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9/11, ten years on

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The tenth anniversary of 9/11 was predictably exploited by the US ruling elite and the media in another attempt to wear down the critical faculties of the American people and justify the crimes carried out over the past decade in their name.

There is a palpable sense, however, that these efforts are wearing thin. Like everything else in American life, the official commemorative ceremonies for 9/11 have a ritualized character that has less and less to do with people's real concerns.

The lives of the three thousand victims of the appalling crime carried out ten years ago should be honored and those they left behind supported. But this is something entirely different from the attempt to exploit their tragic deaths again and again for the most nefarious purposes.

Within hours of the attacks, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned in a statement posted September 12, 2001 that the political establishment would seize on them "to justify and legitimize the resort to war in pursuit of the geopolitical and economic interests of the ruling elite." This assessment has been fully confirmed.

This year's commemorations were lent a sinister character by the prominent participation of George W. Bush and Donald Rumsfeld. Both are so personally responsible for the crimes and

horrors that followed 9/11 that they cannot leave US soil for fear of being arrested on war crimes charges.

The overriding problem with the tenth anniversary is that the American people have passed through ten years of bitter experiences since 9/11—disastrous wars, the degradation of basic democratic rights, social decay and economic crises.

Despite the best efforts of the political establishment to frighten the people with the threat of new terror attacks—manifested in a heavy-handed security crackdown surrounding the anniversary—the great majority of the population is far more fearful of what may be done to them by the US ruling elite and the government. Working people face the constant threat of losing their jobs and their homes and the destruction of vital social programs.

While the media pumps out articles and editorials proclaiming how 9/11 “brought us all together,” the reality is that class divisions were manifest from the outset. The destruction of the Twin Towers contributed to an economic downturn that cost hundreds of thousands of people their jobs and filled New York’s homeless shelters to overflowing, but the CEOs made sure the attacks did not interfere with the piling up of profits. They exploited the tragedy to scoop up millions in stock options at bargain basement prices.

Firefighters and others who responded to the disaster and now face cancer and other ailments are forced to haggle for medical care, while massive subsidies are handed out to ensure fat profits to the owners of the World Trade Center site.

Despite the efforts to mythologize 9/11, large sections of the population do not buy the government’s official story of what happened that day. Polls have shown that fully half of New Yorkers, who bore the brunt of the tragedy, believe that at some level the government knew in advance of the 9/11 attacks and deliberately allowed them to happen. It is just as significant that in New York, where the attacks took place, there is perhaps the greatest opposition to the wars launched in their name.

The events themselves remain shrouded in secrecy and cover-up. It was reported last week that the records of the 9/11 commission which issued its report in 2004—documents that were supposed to be made public, albeit in heavily redacted form—remain sealed at the National Archive.

That commission, in any case, was tasked not with an objective investigation of the attacks and their antecedents, but with an orchestrated cover-up of evidence that elements within the US intelligence apparatus had foreknowledge of and complicity in these attacks.

We know that a number of those involved in the attacks had been subjects of intense surveillance by the CIA and the FBI for as long as two years before 9/11. Last month, an interview was released in which former chief White House counterterrorism advisor Richard Clarke charged that the CIA knew well in advance of the attacks that two of the hijackers had entered the US and deliberately concealed that information from other agencies.

One thing is certain, in the ten years since the attacks, not a single individual in US intelligence circles, the military or the administrations of either George W. Bush or Bill Clinton has been held accountable with so much as a demotion for what was ostensibly the most catastrophic intelligence and security failure in the history of the United States. The unavoidable implication is that to hold anyone accountable would inevitably lead to recriminations that would threaten to uncover damning evidence of state involvement.

What ends did 9/11 serve?

Once again, the American public is being told that 9/11 “changed everything.” The truth is that the policies and actions that were implemented in its aftermath had been in preparation for at least a decade before the attacks took place.

The liquidation of the Soviet Union in December 1991 had opened up an enormous opportunity for the US—proclaimed the world’s sole “superpower”—to assert global hegemony. Restraints on US militarism imposed by the Cold War had been shattered, and predominant layers of the American ruling elite came to see the use of America’s unchallenged military superiority as a suitable means of offsetting the protracted decline in the global economic position of the United States.

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who as Carter’s national security adviser had been the principal architect of the CIA-backed war by the Islamist mujahideen against the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan, outlined the strategic imperative of US imperialism becoming the dominant power in Eurasia and preventing the emergence of any regional rival. In his book *The Grand Chessboard*, Brzezinski cautioned that the “democratic instincts” of the American people were an impediment to the aggressive use of US military force to that end. This problem could be overcome, he counseled, only under “conditions of a sudden threat or challenge to the public’s sense of domestic well-being.”

9/11 provided just such a “sudden threat or challenge,” creating at least temporary public support for military action in the name of retaliation for the attacks on New York and Washington.

