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After the Paris terror attacks: A drumbeat for military escalation and internal repression

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In the days following the horrific terrorist attacks that claimed the lives of 129 innocent civilians in Paris, the response from within the US political establishment and media has been as predictable as it is reactionary. Stoking desires for revenge and exploiting the shock over the attacks claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), politicians, pundits and the media are mounting a drumbeat propaganda offensive for an escalation of military aggression abroad and police state repression at home.

CIA Director John Brennan was among the most blunt on the home front, declaring that the Paris attacks must serve as a “wake-up call.” He demanded an end to “hand-wringing” over blanket government spying on the entire population of the US and the world carried out in the name of combating terrorism.

Among the Obama administration’s Republican critics, there were demands for a sharp escalation of the US military intervention in the Middle East, including calls for the dispatch of another American expeditionary force into Syria. Mitt Romney, the former Republican presidential candidate, in an opinion piece published by the *Washington Post* Sunday, called for a “war on ISIS,” saying the US must “devote whatever resources are required to win—even

boots on the ground.” In a subsequent television interview, he made clear that this meant sending tens of thousands of troops into Syria.

Even more telling was the media’s behavior at Barack Obama’s press conference Monday at the G20 meeting in Antalya, Turkey, where the US president described ISIS as “the face of evil” and declared that Washington’s goal is “to degrade and ultimately destroy this barbaric terrorist organization.”

Correspondents from the major US news outlets rose, one after the other, to goad the president into announcing a more aggressive militarist policy.

CBS: “A more than yearlong bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria has failed to contain the ambition and the ability of ISIS to launch attacks in the West. Have you underestimated their abilities? And will you widen the rules of engagement for US forces to take more aggressive action?”

ABC: “...address your critics who say that your reluctance to enter another Middle East war, and your preference of diplomacy over using the military, makes the United States weaker and emboldens our enemies.”

CNN: “I think a lot of Americans have this frustration that they see that the United States has the greatest military in the world... I guess the question is—and if you’ll forgive the language—is why can’t we take out these bastards?”

The thrust of these questions is clear. After more than 14 years of a US “war on terror” that has plunged the entire Middle East into chaos and carnage, the rising demand from a sizable section of the US ruling establishment is for an even more deadly eruption of American imperialism.

What is deliberately obscured by this outpouring of jingoism is the fact that the terrorist attacks in Paris, and ISIS itself, are the direct products of nearly a decade-and-a-half of US military intervention aimed at imposing US hegemony over this oil-rich region.

ISIS emerged as the byproduct of the unprovoked US war of aggression against Iraq and the subsequent American divide-and-conquer strategy of manipulating and exacerbating sectarian divisions in that country. With the Bush administration having overthrown Saddam Hussein, a secular autocrat, the Obama administration—in alliance with France—embarked on another military adventure, launching the US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya. The imperialists utilized Islamist militias allied to ISIS and Al Qaeda as their proxy ground troops.

Succeeding in toppling and murdering a second secular ruler, Muammar Gaddafi, and leaving Libya in a state of collapse and permanent civil war, the Obama administration decided to repeat this “success” in Syria, where it fomented a civil war. It utilized these same Islamist organizations, augmented by vast stocks of weaponry funneled in from Libya as well as an army of foreign fighters brought in from across the Middle East, Europe and Central Asia.

Now, after ISIS has succeeded in seizing a third of Iraq along with roughly half of Syria, Washington claims to be engaged in a “war” on the Islamist organization. Its principal allies in this venture are Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, which have provided the religious-ideological inspiration, financial resources and weapons that have allowed ISIS to make the gains it has made.

If, after a year of air strikes, the dispatch of thousands of US troops to Iraq and now the deployment of Special Forces units to Syria, this “war” has done virtually nothing to reduce either the geographical reach or troop strength of ISIS, this is no accident. Washington’s main aim remains regime-change in Syria, as part of a broader strategy of weakening the influence of Iran, Russia and China in the region and preparing for far more dangerous military confrontations. To the extent that ISIS fights the troops of the Syrian government, it remains a US ally.

While Obama claims to have seen the “face of evil” in the Paris events, when ISIS was carrying out even bloodier atrocities against Syrian religious minorities and populations supporting the government of President Bashar al-Assad, there was no outcry from the US or its allies. Over the past four years of civil war, the Syrian population’s average daily fatalities have surpassed the number of people killed in Paris last Friday.

Moreover, the attacks in Paris are only the latest in a series of overseas attacks by the Islamist group. In the speculation over ISIS responsibility for bringing down a Russian passenger jet and killing 224 people on October 31, there was less outrage than barely concealed gloating by the Western media, anxious to see Moscow humiliated over its intervention in Syria.

Similarly, last week’s twin suicide bombings that killed at least 43 people in a working-class suburb in southern Beirut was almost universally reported by the US media as an attack on a “Hezbollah stronghold,” again suggesting that the innocent civilian victims got what was coming to them because of the Shia movement’s support for the Assad government.

Terrorism as a thing in itself is not seen as a critical problem for the American ruling establishment. Obama told the press conference in Turkey that his “closest military and civilian advisors” had counseled him that sending tens of thousands of troops into Syria would not be worth the effort.

Terrorism, from the standpoint of these elements within the vast US military and intelligence apparatus, is a useful tactic when directed against Washington’s enemies. It is merely part of the cost of doing business when it hits the US and its allies. And it can be exploited as a pretext for increased militarism and the suppression of political opposition.

In the end, Obama’s “advisors” have bigger things in mind. Little more than a week ago, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter delivered a speech affirming that Russia and China, not ISIS or terrorism, constitute the main threat to Washington’s interests. Driven by its insoluble crisis and contradictions, US imperialism is preparing for the greatest act of mass terror in human history: World War Three.

