

The New York Times closes ranks with Bush on Iraq war

Barry Grey
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On Tuesday night President Bush went on national television and rehashed the lies his administration is using to justify the slaughter in Iraq. On Wednesday, the *New York Times* published an editorial that sums up the position of the so-called “liberal” establishment and the Democratic Party. Oozing evasion and duplicity, the editorial testifies to the commitment of the entire American ruling elite to the war and the complicity of the Democrats in the imperialist enterprise.

The editorial chides Bush for raising “the bloody flag of 9/11 over and over again to justify a war in a country that had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks.” But the conclusion of the *Times* is not that the perpetuation of this lie exposes the predatory character of the war, but rather that this particular canard has become counterproductive and should be set aside in the interests of “winning” the conflict.

The entire argument advanced by the editors proceeds from the premise that the origins of the war, and the lies used to launch it, bear no relation to the character of the war itself. The only questions that matter are whether the war is “winnable,” and what measures are needed to achieve victory. To this end, the *Times* urges “Mr. Bush’s critics” to “put aside... their anger at the administration for its hubris, its terrible planning and its inept conduct of the war in return for a frank discussion of where to go from here.”

The content of this “frank” discussion is summed up by referencing a letter “from an opponent of the invasion who urged the American left to ‘get over its anger over President Bush’s catastrophic blunder’ and start trying to figure out how to win the conflict that exists.”

Since, according to the *Times*, “no one wants disaster in Iraq,” Democrats and Republicans must rally behind the war effort. For its part, the newspaper suggests that more US troops should be sent to the killing fields.

Leading Democrats echoed the same line in their comments on Bush’s speech. “What we need is a policy to get it right in Iraq,” said Massachusetts Senator and 2004 presidential candidate John Kerry Wednesday morning on NBC’s “Today” show. The previous evening he was more explicit. Appearing with Republican Senator John McCain on CNN’s “Larry King Live” program, Kerry agreed with McCain that the US needed more troops in Iraq.

Senator Joseph Biden, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and an announced candidate for the party’s 2008 presidential nomination, said on ABC’s “Good Morning America” program on Wednesday that “there’s not enough force on the ground now to mount a real counterinsurgency.”

In its editorial, the *Times* counsels that Bush should not “continue to obsess about self-justification and the need to color Iraq with the memory of 9/11. The nation does not want it and cannot afford it.” With these concluding words, the newspaper offers the administration

a blanket amnesty for its past lies, the better to promote new ones.

Chief among them is the claim that the US is occupying Iraq in order to produce a “democratic” country. This is a lie, the newspaper evidently believes, that retains its utility.

Hence the editorial’s references to the “elected government” and the “democratic elections” that installed the current puppet regime. The grotesque claim—retailed by both parties and the entire media—that an election held at gunpoint, in which opponents of the American occupation are excluded, can be democratic goes hand in hand with the equally absurd identification of foreign military occupation with “sovereignty.”

The overarching deception that links all of the others is the claim that a judgment on the desirability and political significance of a US victory in Iraq can be separated from the conspiracy of lies used to justify the war in the first place.

The success of a war waged on the basis of lies—itsself a monstrous violation of democratic rights—could only encourage and accelerate anti-democratic tendencies within the US. It would strengthen the most right-wing sections of the ruling elite and further enhance the influence of the military in American political life.

Such an outcome could only embolden the forces that authored the Iraq war to proceed with their plans for other, even bloodier adventures. A number of nations have already been targeted as potential victims of US-style “democratization”: Iran, North Korea, Syria, Cuba, China. A US victory in Iraq would bring the entire world closer to the danger of a new world war.

The fact that the war was based on lies is not some extraneous or secondary question: it speaks to the essence of the war itself. Not that long ago, in the Vietnam era, the revelation that the government lied was sufficient to discredit the war itself. The exposure of President Lyndon Johnson’s lies in the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident played a major role in de-legitimizing the intervention in Southeast Asia.

Now we are told by the politicians of both parties and by the media that the Bush administration’s far more massive and systematic lying in no way diminishes the legitimacy of America’s actions in Iraq.

The US government lied in order to conceal its real aims in invading, without provocation, a country that played no role in the events of 9/11 and represented no threat to the American people. Those aims had—and have—nothing to do with democracy or weapons of mass destruction. They were predatory and imperialist: the American ruling elite invaded Iraq and took over the country in order to seize control of its oil resources and establish a permanent military presence that would give it a huge strategic advantage over its rivals in Europe and Asia. This aggression, following the invasion of Afghanistan, was part of a broader drive to establish US hegemony

throughout the world.

