

# Imperialist war in search of a pretext

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25 August 2014

The Obama administration is moving rapidly towards launching air strikes against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border, in a major escalation of US military intervention in the oil-rich Middle East.

Reports indicate that the initial form of such attacks is likely to be drone-fired missiles aimed at Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and other leaders of ISIS, on the model of those already carried out in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.

“For weeks, the US military’s Central Command, which oversees Middle East operations, has advocated a more expansive, near-term air campaign targeting Islamic State commanders, equipment and military positions that US intelligence has pinpointed in Iraq,” the *Wall Street Journal* reported Thursday, quoting one top official’s mantra: “Hunt while the hunting’s good.”

The drive to war is a measure of the crisis facing US imperialism in the Middle East, after a quarter century of escalating intervention, characterized by the combination of recklessness and brutality that is the particular specialty of the American ruling class.

While increasingly apocalyptic administration comments and media headlines declare ISIS to be a deadly threat to the United States, there has been virtually no acknowledgement that the crisis in the Middle East is the direct product of the repeated US interventions.

Through war, occupation and CIA-backed regime-change operations, the American ruling class has created a social and political catastrophe, while stoking sectarian conflict and civil war. More immediately, the US directly aided, armed and trained Syrian “rebel” fighters who went on to form the core of ISIS, seeking to deploy them to overthrow the Assad government there.

Perhaps the most important feature of the political

crisis facing the Obama administration in Iraq and Syria is that no amount of government-media war propaganda has been able to shift US public opinion. The American people are adamantly opposed to new military adventures in the Middle East, a sentiment that reflects both the thoroughly justified mistrust of the warmongers in Washington and the mounting social crisis within the United States itself.

This deep-rooted social opposition means that the Obama administration’s plans for Syria and Iraq remain a war in search of a pretext. Over the past month, a series of provocations have been staged in an increasingly desperate effort to manufacture support for wider military action in the Middle East.

The first *casus belli* was to be the plight of the Yazidis, a small religious minority in northern Iraq. This was accompanied by claims from the Obama administration that military action was needed to defend American citizens and installations in Iraq.

On Tuesday, August 19 came a new pretext, supplied by ISIS itself, in the video of its barbaric execution of US photojournalist James Foley, held prisoner for two years in Syria. These terrible images generated widespread disgust and outrage at the Islamic fundamentalists.

The administration’s own claims to be horrified by the beheading of the journalist do not hold water. Its closest ally among the Arab states, Saudi Arabia, beheads people with great regularity—19 in just the month of August—including immigrant nannies fleeing slave-like conditions and Saudi citizens “guilty” of religious offenses against the Wahabi version of Islam. There have been no condemnations of Saudi savagery from Washington, let alone demands for regime-change in Riyadh.

In the cynical calculations of US strategists, James Foley as a human being counts for nothing. As one top Pentagon adviser, Anthony Cordesman of the Center

for Strategic and International Studies, declared, “Strategically, it doesn’t matter whether one American is killed. One person is not a measure of strategic importance. Frankly, it would be irresponsible for a president to react to a single killing.”

However, the Obama administration has decided to use the Foley murder as a justification for expanding the current US air war on ISIS to targets in Syria. “If you come after Americans, we are going to come after you,” deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes told a press conference Friday. “We’re not going to be restricted by borders.”

On Sunday came a new theme: ISIS has grown so strong militarily that it is a threat to the entire Middle East. The British *Guardian* wrote that ISIS “is establishing itself with extraordinary speed as a regional power,” and cited one diplomat’s claim that “Islamic State is now the most capable military power in the Middle East outside Israel.”

The purpose of this grotesque exaggeration—ISIS has been stalled outside of Baghdad by the remnants of the Iraqi Army and is now being driven back by lightly armed Kurdish peshmerga forces—is to provide yet another pretext for war. By this account, ISIS is now a threat to US allies like Jordan and NATO members like Turkey, which Washington would be treaty-bound to defend through force.

These reports point to the basic fact that the fundamental aim of US imperialism in the Middle East is not defeating ISIS—which, after all, is its own creation—but reinforcing its control over the entire region. Just one year ago, plans for bombing the Syrian government were put off. These plans, however, have not gone away.

Amidst the various contradictions of American policy in the Middle East, the one consistent thread is that every argument by the Obama administration, the Pentagon, and their media collaborators has been based on lies. The real goals of US imperialism in the region are never publicly declared, but they have nothing to do with the various humanitarian pretexts.

US imperialism seeks to maintain its domination of the oil-rich region, one of the most valuable prizes in world geo-politics. That is why Bush invaded Iraq, why Obama invaded Libya and subverted Syria, why Washington finances and arms Israel, and why the world is once again on the brink of a new imperialist

war in the Middle East.



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