# Friedman of the New York Times attacks London anti-Bush protest

**Bill Vann**
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The *New York Times* has played a key role in providing ideological justification for the Bush administration's predatory policy in Iraq. From the outset, the *Times*' modus operandi has been to deny the real reasons for the assault on Iraq—the pursuit of US hegemony and control of oil resources in the Middle East—while attributing high-minded democratic motives to this war of aggression.

In an attempt to maintain its "liberal" credentials, the *Times* editors have criticized the Bush administration on tactical grounds—particularly its failure to secure United Nations approval for the invasion—while never questioning US imperialism's "right" to seize control of an oppressed country.

The newspaper's foreign affairs columnist, Thomas Friedman, has acted as the point-man in this hypocritical endeavor. His logical and rhetorical acrobatics have increasingly turned him into something of a laughingstock among those who have followed his column. Week after week he has provided multiple and mutually contradictory justifications for the war, dismissing as irrelevant the discredited pretexts he had previously treated as self-evident.

After the US military occupied Iraq, he hit upon his current thesis. As he wrote in his latest column, entitled, "The Chant Not Heard" and published November 30 in the *Times*: "Even though the Bush team came to this theme late in the day, this war is the most important liberal, revolutionary US democracy-building project since the Marshall Plan. The primary focus of US forces in Iraq is erecting a decent, legitimate, tolerant, pluralistic representative government from the ground up."

When precisely this unelected government of the extreme right had an epiphany about its liberal, revolutionary and democratizing mission Friedman never specifies. Was it before or after Vice President Cheney's old firm Halliburton was awarded multibillion-dollar, no-bid reconstruction projects? Before or after the Pentagon leadership realized that its original plan to install convicted bank embezzler Ahmed Chalabi as a US-backed puppet ruler would provoke a general uprising of the Iraqi population?

How an occupying army that is unleashing 2,000-pound bombs on civilian targets and rounding up Iraqis by the thousands is engaged in building a "representative government from the ground up" is something Friedman likewise fails to explain. This failure is not difficult to explain, since his task is to provide rhetorical window-dressing for a naked exercise in neo-colonialism.

The main purpose of Friedman's latest column is to vent his ire at the growing international opposition to the US occupation of Iraq, expressed ten days earlier in the demonstration by some 200,000 people against Bush's visit to Britain.

He attacks the hundreds of thousands who marched through the streets of London for daring to demonstrate against the Bush administration's seizure of Iraq on the same day that car bombs at the British consulate and a British-owned bank in Istanbul, Turkey claimed the lives of 27 people.

"...there is something morally obtuse about holding an antiwar rally on a day when your own people have been murdered," writes the *Times* columnist.

Friedman, of course, finds nothing "morally obtuse" about publishing a column extolling the military occupation of Iraq on the same day that American forces carried out a massacre in the Iraqi town of Samarra.

As for the demonstrators in London, the march had been planned for many weeks. Tens of thousands had already descended on the city before the bombs went off in Istanbul.

More fundamentally, the marchers were not as politically ignorant as Friedman would like to believe his readership is. They saw no reason why such terrorist atrocities should dissuade them from opposing the US-British occupation of Iraq.

Those who have opposed the war and occupation have rejected the attempts by the Bush and Blair governments—backed up by journalistic hacks like Friedman—to justify their aggression against Iraq as part of a "war on terrorism." The claims of a connection between Iraq and Al Qaeda were thoroughly discredited both before and after the US invasion.

Moreover, many of those who demonstrated have examined the historical roots of terrorist organizations like that of Osama bin Laden and their intimate connections with the CIA and other Western intelligence agencies. These ties existed well before the US-backed guerrilla war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, when the CIA funneled massive amounts of money and arms through Islamist groups like bin Laden's.

Given this history, as well as the long legacy of atrocities by the CIA and similar agencies, the possibility that the bombings in Turkey involved either direct action or political manipulation by one or more of these agencies is by no means excluded. Indeed, the terrorist attacks in Turkey came as a political godsend for the increasingly isolated Blair government, which seized upon them to justify its support for US policy in Iraq and intimidate those in Britain opposed to the imperialist takeover of the Persian Gulf country.

Finally, most of those who marched considered—rightly—the attacks in Istanbul to be a vindication of their opposition to the US-British policy of military aggression. In opposing the invasion of Iraq, many had warned that the devastation of war and the yoke of foreign military occupation would unleash greater chaos and instability throughout the region, while increasing support for Islamist terrorist

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organizations like Al Qaeda. These warnings have been borne out by events.

