

Iraq Study Group: a bipartisan coverup of Washington's war crimes

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9 December 2006

A striking feature of the Iraq Study Group report is that its belated admission of the military-political debacle and catastrophic conditions created by the US intervention in Iraq excludes any assessment of how the “grave and deteriorating” situation in that country came to pass, and who bears political responsibility for it.

Instead, the document includes multiple denunciations of the Iraqi government for failing to provide essential services, create a functioning judiciary or foster economic progress. That the country was laid to waste by a US war and remains under military occupation—making Washington fully responsible for all of these failures—is simply passed over in silence.

As one member of the group, Democratic power broker Vernon Jordan, put it, the bipartisan panel made no effort to determine “how the house got on fire.”

The American people, to whom the Iraq Study Group’s report is ostensibly addressed, are more than entitled to ask the question, “Why not?” They have, moreover, every right to suspect that the panel is silent on the identities of those responsible for the torching of Iraq because it is the work of a criminal gang of arsonists who control the US government.

Under the cover of proposing a course change in US policy in Iraq, the panel offers a blanket amnesty for those who conspired to launch an illegal war that has resulted in the destruction of an entire society and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, as well as nearly 3,000 US troops.

This crime continues to widen every day. The Iraq Study Group document contains a section entitled “Sources of Violence.” It says the following:

“Violence is increasing in scope, complexity, and lethality. There are multiple sources of violence in Iraq: the Sunni Arab insurgency, al Qaeda and affiliated jihadist groups, Shiite militias and death squads, and organized criminality. Sectarian violence—particularly in and around Baghdad—has become the principal challenge to stability.”

Yet it fails to state the obvious. The root cause of this violence is an imperialist intervention that was aimed at reducing Iraq to a semi-colony of the US. It was this intervention that generated the so-called “insurgency”—i.e., the legitimate resistance of Iraqis to the foreign military occupation of their country. And it was Washington’s attempts to impose a

client regime, utilizing tactics of divide-and-rule, that gave rise to the nightmare of sectarian violence.

The closest that the report comes to acknowledging US responsibility is contained in the following passage: “Because events in Iraq have been set in motion by American decisions and actions, the United States has both a national and a moral interest in doing what it can to give Iraqis an opportunity to avert anarchy.”

How delicately phrased! The formulation suggests that the US government is somehow only indirectly responsible, its well-intentioned “decisions and actions” having created unforeseeable ill effects—not that those in power today in Washington are both politically and criminally liable for an Iraqi death toll that has been credibly estimated at over 655,000.

Nor is this merely a matter of a crime carried out three-and-a-half years ago which triggered violence by others. The US occupation force of nearly 150,000 soldiers and Marines remains a principal source of lethal violence against the Iraqi people.

This was tragically confirmed once again on Friday, when US warplanes bombed two homes in the town of al-Ishaqi, northwest of Baghdad, killing at least 32 civilians. The town’s mayor said that of the 25 bodies that had been pulled out of the rubble so far, eight were women and six children.

The US military labeled the victims “Al Qaeda terrorists,” the standard designation given to civilians slaughtered by the American military machine.

The Iraq war was not a mistaken policy that can be set right by adopting the Iraq Study Group’s 79-point plan. It was a premeditated crime for which no one has yet been held accountable.

The patent aim of the panel’s proposals is to continue this crime and, under the mantle of bipartisanship, pursue the original objectives of the war—conquering a country with the world’s second-largest oil reserves as part of a strategy of using US military superiority to establish the global hegemony of American capitalism.

In presenting the report, the panel’s Republican chairman, James Baker, dismissed any idea that it represented a call for an end to the US intervention. “This report does not in any way

call for a graceful exit," Baker declared. "In fact, we specifically say we agree with the president's articulated goal."

Baker added, "The report also makes clear: We're going to have a really robust American troop presence in Iraq and the region for a very long time."

Democrats on the panel stressed their commitment to forging a bipartisan consensus for continuing the war and suppressing the mass popular opposition to the Iraq intervention that found expression in the defeat delivered to the Republicans in last month's election.

The panel's Democratic co-chairman, Lee Hamilton, declared his "hope that our report will help bridge the divide in this country on the Iraq war and will at least be a beginning of a consensus here, because without that consensus in the country, we do not think ultimately you can succeed in Iraq."

Leon Panetta, White House chief of staff in the Democratic Clinton administration, was even more explicit. "This country cannot be at war and be as divided as we are today," he declared, adding that the report represented "one last chance at making Iraq work" and "one last chance at unifying this country on this war."

What none of these political eminences bothered to explain is why the American people *should* unite behind a military adventure that is characterized by rampant criminality.

In launching its invasion of Iraq in March of 2003, the Bush administration carried out the same principal crime for which the surviving leaders of Hitler's Third Reich were tried, convicted and hung at Nuremberg—that of waging aggressive war.

The international military tribunal that tried the Nazi officials described waging such a war as "the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." It is this "accumulated evil" that is now unfolding daily in the streets of Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq, in the form of bombings, death squad murders, torture and other crimes against humanity.

For the Bush administration, waging a war of aggression was not an impulsive action, but rather a deliberate policy formulated well in advance. In a speech delivered to the graduating class at the US Military Academy at West Point in June 2002, Bush publicly announced a new national security doctrine that jettisoned the previous policies of containment and deterrence in favor of unprovoked military action against any purported threats to US security and interests.

The war was then foisted upon the American people with lies about imminent threats from non-existent weapons of mass destruction and fabricated ties between Baghdad and Islamist terrorists.

America is a country with over 2 million of its citizens incarcerated, the bulk of them for non-violent offenses. "Zero-tolerance" enforcement and "three strikes and you're out" penalty schemes have filled the country's prisons—overwhelmingly with people drawn from the most

oppressed and impoverished layers of society.

Yet for those in the Bush White House and the Pentagon who have carried out this "supreme international crime," there is neither accountability nor punishment.

The Iraq Study Group could not touch the question of accountability, because both major parties and all the major political institutions in America, including the mass media, were complicit in carrying out or abetting an act of military aggression that constitutes a war crime.

Significantly, among those listed as having been consulted by the panel are the columnists Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* and George Will of the *Washington Post*, two of the most prominent—among so many—of the media voices that not only echoed the lies of the Bush administration, but enthusiastically campaigned for a war against Iraq.

Friedman already had a long and loathsome record of justifying imperialist militarism as a necessary condition for corporate profits. Two and a half years before the Iraq invasion, he wrote, "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist—McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps . . . Without America on duty, there will be no America Online."

In September 2003, as evidence mounted that the claims about weapons of mass destruction were all lies, the *Times* columnist proclaimed blithely, "The war to oust Saddam Hussein was always a war of choice (a good choice, I believe). But democracies don't like to fight wars of choice . . ."

And it was Will who stated in 2004, as the death toll in Iraq mounted, "Regime change, occupation, nation-building—in a word, empire—are a bloody business. Now Americans must steel themselves for administering the violence necessary . . ."

In the final analysis, the Iraq Study Group report only underscores the unbridgeable gulf that separates the entire US ruling establishment, its two political parties and its media spokesmen from the millions of American working people, the overwhelming majority of the US population, who oppose the Iraq war and want American troops withdrawn now.

It is necessary not only to halt this war, but also to ensure that all those who conspired to carry it out be held politically and criminally responsible. Trying the likes of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and others for war crimes is necessary both to achieve a real accounting for the bloody and tragic debacle in Iraq and to prevent the launching of further and even more catastrophic wars of aggression.



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