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## *The Iraq war and the media propaganda of 'terrorism'*

*Based on a talk by the author given at a Nov. 11 meeting of the Marxist Youth League in Buffalo, New York.*



**Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis demand U.S. troops out, Baghdad, Jan. 24, 2020.**

As we are all aware, on Sept. 11, 2001, the largest terrorist attack in U.S. history was carried out on U.S. soil. In the decades prior to this event, the U.S. government had been agitating in the Middle East for the purpose of gaining absolute control of petroleum and valuable mineral reserves, such as gold and uranium, in addition to other valuable natural resources.

“The existence of the Soviet Union until 1991 had, in most cases, defended [Middle Eastern] sovereignty from direct imperialist intervention. With that defense now removed, the Empire has been waging war to replace its yoke firmly on the backs of the world’s people.” (workers.org, editorial, Sept. 17, 2021)

Fast forward to post 9-11-2001. The U.S. ruling class was given a perfect opportunity to “justify” through propaganda its drive for military conflict and the eventual takeover of the land and peoples of the Middle East.

In the wake of any major military conflict in which a member of NATO has been a part, there is generally an opportunity for members of the imperialist ruling class to use institutions and predatory war loans to acquire massive amounts of land within the embattled country, quickly remove any political opposition, and stifle working-class movements such as unions or communist parties. It can then replace the localized smaller capitalists with bigger international capitalists.

The war in Iraq was no exception to this takeover. Each step of the way, neoliberal media institutions in the U.S. worked hand in hand with both military and business leaders to manipulate the U.S. working class into supporting the devastating destruction of Iraqis. The news source Al Jazeera published an article in March of 2023 that condenses and recaps much of this propaganda. Here is the main highlight of the article: “The military campaign was largely framed in the news media by U.S. military information operations to meet specific strategic objectives.

“The upshot was a range of skewed media narratives which continue to conceal many truths. Some will remember the deceit surrounding the weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that allegedly justified the invasion, but far more prominent is the memory of insurgency that became synonymous with the occupation.

“The assertion that the U.S.-led coalition liberated Iraq from a vicious dictator obscures the antidemocratic process of state building conducted by an occupying power. The myth of civil war hid the reality of a dirty war.”

An examination of this process finds two major areas at play: The first is the notion that the U.S. intervention is “saving” the working class of another country from some kind of localized harm. The second is an alarming or extreme statement that is meant to evoke a large and immediate emotional reaction.

There is another major tactic, however, which the U.S. and its allies use in its media and informational war campaigns. This strategy is the Hollywood-style racist demonization of the “other.”

This demonization was accomplished via “the embedding of journalists within military units to help control the perspective from which [U.S.] Americans viewed the conflict, with the experiences of U.S. soldiers foregrounded and those of Iraqis relegated to the background. Sometimes information operations exaggerated the threat of enemies or even invented one altogether.” (Al Jazeera)

Those who lived through this time period might remember the newscaster Brian Williams, wearing green and brown body armor and black sunglasses, like some kind of movie character.

This strategy and this image is crafted to associate the “reality” shown on the news with the “story” presented to us in video games, television shows, and Hollywood action movies. This story presents us with racialized narratives of allegedly “violent and sexist” Arab men who want to “destroy” the “diversity of the West,” and projects U.S. men as the “civilized saviors.”

Those who lived through the period will remember the rampant increase in xenophobia, Islamophobia, and other generalized and systemic violence against anyone perceived to be Arab, including many Latinx and South Asian people. The use of media to subconsciously stoke this narrative, while consciously claiming a neutral position, is a kind of double-speak used to this day.

The only reason why certain government officials, then and now, get suspended in violation of failing to use double-speak is because they say aloud the “quiet parts” – the real aims about colonialism and genocide they were supposed to hide.

Concerning the U.S. savior complex, the idea that the U.S. or its allies are “saving the working class from a barbaric other” is not new. During the time period in question, for example, “First Lady” Laura Bush and other conservative women in leadership positions claimed that U.S. military intervention “liberated 25 million women in Afghanistan and Iraq and [they] vowed to continue promoting democracy — especially in the Middle East — so that more women can claim ‘their rightful place in societies that were once incredibly oppressive and closed.’” (Los Angeles Times, March 13, 2004)

These same conservatives opposed the right to abortion, same-sex marriage and transgender healthcare; funding for social programs for working-class women and children, and aid for other domestic necessities that impact working-class and oppressed women in the U.S.

This omits mentioning less well-known issues, like the high childhood cancer and infant mortality rates, as well as reproductive-related disorders caused by depleted uranium

weapons used by NATO during the 1991 Iraq war. Also, the hypocrisy of claiming to be “pro-birth” yet damning Brown and Black women to miscarry or die during childbirth, or their babies to die immediately after childbirth, in a heavy metal and microplastic contaminated war zone.

### **Mouthpiece for ruling class**

The corporate media are directly culpable in concealing the hypocrisy and spreading relevant lies. With all of this in mind, every time we hear about or see a 9/11 memorial event, we need to remember that these “commemorations should be seen for what they are: an opportunity for the U.S. ruling class to use a collective trauma — the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City — to whip up jingoist and superpatriotic sentiment. The goal of this whipping up is to convince the population to rally around the U.S. flag and support Pentagon military intervention anywhere in the world.” (workers.org, Sept 16, 2021)

Now that the politicians and dominant media in the Global North are trying to make Oct. 7, 2023, into the “Israeli 9/11,” we must remember these same lessons when engaging with neoliberal media or in discussions with those who have been informed only by neoliberal sources.

The people of Palestine deserve their freedom and self-determination. The Israeli settler state has been eliminating and displacing Palestinians for over 75 years. Palestinian resistance is justified — by any means necessary.

Instead of performing a class analysis and sharing the truth about the liberation struggle for Palestine with the U.S. working class, the U.S. ruling class and its media puppets have opted to feed us the same double-talk, demonization of the “other,” and wild claims that they have been feeding us for decades in an attempt to justify their military oppression over our class.

The working class and oppressed peoples of the world are all one international proletariat. Each of our struggles has its own unique features, yet is also against the same oppressor class. The media perform the same policing role in the space of information as armed bodies do in our streets. This is why I believe media literacy rooted in class analysis is a major lifeline for our combined liberation.

Long live the international proletariat! Free Palestine!

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