

New York Times calls for escalation of the “good war” in Afghanistan

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In an editorial published on August 20, the *New York Times* spells out the consensus policy of the liberal, Democratic Party wing of the American political establishment for an escalation of the US military intervention in Afghanistan.

The thrust of the editorial is indicated by its title, “The Good War, Still to be Won.” The basic policy prescription is summed up in the following lines:

“America has never had enough troops in Afghanistan, not in 2001, when Osama bin Laden was on the run in the caves of Tora Bora, and not today, when much of the country is still without effective authority.... Afghanistan, larger and more populous than Iraq, now has 23,500 American troops. Iraq has about 160,000.”

Typical of the *Times*’s pronouncements on US policy in Iraq and Central Asia, the editorial criticizes the Bush administration for its inept prosecution of a neo-colonial strategy, while implicitly solidarizing itself with the underlying and unstated aims that animate that strategy.

“The battle against Al Qaeda and its Taliban allies is still winnable,” the newspaper writes, “and it is vital to American security.” This is all the editorial has to say about the motives that underlay the October 2001 invasion and the ongoing US-led occupation of the country.

“American security,” explains nothing. Rather, it conceals the real war aims of the US intervention. The *Times* feels no obligation to present a serious justification for the war. Indeed, it feels free to designate it as the “good war” because within all factions of the political establishment and its media organs it is universally accepted that, whatever one may say about the war in Iraq, the invasion of Afghanistan was the unquestionably justified response to the 9/11 attacks and the legitimate and necessary starting point of the global “war on terrorism.”

How a “good war” can bring death and destruction to the people of Afghanistan, US government sanction for torture and kidnappings, repudiation of the Geneva Conventions, the establishment of prison camps like Guantánamo and those set up by the US on Afghan soil and elsewhere, and a

massive assault on democratic rights within the US—the *Times* does not say.

The very use of the term “good war” defines the position of the *New York Times* as fully supportive of US imperialism and its striving for hegemony in the Middle East, Central Asia and throughout the world.

At the outset of the US invasion of Afghanistan, the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board explained the true nature of the war and its predatory aims in a statement entitled “Why we oppose the war in Afghanistan.” The farsighted analysis and prognosis set forth in that statement have been fully vindicated. We wrote:

“But while the events of September 11 have served as the catalyst for the assault on Afghanistan, the cause is far deeper. The nature of this or any war, its progressive or reactionary character, is determined not by the immediate events that preceded it, but rather by the class structures, economic foundations and international roles of the states that are involved. From this decisive standpoint, the present action by the United States is an imperialist war.

“The US government initiated the war in pursuit of far-reaching international interests of the American ruling elite. What is the main purpose of the war? The collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago created a political vacuum in Central Asia, which is home to the second largest deposit of proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world.

“The Caspian Sea region, to which Afghanistan provides strategic access, harbors approximately 270 billion barrels of oil, some 20 percent of the world’s proven reserves. It also contains 665 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, approximately one-eighth of the planet’s gas reserves.

“These critical resources are located in the world’s most politically unstable region. By attacking Afghanistan, setting up a client regime and moving vast military forces into the region, the US aims to establish a new political framework within which it will exert hegemonic control.”

The statement continued:

“Were the US to oust the Taliban, capture or kill bin Laden and wipe out what Washington calls his terrorist

training camps, the realization of these aims would not be followed by the withdrawal of American forces. Rather, the outcome would be the permanent placement of US military forces to establish the US as the exclusive arbiter of the region's natural resources. In these strategic aims lie the seeds of future and even more bloody conflicts."

The *Times* editorial laments the deterioration of the US position in Afghanistan and its puppet government in Kabul and places a large measure of blame on the Bush administration's war policy in Iraq. "How different things might be," the newspaper writes, "if the Bush administration had not diverted needed troops and dollars into the misguided invasion of Iraq..."

It neglects to note that the *Times*, notwithstanding its tactical differences over the administration's preparation and conduct of the Iraq adventure, supported the effort to conquer that oil-rich country and played a critical role in manipulating public opinion by promoting the administration's lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.

And it is silent on the decisive role of the United States in promoting the Mujahedin forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s, whose number included bin Laden and some of those who went on to form the Taliban. Washington pursued a policy of inciting Islamic fundamentalism to weaken the Soviet Union and undermine its influence in Central Asia. Bin Laden and other fundamentalists were recruited by the CIA to wage war against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul and the Soviet army when it invaded the country.

The result of this imperialist policy was chaos and devastation in Afghanistan, which the US then sought to resolve by helping to bring the Taliban to power. In the most profound and direct sense, the political responsibility for the tragic loss of life on 9/11 rests with the American ruling elite itself.

As for what the *Times* has in mind for an Afghanistan under a heightened US occupation, there is the following assertion:

"Since the Iraq buildup began in 2002, it has drawn away the resources that could have turned the tide in Afghanistan, including the military's best special operations and counterinsurgency units."

The type of operations carried out by these specially-trained killers was evidenced during the US invasion of Afghanistan, when in late November of 2001 US Special Forces and CIA personnel called in air strikes to shoot down hundreds of prisoners of war at the Qala-i-Janghi fortress in Mazar-i-Sharif.

In recent days the *New York Times* editorial page has issued pronouncements on US policy in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. Its editorial of August 13 criticized the British

decision to remove all but 5,000 of its troops from southern Iraq and argued that the US must maintain a large military force in the region for an indefinite period.

On August 18 the *Times* published an editorial calling for tougher sanctions against Iran, combined with negotiations aimed at securing Iranian acceptance of US dominance in the region. The editorial criticized "war hawks" in the Bush administration pressing for a military attack on Iran, without ruling out such an attack in the future.

This week it calls for military escalation in Afghanistan.

This series of statements coincides with intense discussion and debate within the American ruling elite over the best means for salvaging its interests in Iraq and averting a disastrous defeat, and maintaining US dominance throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. The leading Democratic candidates for the 2008 presidential election have gone out of their way to temper their "antiwar" rhetoric with avowals of support for a continued US military presence in Iraq and the broader region.

All of this indicates an effort to overcome sometimes bitter disputes and shape a new consensus on Iraq and the Middle East. One thing is certain—as underscored by the *Times* editorials—all factions and both capitalist parties are agreed that there will be no end to US military violence and neo-colonial oppression. On the contrary, the thrust of the official debate points inexorably to an expansion of US military operations, not only in Afghanistan, but into new countries, with Iran looming as the first target of choice.



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