

Obama proclaims Boston bombings an “act of terror”

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17 April 2013

President Barack Obama used a briefing Tuesday to declare the bombings the day before at the Boston Marathon “an act of terror,” though the FBI and police still had neither suspects nor a motive for the attacks.

The death toll in the bombings stands at three, including an eight-year-old boy, a 29-year-old woman and a Boston University graduate student. Another 176 were wounded by the bombs, including a number who suffered critical trauma injuries, with some requiring amputation of one or both legs.

“Any time bombs are used to target innocent civilians it is an act of terror,” Obama told reporters in the White House briefing room. “What we don’t yet know, however, is who carried out this attack, or why; whether it was planned and executed by a terrorist organization, foreign or domestic, or was the act of a malevolent individual.”

On Tuesday a number of initial claims and speculations were disproven. Police established that the only bombs were the two that blew up near the marathon finish line, with reports of several other unexploded devices discovered in the area having been false.

The bombs themselves, according to investigators, were fairly crude, made of explosives and ball bearings, pellets, nails or other shrapnel packed into metal pressure cookers and set off with kitchen timers. Instructions for how to build such devices are readily available on the Internet.

Moreover, initial media reports that a Saudi national had been taken into police custody and was a suspect in the bombings were also debunked. Officials reported Tuesday that the 20-year-old Saudi student, who was hospitalized with injuries from the blasts, was not suspected of any involvement in the attack and was rather viewed as a victim and a witness.

The nature of the bombs, the timing of the attack—which was both Patriot’s Day and the federal income tax deadline—and the lack of any prior threat alerts or claims of responsibility by foreign terrorist groups has reportedly led some authorities to suspect that the bombings could have been the work of domestic right-wing terrorists.

Timothy McVeigh, who was associated with the right-wing militia movement, set off a truck bomb outside the federal building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, killing 168 people, including a large number of children in the building’s day care center. The attack took place on the actual anniversary that Patriot’s Day marks—the battles of Lexington and Concord, the onset of the American Revolutionary War. The anniversary was reportedly seen as significant by McVeigh.

The Boston bombs were far less powerful than the one put together by McVeigh. They were more comparable to the pipe bomb devices used by Eric Rudolph, the right-wing anti-abortion and Christian Identity fanatic who carried out a July 1996 bombing at the Summer Olympics in Atlanta, killing two and wounding 111.

Given the mounting social and political tensions within the United States, the grounds for suspecting that the terrorist action was the work of the extreme right are very real, but no concrete evidence has emerged pointing to any definite suspects.

One government official quoted by the *Los Angeles Times* speculated that the bombings could have been carried out by “self-radicalized Islamic extremists from the area.”

There is undoubtedly a political struggle within the US government and its intelligence apparatus over how to make use of the events in Boston to advance US security policies at home and militarist policies abroad.

There was an immediate campaign to place the events within the narrative of the “war on terror,” which has been used to legitimize unending militarism abroad and the dismantling of democratic rights within the United States. Media coverage has sought to connect the events with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The aim is once again to utilize the tragic events to justify the massive buildup of the government’s military, security and intelligence apparatus. The immediate response to the attacks has been a security clampdown not only in Boston, but nationwide, to condition the public for another expansion of the militarization of American society.

In Boston, National Guard troops in combat fatigues and carrying automatic weapons and armored vehicles have been deployed on streets throughout the city. Similarly armed Boston police SWAT team members were also out in force.

The British newspaper *The Guardian* commented that the 12-block area surrounding the bombings “looked as though it had been subject to a military coup. The zone was swarming with detectives, the streets jammed with armored vehicles, and the air resounding to the barking of K-9 sniffer dogs.”

The office of Boston Mayor Thomas Menino issued a statement saying that population “should not be alarmed by this presence of National Guard and other armed officers at key points on the city.”

False security alarms led to tie-ups at airports, including the evacuation of a plane on the tarmac at Boston Logan and of the entire central terminal at New York’s LaGuardia on Tuesday.

The FBI’s special agent in charge of the Boston bombing investigation vowed on Tuesday that US authorities would “go to the ends of the earth to find subject or subjects responsible for this despicable crime.”

The popular reaction within the United States is one of justified horror at a brutal crime. There is also a sense that the bombing in one way or another is an expression of something deeply diseased in American society. For the political establishment, it becomes an occasion for hypocritical moralizing.

In his statement Tuesday, Obama declared, “If you want to know what we are, what America is, how we respond to evil, that’s it—selflessly, compassionately, unafraid.”

In fact, under the banner of the “war on terror,” the American ruling class has engaged in over a decade of unrelenting violence all over the world. The Boston bombings were by no means the only explosions claiming human lives this week. In Iraq on Monday, some 20 separate bombings killed at least 50 people across the country, which remains strife-torn in the wake of the US war and occupation.

A commentator on a popular Facebook page called “Baghdad,” Noora al-Amoora, wrote: “May God see what is happening in the world. It is true that innocent people died in the explosion there and God bless them, but every day this happens in Iraq with more people killed, but no one cares for us anymore. Are they the only lives that are precious and our lives are nothing?”

And in Pakistan, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement Monday condemning another US drone strike that claimed the lives of several people in the country’s northwestern tribal region near the Afghan border.

“Such unilateral attacks are in contravention of International Law and counterproductive to the stability of this country,” the statement said.

Just over a week ago, a drone strike in Afghanistan killed 20 people, including at least 10 children between the ages of one and 12 years old.



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