The political roots of the terror attack on New York and Washington

David North, David Walsh
11 September 2018

On September 12, 2001, the World Socialist Web Site published this political analysis of the 9/11 terror attacks that killed over 3,000 people and became the pretext for launching the "War on Terror." The WSWS's warning that the American government's "crusade against terrorism" is a "campaign of propaganda to justify US military violence around the world" has been tragically confirmed by subsequent events, including the 2003 invasion of Iraq that led to the deaths of over a million people.

The *World Socialist Web Site* unequivocally condemns the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Those responsible for the hijacking of four commercial passenger aircraft and their conversion into flying bombs are guilty of mass murder. Nothing of a socially progressive character will be achieved on the basis of such an indiscriminate and callous destruction of human life.

These acts of homicidal terrorism manifest a toxic combination of demoralized pessimism, religious and ultra-nationalist obscurantism, and, it must be added, political opportunism of the vilest character. Terrorist organizations—notwithstanding their anti-American rhetoric—base their tactics on the illusion that random acts of horrific violence will compel the US ruling class to shift its policies. Thus, in the final analysis, they hope to make a deal with Washington.

However it seeks to justify itself, the terrorist method is fundamentally reactionary. Far from dealing a powerful blow against imperialist militarism, terrorism plays into the hands of those elements within the US establishment who seize on such events to justify and legitimize the resort to war in pursuit of the geopolitical and economic interests of the ruling elite. The murder of innocent civilians enrages, disorients and confuses the public. It undermines the struggle for the international unity of the working class, and counteracts all efforts to educate the American people on the history and politics that form the background to contemporary events in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, our condemnation of Tuesday's terrorist outrages does not in the slightest imply any lessening of our principled and irreconcilable opposition to the policies of the US government. Anyone who wishes to understand the why and wherefore of yesterday's events must study the historical and political record of the US in the Middle East, especially over the last thirty years. The unrelenting efforts of American imperialism to secure its domination over the oil resources of the region, which has entailed, among other things, unstinting support for the Israeli state's oppression of the Palestinian people, has placed the United States in violent opposition to the legitimate and irrepressible democratic, national and social aspirations of the Arab masses.

In the immediate aftermath of Tuesday's events, politicians, editorialists and media pundits have declared over and over that Americans must recognize that the destruction of the World Trade Center means the United States is at war and must act accordingly. But the fact of the matter is that the US government has been engaged in direct warfare in the Middle East, in one form or another, for the better part of two decades.

Putting aside the massive material aid that it provides for Israeli military operations, the United States has been bombing one or another Middle Eastern country almost continuously since 1983. US bombers and/or battleships have attacked Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Sudan and Afghanistan. Without actually declaring war, the United States has conducted military operations against Iraq for nearly eleven years. The ongoing daily bombings of Iraq are barely mentioned in the American media, which has made no attempt to ascertain the total number of Iraqis killed by US bombs since 1991.

Given this bloody record, why should anyone be surprised that those who have been targeted by the United States have sought to strike back?

The same media that is now screaming for blood has routinely applauded the use of violence against whatever country or people are deemed to be obstacles to US interests. Let us recall the words of New York Times columnist

Thomas Friedman, who had this to say to the Serbian people during the US bombing campaign in 1999: "It should be lights out in Belgrade: every power grid, water pipe, bridge, road and war-related factory has to be targeted. . . . [W]e will set your country back by pulverizing you. You want 1950? We can do 1950. You want 1389? We can do 1389 too."[1]

The foreign policy of the US is a mixture of cynicism, brutality and irresponsibility. Washington has pursued a course that has inflamed the hatred of large sections of the world's population, creating an environment in which recruits can be found for bloody terrorist operations. In rare moments of candor, foreign policy specialists have acknowledged that the actions of the United States provoke hatred and the desire for retribution. During the Balkan War, former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger stated: "We've presented to the rest of the world a vision of the bully on the block who pushes a button, people out there die, we don't pay anything except the cost of a missile … that's going to haunt us in terms of trying to deal with the rest of the world in the years ahead."

This insight has not prevented the same Eagleburger from declaring Tuesday night that the United States should respond to the destruction of the World Trade Center by dropping bombs immediately on any country that might have been involved.

George W. Bush's address to the nation Tuesday evening epitomized the arrogance and blindness of the American ruling class. Far from America being "the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world," the US is seen by tens of millions as the main enemy of their human and democratic rights, and the main source of their oppression. The American ruling elite, in its insolence and cynicism, acts as if it can carry out its violent enterprises around the world without creating the political conditions for violent acts of retribution.

In the immediate aftermath of Tuesday's attacks, US authorities and the media are once again declaring that Osama bin Laden is responsible. This is possible, although, as always, they present no evidence to back up their claim.

But the charge that bin Laden is the culprit raises a host of troubling questions. Given the fact that the US has declared this individual to be the world's most deadly terrorist, whose every move is tracked with the aid of the most technologically sophisticated and massive intelligence apparatus, how could bin Laden organize such an elaborate attack without being detected? An attack, moreover, against the same New York skyscraper that was hit in 1993?

The devastating success of his assault would indicate that, from the standpoint of the American government, the crusade against terrorism has been far more a campaign of propaganda to justify US military violence around the world than a conscientious effort to protect the American people.

Moreover, both bin Laden and the Taliban mullahs, whom the US accuses of harboring him, were financed and armed by the Reagan-Bush administration to fight pro-Soviet regimes in Afghanistan in the 1980s. If they are involved in Tuesday's operations, then the American CIA and political establishment are guilty of having nurtured the very forces that carried out the bloodiest attack on American civilians in US history.

The escalation of US militarism abroad will inevitably be accompanied by intensified attacks on democratic rights at home. The first victims of the war fever being whipped up are Arab-Americans, who are already being subjected to death threats and other forms of harassment as a result of the media hysteria.

The calls from both Republican and Democratic politicians for a declaration of war foreshadow a more general crackdown on opponents of American foreign policy. General Norman Schwarzkopf, who commanded American troops in the 1991 invasion of Iraq, spoke for much of the political and military elite when he declared on television that the war on alleged terrorist supporters should be conducted inside as well as outside the borders of the US.

It is the policies pursued by the United States, driven by the strategic and financial interests of the ruling elite, which laid the foundations for the nightmare that unfolded on Tuesday. The actions now being contemplated by the Bush administration—indicated by the president's threat to make "no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them"—will only set the stage for further catastrophes.

Notes:

[1] Thomas L. Friedman, "Stop the Music," *New York Times*, April 23, 1999.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact