

What the New York Times has learned from Iraq

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The lead editorial in Sunday's *New York Times* deserves careful reading and consideration. Entitled "Learning from Iraq," the piece should serve as an antidote to popular illusions that the American electorate's massive repudiation of the Iraq war on November 7 and the capture of Congress by the Democrats will lead to a retreat by the American ruling elite from its policies of neo-colonialism and war.

It is particularly significant, coming from a principal organ of American liberalism, one closely aligned with the dominant sections of the Democratic Party.

The general thrust of the editorial can be gleaned from its opening passages: "While politicians from both parties spin out their versions of Iraqs that should have been, could have been and just maybe still might be, the Army has taken on a far more useful project: figuring out why the Bush administration's military plans worked out so badly and drawing lessons for future conflicts."

There is no questioning here of the legality of an unprovoked war launched on the basis of lies, of the Bush administration's doctrine of preventive war, which justifies such criminal enterprises, or the legitimacy of war as an instrument of foreign policy. All that is accepted as a matter of course.

The death and destruction unleashed on Iraq by the United States—the virtual destruction of a society and the killing of hundreds of thousands of its members—evoke no reconsideration of the legitimacy of such wars. On the contrary, the US Army is to be commended for concentrating on the practical lessons that can be derived for "future conflicts."

The editorial continues: "That effort is a welcome sign that despite six years of ideologically driven dictates from Donald Rumsfeld's Pentagon, Army leaders remain usefully focused on the real world,

where actual soldiers daily put their lives on the line for their country and where the quality of military planning goes a long way toward determining whether their sacrifices help achieve America's national purposes."

The conquest of Iraq and seizure of its oil resources are presumably included in "America's national purposes," although how such an imperialist enterprise benefits any part of the nation other than its financial elite the *Times* does not attempt to explain.

Following this bit of jingoism, the editorial gets down to the meat of its disagreement with the outgoing secretary of defense. The *Times* praises the latest draft of a new Army field manual, which it calls the "basic guidebook for war, peacekeeping and counterinsurgency," because it "quietly jettisons the single most disastrous innovation of the Rumsfeld era. That is the misconceived notion that the size and composition of an American intervention force should be based only on what is needed to defeat the organized armed forces of an enemy government, instead of also taking into account the needs of providing security and stability for the civilian population for which the United States will then be responsible."

The editorial continues: "Almost every post-invasion problem in Iraq can be directly traced to this one catastrophic planning failure, which left too few troops in Iraq to prevent rampant looting, restore basic services and move decisively against the insurgency before it took root and spread."

It is, of course, assumed that the American occupation is legitimate and the resistance of Iraqis to foreign troops is an evil to be extirpated. The core lesson of the Iraq debacle, according to the *Times*, is that more soldiers, more violence, more repression and more killing are required to "achieve America's national purposes."

There is, besides imperialist ruthlessness, a large dose of self-delusion in such pronouncements—as though more bloodshed and repression could prevent the emergence of powerful resistance to foreign occupation.

To underline its point, the newspaper goes on to declare: “Modern innovations in warfare make it possible for America’s technologically proficient forces to vanquish an opposing army quickly and with relatively few troops. But re-establishing order in a decapitated society demands a much larger force for a much longer time.”

From where is this “much larger force” to come? It is only a matter of time before the *Times* joins with those politicians, most notably Democratic Congressman Charles Rangel, in demanding the reinstatement of the military draft.

Turning again to the US debacle in Iraq, the editorial states: “These are useful insights. But they can only go so far when a host government lacks the will to rid its security forces of sectarian militia fighters more intent on waging civil war than achieving national stability. That so far has been the biggest obstacle in Iraq.”

The *Times* characteristically employs the euphemism “host government” to denote a puppet regime installed at the point of American bayonets (and bombs, missiles, prisons, torture chambers, etc.). The complaint about the fecklessness of the current US-backed regime of Prime Minister Maliki reprises a recurring theme in the pages of the newspaper.

In a major piece published November 12, the *Times*’ chief correspondent in Iraq, John F. Burns, put the matter more bluntly. Entitled “Stability vs. Democracy: Could a New Strongman Help?” the article argued for an abandonment of the “democratic” pretenses of the US occupation and the installation of a military strongman to sanction and collaborate in an escalation of US military violence.

The *Times*’ November 26 editorial underscores some critical facts about the foreign policy debate within the American political establishment in the aftermath of the electoral rout of the Republicans three weeks ago. The ruling elite and both of its parties have no intention of allowing the antiwar sentiments of the vast majority of the American people to determine their foreign policy. There is a bipartisan consensus against any early withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and a determination

to do whatever is necessary to avoid an outcome in Iraq that would be seen as a catastrophic defeat for American imperialism in the Middle East and around the world.

Whatever the tactical differences between and within the two parties, the Democrats no less than the Republicans are committed to a policy of using military force to achieve the foreign policy objectives of the US ruling elite. Bush’s talk of the “wars of the twenty-first century” reflects the general outlook of the entire political establishment, liberal as well as conservative.

In the face of the worsening situation on the ground in Iraq, the US ruling elite is seeking to use the elections as an opportunity to sort out policy differences on military and diplomatic tactics and forge a new bipartisan consensus for the ongoing war in Iraq, as well as for “future conflicts.”



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