MAWO Events:

U.S./CANADA HANDS OFF VENEZUELA! NO TO SANCTIONS! NO TO WAR!

On January 3, 2020, the U.S. assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq sparked outrage throughout the Middle East and around the world. With this arrogant and murderous act, the U.S. government and President Trump were saying, “the world is our backyard, where we can kill whoever wants, wherever and whenever we want.”

This assassination does not stand by itself – the U.S.-led war and occupation have killed well over 1 million Iraqi people since their criminal invasion in March 2003. Iraqi people have suffered 17 years of U.S.-led war and occupation that has destroyed their infrastructure, healthcare and education systems. They have left the Iraqi people with high rates of unemployment and poverty. Even rates of cancer and birth defects have risen dramatically, due to the U.S. military’s use of toxic and radioactive depleted uranium weapons, the effects of which will plague the Iraqi people for generations to come.

Meanwhile, in Iran, in 2018, U.S. President Trump withdrew from the Iran deal that was negotiated in 2015 and quickly re-imposed further economic sanctions against Iran. Trump’s campaign of “maximum pressure” against Iran is economically strangling Iran and the Iranian people. Most notably, Iranian cancer patients, along with those needing treatment for other conditions, are in a life or death situation as U.S. sanctions prevent Iran to import critical medicines and equipment.

If the January 3rd assassination was a message of imperialist dominance from the U.S., the people of Iraq and Iran, and throughout the Middle East, also have a message – U.S. imperialists, GET OUT NOW.

In Iraq, protests against the U.S. occupation had already been growing, including a protest which overturned the heavily fortified U.S. embassy in Baghdad from December 31 to January 1, in response to recent U.S. airstrikes. Since the January 3rd assassination, protests have grown, with over a million on the streets of Baghdad on January 24, including men, women, and children demanding that the U.S. leave Iraq. One young protester, 18 year old Mariam, told Al Jazeera at the January 25 demonstration, “we want to liberate our country from these chains of oppression. We have been suppressed and hurt by the U.S.’s interests in the region, so we want them out of Iraq.” Another protester, Aliya al-Ajeel from Sadr City, said, “the U.S. occupation has taken everything from us. We have nothing left. Since 2003, we have been stripped from our basic dignity and right to live a normal life. We’re living in decrepit houses; we have no jobs, no salaries. We don’t want America here.”

Iraq’s government has also demanded that U.S. forces leave Iraq. On January 6, a vote in Iraqi parliament passed to expel U.S. troops. U.S. President Trump’s response was to threaten economic sanctions on Iraq, before flatly refusing to respect Iraq’s self-determination and demands to leave.

Meanwhile, in Iran, millions came out onto the streets in mourning and protest in Tehran, Mashhad, and other cities. In the city of Ahvaz, a funeral procession for General Soleimani stretched more than three kilometers! Faced with the
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direct attack on Iran through the assassination of their top general and diplomat Qassem Soleimani, Iran responded in the language that the U.S. is used to speaking and not receiving – force. On January 8 Iran hit two U.S. bases in Iraq with missiles, demonstrating Iran’s ability to strike back against U.S. aggression, and to tell the U.S. government that they cannot carry on their warmongering actions without consequences and retaliation. U.S. media reports reflected their shock at having a taste of the aggression they are usually inflicting. On January 12, a CNN reporter on the ground in Iraq made the point on CNN TV that “the U.S. has rarely been on the receiving end of this kind of strike, they are usually the ones who are delivering it.” While there were no U.S. casualties in this attack (likely intentionally, as the U.S. had advance knowledge to move their soldiers to bunkers), the U.S. is now reporting 109 soldiers diagnosed with brain injuries (such as concussions). This delay and covering up is a disturbing criticism of the Trump administration, who have tried to dismiss the magnitude of the Iranian response.

Beyond Iraq and Iran, the U.S. is facing more setbacks to its attempts to dominate the Middle East. In Afghanistan, throughout 19 years U.S./Canada/NATO occupation, various administrations have vowed never to negotiate with the Taliban. Not out of any moral reasons; however, almost two decades of U.S. occupation have proved that advancing Afghanistan in the interest of Afghanistan was never a goal. The U.S. government has supported, funded, and backed notorious warlords in Afghanistan who now hold power or positions in government, and has fueled corruption, all to benefit U.S. interests at the expense of the Afghan people. However, now the U.S. government is in negotiations with the Taliban, including discussion of troop withdrawal, after 19 years of the Afghan resistance against the U.S. occupation.

In Syria, U.S. troops are also facing resistance – in recent days, video footage has shown villagers in northeastern Syria blocking and throwing rocks at a U.S. armored convoy which had shot and killed a civilian. Footage shows the villagers taking the U.S. flag off the top of an armored vehicle and arguing with U.S. troops. In another instance, U.S. patrols came under attack by small arms fire. Another video shows a Syrian civilian confronting U.S. soldiers on patrol, asking, “Who are you doing in my country? What do you want from my country? What business do you have here?”

From Iraq to Iran, Afghanistan to Syria, people in the Middle East are telling U.S. imperialism, “we will not back down. We will not relinquish our self-determination, our sovereignty, or our dignity. Even with rocks against a giant, we will fight back.”

No More Wars, U.S. Out of the Middle East

Here in Vancouver, Canada, Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) is standing alongside our Iraqi and Iranian brothers and sisters fighting for their self-determination. On January 10, MAWO held a protest action in downtown Vancouver, attracting the attention of passersby with a large banner reading “No War with Iran! U.S./Canada/NATO All Troops Out of Iraq!” The protest brought together many people who had heard about the protests in Iraq and Iran and were eager to join in solidarity from Canada.

The next day, on January 11, MAWO held a free public forum about the escalation of U.S. wars and aggression in the Middle East. The forum was emceed by Azza Rojbi, MAWO executive member and Tunisian social justice activist. The program started with a series of video clips, showing both the history and recent events in Iraq and Iran. The first speaker was Wala Zaidan, an Iraqi poet and social justice activist, who spoke from her experiences of seeing her home country being destroyed by the U.S. war and occupation. Wala also shared a beautiful and touching poem she had written. The next speaker was Ali Yerevani, who is the political editor of the Fire This Time Newspaper, and was a key figure in the 1979 Iranian revolution. Ali spoke about the overall U.S. imperialist strategy for hegemony in the Middle East, and how the U.S. needs to control Iran as part of this strategy but also cannot easily attack Iran. He spoke of the U.S./Canada/NATO All Troops Out of Iraq!