

Who is responsible for the murder of James Foley?

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The barbaric murder of American journalist James Foley at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has provoked genuine revulsion and anger among working people in the US and all over the world.

Foley, a self-described opponent of war, had said that he turned to journalism in order to expose its human impact on the populations of countries like Syria, Libya and Iraq. There have been widespread expressions of sorrow over his loss and of admiration for both his work as a journalist and his warmth and generosity as a human being.

ISIS justified the videotaped beheading as retaliation for the US bombing campaign in Iraq. In executing such an individual for the crimes of his country's government and ruling class—over which he had no control and, like millions of Americans, apparently opposed—ISIS only exposes the bankruptcy and deeply reactionary character of its own world outlook.

The politics of ISIS and other Al Qaeda-linked groups reflect not the strivings of the oppressed masses for liberation from imperialist oppression, but rather the interests of disaffected bourgeois layers in the Arab and Muslim world, which seek to manipulate sectarian divisions as a means of advancing their own class agenda.

In this sense, their outlook is not all that different from that of predominant layers within the US ruling oligarchy, which are determined to exploit the horror over Foley's death as a lever in shifting the broad-based hostility of the American population to the drive toward a new war in the Middle East.

Foley's murder, carried out in the name of revenge for US killings in Iraq, has been answered by influential sections of the US media with a braying for corresponding revenge in the form of an escalation of

US military intervention in the region.

Thus, the *Wall Street Journal* editorialized Thursday that ISIS had grown because of "Obama's refusal to intervene in Syria" and "his total withdrawal from Iraq in 2011." It demanded that the US president "get over his political fixation on ending Mr. Bush's wars and admit that this country must fight again in Iraq."

Similarly, a *Washington Post* editorial stated: "For three years the United States stood aside as the Islamist extremists built up their strength inside Syria. Washington was surprised in June when they burst into Iraq... They proudly proclaim their enmity to America. America needs a genuine strategy in response."

This editorial was complemented by a crude entry on the paper's "PostPartisan" blog written by Republican strategist Ed Rogers advising Obama on how to reverse his "sagging ratings."

"Unleash hell on those connected to Foley's killing. It doesn't have to be just about vengeance. It's more about showing the world what is in store for the United States' enemies... In this case, vicious payback is good policy," wrote Rogers.

These briefs for a new US war of aggression in the Middle East are founded on grotesque lies aimed at concealing the real roots of Foley's murder.

The rise of ISIS was fueled not by US imperialism "refusing to intervene" or "standing aside" in Syria. On the contrary, abandoning the former "war on terrorism" pretext for US intervention, the Obama administration armed and supported Islamist-led militias in wars for "regime change" first in Libya and then in Syria. The secular head of state in Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, was toppled nearly three years ago, and today the country is in a state of collapse, awash in violence between rival militias, its economy paralyzed and upwards of a million forced to flee for their lives.

In an attempt to bring about a similar downfall of another secular head of state in Syria, Bashar al-Assad, the US and its principal allies in the region—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait—have promoted a sectarian civil war in which ISIS emerged as the predominant armed opponent of the Assad regime, at the cost of well over 100,000 lives. As ISIS rampaged through Syria, beheading captured conscripts, state employees, members of religious minorities and anyone else in its way, Obama maintained a discreet silence.

Now this same ISIS has swept into Iraq, whose entire social fabric was shattered by decades of sanctions, the “shock and awe” of the US invasion of 2003 and eight years of occupation in which sectarian divisions were fueled by Washington’s divide-and-rule policy.

The hope within ruling circles that Foley’s savage killing can be exploited for purposes of another war found their most grotesque expression in the resurfacing on the television news of former Vice President Dick Cheney, who demanded that Obama “deal with the crisis in Iraq.” Acknowledging that Foley’s murder was a “terrible development,” Cheney warned of another 9/11. “But magnify that a million times over because that is what’s in store for the rest of the world if we don’t deal with this crisis,” he said.

Magnification of Foley’s death by a million gives one the best estimate for the number of lives that were destroyed as a result of a war for oil and imperialist interests that Cheney played such a prominent role in foisting onto the American people with lies about “weapons of mass destruction” and a nonexistent alliance between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. The war’s results are now plain to see. The overthrow of Hussein, like Gaddafi and Assad a secular opponent of Al Qaeda, has created the conditions for a spinoff from Al Qaeda overrunning more than a quarter of the country.

Cheney should be behind bars as a war criminal, not allowed to poison public opinion with the claim that yet another US war will somehow lead to peace and security.

Who is ultimately to blame for the murder of James Foley? Behind the Islamist assassin with a knife stands over a decade of US military intervention—carried out under both the Bush and Obama administrations—that has shattered entire societies and promoted these very forces as proxies in predatory imperialist wars.

Cheney’s warning about this atrocity being multiplied by a million contains an unintended truth. The war fever that the ruling establishment is attempting to whip up around Foley’s death is driven in the final analysis by the irresolvable contradictions of crisis-ridden capitalism. US imperialism is lashing out not only in the Middle East, but in Eastern Europe, the Asian Pacific and around the planet, seeking to offset its economic decline by military means. Unless stopped by a revolutionary movement of the working class, imperialism will once again drag mankind into a global bloodbath.



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