

Biden's bombing of Iraq and Syria: the normalization of war

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Washington ordered airstrikes against two nations simultaneously Sunday night, using F-15 and F-16 warplanes to rain an assortment of precision-guided munitions on two targets in Syria and one in Iraq.

Sources on the ground reported five people killed on the Iraqi side of the border and one child killed and several other people wounded on the Syrian side.

Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi denounced the airstrike as "a blatant and unacceptable violation of Iraqi sovereignty." Syria's Foreign Ministry told the official *Sana* news agency that the air raids demonstrated "the recklessness of US policies and the need for Washington to withdraw its aggressor forces" from the region.

The attacks were answered Monday by a militia shelling a US base in Syria and threats by Iraqi militias of retaliation against US forces.

This is second such bombing raid launched by the Pentagon against the Iraqi-Syrian border region since the Democratic administration of President Joe Biden came into office in January. The first, against a target in eastern Syria, came just one month after Biden entered the White House.

That February airstrike marked the first such US bombing inside Syria since the end of 2019, when the Trump administration brought the region, and potentially the entire planet, to the brink of war with its drone missile assassination of Iranian Revolutionary Guard General Qassem Suleimani. It signaled to the world what Biden's vacuous slogan proclaiming that "America is back" really means: US imperialism is embarking upon an even more aggressive foreign policy under the Democrats, threatening the world with catastrophic new wars.

Ostensibly, both Monday's and February's attacks were carried out in retaliation against attacks on US bases inside Iraq by Iranian-backed Iraqi militias hostile to the nearly two-decade-long American occupation. In February, the Pentagon cited a rocket that was fired at the US base in Iraqi Kurdistan's capital of Erbil. The latest airstrikes were justified as a response to militia attacks using drones against several targets, including a secret CIA facility.

One of the remarkable characteristics of the latest attacks is their failure to elicit any significant response or analysis, much less criticism, from within the US media and political establishment. A US president attacking two countries on the same day, in flagrant violation of international law and with no legal authorization from the US Congress, barely makes the news. Leading Democrats and Republicans both praised the action, with some suggesting that further aggression was in order against Iran.

Two decades after the launching of the "Global War on Terror" and the bloody colonial-style interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, illegal military actions by the United States launched without warning in any part of the globe have become fully normalized. While the Obama administration acknowledged "six theaters" in this "global war"—Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Somalia—the full list of countries and entities targeted by Washington remains classified under the Biden administration.

The Pentagon's claim that Washington's bombing and killing of Iraqis and Syrians was "pursuant to its right of self-defense" and designed to protect "US personnel" is nowhere questioned. The most obvious question is, if Washington is so intent on protecting its personnel, why doesn't it withdraw them?

In the wake of the Suleimani assassination, the Iraqi Parliament demanded the immediate withdrawal of all US and other foreign occupation forces. A year and a half later, 2,500 US troops remain on the ground, along with an unknown number of military contractors, CIA operatives and other personnel. A force of some 900 uniformed troops, backed by an unknown number of contractors are occupying Syria in blatant violation of the country's sovereignty and with the express purpose of denying the government in Damascus access to oil reserves needed for the country's reconstruction after a decade-long US-orchestrated war for regime change that has left it in ruins.

In both countries, Washington bases its occupation on the lie that American troops are there to combat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. ISIS, a Frankenstein's monster

created by US backing for Al Qaeda forces in Syria, was decisively defeated in Iraq—in large measure by the very militias that the Pentagon is now attacking—in 2017, and lost its last hold on Syrian territory in March of 2019.

The real reasons for the continued military presence in the region are bound up with US imperialism's desperate drive to reverse the decline of its global hegemony through militarism. The Biden administration, like the Obama and Trump administrations before it, made rhetorical promises to end the "forever wars" in the region, with the patent aim of directing the full force of Washington's military apparatus against its "great power rivals," first and foremost China.

They have all found it impossible, however, to extricate the US military from the Middle East, which remains a strategic battlefield in the confrontation with China, which has emerged as the region's number one investor and the number one trading partner for countries that include Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

This was spelled out last week by Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Marine Corps Gen. Kenneth McKenzie Jr. in an online conference held by the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank.

Noting that China depends upon the region for half of its energy supplies, General McKenzie stated: "China's interests in the Middle East and North Africa extend well beyond oil. Straddling the world's major shipping routes, the region will remain key terrain in a geostrategic sense, long after we've completed the transition to renewable sources of energy. As such, it is one of the principal arenas for strategic competition between two systems with very different values ..."

The eruption of US aggression in the Middle East is part of a global escalation of imperialist militarism. Last week saw the dangerous provocation by the HMS Defender, in which Russian forces fired warning shots and dropped bombs in the British warship's path after it deliberately entered waters claimed by Russia off of Crimea. Far from seeking to ease tensions, NATO is now launching Operation Sea Breeze, a massive two-week military exercise in the Black Sea that Moscow has warned can lead to confrontation.

Only a day before the provocation by the British ship in the Black Sea, the guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur was sent through the Taiwan Strait, provoking protests from Beijing. This is the sixth US warship sent through the Taiwan Strait since Biden took office on January 20, increasing the threat that the sensitive waterway will become a flashpoint for a US-China military confrontation.

Meanwhile, the Japan-based USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier strike group has been sent for the first time into the North Arabian Sea. While the Pentagon has claimed its deployment near the Persian Gulf is to provide security for

US troops withdrawing from Afghanistan, it is far more likely that its arrival amid the US airstrikes is no mere coincidence, a preparation for wider military action, including against Iran.

Any one of these regions can provide the spark for a global military conflagration.

The normalization of war has been joined with the normalization of mass death as the ruling classes the world over subordinate the defense of human life to the pursuit of profit, even as yet another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic drives up an official toll that already numbers 4 million lives lost.

In 1938, on the eve of the outbreak of World War II, Leon Trotsky wrote in *The Transitional Program*, the founding document of the Fourth International:

"Imperialist war is the continuation and sharpening of the predatory politics of the bourgeoisie. The struggle of the proletariat against war is the continuation and sharpening of its class struggle."

The murderous pursuit of profits at the expense of millions of lives during the pandemic has exposed the essential antagonism between the capitalist system and the needs of humanity and provoked an explosive growth of the class struggle internationally.

It is this struggle of the world working class that provides the only genuine foundation for opposing the war drive by US and world imperialism. The burning question is that of a revolutionary leadership that can impart to this struggle a socialist and internationalist perspective. This requires the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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