

New York Times' Thomas Friedman libels opponents of Iraq war

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The bombings in London have been accompanied by a campaign on the part of the political and media establishment to deny the obvious—that these attacks are the inexorable consequences of American and British foreign policy, above all the war in Iraq. A particularly provocative example of this campaign is Thomas Friedman's column in the July 22 *New York Times*, entitled "Giving the Hatemonger No Place to Hide."

Friedman levels against critics of the war policies of the Bush administration the vile charge that they are moral and political accomplices of those who carry out terrorist acts. "After every major terrorist incident," he writes, "the excuse makers come out to tell us why imperialism, Zionism, colonialism or Iraq explains why the terrorists acted. These excuse makers are just one notch less despicable than the terrorists and deserve to be exposed."

This smear comes from a man who has the benefit of a politically influential pulpit at the *Times*. In constructing this amalgam—grouping together those who would seek to explain the historical and political origins of terrorist acts with the terrorists themselves—Friedman provides an ideological justification for legal sanctions and even violence against opponents of government policies.

What does Friedman mean by "excuse makers?" Does Friedman expect anyone who is in any way familiar with the history of the Middle East to believe that the bombings in London and other terrorist attacks are unrelated to the policies of the American government and its allies, above all the British government of Tony Blair? Or that the bitter experience of colonialism, decades of violent political meddling in the region, the relentless efforts to control its resources, and the killing of tens of thousands of Moslems with American bombs in various wars have not produced a

climate in which people are prepared to commit terrorist acts?

These are completely legitimate questions that must be asked and debated. Friedman's provocative libel exposes his own contempt for democratic principles, not to mention his lack of political and professional scruples.

Friedman is attempting to block discussion of the nature and consequences of war by criminalizing dissent. If those rounded up in the "war on terrorism" are subject to torture, indefinite detention without charges and military tribunals, what does Friedman have in mind for those who occupy the position "one notch" below the terrorists?

Friedman's statements are all the more contemptible given that he himself predicted that the war might lead to attacks. In a column published on December 8, 2002 Friedman wrote that it was necessary to prepare people "to deal with the blowback any US invasion will produce." He stated that if the war is not managed correctly, and the right justifications are not put in the forefront, the United States would be seen as an aggressor and "the world will become an increasingly dangerous place for every American."

Friedman has a personal interest in preventing any serious discussion of responsibility for the consequences of the war, inasmuch as he was one of those who employed his position as an opinion-maker to justify the invasion of Iraq. He knew that the Bush administration's case for war consisted of lies, or what he once called "phony reasons."

While peddling every one of the administration's lies on one occasion or another, Friedman himself has focused on two causes. He has more than once acknowledged that the war was waged, at least in part, to secure control of Persian Gulf oil resources. On

January 5, 2003 he wrote, “Any war we launch in Iraq will certainly be—in part—about oil... I have no problem with a war for oil.”

However, Friedman has focused on the idea that the “real reason” for the war is to transform the entire Middle East. His hope has always been that the war would be the first stage in a process that would see the installation of pro-market, pro-American regimes throughout the region, which would then be a crucial bulwark of the interests of US corporations.

While Friedman often speaks of the importance of promoting democracy, the real aim of the policy he advocates is to secure the interests of American business. An unabashed advocate of the use of military power to achieve the political and economic objectives of US capitalism, Friedman wrote on March 28, 1999, “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist—McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.”

In his column he denounces “those who spread hate,” saying he wants to compile a list of “those religious leaders and writers who are inciting violence against others.” These people must be exposed, he says, because “words matter.”

Yes, words do matter, and Thomas Friedman is one of those who bear political and moral responsibility for the American and Iraqi deaths caused by the policies that he has so dishonestly and cynically advocated and condoned.



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