

US press echoes consensus in ruling elite to continue slaughter in Iraq

Patrick Martin
3 December 2005

The American ruling elite is inextricably committed to military victory in Iraq. That is the only conclusion to be drawn from the response of the major media to Bush's November 30 war speech.

The most prominent editorial voices of corporate America, from the ultra-right *Wall Street Journal* to the *New York Times*, the leading voice of upper-class liberalism, despite disputes over tactics and methods, agree that there is no alternative to using whatever level of violence is required for the United States to remain in control of the oil-rich Mideast country.

The December 1 editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* was typically unrestrained in its celebration of the war, hailing Bush's speech as a rededication of the administration to "complete victory" and a repudiation of the growing public disaffection with the war. "Our reading of history is that the American people will accept casualties in a war, even heavy casualties, as long as they think their leaders have a strategy to win," the *Journal* declared, thus announcing its approval in advance of the increased bloodletting which continued occupation will produce.

The tragic human implications of the *Journal's* glib endorsement of "heavy casualties" to secure US control over the region's oil resources were driven home on Friday, when the government announced that at least 10 Marines had been killed by a single explosion in Fallujah. Meanwhile, the US military is preparing to slaughter hundreds more Iraqis in a new offensive in Ramadi.

The *Journal* praised the performance of Iraqi troops in Tal Afar, when mainly Shiite forces rampaged through the predominately Sunni city near the Syrian border. It called for strengthening the interior ministry, although that agency is now believed responsible for some of the worst atrocities, including the underground torture chamber in Baghdad uncovered last week when it was raided by US troops.

The newspaper essentially declared any debate over the origins of the war to be irrelevant, observing, "as military analyst Andrew Krepinevich put it to us yesterday, whether Iraq was a 'war of choice' or a 'war of necessity' at the beginning, it certainly is the latter now. Our adversaries the world over—from North Korea to Syria's Bashar Assad to Iran's mullahs—are watching to see if America has the will to win in Iraq."

While denouncing congressional and media criticism of the Bush administration's conduct of the war, the newspaper made one suggestion for change: "One area that could still use improvement is procurement policy." The *Journal* observed that Iraqi military forces had been equipped with outdated Soviet-bloc weaponry, much of it from former Warsaw Pact countries now enrolled in NATO, such as Poland and Romania. "Iraq should have top-of-the-line US equipment whenever possible," the newspaper complained. In other words, the

US arms industry should be allowed to join in the orgy of plunder and profit in Iraq, along with Halliburton, Bechtel and Big Oil!

The newspaper made a point, as did Bush, of paying tribute to Senator Joe Lieberman, the Democratic Party's vice presidential candidate in 2000, pointing to a column by Lieberman published by the *Journal* on the eve of Bush's speech, which was headlined "Our Troops Must Stay."

The *New York Times* editorial on Bush's speech, headlined, "Plan: We Win," was critical of Bush's evident isolation and indifference to public opinion, comparing him to Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon during the Vietnam War. Commenting on the "Plan for Victory" issued by the White House, the *Times* declared: "The document, and Mr. Bush's speech, were almost entirely a rehash of the same tired argument that everything's going just fine. Mr. Bush also offered the usual false choice between sticking to his policy and beating a hasty and cowardly retreat."

In its search for a "middle way" between Bush's policy and withdrawal from Iraq, however, the *Times* called upon the same military expert cited approvingly by the *Wall Street Journal*. "What Americans wanted to hear was a genuine counterinsurgency plan," the *Times* claimed, "perhaps like one proposed by Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., a leading writer on military strategy: find the most secure areas with capable Iraqi forces. Embed American trainers with those forces and make the region safe enough to spend money on reconstruction, thus making friends and draining the insurgency. Then slowly expand those zones and withdraw American forces."

This paints an utterly false picture of average Americans, in office cubicles, shop floors or supermarket checkout lines, clamoring for "a genuine counterinsurgency plan." What they want is an end to the slaughter. The *Times* echoes a line in Bush's speech, in which he claimed, "Most Americans want two things in Iraq: They want to see our troops win, and they want to see our troops come home as soon as possible."

The *Times*, which generally articulates the position of the Democratic Party, does not advocate an "antiwar" position; it rather seeks a more effective tactic for winning the war. The military expert it cites, Andrew Krepinevich, published a much-cited article in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*, rejecting both "stay the course" and immediate withdrawal, calling instead for "a real strategy built around the principles of counterinsurgency warfare," and citing the lessons of the guerrilla wars in Vietnam, Malaya and the Philippines in the 1950s and 1960s.

