

# US threatens Iran after fall of ISIS “capital” of Raqqa

James Cogan  
23 October 2017

US-backed forces announced on October 16 they had fully captured Raqqa, the Syrian city on the Euphrates River that the fundamentalist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had styled the “capital” of its “caliphate.”

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), largely comprised of Kurdish nationalist militias, laid siege to Raqqa in June. For four-and-a-half months, ISIS fighters and tens of thousands of civilians in the city were subjected to relentless, daily air strikes by American, French and British fighter-bombers. Hundreds of American special forces personnel served as “advisors” and spotters. A US marine unit provided ground artillery support.

By all accounts, Raqqa has been destroyed, with at least 80 percent of all buildings uninhabitable and the remainder severely damaged. Major General Igor Konashenkov, the main spokesperson for the Russian Defence Ministry, told journalists: “Raqqa has inherited the fate of [the German city] Dresden in 1945, wiped off the face of the Earth by Anglo-American bombardments.”

Of the city’s pre-ISIS takeover population of more than 200,000, barely 45,000 remain. The rest are dead or scattered in refugee camps.

The exact casualties may never be known. The monitoring organisation Airwars claims to have verifiable reports that airstrikes killed at least 1,300 civilians. It notes allegations that the figure is as high as 3,200. During the final stages of the offensive and the intense bombardment, hundreds more may have been killed and left buried under tonnes of rubble.

The number of ISIS fighters killed is also unknown. It certainly runs into the thousands. As during the US-backed assault on ISIS in the Iraqi city of Mosul, no mercy has been shown, especially to “foreign fighters.”

Brett McGurk, the White House special envoy to the

US-led anti-ISIS “coalition,” told Dubai television: “Our mission is to make sure that any foreign fighter who is here, who joined [ISIS] from a foreign country and came into Syria, they will die in Syria. So if they’re in Raqqa, they’re going to die in Raqqa.” McGurk first went to Iraq in 2004 as part of the US occupation regime, and has held increasingly responsible positions in the region through the Bush, Obama and now Trump administrations, symbolizing the continuity in the US imperialist intervention in the region.

Up to 6,000 people are believed to have come from Europe alone to join ISIS in Syria. They particularly came between 2011 and 2014, when ISIS and other fundamentalist organisations were treated as de-facto allies of the US and European powers in their efforts to overthrow the Russian- and Iranian-backed Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad.

The end of ISIS control over large swathes of Syria and Iraq has not ended the carnage in both countries, but opened up a potentially even bloodier stage.

The focus in Washington is shifting to a stepped-up confrontation with Iran and Russia, which have provided significant military assistance to the Assad government and its armed forces against both the imperialist-backed “rebels” and ISIS. Iran also has given large-scale support to the Shiite-based political parties that dominate the Iraqi government.

The October 21 *Washington Post* editorial asserted that the “terrorists’ defeat raises complex challenges for the United States in Iraq and Syria, where Iran and Russia are consolidating their influence at the expense of US allies.”

In Iraq, the editorial complained, the US “remained passive as Iranian-led militia forces helped the Iraqi army push US-allied Iraqi Kurds out of the disputed

city of Kirkuk and nearby oil fields.”

The “Russia-Iran-Assad coalition,” the *Post* continued, used the preoccupation of the US-backed forces on re-taking Raqqa to launch its own operations and was “winning what has been a race to grab territory in eastern Syria, including the country’s main oilfields.”

The editorial concluded: “A failure by the United States to defend its allies or promote new political arrangements for the two Arab states will lead only to more war, the rise of new terrorist threats and, ultimately, the necessity of more US intervention.”

Frederick Kagan, a bellicose advocate of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and regime-change in Syria, was even more explicit in calling for the US to initiate a military confrontation with Iranian and Russian forces.

Writing in the *Hill*, Kagan accused the Obama and Trump administrations of “acquiescence to Iranian military dominance and expansion in Syria,” which was “incompatible” with a strategy of shattering Iran’s influence in the Middle East.

Kagan called for the American military to “counterattack” and “retaliate,” if any US-allied militias came under attack from “Syrian, Iranian or Russian forces.” The US, he declared, should be prepared to risk war with nuclear-armed Russia and Iran, as they would back down in the face of American military superiority.

In a measure of the reckless and even deranged discussion underway in sections of the American establishment, Kagan suggested Moscow would not escalate a conflict even if the US military attacked and destroyed Russian ships and aircraft.

Kagan opined: “This is the calculation and the principle that underlies deterrence and that can allow an intelligent American strategy to escalate against Iran in Syria with a reasonable expectation of avoiding all-out war.”

The Trump administration had already signalled a sharp intensification of US hostility toward Iran with its demand on October 13 for the “renegotiation” of the nuclear deal struck with Tehran in 2015. In defiance of the support for the deal by the key European allies of the US, the Trump administration is moving toward the unilateral re-imposition of sweeping sanctions against Iran.

Over the weekend, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson

ramped up the denunciations of Iran during his visit to Saudi Arabia—Tehran’s main regional opponent, which the United States has armed to the teeth.

Tillerson demanded “any foreign fighters in Iraq need to go home and allow the Iraqi people to regain control of areas that had been overtaken by ISIS that have now been liberated.” The US official was referring only to Iranian forces—not the thousands of American troops and mercenary contractors in the country.

Tillerson declared that both the US and Saudi Arabia “believe” that companies—including European companies—must stop conducting business with Iranian corporations linked to the country’s Revolutionary Guard.

Even as the prospect of a catastrophic war launched by the US hangs over the Korean peninsula, Washington is heightening tensions and the danger of war in the Middle East.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**