

By Larry Everest

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On Friday, October 21, President Barack Obama announced that all 40,000 remaining U.S. military forces would be withdrawn from Iraq by the end of this year: "After nearly nine years, America's war in Iraq will be over," he said.

Obama presented the end of the war as the fulfillment of a campaign promise, and a proud moment for the U.S. in fulfilling a noble mission:

"The last American soldier[s] will cross the border out of Iraq with their heads held high, proud of their success, and knowing that the American people stand united in our support for our troops...This December will be a time to reflect on all that we've been through in this war. I'll join the American people in paying tribute to the more than 1 million Americans who have served in Iraq. We'll honor our many wounded warriors and the nearly 4,500 American patriots—and their Iraqi and coalition partners—who gave their lives to this effort."

Obama also called the withdrawal from Iraq part of "a larger transition." He said, "The tide of war is receding...Now, even as we remove our last troops from Iraq, we're beginning to bring our troops home from Afghanistan..." He claimed "the United States is moving forward from a position of strength."

While Obama talks about "the tide of war receding," the U.S. is increasing its military presence and aggression in Libya and Africa. It's escalating drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. It's waging a bloody war in Afghanistan, where there are still close to 100,000 troops. And no, the U.S. military role is not being ended in Iraq either. The U.S. has been forced to withdraw its military units—in part because it couldn't forge a new "status of forces" agreement with the Iraqi government. But thousands of U.S. diplomats, military contractors, CIA operatives, and other support personnel will remain in Iraq after the end of the year. The U.S. will still have tens of thousands of troops, as well as air and naval power and various military alliances in the Middle East and Central Asia. And it continues to rattle its sabers against Iran and Syria.

The 2003 Iraq Invasion—A Towering War Crime, Based on Lies

This announcement by Obama should make people reflect—on how and why this war was launched, what it was actually about, and what it says about the nature of the U.S. capitalist-imperialist system. Obama and the ruling class and media have deliberately obscured, covered up, and lied about these issues for a decade—ever since the run-up to the Iraq war began in the hours after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

This war was justified on the basis of bald-faced lies that were cooked up through a deliberate campaign of deceit that began soon after Sept. 11. There was the lie that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Then there was the lie that Saddam Hussein had ties to Al Qaeda and was somehow involved in September 11. U.S. government "investigations" and the media have blamed "faulty intelligence" or being "suckered" by Iraqi sources for their failure to find a single cache of WMD in Iraq. This is just another cover-up.

There is overwhelming evidence—from many sources—that prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that these were deliberate lies—concocted at the highest levels of government, repeated endlessly by both Democrats and Republicans, and by the imperialist media, which served as cheerleaders for the war. And these lies were enforced by threats, smear campaigns, and retaliation against any government and/or military officials or former officials who tried to challenge or expose them. (For instance, government officials and experts knew full well that Hussein was hostile to Islamic fundamentalism and that Al Qaeda essentially didn't even exist in Iraq before the U.S. invasion—it was only until *after* the invasion that they arose within Iraq.)

Obama and the rest of the rulers want us to forget about all this.

These lies were designed to cover up the nature of the U.S. invasion: a naked act of aggression against a small, weak, Third World country which had not attacked the U.S., and which had been subject to over 20 years of U.S. military assaults, covert attacks, and political and economic strangulation. This aggression included the Iran-Iraq War (green lighted and prolonged by the U.S.), the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and a decade of U.S.-UN sanctions. These sanctions were responsible for the deaths of at least 500,000 children and perhaps as many 1.7 million Iraqis overall.

In short, the U.S. invasion of Iraq fit the textbook definition of a *criminal war*—a *war crime*. This

basic—and obvious—truth has systematically been censored, suppressed, and covered up by a decade of ruling class lies and double-talk.

