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The fall of Ramadi and the criminality of US imperialism

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Nearly a year after the debacle suffered by US imperialism and the regime it imposed during more than eight bloody years of war and occupation of Iraq—the fall of the country’s second largest city, Mosul to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—a similar collapse has unfolded in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar, Iraq’s largest province.

Attempts by the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon to dismiss the events in Ramadi as a minor setback are either disingenuous or delusional. As in Mosul, Iraq’s US-trained and armed regular army largely melted away in the face of an offensive by the Islamist guerrillas. And once again, it has left behind large stores of US-supplied weaponry, ranging from dozens of armored cars and tanks to artillery and other armaments and vast quantities of ammunition, all of it now in ISIS hands.

Just as with Mosul, the fall of Ramadi has unleashed a new humanitarian catastrophe on the war-ravaged people of Iraq, with hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians killed and tens of thousands turned into homeless refugees. Those who remain face the threat of violence at the hands of ISIS as well as sectarian reprisals from the Shiite militias that are massing for a bid to retake the city.

This latest debacle has unfolded nearly 10 months into the Obama administration’s “Operation Inherent Resolve,” the title given to Washington’s latest military intervention in the Middle East. It has provoked criticism within ruling circles of US strategy, which has consisted of US

airstrikes against both Iraq and Syria, the deployment of nearly 5,000 US ground troops in Iraq and the launching of a \$500 million program to train and arm so-called Syrian “rebels.”

There is a growing drumbeat for sending greater numbers of US ground forces more directly into the fighting. The *Washington Post* published an editorial Tuesday charging that “the US lacks a strategy to fulfill President Obama’s pledge to ‘degrade and ultimately destroy’” ISIS. It demands that the administration commit US military units to “work with Iraqi forces on the ground.”

Similarly, the *Wall Street Journal* published a column urging “more ground operations by Special Operations forces” as well as the deployment of “Apache attack helicopters and transport planes,” along with an entire brigade “dedicated to improving operational command and intelligence support.”

It is no accident that amid this drive for the escalation of the ongoing US intervention another, thoroughly dishonest, debate has played out in the context of the 2016 presidential election campaign, over whether the launching of the March 2003 invasion of Iraq was a “mistake” or a justified response to what proved “faulty intelligence.”

The immediate impetus for this phony debate has been calls for Republican presidential hopeful Jeb Bush—and other Republicans—to account for the actions of the younger Bush’s brother, George W. The cynical aim of both the capitalist politicians and media, however, is to erase from the consciousness of the American people the bitter lessons of being dragged into a criminal war of aggression foisted upon them through scaremongering about “weapons of mass destruction” and ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda. Both were fabrications employed to promote a war whose real aim was securing US hegemony over the energy-rich Middle East.

That there is a difference between “faulty intelligence” and lies is self-evident, just as a “mistake” is not the same thing as a premeditated war of aggression, the principal crime for which the Nazi leadership was tried at Nuremberg.

Jeb Bush’s response has consisted in large measure of the undeniable assertion that not only did he and his brother support the war in Iraq, but that so did the Democratic frontrunner, former senator and secretary of state Hillary Clinton, along with virtually the entire US ruling establishment. In short, there are no clean hands; everyone is implicated in a crime of historic proportions.

Nor, clearly, have these crimes stopped with either the end of the Bush administration or the 2011 withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. The US-NATO war that destroyed Libya was launched on the pretext of “human rights.” It was necessary, the public was told, to protect the people of Benghazi from imminent massacre. Today, much of Benghazi—and the entire country—has been reduced to rubble by fighting between rival militias. The death toll mounts daily and millions of Libyans have become refugees.

The predatory aims of this imperialist intervention have been further exposed by the recent revelation that Hillary Clinton, then secretary of state, was promoting the Libya policy

recommendations of former Bill Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal, who was in turn working with a group of capitalist investors on schemes to exploit the oil-rich country's wealth once its government was smashed and its leader, Muammar Gaddafi, murdered.

What incredible mayhem and destruction has been wrought upon the Middle East through the last dozen years of US military aggression! Promoted and defended by Democrats and Republicans alike, this criminal bloodletting has been carried out in the service of naked profit interests. Well over a million people have lost their lives, with millions more maimed or driven from their homes.

Entire countries have been destroyed. In the drive to overthrow and assassinate one secular Arab head of state after another—from Saddam Hussein to Gaddafi to Bashar al Assad—the Pentagon and the CIA have deliberately fomented sectarian tensions, pitting Sunnis against Shia in an even bloodier version of the old colonial strategy of divide and conquer. ISIS is the direct product of this process, spawned by the US intervention in Iraq and then strengthened by the proxy war for regime change in Syria, where it and similar Sunni Islamist militias were armed and funded by Washington's regional allies, under the guiding hand of the CIA.

As one crime and debacle follows another, what is most remarkable is that no one is held accountable. Not only is no one involved fired from their posts—much less tried for war crimes—there are not even serious public hearings held to expose the decisions and policies that produced these disasters.

Every element of the ruling strata and every institution of American society are implicated, from the Bushes, Clintons and Obama to Congress, the profit-hungry corporations, the lying media and an overwhelmingly cowardly and self-satisfied academia.

The impunity they have all enjoyed after each criminal war only paves the way for even greater conflagrations. Preventing such global catastrophes is the task of the American and international working class, which alone can mount a genuine struggle against war and the capitalist system that produces it.