

9/11: The Beginning of the End of the US Empire Project

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Today, it has been 16 years since the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States. Nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks, and more than 6,000 were injured in the spectacular violence across New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC.

The Bush/Cheney administration used these horrible events to justify projecting the US empire deeper into the Middle East by invading Iraq, as well as launching into war-torn Afghanistan. They also used the opportunity to pass the so-called PATRIOT act, which amounted to a vicious attack on civil liberties and human rights at home.

Any pretense that the US intended to seek justice or increase world stability via its so-called War on Terror has been dramatically overshadowed by increased global resentment toward the US, which has in fact generated more terror attacks around the world.

It is precisely this legacy that continues today: ongoing US military violence abroad, increased domestic surveillance and repression at home, and a world more violent and less safe for all.

The Numbers

Having reported from Iraq, on and off between 2003 and 2013, I witnessed the ravages of US imperialism abroad firsthand.

Reporting from inside Fallujah during the April 2004 US military siege of that city, I watched women, children and elderly people being brought, dead or alive, into a small makeshift clinic. Most of them had been shot by US military snipers, while drones buzzed above and US warplanes roared in the distance.

When the US military failed to take the city that month, a truce was called as the US waited for Bush to be reelected later that year. Days after the election, the US military laid siege to that city, committing war crimes while slaughtering thousands of civilians.

Six months later, I co-authored a piece with Jonathan Steele for the Guardian, and called Fallujah a “monument to brutality” of the US empire.

“In the 1930s the Spanish city of Guernica became a symbol of wanton murder and destruction,” [we wrote](#). “In the 1990s Grozny was cruelly flattened by the Russians; it still lies in ruins. This decade’s unforgettable monument to brutality and overkill is Fallujah, a text-book case of how not to handle an insurgency, and a reminder that unpopular occupations will always degenerate

into desperation and atrocity.”

As the US occupation of Iraq ground on, the numbers of civilians killed by the US military and other violence that wracked the country reached apocalyptic totals.

Authors of a report titled [“Body Count: Casualty Figures After 10 Years of the ‘War on Terror,’”](#) told [Truthout](#) the numbers of dead in Iraq and other countries the US had waged war on since the events of September 11 had reached “genocidal dimensions” and “could also be in excess of 2 million, whereas a figure below 1 million is extremely unlikely.”

In Afghanistan alone, well [over 31,000 civilians have died](#) violent deaths from the war, and uncounted numbers have suffered — and continue to suffer — from wounds and health impacts and being unable to get treatment or assistance.

Afghanistan, already a war-ravaged country, has been made even more difficult to live in by the US occupation, which the US has just amped up again by sending nearly 4,000 more troops. Issues like lack of sanitation, extreme poverty, lack of basic healthcare, pollution and malnutrition have all grown worse, not better, with the US presence there.

Back in the US, estimates from six years ago pegged the price tag of the so-called War on Terror at [3 to 4.4 trillion dollars](#) when direct and indirect costs are calculated, and that figure continues to rise on a daily basis. A [2016 study increased](#) the total to nearly 5 trillion dollars.

Intangibles

While then-president Bush saw a temporary bump in his approval ratings by launching the US into wars abroad, they rapidly plummeted and largely stayed low until the end of his administration.

While President Obama rode this wave of anti-Bush and anti-US Empire sentiment into office by promising “hope” and “change,” he did not bring an end to either of these wars.

Obama simply followed Bush administration policy by making a slow withdrawal from Iraq while [maintaining a US presence there](#) in the form of “advisers,” surveillance, air strikes, artillery, drones and later, troops. All of this continues under the Trump administration, but with more troops on the ground.

The US occupation played a huge role in the radicalization of Iraqi youth and drove many of them into ISIS (also known as Daesh), which continues to plague portions of war-torn Iraq today.

The US occupation and destruction of the Iraqi state also played a key role in destabilizing Syria, which is now another failed state, with hundreds of thousands dead and millions of refugees multiplying as the bloodbath continues.

All the while, a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan has never been discussed seriously.

Given that the invasion and occupation of Iraq was, at least in part, about gaining control of that country’s oil, the US occupation failed on that front as well. While ExxonMobil owned one of Iraq’s largest oil fields in the wake of the occupation, China, without deploying one soldier or firing one shot, has slowly yet methodically been moving into the mix, and angling for more control of Iraq’s oil, in addition to being its largest oil consumer.

Denise Natali, an expert on the Middle East with the National Defense University in Washington, DC, [told the New York Times in 2013](#),

“The Chinese are the biggest beneficiary of this post-Saddam oil boom in Iraq.”

Even before 9/11, the Bush administration was being [heavily criticized around the world](#) for the US government’s positions on both domestic and international issues. US policies that were furthering poverty, inequality, geopolitical conflict, environmental degradation and globalization were all hot-button issues, which were exacerbated by the US’s response to 9/11.

In the US, [Amnesty International even argued](#) that the so-called War on Terror,

“far from making the world a safer place, has made it more dangerous by curtailing human rights, undermining the rule of international law and shielding governments from scrutiny. It has deepened divisions among people of different faiths and origins, sowing the seeds for more conflict. The overwhelming impact of all this is genuine fear — among the affluent as well as the poor.”

Human Rights Watch, in a 2004 report titled, “Above the Law: Executive Power after September 11 in the United States,” stated,

“The Bush administration’s anti-terrorism practices represent a stunning assault on basic principles of justice, government accountability, and the role of the courts.”

All the while, the US military maintains roughly [300,000 active military personnel](#) in over 150 countries [and nearly 800 bases](#) globally.

So, has the so-called War on Terror succeeded?

Even if we take seriously the criteria by which it was propagandistically sold to the US public, as well as the rest of the world, the answer must be a resounding “no.” The Global Terrorism Index revealed that, as of 2014, there had been a [fivefold increase](#) in global terrorism fatalities since 9/11.

Another result of these post-9/11 policies has been the [decline of the US empire](#). US power in the world and its days of being the sole superpower were already waning when 9/11 occurred. Today, especially with the administration of President Donald J. Trump, whatever vestiges of the US empire project that are left are being summarily burnt out.

Clearly, there is no merit in preserving the US empire. The primary question we are left with, then, is how many more people will die as this empire fights a losing battle to maintain its dominance?

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