

New York Times “military analysis” foreshadows US bloodbath in Baghdad

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24 October 2006

In the midst of intensive strategy sessions between the Bush administration and military commanders and urgent calls from politicians and media commentators for a “change of course” in Iraq, the *New York Times* has published a “military analysis” that lays bare the core of the various schemes being discussed to salvage the American occupation of the country.

At the center of the crisis talks are plans for a military assault on densely populated neighborhoods in the capital city, where anti-American insurgents and militia are entrenched, beginning with Sadr City, the home of some 2 million impoverished Shia and the stronghold of the anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army militia.

The commentary, appearing on the front page of Monday’s *Times* and authored by Michael R. Gordon, makes no attempt to disguise the newspaper’s support for such an action, which would entail killing on a mass scale. Below the heading “Military Analysis,” the headline reads: “To Stand or Fall in Baghdad,” followed by a second headline: “For American Commanders, This Is It: Securing Capital Is the Key to Their Mission.”

Calling the “Baghdad security plan” the American military’s “last hand,” Gordon writes: “But military commanders here see no plausible alternative to their bedrock strategy to clear violence-ridden neighborhoods of militias, insurgents and arms caches, hold them with Iraqi and American security forces, and then try to win over the population with reconstruction projects.... There is no fallback plan that the generals are holding in their hip pocket. This is it.”

The unstated premise of the article is continued support for the real cause of the nightmare of death and destruction in Iraq—the American invasion and military occupation of the country. As with virtually all reportage and commentary on the war by the *Times* and the US media as a whole, the American military is presented as a

benign force seeking to protect the Iraqi people from “insurgents” and sectarian militias, who are depicted uniformly as hostile forces bent on thwarting the humanitarian mission of the United States.

The deteriorating military and political situation for the US in Iraq now requires the apologists for US imperialism at the *Times* to justify in advance a massive escalation of American violence.

At the point in his commentary where Gordon defines the US mission, he omits, significantly, any mention of democracy. Citing American generals who speak of the “larger American mission in Iraq,” he writes: “Their assessment is that if Baghdad is overwhelmed by sectarian strife, the cause of fostering a more stable Iraq will be lost.”

Following the evolving line of the Bush administration, the mantra of a “democratic” Iraq is shelved. Democracy in Iraq has always been a façade to conceal Washington’s real war aims: seizing control of the country’s oil riches and establishing a subservient client regime and military beachhead in the Middle East.

However, the downgrading of “democracy” as the purported aim of the occupation coincides with high-level discussions among US policymakers about ousting the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki by means of a military coup, should he continue to resist American pressure to disarm Shia militias that are hostile to the US presence.

An earlier article in the *Times*, published on Sunday (“US to Hand Iraq a New Timetable on Security Role”), cited “senior American officials” who indicated that one of the alternatives under consideration is to “give the Iraqi Army the lead role in domestic security, downgrading the role of police units.” A turn to the Army for policing operations would represent a turn to military dictatorship and the enlistment of the traditional Sunni officer corps to attack Sadr and his militia.

Gordon's commentary is typical of the *Times*' cynical and dishonest coverage of the war. After quoting Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli, commander of American forces in Iraq, as stating, "As Baghdad goes, so goes Iraq," Gordon adds his own comment: "It is hard to see how any Iraq plan can work if the capital's citizens cannot be protected."

Protected from whom? The *Times* depicts the American military as the protector of the Iraqi people, even as it promotes plans for a massive assault on Baghdad neighborhoods.

As confirmed by polls released last month, a large majority of Iraqis believe that the American military is the main threat to their security and well-being. A poll conducted by the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes reported that 60 percent of Iraqis approve the attacks on US-led forces and almost 80 percent say the US military provokes more violence in Iraq than it prevents. The US State Department's own poll, according to the Associated Press, found that two thirds of Iraqis in Baghdad favor an immediate withdrawal of US forces.

Gordon goes on to assert that "the sectarian violence would be far worse if not for the American efforts." How does he know? The US occupation is the basic cause for the eruption of sectarian conflicts, and the US military has promoted these divisions in an effort to pit Iraqis against each other in line with the old colonialist strategy of "divide and rule."

Gordon's article suggests that the *Times* favors a further increase in American troop strength in Iraq. He writes: "Keeping the Army's Fourth Division in place in Baghdad instead of rotating it home when it is to be replaced by the First Cavalry Division would substantially increase the number of American troops in the city. There have been no indications that such an idea is under serious consideration."

Maliki himself made clear what the Bush administration and the US military are demanding in an interview published October 16 in *USA Today*. The newspaper quoted him as saying: "We have told the Americans that we don't mind targeting a Mahdi Army cell inside Sadr City. But the way the multinational forces are thinking of confronting this issue will destroy an entire neighborhood."

There is a model for such actions. In November of 2004, the US "secured" the predominantly Sunni city of Fallujah by driving out or killing most of its population of 300,000 and leveling large swaths of buildings and

homes. Much of the city was destroyed through an aerial bombardment, which was followed by "clear and hold" operations. When they were finished, Fallujah was transformed into a garrison city, subject to permanent conditions of martial law.

The *Times* is touting measures that are no different from the type of actions for which Saddam Hussein is presently on trial for his life. He is being tried as a war criminal for carrying out bloody assaults on civilian populations in pursuit of political aims. How is this in any way different from what the American military has already done and what it is preparing to do on an even bigger scale in the coming weeks and months? The *Times* cheers on the trial of Saddam Hussein even as it endorses even more bloody war crimes by the US.

Gordon's column casts additional light on the newspaper's decision to bury a Johns Hopkins University study released earlier this month that estimates 655,000 Iraqis have died as a result of the American invasion and occupation of the country. The virtual silence of the *Times* on this staggering and damning scientific study was not a casual editorial decision, but rather part and parcel of the newspaper's support for an escalation of the killing.

The *Times* articulates in broad terms the outlook of the "liberal" establishment in general and the Democratic Party in particular. Gordon's article makes clear that a Democratic victory in the November congressional elections, or even in the 2008 presidential race, will in no way signal a retreat from the Bush administration's policies of militarism and war. The entire US political and media establishment is implicated in the war and committed to avoiding a defeat for US imperialism in Iraq, regardless the cost in Iraqi as well as American lives.



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