

Fifteen years since the launching of the Iraq War

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Fifteen years ago today, on the night of March 20-21, 2003, the armed forces of the United States and Great Britain began an illegal and unprovoked invasion of Iraq, a country of 26 million people. As bombs and missiles began to rain down on Iraq's cities, and tanks and armored vehicles crossed the border from Kuwait, US President George W. Bush set in motion a war of aggression whose catastrophic consequences now shape world politics.

The *World Socialist Web Site* described the consequences of this onslaught for the Iraqi people as “sociocide,” the deliberate destruction of the entire infrastructure of modern civilization (see: “The US war and occupation of Iraq—the murder of a society”). Similar catastrophes have now been visited upon Syria, Libya and Yemen, as a direct result of the continuation and extension of US aggression by Bush's Democratic successor, Barack Obama. Now Donald Trump threatens to add Iran and North Korea to the list.

According to the running tally of the Costs of War Project, sponsored by the Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs at Brown University, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined killed 370,000 people directly and 800,000 people indirectly (with Iraq accounting for the bulk of the total). Other estimates, based on mortality surveys and other public health measurements, place the death toll as high as 2.4 million.

The war on Iraq was launched by President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the basis of deliberate and flagrant lies: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had “weapons of mass destruction” that threatened the world's population; and he was in alliance with the Al Qaeda movement of Osama bin Laden, which had carried out the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

The truth—well known at the time to the propagandists for imperialism—was that Hussein had never had more than primitive chemical weapons, supplied to him by the US and the European powers for use against Iran during the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. His rudimentary nuclear program had been shut down completely under US and UN supervision. And Hussein was implacably hostile to the Sunni

fundamentalists of Al Qaeda, who in turn sought to overthrow his secular nationalist regime.

The real motivation for the war, as the WSSWS explained, was to seize control of the oil resources of Iraq, among the richest in the world, and to gain for US imperialism a dominant strategic position in the Middle East, the source of the bulk of the world's oil exports, thus giving Washington a stranglehold over the oil lifeline to its major rivals in Europe and Asia.

As a matter of international law, the US-UK invasion of Iraq was a criminal act, a brazenly unjustified violation of Iraq's rights as a sovereign nation. Under the principles laid down at the Nuremberg Tribunal, which declared that the planning and launching of a war of aggression was the supreme crime of the Nazis, from which all other crimes flowed, including the Holocaust, Bush, Blair, Vice President Cheney and aides like Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice should all have been prosecuted as war criminals and jailed for the rest of their lives.

Joining them in the dock would be the media pundits and editors who spread the Bush administration's lies and deluged American public opinion with war propaganda, in a concerted and deliberate effort to suppress mass antiwar sentiment. The *New York Times* played the leading role, with correspondent Judith Miller serving as the main conduit for official claims about “weapons of mass destruction,” while columnist Thomas Friedman declared that he had “no problem with a war for oil.” *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen gushed that Colin Powell's presentation before the United Nations Security Council—based on manufactured “evidence” of Iraqi chemical weapons stockpiles—was “so strong, so convincing” that “there is no choice” but to go to war.

In absolute contrast to the complacent apologetics of the corporate-controlled media, the *World Socialist Web Site* carried out a continuous exposure of the lies of the Bush administration, while seeking to encourage the mass opposition to the war voiced in the unprecedented mass demonstrations carried out worldwide throughout the

months before the US-UK attack, involving tens of millions of people.

WSWS editorial chairman David North, in a statement published March 21, 2003, compared the unprovoked attack on a largely defenseless country to the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, while noting that, like the Nazis, the Bush administration had embarked on a course of action that must end in catastrophe. North warned:

“Whatever the outcome of the initial stages of the conflict that has begun, American imperialism has a rendezvous with disaster. It cannot conquer the world. It cannot reimpose colonial shackles upon the masses of the Middle East. It will not find through the medium of war a viable solution to its internal maladies. Rather, the unforeseen difficulties and mounting resistance engendered by war will intensify all of the internal contradictions of American society.”

This warning has been completely vindicated. The impact of the war on American society has been devastating. To cite, again, the figures published by the Cost of War Project in November 2017, by the end of the current fiscal year, in September 2018, the US federal government will have spent or obligated \$5.6 trillion on post-9/11 wars, the bulk of that in Iraq, including medical and disability payments to veterans for the remainder of their lives.

Moreover, since the Bush and Obama administrations financed war spending by borrowing, rather than taxing the wealthy, the federal government has incurred interest costs that will amount eventually to \$8 trillion, more than the actual cost of the war. In other words, Wall Street will rake in that much in additional income from the wars it has imposed on the American people and the world.

While 4,800 US soldiers died in Iraq, the human toll goes far beyond that. An estimated one million out of the two million soldiers who had tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan have filed claims and begun receiving disability benefits, including hundreds of thousands suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries.

There are other equally pernicious consequences for American society as a whole. Democratic rights have been shredded by the build-up of a national-security state that engages in mass surveillance of the entire US population, including telecommunications, the Internet and social media. The entire society has been saturated in violence, stemming not only from Iraq but from a quarter century of virtually uninterrupted military aggression, in the Middle East, Central Asia, the former Yugoslavia, Africa and—perhaps sooner rather than later—the Far East.

The effort to sustain a position of worldwide dominance out of all proportion to the actual weight of the United States in the world economy—the US spends more on the military than the next dozen countries combined—has been the

driving force for drastic cutbacks in social spending, undermining education, infrastructure, healthcare and other social necessities.

Another consequence of the war in Iraq has been the rise of the military-intelligence apparatus to a central role in American political life. Iraq and Afghanistan war criminals—Kelly, Mattis, McMaster—direct the national security policy of the Trump administration. The Democratic Party is currently being taken over by a slew of military-intelligence operatives, nearly all of them veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most were not rank-and-file soldiers, but commanders, Special Forces operatives, or intelligence agents, who shared both the political outlook and the criminal responsibility of those who organized and instigated the war.

The 15th anniversary of the war has been little noted in the American media, which prefers to pass over the crimes of imperialism, and its own complicity, in virtual silence. This is all the more necessary, as the same methods used to justify the war with Iraq are now being employed to instigate an even more terrible calamity, a campaign of provocation and aggression against Russia whose logic leads to an all-out war involving nuclear weapons.

If anything, the current campaign against Russia is based on even more flimsy and transparent lies than the campaign against Iraq, with Vladimir Putin replacing Saddam Hussein as the target for demonization. The alleged Russian poisoning of British spy Sergei Skripal has become, in this narrative, the equivalent of Saddam Hussein’s “weapons of mass destruction.” British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson seeks to reprise Colin Powell’s role in delivering “proof” of the necessity for an escalating confrontation with the regime targeted by Washington and London.

These 15 years have not passed in vain, however. All over the world, there is a growing audience for the one consistent voice of opposition to imperialist war, the *World Socialist Web Site*. The Marxist perspective advanced by the WSWS shows the road forward for the international working class. The fight against war today requires the building of the Socialist Equality Party (US) and its sister parties around the world in the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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