

The US-directed assault on Mosul and imperialist hypocrisy

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The long-planned, US-directed offensive to recapture the northern Iraqi city of Mosul from Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has begun. On Monday morning, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared on national television: “Today, I declare the start of these victorious operations.”

The assault on Mosul starkly raises the boundless hypocrisy of US and European resolutions in the United Nations, and incessant media coverage, accusing Russian-backed Syrian forces of “war crimes” against civilians as they attempt to retake the eastern sectors of Aleppo from Islamist militias. In Iraq, the US, its allies and its puppet government in Baghdad have begun a savage onslaught against a far larger city, in which as many 1.5 million civilians, including 600,000 children, are trapped.

Lise Grande, the United Nations’ humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, told the *New York Times* on the weekend: “The United Nations is deeply concerned that in a worst-case scenario, the operation in Mosul could be the most complex and largest in the world in 2016, and we fear as many as one million civilians may be forced to flee their homes.”

The *New York Times* nevertheless welcomed “The Coming Battle for Mosul” in its October 14 editorial. It declared that the city must be “liberated” from “terrorists’ rule”—regardless of the human cost. Barely two weeks ago, its editorial page labelled Russia an “outlaw state” because it was supporting an assault in Aleppo that “threatens the lives of 250,000 more people.”

The difference between the two battles, as far as the imperialist hypocrites are concerned, is that the Islamist extremist groups under attack in Aleppo are being supported and used by Washington and the European powers to attempt to overthrow the Russian-backed

Syrian government. Civilian casualties are therefore “war crimes.”

ISIS, by contrast, is considered an obstacle in Washington because it used the weapons and recruits it gained as a result of US intrigues in Syria to seize large parts of western and northern Iraq in 2014, threatening the pro-US puppet regimes in Baghdad and the Kurdish region. Any civilians killed in the process of recapturing Mosul will therefore be brushed aside as “collateral damage.”

In both Syria and Iraq, US objectives are the same: asserting its dominance over the key oil-producing region of the world.

Mosul is being attacked by up to 20,000 Iraqi Army personnel and 10,000 Kurdish Peshmerga troops, reinforced by some 6,000 Iraqi police, thousands of anti-ISIS Christian, Turkmen and Sunni militia fighters and thousands more militia members loyal to the Shiite-based political parties that control the Baghdad regime.

Behind the scenes, the US military is monitoring and effectively commanding the onslaught. American, British, French, Australian and Jordanian jet fighters and helicopters are providing air support to the disparate government forces. US Marine and French Army units are giving artillery fire support. Hundreds of American, British, Australian, German and Italian special forces and “trainers” are involved in the battle, advising Iraqi and Kurdish units and directing air and artillery attacks.

Every atrocity for which the Russian regime and its Syrian client state are responsible in Aleppo will be matched, and most likely exceeded, by the US-backed forces in Iraq. Past experience, including the assault earlier this year on the western Iraqi city of Fallujah, leave little doubt as to the outcome of the attack on Mosul. Entire suburbs will be reduced to rubble from

both the air and the ground, regardless of how many desperate civilians are hiding in their homes. The city's electricity, water and sewerage systems will be destroyed. Medical services and transport networks will be rendered dysfunctional.

The destruction of Mosul and enormous toll in civilian casualties are being justified in advance as unavoidable, due to fanatical ISIS resistance. The estimates of the number of ISIS militants still in the city range from just a few thousand to over 10,000. Lurid accounts have appeared of extensive preparations by ISIS for protracted, street-to-street fighting. US and Iraqi officials, citing Mosul residents, have told media that buildings and cars have been rigged with explosives, minefields laid and roadblocks erected on the main thoroughfares. A tunnel network has allegedly been constructed linking various areas of the city.

Mosul, to recall the reported 1968 US military statement in regard to the Vietnamese town of B?n Tre, must be destroyed "to save it."

The indifference toward the lives and well-being of the city's population is revealed in the leaflets that were dropped, in the tens of thousands, over the city on Saturday night. According to a Reuters report, one leaflet advised: "Keep calm and tell your children that it [the bombardment] is only a game or thunder before the rain... Women should not scream or shout, to preserve the children's spirit." Another ominously warned: "If you see an army unit, stay at least 25 metres away and avoid any sudden movements."

The Iraqis who survive their "liberation" from ISIS by US-led forces will be forced to flee the unliveable ruins of the city for overcrowded and inadequate refugee camps. No serious preparations, such as pre-built tent cities with hospitals, food and water supplies, have been made to cope with such a situation. Aid agencies fear that tens of thousands will die from injury, exposure, disease, dehydration or starvation.

The assault on Mosul will join the long list of horrors and crimes that have been inflicted on the Iraqi people by US imperialism and its military machine over a period of more than 25 years, in Washington's quest for hegemony over one of the most resource-rich and strategically significant regions of the world.

The thousands who die will join those who lost their lives as a result of the 1991 Gulf War, the subsequent sanctions imposed on Iraq, the legacy of depleted

uranium weapons contamination, the 2003 invasion, the murderous Sunni-Shiite sectarian warfare that was deliberately provoked by the US occupation forces, and the predations of the US-backed Iraqi government after most American troops were withdrawn in 2010-2011.

Credible estimates place the cumulative death toll over a 25-year period at well over 1.5 million and as high as two million. Since 2003 alone, at least four million Iraqis have been internally displaced or forced to flee the country as refugees.

The defence of the masses of Iraq and the Middle East against imperialist oppression must be at the very forefront of the struggle for an international anti-war movement of the working class, based on a revolutionary and socialist perspective.



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