Obama’s war in Iraq and Syria

Barry Grey
10 September 2014

President Barack Obama will use his nationally televised speech tonight to officially announce what has already begun: a new US war in Iraq that will soon be extended to Syria.

The man who ran for president in 2008 as an opponent of Bush’s war in Iraq is, like his predecessor, seeking to justify American military violence in that tortured land and its extension into Syria with deceit and lies.

Just a month ago, announcing the initiation of US air strikes, Obama presented them as a short-term, narrowly focused measure restricted to providing “humanitarian relief” for Yazidi refugees threatened by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia and protecting US personnel in the Kurdish capital of Erbil.

Those pretexts failed to generate public support for renewed war in the Middle East and were quickly dropped. Then came the beheading of two American journalists by ISIS. The media ran lurid accounts of Western recruits to ISIS and an increased threat of terrorist attacks within the US.

The beheadings provided a new, made-to-order pretext, reviving “war on terror” fear-mongering, for US military intervention in the Middle East. It was handed to American imperialism by a Sunni jihadist group that owes its existence to Washington.

ISIS is a creation of the United States. It arose out of the destruction of Iraqi society by the US military between 2003 and 2011 and the colonialist policy pursued by Washington of whipping up sectarian warfare between Sunnis and Shiites.

In Syria, the organization was directly and indirectly armed and trained by the CIA as the spearhead of the US drive to overthrow the pro-Russian and pro-Iranian regime of Bashar al-Assad and replace it with a US puppet government. Much of its leadership has ties to American intelligence. (See: “American imperialism and the rise of Islamic extremism in Syria and Iraq.”)

The war on ISIS is camouflage for an unstated agenda. The United States is using military force to attempt once again to restructure Iraq in line with the aims of its 1991 war and its 2003 invasion—complete domination of the country’s vast oil resources.

Even more centrally, the new war is aimed at overthrowing Assad in Syria. It is an attempt to reverse the setback Washington suffered a year ago when it had to scuttle its plans to intervene in Syria on the basis of fabricated claims of chemical weapons attacks by Assad. The Obama administration was not able to generate any significant public support for such an attack and found itself internally divided.

Now, the same agenda is disguised as a war against ISIS, with which the US has been allied in the drive for regime-change in Syria. Administration officials are making clear in advance of Obama’s speech that he has adopted a policy of carrying out air strikes in Syria as well as Iraq. It is reported that Obama will urge Congress to authorize stepped up US military aid to so-called “rebels” in Syria.

The agenda of the new war is the basic agenda that lay behind Washington’s first war against Iraq 23 years ago—total US control of the energy resources of the Middle East.

It will continue to be pursued if Washington succeeds in toppling and likely murdering Assad (as it murdered Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya). Washington will in short order openly resume its war drive against Iran.

The pursuit of US hegemony in the Middle East is also bound up with Washington’s war-mongering against Russia. Last year, Russia obstructed the Obama administration’s plans to attack Syria, Moscow’s only ally in the Arab world and the site of a major Russian naval base. The desire to remove an obstacle to US domination of the Middle East was a significant factor in the confrontation the US created with Moscow by

© World Socialist Web Site

conspiring to overthrow a pro-Russian government in Ukraine and replace it with a far-right, rabidly anti-Russian puppet regime.

This new war, like the ones that went before it, is being carried out over the heads of the American people, without any explanation or public discussion. The decisions are made by a cabal of military and intelligence operatives in consultation with Washington think tanks and Wall Street.

On Tuesday, Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), published a commentary outlining the aims of Obama's Wednesday night speech. The CSIS is a key part of the nexus of government and military officials and national security think tanks that actually shapes the life-and-death decisions, including going to war, that impact the American and world population.

On his web site, which is produced for the political elite, Cordesman spelled out frankly what is being prepared. Noting that, "there are many good reasons the president needs to be cautious about what he says and not speak too openly about the details," he made clear that Obama's promises of "no combat troops on the ground" were virtually meaningless, and that what was being launched was a massive military escalation in the Middle East.

"There is a critical difference between no ground troops and no major ground combat units," he wrote. "The United States already has some 1,100 military personnel in Iraq and counting. It will need more in the future—plus civil intelligence personnel—for training, equipment transfers, targeting and intelligence analysis, and various enabling functions. Ideally, it will also need Special Forces or their equivalent to work with Sunni areas that return to supporting the government or become hostile to the Islamic State, work with the Kurds, and embed in Iraq forces to help provide tactical guidance and air strike planning…

"Limited US airpower may be able to contain the Islamic State, but it will take a far larger campaign to defeat it in Iraq and a campaign that strikes targets in Syria to have any chance of reducing the Islamic State back to a small extremist faction with only limited support. In practice, air power must be extended well beyond targeting forward IS combat elements and strike at the entire leadership, military forces, key cadres, and key strategic political and economic centers of IS operations."

Under the heading "The Assad Problem: The Enemy of Our Enemy is Worse than Our Enemy," Cordesman made clear that military action in Syria ostensibly targeting ISIS would be used to carry through the US policy of regime-change against Assad.

None of the conspirators are held accountable for their endless wars based on lies. On Tuesday, former Vice President Dick Cheney, a prime architect of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, met with Republican members of the House of Representatives to push for full-scale war in both Iraq and Syria.

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, whose résumé includes the murder of millions in Vietnam and the fascist coup that brought Pinochet to power in Chile, gave an interview to the *Times of London* in which he urged Obama to "launch an all-out attack" on ISIS, saying that air strikes should "not make any distinction between Syria and Iraq."

The entire political establishment and corporate-controlled media are lined up behind the new war. Congress functions as a rubber stamp of the Pentagon and CIA.

These events underscore the fact that we live today in an age of permanent war. This is what Bush meant, speaking for the American ruling class, when he talked in 2001 of the "wars of the 21st Century." One war follows another, each one more violent and ominous than the last.

The only thing that can stop perpetual war, leading inevitably to a nuclear World War III, is the independent movement of the working class in the United States and internationally against the source of imperialist war, the capitalist system.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site