

The New York Times celebrates “retaking Ramadi”

Bill Van Auken
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The *New York Times* Tuesday joined the chorus of Pentagon, State Department and White House officials celebrating the entry of Iraqi government security forces into the city of Ramadi as a turning point in the war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

In an editorial entitled “The Importance of Retaking Ramadi,” the *Times* declared that “the fact that Iraqi forces could raise their country’s flag above the main government complex is a substantial achievement and gives reason to hope that the barbaric terrorist group can eventually be defeated.”

What the *Times* editors choose to cover up is the fact that the Iraqi flag was raised over a city that has been largely reduced to rubble by a protracted siege and at least 630 air strikes by US and allied warplanes. There were no crowds to hail Ramadi’s supposed liberation and there is, as yet, no indication of how many civilians have been killed in this military operation. One can assume that the death toll is high, however, given the massive scale of the destruction.

The retaking of Ramadi will hardly go down as one of history’s great military feats. When the city fell to ISIS in May of 2015, about 600 ISIS fighters routed an Iraqi government force ten times larger. The insurgents were even more greatly outnumbered this time around, with at most 350 fighters thought to be in the city, meaning the Pentagon launched roughly two air strikes for every armed member of ISIS.

Ramadi, the capital of Iraq’s predominantly Sunni Anbar Province, had a population of over half a million before the US invaded the country in 2003. Over a decade ago it was turned into one of the bloodiest killing fields of the Iraq war. Whole areas of the city were decimated by American firepower, while entire blocks of housing around the town center were bulldozed to deny insurgents cover. American forces

deliberately attacked infrastructure and cut off water and electricity in an attempt to subdue popular resistance.

Today, the vast majority of that population has either been killed or turned into homeless refugees, many of them desperately trying to flee the country.

The *Times* acknowledged that hoisting the Iraqi flag over Ramadi has hardly resolved the desperate crisis gripping Iraq, Syria and the entire region. “There are formidable obstacles ahead as well as questions about how President Obama’s strategy in Iraq relates to the fight against the Islamic State in Syria and about a deepening American involvement in the conflict,” the editorial notes.

What are these “questions” about how US strategy in Iraq relates to its intervention in Syria? The *Times* editors remain discreetly silent on this score. To examine them can only point to the wholly criminal and predatory character of US imperialism’s intervention in the region.

In Syria, Washington and its principal regional allies—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar—have provided arms and funding to Al Qaeda-linked Sunni sectarian militias such as ISIS in a proxy war for regime-change aimed at toppling President Bashar al-Assad and installing a more pliant Western puppet.

It was the foreign-sponsored strengthening of these forces that gave ISIS the ability to surge into Iraq, overrunning its second-largest city, Mosul, in June of 2014. This offensive exposed the utterly ramshackle character of the Iraqi security forces trained by the US at the cost of over \$20 billion. Much of the weaponry paid for with this money fell into the hands of ISIS.

Meanwhile, Washington has sent some 3,500 US troops back into Iraq to “train” and “advise” the military forces of a predominantly Shia government,

whose repression and discrimination against the country's Sunni minority provided ISIS with the political conditions for its victories. While US officials, echoed by the *Times*, have claimed that Shia militias, which have been blamed for attacks on Sunni civilians, were excluded from the siege of Ramadi, there have been widespread reports that these forces were merely given government uniforms.

The *Times* editorial refers briefly to this sectarian dynamic. It notes in passing: "No military victory by itself will be enough to defeat the Islamic State, also known as ISIS. Political reforms are also essential. The group exploits the anger of Iraq's Sunni minority, which has been disenfranchised from Iraqi politics since Saddam Hussein was overthrown in 2003."

What a revealing choice of language! The Iraqi government "was overthrown in 2003." Who did the overthrowing and to what ends is left unstated, and for good reason. The US war of aggression launched in that year claimed the lives of roughly one million Iraqis and laid waste to the entire society. The US occupation deliberately stoked sectarian division between Shia, Sunni and Kurdish populations as part of a strategy of divide and rule.

The *Times* itself played a significant role in preparing and promoting this war. It set the tone for the US media as a whole by retailing and amplifying the Bush administration's lies about Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction" and non-existent ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda, while editorializing in favor of an unprovoked US invasion.

Now, with its celebration of the "liberation" of Ramadi, the *Times* is once again lending its services to the escalation of American militarism in the Middle East and promoting the conception that Washington somehow holds the key to overcoming the catastrophe into which it has plunged the entire region.

In reality, US imperialism's renewed intervention will only deepen this catastrophe. It is directed not at combating terrorism or promoting "human rights," but rather at imposing a US stranglehold over the Middle East and its vast energy resources.

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