The siege of Mosul and the crimes of US imperialism

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The US-led offensive against the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, begun this week, is part of the protracted and unfolding US war crimes that have killed, maimed and displaced millions across the Middle East.

Once again, a horrific humanitarian catastrophe is being unleashed upon a civilian population that suffered more than its share of death and destruction during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent eight years of American occupation.

This occupation relied on the age-old oppressor's tactic of divide and rule, stoking sectarian conflicts that had a particularly bitter character in Mosul with its broad intermingling of different ethnic and religious groups, including Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Yazidis, Armenians and others.

The sectarianism promoted by the US occupiers created fertile ground for the growth of the Islamic State (ISIS), which the present offensive is ostensibly directed at crushing. The Shia-dominated government installed in Baghdad persecuted the Sunni majority of Mosul and Anbar province, jailing and killing prominent Sunni leaders, suppressing the population and treating all opposition to its rule as "terrorism."

ISIS, an offshoot of Al Qaeda, is itself a direct product of US imperialism's interventions in the region, utilizing Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias, first in Libya and then in Syria, as proxy forces in Washington's wars for regime change.

When it stormed into northern Iraq from Syria in June of 2014, ISIS exposed the rot within the government and military created by Washington through a war that cost the US nearly 5,000 soldiers and trillions of dollars. In the face of a far smaller force, the Iraqi security forces disintegrated, throwing down their weapons and tearing off their uniforms, while a substantial layer of the population welcomed the Islamist militia as preferable to the rule of the sectarian regime in Baghdad.

This history is a closed book as far as the US media is concerned. Once again, its reporters are embedded with the US-led forces, enthusiastically promoting their advances, as if the bloody events that began in 2003 had never happened.

The US-led assault on Mosul is being portrayed as a battle to "liberate" the city from the clutches of ISIS, which is accused of exploiting the population and using civilians as "human shields." Such allegations, also leveled against the Iraqi government in 2003, have always served as an advance alibi for the slaughter of civilians in US bombardments.

Curiously, 300 miles to the west, where Russian-backed Syrian government forces are attempting to wrest the eastern part of the city of Aleppo from similar Islamist militias, the media speaks in terms of "war crimes" rather than liberation, and no one suggests that the "rebels" could be making use of the civilian population, much less employing "human shields."

The grotesque double standard only underscores the fact that the real objective of Washington's intervention in both Iraq and Syria is not the eradication of terrorism, much less the promotion of human rights, but rather the assertion of US hegemony over the Middle East at the expense of and in preparation for conflicts with American imperialism's larger rivals, particularly Russia and China.

To that end, Washington is prepared to employ both military sieges, as in Mosul, in the name of combating terrorism, and the arming of Al Qaeda-connected militias in Syria in the name of promoting human rights. There are credible reports that the operation in Mosul may involve both, with the US and Saudi Arabia working to funnel ISIS fighters out of the Iraqi city and

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back into Syria to fight against the government and its principal ally, Russia.

No doubt the Pentagon also sees the assault on Mosul as an important exercise in testing out its doctrine for urban military operations in what are seen as coming major wars. These bloodthirsty theories were spelled out in a report titled “The Future of the Army” issued last month by the influential US think tank the Atlantic Council.

Drafted by a retired major general who served as the commander of US forces in Afghanistan and a military adviser to several US administrations, the report projects a coming world of intense social inequality and class conflict in which “urban operations will increasingly dominate land warfare,” and US armies will operate “in densely packed metropolitan areas where civilian populations are a part of the battlefield.”

The people of Mosul, including an estimated 600,000 children, will be treated as human guinea pigs in this operation, which could drag on for months, entailing not only relentless US air strikes and artillery bombardment, but also the systematic starvation of the population. All of this will unfold under the watchful eyes of the US military command.

The bloody operation in Mosul has been launched less than three weeks before the US presidential election. It is a massive escalation of US military intervention in the Middle East, with US Special Forces troops accompanying Iraqi government and Kurdish units into battle, and US warplanes and artillery units providing the bulk of the siege’s firepower. Yet, there is no public discussion, nor even a hint of questioning of US policy by the candidates of the two major parties.

President Barack Obama, who was elected in 2008 in large measure due to the false perception that he was an opponent of the Iraq war and other crimes of the Bush administration, has not even bothered to make a public statement to the American people explaining this new escalation. Asked about it at a press conference Tuesday, he acknowledged that the offensive would produce “heartbreaking circumstances.” Concluding with what amounted to a chilling acknowledgement that the city will be reduced to smoking rubble, he declared, “It’s hard when you leave your home.”

All of this is supposed to be accepted by the American people as just another episode in a state of unending and continuously escalating global war.

From the media and the entire political establishment, there is not a single note of criticism of US war policy. Moreover, 13-1/2 years after millions took to the streets in the US and across the globe to oppose the impending 2003 invasion of Iraq, there is not even verbal opposition from the pseudo-left organizations and tendencies that trace their origins back to the middle-class anti-war protest movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This socio-political layer, including organizations such as the International Socialist Organization in the US, the Left Party in Germany and the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France, reflects the interests of privileged sections of the middle class. They have all moved far to the right, becoming today one of the principal constituencies for “human rights” imperialist interventions, as in Libya and Syria.

The siege of Mosul, a new and bloody US crime in the Middle East, is part of a far broader escalation of military interventions in that region and around the globe that threaten to coalesce into another world war, involving the major nuclear powers. The fight against this mounting threat requires the building of a new mass anti-war movement based upon the working class and the youth and directed against the capitalist system.

As a critical step in building a movement against imperialist war, the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are holding a November 5 conference in Detroit*Socialism vs. Capitalism and War*. We urge all of our readers and supporters to register for and attend this vitally important event.

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