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The fiasco of Kerry's Middle East tour

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US Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Brussels Tuesday following a hurried three-day tour of the Middle East. The trip was organized in response to the historic debacle for Washington represented by the disintegration of US-trained Iraqi security forces in the face of an offensive by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and a growing Sunni insurgency.

It was clear well before Kerry reached Europe for a NATO foreign ministers meeting, however, that his trip accomplished nothing outside of underscoring the hypocritical and criminal policies that have led to the current debacle, and placing on public display the contradictions that Washington has piled one atop the other in pursuing its predatory aims in the Middle East.

On his first stop, Cairo, Kerry groveled before Egypt's president and de facto military dictator, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. His visit celebrated the fact that the US military aid spigot is being turned on full blast once again. This is despite the fact that Sisi has massacred thousands of demonstrators, jailed at least 20,000 political prisoners, sentenced over 2,000 political opponents to death in drumhead trials, and carried out widespread torture.

It was revealed that 10 days earlier, Washington had quietly released \$572 million in funds for Egypt's military. Kerry stressed that the US was going ahead with the delivery of 10 Apache

attack helicopters to the Egyptian regime—weapons that are supposedly to be used to attack Islamist militants in the Sinai, but would prove lethally effective in the suppression of a mass revolt.

In the same breath, Kerry stated his commitment to “upholding the universal rights of all Egyptians,” and recounted that he had gotten “a very strong sense” of Sisi’s commitment to human rights.

Within barely 24 hours, the Egyptian champion of human rights Sisi rewarded Kerry’s sycophantic praise by upholding an Egyptian court’s sentences of between seven and 10 years in prison for three Al Jazeera journalists charged in a mockery of a trial with “spreading false news.” Washington issued formal denunciations of the sentences, but made it clear that the Apaches are still on their way.

While posturing as a crusader for “democracy” in countries like Iraq, Libya and Syria that have been targeted for regime-change, and hypocritically feigning support for the so-called “Arab Spring,” US imperialism bases its strategy in the Middle East on a series of dictatorial regimes, ranging from Sisi’s in Egypt to the reactionary monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Gulf states.

In Iraq, where he made an unannounced stop, exiting a military plane wearing a bullet-proof vest, Kerry held a 90-minute meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in which he purportedly argued for the formation of a national unity government and for all sides to “rise above sectarian divisions.”

Just after Kerry left Iraq, Maliki made a speech denouncing the conception of a national unity regime as a “coup against the constitution,” while adopting clearly sectarian rhetoric in calling for a “holy war against terror.”

Kerry’s appeal for the Kurdish leadership in Erbil to rally to the Baghdad government was rejected out of hand by the Kurdish president, Massoud Barzani, even before it was made. In an interview directly before meeting with Kerry, Barzani declared that “we are facing a new reality in Iraq,” and that it was “very difficult” to imagine the country staying together. He suggested that Kurdistan would move toward independence while holding onto Kirkuk and the surrounding oilfields, which had been seized by Kurdish forces in the midst of the crisis created by the ISIS offensive.

Kerry’s tour only deepened the debacle created by US policy in Iraq. In the course of the trip, he made the most astounding statement at a news conference in Cairo, declaring, “The United States of America is not responsible for what happened in Libya, nor is it responsible for what is happening in Iraq today.” He went on to add, “The United States shed blood and worked hard for years for the Iraqis to have their own governance.”

What arrogance and hypocrisy! Not only is US imperialism responsible for the crises in Iraq and Libya (not to mention Syria), the crimes it has carried out in each of these countries have come together to create the current Iraqi disaster.

In Iraq, the full force of the US military was unleashed to decimate an entire society, destroying every institution and the country's entire infrastructure, while claiming the lives of over one million people. Employing a strategy of divide and rule, Washington deliberately implanted a system of sectarian politics to extinguish Iraqi nationalism, thereby unleashing the bitter sectarian civil war that is now reigniting.

In Libya and Syria, Washington armed and funded Islamist militias, including ISIS, as shock troops in sectarian civil wars for regime-change that again claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Now, ISIS, which the US and its reactionary allies in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies have backed against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, have crossed the border into Iraq, turning a war fanned by US imperialism into a regional conflagration. On the Syrian side of the border, Washington denounces the existing government for military strikes against ISIS, while on the Iraqi side it is desperately attempting to organize government forces to defeat ISIS.

As for having “shed blood” to give Iraqis democracy, Kerry's attempt to rehabilitate the Iraq war is part of a concerted campaign by the Obama administration—originally brought into office on a wave of antiwar sentiment—to legitimize this US war of aggression in order to prepare new and even bloodier interventions. The US invaded Iraq no more to implant democracy than to find weapons of mass destruction. Its aim—then as now—was to use American military power to impose US hegemony over the strategic resources and regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

In 1971, a young Kerry, having returned from four months in Vietnam, delivered a moving statement for the group Vietnam Veterans against the War to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, detailing the crimes of US forces—killing civilians, destroying villages, torturing prisoners, bombing indiscriminately. All of these crimes were repeated three decades later in Iraq.

In his statement to the committee, Kerry indicted the American politicians of the day, declaring that “to attempt to justify the loss of one American life in Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos by linking such loss to the preservation of freedom...is to us the height of criminal hypocrisy, and it is that kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart.”

Substitute the word “Iraq” for “Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos” and one has a perfectly serviceable indictment of Kerry himself, 43 years older and hundreds of millions of dollars richer.