

US press justifies slaughter in Iraq

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The uprising sweeping Iraq has shaken the confidence of ruling circles in the US, and this has found unmistakable expression in the press. The lead editorial in Sunday's *New York Times*, entitled "The Story Line in Iraq," begins by comparing the Iraqi revolt against the US occupation to the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam.

It warns that while the US military was able to crush the Tet offensive, it "marked the beginning of a shift in the attitude of the American public" toward the US intervention in Vietnam.

The *Times* adds: "The lesson of Tet that President Bush needs to embrace is that the American people will faithfully follow a commander in chief through a difficult course, but only if they have faith in the mission."

There are many lessons from Tet worth remembering. The US military response gave rise to the infamous words of a US officer explaining the annihilation of an entire village: "We had to destroy it in order to save it."

A similar campaign has unfolded in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, where F-16s, Apache helicopters, artillery and tank fire have been unleashed against densely populated residential areas, killing at least 600 and wounding more than twice that number. Medical officials in the town report that the majority of these casualties are women, children and the elderly.

Fallujah has produced its own bloodthirsty statements expressing the brutality of Washington's occupation and its gross indifference to human life. Asked about the dead in the city, a Marine lieutenant colonel responded: "The fact that there are 600 goes back to the fact that the Marines are very good at what they do."

Tet unquestionably had an electrifying effect on the American public's opinion of the Vietnam War. This shift in attitude found direct expression within the mass media. Prominent television newscasters like Walter Cronkite began to openly question US policy in Vietnam.

No such critical approach is to be found today. For the most part, the media act as cheerleaders for US military atrocities. To the extent that the press even questions the Bush administration's policy, it is entirely from the standpoint of its tactical expediency in suppressing the resistance of the Iraqis to foreign occupation. Not a single prominent voice in the media has been raised in protest against the barbaric siege against a city of over 300,000 inhabitants, an act of collective punishment that violates the most basic laws of war.

The press is marching in lockstep because the criminal war in Iraq represents a policy embraced by the entire US ruling elite. To the extent that the *Times* raises doubts and criticisms, it is from the standpoint of advising the Bush administration that it must repackage its message to stem the growing popular demand for the withdrawal of US troops.

The *Washington Post*, the other authoritative voice of the US establishment, is even more blunt. It's Sunday editorial also criticizes the Bush administration's tactics—specifically, its failure to get UN assistance and its over-reliance on the US-led Iraqi security forces that have melted away in the face of the mass insurrection.

But on the essential question of the occupation of Iraq, the *Post* advises the American people to get used to the killing and dying. Suppressing Iraqi resistance, the paper warns, "will require military power and

probably more of the woeful casualty reports and gruesome television footage that have been shocking the country. More troops will be needed."

The day after the editorial appeared, Gen. John Abizaid, the head of the US Central Command, formally requested reinforcements to deal with the growing resistance. He asked for two more combat brigades, consisting of 10,000 troops. Right-wing columnist Robert Novak had reported last week that US commanders were furious at the administration's failure to provide adequate forces for the occupation, and were telling the Bush White House that they would not be the "fall-guys" for a US debacle in Iraq.

But where are these troops to come from? The military is stretched so thin that it has been forced to halt the return of soldiers who had been deployed in Iraq for a full year, telling them on the eve of their flights home that they have to stay another three months. The Pentagon has also resorted to "stop-loss" orders to impose involuntary service on GIs who are prepared to quit, subjecting them to as much as a year-and-a-half of involuntary servitude. Reservists and National Guard members have been mobilized in unprecedented numbers.

The *Times* proposes a solution to this problem. "[I]f the goal was clear, and people understood how to reach it, Mr. Bush could compensate," the paper states. "He could even bolster the desperately straitened military with a draft if Americans understood the need to sacrifice."

This proposal is a measure of both the desperation and intransigence within ruling circles over Iraq. It has been over 30 years since the Pentagon abandoned compulsory military service, a decision taken in 1973 in the face of the virtual disintegration of its largely conscript army in Vietnam. Now, with Iraq and the mushrooming global deployment of US forces threatening to have a similar effect on the all-volunteer force, dragooning American youth into fighting and dying to maintain a dirty colonial occupation is once again seen as a viable option.

All that is needed is a "clear goal," the newspaper argues. The problem, the *Times* acknowledges, is that the American people have already been presented with multiple goals, all of them lies. "The goal has gone from destroying weapons of mass destruction to ousting a repulsive dictator to stopping terrorism to establishing a free and stable democracy in the Arab world," the editorial states.

There were no weapons of mass destruction, something that was evident to most of the world before the US ever invaded. Similarly, the only tie between Saddam Hussein's regime and the Islamist terrorists blamed for attacks on US targets was one of mutual hatred. As for establishing a "free and stable democracy," the events of the past two weeks have thoroughly exposed the US project in Iraq to be a brutal colonial dictatorship.

