system to provide constant warnings of danger. Whenever his credibility ratings were sagging or Democrats had gained in the polls, you could count on manufactured, phony terrorist threats, such as the fabrication that paralyzed the New York City subway in October 2005. Bush’s team called endless press conferences to announce the capture of yet another “terrorist cell,” whereas invariably the hapless suspects were released as the “threat” proved non-existent. In August 2006, with impending mid-term elections and polls showing Republicans in danger of losing control over Congress, the government shamelessly exploited the capture of an alleged terrorist cell in London in order to keep fear alive and convince the public they are safe only under the rule of the Republican Party.

This is terrorism, the terrorism of “terrorism,” the willful construction of a climate of fear. By spreading fear, rather than hope, Bush has done exactly what terrorists seek to accomplish. Given that police states such as the UK and US function best when their citizens are fearful, Islamic extremists are their best ally in the war on democracy. Just as Bin Laden suited Bush’s purposes, so Bush plays right into the hands of Bin Laden and other jihadists, as Bush’s war on Iraq and insults to Muslim culture were exactly the kind of response to 9/11 Islamic extremists wanted in order to foment resistance to the West and breed thousands of new suicide bombers and martyrs. Moreover, Bush is carrying out another key goal of Muslim extremists by destroying Western democracy, liberalism, and secularism. In fact, Bush has equal contempt for these values, and he and fellow neo-con extremists pose a far greater threat to the planet than radical Islam.

The current geopolitical conflict is not a “clash of civilizations,” as Samuel Huntington argues, but rather, as Tariq Ali suggests, a “clash of fundamentalisms.” Whereas Bush constructs mythic binary opposites of Good vs. Evil, and Civilization vs. Barbarism, there are more similarities than differences between the Radical Right and radical Islam: both are grounded in fundamentalist religious views; both are authoritarian; and both seek to subvert modern Enlightenment, the democratic process, and the separation between Church and State. The best heritage of modernity – Enlightenment norms, democracy, civil liberties, and secular culture – is now threatened from both sides, such that Bush and the Christian Right pose as much a danger as Bin Laden and the Taliban. The Bush and Blair administrations, along with sundry contemporary tyrants, view champions of democracy and rights to be “civil liberties absolutists” and people who “just don’t get it” – namely, that we live in dangerous times where security must trump liberty and every turn and citizens are denizens of their social garrisons whose role is to watch each other, not their governments.

If the US wants to stop terrorism, it only has to stop itself. Stop building army bases in Muslim nations, stop overthrowing foreign countries and sovereign governments, stop assassinating presidents and national leaders, stop violating international treaties, stop training and arming dictators, and stop plundering the resources and economies of the undeveloped world. Stop the CIA and International Monetary Fund, shut down the School of the Americas that trains torturers, and reign in the “economic hit men” who open up nations to capital markets one way or the other. US policy has been a major factor driving Islamic extremism, through its military presence in Muslim countries, its support of Israel, and transnational corporate policies that create poverty and desperate conditions ripe for cultivating soldiers in the war against the West.

The US identifies states such as Iran, Syria, and Korea as state sponsors of terrorism, but on to its own definition of terrorism the US is the leading terrorist power on the planet. The US has invaded countries such as Vietnam and Iraq; overthrown democratically elected governments such as Guatemala (1954) and Chile (1973); trained (at the School of the Americas), armed, and financed terrorist forces, death squads, and armies to overthrow governments (Nicaragua); attempted to assassinate leaders of nations (Cuba); installed and supported dictators and terrorists when they served their interests (Noriega, Hussein, Al Qaeda, the Taliban), while supplying them with chemical and biological weapons (Hussein, Afghan resistance); and overthrown them when they did not (Noriega, Hussein). The US is the only state to be condemned for terrorism by the World Court and the Security Council. Let us not forget it has also dropped bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima -- the greatest terrorist acts in history -- killing hundred of thousands of innocent civilians.

In the current climate of administratively managed fear, we must all pause and gain a critical perspective. Islamic terrorism is a serious threat, but it is not our greatest concern, nor is it a significant menace to the average person. Since 9/11, as many Americans have been killed by terrorists as have been killed by lightning, accident-causing deer, or severe allergic reaction to peanuts. Sprawl, car accidents, chemical spills, and environmentally

influenced cancers are bigger threats to the lives of average Americans than terrorism. Certainly hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation cause far more death, suffering, chaos, and economic costs in the world than any terrorist could. According to scientific reports, far more people have lost their lives from the direct and indirect effects of climate change than terrorism.

While politicians and the media perpetuate and pander to the politics of fear, crucial social issues are ignored. We need a broad holistic concept of security, one that recognizes the risks posed not only by weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, but also poverty, underdevelopment, national debt, militarization, and environmental problems such as global warming.

Bypassing, ignoring, misunderstanding, and exacerbating the real sources of foreign terrorism, Bush's war on terrorism is a farce, as evident by the obsessive focus on Iraq rather than actual terrorist networks that lie elsewhere. The *real goals* of the Bush administration, the far-right, and transnational corporations are not to make the world a safer place, but rather: to advance the neoconservative drive for World Empire, to build a fascist corporate-state government, to demonize and destroy democracy and dissent, and to divert attention from an ongoing war against the middle and lower classes.