U.S. Chooses Genocide Over Diplomacy in the Middle East

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On February 7, 2024, a U.S. drone strike assassinated an Iraqi militia leader, Abu Baqir al-Saadi, in the heart of Baghdad. This was a further U.S. escalation in a major new front in the U.S.-Israeli war on the Middle East, centered on the Israeli genocide in Gaza, but already also including ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, Israeli attacks on Lebanon and Syria, and the U.S. and U.K.'s bombing of Yemen.

This latest U.S. attack followed the U.S. bombing of seven targets on February 2, three in Iraq and four in Syria, with 125 bombs and missiles, killing at least 39 people, which Iran called "a strategic mistake" that would bring "disastrous consequences" for the Middle East.

At the same time, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has been touring the shrinking number of capitals in the region where leaders will still talk to him, playing the United States' traditional role as a dishonest broker between Israel and its neighbors, in reality partnering with Israel to offer the Palestinians impossible, virtually suicidal terms for a ceasefire in Gaza.

What Israel and the United States have proposed, but not made public, appears to be a second temporary ceasefire, during which prisoners or hostages would be exchanged, possibly leading to the release of all the Israeli security prisoners held in Gaza, but in no way leading to the final end of the genocide. If the Palestinians in fact freed all their Israeli hostages as part of a prisoner swap, it would remove the only obstacle to a catastrophic escalation of the genocide.

When Hamas responded with a serious counter-proposal for a full ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, Biden dismissed it out of hand as "over the top," and Netanyahu called it "bizarre" and "delusional."

The position of the United States and Israel today is that ending a massacre that has already killed more than 27,700 people is not a serious option, even after the International Court of Justice has ruled it a plausible case of genocide under the Genocide Convention. Raphael Lemkin, the Polish holocaust survivor who coined the term genocide and drafted the Genocide Convention from his adopted home in New York City, must be turning in his grave in Mount Hebron Cemetery.

The United States' support for Israel's genocidal policies now goes way beyond Palestine, with the U.S. expansion of the war to Iraq, Syria and Yemen to punish other countries and forces in the region for intervening to defend or support the Palestinians. U.S. officials claimed the February 2 attacks were intended to stop Iraqi Resistance attacks on U.S. bases. But the leading Iraqi resistance force had already suspended attacks against U.S. targets on January 30th after they killed three U.S. troops, declaring a truce at the urging of the Iranian and Iraqi governments.

A senior Iraqi military officer told BBC Persian that at least one of the Iraqi military units the U.S. bombed on February 2nd had nothing to do with attacks on U.S. bases. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani negotiated an agreement a year ago to clearly differentiate between Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) units that were part of the "Axis of Resistance" fighting a low-grade war with U.S. occupation forces, and other PMF units that were not involved in attacks on U.S. bases.

Tragically, because the U.S. failed to coordinate its attacks with the Iraqi government, al-Sudani's agreement failed to prevent the U.S. from attacking the wrong Iraqi forces. It is no wonder that some analysts have dubbed al-Sudani's valiant efforts to prevent all-out war between U.S. forces and the Islamic Resistance in his country as "mission impossible."

Following the elaborately staged but carelessly misdirected U.S. attacks, Resistance forces in Iraq began launching new strikes on U.S. bases, including a drone attack that killed six Kurdish troops at the largest U.S. base in Syria. So the predictable effect of the U.S. bombing was in fact to rebuff Iran and Iraq's efforts to rein in resistance forces and to escalate a war that U.S. officials keep claiming they want to deter.

From experienced journalists and analysts to Middle Eastern governments, voices of caution are warning the United States in increasingly stark language of the dangers of its escalating bombing campaigns. "While the war rages in Gaza," the BBC's Orla Guerin wrote on February 4, "one false move could set the region alight."

Three days later, Orla would be surrounded by protesters chanting "America is the greatest devil," as she reported from the site of the U.S. drone assassination of Kataib Hezbollah leader Abu Baqir al-Saadi in Baghdad – which could prove to be exactly the false move she feared.

But what Americans should be asking their government is this: Why are there still 2,500 U.S. troops in Iraq? It is 21 years since the United States invaded Iraq and plunged the nation into seemingly endless violence, chaos and corruption; 12 years since Iraq forced U.S. occupation forces to withdraw from Iraq at the end of 2011; and 7 years since the defeat of ISIS, which served as justification for the United States to send forces back into Iraq in 2014, and then to obliterate most of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, in 2017.

Successive Iraqi governments and parliaments have asked the United States to withdraw its

forces from Iraq, and previously scheduled talks are about to begin. But the Iraqis and Americans have issued contradictory statements about the goal of the negotiations. Prime Minister al-Sudani and most Iraqis hope they will bring about the immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces, while U.S. officials insist that U.S. troops may remain for another two to five years, kicking this explosive can further down the road despite the obvious dangers it poses to the lives of U.S. troops and to peace in the region.

Behind these contradictory statements, the real value of Iraqi bases to the U.S. military does not seem to be about ISIS at all but about Iran. Although the United States has more than 40,000 troops stationed in 14 countries across the Middle East, and another 20,000 on warships in the seas surrounding them, the bases it uses in Iraq are its closest bases and airfields to Tehran and much of Iran. If the Pentagon loses these forward operating bases in Iraq, the closest bases from which it can attack Tehran will be Camp Arifjan and five other bases in Kuwait, where 13,500 U.S. troops would be vulnerable to Iranian counter-attacks – unless, of course, the U.S. withdraws them, too.

Toward the end of the Cold War, historian Gabriel Kolko observed in his book Confronting the Third World that the United States' "endemic incapacity to avoid entangling, costly commitments in areas of the world that are of intrinsically secondary importance to [its] priorities has caused U.S. foreign policy and resources to whipsaw virtually arbitrarily from one problem and region to the other. The result has been the United States' increasing loss of control over its political priorities, budget, military strategy and tactics, and, ultimately, its original economic goals."

After the end of the Cold War, instead of restoring realistic goals and priorities, the neocons who gained control of U.S. foreign policy fooled themselves into believing that U.S. military and economic power could finally triumph over the frustratingly diverse social and political evolution of hundreds of countries and cultures all over the world. In addition to wreaking pointless mass destruction on country after country, this has turned the United States into the global enemy of the principles of democracy and self-determination that most Americans believe in.

The horror Americans feel at the plight of people in Gaza and the U.S. role in it is a shocking new low in this disconnect between the humanity of ordinary Americans and the insatiable ambitions of their undemocratic leaders.

While working for an end to the U.S. government's support for Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people, Americans should also be working for the long-overdue withdrawal of U.S. occupying forces from Iraq, Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East.

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Featured image: Israeli airstrike on an apartment building in Rafah, the last refuge in southern Gaza. Photo credit: MENAFN

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