

Pompeo in Cairo: The ugly face of US imperialism

By Bill Van Auken
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Overloaded with lies, hypocrisy and absurdities, the speech delivered by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the American University in Cairo, Egypt on Thursday signaled to the collection of monarchs and despots that count as Washington's allies in the Middle East that US imperialism is committed to a continued escalation of war in the region, particularly against Iran.

He insisted that despite Donald Trump's December 19 announcement of a decision to withdraw US troops from Syria, there would be no "change of mission."

"For our part, airstrikes in the region will continue as targets arise," he said. "We will keep working with our partners in the Coalition to Defeat ISIS. We will continue to hunt down terrorists who seek safe havens in Libya and in Yemen."

He vowed that the US would continue its intervention in Syria "to expel every last Iranian boot" from the country and spelled out an unwavering agenda of regime change in both Damascus and Tehran.

Reflecting US imperialism's priorities in the region, Pompeo mentioned Iran 25 times in his speech, compared to a mere dozen references to "terrorism."

Universally described as a "keynote" speech, Pompeo's address was as crude and thuggish as the man himself.

Titled "A Force for Good: America Reinvigorated in the Middle East," it represented an unabashed celebration of the decades of US military interventions, occupations and bombings that have decimated entire societies.

Pompeo introduced himself as the personification of Washington's role in promoting "goodness" in the Middle East, noting in his opening remarks that the visit to Egypt was "especially meaningful for me as an evangelical Christian" and sharing with his audience that "In my office, I keep a Bible open on my desk to remind me of God and His Word and The Truth."

He went on to insist that "because I'm a military man by training, I'll be very blunt and direct today: America is a force for good in the Middle East."

Taking these self-descriptions together, it was as if

Pompeo had crafted his remarks to substantiate the Islamists' portrayal of America's role in the Middle East as that of "crusaders."

It was notable that even in the audience of handpicked functionaries, businessmen and vetted flunkies of Egypt's dictatorial regime, only a single line in Pompeo's delusional presentation was interrupted by applause—when he thanked the Egyptian dictator Gen. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi for "his courage"—and at the end, the response was at best tepid.

The rhetoric about the US as a "force for good" is so at odds with the reality of a quarter century of unending US wars in the region that even this audience found it tough to swallow.

The war in Iraq, launched on the basis of lies about weapons of mass destruction with the criminal invasion of 2003, claimed well over 1 million lives and left the society in shambles, torn by sectarian divisions. It saw massacres in Fallujah and other cities and the degrading spectacle of torture at Abu Ghraib

In Syria, the attempt by the US and its allies to effect regime change through a CIA-orchestrated insurgency by Al Qaeda-linked militias has claimed hundreds of thousands more lives and turned millions into refugees. Similarly, the US-NATO war for regime change in Libya left the country in a shambles, with continuous fighting between rival militias, a government that exists in name only and a hell on earth for migrants trapped in a network of prisons and slave markets.

Meanwhile, in Yemen, the Pentagon continues to arm and aid a near-genocidal Saudi-led war that has claimed well over 60,000 lives and brought some 20 million people to the brink of famine in what the United Nations has described as the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe.

To attribute such mass slaughter and suffering as the workings of a "force for good" is obscene.

Driving this rhetoric was a puerile attempt by Pompeo to contrast his speech to one given by then-president Barack Obama 10 years earlier from the same podium at Cairo's American University. Not mentioning the former president

by name, referring to him only as “another American who stood before you” in 2009, Pompeo excoriated Obama for offering even a hint of an apology for the crimes carried out by US imperialism in the Middle East and claimed that the message he delivered resulted in the US becoming too “timid in asserting ourselves” and a “reluctance to wield our influence.”

In reality, the speech delivered this week and the one given by Obama ten years ago have more in common than Pompeo let on.

As the World Socialist Web Site noted at the time, Obama and his speech were merely a means of presenting a new face for imperialism.

While Obama voiced support for “democracy” and “human rights,” he said nothing about the actual conditions in Egypt under the US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak, or Saudi Arabia, which he had just visited, under the tyrannical House of Saud. He defended the ongoing US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and said nothing about the Israeli slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza.

“The vague and flowery rhetoric, the verbal tributes to Islamic culture and the equal rights of nations, constitute an adjustment of the language being used to cloak the policy of US imperialism, not a change in substance,” the WSWS stated. “Obama made not a single concrete proposal to redress the grievances of the oppressed peoples of the Middle East. That is because the fundamental source of this oppression is the profit system and the domination of the world by imperialism, of which American imperialism is the most ruthless.”

Pompeo has ditched the flowery rhetoric as Washington pursues a naked policy of aggression against and demonization of Iran. He boasted of Trump’s scrapping of the Iran nuclear treaty and the ever-escalating economic sanctions that have been imposed against the country, punishment tantamount to an act of war.

He vowed that US sanctions would only “keep getting tougher until Iran starts behaving like a normal country.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif responded on Twitter: “The day Iran mimics US clients ... to become a ‘normal’ country is the day hell freezes over ... Best for the US to just get over loss of Iran.”

Noting that Obama had declared that the relationship between the US and the Middle East needed a “new beginning,” Pompeo insisted that only with the advent of Trump had the “real new beginning” become possible. As evidence of this, he pointed to the two US cruise missile attacks on Syria—emphasizing that Washington is “willing to do it again.” He cited the airstrikes that leveled the cities of Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria and the unfettered relations with the monarchical dictatorships of the Persian

Gulf and the police state regime of General Sisi in Egypt.

“The good news is this: The age of self-inflicted American shame is over,” Pompeo declared.

He added: “For those who fret about the use of American power, remember this: America has always been, and always will be, a liberating force, not an occupying power. We’ve never dreamed of domination in the Middle East.”

Somehow, Pompeo’s listeners contained their laughter. US domination of the Middle East and its oil wealth has been a cornerstone of US foreign policy for over 70 years. US imperialism has always masked its predatory interests by the “liberating” myth. As Leon Trotsky noted wryly in 1924: “America is always liberating somebody. That is her profession.”

The US secretary of state went so far as to brag about the role being played by the Pentagon in the slaughter of the Yemeni people, declaring, “In Yemen, we’ve assisted our coalition partners as they take the lead in preventing an Iranian expansion...”

The main thrust of his speech was the call for the building of an anti-Iranian coalition that he referred to as the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) based upon the Sunni oil sheikdoms, the Egyptian dictatorship and Israel.

To that end he praised the regime of General Sisi, the former army commander who came to power through a coup against Egypt’s first elected president, Mohamed Morsi, which saw the massacre of some 1,600 of his followers and the subsequent imprisonment of an estimated 60,000 Egyptians for political reasons, in prisons where torture is routine. Pompeo presented the general’s regime as a beacon of tolerance and freedom in the Middle East.

While General Sisi has enthusiastically embraced Washington’s war on terrorism—labeling all of its opponents as terrorists—it is less clear that Cairo is anxious to enlist in a US-led war on Iran.

Pompeo’s speech served only to underscore the continuing catastrophic role played by US imperialism throughout the Middle East and the threat that a new and even bloodier war is being prepared in the drive for US hegemony over the region.

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