

America's "dirty brigades" in Iraq

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Last August, the United States government and the media responded to the brutal decapitation of American journalist James Foley by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) with a show of moral indignation. The murder was seized on to justify an escalation of the war launched the previous week against ISIS in Iraq and, soon after, its extension into Syria. President Barack Obama denounced Foley's execution as "an act of violence that shocks the conscience of the world."

It has now emerged that even as Obama and other officials were declaring their abhorrence of ISIS atrocities, they were concealing, with the connivance of the media, photographic and video evidence of similar crimes being carried out on a large scale by US-backed forces in Iraq.

ABC News reported last week that Iraqi military units and Shiite militias trained and armed by the United States are being investigated by the Iraqi government for possible war crimes, including the torture and summary execution of Sunni prisoners, in many cases by decapitation, and the desecration of corpses. ABC has known of these crimes since September last year, when it came across an online video posted by a member of the Iraqi security forces showing a handcuffed prisoner being shot in the head.

An investigation was reportedly opened by the Iraqi government after an ABC News journalist presented evidence of "uniformed soldiers from some of Iraq's most elite units and militia members massacring civilians, torturing and executing prisoners, and displaying severed heads."

Multiple images posted by ABC last week depict soldiers wearing the uniforms of the Iraqi Special Operations Forces and the Emergency Response Brigade, which operates under the authority of the Iraqi Interior Ministry, posing with severed heads. Others depict Iraqi Special Forces dragging corpses behind their Humvees. Another image shows a corpse being

hung from the guard tower of an Iraqi military base.

Responding to the revelations of war crimes carried out by its proxies in Iraq, the Obama administration issued a statement declaring, "If these allegations are confirmed, those found responsible must be held accountable."

Such statements are worthless. While there has been detailed reporting on the crimes of ISIS, next to nothing has been said by the American government or media about the activities of the US-backed forces. The *New York Times* has yet to dedicate a single column inch to the latest revelations.

The ABC report has been buried by the rest of media, just as the US media sought to suppress the photos of torture carried out by the CIA and US military at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq 11 years ago. The Obama administration continues to suppress more than 2,000 photographs that depict American soldiers torturing, raping and murdering Iraqi and Afghan prisoners.

As for accountability, it is the American government and military that bear principal responsibility not only for the crimes of the Iraqi military, but for those of ISIS as well.

Prior to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, there was no sectarian fighting and Al Qaeda had no significant presence in the country. The devastation produced by decades of sanctions, war and occupation wreaked havoc on the country, while the US deliberately whipped up sectarian divisions in accordance with the imperialist strategy of "divide and rule."

The US installed a sectarian Shiite government and financed and trained a largely Shiite army to uproot the foundations of the Sunni-based regime of the deposed ruler Saddam Hussein. At the same time, the CIA maintained extensive contacts with the Sunni-based Al Qaeda, including its branch in Iraq, which engaged in sectarian warfare against the Shiite regime, leading to

tens of thousands of civilian deaths. The CIA's ties to Al Qaeda go back to that terrorist organization's origins in the CIA-financed and armed mujahideen militias employed against pro-Soviet governments and Russian troops in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

In the US-led air war in 2011 that ended in the ouster and lynch-mob murder of Muammar Gaddafi, the United States employed Islamist jihadist forces as its proxy army on the ground, including "rebel" leaders who had previously been detained at Washington's Guantanamo prison camp. At the same time, the US and its regional allies were funneling weapons to Al Qaeda-linked forces in Syria, including the al Nusra Front and elements that would form ISIS, in the US-sponsored war for regime-change against President Bashar al Assad.

Last year, the forces it promoted and armed in Syria came into opposition to the US and its puppet regime in Baghdad. ISIS launched an offensive across the border, seizing large swaths of northern Iraq and threatening the US-sponsored set-up in the country. Iraqi Special Forces and Shiite militias have now been unleashed to push ISIS out of Iraq and back into Syria, while terrorizing the Sunni population in the north and west of Iraq.

The exposure of Iraqi government atrocities in the war against ISIS shatters the propaganda pretense of a war between "good" and "evil." It is a conflict between reactionary forces brought to the fore by the predatory imperialist policies of the United States.

The aim, as was the case with the previous wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria and the ongoing slaughter in Afghanistan, is to establish US hegemony in the Middle East, Central Asia and Northern Africa. In addition to its immense oil resources, the region is of central geo-strategic importance in the American ruling class' offensive against regional and global rivals, particularly Russia and China.



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