

The catastrophe unleashed by US imperialism in the Middle East

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14 January 2014

In December 2011, having been forced to pull the last US combat troops out of Iraq after failing to secure a status of forces agreement with Baghdad, President Barack Obama repeatedly offered the assurance that “the tide of war is receding.”

Little more than two years later, the entire region is engulfed in violence due to the policies pursued by US imperialism, with the possibility of a region-wide war emerging as a serious threat.

The Obama administration is currently pursuing negotiations with Russia on a possible political settlement in Syria, and with Iran on a rapprochement based on an agreement on its nuclear program and at least a partial lifting of economic sanctions.

Both sets of talks were initiated last September, after Washington stepped back from the brink of a direct intervention in Syria that was overwhelmingly opposed by the people of the US and the entire world. Far from a turn to peace and diplomacy, however, the shift from bombing Syria to negotiations emerged as part of US imperialism’s “pivot to Asia,” based on the strategic conception that defusing the confrontation with Iran would create more favorable conditions for prosecuting the conflict with US imperialism’s more essential global rival, China.

Yet Washington is hardly managing to execute its pivot neatly. It is finding it increasingly difficult to extricate itself from an unfolding catastrophe of its own making in the Middle East.

The US-backed war for regime-change in Syria, which has claimed the lives of some 130,000 people and forced 9 million from their homes, has increasingly spilled across Syria’s borders into Lebanon, where assassinations, suicide bombings and armed clashes have become daily occurrences, and Iraq, which has been the scene of an armed standoff between the Iraqi army and local militias in the western cities of Fallujah and Ramadi.

The primary responsibility—political and moral—for this bloodletting lies with US imperialism. It has committed war crimes whose dimensions can be compared only to those carried out by the Third Reich in the Second World War. Aggressive war—the principal charge leveled against Nazi war criminals in the Nuremberg Trials—is also the chief crime of the US government, from which so many other horrors have flowed.

The Iraq war, promoted on the basis of lies about non-existent weapons of mass destruction, was a calculated and predatory act of imperialist aggression. It was aimed at asserting US hegemony in a strategically vital and oil-rich region and providing the entire planet with a “shock and awe” demonstration of the naked power of American militarism.

In the process, the US military succeeded not only in blowing to smithereens a fragile society, already war-ravaged and devastated by sanctions, but also undermining the entire regional state system.

Washington is responsible not only for the massive death toll in the nearly nine years of war in Iraq—

placed by a recent US-Canadian survey at over 500,000—but also for the potentially millions more deaths to come given the continuing unraveling of the Middle East. The cost in blood of a new partition of the region would likely put the partition of India some 65 years ago in the shade.

Among those involved in the fighting is the Al Qaeda-affiliated ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), which has been one of the most prominent elements in the Western-backed proxy war to oust the government of President Bashar al-Assad across the border in Syria.

As for Al Qaeda, it did not exist in Iraq before the US invaded. Now it has been vastly strengthened by the US-backed war in Syria and the flood of money and weaponry funneled by Washington and its regional allies to the so-called “rebels.”

As the 100th anniversary of the First World War approaches, it is becoming increasingly clear that the state system founded on the division of the region by the old colonial powers, France and Britain, in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 is being blown apart by new imperialist interventions and the impact on the oppressed nations of the Arab world of the crisis of global capitalism.

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