

Obama exploits Fort Hood massacre to promote US wars

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President Barack Obama used his speech at Tuesday's service for the 13 men and women killed last week at Fort Hood, Texas to promote the two ongoing US wars and his own plan to escalate the intervention in Afghanistan.

The president delivered his remarks as his administration is finalizing plans to send tens of thousands more US troops to Afghanistan.

Obama spoke before thousands of Army troops as well as relatives of the 12 soldiers and one civilian who were killed last Thursday in a shooting spree allegedly carried out by US Army Major Nidal Hasan.

Hasan, an Army psychiatrist, is accused of opening fire with a handgun inside the post's Soldier Readiness Processing Center, where troops are processed for deployment to the Iraq and Afghanistan war zones.

"These are trying times for our country," Obama said. "In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the same extremists who killed nearly 3,000 Americans continue to endanger America, our allies, and innocent Afghans and Pakistanis. In Iraq, we are working to bring a war to a successful end, as there are still those who would deny the Iraqi people the future that Americans and Iraqis have sacrificed so much for."

He argued that "the stories of those at Fort Hood reaffirm the core values that we are fighting for," while praising US troops for having "served tour after tour of duty in distant, different and difficult places... serving together to protect our people, while giving others half a world away the chance to lead a better life."

Obama's speech earned him immediate praise from the media. The *New York Times* speculated as to whether his "soaring rhetoric" would boost his approval ratings.

The content of his eulogy, however, was based on lies that have served as the cornerstone of US foreign policy for the past eight years.

Obama contended that the US is fighting against "the same extremists who killed nearly 3,000 Americans" on September 11, and that US troops are in Iraq and Afghanistan to provide the "opportunity of self-government to peoples that have suffered tyranny and war." These are the essential claims made by the Bush administration to justify the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the international belligerence and

lawlessness that have characterized the "global war on terrorism."

The US deployment of 68,000 troops in Afghanistan and 120,000 in Iraq is aimed neither at pursuing those responsible for 9/11 nor at bringing democracy to the peoples of those two countries. These are the propaganda claims made by the Bush administration to promote the wars in the first place, and they have been picked up by Obama in order to continue and escalate them.

The US wars and military occupations in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia were planned and prepared well before the events of September 11, 2001. They were begun under Bush and are being continued under Obama to pursue US interests in two of the most strategically vital regions of the globe, which together contain the bulk of the world's known energy resources.

The brutal colonial character of these wars and the impact they have had upon the troops sent to fight them in—to use Obama's words—"tour after tour of duty" are ultimately the cause of last week's killing spree at Fort Hood.

Obama's attempt to cast these wars of aggression as a crusade for freedom was aimed not merely at comforting the grieving loved ones of those cut down by gunfire last Thursday. Rather, it is part of a conscious attempt to overcome the antiwar sentiment of the American people in preparation for a major escalation of the war in Afghanistan.

Citing administration sources, CBS News reported Monday night that the Obama White House has already decided to grant "most if not all" of the 40,000 additional troops requested by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the senior US commander in Afghanistan. This would bring the total US occupation force to more than 100,000.

According to the CBS report, the first additional combat troops would arrive in Afghanistan by early next year, but, because of troop shortages, it would take until the end of 2010 to deploy all of them. Unlike the Iraq "surge," the network said, "the buildup would be expected to last about four years." This estimate is based on the highly optimistic assumption that the US will prove successful in building up a far larger and more reliable Afghan army and police force within that time frame.

While the White House denied that Obama has settled on any

plan, the CBS report is only one of several in recent days citing administration officials as saying that somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 more troops are to be sent to the war.

Obama returned to Washington Tuesday night and is to hold a final meeting with his war council before embarking on a nine-day trip to Asia. Upon his return, he is expected to announce his decision to escalate the Afghanistan intervention.

It is this decision that underlies the administration's compulsion to falsify the nature of the wars and to misrepresent the character of the killings at Fort Hood.

According to multiple accounts, the alleged gunman, Nidal Hasan, had deeply opposed the wars and had become increasingly frantic over the Army's orders for his deployment to Afghanistan.

Both sentiments had been fueled by his six years at the Army's Walter Reed Medical Center, where he counseled physically maimed and mentally shattered soldiers, spending day after day listening to what they had done and seen in combat and dealing with their trauma.

These feelings were also no doubt intensified by the pervasive anti-Muslim attitudes within the military. These prejudices, though officially discouraged by the military command, are the inevitable product of the universal tendency to vilify and dehumanize those whom soldiers are sent to kill, and the unchecked influence of Christian fundamentalism in the military, which has led many to see the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of a holy war. Hasan had complained repeatedly to relatives and friends of suffering harassment for being a Muslim.

These pressures, intersecting with evident emotional and mental instability, led to an eruption of violence of the kind that has become an all-too familiar feature of American society.

Within the military itself, the toll taken by repeated deployments has produced an epidemic of violence to which Fort Hood is no stranger.

According to the *New York Times*, since the Afghanistan and Iraq wars began, reported incidents of domestic violence in Killeen, Texas, where Fort Hood is located, have soared by 75 percent, and violent crime has increased by 22 percent, even as it has fallen in similarly sized towns elsewhere in the US. Meanwhile, 76 individuals assigned to Fort Hood have committed suicide since 2003.

Increasingly, however, leading political figures and much of the media have promoted the theory that such social and psychological pressures are beside the point, and that the massacre at Fort Hood was an act of terrorism.

The supposed evidence to substantiate this claim is all based upon Hasan's religion and his opposition to the war.

Among the facts cited is that Hasan attended a mosque in Virginia in 2001 when two of the 9/11 hijackers were also there. The mosque, however, is one of the largest in the US, frequented by thousands of people.

Also cited is Hasan's emails to a US-born imam at the

mosque, Anwar al Awlaki, who moved to Yemen and voiced support for resistance to US policy in the Middle East. Federal investigators have reported that they investigated the emails and concluded that they had nothing to do with terrorism and dealt with religious and cultural questions consistent with Hasan's research.

Finally, there is the report that Hasan shouted the words "Allahu Ahkbar" (Arabic for "God is Great") during his alleged attack.

The *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial Tuesday asserting, "The Fort Hood massacre makes clear, again, that Islamic terror is unavoidably a *domestic* US problem as well."

The newspaper went on to suggest that the incident demonstrated the need for stepped up domestic spying. "Before the Democrats came to power in the 2008 elections, one issue they pushed hardest through the policy debate was their opposition to domestic electronic surveillance in pursuit of Islamic terror activities," the editorial stated. It added: "... we would hope that the response of our lawmakers would be more than a shrug that these 13 dead are simply the price we have to pay for living in 'our system.'"

Also arguing that the massacre was a terrorist act is Senator Joseph Lieberman, the so-called independent Democrat from Connecticut who chairs the Senate's Homeland Security Committee. Lieberman called for an investigation into the Fort Hood shootings, voicing his concern that the Army major was "a self-radicalized, home-grown terrorist." He argued that "if that is true, the murder of these 13 people was a terrorist act and, in fact, it was the most destructive terrorist act to be committed on American soil since 9/11."

US Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey voiced concern about this approach Sunday, warning that "speculation could potentially heighten a backlash against some of our Muslim soldiers." With the military facing a desperate shortage of interpreters in Afghanistan, the general's concern is that the witch-hunting of Muslims will drive the few that they have to leave the Army.

Such considerations seem to carry little weight, however. From Lieberman and the Republican right to the Obama administration and the Democrats, official Washington appears intent on exploiting this bloody episode to intimidate antiwar sentiment and justify the escalation of war abroad and renewed attacks on democratic rights at home.



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