

OCCUPYING BUSH'S STATE OF THE UNION

By Greg Coleridge

Drafts are out of George Bush's State of the Union address. Here's what should have occupied most of the space.

My fellow Americans. Cabinet members. Congresspersons. Supreme Court Justices.

I come before you tonight to share with you my reflections on a single topic – occupation.

The reality is that “occupation” much better describes US military actions in Iraq than “war.” Of course there is brutal violence occurring in Iraq. The US military has killed and injured Iraqis by the tens of thousands. US troops are also being killed and injured by the thousands. In addition, the US military is responsible for the destruction of Iraqi cities and villages, not to mention the natural environment as a result of US bombs, bullets, planes, tanks, guns and grenades. Killing, injuring and destroying are basic acts of war. The US is responsible for inflicting all these acts.

Yet, to call what is going on in Iraq simply as “war” is incomplete. The United States of America, with the backing of a vast majority of members of both political parties, has occupied a sovereign nation for nearly 4 years. We moved in and tried to take over the country in every way, beginning with the initial invasion, followed by the Coalition Provision Authority (CPA) led by my good buddy, Paul Bremer. The CPA issued orders and edicts seeking overall control of the economy, natural resources, public policies, politicians and basic governing rules. My administration has done all it can -- sometimes outwardly, other times behind the scenes -- to influence the Iraqi constitution, elections and candidates. Invasion and control are among the basic acts of occupation. The US is responsible for all these acts.

Obviously, framing the US military presence in Iraq primarily as a “war” rather than an “occupation” has been pretty smart on my part ... and those who invest in my administration.

Connected to war in our country are feelings of patriotism, loyalty and obedience to leaders like myself who come across as tough and strong. Implied in a war is a threat to the homeland, providing ample opportunity to call for slashing domestic civil liberties and further consolidating my power. Snooping into your mail and email, listening in on your phone calls and arresting and holding people indefinitely is harder to sell under the guise of “occupying” a nation on the other side of the planet. It's also much easier under the banner of war to create enemies – people to hate, and thus, an excuse to kill and destroy.

In contrast, an “occupation” of another people's country begs all sorts of discomfoting questions, such as: “Why are we actually there?” “Why can't people take care of themselves?” “Will we leave if a majority of people being occupied, as in Iraq, want us out?”

I'd rather not have to answer these questions. In plain and simple English, this is why we're in a “war” and not an “occupation” in Iraq.

There's a second type of “occupation” I want to share with you tonight, my fellow Americans.

It's an occupation right here at home. It's not a physical or military one of our cities, suburbs or rural communities by any foreign power. That kind of occupation is easy to see, obvious to

everyone and, relatively speaking, easier to resist.

The occupation I'm talking about is much more insidious, one that involves invasion and control and ultimately, like a military occupation, threatens sovereignty, self-determination, and democracy.

Your public spaces, public arenas, public policies, and public trust have been invaded and have become controlled by a few people of wealth against the majority for a very long time. It precedes my administration. It includes Democratic administrations as well as Republican ones. The weapons of this form of occupation are not bombers, tanks or soldiers but the legal structure called the business corporation, aided up by several sections of the United States Constitution.

Business corporations have over the past century amassed "rights" to invade and control (that is, occupy) vital parts of your lives, communities and society. Corporations occupy your health care space once reserved exclusively for patients and their doctors. They increasingly occupy your educational spaces once reserved exclusively for students and their teachers. Corporations increasingly occupy the nutrition spaces once reserved exclusively for farmers.

Corporations have invaded elections and political campaigns. They control the airwaves (television and radio) and major print media. They, not you, determine the majority of trade and investment, where plants and factories will move, who will be employed and who will not, what communities will thrive, which ones will suffer. They are threatening the heart and soul of life itself by claiming that human, animal and plant genes can be patented.

The list, my fellow Americans, of society where business corporations dominate would put any oppressive military occupation force with soldiers on every street corner to shame.

The wealthy few who run business corporations have expanded their occupying force thanks to the supply line of the US Constitution. Anti-democratic provisions in the Constitution (i.e. the Contracts and Commerce Clauses, no direct election of President, life-time appointments of Supreme Court Justices, and holding citizens indefinitely without charge in a national emergency) collectively place the rights of property above people. Corporate friendly Supreme Court justices anointed corporations with Bill of Rights protections over the past century – expanding the invasion and control of corporations into our politics, economy and culture.

Why am I telling you this? Freely admitting to it all? Simple. I've blown it on Iraq (no pun intended). My poll numbers are abysmally low. I want to salvage my legacy in some way.

This nation was founded by colonists who kicked out the occupation army of the most powerful nation on earth. Their task was simple compared to the one at hand. Yet, people are increasingly waking up, opposing my policies, but also increasingly questioning why they don't have a real voice in what's going on in their lives, communities and nation. Citizens are flexing their democratic muscles.

Herein lies hope for the future.

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While such thoughts didn't occupy the attention of George Bush during his address, may they occupy ours.