

The debacle in Iraq

Bill Van Auken
14 June 2014

The events that have unfolded in Iraq over the past several days represent the greatest debacle for US imperialism since the fall of Saigon in 1975 sent the last Americans scurrying onto helicopters atop the embassy roof.

The collapse of the Iraqi army, a force the Pentagon spent some \$22 billion and a decade to arm and train, and the overrunning of much of the country by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), an offshoot of Al Qaeda, represent more than the failure of a single foreign intervention. What is involved is the implosion of an entire set of policies that have been pursued over the course of the more than two decades since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The decision to invade Iraq in 2003, using the pretexts of the “war on terrorism” and “weapons of mass destruction,” flowed from the conclusion reached by the US ruling elite that, with the end of the USSR, nothing stood in the way of utilizing America’s military might to assert unrestricted domination over strategic regions of the globe.

The conception was that by means of preemptive war and the use of military power, American capitalism could reverse the consequences of its long-term economic decline. After the events of September 11, 2001, the “war on terrorism” was continuously invoked to justify the unrestrained use of militarism to attain the aims of US imperialism.

The crude ideology underlying this imperialist strategy was exemplified by the infamous statement of the *Wall Street Journal*, following the first invasion of Iraq in 1991, that “force works.”

The war launched against Iraq in March of 2003 was based on out and out lies combined with a callous contempt for the lives of the Iraqi people. Almost from its first hours, the delusional policies and expectations that underlay the war began to unravel. Washington’s response to each new crisis and failure was to ratchet up the violence, laying waste to what had been one of the most advanced societies in the Middle East.

In an editorial on the Iraq crisis Friday, the *New York Times* took the position, increasingly popular with the American corporate media, that Iraq’s President Maliki “more than anyone... is to blame for the catastrophe” now unfolding in the country.

The obvious question raised by such a claim is, “Where did Maliki come from?” The answer is that he was a chosen instrument of the US invasion, installed as president during the

American occupation of Iraq.

The problems that US imperialism now sees in Maliki’s rule are the product of the contradictions of US policy in Iraq and the surrounding region.

An essential component of the American strategy in launching a war to topple Saddam Hussein was to exploit Shia resentments in order to win allies against the Sunni-based Baathist regime. Washington crassly manipulated sectarian tensions as part of a divide and conquer strategy that ultimately unleashed sectarian warfare that led to countless thousands of deaths and the displacement of entire populations.

Even as it encouraged Shia religious parties in Iraq, the US simultaneously pursued an aggressive policy against Shia-led Iran, where these same parties had sought refuge during the reign of Saddam. Until last year, it appeared that Iran would be the target of a US-Israeli attack.

These contradictions have only intensified as Washington has sought to exploit Sunni Islamist radicalism as a force to topple the regime of Bashar al-Assad in neighboring Syria. The net result is that, while opposing Al Qaeda-linked forces in Iraq as “terrorists,” US imperialism is supporting them on the other side of the border in Syria as fighters for “democracy” and “freedom.”

The policies pursued in one country collide with those employed in another. The US is now sending arms and contemplating air raids to prosecute the “war on terrorism” against an offshoot of Al Qaeda in Iraq, even as it and its Arab Gulf allies continue to send arms and aid to promote and strengthen these very same tendencies in both Libya and Syria.

Everywhere, US foreign policy is based not on principles, but on crude pragmatic maneuvers in pursuit of immediate interests, with the “war on terrorism” or “human rights” invoked as increasingly discredited justifications.

Now this same kind of operation is being pursued in the US-led intervention in Ukraine and the escalating tensions in the South China and East China seas, posing the danger of far more devastating wars against nuclear-armed powers, Russia and China.

There is no iron wall separating US foreign and domestic policy. The same combination of recklessness and shortsightedness that characterizes US militarist interventions abroad dominates every aspect of policy within the United States itself, as manifested in the criminal methods employed

by Wall Street that precipitated the financial meltdown of 2008-2009.

