25 years since the September 11 terrorist attacks

Patrick Martin
10 September 2026

Today marks 25 years since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, which killed nearly 3,000 people in the United States. Nineteen men, 15 of them from Saudi Arabia, hijacked four airliners, flying two into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, one into the Pentagon and one into a field in Pennsylvania after passengers fought back against them. It was the largest number of violent deaths on a single day in America since the Civil War.

On September 12, 2001, the *World Socialist Web Site* issued a statement declaring:

> 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.

All the events that followed confirmed this analysis. This statement, along with many others, is included in a special exhibit on the record of the WSWS on 9/11, its origins and consequences.

The attack was immediately described as the greatest “failure” of the US intelligence apparatus in the history of the country. Yet despite saturation media coverage, the investigation by the 9/11 Commission and countless congressional hearings, the American people know little more about the organization of this crime today than they did the day after it happened.

Moreover, not a single person was fired, demoted or held in any way responsible or accountable for this disaster. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, several Navy admirals and lower-ranking officers lost their jobs. Nothing of the kind followed in the wake of September 11.

Instead, there has been a sustained and systematic cover-up, with the claim that the intelligence agencies failed “to connect the dots.” This phrase became an all-purpose explanation of the inexplicable. The US security agencies allowed known Al Qaeda operatives to enter the country, attend flight schools where they trained to fly passenger jets, and organize teams of four or five armed men who boarded four airliners departing from Boston and Washington D.C. on the same morning.

As the WSWS explained in dozens of articles, collected in the exhibit, the official account was a whitewash for a deliberate security stand-down. In January 2002, in a four-part analysis based entirely on public sources, the WSWS wrote that “certainly the least likely and least credible explanation of that day’s events is that the vast US national security apparatus was entirely unaware of the activities of the hijackers until the airliners slammed into the World Trade Center and Pentagon.”

There were numerous warnings of the impending terrorist attacks, including the notorious briefing given to President George W. Bush in August 2001 about the danger of airplane hijackings.

The US security services had direct access to several of the hijackers. Two of them, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, lodged in San Diego in the home of an FBI informant. Mohamed Atta, the chief organizer, re-entered the United States at Miami in January 2001 on a tourist visa and told immigration inspectors that he was training at a Florida flight school—a direct contradiction of the terms of his entry. He was referred to secondary inspection and admitted anyway. He returned to the training that allowed him to fly an American Airlines 767 into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

The Al Qaeda organization was well known to US intelligence agencies. Its founder, Osama bin Laden, a Saudi construction multimillionaire, had been financed by the American CIA as part of its effort to build an anti-Soviet paramilitary force in Afghanistan to provoke the 1979 Soviet invasion. The goal, in the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser to Democratic President Jimmy Carter, was “giving the USSR its Vietnam.” It was only after the US mobilization of 700,000 troops in the Persian Gulf War of 1990–91, most of them based in Saudi Arabia, that bin Laden turned against his American backers.

Whatever the specific elements of the still unexplained conspiracy, the real political significance of the attacks is how they became a turning point in both the foreign and domestic policy of the American government. The “war on terror” became the all-purpose pretext for an unprecedented campaign of international aggression and domestic repression. These measures had long been prepared, and awaited only a suitable pretext, supplied by 9/11.

Within weeks, Congress passed, with the near-unanimous support of

© World Socialist Web Site

Democrats and Republicans, an Authorization for the Use of Military Force against those responsible for the 9/11 attacks. It was first invoked by the Bush administration as the basis for invading Afghanistan, where Osama bin Laden had his main base. However, the AUMF was repeatedly invoked as the basis for further military operations in at least 22 countries, including drone strikes and Special Forces attacks from Pakistan to Syria to Libya and across North Africa, by Democratic and Republican administrations alike. It remains in force today, 15 years after the killing of bin Laden. Meanwhile, when it suits the policy of Washington, a Syrian regime clearly linked to Al Qaeda is welcomed as an ally when it agrees to serve US foreign policy goals.

While a separate AUMF was the legal basis for the war in Iraq, the Bush administration cited a nonexistent connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda (in reality bitter enemies) as one basis for obtaining the second war resolution. The other lie was the claim that Iraq was in possession of "weapons of mass destruction" and might supply a nuclear bomb to Al Qaeda for use against the United States. As Bush national security adviser Condoleezza Rice declared in 2002, dismissing the need for proof that Iraq was a threat to the US: "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."

