

Obama Invokes Holocaust to Ratchet up War Threats on Iran, Syria

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President Barack Obama used a visit to Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum Monday to unveil a set of new sanctions against Iran and Syria and to promote the administration's use of "human rights" as a pretext for aggressive war and regime change.

The new sanctions target Syrian and Iranian intelligence agencies as well as telecommunications and Internet providers for use of information technology to monitor and repress political opposition. They have been rolled out under conditions in which the United Nations is deploying its monitors in Syria to oversee a ceasefire and as Iran prepares for a second round of negotiations next month in Baghdad with the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany) over its nuclear program.

The timing of this latest round of sanctions, coming on top of a whole series of unilateral US and European Union measures aimed at crippling the Syrian and Iranian economies, strongly indicates that Washington is merely using negotiations with both countries as a cover for preparing war and regime change.

Obama's executive order calls for Washington to impose sanctions on Syrian and Iranian officials for using information technology, including software to track cellphones and monitor Internet use and to spy upon and repress dissidents. It also would punish what the US president refers to as the "digital guns for hire," i.e., information technology companies that sell software and equipment to targeted regimes.

"These technologies should be in place to empower citizens, not to repress them," Obama declared.

Among those named in the order are the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate, the Syriatel phone company as well as Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, its Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and Datak Telekom, an Iranian Internet provider.

Left unscathed by the order are dictatorial regimes that are US allies in the region. Virtually all of them have contracted with the so-called "digital guns for hire" of Silicon Valley to carry out the same kind of operations in their countries.

As the *Wall Street Journal* reported last month, "McAfee Inc., acquired last month by Intel Corp., has provided content-filtering software used by Internet-service providers in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait," while Websense Inc. of San Diego, California "has sold its Web-filtering technology in Yemen, where it has been used to block online tools that let people

disguise their identities from government monitors.”

The dictatorial monarchy in Bahrain, which hosts the US 5th Fleet, has installed a string of “monitoring centers” using sophisticated technology to track and eavesdrop on oppositionists, who have been rounded up, imprisoned and tortured.

For that matter the US government and the military’s National Security Agency (NSA) employ a spying apparatus that makes surveillance operations in Syria and Iran look amateurish by comparison. Congress, meanwhile, is preparing to act upon new legislation, the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act of 2011, that would promote the government’s ability to monitor and block Internet use.

Obama’s supposed concern that the Internet be utilized to “empower citizens, not to repress them,” is belied by his administration’s ruthless repression of WikiLeaks, whose founder Julian Assange faces the threat of extradition to the US to face espionage charges, punishable by death, and of Private Bradley Manning, who is being prosecuted by the military for allegedly exposing US war crimes via WikiLeaks.

Obama announced the new sanctions in a speech saturated with hypocrisy and lies. The US president invoked the Holocaust as an abstract evil, whose causes were seemingly inexplicable. The words “Nazi,” “fascist,” or “Hitler” did not appear in the text. Rather, the words “never again” were mouthed as a slogan meaning unconditional support for Israel. How the death camps and the extermination of millions came to be is not explained, outside of the suggestion that it arose out of a failure to intervene militarily.

That fascism in Germany was the answer of the country’s ruling class to the desperate crisis of the capitalist system—and was able to consolidate power only through crushing the socialist movement and the working class as a whole—is of no interest in this brand of “Holocaust remembrance.” Nor for that matter is the fact—underscored by the US prosecutors of the Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg—that their crime of mass murder arose out of the policy of aggressive war, described by the tribunal as “the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

The invocation of the Holocaust to justify wars of aggression is not merely hypocritical, but morally obscene. But this is precisely what Obama did.

He hailed the US-NATO war against Libya as a success and a model for future imperialist interventions. As a result of the eight-month war, he claimed, “the Libyan people are forging their own future, and the world can take pride in the innocent lives that we saved.” The Libyan regime installed by the US-NATO intervention has itself estimated that some 50,000 Libyans died in the war, far more “innocent lives” lost than were ever threatened by the repression of the Gaddafi regime. Meanwhile, the destabilization of not only Libya, but the entire region, threatens to claim many thousands more lives.

Obama also used the speech to announce that he is extending the deployment of US Special Operations troops in Central Africa, ostensibly to assist in the hunt for the Lord’s Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony.

Finally, he announced the creation of a new “Atrocities Prevention Board,” which is to be chaired by Samantha Power, the White House National Security Council senior director for

multilateral and humanitarian affairs and a leading advocate of “humanitarian” military intervention. The new panel is supposed to coordinate actions across the US government in promoting imperialist interventions in the name of protecting civilian life and human rights.

In exploiting the Holocaust to justify a buildup to a war against Iran that could well lead to millions more deaths, Obama was merely echoing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who last week delivered a speech on Israel’s Holocaust Remembrance Day declaring Iran an “existential threat” to nuclear-armed Israel and equating Iran’s nuclear power program to the Holocaust.

At the time, Elie Wiesel, who has made a career as Washington’s semi-official Holocaust spokesman, criticized Netanyahu’s remarks on Iran. “Iran is a threat, but can we say that it will make a second Auschwitz?” Wiesel remarked. “I don’t compare anything to the Holocaust ... Only Auschwitz was Auschwitz.”

By the time of his appearance Monday, introducing Obama at the museum, Wiesel had gotten his line in sync with the war propaganda needs of Israel and Washington. “Have we learned anything?” he declared in reference to the Holocaust. “If so, how is it that Assad is still in power? How is it that the Holocaust’s No. 1 denier, Ahmadinejad, is still the president, he who threatens to use nuclear weapons ... to destroy the Jewish state.”

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