

Obama Announces Open-Ended War in Iraq and Syria

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In a perfunctory speech on national television Wednesday night, US President Barack Obama announced an open-ended escalation of US military violence in the Middle East.

Using the crimes of the Muslim fundamentalist group ISIS as a pretext, Obama announced he was sending another 475 US troops to Iraq, stepping up the bombing of ISIS targets in that country, and preparing a cross-border extension of the bombing campaign into Syria.

In addition, he called on Congress to provide funding for a major increase in US recruitment, training and arming of “rebel” forces in Syria to fight both ISIS and the main target of American imperialism in the region for the past three years, the Syrian government of President Bashar al Assad, which is allied with both Iran and Russia.

It was only 12 months ago that Obama tried and failed to create the political conditions for US air strikes against the Assad regime, making allegations of the use of nerve gas weapons that were later discredited. Now Obama is seeking to achieve the same goal by a different route, using ISIS as a pretext to get American military forces into Syria, where they will become the spearhead of the campaign to oust Assad and install a pro-US stooge regime in Damascus.

In devoting less than 15 minutes to motivating a dramatic change in US foreign policy—reversing his previous posturing as an opponent of long-term US military intervention in the Middle East—Obama demonstrated his contempt for the American people and any conception of democracy.

Obama did not offer any serious accounting for his decision to plunge once again into the cauldron of the Middle East, other than the actions of ISIS, particularly the repulsive beheading of two American freelance journalists over the past month.

He presented ISIS as an inexplicable evil, although the group originated as a byproduct of US imperialist interventions in Central Asia and the Middle East. The organization, he said, “has taken advantage of sectarian strife and Syria’s civil war to gain territory on both sides of the Iraq-Syrian border.” He did not mention that both the sectarian strife and the civil war were instigated by the United States.

After its defeat by Sunni tribal forces and Shiite militias in Iraq, Al Qaeda in Iraq reformed itself as ISIS, operating on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border. It profited enormously from the US-backed campaign of subversion against the Assad regime. ISIS rebuilt itself from aid provided by the CIA and US allies such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, then crossed back into

Iraq and launched its current offensive against the US-backed puppet regime in Baghdad.

Obama could not discuss any of this history in his television address, since it would underscore the reckless and incendiary character of the new round of military intervention he has begun. One thing is certain: more American bombs, missiles and soldiers will only worsen the humanitarian catastrophe in Iraq and Syria, while increasing the likelihood that localized conflicts spread into a general war throughout the Middle East, and even beyond.

The US president emphasized that there was no geographical limit to the new war he was declaring. “This counter-terrorism campaign will be waged through a steady, relentless effort to take out [ISIS] wherever they exist,” he said. This amounts to a declaration that Washington is prepared to bomb not only Iraq and Syria, but Lebanon, Jordan and anywhere else the Islamists may rise up.

Obama reiterated his policy that the US has the right to wage war against anyone, anywhere that it determines poses a threat to the “core interests” of the United States—i.e., the interests of the American ruling class.

In the closing portion of his speech, Obama insisted on the leading role of the United States in virtually every international crisis on every continent, saying, “American leadership is the one constant in an uncertain world.”

He continued, “It is America that has the capacity and the will to mobilize the world against terrorists. It is America that has rallied the world against Russian aggression...”

The quick transition from targeting ISIS to confronting Russia—the world’s second-largest nuclear power—is particularly ominous. As for Russian “aggression,” the crisis in Ukraine was provoked by US and German sponsorship of a right-wing coup backed by fascist forces.

The way in which the new policy on Iraq and Syria was formulated and rolled out shows the complete decay of democracy in America. After weeks of discussion with the military-intelligence establishment, Obama presented his proposals Monday in a meeting of several hours with leading figures in the foreign policy establishment.

On Tuesday he met briefly with the congressional leaders of both parties, telling them that he did not need their approval for military action, to which they readily assented.

Then on Wednesday, he gave a perfunctory television speech, with only the barest pretense of seeking to persuade the American people, who have absolutely no say on the most fundamental questions of war and peace.

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