

The New York Times “sours” on Bush’s new plan for Iraq

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In its lead editorial of November 16, entitled “Iraq Goes Sour,” the *New York Times* decries the decision of the Bush administration to move up its time-table for handing over political power to a US puppet regime in Iraq. Voicing the fear that American forces might be pulled out of Iraq “prematurely,” the newspaper advances its own recommendations for salvaging the US occupation.

The editorial reflects the mood of crisis that is gripping the American ruling elite as it confronts the prospect of a debacle in the face of a growing movement of national resistance in Iraq, combined with mounting opposition to the war at home.

“It’s a bit cynical to say that the plan is to toss the whole hot potato to whatever Iraqis are willing to grab it. But the White House thinking is veering close,” the *Times* writes.

Instead, the newspaper proposes that the White House “toss the whole hot potato” into the lap of the United Nations. It chides the Bush administration for “doggedly refusing to take the only realistic next step—asking the United Nations to take over nation-building.”

In reality, the US administration is unwilling and unable to divest itself of the Iraqi quagmire. It is stuck in a morass of its own making, confronting insoluble contradictions that flow from a predatory war carried out on false pretenses and in violation of international law. The price for this criminal enterprise is being paid by the Iraqi people, whose dead and wounded number in the tens of thousands, and by American soldiers, whose casualties number close to 9,000, including at least 422 dead.

The *Times*’ characterization of the new US plan as “tossing” power to the Iraqis is part of a disingenuous campaign by the administration and the media to create the illusion that the Bush administration is on the verge of extricating itself from the Iraqi morass by ceding authority to a new provisional government.

Pressure for the Bush White House to initiate a change in course has come from a number of directions. First and foremost is the mounting losses that the Iraqi resistance has inflicted on US forces—nearly 60 US troops killed in the first two weeks of November alone, with the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters claiming the lives of 17 soldiers on Saturday—and their impact on the US public’s support for the war. Bush’s handlers increasingly fear that unless the US offers at least the illusion of an “exit strategy,” the administration could be defeated at the polls next year.

Secondly, the Quisling “Governing Council” that Washington installed in Iraq has proven not only useless, but an outright impediment to US policy. Divided among themselves and without any substantial support among the Iraqi people, the constituent elements of the council could agree only on their desire to continue the US occupation and, if possible, get a share of the nearly \$20 billion that Washington intends to spend in the “reconstruction” of the country.

The council declared itself at an impasse in the principal task assigned by its US patrons—the preparations for the drafting of a new Iraqi

constitution. Moreover, it cut across US aims when it rejected the deal that had been reached by Washington and Ankara to deploy Turkish troops.

Far from a restoration of Iraqi sovereignty and an end to the occupation, the new plan would install an unelected regime utterly dependent on US firepower and funding. The process by which the new regime is to be created—a complicated series of town and provincial council meetings—is to unfold under the thumb of the US occupation authorities, ensuring that their chosen Iraqi agents are selected.

The first aim of this exercise is to declare that the occupation has ended and US forces have been transformed into a “military presence” requested by the new “sovereign” government.

A second, though by no means unimportant, consideration is that a supposedly sovereign regime will have legal authority to sign off on deals already prepared in Washington to auction off privatized sectors of the Iraqi economy to US-based multinationals and turn over effective control of Iraq’s oil fields to US energy conglomerates.

This political charade is to be accompanied by a massive intensification of violence and repression—a process that is already underway in Iraq. For the first time since Bush declared an end to “major combat” last May, US F-16 fighters carried out air strikes Tuesday, hitting targets near the town of Samara in central Iraq. In other areas of the country, satellite-guided bombs, attack helicopters, AC-130 Specter gunships, tanks and heavy artillery have been unleashed against what Pentagon spokesmen refer to as “terrorist lairs” and hideouts—in reality, people’s homes, industrial facilities and businesses.

This use of inordinate and largely ineffectual firepower—designed in large part to boost the plummeting morale of the US soldiers—has succeeded only in antagonizing wider layers of the Iraqi population. But it is only the first step. Washington is preparing to utilize combined detachments of US troops, newly trained Iraqi paramilitaries and the militias of the collaborationist groups to carry out a killing spree along the lines of the infamous Operation Phoenix in Vietnam.

This is the real content of what has been dubbed “Iraqification.”

In the *Times*’ editorial indictment of the present course of the Bush administration in Iraq, it should be noted, there is not even a hint of opposition to the turn by the US military to mass murder and repression.

What of the “only realistic next step” proposed by the *Times* editorial board—turning over “nation-building” to the UN? The *Times*’ editors overlook the fact that the Iraqi resistance has already forced the UN to evacuate virtually all of its personnel from the country. After the August suicide bombing of its Baghdad headquarters, the international body has shown little inclination to return any time soon.

Nor is there any reason to believe that the UN’s formal assumption of political oversight would dampen nationalist resistance. For most Iraqis, such a transfer would amount to putting lipstick on the pig, providing an international cover for a continuing US occupation.

