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Obama Ensures His Status as War President

By Jason Ditz

January 21, 2015



Ending the US occupation of Iraq in 2011, President Obama tried to portray himself as a peacemaker. He's still trying to sell that narrative, even as he quickly escalates in his new Iraq war.

The State of the Union address nominally continued that story, but between talking up further escalation of the ISIS war, and commanders suggesting they could extend the Afghan occupation even further, President Obama's status as a war-time president from start to finish seems secured.

Much of his commentary in the Tuesday speech was contradictory to his policies, as he insisted he "needed the authority" to fight a war with ISIS months after unilaterally launching that war, and insisting at the time he didn't need permission to do so.

Similarly, he bragged about making unseen reforms to the use of drones for overseas assassinations, even though he was the one who dramatically escalated this policy in the first place, and has long defended his authority to assassinate anyone he wants to on national security grounds.

Attempts to sell his policy at any given time as something short of a more hawkish alternative have defined his presidency on a narrative basis. Ultimately, this fear of being defined by his wars never seems to get in the way of starting or escalating those wars.

Other than an early move toward rapprochement with Cuba, Obama-era foreign policy seems to be defined by wars and acrimony, seeking military buildups in Asia and Eastern Europe while ensuring that the extent wars are going to last for many, many years to come.