

Thomas Friedman: Your Head is Flat

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Long a master of persuasive writing, albeit not always in the pursuit of truth, Thomas Friedman has finally revealed his inherent barbarism. He is a 'Foreign Affairs' columnist for the New York Times although his most recent gig, lasting almost five years, is as an unembarrassed apologist for the White House.

Many readers will remember his book From Beirut to Jerusalem as a wide-ranging, if somewhat biased, perspective of an American Jew reporting for ten years from the hotbed of anti-Israel sentiment. Most recently, his The World is Flat has enjoyed stellar sales figures. That book carries on some of the specious writing he began with The Lexus and the Olive Tree, wherein he wrote a popular justification for the rich of the world to suppress the poor. That's not the way he put it, of course: he actually argued that economic globalization is the cure-all for the world's ills in a kind of 'trickle down' effect like that fostered by US president Ronald Reagan. He conveniently ignored the relativity of wealth: if some of the crumbs trickle down to me, it is only because someone further up the chain got a much bigger piece of the pie – the result being the gap between top and bottom becomes an ever-widening abyss.

Friedman is a persuasive writer. His technical ability to put sentences and paragraphs together is impressive and he has learned well how to touch on the individual fears, desires, prejudices of the American public, the largest consumers of his writing.

But, intellectually, he is such a lousy writer and so full of rubbish that one hardly knows where to begin to criticize. So I'll simply quote from New York Press writer Matt Taibi in his rant about The World is Flat:

On an ideological level, Friedman's new book is the worst, most boring kind of middlebrow horseshit. If its literary peculiarities could somehow be removed from the equation, The World Is Flat would appear as no more than an unusually long pamphlet replete with the kind of plug-filled, free-trader leg-humping that passes for thought in this country ...

... It's impossible to divorce The World Is Flat from its rhetorical approach ... Friedman is an important American. He is the perfect symbol of our culture of emboldened stupidity. Like George Bush, he's in the reality-making business. In the new flat world, argument is no longer a two-way street for people like the president and the country's most important columnist. You no longer have to worry about actually convincing anyone; the process

ends when you make the case.

Things are true because you say they are. The only thing that matters is how sure you sound when you say it ...

Even so, Friedman manages to convince a lot of people, even some very bright people, with his writing. So it is particularly disturbing to read his call for a Final Solution in Iraq. Let's remember that Friedman is Jewish, and the concept of a 'final solution' is not something one would expect him to find attractive. But his recent calls for a resolution of American involvement in Iraq have an uncomfortable resemblance to the German plans that crystallized during World War II.

In a September 27, 2005 column for the New York Times, Friedman proposed an 'endgame' bloodbath in Iraq. Although he has written extensively about the nobility of the Anglo-American effort to bring about alleged democracy and liberation in Iraq, he thinks the time has arrived to get the troops out and let all the Iraqi people kill each other.

Friedman has a history of glossing over the truth in his rush to support the neo-fascist agenda of the neo-colonial United States and the neo-liberal thugs racing to grab the world by the throat. In a July 2003 column, he encouraged the Bush White House not to get "so tied up defending [the] phony reasons for going to war"; instead, they should focus on "the real and valid reason for the war: to install a decent, tolerant, pluralistic, multi-religious government in Iraq." When the war started to be less of a 'mission accomplished' than the administration claimed, Friedman began to issue exhortations to the Iraqi people and called on them to forget they were Sunni, or Kurd, or Shi'a and to step forward as Iraqis to fight for self-determination. What he meant by self-determination, of course, was obeisance to the American military and the goals of the United States.

Even as recently as June 2005, Friedman waxed on with his assurances to the American public that the war was going well and victory was at hand. But his September 27 column, entitled 'Endgame in Iraq' tells a very different tale. He writes that "Iraq, at the end of the day, was always going to be what the Iraqis decided to make of it." This reads like an admission that the military effort has failed.

But his column goes on to complain that the ungrateful Iraqis have failed to toe the line and follow Washington's orders. Having acknowledged that it was always inevitable that Iraqis would make their own country, their own rules, their own society, Friedman bemoans that they can just go to hell for not knuckling under to US authority and demands.

The "Bush team's incompetence" has weakened the colonizing efforts of the US, according to Friedman. Not many would disagree with the characterization of Bush and his crew as 'incompetent' but Friedman suggests that is not nearly so culpable as the "moral vacuum in the Sunni Arab world" which is determined to "stifle any prospect for democracy." It doesn't matter that the 'democracy' that would follow is actually the dismemberment of Iraq which would leave Sunnis landlocked in a small fiefdom and without resources. According to Friedman, it is the fault of the Iraqis themselves that their current

situation is so desperate and cannot in any way have arisen because of more than two years of occupation by a rapacious foreign power.

Leading up to the invasion and during the occupation, Friedman repeatedly cried that America went in to fix everything and that entitled them to own everything. He said it much more obliquely ... but that is what he meant. Now, in his recent column, he writes: “Maybe cynical Europeans were right. Maybe this neighborhood is just beyond transformation.” He says that if the minority Sunni population fails to support the constitution that Washington has demanded, “then we are wasting our time”. He finishes by saying: “We should arm the Shiites and Kurds and leave the Sunnis of Iraq to reap the wind”.

In other words, if the US can't get what it wants it should provide the weaponry to let the Iraqis slaughter each other. In short, Friedman abandons his years of pitching the purported democracy that America was going to bring to Iraq in favour of an ethno-religious bloodbath. One can imagine Friedman's horror if the suggestion was made to arm all the Arabs and the Israelis and see who was left standing at the end.

I have never had any doubt that Thomas Friedman is a simpleton. Now I know he is also vicious.

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