

Obama claims credit for killing Somalis

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The killing of three Somali pirates by US Navy snipers Sunday has been celebrated by the US media as a “daring rescue” and an act of heroism. With all of its usual stupidity and brutality, the media has reveled in the outcome precisely for its violence, giving barely a thought to the long-term consequences.

More importantly, the bloody end of the five-day hostage drama in the Indian Ocean is being treated as a pivotal moment for President Barack Obama. He has been tested by a crisis, the media argues, and proven that he is prepared to kill without flinching.

The target was a hapless band of Somali hijackers, aged 16 to 19, who failed in their attempt to seize the American-flagged cargo ship Maersk Alabama and then took the ship’s captain, Richard Phillips, hostage in the ship’s lifeboat.

No matter the scale of the episode, as the *New York Times* noted, this was “the first known order by the new president authorizing deadly force in a specific situation.”

The political character of Obama’s decision was made abundantly clear in the aftermath of the incident as White House aides stressed the American president’s hands-on role in the military response to the hijacking, reporting that he had been briefed 17 times on the situation and had twice provided authorization for the military to kill.

The media echoed this version of events, treating the violent end of the hijacking as a political coup for the White House.

The Associated Press commented, “Obama’s handling of the crisis showed a president who was comfortable in relying on the US military, much as his predecessor, George W. Bush, did.”

US News & World Report called the episode “a defining moment” for Obama, showing that “the new commander in chief will apply American muscle in a crunch.”

Washington Post ~~And~~ commented that incident had “left Obama with an early victory that could help build confidence in his ability to direct military actions abroad.” The bloodletting, the *Post* argued, “may help to quell criticism leveled at Obama that he came to office as a Democratic antiwar candidate who could prove unwilling or unable to harness military might when necessary.”

The most brutally frank of these reactions came from the right-wing editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, which stated: “With all the world watching, the US Navy couldn’t afford to be long stymied by sea-faring kidnappers. No doubt Mr. Obama would have been criticized in some quarters—though not by us—had Captain Phillips been killed once the order was given to shoot the pirates.”

In other words, the life of the captain was an entirely secondary consideration in the calculations of the White House and the Pentagon, which centered on the political imperative of violent retribution against any challenge to US interests.

In the end, the decision to end the standoff with sniper fire reflected not just Obama’s callousness, but more importantly, his subordination to the most reactionary forces around him, above all the military.

There is no doubt that this reckless decision will only set into motion greater tragedies. Until now, no one had been killed by the Somali pirates, who were interested only in extracting ransom for the ships they seized. As the pirates themselves have threatened, that may soon change, and the crew of the next American ship to be boarded may not be as lucky as Captain Phillips.

Moreover, there are some 250 seamen being held hostage by the pirates, most of them from the Philippines and South Asia. What will be the impact of the “decisive action” ordered by Obama on their fate? The inevitable result of Sunday’s operation will be the deaths of many more people.

In a statement Monday, Obama indicated that the White House is prepared to escalate military operations in response to Somali piracy. “I want to be very clear that we are resolved to halt the rise of piracy in that region and to achieve that goal. ... We have to continue to be prepared to confront them when they arise.”

According to press reports, there are already multiple plans for intervention in Somalia. Citing Pentagon officials, Bloomberg news reported Monday that “The US military is considering attacks on pirate bases on land” and is “drawing up proposals to aid the fledgling Somalia government to train security forces and develop its own coast guard.”

Another intervention plan was revealed by the *Washington Post* on Saturday. Just before the seizure of the *Alabama*, the White House held discussions on military strikes against camps of the al-Shabab organization, an Islamist militia that played a prominent role in battling Ethiopian troops which occupied the country since 2006, until they were recently forced to withdraw.

The Ethiopian invasion and the subsequent brutal occupation were backed by the US, with American special operations troops participating in what was portrayed as part of the “global war on terrorism.”

This invasion, like the present proposals for direct American intervention, was an indication of the longstanding and intense US interest in Somalia.

In December 1992, the administration of George H.W. Bush dispatched nearly 30,000 US troops to Somalia on the pretext of a “humanitarian intervention.”

Before that, Washington had backed the corrupt dictatorship of General Mohammed Siad Barre in the late 1970s and 1980s, turning Somalia into a Cold War client state and a base for the American military.

With the end of the Cold War, Barre lost his usefulness for Washington and his regime was allowed to collapse and the country to slide into a social catastrophe prepared by the previous US policy. The result was the desperate impoverishment of the Somali people. Meanwhile, foreign corporations exploited the country’s coastline—and lack of a functioning state—to turn Somalia’s coastal waters into a dump for toxic and radioactive waste, while foreign fishing fleets poached in its waters. These are the conditions that allowed piracy to flourish.

Somalia’s strategic importance is obvious. The country has the longest coastline on the African continent, commanding sea lanes through which some 12 percent of the world’s seaborne oil passes. US military control over these waters would provide US capitalism with a powerful weapon against its major rivals.

Moreover, Somalia itself is seen as a potential source of new oil reserves. Under Barre, US oil giants had signed contracts granting them huge concessions in the country. They now face competition from China, which is seeking to meet its own burgeoning energy needs with African oil.

Underlying the hostage drama is the threat of another US imperialist war. And what is being hailed as a political triumph for Obama is, in reality, part of a violent shift to the right that will ultimately unleash new death and destruction.

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