

Who is Responsible for the Catastrophes in the Middle East?

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"The United States of America is not responsible for what happened in Libya, nor is it responsible for what is happening in Iraq today," Secretary of State John Kerry declared at a Cairo news conference held in the midst of his recent crisis tour of the Middle East.

As Kerry spoke, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and a growing Sunni insurgency were consolidating their grip over the north and west of Iraq, including the country's borders with Syria and Jordan. Upwards of a million Iraqis had been displaced by the fighting, and thousands had been killed in the mounting sectarian slaughter.

Libya is in a state of complete collapse, with continuous fighting between rival militias, a government that exists in name only, oil production down by at least 80 percent, and over a million people forced to flee the country's violence. Many thousands are incarcerated in a network of prisons run by armed groups that practice systematic torture.

Kerry's statement merely made official the steady drumbeat from the political establishment and the media since the situation in Iraq turned into a complete debacle: "The US bears no responsibility."

Typical was the commentary by *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, a "human rights" imperialist who was a vocal proponent of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. He wrote: "The debacle in Iraq isn't President Obama's fault. It's not the Republicans' fault... overwhelmingly, it's the fault of the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki."

Maliki, the stooge put in power and kept there by the US occupation, is made the fall guy.

Thomas Friedman, the *Times'* foreign affairs columnist, wrote Sunday that Maliki is an "arsonist," who, "the minute America left Iraq," deliberately unleashed mayhem. This is the same Friedman who in 2003 declared that the US invaded Iraq "because we could," spoke proudly of US troops going house-to-house and ordering Iraqis to "suck on this," and declared that he had "no problem with a war for oil."

Listening to the chorus of statements insisting that the US has no responsibility for the deepening tragedy inflicted upon the people of Iraq and Libya, one is reminded of nothing so much as the Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, from Hermann Göring on down, rising one-by-one in the dock to declare themselves "not guilty."

What are the crimes for which Kerry and so many others in the ruling establishment insist

Washington bears no responsibility?

The description that they used for their own actions at the time was “shock and awe,” the unleashing of colossal destructive force upon a society already shattered by a decade of sadistic US sanctions. Killing hundreds of thousands of people and turning millions into refugees, the US war and occupation destroyed every institution of Iraqi society, while Washington deliberately fomented sectarian divisions as a means of overcoming Iraqi nationalism. The country’s deposed ruler, Saddam Hussein, was tried by a drumhead court and unceremoniously executed.

All of this was justified with warnings about the imminent threat from “weapons of mass destruction” and ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda. As the whole world now knows, it was all lies.

There were no WMDs and there was no Al Qaeda in Iraq until US imperialism overthrew the country’s government and tore its social fabric to pieces. In fact, there was no Al Qaeda at all before Washington set about inciting a bloody war by right-wing Islamists in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

In Libya and now in Syria, the Obama administration abandoned the “war on terrorism” pretext for an equally cynical and fraudulent justification for regime-change: “human rights.” In Libya, the US and NATO heavily bombed the country while organizing and arming Islamist-led militias in a sectarian war that destroyed all of the existing governmental and social structures. As in Iraq, it ended its war with the brutal murder of the country’s secular leader, Muammar Gaddafi.

Washington is carrying out a similar war for regime-change in Syria, backing Sunni Islamist and sectarian militias that are led by ISIS, the same force that has overrun much of Iraq. The US hopes to end this war with the assassination of a third secular Arab head of state, Bashar al-Assad.

Just last week, Obama proposed to funnel \$500 million in arms to the Syrian “rebels”—weapons that everyone knows will end up in the hands of ISIS, which the US is supposedly committed to defeating in Iraq.

As the contradictions and deceptions of Washington’s policy become ever more glaring, US officials simply act as though the American people won’t notice, or will believe anything. Or, for that matter, they won’t see that \$500 million can be conjured up instantly to pay for a criminal war, while working people are being told “there is no money” for health care, education, housing or jobs.

The destruction that the US oligarchs have wrought in the Middle East, with all of its terrible human consequences, is the external manifestation of their destructive role within the US itself—smashing up the country’s manufacturing base, turning its economy into a gambling casino for financial parasites, destroying the jobs and living standards of millions of people. With no answers to the growing crisis at home, they turn to violence abroad, only compounding the catastrophes they have created overseas.

The “not responsables” and “not guilties” from Kerry, Kristof, Friedman and the other advocates and apologists for American military aggression won’t wash. US imperialism is responsible for terrible crimes against humanity.

Yet no one has been held accountable. Not those in Washington—Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Powell, et al.—who conspired to wage a war of aggression; not those in the current administration, from Obama on down, who conspired to shield their predecessors and continue the same predatory policies; not the military brass who carried out the war; not the private contractors who enriched themselves off of it; not the lying media that helped foist the war onto the American public; not the cowardly and conformist academics who justified and went along with it.

Together, they are responsible for the catastrophes that have been inflicted upon the peoples of Iraq, Libya and Syria.

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