New York Times' Friedman proposes "endgame" bloodbath in Iraq

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Since well before the US invaded Iraq, Thomas Friedman, the *New York Times*' chief foreign affairs commentator, has been the most enthusiastic proponent of US imperialism's neo-colonial conquest of the country.

Early on he served as a conduit for the right-wing ideologues in the civilian leadership of the Pentagon—putting their phony pretexts for war into print, while embellishing them with noble aims of bringing "democracy" and "liberation" to the Iraqi people.

That the newspaper identified with an erstwhile American liberal establishment published Friedman's exhortations to war played no small role in poisoning public opinion on the eve of the US invasion. It helped pave the way for the ongoing tragedy that has cost the lives of over 100,000 Iraqis and nearly 2,000 American soldiers.

As it became ever more apparent to the American people that they had been dragged into an unprovoked war based upon lies about non-existent "weapons of mass destruction" and phony claims of ties between Baghdad and terrorism, Friedman brushed off the criminal implications of the Bush administration's actions.

Don't get "so tied up defending [the] phony reasons for going to war," he counseled the White House in July 2003. Instead, he said, it should focus on "the real and valid reason for the war: to install a decent, tolerant, pluralistic, multireligious government in Iraq."

By November of that year, as the Iraqi insurgency and US military repression were claiming a growing number of victims, Friedman was waxing ever more lyrical about the dirty war of American occupation. It was, he said, "the most important liberal, revolutionary US democracy-building project since the Marshall Plan... one of the noblest things this country has ever attempted abroad."

By April of 2004, as the US military was unleashing bloody attacks against both the Sunni city of Fallujah and the Shiite slums of Baghdad, Friedman had taken to issuing exhortations to the Iraqis. "Is there a critical mass ready to identify themselves—not as Shiites, Kurds and Sunnis—but as Iraqis, who are ready to fight for the chance of self-determination for the Iraqi people as a whole?"

Self-determination in the Orwellian newspeak adopted by the *New York Times* columnist meant siding with the American military to suppress those fighting to expel the foreign occupiers from their country.

Criticizing the Bush administration for failing to deploy sufficient military power to crush this resistance, Friedman at that time concluded: "I know the right thing to do now is to stay the course, defeat the bad guys, disarm the militia and try to build a political framework..."

As recently as last June, Friedman voiced the hope that the US could still claim victory in Iraq, provided it used sufficient military force. He called on the administration to "do it right" and "double the boots on the ground."

That the US does not have an additional 145,000 active-duty troops to send to Iraq was something Friedman didn't even bother to consider. The unstated implication of "doing it right" is restoring the draft, conscripting hundreds of thousands of American teenagers and sending them off to fight and die. If such a prospect doesn't faze Friedman, it is because he is confident that any revival of the selective service system would—as in the Vietnam era—include deferrals and safe havens for all those in the elite financial and social circles that he inhabits.

It seems that now, however, the number one cheerleader for the US conquest of the Persian Gulf has come to the end of his rope. In a September 27 column published in the *Times* entitled "Endgame in Iraq," he concludes that US military strategy is secondary and that "Iraq, at the end of the day, was always going to be what the Iraqis decided to make of it."

How the Iraqis are to decide or make anything for themselves under a foreign occupation that dictates all essential terms of political and social life Friedman doesn't bother to explain. Clearly, the implication is that either the Iraqis knuckle under to US demands, or they can go to blazes.

In short, Friedman has concluded that the Iraqis—and specifically the more than five million members of the

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country's Sunni minority—are not worthy of Washington's "noble" efforts to liberate, civilize and democratize them.

His latest column is an ultimatum to the Sunnis to vote the right way—or else—on the draft constitution that Washington is promoting as yet another "turning point" in extricating itself from its Iraqi quagmire.

Having proclaimed the US intervention a war of liberation for a "multireligious government" based on those "ready to identify themselves—not as Shiites, Kurds and Sunnis—but as Iraqis," Friedman now insists that the Sunnis must accept a constitutional scheme that sanctions Iraq's de facto partition precisely along these ethno-religious lines.

The Sunnis are being prodded along this supposedly democratic path not primarily by Friedman's sermons, but rather by US military assaults on cities in the majority Sunni provinces of Ninewa and al-Anbar, as well as raids and arrests carried out against Sunni representatives in Baghdad.

Most who know anything about Iraq and the surrounding region are warning that the constitution and the US rush to impose it through an October 15 referendum vastly increase the threat of civil war—an explosion of sectarian violence and ethnic cleansing, leading ultimately to the country's breakup.

While Friedman allows that the "Bush team's incompetence" has undermined Washington's colonialist efforts, he directs his main fire at the "moral vacuum in the Sunni Arab world" and its determination to "stifle any prospect for democracy." That the "democracy" on offer is the effective destruction of Iraq, leaving the Sunnis trapped in a landlocked statelet without resources, is of no interest to the *Times* columnist.

Who is Friedman to preach morality to anyone? Here is a man who has made his living inventing alibis and pretexts for the most powerful imperialist state in the world seizing control of an oppressed and impoverished nation, killing thousands upon thousands of men, women and children in the process, all for the purpose of controlling the region's strategic oil reserves.

As Iraq sank into a hellish abyss of bloodshed, poverty and the disintegration of all essential functions of society, Friedman invented fairy tales about it becoming a beacon of democracy that would be emulated by peoples throughout the Arab world. As thousands of young American soldiers came home in coffins or returned maimed physically and shattered psychologically, he casually called for sending twice as many. And now he has the gall to accuse others of living in a "moral vacuum"?

Behind all of this moralistic fulminating there no doubt lie definite political and strategic calculations. Some analysts speak more openly about Iraq's partition and even a protracted civil war as possible paths to achieving US imperialism's main aim—hegemonic control over the oil-rich Middle East.

But there is something more going on here.

In the period leading up to the war and in the aftermath of the US invasion, Friedman was known for his exultant colonialist rhetoric, declaring that the occupation must proceed on the principle of "we break it; we own it" and proclaiming that Washington had "adopted a baby called Baghdad."

Now he is writing something very different: "Maybe cynical Europeans were right. Maybe this neighborhood is just beyond transformation." If the Sunni minority fails to support the constitution demanded by Washington "then we are wasting our time," he declares in his September 27 column.

"We should arm the Shiites and Kurds and leave the Sunnis of Iraq to reap the wind," Friedman concludes. "We must not throw more good American lives after good American lives for people who hate others more than they love their own children."

Using the slander employed in every colonial war to justify mass murder against those resisting foreign domination—they don't love their children, they are indifferent to human life—Friedman abandons his democratizing pretenses and calls instead for a ethno-religious bloodbath.

That this is the perspective of someone who is arguably the most influential foreign affairs commentator in the US, writing for America's newspaper of record, is a measure of the profound demoralization and disorientation within the US ruling establishment over the course of its imperialist venture in Iraq.

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