There is a note of desperation creeping into Friedman's columns, as the project with which he has identified himself so fervently—the US conquest of Iraq—turns increasingly into a debacle. He writes like a man who feels under siege. Though promoting the policy of the strongest imperialist power on the face of the earth, he sounds as if he were standing up for a hopeless underdog. Even his wife, it seems, is turning against him.

Going so far as to feign sympathy for the general world view of those who participated in the London march, he writes: "Believe me, being a liberal on every other issue than this war, I have a great sympathy for where the left is coming from. And if I didn't my wife would remind me."

Here, the *Times* columnist exhibits one of his journalistic trademarks, the fervent hope that none of his readers can remember beyond his last column. While the discourse of establishment politics in the US has grown ever more debased, and the politics of what once passed for liberalism ever more indistinguishable from reaction, for Friedman to pose as a "liberal" and a sympathizer of the "left" is simply ridiculous.

His entire record proves the opposite. He is an unabashed advocate of the American plutocracy, a petty-bourgeois sycophant who practices a well-paid style of journalism dedicated to comforting the comfortable and afflicting the afflicted.

Having gotten his start as a Middle East reporter for the *Times*, Friedman acquired a taste for the methods and politics of brutal thugs like Ariel Sharon and the Lebanese Falangists. Whatever criticisms he has voiced since of the Israeli regime have always remained within the limits of whether or not its tactics are an effective means of subjugating the Palestinian people.

He became an ardent defender of the use of military power to promote the interests of corporate America, summing up his position in the oft-quoted line from his 1999 book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*: "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the US Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps..."

Far from an exception, Friedman's position on Iraq is merely the logical outgrowth of his general orientation, and an extension of his previous exhortations for US administrations to bomb Iraq, Afghanistan and Serbia into submission.

Friedman has supported virtually any measure that ensures the global reach of the American financial oligarchy and its unfettered rule at home, including the destruction of the trade unions. In *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Friedman praised Ronald Reagan for his "decision to fire all of the striking air traffic controllers in 1981." Of this brutal assault on the American working class, he wrote: "No single event did more to alter the balance of power between management and workers."

That the "labor flexibility" he extols has led to the destruction of millions of manufacturing jobs and a steady downward spiral in real wages for American workers is beside the point for the *Times* columnist.

So why is Friedman masquerading as a "liberal" and even a sympathizer of the "left?" His aim is to convince those who opposed the war that it is their duty to make the US occupation of Iraq work. He writes, "...the left needs to get beyond its opposition to the war and start pitching in with its own ideas and moral support to try to make lemons into lemonade in Baghdad." Instead of opposing the occupation, he continues, the "liberal opposition" should "demand that we send more troops to Iraq, and more committed democracy builders."

Apparently recognizing that his arguments fail to convince, Friedman concludes by resorting to fear, racism and intimidation. He writes that "a virulent, nihilistic form of terrorism...is growing in the darkest corners of the Muslim world." Unless the occupation of Iraq is a success, the likelihood of another major terrorist attack will grow, he warns. "It is the most serious threat to open societies, because one more 9/11 and we'll really see an erosion of our civil liberties."

With this, the *Times* columnist has come full circle. Having begun by declaring that the terrorist attacks in Istanbul should have halted the London demonstration, he concludes by threatening those opposed to US policy that if they fail to mend their ways they risk furthering another terrorist attack that will put an end to their democratic rights. His column it itself an instructive example of the political use reaction makes of terrorism.

Friedman is not merely voicing a hollow threat. He enjoys close and numerous contacts within the Bush administration and the national security establishment. He is repeating similar warnings made by former CentCom commander Gen. Tommy Franks and others who have predicted that such an attack would solidify the Bush administration's grip on power, possibly leading to the calling off of the 2004 election and the suspension of the US Constitution. [*See* "The "war on terror" and American democracy—some ominous warnings"]

The principal threat to democratic rights comes not from terrorism, but from a ruling clique that is prepared to seize upon terrorism—if not directly instigate it—as the pretext for suppressing opposition and seizing unrestrained power.

As for Friedman's claim that those who opposed the war have an obligation to make the occupation work, just the opposite is the case. It is necessary that the entire criminal enterprise initiated with the invasion of Iraq be defeated, and that the Bush administration's policy of "preemptive war" be totally discredited. "Success", i.e., the suppression of the Iraqi resistance and the imposition of a US-backed puppet regime, would only set the stage for more and even bloodier wars of aggression.

The attempt by the *Times* and Friedman to put a liberal gloss on US policy in Iraq merits only contempt. The fight must be redoubled for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq, and for all those responsible for plotting and executing this war to be held accountable, through impeachment and criminal prosecution.

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