

Daniel Pipes and the unfolding civil war in Iraq

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Daniel Pipes, the director of the neo-conservative Middle East Forum and a vociferous supporter of the invasion of Iraq, is not an inconsequential figure in the American political establishment. His writings consistently articulate and refine the views of the extreme right in the United States, a layer that exerts considerable influence over the policies of the Bush administration. It is therefore noteworthy when such an individual begins publicly arguing that a sectarian civil war in Iraq would be to the strategic advantage of US imperialism. One can conclude that similar views are prevalent in Washington's corridors of power.

Pipes first presented what he views as the advantages of an Iraqi civil war in an article published by the *New York Sun* on February 28—six days after the destruction of the Shiite Muslim Al-Askariya mosque by suspected Sunni Muslim extremists and amid the reports that Shiite militias were carrying out revenge killings of Sunnis. He expanded on the theme during a visit to Australia in March, in interviews given to Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) television and radio current affairs programs.

The core of Pipes' argument is that a fratricidal conflict between Sunni and Shiite Iraqis, whatever the death toll and however tragic for the Iraqi people, would have definite benefits for American strategic, economic and military interests in the Middle East.

Pipes' calculations are completely ruthless. The US and its allies invaded Iraq on false pretexts, including that of establishing "democracy". Yet Pipes rejects completely that the United States has any obligations toward the population. "Iraq's plight is neither a coalition responsibility nor a particular danger to the West," he wrote in the *New York Sun*.

Instead, the catastrophe unfolding in Iraq could have positive consequences, according to Pipes. In the short

term, he asserts that a civil war would "reduce coalition casualties" as Iraqis "fight each other". Pipes also argues that there would be fewer terrorist attacks on US and allied targets outside Iraq as networks like Al Qaeda—which is based on Sunni extremism—would focus their attention on a sectarian war against Shiites. He wrote: "When Sunni terrorists target Shiites and vice-versa, non-Muslims are less likely to be hurt."

More importantly for Pipes, however, civil war in Iraq would end what he views as the dangerous talk of establishing democracy in Iraq or anywhere else in the Middle East. As far as Pipes is concerned, the masses of the region should not and cannot have democratic rights because they will not necessarily vote for the preferred candidates of Washington. To the extent that elections in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon and elsewhere have given the population the chance to express their sentiments, large numbers of people have given their support to Islamic fundamentalist movements opposed to the American presence in the region—organisations that Pipes refers to as the "extreme enemies" of US interests.

Before the war, Pipes was indistinguishable from other neo-conservative ideologues who were justifying a US invasion of Iraq on the grounds it would inspire a democratic "revolution" in the Middle East. In an article published by the *New York Post* on February 11, 2003, Pipes argued that an American victory and the "successful rehabilitation" of the country "will bring liberals out of the woodwork and generally move the region toward democracy".

Within a matter of months, as resistance to the US occupation developed, he had abandoned such talk. Pipes' argued last month that Iraq is in "no position... to develop advanced institutions of democracy and capitalism". By implication, the type of regime

advocated by Pipes in Iraq is a pro-US dictatorship no less brutal than that of Saddam Hussein—after many hundreds of thousands more Iraqis have lost their lives in a sectarian bloodbath.

Elsewhere in the region, Pipes asserts that it will take “decades” before the people of the Middle East are ready to elect their own governments. A fervent defender of the Zionist state in Israel, Pipes is particularly outraged by the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections. While he rhetorically declares that democracy is a long-term goal, Pipes articulates the view of the US ruling class that no regime can be allowed that is not compliant with American interests.

From this standpoint, Pipes argues that a civil war in Iraq could be advantageous by providing a pretext for US military action against Iran and Syria. Open warfare between Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites, he wrote in the *New York Sun*, would most likely “invite Syrian and Iranian participation... hastening the possibility of an American confrontation with those states, with which tensions are already high”.

The American neo-conservatives make no secret of their ambitions for “regime-change” in Iran and Syria, which are currently regarded as obstacles to untrammelled US domination over the Middle East. An incredulous ABC radio journalist asked: “America can’t afford to take them on in open warfare, can it?” And Pipes bluntly replied: “America’s good at open warfare. It’s just not good at occupying countries.”

While Pipes repeats *ad nauseum* that a civil war in Iraq would be a tragedy, the obvious conclusion is that he believes the US has no interest in preventing one. The fact that such a figure can callously speak of the advantages of a sectarian bloodbath points to the possibility that agencies of the US government that share his views may have been involved in encouraging communal conflict. Numerous highly suspicious provocations, murders and bombings have occurred at particularly opportune times for the US occupation and the Bush administration.

More generally, American policy since the occupation of Iraq began has been to foment tensions between the country’s various religious and ethnic groups in order to weaken resistance to the US presence. A classic “divide and rule” strategy has been pursued.

Kurdish nationalist and Shiite fundamentalist

organisations were promoted into positions of privilege and authority at the expense of the largely Sunni Arab elite that dominated under the Hussein regime. Almost as soon as the war was over, shadowy Sunni organisations began carrying out murderous and indiscriminate attacks on Shiite civilians. Thousands of Shiites have been killed. The Shiite fundamentalist parties have used the carnage to justify their collaboration with the US forces.

A considerable proportion of the US-recruited Iraqi military were members of Kurdish or Shiite militias. The Sunni population is deeply fearful of these sectarian formations, which fight alongside American troops against the largely Sunni-based resistance. The Shiite fundamentalist parties have used their control over security forces to unleash death squads against Sunni communities, to wipe out opponents and terrorise the population. Hundreds of Sunnis have been murdered after being detained by police.

Alongside the killings, there are now reports of ethnic cleansing. Thousands of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds are being forced either by direct threats or the general escalation of violence to leave their homes in mixed neighbourhoods to find protection elsewhere.

The response of Pipes to this catastrophe in Iraq underscores the predatory and criminal nature of US foreign policy. The American ruling elite as a whole does not have one iota of concern for the lives, well-being or democratic rights of the masses in the Middle East or anywhere else. It is desperately seeking to establish US dominance over key strategic territory and crucial energy resources and markets for the benefit of American corporations and financial conglomerates.

Significantly, Pipes’ neo-fascist speculation on the benefits of barbarism in Iraq has produced hardly a word of comment, let alone criticism, in the American and Australian press or political establishment.



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