These lies—and the lie that this war was about "liberating" the Iraq people—twisted the truth inside out, in true Hitlerian fashion. In reality, this was a war launched by the world's most violent and globally oppressive power. It was part of a plan to seize on 9/11 to launch a war to strengthen and extend its empire of exploitation and military domination. The U.S. imperialists aimed to turn Iraq into a U.S.-controlled military and political outpost—and imperialist gas station—in the heart of the Middle East. It was to be a first step toward reshaping the whole region to suit U.S. capitalism-imperialism. It was meant to be part of defeating and socially undercutting Islamic fundamentalist forces in the region, which were posing obstacles to U.S. plans. The U.S. rulers planned to use this oil-rich and strategically located region as a club against any rivals—regional or global. They were driven by a real fear that their "unipolar moment" of global dominance—when the U.S. was the only imperialist Superpower after the demise of the USSR—could be slipping away. And the U.S. was intoxicated with imperial hubris—they dreamed of creating an unchallenged, and unchallengeable empire—dominating the planet as no other power ever had before.

As Bob Avakian puts it, "These imperialists make the Godfather look like Mary Poppins." (*Basic* 1:7)

Horrendous Impact on the Iraqi People

Obama talked of honoring "our many wounded warriors and the nearly 4,500 American patriots—and their Iraqi and coalition partners—who gave their lives to this effort"—the reference to the Iraqi people inserted in passing, a throw-away line, with no content.

But what has the impact of this war been on the Iraqi people? This reality—while well documented—has been deliberately ignored and lied about by the imperialist state, and the ruling class' multi-faceted apparatus for shaping public opinion.

The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq has led directly to massive slaughter, displacement, torture, sectarian violence, suffering and death. While the U.S. media occasionally mentions that 100,000 Iraqis have died during the U.S. war and occupation, this number vastly understates the actual number of Iraqis directly murdered or who died as a result of the war—as well as those whose lives have been drastically shattered.

A 2006 survey published in the British medical journal *Lancet* found that there had been more than 650,000 "excess Iraqi deaths as a consequence of the war" up to that point. In 2008, a study by the polling firm Opinion Research Business put the number at over 1 million.

According to the UN's Refugee Agency, over 4.7 million Iraqis have been driven from their homes—two million forced out of Iraq entirely. Three million Iraqi women are now widows, according to Iraq's government—many forced into prostitution.

When government officials and the mainstream media do mention the fact that the war has left 100,000 Iraqis dead, what's left unsaid is who is responsible—making it seem as if these deaths were accidents or unfortunate "collateral damage," or the fault of "terrorists" or "age-old conflicts" among Iraqis. In fact, the U.S. imperialists are directly responsible for most of these deaths—even as reactionary Islamists (whether inside or outside the Iraqi government)—have carried out atrocities as well. First, many of these millions were killed or displaced directly by U.S. forces. Second, since 1990, the U.S. had systematically shattered Iraq's civilian infrastructure (water, power, etc.), and then violently dismantled Iraq's governing structures after the invasion; both actions had catastrophic impacts on life in Iraq. Third, the U.S. empowered reactionary forces, including Islamist parties, to govern Iraq—butchers who have carried out widespread massacres and campaigns of religious sectarian cleansing against the Iraqi people, particularly against the Sunnis, as well as campaigns to forcibly impose reactionary Islamic strictures on Iraqi women.

The U.S. military has committed widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity. They have tortured and sexually degraded and abused countless thousands of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib and other torture centers. They've turned prisoners over to the reactionary U.S.-backed Iraqi regime knowing they would be tortured. "US authorities failed to investigate hundreds of reports of abuse, torture, rape and even murder by Iraqi police and soldiers whose conduct appears to be systematic and normally unpunished," the *Guardian* UK reported. ("Iraq war logs: secret files show how U.S. ignored torture," guardian.co.uk, Oct. 22, 2010).

In November 2005, U.S. Marines murdered 24 Iraqis in cold blood in the city of Haditha, and then blamed it on "insurgents." In 2006 in Ishaqi in central Iraq, "U.S. troops executed at least 10 Iraqi civilians, including a woman in her 70s and a 5-month-old infant, then called in an airstrike to destroy the evidence." In July 2007, a U.S. helicopter gunned down 11 civilians in Baghdad. Iraqi blogger Raed Jarrar wrote, "A video posted this week by WikiLeaks [of the helicopter massacre] is not an exception to how the U.S. occupation operated in Iraq all along,

but rather an example of it. While the video is shocking and disturbing to the U.S. public, from an Iraqi perspective it just tells a story of an average day under the occupation." ("The Haditha Massacre, and the Bush Regime: Illegal, Immoral, and INTOLERABLE," *Revolution* #50, June 11, 2006; "WikiLeaks: Iraqi Children in U.S. Raid Shot in Head, U.N. Says," McClatchy Newspapers, September 1, 2011; "Video Shows U.S. Killing of Reuters Employees," *New York Times*, April 5, 2010; Raed Jarrar, "Iraq: Seven Years of Occupation," CommonDreams.org, April 10, 2010)

These are the actions that Obama says Americans should "be proud of."

