

New York Times uses rape allegations to promote a wider war in the Middle East

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The *New York Times* led its Friday edition with a lengthy front-page article headlined “Enslaving Young Girls, the Islamic State Builds a Vast System of Rape.” The article, spread out over more than two pages, provides a lurid account of women and girls belonging to the Yazidi religious minority being systematically captured and sold as sex slaves by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) fighters.

The author, Rukmini Callimachi, cites various US academics and think tanks to argue that ISIS has devised a religious justification for rape and “developed a detailed bureaucracy of sex slavery.” The prominence of the article, its sensationalist tone and presentation, and its timing—appearing in the midst of a US escalation of its military interventions and proxy wars in Iraq and Syria—make clear that the publication of the piece is calculated to inflame public opinion and build support for a wider war.

That the *Times* article may be part of a broader media campaign was indicated by press reports later Friday that Kayla Mueller, a US citizen captured by ISIS in Syria, was repeatedly raped by then-ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi before she was killed earlier this year.

And the *Wall Street Journal* carried a front-page lead article citing German and US military and intelligence officials claiming ISIS had used chemical weapons linked to the Syrian regime against Kurdish militia forces in Iraq.

It is impossible to know the extent to which women and girls are being subjected to rape by the various Islamist militias, including those armed and funded by Washington and its allies, which are contending for territory and power in Iraq and Syria. That such crimes are taking place is hardly in doubt. They are a common feature of war.

But even if the practice is as widespread and systematic as the *Times* contends, the ultimate responsibility rests with United States imperialism. It has carried out wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria that have devastated those countries (something, of course, the *Times* fails to mention).

Three societies that were among the most secular and advanced in the Middle East and North Africa have been destroyed and turned into killing fields. Rape was not a serious problem before Washington intervened to occupy Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein, overthrow and murder Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, and ignite a sectarian civil war for regime-change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Moreover, the forces that comprise ISIS emerged as proxies of the US and offshoots of its principal regional allies—Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey—in these wars. Even as it wages war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the US continues to collaborate with Al Qaeda-linked terrorists such as the al-Nusra Front in Syria.

There is a huge element of cynicism in the *Times*’ newfound concern for the fate of the Yazidis. They and other minorities are picked up and dropped as “human rights” causes in accordance with the immediate requirements of American imperialism.

Just over a year ago, the *Times* and the rest of the American media uncritically disseminated Obama administration propaganda to the effect that the White House was ordering limited air strikes in Iraq and dispatching a small contingent of Special Operations troops for the sole purpose of rescuing the Yazidis from supposedly imminent massacre at the hands of ISIS.

Once the new war in Iraq was underway, and soon after extended into Syria, the fate of the Yazidis disappeared from government statements and media coverage. Now, thousands of more US troops later,

with Washington beginning to bomb Syria from Turkish air bases, helping carve out a Turkish “buffer zone,” and sanctioning the use of US air power against Syrian government forces, the *Times* has suddenly rediscovered the plight of the Yazidis.

It is the same pattern, in reverse, with the Kurds. The defense of Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Kobani, Syria, became a *casus belli* at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015, the pretext for escalating the US intervention in the region. Now, in return for Turkey’s agreement to allow US war planes to stage attacks from Turkish air bases, Washington has signed off on Turkish attacks on Kurdish forces in Iraq, Syria and Turkey itself.

The placement and content of the *Times* article underscore its essential propaganda character. Traditionally, the front-page lead of the *Times* was reserved for hard news of undoubted national or international import: statements of the US president or high cabinet members; major economic, political or social developments.

This article, notwithstanding its sweeping claims, is built around direct or indirect quotes from six women, only one of whom is named, who describe horrific treatment at the hands of ISIS. The author claims to have interviewed 21 Yazidi women and girls captured by ISIS last August, but it is not clear that all 21 say they were raped.

Beyond that, the author comments on documents and statements posted on ISIS web sites, includes links to earlier reports on ISIS and rape by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and cites a number of authorities on Islamic extremism. One such authority is Cole Bunzel, described as a “scholar of Islamic theology at Princeton University.” Bunzel is, in fact, a graduate student who authored a research paper on the ideology of ISIS that was published by the Brookings Institution.

Last February, shortly after the ISIS killing of Kayla Mueller was confirmed, Bunzel appeared on the Charlie Rose interview program to advocate the deployment of US ground troops to Iraq.

Even more significant is the source cited by the *Times* as having translated an ISIS pamphlet posted on Twitter that allegedly condones child rape. The Middle East Media Research Institute is a neo-conservative Washington DC think tank chaired by Oliver “Buck” Revell, former executive assistant director of the

Federal Bureau of Investigation in charge of counter-terrorism and counter-intelligence programs.

Its web site boasts that its Board of Advisers and Directors includes “former United States government officials, such as the director of the CIA; secretary of the Navy; director of operations with the FBI.” It continues: “Members of MEMRI’s Board of Advisers are bipartisan and have honorably served Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.”

The Board of Advisers includes some of the key war criminals who dragged the United States into the 2003 invasion of Iraq on the basis of lies and oversaw torture programs and the gutting of democratic rights, such as former NSA and CIA director Michael Hayden, Donald Rumsfeld, John Bolton, John Ashcroft and the US proconsul in Iraq, Paul Bremer.

These are the very forces with whom the *Times* collaborated, utilizing its notorious correspondent Judith Miller, among others, to promote fabrications about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in the run-up to the invasion.

The so-called “newspaper of record” has a long and filthy record of serving as a mouthpiece for government war propaganda, having marketed imperialist wars of aggression as crusades for human rights and democracy in the Balkans, Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, Syria, eastern Ukraine and once again in Iraq and Syria.

The *Times* is up to its old tricks, working in tandem with the most rabidly militaristic factions of the US ruling elite to condition the American people for even more bloody and destructive wars in the Middle East and beyond.



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