Krepinevich calls for refocusing the military effort from "search and destroy" operations aimed at locating and killing insurgents, to the creation of secure zones completely denied to the insurgents. In

Vietnam, such efforts by successive foreign occupiers involved the creation of what the French called “*agrovilles*” and the Americans “strategic hamlets.” Both were essentially concentration camps into which the local population was herded and kept at gunpoint to prevent them from giving material support to the insurgency.

Somewhat provocatively, Krepinevich calls this plan for Iraq the “oil-spot strategy,” using the “o-word” that has been virtually banned in discussions of the Iraq war in the major US media, precisely because it suggests the real motivation for the US invasion and occupation. He wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that his strategy “would require a protracted commitment of US resources, a willingness to risk more casualties in the short term, and an enduring US presence in Iraq...” He added: “Even if successful, this strategy will require at least a decade of commitment and hundreds of billions of dollars and will result in longer US casualty rolls.”

This is what the “critical,” pro-Democratic *New York Times* proposes for the American and Iraqi people. The *New York Times* is calling for—along with virtually the entire leadership of the Democratic Party—a reorientation of the military effort in Iraq that could well produce an even greater bloodbath. (Krepinevich also suggests dispensing with Bush’s rhetoric about democratizing Iraq, arguing that local elections in contested areas like Baghdad and Anbar province should not be held until “the population sees the benefits of security and reconstruction—and not until then.”)

The *Washington Post* occupies a middle position in the right-wing political spectrum of the American ruling elite—advocating what today passes for moderate to liberal positions on domestic policy, while firmly supporting the war in Iraq. Its position corresponds most closely to that of Democratic senators like Lieberman and Hillary Clinton, who flatly reject all calls for withdrawal from Iraq and declare that the United States must prevail militarily.

The *Post* editorial on Bush’s speech began with an accurate observation: “Though you wouldn’t know it from the partisan rhetoric, there is substantial agreement in Washington on the strategy for Iraq outlined yesterday by President Bush.”

The newspaper dismissed the rhetorical differences, saying: “The president denounced those who would ‘cut and run’ from the country and in turn was lambasted by Democrats for inflexibly staying the course. In fact, many Democrats in Congress agree with the principal elements of Mr. Bush’s ‘strategy for victory’...”

The *Post* cited the 79-19 vote in the US Senate two weeks ago endorsing the broad outlines of the Bush administration policy in Iraq, and the opposition by leading Senate Democrats, including Clinton and Joseph Biden, to an immediate pullout.

“The agreement flows not from converging views over a war that has polarized the country but from a simple absence of choices. To abandon Iraq while the country’s emerging leaders are still trying to hammer together a workable political system would be a disaster for US interests around the world. At the same time, the US military cannot maintain its present force levels in Iraq much longer without unpalatable measures, such as sending units for fourth and fifth tours or mobilizing more of the National Guard.”

As the *Post* explains, both parties proceed from the same starting point: “US interests around the world”—i.e., the economic and strategic interests of American capitalism—and both parties recognize that the Iraq war has produced enormous strains on the US military, the principal instrument for securing imperialist interests.

The newspaper continues: “Real question about Mr. Bush’s strategy, which few in Congress dare to ask, is whether the means

meet the ends. Every plan the administration has prepared, starting with the original invasion, has been based on overly optimistic assumptions and insufficient resources.”

The *Post*’s concern is that military victory in Iraq, which the entire ruling elite considers indispensable, may require more rather than fewer troops. Democratic criticism of Bush’s conduct of the war, insofar as it encourages and legitimizes popular demands for troop withdrawals, may make such a military escalation politically unviable.

Against all these spokesmen for imperialism, the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* state that “victory” for the American ruling elite is not in the interests of the working people of this country or of the world. Such a victory means concretely an escalation of death and destruction in Iraq—by means of bombs, death squads, concentration camps, torture—that will further devastate that country, and consume the lives of untold numbers of American soldiers. The resulting regime would be a dictatorship no less brutal than that which preceded it, only entirely subservient to American oil companies and the US government. The American ruling elite has no problem inflicting such carnage, so long as it continues to believe it can produce unchallenged US control over the oil wealth and the vast profits and strategic advantages that go with it.

An American military success in Iraq would only embolden the war criminals in the White House and Pentagon to engage in new wars of aggression in Syria, Iran or elsewhere, just as the initial military success in Afghanistan encouraged the attack on Iraq.

The goal of working people must be to put an end to this unprovoked, illegal and aggressive war. This means the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, an end to the squandering of human lives and waste of billions of dollars, the mobilization instead of massive resources and manpower to meet critical social needs, and holding the war conspirators in the White House, the Pentagon, the State Department and the CIA legally accountable for their war crimes.

This struggle can be waged only by breaking completely with the Democratic Party and the entire two-party system, and building the Socialist Equality Party as the mass independent party of the working class.



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