Not one single major U.S. military commander, U.S. official, political leader or war-leading media talking head has been held to account for any of this.

The U.S. and its military forces are not beloved by Iraqis as "liberators"—they're hated by millions of people around the world as savage, violent foreign imperialist occupiers.

Withdrawal of U.S. Troops Amidst Mounting Contradictions

For all this violence, the U.S. has not been able to achieve its grand strategic objectives in Iraq, or even its scaled-back objectives. When George W. Bush signed the status of forces agreement in 2008 calling for an end to the U.S. presence in Iraq by the end of 2011, it was assumed (perhaps even directly agreed upon) that U.S. forces would remain in Iraq for sometime after that "withdrawal date."

For over a year under Obama, the U.S. has been trying to negotiate a treaty with Iraq under which as many as 18,000 U.S. military forces could remain in Iraq. This summer, the U.S. scaled down its demand to some 5,000 military personnel. But when the U.S. insisted its military forces be given immunity from prosecution by Iraqi authorities for crimes under Iraqi law, the negotiations broke down. This breakdown reflects, and is a product of, the many complex, shifting contradictions the U.S. faces in attempting to more forcefully assert its domination in the Middle East—and how its "war on terror" to forcibly reshape and more directly control Iraq, Afghanistan, and the region has ended up exacerbating the very contradictions and obstacles the war was designed to resolve. All this has also intersected with new, unanticipated developments across the region and globally.

So it was this breakdown (and ultimately these deeper difficulties)—not a deliberate plan—that forced Obama's hand (even as he had strategically aimed to scale back U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, in an attempt to better deal with the deep stresses and strains on the empire).

This is but the latest chapter of U.S. ambitions in Iraq being thwarted, then scaled back, and then thwarted some more. It is important to recall what exactly the Bush regime dreamed of in Iraq. A March 21, 2003 *Wall Street Journal* piece spelled some of it out:

"[Bush's] dream is to make the entire Middle East a different place, and one safer for American interests. The vision is appealing: a region that, after a regime change in Baghdad, has pro-American governments in the Arab world's three most important countries, Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In the long run, that changes the dynamic of the region, making it more friendly to Washington and spreading democracy. Reducing the influence of radicals helps make Palestinians more amenable to an agreement with Israel."

But the U.S. began to encounter big problems within a few months of invading Iraq. The Bush regime thought it could quickly and totally remake Iraqi society and start "fresh"—creating a fully subservient neocolony, designed to fit the global needs of U.S. capital and the regional needs of U.S. power. The U.S. disbanded the Iraqi Army, barred most Sunnis from holding government positions, and attempted to install a hand-picked U.S. puppet council to rule. It even tried, under Paul Bremer, the U.S. "Administrator" of Iraq, to ram through drastic "free market" capitalist economic restructuring.

These predatory and nakedly imperialist measures soon sparked a growing armed resistance, centered among Iraqi Sunnis, that led to a 5-plus year civil war and threatened to both tear Iraq apart and render the U.S. occupation untenable. The American invasion, coupled with the end of Hussein's essentially secular regime, fueled Islamic fundamentalism—both Sunni and Shia. It provided an opening for Al Qaeda and other Islamist forces to gain a foothold in Iraq. The U.S. was forced to abandon its chosen lackeys (who had little following inside Iraq) and turn to reactionary Shia religious forces and parties, willing to work with and under the U.S., to attempt to govern and stabilize the country. (A majority of Iraqis are Shias, and these parties have a long history in the country.) These forces have varying ties to and tensions with Iran; and they have tensions and differences, as well as common interests, among themselves and with the U.S.

