

Democracy and the debacle in Iraq

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Over the past two weeks, the Obama administration and the foreign policy establishment in the United States have moved rapidly to exploit the crisis in Iraq to intensify military operations throughout the Middle East. Hundreds of US military “advisors” are on their way back to Iraq even as the American ruling class plans air strikes against Syria and maneuvers aimed at undermining Iran.

The propaganda that emanates from the political establishment, uncritically reflected in the media, is sickening in its cynicism and hypocrisy. While divided over tactics in the pursuit of global power, the different factions of the state and military apparatus are united on at least one issue: they bear no responsibility for anything.

Obama’s secretary of state, John Kerry, dispatched to the Middle East to plot with US allies and threaten adversaries, summed up the general sentiment when he declared at a press conference in Cairo (where he met with US-backed Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi): “The United States of America is not responsible for what happened in Libya, nor is it responsible for what is happening in Iraq today.”

According to Kerry’s interpretation of history, the American military “shed blood and worked hard for years for the Iraqis to have their own governance.” While the United States selflessly promoted democracy, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria “crossed the line from Syria.”

ISIS, Kerry continued, “have attacked communities and they are the ones marching through to disrupt the ability of Iraq to have the governance it wants.”

As always, American government officials speak as if no one knows anything and they can peddle blatant lies without consequence. But Kerry’s narrative is contradicted by facts that have found their way into even the media’s coverage of events.

First, while the US may have been caught off guard by the rapidity with which the Iraqi state has disintegrated over the past several weeks, it is by no means unfamiliar with ISIS. The Islamic fundamentalist group has received funding from the US and its autocratic Gulf allies as part of the imperialist-backed insurgency against President

Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Once again, the United States is reaping what it has sowed.

Moreover, ISIS’s advance in Iraq is certainly seen by sections of the American (and Israeli) ruling class as a positive development to the extent that it undermines the influence Iran exerts over the government of Iraq and its current prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki.

Despite Kerry’s protestations, it is understood throughout the world that the United States is principally responsible for the catastrophe that threatens to plunge the entire region into generalized civil war.

The complete absence of any accountability for the crimes of American imperialism has been on graphic display over the past week in the political reemergence of former Vice President Dick Cheney, the criminal mastermind behind the Bush administration’s foreign policy.

Cheney appeared Sunday on ABC’s “This Week with George Stephanopoulos” to agitate for the reinvasion of Iraq. Criticizing the Obama administration for not moving quickly enough, Cheney declared, “When we’re arguing over 300 advisers when the request had been for 20,000 in order to do the job right, I’m not sure we’ve really addressed the problem.”

Cheney added that a “broad strategy” was needed, including “helping the resistance up in Syria, in [the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’s] back yard, with training and weapons and so forth,” and intensifying the military campaign in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Seeking to deflect suggestions that he had anything to do with the present crisis, Cheney said, “If we spend our time debating what happened 11 or 12 years ago, we’re going to miss the threat that is growing.”

Nothing testifies so clearly to the dysfunctional state of American democracy than the fact that Cheney is still paraded before the public as a distinguished authority on foreign policy. He exemplifies the absence of any real legal or political accountability for the crimes committed by the ruling oligarchy. Even in the midst of a major foreign policy disaster, there has been no call for even the

formality of congressional hearings into the history of the US intervention in Iraq and the so-called “war on terror.”

It should be recalled that in the midst of the Vietnam War, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a series of hearings between 1966 and 1971, referred to collectively as the Fulbright hearings. These hearings took testimony from a wide range of expert witnesses, including prominent opponents of the war. Kerry himself took part, as a veteran advocating an end to the war. At that point in American history, there still existed a certain conception that the public had some right to know how foreign policy was made.

Nothing of that remains today. Foreign policy is carried out exclusively behind the backs of the people. It is decided by a criminal cabal that operates with full knowledge that there will be—at least from within the political establishment—no consequences for its actions. These are the features of a political system thoroughly corrupted by unrestrained militarism and extreme social inequality.

There is an urgent need for the creation of a new mass movement against imperialism and war. Such a movement can develop only on the basis of the political mobilization of the working class. The struggle against the new catastrophes that the ruling class is planning must develop outside of and in opposition to the Obama administration, the Democratic and Republican parties, and the political agencies and institutions of the capitalist state.

A renewed antiwar movement can succeed only to the extent that it is rooted in the independent interests of the international working class, armed with a socialist program, with the aim at wrenching power out of the hands of the financial oligarchy and its cast of political conspirators.



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