For its part, the Bush administration has steadfastly opposed UN control both as a matter of principle—resisting any international interference in its

unilateral use of military force and its right to wage “preemptive” war—and out of regard for the mercenary interests of its corporate backers like Halliburton and US oil and telecommunications companies. The administration does not want any international body determining who gets the contracts for exploiting Iraqi oil or who assumes control of other profitable sectors of the country’s economy.

For the Bush White House to turn control over to the UN now would be an admission that its entire policy in Iraq has failed. It knows, moreover, that such a handover could be consummated only at the price of significant concessions to economic rivals that opposed the war, particularly France, Germany and Russia.

Thus the *Times*’ “only realistic next step” reveals itself to be little more than whistling in the dark.

Much of the *Times* editorial consists of a rambling and utterly dishonest rehashing of the “weapons of mass destruction” claims advanced by the Bush administration as the pretext for the war. “It’s useful, at this point, to look back and see how we got here,” it states.

The problem, if the editorial is to be believed, was primarily a matter of intelligence failures. Both the Clinton and the Bush administrations, we are told, operated on the basis of CIA reports that “were basically worst-case scenarios of what the Hussein regime might have been up to.” It adds: “That was apparently a mistake, if an understandable one.”

Under the Bush administration, the editorial continues, the intelligence on weapons of mass destruction “seems to have been hyped further.” The newspaper blames this largely on the Pentagon’s reliance on information from Iraqi exiles, most notably Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the Iraqi National Congress. Similarly, the failure of the Pentagon to prepare for the resistance US forces have faced since the invasion is blamed on the fact that “the Defense Department and the president’s security advisers believed the reassurances of Mr. Chalabi...”

This is self-serving nonsense. The problem with US intelligence was not that it was faulty, but that it was falsified. Had such “errors” at the CIA and the Pentagon cut across US geopolitical interests, they would have been swiftly corrected.

What the *Times* account deliberately obscures is that the Bush administration and decisive sections of the US ruling elite wanted a war against Iraq to secure control over the second-largest oil reserves in the world and create a firm base for the projection of US power throughout the Middle East. They set out to browbeat and terrorize the US population into accepting their war, using phony scare stories about terrorist ties and WMD.

As for Chalabi, if the convicted bank embezzler turned Iraqi patriot had not existed, the warmongers in the Pentagon would have had to invent him—and they largely did. It was widely recognized that the “intelligence” provided by the Iraqi National Congress was worthless, but it was promoted because it fed the propaganda drive for a war that had already been decided on.

In their potted review of the lead-up to the war, the *Times* editors evince a remarkable degree of false modesty. They entirely leave out their own role in the dissemination and even concoction of phony intelligence, as well as their prominent part in providing rationalizations for the criminal enterprise.

The *Times* senior correspondent, Judith Miller, was a leading journalistic source for stories about alleged Iraqi WMD. The *Times* published her lurid stories, even when they could only cite US military officials who subjected them to prior censorship. It was later revealed that the “exclusive” source for most of Miller’s scoops was none other than Ahmed Chalabi.

The newspaper’s foreign affairs columnist, Thomas Friedman, spent the months leading up to the war as well as the seven months since providing every conceivable justification and alibi for the conquest and occupation of Iraq. He has lied with abandon, apparently not noticing that his

assertions in one column contradicted those in another. Thus he wrote prior to the invasion that the war was justified by America’s need to control Iraqi oil, and declared in the war’s aftermath that it had nothing to do with oil. He claimed in one of his pre-war screeds that military action was justified by Iraqi development of WMD—which he proposed to uncover through the abduction of Iraqi scientists—and declared in a post-war piece that the failure to find WMD was besides the point, because it was really a “war of choice” to spread democracy.

The hands of the editorial writers are no less dirty. In the run-up to the war they justified a US invasion, while advising the Bush administration to seek United Nations sanction for the attack.

In an editorial published February 23, a month before the invasion, the newspaper stated: “Although many Americans are puzzled about why the Bush administration chose to pick this fight now, it’s not surprising that in the wake of September 11, the president would want to make the world safer, and one of his top priorities would be eliminating Iraq’s ability to create biological, chemical and nuclear weapons.”

Barely six weeks ago, the same editorial board was echoing the Bush administration line that the war was waged for the benefit of the Iraqi people. As a result of the US occupation, the *Times* wrote, Iraq might become “a freer and happier country in coming years,” and a “focal point for the evolution of a more peaceful and democratic Middle East.”

Now the *Times* bemoans the disaster resulting from the very policies it previously supported. Iraq has gone “sour,” it declares, inadvertently admitting that it once considered the US invasion and occupation of a defenseless country to have been “sweet.”

The inevitable path ahead involves deepening tragedy and increased bloodshed for both the Iraqi people and the young Americans in uniform forced to carry out the Bush administration’s criminal policy. The *Times* and its editors bear no small share of responsibility for this catastrophe. Their complicity is shared by the Democratic Party and the erstwhile liberal establishment as a whole.

The only realistic alternative to the present carnage in Iraq—the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops—can be realized only through the emergence of an independent political movement of the masses of working people in struggle against the political and social system that gave rise to this war.



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