The *Times* account of Washington's shifting pretexts is discreetly silent on the newspaper's own role in promoting each and every one of them. Its senior correspondent Judith Miller served as a conduit for phony "intelligence" concocted by the Iraqi exile conman Ahmed Chalabi and his sponsors in the Pentagon's civilian leadership. Its senior foreign affairs columnist, Thomas Friedman, peddled each and every one of the government's justifications, not even bothering to square assertions in one column with contradictory ones made in another.

On the eve of the war, the newspaper published an editorial supporting

the invasion while voicing the pious plea for the Bush administration to “use our influence to unite [the world] around a shared vision of progress, human rights and mutual responsibility.”

How obscene these words sound today as the world gazes with horror on the implementation of Washington’s “vision” through the wanton slaughter of women and children. Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, as well as those who provided them with alibis, stand dripping in blood.

What are the “liberal” apologists for the war in Iraq left with now? The *Times* admits that the sole remaining rationale is a “negative one.”

“If the troops leave, bloody civil war would probably follow and Iraq, which had not been a haven for terrorists, could easily become one,” the newspaper declares. It adds a warning, however. “If there is no vision of a workable exit plan with a better outcome, even that terrible prospect will lose its power to convince the public that this is a fight worth continuing.”

This is an argument worthy only of contempt. The initial crime is used to justify new and more terrible ones. As it twists and turns to come up with new rationalizations for its filthy support of the war, the *Times* succeeds only in demonstrating how the official pretexts become ever more threadbare, as the US occupation becomes ever more violent and brutal.

In reality, Washington’s self-serving warnings about inevitable civil war in Iraq without a US military presence have suffered a resounding blow in recent weeks. Those who would supposedly be the principal antagonists in such a conflict—the Sunnis and Shiites—have united in a common struggle against the US occupation. Shiites have turned out by the hundreds of thousands to demonstrate their support for the Sunni fighters in Fallujah, donating blood and collecting food and supplies for the besieged city. Meanwhile, posters bearing the photograph of Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr have appeared throughout Sunni neighborhoods.

Iraq faces not a sectarian civil war, but a war of national resistance against US colonialism.

In the face of this uprising, the *Times* pleads: “What we desperately need is a clear mission, a believable strategy for success, a morally viable exit plan and international involvement.”

What are the “vision” and “clear mission” the *Times* would have the Bush administration present to the American people? What new lies do they think would be believed, after the exposure so many previous ones? The editorial doesn’t say.

Perhaps Bush and his ostensible political opponent, Democratic presidential candidate Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, should try something entirely different. They could give a joint press conference and tell the American people the truth. Kerry has no fundamental differences with Bush on the war, so they should be able to work up a bipartisan statement. Bush could read the following from his teleprompter:

“Fellow Americans, Senator Kerry and I agree on our vision for Iraq and are determined to carry through the mission, no matter what the cost in Iraqi and American blood. Iraq has the second largest proven oil reserves in the world. Our principal vision is for these vast natural resources to be taken from the Iraqis and placed under the control of ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco. This will simultaneously advance our strategy of asserting US global hegemony by means of military force, and further enrich the financial oligarchy that we both represent.

“We cannot abandon Iraq. If we are defeated by the masses in that country, it will only embolden people in other parts of the world to rise up against the rule of the banks and transnational corporations, and fatally undermine the myth that its military might makes US imperialism invincible.

“Finally, such a debacle would expose before the American people the complete rot of the political system in this country. We are deeply concerned that many of you would demand that we be held accountable for dragging the country into a war that is criminal in every sense of the word. The viability of our two-party system, which ensures the interests of

the wealthy at the expense of the vast majority of you, my fellow Americans, would be called into question.

“Senator Kerry and I agree that the draft must be reinstated. We are calling upon you to sacrifice your children and support the slaughter of the Iraqis to further the interests of the banks, the oil conglomerates and the super-rich.”

The above scenario, of course, will not happen. There is no danger that either of these politicians will level with the American people. There is, however, every reason to believe that they will agree on a bipartisan policy for escalating the US war against the Iraqi people. And, if it is deemed necessary, they will support the drafting of 18-year-old working class youth to carry out this dirty work.

Millions upon millions of Americans are revolted by the carnage in Iraq and the pointless deaths of young American soldiers in a war based on lies. Even the official opinion polls have shown close to half of the population supporting the withdrawal of US troops from the Middle Eastern country.

That these deep-felt and broad-based sentiments find no expression in either party or in the mass media is a measure of the vast gulf dividing America’s wealthy elite from the vast majority of the population, and the effective political disenfranchisement of the working class. Within the framework of the existing two-party system, American voters have no means of even expressing their opposition to war and occupation, much less bringing them to a halt.

This goal—the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops—can be achieved only through the emergence of a mass independent political movement of working people in struggle against the two political parties and the social system which they defend, and which is the root cause of this war. Such a movement is likewise necessary to hold all those who conspired to launch the unprovoked and illegal invasion of Iraq accountable, by bringing them to trial as war criminals.

The Socialist Equality Party is participating in the 2004 US elections to advance these demands as forcefully and broadly as possible. Through our campaign, we seek to develop the political debate and activity needed to prepare a mass movement for the revolutionary transformation of American society.



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