

The “liberation” of Mosul: Washington’s latest war crime in the Middle East

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President Donald Trump issued a statement on Monday celebrating the “liberation of Mosul” as a “victory over terrorists who are the enemies of all civilized people.”

The fate of Iraq’s second-largest city and that of the country as a whole, however, has proven that when it comes to enemies of humanity, ISIS is a bit player compared to US imperialism.

This city, which three years ago had a population of nearly two million, has been subjected to a murderous siege that dragged on for nearly nine months. The scenes of destruction in Mosul are comparable only to the kind of devastation that was wrought upon European cities in the Second World War. The Old Town of western Mosul, the heart of this ancient city, has been largely flattened by US missiles, bombs and shells, with hardly a single residential or commercial building left intact.

The crimes carried out against the civilian population are on a Hitlerian scale. Close to one million people have been driven from their homes. Those trapped in the city were subjected to a continuous bombardment by US warplanes, attack helicopters and heavy artillery. Early on in the siege, the destruction of basic infrastructure and the cutting off of all supply routes deprived hundreds of thousands of men, women and children of electricity, clean drinking water and access to adequate food and medical care.

The total number of dead and wounded may never be known. Buried in the reports of the victory celebrations by the US-backed Iraqi forces is the grim fact that these troops were dancing on rubble amid the unmistakable stench of rotting corpses.

The monitoring group Airwars has documented the deaths of 5,805 civilians as a result of attacks launched by the US-led “coalition” between February and June of 2017. There is no doubt that this figure, which

excludes casualties during the first four months of the siege as well as those resulting from the intense bombardment of the past three weeks, is a serious underestimate. Tens of thousands more have been wounded.

Among those escaping from the besieged city, boys and men were treated as ISIS suspects, in many cases subjected to interrogation, brutal torture and summary execution, all under the approving eyes of American Special Forces “advisers.”

Amnesty International issued a report Tuesday titled “At Any Price: The Civilian Catastrophe in West Mosul,” in which it recounted that civilians were subjected “to a terrifying barrage of fire from weapons that should never be used in densely populated civilian areas.”

In Amnesty’s typically cautious fashion in dealing with the US government, the report stated that “US-led coalition forces appear to have committed repeated violations of international law, some of which may amount to war crimes.” The organization is calling for the convening of “independent and transparent investigations where there is credible information that violations of international humanitarian law have taken place,” in order to “prosecute those reasonably suspected of responsibility for war crimes.”

While Amnesty indicts ISIS with far greater conviction than it does the US military, it raises no questions as to who is responsible for ISIS in the first place, much less the historical roots of the human catastrophe inflicted upon Mosul.

When it swept across Iraq three years ago, seizing Mosul and roughly one-third of the country’s territory and exposing the rotten foundations of the US-trained Iraqi security forces, ISIS had been well-armed, funded and trained for use as a proxy force in the wars for regime change orchestrated by the CIA and

Washington's regional allies, first in Libya and then in Syria.

The roots of the emergence of Al Qaeda-linked Sunni militias in Iraq, however, lie in the quarter-century of war, sanctions, invasion and occupation inflicted by US imperialism on the oil-rich country, resulting in the decimation of an entire society, the loss of well over a million lives, and the turning of millions more into homeless refugees.

In pursuit of a divide-and-rule strategy, the US occupation stoked sectarian divisions in Iraq, with particularly bloody results in Mosul, with its broad intermingling of ethnic and religious groups. Subsequently, the Shia-dominated government installed in Baghdad persecuted the Sunni majority of Mosul and Anbar province, creating fertile soil for ISIS.

The overriding source of the disasters that have befallen the people of Mosul, Iraq and the broader Middle East is the unprovoked war of aggression launched by the US in 2003 on the basis of lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. At the time, apologists for US imperialism promoted the war with the charge that "Saddam Hussein kills his own people." The late Iraqi ruler, however, would be amazed at the scale of death and destruction Washington has been able to inflict upon his country over the course of the past 14 years.

If the legal principles and criteria employed by the prosecutors at Nuremberg were applied today, there would be many in Washington facing life in prison, if not execution. These include George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and the rest of the US administration that launched an unprovoked war of aggression, the main charge for which the surviving leaders of the Third Reich were tried.

In addition, there is Barack Obama and the leading figures in his administration and military-intelligence apparatus. Elected largely on the basis of misplaced hope that he would put an end to US wars, Obama continued them in both Iraq and Afghanistan and expanded US interventions into Libya and Syria. It was under his administration that the siege of Mosul was launched.

Finally, there are the criminals within the Trump administration, from the president to his defense secretary, Gen. James "Mad Dog" Mattis, who proclaimed a policy of "annihilation" in Iraq and Syria,

to the generals and CIA chiefs who have implemented this policy of mass slaughter.

Both major political parties, a media that has become a shameless instrument of war propaganda, the corporations and banks seeking to counter American capitalism's decline by means of militarism and war, and every other major American institution are responsible for the war crimes in Mosul and those that have been carried out throughout Iraq and the rest of the region over the past decade-and-a-half.

Complicit as well are the US academics who have maintained a discreet silence on the crimes and lies that pervade US policy, not to mention the various pseudo-left organizations that have enlisted themselves in support of imperialism under the disreputable banner of "human rights."

If action were taken on Amnesty's proposal to "prosecute those reasonably suspected of responsibility for war crimes," the defendants' dock in Washington would be crowded indeed. Yet no one has been held accountable for these crimes.

Settling accounts with Washington's war criminals is the task of the American working class, united in struggle with the working people of Iraq, the rest of the Middle East and the entire planet. Under conditions in which escalating militarism in the Middle East and around the globe threaten to coalesce into another world war, the fight to build a new mass antiwar movement based on the working class and the youth and directed against the capitalist system assumes ever greater urgency.

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