The American people had no say in the matter. They were lied to and kept in the dark by all of those who supposedly represent them, and by the media. Moreover, political power in the US, notwithstanding the holding of elections, does not reside with the people, but rather with a financial oligarchy that controls both of the major parties and systematically excludes any working class, socialist alternative.

When the *Times* declares that nobody wants to see a “disaster” in Iraq, it reveals the indifference of the American ruling elite to the carnage and suffering it has wrought.

The disaster has already happened. The war *is* the disaster, having to date cost the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis and reduced the country to ruins—without regular electricity, water, sanitation or jobs for the majority of its inhabitants. The people live under the permanent condition of terror that attends any military occupation, subject to be seized at any moment by American forces or their Iraqi military counterparts and thrown into prison or killed.

Already nearly 1,750 Americans, having been sent to a distant battlefield on false pretenses, are not coming back. They leave behind orphans, widows and shattered families. Then there are the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis maimed by US missiles and bombs, and the thousands of US soldiers who have been permanently crippled and disfigured.

There is the vast squandering of resources—some \$200 billion to date—which will ultimately mean new cuts in funding for schools, health care, housing and other essential needs. And there are the poisonous political consequences of the war, including ideological justifications for torture and unprecedented attacks on democratic rights.

What the *Times* and those for whom it speaks want to avoid is being held accountable for this disaster. The only way to end it, however, is for the US to get out of Iraq.

The Democratic Party and the *Times* are aware that more and more Americans are coming to this conclusion. In an attempt to confuse and dissipate the rising anti-war sentiment, they resort to two further arguments. The first is stated in Wednesday’s editorial as follows: “...if American forces were withdrawn, Iraq would probably sink into a civil war that would create large stretches of no man’s land where private militias and stateless terrorists could operate with impunity.”

This type of argument goes under the heading of justifying new crimes with old ones. In reality, the US intervention has arguably done more to fuel sectarian and ethnic tensions and violence than anything carried out by Saddam Hussein.

As for the claim that a US withdrawal would create a vacuum that would be filled by terrorists intent on harming the American people: Can any sane person deny that the US occupation of Iraq does more every day to foment anti-American hatred and create terrorist recruits than any fatwa by Al Qaeda?

Finally, there is the last resort of scoundrels: the argument that we have to stay the course in order to support our troops. Here, those who are responsible for placing American men and women in harm’s way—on the basis of lies, and in pursuit of selfish and predatory aims—hide behind the very troops they have victimized.

Why are the *New York Times* and the Democratic Party so intent on continuing the war? Because they speak for a political establishment that supports the project of global hegemony. Whatever disagreements emerge between Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, they are always over tactics, not aims. They all believe

that the economic and political viability of American capitalism depends on US domination of the world’s strategic resources—such as oil—as well as international markets and sources of cheap labor.

They fear, moreover, that a Vietnam-style defeat would profoundly discredit the existing social and political order in the eyes of the American working class, with far-reaching and dangerous consequences.

The lineup of all factions of the American political establishment behind the war—and against the majority of Americans who oppose it—demonstrates that the struggle against the war is inseparably bound up with a struggle against the entire social and political system. Just as it is not possible to discuss “where we go from here” in Iraq outside of a discussion of the origins of the war, it is not possible to seriously oppose the war without opposing the capitalist system which gave rise to it, and the American financial oligarchy which authored it and in whose interests it is being waged.

The starting point for a struggle against the war must be the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops. The US government must pay full reparations for the destruction it has wreaked in Iraq, and reparations to the families of US soldiers killed in the war, as well as to soldiers wounded in the fighting.

All those involved in the criminal conspiracy that produced the war must be held accountable both politically and legally. They must be placed before an independent tribunal and tried for war crimes.

This will not happen of itself. The Socialist Equality Party calls for the development and building of a new independent mass movement against war and social reaction. It is clear that the fight against war cannot be directed just against the Bush administration. It must also be a fight against the administration’s accomplices in the Democratic Party.

It is necessary to break out of the straitjacket of the two-party system. Already it is obvious that, in advance of the 2006 congressional elections, both parties are working to frame the debate on the war along the lines of how the war can be won. This must be rejected. The only legitimate response to the killing in Iraq is the demand for the withdrawal of all US troops.

There is enormous opposition to the war among the American people, and it is growing. There is also political confusion. How could it be otherwise when the government lies systematically and the media either covers up the lies or minimizes their significance?

What is needed is a fight to link the growing opposition to the war to rising social discontent over the attacks on workers’ jobs, wages and pensions. There is a profound connection between militarism abroad and the ever-greater concentration of wealth at home, between foreign predations and the assault on the working class within the US.

The struggle against war requires a break with the Democratic Party and the building of a mass, independent party of the working class fighting for the socialist reorganization of society.



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