

# New York Times calls for more troops in Iraq

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On October 24, the *New York Times* published an extended editorial (“Trying to Contain the Iraq Disaster”) laying out its proposals for salvaging the US occupation of Iraq. The commentary expressed at once the perplexity and gloom within the US ruling elite over its prospects in Iraq, and its determination to intensify the violence and terror against the Iraqi resistance.

The editorial concluded on a somber note: “When it comes to Iraq the choices in the immediate future are scant and ugly... there is little time left and the odds are very long.”

The *Times*’ proposals track in general terms those currently being floated by prominent Democrats, foreign policy experts, and sections of the Republican Party, including former Secretary of State James Baker and others involved in the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

What all of these proposals have in common is the demand for a massive escalation of violence to crush the anti-American resistance, and particularly the Mahdi Army militia of Moqtada al-Sadr and its stronghold in the impoverished Shia neighborhood of Sadr City in Baghdad.

While denouncing the Bush administration’s conduct of the war, the *Times*, reflecting the consensus of the “liberal” sections of the ruling elite and the position of the Democratic Party, rejects out of hand a withdrawal of US troops. Exemplifying the cynicism and duplicity that have characterized its commentary and reportage throughout this bloody and illegal war, the *Times* presents uncritically the Bush administration’s supposedly democratic motives for invading and occupying the country.

The *Times* knows better. It is well aware of the imperialist and predatory war aims that underlay the decision to launch an unprovoked war on the basis of lies. But it, along with the rest of the so-called liberal establishment, fully supported the goal of seizing the

second largest oil reserves in the world and establishing American hegemony in the Middle East.

That is why, even as the *Times* alludes to the catastrophic consequences for Iraqi society of the US intervention, it does not suggest that there should be any consequences for those US policymakers who prepared and carried out what is, in the fullest political and legal sense, a criminal war.

Instead, it argues for more US troops to be sent into the slaughter. Under the heading “Stabilize Baghdad,” the editorial states: “The problem is not one of military strategy.... The problem is that the commanders in Baghdad have been given only a fraction of the troops—American and Iraq—they need. There have never been enough troops...”

The *Times* makes clear from the beginning that it opposes a withdrawal of American troops, warning of “the terrible consequences of military withdrawal.” When it speaks of “terrible consequences,” it is referring to the consequences for American imperialism. When it speaks of “success”—a word that is used repeatedly but never defined—it means the successful pacification and subjugation of the country.

“This page opposed a needlessly hurried and unilateral invasion,” the editorial declares. In other words, it supported an “unhurried” and “multilateral” invasion. But hurried or unhurried, unilateral or multilateral, an unprovoked military attack is, under international law and the principles laid down by the Nuremberg Tribunal, a war crime.

“Americans can only look back in wonder on the days when the Bush administration believed that success would turn Iraq into a stable, wealthy democracy—a model to strike fear into the region’s autocrats while inspiring a new generation of democrats,” the newspaper writes. This effort to lend credibility to the official pretexts for the war is as self-serving as it is dishonest.

Bush was not alone in portraying the war as a crusade for democracy. The *Times'* chief foreign policy columnist, Thomas Friedman, churned out column after column both before and after the invasion giving credence to the administration's justifications for the war and inventing a few of his own.

The newspaper's prescription for averting an outright defeat in Iraq begins with a call for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to be fired.

We have no brief for Rumsfeld, who by rights should be brought before a tribunal and tried for war crimes. But the demand for his firing is put forward by sections of the Democratic Party as a diversion and cover for their own support for the war. At the same time it reflects the position of sections of the ruling elite and military establishment who attribute much of the incompetence and bungling that has characterized the disaster in Iraq to Rumsfeld, including many whose main criticism is Rumsfeld's opposition to a much larger US military force in the country.

"The president should also make it clear," the newspaper continues, "once and for all, that the United States will not keep permanent bases in Iraq. The people in Iraq and across the Middle East need a strong sign that the troops are not there to further any American imperial agenda." In other words, the US is there precisely to further "an imperial agenda"—and the masses in the Middle East know it.

Permanent military bases have already been constructed, but the *Times* would like some sort of verbal statement to the contrary, in the hope that this might somehow diffuse opposition to the occupation.

The *Times* then echoes calls from both critics and supporters of the Bush administration to step up pressure on Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to hold "reconciliation talks" until some agreement is reached "among the nation's top politicians ... on protecting minority rights, dividing up Iraq's oil revenues, the role of religion in the state, providing an amnesty for insurgents willing to put down their weapons, and demobilizing and disarming the militias."

Translated into straight talk, what the newspaper wants is a deal between the different factions (Sunni, Shia and Kurd) of the Iraqi elite, which will necessarily entail a division of whatever booty from the country's oil wealth remains after the Americans get theirs, so as to provide the political basis for a war of extermination

against the most determined and implacable opponents of US domination.

The *Times* goes on to endorse calls by Baker and others to bring Syria and Iran into negotiations over the future of Iraq.

The editorial concludes with a section, "Acknowledge Reality," in which the *Times* warns, "All plans to avoid disaster involve the equivalent of a Hail Mary pass" to avoid "the worst foreign policy debacle in American history."

The newspaper declares self-righteously, "In America, almost no one—even the administration's harshest critics—wants to tell people the bitter truth" about the consequences of a defeat in Iraq. It then urges those bitter over the war to express their anger at the polls next month, i.e., to vote for the Democrats.

"But anger at a president is not a plan for what happens next," the editorial adds.

What is the message behind the rhetoric? The disaster facing US imperialism in Iraq, if it is to be averted, requires not only a political settlement among the Iraqi elite, but it demands as well, once the elections are out of the way, a bipartisan agreement between the Democrats and the Bush administration to prosecute the war, regardless the cost in Iraqi and American lives, and to impose whatever sacrifices are required on the American people.

This, in a nutshell, is the real position of the Democratic Party, and the policy it will pursue should it gain control of Congress on November 7.



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