

Obama's "Mission Accomplished"

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The White House and the Pentagon, assisted by a servile media, have hyped Thursday's exit of a single Stryker brigade from Iraq as the end of the "combat mission" in that country, echoing the ill-fated claim made by George W. Bush seven years ago.

Obama is more skillful in packaging false propaganda than Bush, and no doubt has learned something from the glaring mistakes of his predecessor. Bush landed on the deck of the US aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003 to proclaim—under a banner reading "Mission Accomplished"—that "major combat operations" in Iraq were over. A captive audience of naval enlisted personnel was assembled on deck as cheering extras.

Obama wisely did not fly to Kuwait to deliver a similar address from atop an armored vehicle. He merely issued a statement from the White House, while leaving the heavy lifting to the television networks and their "embedded" reporters, who accompanied the brigade across the border into Kuwait and repeated the propaganda line fashioned by the administration and the military brass.

When Bush delivered his speech, a total of 139 US troops had been killed. Nearly 4,300 more have died since. Iraq, mauled by the "shock and awe" bombardment and invasion of March 2003, was turned into a slaughterhouse, with estimates of over a million lives lost as a result of the US war, many more wounded, some four million people turned into homeless refugees and thousands imprisoned and tortured in US-run detention centers like Abu Ghraib.

Violence in Iraq last month rose to its highest level in the past two years. The carnage over recent weeks will likely drive the Iraqi death toll even higher for August. Indeed, the logistics surrounding the withdrawal of the Stryker brigade—with F-16s and helicopter gunships providing air support and reporters sworn to secrecy about its timing and route—testifies to the continued

threat posed by the Iraqi insurgency.

As for the Iraqis themselves, the intervening years have only deepened a social and humanitarian catastrophe. More than half of the population is either unemployed or underemployed, nearly a quarter lives below the miserable poverty line of \$2.20 a day, and most Iraqis lack access to clean water, adequate sanitation, decent housing, health care and all but sporadic electricity.

It is this bloody and criminal legacy that makes Obama's more discreet statements even more obscene than the stage-managed bravado of his predecessor.

"Our combat mission will end this month, and we will complete a substantial drawdown of our troops," wrote Obama in his statement Wednesday. "And, consistent with our agreement with the Iraqi government, all of our troops will be out of Iraq by the end of next year."

He proclaimed the exit of the 4th Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division as a "milestone" in the ending of the US military intervention in Iraq.

The US media has embellished these brief remarks with a flag-waving celebration of American militarism, combined with potted historic retrospectives that manage to obscure the fact that from the outset this has been a war of aggression—a war crime—that was forced upon the American people with lies about nonexistent "weapons of mass destruction" and Iraq-Al Qaeda connections.

In his statement, Obama repeated his standard formulation about his determination to "end the war in Iraq responsibly." He was not referring to any responsibility to the American people. They voted for him largely out of the mistaken belief that he would end this war, which the latest polls indicate is opposed by a better than two-to-one margin. On the contrary, he is acting "responsibly" to secure the aims and interests of the US corporate and financial aristocracy, which

embraced military aggression as a means of pursuing its global interests, particularly by laying hold of the oil-rich Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

Obama was a bit more effusive at a Democratic fundraiser in Columbus, Ohio Wednesday, telling his audience: “We’re keeping the promise that we’ve made when I began my campaign for the presidency. By the end of this month...our combat mission will be over in Iraq.”

This short statement strings together a series of lies. The present partial withdrawal of US troops is not the promise Obama made during his presidential campaign, which was to withdraw all US combat troops from Iraq within 16 months. The timetable for which he is now claiming credit was set by his Republican predecessor, George W. Bush, as part of a status of forces agreement (SOFA) reached with the Baghdad regime in 2008.

The timing of the withdrawal aside, Obama’s campaign promise to withdraw all combat brigades from Iraq was jettisoned in favor of leaving 50,000 US troops in Iraq until the end of 2011—again the Bush plan embodied in the SOFA. These remaining brigades are indistinguishable from the one that crossed into Kuwait Thursday. They have merely been rebranded as “transitional” troops, who are now supposedly in Iraq merely to “advise and assist,” but have the full capacity to conduct combat operations.

US planes and attack helicopters continue to control Iraq’s skies and will continue to do so long after December 2011, the supposed deadline for a full withdrawal of US forces. And Special Forces remain in place to carry out counterinsurgency warfare and “targeted” killings.

No one in the military or foreign policy establishment believes that the December 2011 deadline will see a withdrawal of all US forces. US diplomatic envoys are pressuring Iraqi factions to break the five-month logjam in cobbling together a coalition government precisely so a US puppet regime can “request” American troops to remain longer.

At the same time, as the *New York Times* reported Thursday, the US State Department is implementing plans to field its own army of up to 7,000 civilian “security contractors.” These mercenaries are to man colonial-style fortress bases and organize “quick reaction forces,” using military gear that the State Department has asked the Pentagon to leave in place.

Times quoted an unnamed administration official who acknowledged that military commanders are advocating that as many as 10,000 US troops remain in Iraq after the end of 2011. “The administration does not want to touch this question right now,” the official said. “It runs counter to their political argument that we are getting out of these messy places.”

In other words, with popular opposition to the ongoing wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan growing, the Obama administration is trying to divert public opinion with an orchestrated media event portrayed as the end of the “combat mission” in Iraq.

It is no such thing. To serve the same predatory ends that motivated the illegal war in the first place, the military occupation, the killing and the dying in Iraq, will continue.

If the Obama administration has withdrawn 90,000 troops from Iraq—while leaving 50,000 in place—it is in order to shift military resources. It has tripled the size of the US expeditionary force in Afghanistan, which will rise to nearly 100,000 within the next few weeks in preparation for a military offensive that will claim the lives of thousands more Afghan civilians as well as hundreds more US troops.

Moreover, the logic of these two wars is inexorably paving the way to a third war. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, Washington is making increasing complaints that Iranian influence stands as an impediment to the US achieving its strategic aims in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

Behind the media flag-waving and triumphalism accompanying the fraudulent “end of combat” in Iraq, even bloodier conflicts are being prepared. Stopping them and forcing a withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan can be achieved only by the American working class mobilizing its independent political strength against the Obama administration and the militarist policies and profit interests it defends.

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