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A Guide to the President's First Post-Downing Street Speech on Iraq

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Global Research, June 27, 2005
27 June 2005

Region: USA
Theme: US NATO War Agenda
In-depth Report: FAKE INTELLIGENCE, IRAQ REPORT

President Bush will be addressing the nation about Iraq on Tuesday night. This is the first time he will be speaking to the country on the U.S. occupation of Iraq since the Downing Street Memos have been released. As ten senators pointed out in a letter on Friday, June 24 "at a time the White House was promising Congress and the American people that war would be their last resort, that they believed military action against Iraq was 'inevitable.'"

Thus, the President was telling the public he was seeking a peaceful resolution when in fact he was planning an invasion. He told Americans there were unmanned Iraqi aircraft that could drop bombs over our cities. His own intelligence agencies told him this was inaccurate. He tied Saddam to Al Qaeda and Bin Laden – there was no evidence of that. Indeed, the two – one secular, one fundamentalist – were mortal foes. He talked about Saddam being able to launch a strike on the United States in 45 minutes – there was no evidence Iraq was capable of such an attack. He talked about the potential of a mushroom cloud over the United States – a nuclear attack by Saddam – when there was no evidence that a weakened, surrounded and embargoed Saddam had any nuclear capability. When he was going to the U.N. it was not to seek peace but to try and make an illegal invasion legal by tricking Saddam into a misstep. For month after month, it now seems evident, President Bush and his minions misled the nation, repeating the fabrications and manipulations about weapons of mass destruction, over and over and over in a drum beat to war.

The administration has claimed the insurgency's demise repeatedly for the last two years – when the Iraq Governing Council was created, when Saddam's sons Uday and Qusai were killed, when the Coalition Provisional Authority handed over powers to an Iraqi interim government, when Saddam Hussein was captured and after the elections in January. Yet the most recent months, have been the most violent. It seems to be time for the American public and media covering Iraq to have some doubt about the president's sugarcoated assurances.

When the President speaks on Tuesday night, viewers must take his words with caution – with doubt – with an ear for the false statement, phony motivation and exaggeration. Sadly, our commander in chief has made it hard for the people to trust him on the Iraq situation as shown in poll after poll. To assist viewers we provide the following guide to the realities of the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

Making America Less Safe: *The New York Times* reported on Sunday, June 26 "A classified assessment by the Central Intelligence Agency says Iraq may be an even more effective

training ground for Islamic extremists than Afghanistan was for Al Qaeda in the days of the struggle against Soviet occupation. Iraq, unlike Afghanistan, is serving as a real-world laboratory for urban combat." This report echoes testimony of CIA Director Porter Goss before the Senate in February that Iraq was a training ground for terrorists. The leaked classified CIA report "says the urban nature of the war in Iraq is helping combatants learn how to carry out assassinations, kidnappings, car bombings and other kinds of attacks . . ."

Insurgency Getting Stronger and Could Last More than a Decade: The Bush administration has been predicting the imminent defeat of the insurgency. Most recently Vice President Cheney claimed on May 31 on Larry King Live that the insurgency in Iraq is "in their last throes," and predicted that the fighting will end before the Bush administration leaves office. These statements are inconsistent with statements made by Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, who acknowledged on Sunday, June 26th that the insurgency could last up to 12 years; and with his top U.S. Commander in the Middle East, Gen. John Abizaid, who testified before the Senate last week that the Iraqi insurgency is as active as six months ago and more foreign fighters are flowing in all the time. More and more people on the ground in Iraq are saying the fight against the insurgency is not winnable under present troop force.

Death Rate in Iraq in Mounting: In March, 35 American soldiers died in Iraq, in April 52 were killed, in May 80 died – those are more troops killed than when Saddam's poorly equipped army responded to the U.S. invasion. Since the invasion of Iraq, Johns Hopkins estimates more than 100,000 Iraqis have been killed while a total of 1,726 U.S. soldiers have died. The past four months have been among the deadliest in Iraq – an average of 21 Iraqis were killed each day in May. Last month there were about 700 reported attacks against U.S. forces using improvised explosive devices – the highest number since the war began.

Troops Continue to Be Poorly Armed and Severely Injured: The amount of time we have spent in Iraq is longer than World War I and by this time in World War II we were looking toward D-Day – yet in Iraq U.S. troops are unable to adequately protect themselves. The lack of body armor and armor for vehicles is still inadequate to protect U.S. troops after two years of soldiers' complaints and media criticism. Will President Bush admit at least this fatal "mistake" to the soldiers he is addressing on Tuesday night? This incompetent management of the war and occupation has led to thousands of wounded. The DoD reports 13,074 but knowledgeable estimates range from 15,000 to 38,000 according to UPI investigative reporter, Mark Benjamin. The Pentagon does not provide publicly a comprehensive accounting of the human toll of the war from the American side, not to mention the larger toll on the Iraqi people. The Administration only reports the strictly combat-related injuries. Neither injuries incurred not in combat nor disease-connected sicknesses nor severe mental traumas are reported. What other President has deliberately undercounted American casualties? No wonder President Bush orders the return of U.S. casualties at nighttime to Andrews Air Force base and bans the press from the military airport at Dover, Delaware.

U.S. Respect in the World Diminishing: The illegally fabricated Iraq War and Occupation continue to isolate us further from the people around the world. Last week an Italian court issued a warrant for ten CIA agents involved in the rendition of a kidnapped Islamic cleric. And, in Australia, some U.S. students report such intense harassment for being Americans that they are leaving school there and returning home. The continued use of Guantanemo Bay to house uncharged "detainees" (a euphemism for prisoners), the Abu Gulag prison

scandal, prison abuse reports in other parts of Iraq and Afghanistan, the rendition policy of seizing people and bringing them to countries known for torture all add up to a downward spiral in perception of the U.S. around the world. Our government can no longer claim the mantel of human rights protector when human rights organizations report that we are a human rights violator around the world.

The truth many Americans want to hear from the President, but are very unlikely to hear, is that the war and occupation of Iraq was not based on available intelligence, that our continued presence in Iraq is counterproductive to the safety of Iraqis and the United States, and that a responsible withdrawal from Iraq – of both U.S. military and corporate interests – with continued humanitarian and economic support is the most likely way to bring stability and democracy to the country. (For a more detailed withdrawal plan see www.DemocracyRising.US.) But sadly, more war talk is likely from this President and more deaths of Americans and Iraqis will be the inevitable and tragic result. Brent Skowcroft, National Security Advisor to the first President Bush along with prominent retired military, diplomatic and intelligence leaders warned this President Bush against invading Iraq in 2002-2003. They must feel like prophets.

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Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer, and author. He has founded many organizations including the Center for Study of Responsive Law, the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), the Center for Auto Safety, Public Citizen, Clean Water Action Project, the Disability Rights Center, the Pension Rights Center, the Project for Corporate Responsibility and The Multinational Monitor. Visit his website at http://nader.org/

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