

9/11 Anniversary: The Terror Pretext in Tatters

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The 11th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks passed Tuesday with diminished official commemoration, as attempts to exploit the tragic deaths of that day as a pretext for Washington's unending wars have grown ever more hollow.

In New York City, where over 2,700 people died in the collapse of the Twin Towers, no politicians spoke. The ceremony consisted of family members reading the long list of the dead and invoking the memory of lost parents, children, siblings and spouses.

In Washington, President Barack Obama and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta delivered banal and hypocritical speeches outside the Pentagon, where 125 died. Obama extolled the victims of the 9/11 attacks, declaring that “through their sacrifice, they helped us make the America we are today—an America that has emerged even stronger.”

By what measure is America stronger? Elsewhere in his speech, Obama suggested that “when the history books are written,” 9/11’s legacy will be a country that has become “safer” and “more united than ever before.”

His is an America that can be conjured up only in empty rhetoric, far from the real country that is gripped by profound crisis, with tens of millions unable to find work, and where the divisions between the financial oligarchy that he represents and the working people who make up the vast majority of the population have never been starker.

As for the history books, their first task is to explain the events of September 11 themselves, which over a decade later remain shrouded in mystery and cover-up. In what ostensibly was the most catastrophic intelligence failure in US history, no one in the US intelligence/military apparatus or in the Bush and Clinton administrations has ever been held accountable.

The official story is that 19 Arab members of Al Qaeda were able to enter the US, spending many months here, with some of them undergoing extensive training as pilots, without anyone in Washington’s vast intelligence apparatus having the slightest notion of what they were up to. This remains the most improbable explanation, contradicted by the evidence that several of these individuals were under surveillance and by the multiple warnings that were given to the Bush administration.

Obama’s reference to the 9/11 victims’ “sacrifice” to make America “even stronger” struck an odd note. Sacrifice implies an element of consciousness on the part of the victims themselves—or someone else—in offering up lives in pursuit of definite aims. The president’s choice of words may have suggested more than he intended.

No one went to work at the World Trade Center or the Pentagon on the morning of September 11, 2001 thinking they were going to die, much less that their deaths would be used as the justification for launching a decade of wars that would claim the lives of over a million Iraqis, hundreds of thousands of Afghans, and 6,600 US troops.

Yet those in the top echelons of the US government and military and intelligence agencies lost no time in seizing upon the attacks to implement pre-existing plans for military conquest. They exploited 9/11 to justify wars of aggression aimed at offsetting the economic decline of American capitalism by establishing US hegemony over the energy-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

The incessant claim that these wars were being waged to defeat Al Qaeda never stood up to scrutiny. The US invaded Iraq to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein, an enemy of Al Qaeda, after concocting lies about “weapons of mass destruction” and non-existent terrorist ties. In Afghanistan, Obama tripled the size of the US occupation force under conditions in which US military and intelligence officers acknowledged that Al Qaeda had virtually no presence in the country.

The invocation of 9/11 to justify the crimes carried out over the past decade—as well as new ones yet to come—has worn increasingly thin. The American people have passed through the experience of wars based on lies, as well as a relentless assault on basic democratic rights. Despite the ceaseless attempts to terrorize them with the supposedly ubiquitous threat of terrorism, the majority of the population lives in greater fear of the economic and social terror of America’s financial and corporate rulers.

Today, the pretense that the global operations of American militarism are directed at quelling Al Qaeda is patently absurd. In both the war for regime-change waged against Libya last year and the current campaign to bring about similar results in Syria, Washington has overseen the funding, training and arming of forces linked to Al Qaeda. The US is working with these elements in order to topple secular Arab governments and pave the way for an even bloodier war against Iran. In these adventures, US imperialism has come full circle, reproducing the relationship forged between the CIA and Al Qaeda when the latter was created to conduct a war to oust the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Defense Secretary Panetta’s remarks Tuesday—an unrestrained glorification of war and militarism—reflected this shift, with 9/11 serving as an all-purpose justification for war against anyone, anywhere.

September 11, he declared, “inspired a fierce determination to fight back and protect our way of life.” Vowing that the US would continue military operations in Yemen, Somalia and North Africa, he continued, “We will continue to pursue and fight our enemies wherever they go, wherever they hide, wherever they try to find refuge—we will never stop until we have made sure that America is safe.”

Nearly four years ago, Barack Obama won election on a wave of antiwar sentiment and popular disgust with the crimes carried out under the Bush administration. Today he affirms that the wars and crimes of his predecessor have made America “stronger” and “more united,” while promising to unleash new and even more horrific wars of his own.

The American people face an election that offers them no means of expressing their deep-seated hostility to militarism. The threat of new military interventions and, ultimately,

another world war emerges not merely from the reactionary policies of both the Democrats and Republicans. It is the inevitable product of the deepest world crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

A successful struggle against this threat requires the independent political mobilization of the working class against its source, the capitalist profit system. This is the perspective fought for by the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates for president and vice-president, Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer.

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