

Obama's empty eulogy for Fort Hood shooting victims

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On Wednesday, President Barack Obama delivered yet another banal and insincere eulogy for victims of the type of violent eruption at a school, work place or military facility that has become a permanent feature of life in America. This time the venue was Fort Hood in Texas, where an emotionally and psychologically unbalanced soldier, who had served in Iraq, went on a shooting spree last week, killing three other soldiers.

This was the second such appearance by Obama at Fort Hood in five years, the first coming in the wake of the November 2009 shooting rampage by Army psychiatrist Major Nidal Hasan, which took the lives of 13 people at the base.

After meeting with the families of the three dead soldiers, Obama gave an 11-minute speech filled with religious, patriotic and militarist overtones. Following a by now well-worn script, he delivered the inevitable paeans to the “loyalty, devotion and honor” of the victims. “It was love for country that inspired these three Americans to put on the uniform and join the greatest Army that the world has ever known,” Obama declared.

For all their expressions of sympathy for the families of the deceased, the remarks of the president and the Army officers who spoke, and the general atmosphere of the event, left an impression of callousness combined with perplexed anxiety over the mounting signs of crisis within the ranks of the American military.

None of the speakers, least of all the president, dared to seriously probe the causes of repeated eruptions of violence at US military installations. While making a passing reference to “caring for our fellow Americans with mental illness in the military and outside,” Obama insisted there was no rational explanation as to why soldiers “who survive the war zones are killed here.”

General Raymond T. Odierno, who led the occupation and “surge” in Iraq, said the loss of soldiers in a war was a tragedy the country could come to understand, but the

death of soldiers at the hands of another soldier was “inexplicable.”

To even slightly lift the lid on the deeper reasons for these tragedies would expose the criminal character of US foreign policy and its wars of aggression. The American ruling class, under governments of both parties, has sent more than 2 million soldiers in repeated deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq. The participation of these soldiers in brutal colonial-style wars has inevitably left hundreds of thousands physically and psychologically damaged and prone to suicide and violent outbursts.

Army Specialist Ivan Lopez, the 34-year-old soldier who carried out the April 2 shootings at Fort Hood, had been deployed to Iraq and was under psychiatric care for anxiety and depression. He was being evaluated for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

He was apparently pushed over the edge when he learned that his request for a leave of absence following the death of his mother had been rejected. Firing at least 35 times, Lopez killed three soldiers and wounded another 16 before turning the gun on himself.

The victims of the shootings—Sgt. 1st Class Daniel M. Ferguson, 39, of Mulberry, Florida; Staff Sgt. Carlos A. Lazaney, 38, of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico; and Sgt. Timothy W. Owens, 37, of Effingham, Illinois—had survived nine deployments collectively, including to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Fort Hood is the nation's largest Army post. An estimated 576 soldiers based there have died since 2001 in the Afghan and Iraq wars.

Major Hasan, who carried out the rampage at Fort Hood five years ago, is the son of Palestinian immigrant parents. He had treated wounded and traumatized soldiers at the Army's Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC and had apparently turned against the wars. He was vilified as a “terrorist” by the Obama administration and convicted and sentenced to death by a military tribunal.

Last week's shooting rampage at Fort Hood was the third violent eruption at a US military installation in just the last seven months. In September 2013, 34-year-old Aaron Alexis, a Navy reservist, shot and killed a dozen people and wounded 14 others at the Washington Navy Yard before he was fatally shot by police. Last month, a civilian trucker drove onto the Navy base in Norfolk, Virginia and killed a sailor before being shot dead.

On Tuesday, the day before the Fort Hood memorial service, a Marine guard at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina shot and killed another Marine. Military authorities are investigating the incident, but initially claimed the gun went off accidentally.

Extraordinary security measures were taken to protect the president, the military brass and various congressmen who attended the Fort Hood memorial. The local media reported seeing snipers on top of the Three Corps Headquarters Building, right next to Sadowski Field, where the ceremony was held. Tall barricades—made up of triple-high shipping containers—had been built to encircle the facility and block people from getting into the service.

The unceasing wars waged by the United States have left a swath of death and destruction in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries. The vast gulf between the government and media promotion of soldiers as noble “warriors,” heroes and liberators and the daily realities of the colonial-style wars and occupations have left deep psychological scars on US soldiers.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in five active duty service members has experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress (PTS), depression or other mental health problems. Military suicide is a “national crisis,” NAMI reports, with one active duty soldier taking his or her own life every 36 hours and one veteran every 80 minutes—or more than 20 a day.



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