Domestically, the impact of 9/11 was perhaps even greater. The country was placed on a war footing, with internal military-police measures on a massive scale. Congress passed the Patriot Act by 357 to 66 in the House and 98 to one in the Senate.

A new federal department was created, the Department of Homeland Security, merging 22 agencies and housing the newly established Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which has become the spearhead of Trump's police-state operations. Torture became a standard practice at secret CIA prisons around the world, as well as at the main detention center at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Justice Department memos justified waterboarding prisoners in the name of preventing "another 9/11."

The Democratic Party was a full participant in the "war on terror," repeatedly voting to fund Bush's wars, then continuing and expanding them under Obama, who launched the US-NATO bombing of Libya and US-backed wars in Syria and Yemen. It was Obama's attorney general, Eric Holder, who concocted the legal basis for drone missile assassinations, including of US citizens, without due process, and spearheaded the persecution of courageous whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, who exposed US war crimes and illegal mass surveillance.

The corporate media were enthusiastic cheerleaders for the attacks on international law and the Constitution. Every shred of media independence was discarded, with the *New York Times*, the principal mouthpiece of Democratic Party liberalism, leading the way.

The role of the *World Socialist Web Site* stood in the sharpest contrast to the subservience of the corporate media. From the day of the attacks, the WSWS denounced them as reactionary acts of mass murder, while warning that they would be seized on by US imperialism as a means of carrying out long-planned military attacks and the destruction of democratic rights at home.

We carefully analyzed all the evidence that emerged despite the media-government cover-up, and fought to mobilize the working class against the program of war and repression embraced by both the Democrats and Republicans. We rejected the demagogy of sections of the petty-bourgeois left, who hailed the Al Qaeda mass murder, writing, ten days after the attacks, of "a form of pseudo-socialism, the phony 'anti-imperialism' of cynics and fools."

And we exposed the capitulation of the liberal academics and intellectuals who used September 11 to justify military aggression, mass detentions and torture. Of the sixty professors who signed the manifesto "What We're Fighting For," the WSWS wrote: "What is involved here is not ignorance or innocence, but dishonesty and cynicism."

The 25 years which have elapsed since 9/11 have discredited the propaganda lies and demonstrated the deepening crisis of American imperialism. The Afghanistan war resulted in a debacle, with more than 100,000 Afghan dead, as well as 6,000 Americans, in a 20-year conflict that ended with the return of the Taliban to power. The war in Iraq was an even greater bloodbath, with an estimated 1 million Iraqi dead, along with 7,000 Americans. The US is now at war with Iran, while Saudi Arabia, which supplied most of the attackers and actually supported some of them financially, enjoys even closer ties with Washington.

Its response to 9/11 revealed the absence of any support for democracy within the American ruling class. Since then, the intensification of internal police powers—surveillance, police killings, mass detentions—has proceeded by leaps and bounds. Were another such attack to take place—or be staged, on the model of Hitler's Reichstag fire—the response of the capitalist state would be even more unrestrained. There would be troops on the streets, mass arrests, and full-scale police-state methods.

But the working class has learned bitter lessons as well. There is no support for the "forever wars" conducted by Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden and now Trump. Few take seriously the pro-war propaganda of the military-intelligence apparatus and its media mouthpieces. The police murder of George Floyd produced massive public protests in 2020. The restored Trump administration has faced the largest opposition demonstrations in US history, in the "No Kings" protests. Workers are increasingly turning to methods of class struggle, where they immediately encounter the opposition of the trade union apparatus.

The task now is to draw the political lessons of the past quarter century—and more—and build a powerful mass movement of the working class against capitalism, based on a political break from the corporate parties, Democratic and Republican alike, and advancing a revolutionary socialist program.

We urge all readers to study the exhibit accompanying this statement, which assembles the record of the World Socialist Web Site *on September 11, its origins and its consequences. We urge readers as well to purchase David North's* A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990-2016, *available from Mehring Books, which situates the attacks within the drive to war that began in the Persian Gulf in 1990.*

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site