The first war was launched to overturn the Taliban government in Afghanistan, whose rise to power had previously been backed by Washington. Nearly ten years after the start of the war, 100,000 US troops remain deployed in the country, which US officials admit contains no significant Al Qaeda presence. What it does provide is a strategic beachhead near the Caspian Basin, which holds some 20 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves and one eighth of its gas reserves.

The war in Afghanistan was followed in 2002 by Bush’s issuance of a National Security Strategy claiming Washington’s right to wage “preemptive” war on any nation it perceived as a potential threat to its interests. This strategy was, in fact, a license for the waging of aggressive war, which had been explicitly repudiated by the Nuremberg tribunals and which formed the substance of the principal war-crime charge brought against the Nazis.

In 2003, this doctrine was put into practice in an unprovoked war for regime change in Iraq, which holds the world's second largest proven oil reserves. This war was justified with lies about nonexistent Iraqi ties to Al Qaeda and "weapons of mass destruction."

These events were the initial milestones in the thoroughgoing criminalization of US foreign policy. Washington's aggressive wars would claim the lives of over a million Iraqis as well as thousands upon thousands of people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and now Libya.

These wars were accompanied by a descent into ever more abhorrent forms of behavior, with torture and assassination openly proclaimed as state policy and revelations of barbaric practices at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram air base and CIA "black sites" provoking worldwide revulsion. The unleashing of the American military has been accompanied by the increasing militarization of the CIA, which operates the fleets of Predator drones that have killed thousands in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and other countries. It has also seen the buildup of massively funded mercenary armies, run by outfits such as Blackwater, that are accountable to no one.

One domestic disaster after another over the past ten years—including Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill—has exposed the disintegration of basic infrastructure, pervasive social inequality, the precarious living conditions of vast sections of the population and the subordination of all facets of economic life to the banks and corporations together with the ever more obscene accumulation of wealth by the top 1 percent.

The financialization of American capitalism and the obliteration of the line dividing speculation from outright criminality ultimately produced the Wall Street meltdown of September 2008, leaving 25 million Americans without jobs.

Political life has been dominated by an assault on democratic rights ranging from massive domestic spying and the repudiation of habeas corpus begun under the Bush administration to the Obama administration's assertion of the right to murder an American citizen based upon unsubstantiated charges of terrorism.

The election of Obama only demonstrated the impossibility of opposing war or the destruction of democratic rights within the framework of the capitalist two-party system. Nearly three years after his election, US troops remain in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan has been sharply escalated. The Democratic president has gone beyond the Bush Doctrine, arrogating to US imperialism the right to wage war anywhere it sees a threat to its interests and "values." Included in these "values" is the "flow of commerce," meaning the free-market policies dictated by the US-based banks and corporations and the profits they produce.

This new doctrine has been implemented in the unprovoked war on Libya, waged openly for the goal of regime change and the installation of a puppet state more subservient to US interests and Western oil companies.

9/11 and the wars that followed also served to expose the deep decay of whatever remained of an American intelligentsia. Its integrity had already been eroded by its participation in the accumulation of wealth made possible by the speculative boom of the 1990s. Newfound social

interests led many within this layer to adapt themselves to imperialism, portraying the Iraq war as legitimate, offering up liberal justifications for Washington's crimes, and repudiating the antiwar sentiments of an earlier era.

This process has found its fruition in the Libya war, which won the enthusiastic support of liberal academics and wide layers of the ex-left who helped dress up an imperialist takeover of a former colonial country as an exercise in human rights.

Among the more extreme manifestations of this general tendency has been the wretched role of the media, which, with its "embedded" journalists, serves as a jingoistic cheerleader for every militarist action and the willing conduit of lies to justify them.

This ideological turn to the right took place under conditions of mass popular opposition to war, which has only intensified but can find no significant expression in the two-party political setup.

The endeavor begun by US imperialism in 2001, using 9/11 as a pretext, has not produced the desired results. The wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq turned into bloody debacles. Rather than US military conquest producing a bonanza of new oil profits, the trillions of dollars spent on a decade of war has only deepened the US financial crisis.

These failures, however, do not herald an end to US militarism. Quite the opposite, they point to greater and far more deadly wars to come. Discussions of a further drawdown of US troops in Iraq have been accompanied by calls for expanded CIA operations against Iran. It can be anticipated that the unabashed war for regime-change in Libya will be repeated elsewhere in the Middle East and Central Asia. And the Pentagon is preparing for war against China.

What Bush referred to when he spoke of the "wars of the 21st century" continues unabated and will inevitably produce a new and greater catastrophe.

The decisive lesson of the experiences of the decade since 9/11 is that the struggle against war and in defense of basic social and democratic rights can be waged only on the basis of the independent political mobilization of the working class against the profit system, the source of militarism and reaction.

The deepening crisis of American and world capitalism is ushering in a new period of revolutionary upheavals. The central question is that of revolutionary leadership and perspective, to arm the coming struggles with a worked-out socialist and internationalist program. This means, above all, [building the Socialist Equality Party](#).