

Iraqi prime minister claims “liberation” of devastated Mosul

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Iraq’s Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi staged a triumphalist visit to Mosul Sunday, proclaiming the “liberation” of Iraq’s second-largest city from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), even as US airstrikes and automatic weapons fire continued nearby. Heavy fighting is still reported in parts of western Mosul’s Old City along the Tigris River, where ISIS fighters reportedly continued to hold nearly one square kilometer of territory.

“The commander in chief of the armed forces (Prime Minister) Haider al-Abadi arrived in the liberated city of Mosul and congratulated the heroic fighters and Iraqi people for the great victory,” Abadi’s office said in a statement.

The “liberated city of Mosul” has been largely reduced to smoking rubble littered with decaying corpses. Entire blocks have been leveled and huge stretches of residential buildings have been either demolished or badly damaged.

The United Nations issued a report last week estimating that replacing basic infrastructure alone will cost upwards of \$1 billion. The UN admitted that this figure is probably an underestimation of the real costs, particularly given the massive destruction inflicted on the narrow and densely populated streets of Mosul’s Old City, ISIS’s last redoubt, which was subjected to the most intense bombardment.

The battle for Mosul has been raging since last October 15, with US warplanes, attack helicopters and heavy artillery providing the bulk of the firepower for the slow advance of Iraqi and army police units operating under the direction of US special forces “advisers.” British, French, Australian, Jordanian and Iraqi bombers have also participated in pummeling the city.

In the continuing nine-month-long siege, the city’s

civilian population has been subjected to wholesale slaughter and hellish conditions. Tens of thousands have been killed or wounded, and at least a million driven from their homes. Some half a million Mosul residents have been forced into crowded refugee camps. Those trapped within the city itself were deprived of electricity, clean water, adequate food and access to medical care, while facing a continuous rain of bombs and missiles.

Those fleeing the city have faced abuse at the hands of Iraqi security forces and sectarian militias besieging Mosul. Young men and boys have been detained as ISIS suspects and, in many cases, subjected to brutal torture and summary executions.

Among the weapons unleashed upon the population in the US air war was white phosphorous, a chemical weapon that burns human flesh down to the bone, and whose use in populated areas is banned under international law.

All of these crimes have been carried out under the explicit direction of the Pentagon, whose chief, the recently retired Marine Corps general James “Mad Dog” Mattis, announced in May that the US military had shifted from “attrition tactics” to “annihilation tactics” in its anti-ISIS war. Mattis, who led two murderous sieges of the city of Fallujah during the US occupation of Iraq in 2004, added, “Civilian casualties are a fact of life in this sort of situation.”

The battle for Mosul has exacted a heavy toll on Iraqi security forces, with some units reporting casualty rates of 50 percent, and the total number of dead and wounded as high as 10,000.

There has been no attempt to record the number of civilian deaths caused by US airstrikes in Mosul, though the Pentagon was compelled to admit to one particularly bloody air raid on March 17 which it

acknowledged claimed over 100 lives. Iraqi witnesses have put the death toll from that attack at over 200.

Among the first to join Abadi in hailing the “liberation” of Iraq was newly elected French President Emmanuel Macron. “Mosul liberated from ISIS: France pays homage to all those who, alongside our troops, contributed to this victory,” Macron wrote on his Twitter account.

France intervened aggressively in Iraq and Syria, sending the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle and dozens of warplanes to carry out airstrikes in both countries. French special forces units were also deployed on the ground as “trainers.” Macron’s rush to celebrate a still unconsummated victory in Mosul is indicative of his government’s embrace of stepped-up militarism and widening foreign interventions, particularly in areas of the Middle East and Africa where France previously exercised colonial domination.

The Iraqi government’s retaking of Mosul will by no means spell the end of fighting in Iraq. ISIS and similar Sunni Islamist militias are expected to continue a rural-based insurgency as well as bombing attacks on targets in Iraqi cities.

There is no indication that the government in Baghdad and its US backers have any clear plan for stabilizing Mosul, or for that matter the predominantly Sunni Anbar Province to the south, where similarly devastating sieges have been waged against the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah.

When it swept across western Iraq three years ago, ISIS had gained military strength thanks to the support given by the US and its allies to the Islamist militias serving as proxy forces in the wars for regime change in Libya and Syria. Its ability to rout larger Iraqi government forces stemmed not only from the corruption and low morale dominating these US-trained units, but also the hostility of the Sunni population towards the Shia-dominated government and security forces.

These sectarian divisions, deliberately stoked under the American occupation as a divide-and-rule tactic, can be expected to deepen with Shia militias deployed in the area and Iraqi Kurdistan seeking independence as well as enlargement of the areas under its control at the expense of Sunni populations.

US commanders have made it clear that they don’t see American forces leaving the country in the

foreseeable future. And the Pentagon has asked for nearly \$1.3 billion in its 2018 budget to fund continued support for Iraqi security forces

Meanwhile, the US continues its airstrikes and artillery bombardment of Raqqa, 231 miles to the west in Syria, where the Kurdish YPG militia serves as the main US proxy ground force. While the city is far smaller than Mosul, there too the siege is expected to drag on for months, with civilian casualties climbing into the thousands.

In both countries, under the cover of fighting ISIS and “terrorism,” Washington is unleashing military force with the aim of furthering its grip over the oil-rich Middle East at the expense of its rivals, and in preparation for war against the main regional obstacle to US hegemony, Iran.



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