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Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the forgotten history of Iraq

US President Donald Trump announced the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Sunday morning with a bloodlust and brutality never before heard from an American president.

“He died like a dog... whimpering, screaming and crying,” Trump declared. He added that the footage of the US Army raid, which he watched live, was “something really amazing to see... as though you were watching a movie.” According to the White House, this would have included Baghdadi blowing himself up along with three of his children.

The president, the supposed “leader of the free world,” gloated over Baghdadi’s corpse like a common thug, in language almost calculated to incite reprisals.



US soldiers detain a man in the street of Baghdad accusing him and his group of driving a vehicle of weapons and attempting to ambush US troops Monday April 14, 2003. US soldiers and locals claimed that the group were non-Iraqi Arab fighters. The American military continue operations in Baghdad trying to secure control of the capital city. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)

There is no doubt Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi carried out monstrous crimes. The organization that he led has murdered thousands of people. But within the media and the political establishment, there is total silence over the circumstances that created him. The general line is that Trump's assassination operation is to be lauded, but that it only demonstrates that the administration is wrong to pull troops out of Syria and the Middle East, or to criticize the US military-intelligence apparatus.

This position was laid out by the *New York Times*, whose correspondent David Sanger wrote on the newspaper's front-page Monday that the raid "vindicated the value of three traditional American strengths: robust alliances, faith in intelligence agencies and the projection of military power around the world."

The outcome of the raid, Sanger wrote, "did little to quell doubts about the wisdom of [Trump's] push to reduce the United States military presence in Syria."



In this July 11, 2017 photo, damaged buildings are lit by the setting sun on the west side of Mosul, Iraq. Iraq's U.S.-backed forces succeeded in wresting Mosul from the Islamic State group but at the cost of enormous destruction. The nearly 9-month fight culminated in a crescendo of devastation _ the blasting of the historic Old City to root out the militants' final pockets. (AP Photo/Felipe Dana)

The *Times*, speaking for the Democratic Party, would like the world to forget the real and bloody history of American imperialist operations in Iraq and the broader Middle East, euphemistically referred to as “the projection of US military power,” out of which ISIS emerged. As for Baghdadi himself, whether an enemy of the United States, a CIA asset, or both, one thing is certain: he is a byproduct of criminal actions by the US government spanning four decades.

Baghdadi was born in 1971, near Samarra, Iraq. During his teenage years, Iraq, backed by the US, waged a war with Iran that cost millions of lives and left both countries traumatized.

He was twenty years old in 1991, when the US, under the first Bush administration, invaded Iraq and carried out a military slaughter that left over 100,000 Iraqis dead. This was followed by a decade of trade and economic sanctions, under the Clinton administration, that killed an estimated 500,000 children.

Then came the invasion of 2003, launched by the second Bush administration. This war was aimed at the predatory plunder of a largely defenseless country for its oil reserves, and based on outright lies, swallowed whole by the media and the Democratic Party. Before the eyes of the entire world, the United States carried out a war of aggression, for which those responsible should have been hauled before war crimes tribunals.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq caused death and destruction on a scale described by the WSWS as “**sociocide**”—the murder of an entire society. Iraq, once one of the most advanced and developed countries in the Middle East, was blown apart by the US invasion. More than a million people were killed, and millions more turned into refugees.

In 2004, Baghdadi was detained at the Abu Ghraib prison complex, notorious for the horrific mass torture and rape of detainees by American troops. He subsequently spent nearly five years imprisoned at Camp Bucca in southern Iraq before being released by the US Department of Defense.

In 2007, journalist Seymour Hersh described a “redirection” in US foreign policy. “To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East... The US has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups” that are “sympathetic to Al Qaeda.”

The subsequent US-backed “revolution” in Syria, largely directed by Obama, was the product of this “redirection,” which saw the United States funnel arms and money to Islamist forces, many with close ties to Al Qaeda.



Iraqi special operations commandos detain suspects in the town of Arab Jabour south of Baghdad, Iraq, Friday, June 15, 2012. Iraqi security forces raided a house and arrested five men suspected members of al-Qaida and found weapons and explosives in their house, police said. (AP Photo/Alaa al-Marjani)

In 2013, Baghdadi announced the founding of the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” and took control of most of the foreign fighters of Jabhat al-Nusra (Al Qaeda), which the *Times* reported was playing a “key role” in the US government’s efforts to overthrow the Assad regime.

The *Times* warned the US against an explicit rejection of the Al Qaeda-linked group, writing that “it would pit the United States against some of the best fighters in the insurgency that it aims to support.” The *Times* noted that many “Syrian rebels... work closely with it and admire it.”

None of this history has made its way into the current commentary of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* or the broadcast news networks.

As part of their efforts to frame all opposition to Trump as support for war, the media and the Democratic Party want no accounting of the horrific crimes carried out by the United States. They want to wipe away from memory the millions dead, the photos of torture, the evidence of war crimes.

In 1990, when the Democratic Party still felt compelled to adapt itself to the mass anti-war sentiment that persisted for decades after the Vietnam debacle, virtually all its senators

voted against a resolution authorizing the invasion of Iraq (but which still, as the Democrats knew it would, passed). A decade later, millions of people in the United States and all over the world marched against the Iraq war in 2003, in the largest coordinated global demonstrations in history. But these demonstrations were stifled by their subordination to the Democratic Party, which, 16 years later, has emerged as the most determined advocate of US military involvement in the Middle East.

In its response to the killing of Baghdadi, as with the killing of bin Laden, the media is appealing to and attempting to whip up the most primitive and reactionary instincts. If they have their way, it will be the occasion for even more bloodletting and violence.

The real history of US imperialist violence in Iraq will not be forgotten by the working class, nor will the present and future crimes go unopposed. The deep and abiding hostility to war must be connected to the growth of class struggle in a powerful movement to do away with imperialist barbarism and hold to account those who are responsible.

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