Being a foreign occupying power and creating a new state from the ashes of the Hussein

regime proved to be extremely difficult. Toppling the regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, other regional developments, and the hatred the U.S. wars spawned across the region ended up strengthening Iran. Such tensions and contradictions, including the mood of the people in Iraq, and the Iraqi rulers' fear of the kind of popular uprising sweeping the region (perhaps triggered by a too-close public embrace of the U.S.) factored in to the impasse in negotiations over U.S. forces continuing in Iraq.

None of this is to say that the U.S. is giving up on control and domination of Iraq, or that it won't continue to have a presence and shape events there—including with new assertions of political and military intervention. Iraq's economy, politics, and military remain subordinate to and dominated by imperialism (even as there are complex, shifting, and multi-layered contradictions at work). The largest U.S. embassy in the world is in the heart of Baghdad, Iraq's capital. ABC News reported that the State Department will continue to have some 5,000 security contractors and 4,500 other support contractors in Iraq, as well as a significant CIA presence. And U.S. officials have stated there will be a continuing military relationship with Iraq that will include the training of Iraqi forces. "So we are now going to have a security relationship with Iraq for training and support of their military," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated, "similar to what we have around the world from Jordan to Colombia." (*Democracy Now*, 10/24)

Further, the U.S. has built up a regional military infrastructure over the past 30 years, and officials have made clear they are not leaving the region: "We're going to maintain, as we do now, a significant force in that region of the world," Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated, including some 23,000 troops in Kuwait and about 100,000 in Afghanistan. "So we will always have a force that will be present and that will deal with any threats." ("U.S. Withdrawal Plans Draw Suspicion, Fear in Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, Oct 23)

Containing, weakening, perhaps overthrowing Iran's Islamic Republic of Iran has been a central objective of U.S. strategy since the launch of the "war on terror" in Sept. 2001. Yet in many ways, the U.S. war and other events have strengthened Iran. And now, it's possible that the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq may strengthen Iran further—in Iraq and regionally.

"The withdrawal from Iraq creates enormous strategic complexities rather than closure," one imperialist think tank analysis posed. "Therefore, if the U.S. withdrawal in Iraq results in substantial Iranian influence in Iraq, and al Assad doesn't fall, then the balance of power in the region completely shifts. This will give rise to a contiguous arc of Iranian influence stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea running along Saudi Arabia's northern border and along the length of Turkey's southern border." ("Libya and Iraq: The Price of Success," STRATFOR, Oct 25 2011)

This possibility has driven the U.S. to ramp up its threats against Iran. As soon as the troop withdrawal was announced, Secretary of State Clinton warned, "Iran would be badly miscalculating if they did not look at the entire region and all of our presence in many countries in the region." (CNN—State of the Union, 10/23)

Grand Schemes.... Profound Difficulties

Obama's hollow claim that "the United States is moving forward from a position of strength" cannot hide the fact that this entire decade of war has cost the U.S. enormously. It has greatly aggravated deep stresses in the U.S. empire, and it has intensified a whole cauldron of contradictions the U.S. faces in the strategically crucial Middle East-Central Asian regions. Dominance in this area has been a pillar of U.S. global power in the post-World War 2 era, and to its current and future status as the world's superpower. So the U.S. imperialists are compelled to attempt to find ways to maintain their power, presence, and preeminence in the region. But they're finding this an increasingly difficult and uncertain endeavor.

So yes, let's reflect on these nearly nine years of war and occupation in Iraq. They demonstrate that the U.S. is willing to employ massive violence and commit savage crimes to advance its imperialist interests and stave off reversals or defeat. It shows that the rulers of this country are chronic liars who will say anything—including the most blatant and obvious lies—to bamboozle people into going along with their program. These eight plus years prove, once again, that *nothing* good can come of U.S. intervention and aggression—no matter how it's dressed up. And they underscore the moral imperative of exposing the crimes and opposing the aggressions committed by this country.

At the same time, the war's unfolding and now the U.S. military's ignominious exit from Iraq, also illustrate the empire's profound and growing vulnerabilities, and how quickly its grand schemes can backfire. All this points to the potential for even deeper shocks and crises to jolt U.S. capitalism-imperialism, and the urgency of revolutionary work today to prepare for such a moment in order to be able to seize such an opening to sweep this war-mongering system away. Then we won't have to mark anniversary after anniversary of imperialist war after imperialist war.