

New York Times urges “debate” to prepare war

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In the frenzied drive towards war against Iraq, some voices have been raised from within the political establishment and the media lamenting the “politicization” of the war issue for partisan advantage in the midterm elections. Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle angrily accused Republicans of impugning Democrats’ commitment to national security, while the Democratic Party leadership as a whole has advanced a cowardly strategy of quickly rubber-stamping a military intervention in order to then shift public discussion to the economy.

House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt and the rest of the Democratic congressional leadership have already acted upon this plan, beginning the process of ramming through a resolution giving Bush unlimited powers to launch a “preemptive” war against Iraq whenever and however he chooses.

The *New York Times* has weighed into this squalid non-debate to urge “solemn” discussion and “measured deliberation.” In an editorial entitled “A Time for Debate and Reflection,” the newspaper warns that in the rush to line up behind the White House war plans, the Democrats may be doing a disservice to US national interests.

The editorial is typical of a certain style the *Times* editorialists have perfected. It combines a sanctimonious invocation of high-minded civic virtues with the ludicrous pretense that the criminal political methods and aims of the present ruling establishment have anything to do with such sentiments.

“Flag-waving sound bites with an eye to next month’s hotly contested midterm elections will not be enough,” the *Times* declares in its October 3 lead editorial. “There are too many crucial issues that require deeper examination than they have had so far.”

The *Times* does not include among these “crucial issues” whether or not war is justified and the pretexts advanced by the Bush administration for invading Iraq are valid. Whether or not the US has the right to carry out an unprovoked invasion of Iraq for the purpose of overthrowing its government is likewise excluded from the discussion.

Deliberation is to be reserved for how best to prepare a war, not how to prevent it.

“No further debate is needed to establish that Saddam Hussein is an evil dictator whose continued effort to build unconventional weapons in defiance of clear United Nations prohibitions threatens the Middle East and beyond,” this semi-official voice of what once passed for American liberalism declares.

Precisely what debate has taken place on this question the *Times* does not say. The endless repetition of the mantra of “weapons of mass destruction” notwithstanding, the Bush administration has offered no evidence that the Iraqi regime has such weapons or represents a threat to anyone outside of its own people.

Many familiar with Iraq’s military capabilities, including former weapons inspector Scott Ritter, have categorically asserted that the country has been effectively disarmed since the first Persian Gulf War. One telling indication that no evidence exists to support the administration’s charges is the CIA’s stonewalling of Senate Intelligence Committee requests for reports on Iraqi weapons capabilities.

The claim that the US is in imminent danger of a chemical, biological or nuclear attack from Iraq is a barefaced lie aimed at terrorizing the American public, and the Bush administration, the Democrats in Congress and the editors of the *Times* all know it. That is the reason that “no further debate is needed”—or allowable—on this issue.

There has been no debate whatsoever on the real aims of the US war drive—the seizure of Iraq’s oil wealth and the assertion of US global hegemony. Even mention of these long-standing strategic objectives is for the most part avoided through a rigorous self-censorship by the mass media. Instead, the public is fed a steady diet of “weapons of mass destruction” and the need to overthrow the “evil dictator.”

It is worth noting that the *Times*, just the day before this editorial appeared, did publish an article on the war’s potential impact on petroleum prices, the oil industry and the American capitalist economy in general.

“A market awash in Iraqi oil would mean lower prices—an economic boon to the United States, the world’s top consumer of oil,” the article noted. “As before the gulf war, there is a sharp debate about the extent to which oil is driving Washington’s policies toward Iraq,” it continued. “That would seem inevitable, given the potential of Iraqi oil fields. ‘It’s not about oil, but becomes about oil,’ said Lawrence J. Goldstein, president of the Petroleum Industry Research Foundation, a research group.”

When they say it’s not about the oil, it’s about the oil. But the gentlemen at the *Times* have no interest in opening up a debate on this predatory motive for the explosive development of US militarism. They are proposing only a discussion on the most effective tactical means to prepare a US invasion.

Thus, the editorial counsels Congress to “make clear its expectation that all diplomatic avenues be thoroughly explored,” and “emphasize the need for the broadest international unity.” In other words, the United Nations should be utilized in the preparation for war. This means following through on the provocations Washington has begun around the weapons inspection regime and securing a pseudo-legal justification for a war of unprovoked aggression.

The editorial suggests that the American public should be prepared for a level of slaughter that it has not experienced in generations. “There could be urban clashes like those Americans experienced in Somalia, but on a vastly larger scale,” the newspaper warns. “If Baghdad sees war as inevitable, it might launch a preemptive attack of its own as American forces are assembling in the region.”

Likewise, the *Times* advises, “Americans must think more seriously about the shape of postwar Iraq and the regional upheavals that could follow changes in Baghdad.... Reconstituting it as a democracy could take years and a substantial American commitment. At the same time, the neo-colonial nature of such an endeavor could produce a fierce backlash by Iraqis and others in the region.”

Which “Americans” must give more thought to a postwar Iraq? The *Times* editorialists write as if they were living in some ideal democratic society, with policies being hammered out at a town meeting. The nature of the regime that will be imposed on the Iraqis will be worked out in secret by a handful of gangsters at the top of the Bush administration working through the CIA and the military.

Inadvertently, however, the *Times* begins to let the cat out of the bag. A US invasion and occupation of Iraq would indeed constitute a “neo-colonial” endeavor. This effort will not be directed at “reconstituting” Iraq as a democracy. The objective of colonialism, today no less than 100 years ago, is to extract the wealth of the colonized territory in order to

increase the profits and strengthen the geopolitical position of the colonizer.

Such a relationship will require a ruthless dictatorship. The British set the standard when they first occupied the territory of Iraq in the aftermath of World War I, sending in a Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force of some 100,000 troops. For over a decade, the British—who proclaimed that they were “civilizing” the Arabs, much as the *Times* today promises “democracy”—carried out punitive expeditions and aerial bombardments against villages deemed in revolt against colonial rule or for merely failing to pay their taxes.

Should the threat of massive casualties—both Iraqi and US—and the prospect of an open-ended military occupation of what will effectively become an American colony dissuade Washington from going to war? The *Times* editors make no such suggestion. Rather, they merely caution: “The likely consequences of war in Iraq extend far beyond November’s elections. The Congressional debate must be equally farsighted.”

Any such debate in Congress will be conducted within the narrow parameters of what serves the interests of the financial oligarchy that controls both political parties. It will in no way reflect the broad opposition and disquiet in relation to war that currently exists among the vast majority of working people in the US. They are the ones who will be forced to pay the price—both the deaths of working class youth used as cannon fodder and the vast sums to be spent on war as well as the economic dislocation that will inevitably result.

The necessity of a real farsighted debate is posed by the unity of Republicans and Democrats—from the right-wing ideologues of the Bush administration to the erstwhile liberals of the *New York Times*—behind war. That debate, over how war can be stopped, can only take place within the broad mass of the working population. A serious consideration of this life-and-death question points inexorably to the necessity of building a new, independent political movement of the working class fighting against war and militarism and for social equality.



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