

After the US Election, an Escalation of the Mideast War

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Last week, the Pentagon announced the death of a 19-year-old Marine, the first fatality among the estimated 1,900 US troops currently deployed in the new US war in the Middle East. This will undoubtedly be only the first of many American casualties in this war, a death toll that will be multiplied many times over for the Iraqi and Syrian men, women and children who will lose their lives in this latest imperialist intervention.

Less than one week before the midterm elections in the US, it is becoming ever more clear that, whatever the results in terms of the breakdown of Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Obama administration will embark on a major escalation of military operations once the voting is done.

Already there is a mounting drumbeat from within Washington's vast military and intelligence apparatus—and those in politics and the media who voice its demands—for stepped-up bombing and more US "boots on the ground" in both Iraq and Syria.

This campaign for military escalation was summed up in a lead editorial published in Monday's *Washington Post* entitled "Mr. Obama's half-hearted fight against the Islamic State." The editorial asserts that "an unlikely consensus is emerging across the ideological spectrum" in Washington that the Obama administration's current strategy in the war on the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is "unworkable," and that "the military means the president has authorized cannot accomplish his announced aims."

The editorial criticizes the "modest tempo of airstrikes" as well as "the absence of ground trainers and special forces who could accompany Iraqi and Syrian forces." It cites an unnamed senior Pentagon official as stating that the aim of fielding a new mercenary army of "rebels" in Syria is impossible "if you're not on the ground to advise and assist them."

"The United States will have to broaden its aims and increase its military commitment if the terrorists are to be defeated," the editorial concludes. This means "a strategy to counter the Assad regime" and deploying special operations troops in combat together with Iraqi and Syrian proxy forces.

The editorial follows a report in the *Post* last week that US and Iraqi officials recently discussed increasing the number of US military "advisers" in Iraq, and that deploying them "in the field with the Iraqis" is under consideration, given the abysmal record of Iraqi security forces collapsing in the face of ISIS advances.

Along similar lines, Anthony Cordesman, a former Pentagon official and adviser at the

Center for Strategic and International Studies, has written of US strategy in the Iraq-Syria war “imploding” and dismissed the campaign of air strikes in both countries as “military tokenism.” He insists that “advisers” must be deployed alongside Iraqi troops “as soon as possible,” and that the US must accept “risking combat losses.”

Then there is Lt. Col. John Nagl (ret.), the co-author of the Army’s Counterinsurgency Manual, who states that some 15,000 US “advisers” are needed on the ground, and that the war in Iraq and Syria will have to go on “for at least a generation and probably longer.”

The Vietnam War provides an instructive precedent for the steady escalation in the number of “advisers” deployed in a US overseas intervention. John F. Kennedy deployed several hundred to the country shortly after taking office. By the time he was assassinated in November 1963, they numbered 16,700. Within barely two years, 200,000 US troops had been thrown into the war, and by 1968 the number was well over half a million.

Obviously, there are vast differences between Vietnam, where Washington intervened in an attempt to crush a popular anti-colonial struggle, and Iraq and Syria, where it confronts a crisis entirely of its own making, forged through the destruction of Iraq in nearly nine years of war and the devastation of Syria by the Islamist militias that the US and its allies have armed and supported.

What they have in common, however, is that the existing forces on the ground, the Iraqi army and the so-called Syrian “moderate rebels,” are—like the South Vietnamese Army before them—wholly inadequate (or non-existent) instruments for achieving US aims. Thus, the demand for US “boots on the ground”—plenty of them and in short order.

Once again, the American people are being dragged into a criminal war of aggression based upon lies. While this war is being sold with propaganda about ISIS atrocities against minorities, beheadings, etc., the real objective is the use of military force to assert US hegemony over the strategically vital and oil-rich Middle East.

The aims of this war, which spans national boundaries, involves not only the re-occupation of Iraq, but also the overthrow of the government of Syria and its replacement with a pliant US puppet regime. These war aims, in turn, place US imperialism on a clear trajectory for military confrontation with Iran and Russia, posing the real threat of a Third World War.

Every step has been taken to preclude next week’s midterm elections from providing the slightest possibility for the American people to express their will in relation to the most important political question, that of a war which we are told may last for more than “a generation.”

Just before the bombs began falling in Iraq, the members of the US Congress scurried out of town for a two-month campaign season recess without taking any vote to authorize a war that is both unconstitutional and in violation of international law. Any vote that is taken will be held after the election in a lame-duck session of Congress, thereby assuring that no one will be held politically accountable. In the election campaign itself, the war—like virtually every other social question of vital importance to the masses of working people—is not even an issue.

Nothing could more clearly expose the entirely rotted-out character of the American political system, which is controlled lock, stock and barrel by a financial aristocracy, and in which

decisions on imperialist war abroad and repression at home are made by an unelected cabal of military and intelligence officials for whom Obama serves as a mouthpiece.

The corrupt capitalist two-party system offers no means to resist the drive to war. The working class must intervene independently, mobilizing its objective strength in a mass antiwar movement based upon a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to capitalism, which is the source of war.

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