

The US embassy protests

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Protests at US embassies throughout the Middle East against an anti-Islamic video are a devastating popular verdict on the policies of the United States government.

Protests have spread to at least eleven countries, including Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Iran, Morocco, Sudan and Bangladesh.

Popular anger over the video, a political provocation by right-wing circles in the United States, has brought to the surface deep popular anger over Washington's Middle East policies. Since mass working class uprisings last year toppled US-backed dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt, the Obama administration has relentlessly backed right-wing regimes against popular opposition and organized bloody proxy wars in Libya and Syria.

At the US embassy in Egypt, day laborer Yassin Maher told *Al Ahram* that he was protesting the US-backed regime of Islamist President Mohamed Mursi to demand better living conditions. He denounced the police crackdown against the protest: "As you can see, the security forces under Mursi are the same as those during the Mubarak era—both are defending America."

Workers and youth stormed the US Embassy in Sana'a, the capital city of Yemen, an impoverished country whose corrupt government Washington has backed against popular protests as it wages a bloody civil war. US forces routinely organize Special Forces raids and launch drone strikes in the country, where a drone murdered US citizen Anwar al-Awlaki last year.

Yemeni President Rabbo Mansour Hadi denounced the protests as a conspiracy to derail Yemen's relations with Washington.

In Iraq—a country invaded by the United States in 2003 and then devastated by a nearly decade-long US occupation that cost over a million Iraqi lives—thousands

of Sunni and Shia protesters marched together in Baghdad and Basra.

In Libya, where a coordinated raid on the US consulate in Benghazi killed four US officials, Washington is reaping what it sowed during last year's war.

The Obama administration orchestrated the toppling of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi with a bombing campaign in support of various Islamist and tribal militias that acted as its proxies on the ground, guided by US and European Special Forces. However, the US government did not intend to give these forces full control of Libya and its oil money, or a blank check for international operations unsupervised by the United States. A falling out between the United States and sections of its local proxy forces in Libya was inevitable.

Amid the social chaos the US created by its intervention—which left a patchwork of right-wing militias fighting for control of the country—the group that attacked the Benghazi consulate was able to plan and launch its operation.

Washington is recklessly pursuing the same policies in its bloody proxy war in Syria. With consummate cynicism, it is unleashing forces like Abdel Hakim Belhadj—a Libyan mercenary held for a time at a secret CIA prison in Thailand before being rendered to Libya—in its proxy war against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

This underscores the Orwellian hypocrisy of the "war on terror" the United States claims to be fighting against Al Qaeda. It is a branding operation, marketing a filthy product to the American public: the bloody assertion of US imperialist interests in the Middle East. Depending on whom the United States has selected as its target, Al Qaeda emerges as either a target or a tool of US military intervention.

The US promotion of “democracy,” no less than the “war on terror,” is an empty rhetorical device. What is real is the death, destruction and poverty left behind by US wars and the looting of the region it organizes together with its proxy regimes.

Washington’s response to the latest upsurge of popular protests in the region is to mobilize its military power to intimidate popular opposition and set the stage for a new round of bloodshed. It has dispatched US destroyers to patrol the Libyan coast and fire cruise missiles at targets inside the country.

Amid the US proxy war with Syria and US threats against other Iranian-allied forces, such as the Hezbollah organization in Lebanon, the new escalation of US operations sets the stage for a war with Iran demanded by the Israeli regime and large sections of the American ruling class.

A report recently published by the Iran Project—a group of US academics, military officers and foreign policy officials—warned of the likely consequences of such war. These include the disruption of world oil trade by fighting in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, fighting between US-backed and Iranian-backed forces that could engulf the entire Near East, and increased weapons supplies to Iran by other major powers, such as Russia and China.

American imperialism’s violent response to rising working class opposition to its Middle East policies, at home and abroad, sets the stage for bloodier disasters. As in the 1930s before the outbreak of World War II, the eruption of local wars is preparing a general conflagration, with disastrous consequences.

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