# One year of Obama's Iraq-Syria war

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This week marks the first anniversary of the initiation of air strikes in Iraq and launching of yet another US war in the Middle East.

The Obama administration is marking this grim milestone with a qualitative new escalation of the war, rubber-stamping a Pentagon proposal to authorize US warplanes to provide blanket air cover for a small band of mercenaries sent into Syria after being trained, armed and paid by the US military.

These new rules of engagement specify that air strikes on behalf of this force—which numbered less than 60 before its commanders and several of its members were captured and others were killed last week—will be carried out against any purported threat from Syrian government forces.

These orders are a transparent ploy for sending the US military directly into the bloody four-year war for regime change in Syria that has been backed by Washington and its regional allies, using Islamist sectarian militias as their proxies. The only conceivable function of the so-called "New Syrian Force," which has a roster barely the size of an American football team, is to serve as a decoy to draw fire from the Syrian military and provide the pretext for an all-out US intervention to overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

This turn toward deeper intervention and even greater bloodshed is only the latest chapter in a war policy beset by so many dizzying contradictions that its coherent defense is impossible. Instead, the Obama administration has relied on lies and deceit in its attempt to foist the war onto the American public.

It was only a year ago that Obama told the American public that he was ordering air strikes in Iraq and sending in a small contingent of Special Operations troops for the sole purpose of rescuing the Yazidis, a small religious community in northern Iraq, from a supposedly imminent massacre at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

This Sunni Islamist militia had overrun roughly a third of Iraq the previous month, routing US-trained Iraqi troops that fled in disarray. This debacle was the product of the past US interventions, which had killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and left behind a shattered society divided along sectarian lines.

ISIS itself bore the stamp "Made in the USA," having enjoyed the backing of the CIA and Washington's principal regional allies, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in the war for regime change in Syria. It was also strengthened by the 2011 US-NATO war to topple and murder Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. That neocolonial enterprise relied upon similar Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias, many of whose members—along with huge stocks of captured Libyan weapons—were funneled into Syria.

The fate of the Yazidis has long been forgotten. Subsequent attempts were made to sell the new war as an existential struggle against terrorism—that is, against the very terrorists the US had been supporting in Libya and Syria—exploiting the fate of captive Americans beheaded by ISIS.

Then came the struggle to break the siege of the Syrian city of Kobani, with the US Air Force intervening to supply close air support to Kurdish militias fighting ISIS. Various pseudo-left organizations predictably found in the Kurds a rationale for supporting imperialist war.

Only months later, Washington's erstwhile Kurdish allies have been thrown to the Turkish wolves. In exchange for the use of Turkish bases to bomb Syria, Washington has endorsed Ankara's bombardment of Kurdish positions as a struggle against "terrorism." Obama has also embraced the Turkish proposal for carving a buffer zone out of Syrian territory on Turkey's border in order to further the war for regime change against Assad.

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Meanwhile, as made clear by the surprise and dismay in Washington over the latest debacle—the capture of America's Syrian mercenaries by the al-Nusra Front—the Obama administration's strategy has been based on fighting as part of a "united front" with this Syrian affiliate of Al Qaeda. So much for the "war against terrorism"!

The only identifiable constants in this war are the predatory aims of US imperialism, pursued uninterruptedly over the past quarter century through the use of military violence. The war launched by Obama—who was swept into office on a wave of antiwar sentiment, only to serve as the servile mouthpiece for the US military and intelligence apparatus—represents the continuation of the criminal war of aggression against Iraq launched on the basis of lies in 2003 by George W. Bush. That war, in turn, was a continuation of the Gulf war launched by Bush's father in 1991.

Each stage in this eruption of American militarism has proven to be more dangerous than the last. This latest intervention in Syria is aimed not only at toppling the Assad government and imposing a US-controlled puppet regime, so as to bolster US hegemony over the strategically vital and oil-rich Middle East, but also at preparing for even more catastrophic wars against the principal allies of Damascus—Iran and Russia.

The logic of US imperialism's drive for world domination leads inevitably to war with Russia and China and escalating tensions with Washington's ostensible allies in Europe, confronting humanity with the specter of a Third World War.

In addition to the first anniversary of Obama's Iraq-Syria war, this week marks one year since the Third National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US) unanimously adopted the resolution "The Fight Against War and the Political Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party."

This vital document stated, in part: "Because the United States is the center of world imperialism, the cockpit of international war planning and counterrevolution, opposition to war on a world scale cannot be mobilized without the emergence of a powerful antiwar movement in this country. The American working class must take its place in a struggle of the international working class to abolish imperialism and the capitalist nation-state system."

It continued: "There is no other movement, outside of the ICFI [International Committee of the Fourth International] and the SEP, that seeks to or is capable of leading the working class in a revolutionary struggle against war, which requires the development in the working class and its vanguard of an understanding of the inextricable connection between war abroad and exploitation at home—between imperialism and capitalism."

The events of the past year—the expansion of war in the Middle East to Yemen and its escalation in Iraq and Syria, the militarization of Eastern Europe and threat of war against nuclear-armed Russia, the ever more aggressive provocations against China—have imparted to this perspective even greater urgency.

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