Whether it is a matter of financial collapse, social devastation or murderous wars, no one is held accountable, much less punished, for bringing these disasters about, and no truthful or rational explanation is offered to the American people as to the source of these catastrophes.

This was exemplified by the appearance Friday of President Barack Obama for ten minutes beside a waiting helicopter on the White House lawn. Speaking with unconcealed callousness and indifference, he gave no sense of the magnitude of the disintegration in Iraq, which has already killed many people and turned over half a million Iraqis into refugees.

Obama indicated that US military aid to the besieged regime of Prime Minister Maliki—including US air strikes—would be conditioned on unspecified efforts by the Iraqi government to “promote stability.” One likely condition is that the regime sign the “status of forces” agreement it rejected two-and-a-half years ago and allow the Pentagon to reclaim its bases in Iraq.

Pointing to US interests in Iraq, Obama declared, “obviously our troops and the American people and the American taxpayers made huge investments and sacrifices in order to give Iraqis the opportunity to chart a better course, a better destiny.”

What lies! The Iraq war was not a humanitarian crusade to bring democracy to the Iraqi people. It was justified on the basis of lies about “weapons of mass destruction” and nonexistent ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda and was carried out to further US imperialism’s drive to assert hegemony over the Middle East and its vast energy reserves. Far from providing a “better destiny” to the Iraqis, the war laid waste to an entire society.

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were killed by the US war, millions more were turned into refugees, and every facet of the economic, social and political infrastructure holding the country together was reduced to rubble. Nearly 4,500 US troops lost their lives, tens of thousands were wounded, and hundreds of thousands were left with the psychological and emotional toll of having been part of a dirty colonial-style war. Trillions of dollars were squandered on a criminal enterprise that enriched politically connected contractors and oil companies, while leaving Iraq’s population in a state of abject misery.

While the last of the US occupation troops were pulled out of the country at the end of 2011—as a result of the Obama administration’s inability to secure a status of forces agreement—the Iraq war was hardly an aberration. It was part of a series of operations launched by Washington. From Afghanistan to Libya, Syria and Ukraine, US imperialism has left a trail of blood and destruction wherever it has intervened. Everywhere it is driven by the most base motives: what resources can be plundered, markets seized and financial interests advanced.

The criminal character of these policies is rooted in the very nature of the US ruling elite, whose wealth is embedded to an

overwhelming extent in financial parasitism and swindling.

Every section of the American ruling establishment is deeply implicated in the destruction of Iraqi society and responsible for the catastrophe that is unfolding in that country today. This includes at least the last four US administrations—Bush I, Clinton, Bush II and Obama—which have attacked and occupied the country over the course of a quarter century.

It includes Congress, which has consistently rubber-stamped decisions to wage aggressive war, not bothering even to hold serious hearings on actions that have claimed so many human lives.

And there is the US media, which has ever more directly defined its role as providing propaganda to support whatever policies are pursued by those in power.

It is nauseating in the context of the present debacle in Iraq to see the same talking heads and read the same columnists who a decade ago promoted and, in some cases, embellished upon the lies used to foist a war of aggression on the American people.

One only has to contrast the myopic and lying analyses provided by these elements with the statements produced by the *World Socialist Web Site* at the time.

In March 2003, at the outset of the US war in Iraq, David North, the chairman of the WSWS international editorial board, wrote: “Whatever the outcome of the initial stages of the conflict that has begun, American imperialism has a rendezvous with disaster. It cannot conquer the world. It cannot reimpose colonial shackles upon the masses of the Middle East. It will not find through the medium of war a viable solution to its internal maladies. Rather, the unforeseen difficulties and mounting resistance engendered by war will intensify all of the internal contradictions of American society.”

This perspective has been fully borne out. The disaster has happened, and it will by no means be the last. The deep crisis of American imperialism will produce similar consequences within the US itself.

The decisive political question today is the development of a socialist and anti-imperialist political movement in the American and international working class to confront the growing danger of world war and the relentless attacks on social conditions—a movement armed with a socialist program to put an end to the rule of the financial oligarchy and the capitalist economic system.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact