

# New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman glorifies American militarism

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In the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*, the newspaper's chief commentator on foreign affairs, Thomas L. Friedman, devotes his entire column to a grotesque celebration of the role of the American military, presenting its operations, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq, as humanitarian and liberating.

He takes the occasion of the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Barack Obama to suggest the US president go to Oslo in December, decline the award for himself, and then declare, "I will accept it on behalf of the most important peacekeepers in the world for the last century—the men and women of the US Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps."

Friedman mentions a series of actions by the American military, including the Normandy landing of June 1944, the Berlin Airlift of 1948, the stationing of US troops in Europe throughout the Cold War, the troop presence in South Korea, and the ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The very length of this list might give a reader pause—there is no other country whose military actions over the last 70 years would require a full column merely to name.

But significantly, Friedman's account of the "last century" is highly selective. He leaves out more American wars than he includes. Left off his list are World War I, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the first Gulf War. He makes no mention of the dozens of US military interventions in Central America and the Caribbean, including invasions and occupations of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Nicaragua, Panama and Mexico.

Nor does he make reference to the use of American military, paramilitary and intelligence forces to overthrow governments, suppress popular revolts and establish dictatorships around the world. A partial list

would include Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, Paraguay, Bolivia, Uruguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, Greece, Turkey, and numerous African countries.

Even in the wars Friedman does mention, his account is one-sided and false. He refers to Normandy and the liberation of Buchenwald, but not Hiroshima, Nagasaki, or the firebombing of Tokyo, Dresden and Hamburg. He describes the role of US forces today in Iraq and Afghanistan as "peacekeeping," without noting the sea of blood that accompanied the invasion and conquest of those countries.

In one particularly cynical passage, he urges Obama to sing the praises of "the American soldiers who stand guard today at outposts in the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan to give that country, and particularly its women and girls, a chance to live a decent life free from the Taliban's religious totalitarianism." Thousands of Afghan women and girls have been incinerated, dismembered or maimed by American missiles and bombs: presumably a small price to pay for their "liberation" from religious oppression.

Moreover, as Friedman well knows, the Taliban's obscurantist regime is itself the direct product of a previous US intervention, in which Islamic fundamentalists from all over the world, including Osama bin Laden, were mobilized under CIA auspices to fight the Soviet army in Afghanistan. And the oppression of women in American allies like Saudi Arabia evokes no response from Washington.

But it is the omission of Vietnam which is the most telling exposure of Friedman's attempt to dress up American imperialism in "democratic" and "humanitarian" garb. Vietnam was the liberals' war, launched by the Democratic Party administrations of Kennedy and Johnson, waged under the auspices of

defending the “Free World” against “communist aggression.” In reality, America followed the French, the former ruling power, as the imperialist nation seeking to subjugate the resistance of the Vietnamese people to national oppression and semi-colonialism.

The atrocities of the Vietnam era—saturation bombing, the use of napalm and Agent Orange, “free-fire” zones, outright massacres like My Lai, the propping up of a ruthless and corrupt dictatorship in South Vietnam—these experiences discredited the Cold War anti-communist politics of American liberalism and radicalized an entire generation, not only in the United States but around the world.

Friedman’s column is only the latest effort to banish the “Vietnam syndrome” and revive a democratic façade for US military operations. His role is predictable, as the *Times* foreign affairs columnist has long been an apologist for American militarism.

While his latest opus presents the role of the American military as purely democratic, even altruistic, in other circumstances Friedman has openly embraced the imperialistic aims of Washington. In January 2003, as the Bush administration was gearing up for its unprovoked, illegal invasion of Iraq, he wrote a column in the *Times* headlined “A War for Oil?” His answer to that question: an enthusiastic yes.

“There is nothing illegitimate or immoral about the US being concerned that an evil, megalomaniacal dictator might acquire excessive influence over the natural resource that powers the world’s industrial base,” he wrote. As we noted at the time, this remarkable doctrine smacks of Hitler’s demands for *lebensraum* for German imperialism, giving a license for the United States to intervene militarily in any country possessed of significant natural resources, regardless of national sovereignty or international law.

Friedman’s screed reflects the line of the *Times*, which has relentlessly campaigned for the prosecution and expansion of the war in Afghanistan. It underscores the further march to the right of the American liberal establishment.

The *New York Times* speaks in particular for a social layer, a generation of the upper-middle-class that has enriched itself over the past three decades and dropped any previous association with perspectives of social reform, let alone opposition to American militarism. Ex-radical or ex-liberal, they recognize that it is impossible

to present Vietnam as a great humanitarian effort, so they seek to pass over this seminal experience of their youth in guilty silence.

But Vietnam was no aberration. It was the template for the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The historical balance sheet is the direct opposite of the claims made by Friedman about a democratic and humanitarian role for the US military. Vietnam, Korea, Iraq, Latin America—the victims mount into the millions. In the half century since Hitler and Stalin, no institution has killed more people in wars and other acts of barbarism than the government of the United States and its military-intelligence apparatus.



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