The Quagmire Continues: 14 Years in Iraq

March 17, 2017

On March 19, 2003, the US invaded Iraq with a barrage of missile attacks nicknamed "Shock and Awe." Still reeling from the effects of 13 years of US/UN sanctions, including limited access to electricity, medicine and food, thousands of Iraqis died in the invasion and subsequent fighting. And although the US declared "Mission Accomplished" on May 1, 2003, the war in Iraq continues today.

President Donald Trump is planning to send 2500 troops to Kuwait to support the roughly 6000 currently in Iraq and 400-800 in Syria (*Army Times*, March 9). When White House spokesperson Sean Spicer was asked why some US troops in Syria were firing long-range explosives, he referred to the US presence in both countries as "advisers" (The *Intercept*, March 10). This was the same myth Americans were told about the troops which trickled into Viet Nam in the 1960s, leading to a massive buildup and hundreds of thousands of deaths and other casualties.

To see an image go to
https://www.france24.com/en/20170227-iraq-mosul-offensive-floating-bridge-tigris-river-east-bank

In January 2017, Iraqis cross one of Mosul's bridges, all damaged by US "coalition" planes (AFP/Getty 1/21)

This 14th anniversary of the 2003 invasion is only one of a series of dates tied to the US intervention in Iraq. January 16, 1991 marked the beginning of the "Gulf War," and August 8, 2014 was the date of the first US military action against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in phase three of the US war.

In late 2011, President Obama followed up on a pledge made by President Bush to withdraw US combat troops, but left about 500 military personnel there as "advisors" and to protect the US embassy in Iraq— the world's largest.

The US is supporting Iraqi forces, dropping bombs with conventional and drone aircraft. In the current efforts to push ISIS out of Mosul, the US damaged or destroyed all of that city's bridges — imagine that happening in Portland. The claim that they are merely providing support for Iraq is tenuous at best, with a handful of American soldiers now having died in combat in Iraq, and new "rules of engagement" that don't require consultation with Iraqis before calling in airstrikes (Associated Press, February 24).

Though sanctions were put in place against the late Saddam Hussein's regime in 1990 to force Iraq to repay Kuwait for their invasion of that country, Iraq still has to make payments despite its dire financial and political situation. Making matters worse, Donald Trump told NBC on January 25: "We should've kept the oil when we got out"— as if the US had the right to take Iraq's oil. This led to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis needing to tell Iraqis the US is "not in Iraq to seize anybody's oil" (Reuters, February 20).

The US is currently engaged in active warfare in seven countries— Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and Libya.* Not coincidentally, five of these countries appeared on President Trump's first travel ban (only Pakistan and Libya were left off, while Sudan— which the US bombed in 1998— and Iran— whose government the US overthrew in 1953— were on it). Iraq's government pressured Trump to take them off the list if he wanted to keep their cooperation in fighting ISIS (CNN, March 6). The Department of Homeland Security noted that of 82 persons suspected of supporting foreign terrorist organizations, "just over half were U.S. citizens born in the United States. The others were from 26 countries, led by Pakistan, Somalia, Bangladesh, Cuba, Ethiopia, Iraq and Uzbekistan... Of the other five nations, one person each from Iran, Sudan and Yemen was also involved in those terrorism cases, but none from Syria" (Associated Press, February 24).

The unending siege and occupation of Iraq has cost countless billions of dollars ($11 billion just on the war on ISIS**), millions of Iraqi and thousands of American lives, and kept the entire Middle East in conflict for decades. It is time for the US to get out once and for all and leave Iraq for the Iraqis!

* Note: Peace and Justice Works also notes that March 19 marks six years since the US attack on Libya unleased turmoil in that country.
**Military.com's "DODBuzz," January 19.