

In wake of Obama speech, UN debate dominated by “terror,” war

By Bill Van Auken
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In the wake of President Barack Obama’s brazen speech Wednesday before the United Nations General Assembly demanding that the world line up behind his war in Iraq and Syria, the subsequent UN debate has seen the leaders of major allies solidarize themselves with US militarism.

Leaders of other regimes have sought to capitalize on the “terror” hysteria to justify their own crimes and repression. And a few, for their own reasons, rose to challenge Obama’s cynical and borderline delusional characterization of the world situation, indicting Washington itself for the crisis in the Middle East.

President Hassan Rouhani was one of the first speakers Thursday morning. Rouhani coupled his indictment of the US role in the region with expressions of hope that his government can reach an accommodation with US and European imperialism through the ongoing negotiations over Tehran’s nuclear program.

The Iranian president stated that “extremism” in the region is “the offspring of yesterday’s colonialism” and a “reaction to yesterday’s racism.” He indicted unnamed “intelligence agencies” for having “put blades in the hands of madmen.”

He pointed directly to the decade of US wars in the region as the source of the present crisis. “The strategic blunders of the West in the Middle-East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus have turned these parts of the world into a haven for terrorists and extremists,” he told the General Assembly.

“Military aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq and improper interference in the developments in Syria are clear examples of this erroneous strategic approach in the Middle East,” he said. “As non-peaceful approach, aggression, and occupation target the lives and livelihoods of ordinary people, they result in different adverse psychological and behavioral consequences that are today manifested in the form of violence and murder in the Middle East and North Africa, even attracting some citizens from other parts of the world.”

The terms “strategic blunders” and “erroneous strategic approach” to describe the historic crimes of imperialism in the region, which are being continued and deepened with the present intervention into Iraq and Syria, are revealing. Rouhani’s government, representing the interests of the Iranian bourgeoisie, is seeking to reach a deal with the US and its allies

that would lift the sanctions imposed on the pretext of punishing Tehran for its nuclear program.

Similarly, he described the sanctions as a “strategic mistake.” He declared, “A final accord regarding Iran’s peaceful nuclear program can serve as the beginning of multilateral collaboration aimed at promoting security, peace and development,” and that such a deal would represent an “historic opportunity” for the West, presumably to pursue its interests with the Iranian regime as its ally.

In pursuit of such aims, Rouhani met on the sidelines of the General Assembly with British Prime Minister David Cameron—the first such Anglo-Iranian talks since the toppling of the Shah in 1979—as well as with French President Francois Hollande and Germany’s Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Both Cameron and Hollande echoed Obama’s bellicose speech, affirming their determination to participate fully in the US-led imperialist intervention. The leaders of the two powers that formerly colonized Iraq and Syria, as well as most of the region, cast themselves as the champions of universal values of freedom, democracy and civilization.

Hollande began his speech by reporting that France was “going through a tragedy” as the result of the beheading of a French tourist, Herve Gourdel, at the hands of an Algerian Islamist group. He charged that the killing was directed against the French people because they “defend human dignity against barbarism.” France was the first major power to join the US in bombing Iraq. While it had refrained from carrying out strikes in Syria, French officials have indicated that that too is now being considered.

Hollande invoked “the force of military action” in a war “against terrorism that knows no borders.” He also boasted of French imperialism’s role in Mali, where it has carried out a protracted intervention without UN sanction to pursue its neocolonial ambitions in Africa under the cover of a struggle “against terrorism.”

He concluded with the cynical and demagogic declaration that “France will never give in to terrorism because it is our duty, and, more than that, because it is our honor.”

Similarly, Cameron insisted on the determination of his government to join the US-led war, declaring the need to “be

uncompromising, using all the means at our disposal—including military force—to hunt down these terrorists.”

He insisted, “We must not allow past mistakes to become an excuse for indifference or inaction.” Whether these “mistakes” include the decimation of Iraqi society in the predatory US war launched with British participation in 2003, the US-NATO war that left Libya in a state of civil war and chaos or the Western arming, and support for Islamist militias against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, Cameron failed to make clear.

The British prime minister also used his remarks to argue for the “war against terror” to be stepped up on a far wider arena, including in Nigeria, Somalia, Libya and Yemen.

Speaking Thursday afternoon, Australia’s Prime Minister Tony Abbott made it clear that he was on the same page as Obama, denouncing the “murderous rage” of ISIS as well as Russian “aggression” in Ukraine. Earlier, in a special Security Council session that passed a sweeping resolution on “foreign terrorist fighters,” Abbott pledged his government’s “utterly unflinching” support for the US-led “war on terrorism.”

Egypt’s military strongman President Abdel-Fattah El-Sissi, one of the erstwhile American allies that Washington is attempting to line up behind the war in Iraq and Syria, used his remarks to turn the Western “war on terrorism” into a cover and justification for the coup that brought him to power and the brutal repression he has carried out since.

“The world has started to grasp the reality and understand why Egyptians revolted against extremism that wanted to break the unity of the nation,” said El-Sisi. He was referring to the elected Muslim Brotherhood government of President Mohamed Mursi that was overthrown by the army in July of last year, equating it with ISIS.

He claimed that since the coup, the Egyptian regime—which has sentenced thousands to death or lengthy prison terms for political offenses and holds tens of thousands more detainees—is building a “civil democratic state” with respect for law and human rights.

Other regional allies of Washington used the General Assembly debate to lash out at each other. Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, for example, speaking barely two hours after General Sisi, declared, “The elected president of Egypt was overthrown by a coup,” adding, “The United Nations and democratic countries have done nothing and the person conducting the coup is legitimized.”

Also challenging Obama’s delusional claims that America’s role in the world was to oppose those who would “bully” smaller nations were two Latin American heads of state, Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia. Both governments have faced repeated US attempts at subversion and destabilization. Both also are confronting mounting unrest in the working class and no doubt saw the UN speeches as an opportunity to deflect opposition from the left.

Maduro told the Assembly, “Venezuela has had to endure bullying, a permanent conspiracy on the part of the imperialist

forces and the forces allied with the US empire which have attempted again and again to undermine democracy.” He charged Washington with responsibility for the abortive coup of 2002 as well as the recent upheavals in the country provoked by right-wing protests demanding the fall of his government.

He also blamed Washington for the violence in the Middle East, condemning the “terrorist attack carried out by NATO and its allies against Syria for a year and a half for regime change.”

For his part, Morales said, “Bolivia condemns and rejects the intervention of the United States of America in Iraq, which has provoked the present crisis in that country.” He recalled that Washington had “said that Iraq possessed large quantities of weapons of mass destruction, and this ploy turned out to be one of the biggest lies in the history of imperialism.”

The lesson of the Iraq war, Morales added, was that “wherever the United States of America intervenes it leaves behind destruction, hatred, misery and death, but it also leaves wealth in the hands of those who profit from wars, the transnationals of the arms and petroleum industries.”

The Bolivian president concluded, “Every year here we hear Mr. Obama give a speech of war, of arrogance and of threats to the people of the world. This is also a speech of extremist fanaticism.”

Most of the speeches are given to a General Assembly hall that is at least half empty, a graphic expression of the impotence of the UN, whose founding charter has been turned into a dead letter as US imperialism pursues an openly stated policy of “preventive,” i.e., aggressive, war.

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