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What's Really Going On in the Mideast?

Something very weird is afoot. I have been hearing commentators suggest that the invasion of Iraq and the ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003 set the stage for the current Arab democratic revolt. The story goes something like this: The people of the Arab world saw that a dictator could be overthrown and they then saw the benefits of an alleged democracy. This, according to the story, sparked their desire to move to overthrow various Arab despots.

When I first heard this, I assumed that someone was joking or being sarcastic. The thought that the U.S./British invasion of Iraq, in clear violation of international law, followed by the installation of puppet regimes would have inspired a democratic revolt eight years later is a bit absurd. If you leave aside some level of delusion, what is one to make of these suggestions?

The foreign policy view of the so-called neo-conservatives—the largely Republican group that dominated foreign policy debates during the George W. Bush administration—was one calling for an active and interventionist role in installing pro-U.S. governments. The neo-cons called these governments “democratic,” but what they meant by that was permitting people to vote as long as



TRANS AFRICA

Bill Fletcher Jr.

they vote for pro-U.S. candidates.

mately and have moved to take their countries in a direction that U.S. ruling circles have failed to approve. As such, the neo-con view has nothing to do with democracy but revolves instead around whether a regime is perceived as being pro- or anti- the objectives of the U.S. ruling circles. Two other examples of this the cynical manner in which this plays out were the coups that over-

support or at least the knowledge and permission of the U.S. government, yet this was not at all seen as a threat to democracy by the neo-cons. Instead, the neo-cons applauded such actions as necessary efforts to restore democracy!

The Arab revolt that we are witnessing has nothing to do with Iraq. The Iraq invasion and occupation was reprehensible as far as the Arab World was concerned. Today's revolt is a revolt against tyrannies, including those openly supported by the U.S.A. (such as Egypt). As such these are not only revolts against domestic tyrants but they also represent revolts against a global system that has helped to place such tyrants into power and reinforce their rule during the decades.

The next time that you hear someone suggest that the Iraq invasion was a step forward for democracy and that it inspired the Arab masses to revolt, well, it is fine to laugh.

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This is why U.S. ruling circles so bitterly hate Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Bolivian President Evo Morales. These leaders were both elected legitimately and overthrown with either the active

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Obama's Budget Makes Disturbing Cuts

President Barack Obama has proposed a 2012-2013 budget that is, at best, politically pragmatic. Responding to the Republican sway in congress, he has decided to impose a set of his own cuts, anticipating those his opponents might offer. Their response is predictable. The Obama cuts are not deep enough; they do not go far enough. And, I think they are just too much.

In other words, President Obama has been forced to take the knife to programs he supports, and he chooses to do so to hold another set of programs harmless. He would cut community service programs, but he'd hold firm on education. In yielding to the new Republican majority, he has also reminded us that education is a priority for him, and that he will not cut the plethora of educational programs that buttress his vision.

Still, it is disturbing that education is on the table in a number of cities and states. When people have to balance budgets they come up with all kinds of cockamamie schemes, including reducing school days from five to four, or reducing classroom hours, or reducing something that not only impacts the ways students encounter learning, but also the quality of their lives.

Some school districts, thanks to cuts, have no more than 900 hours a year of instruction for students; others have as many as 1400. Imagine what this means on a daily basis when, post high school, these students encounter a classroom. Some are well prepared,



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

some are unprepared, both are products of decision that grown folks made, often mistakenly, about ways to manage budgets.

there are challenges, and the challenges are also federal, because our government has been asked, as states must, to balance budgets. What does this mean for education?

To cut education in recession is akin to eating seed corn when it is clear that planting will provide resources for a new day. We can cut a plethora of things, but cutting education is unconscionable. Education is our nation's investment into futures,

person for herself". Some phenomenal young women can use more parental support than they get, and more of an opportunity to explore life's opportunities. African American students are less likely than others to have the access that comes from unpaid internships, often because parents and others expect them to work, and to earn, during their summers.

If we want to develop a world that is resplendent with diverse opportunities, we must develop a world where our young men and women are held harmless from cuts that are too deep, too harsh, too much. President Obama has been a visionary in suggesting that we in the United States can again lead the world in college attainment, but a budget that cuts education does not reflect his goals. Politics notwithstanding, it is on time and overtime for us to figure out ways to educate more people. Even as programs are cut, education funding must be expanded.

Those who have budgets in their hands must be prudent. Sound fiscal planning does not mean cutting today to hurt tomorrow. Education must be our priority. Whether we are looking at cities, counties, states, or our nation, we must hold education harmless as we exercise fiscal prudence.

Still, it is disturbing that education is on the table in a number of cities and states

And now the budget thing is really rearing its ugly head. What will we do to balance federal, state, and local budgets? In our opportunity to shine, grow, compete we have to wrap our arms around our young people,

To cut education in recession is akin to eating seed corn when it is clear that planting will provide resources for a new day

Wisconsin, there is a proposal to change the way the state deals with teachers. In North Carolina we are blessed to have a governor who says she will not sacrifice classroom study on the altar of a blanked budget. In other states,

young achievers, and provide them with opportunities.

One of the most disturbing ends of the early 21st century is the extent to which parents have embraced the notion of, “every

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