

The Media and the Paris Terror Attacks: Inspiring Panic and Justifying War

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Last Friday's terror attacks in Paris have triggered an international media campaign aimed at inspiring panic and justifying an escalation of the wars in the Middle East and the assault on democratic rights within the US and Europe.

The establishment media accepts uncritically all of the claims of government officials, as well as their cynical statements of sympathy for the victims and their self-serving denunciations of the killers as evil incarnate. It works to use the latest attack to legitimize the wars and repressive measures that produced it and previous terrorist atrocities, while setting the stage for wider wars and outright dictatorship.

The calls for more troops and bombs in Syria and even more pervasive government spying, harsher policies against immigrants and other undemocratic measures have nothing to do with protecting anybody. They are about implementing pre-existing plans to seize the oil resources of the Middle East and clamp down on restive populations within the imperialist countries.

CNN, for example, has been recycling a video clip of Dianne Feinstein, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, declaring that she has premonitions of disaster like those she had just before the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

The *Washington Post* published an editorial Tuesday denouncing President Obama's policy in Syria as insufficiently aggressive. It called for increasing the deployment of Special Forces troops beyond the level announced by Obama earlier this month, using drone missiles, and setting up so-called "safe zones" as staging grounds for an offensive to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The same edition of the *Post* featured a column by former Bush administration official James Jeffrey, headlined "No more half-measures," demanding a full-scale conventional ground war in Syria.

Essentially the same line is promoted by so-called "liberal" commentators in the *Post* and the *New York Times* such as [Richard Cohen and Roger Cohen](#).

At the same time, the networks, cable news channels and press outlets are promoting calls from intelligence and police officials to increase government spying powers by allowing the state to disable encryption systems. On Monday, CIA Director John Brennan suggested that ISIS could attack the US and called the Paris events a "wake-up call" that should put an end to "hand-wringing" over broader government surveillance powers.

The *Washington Post* on Tuesday cited an internal email sent last August by Robert Litt, the general counsel of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, arguing that legislation authorizing the disabling of encryption would have a good chance of being passed “in the event of a terrorist attack or criminal event where strong encryption can be shown to have hindered law enforcement.”

There have been nearly fifteen years of virtually uninterrupted wars against largely defenseless populations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. These wars were preceded by US imperialist interventions in Panama, Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Serbia, as well as US military and political support for Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians and its aggressive wars against its Arab neighbors, together with US backing for bloody dictatorships in Egypt and the Persian Gulf.

These imperialist wars have killed millions, devastated entire countries and turned tens of millions of people into refugees. French President Hollande and his counterparts in the US, Britain, Germany, etc. declare the attacks in Paris to be “an act of war.” But what have they been doing, except waging merciless war on the people of these countries?

You cannot carry out such crimes without engendering an environment of hatred and the desire for revenge. These are the real roots of the terrorist attacks of the past fifteen years, beginning with 9/11.

But it is virtually impossible to find in the saturation media coverage of the Paris events any questioning of the legitimacy of the underlying policies of the imperialist governments. At the most, media commentators and politicians speak of atrocities such as the invasion and occupation of Iraq as a “mistake.” They never call the horrors inflicted by the United States and its allies by their right name—war crimes.

Their moral outrage is always selective. ISIS and other Islamist jihadist groups such as al-Nusra have been carrying out mass killings of civilians in Syria for years, but the US and European media have either hailed such actions or covered them up so long as they were directed against the Assad regime, which they have targeted for removal.

Every major terror attack in the West, beginning with 9/11, has had the character of a blowback event carried out by forces with whom the imperialist governments had collaborated. The perpetrators were known to the intelligence and police agencies and were in many cases being tracked and monitored.

Such is the case in Paris. ISIS itself is the product of the devastation caused by the US invasion and occupation of Iraq and the “divide and rule” policy employed by Washington to incite sectarian warfare between Sunnis and Shiites. Islamist jihadist forces linked to Al Qaeda, including the precursors of ISIS and al-Nusra, were used as proxy ground forces in the US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya and have been employed in Syria. Al Qaeda itself emerged from the Islamist forces the US armed and mobilized in its proxy war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

It is widely reported that the ISIS operative alleged to have masterminded the Paris attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, had been linked to a series of abortive terror attacks in Europe over the past two years and had been put on a kill list. Yet in an ISIS video, Abaaoud boasts of being able to move back and forth between Syria and Europe without interference.

Under conditions of blanket spying on the entire population of every imperialist country and most of the rest of the world, and admissions that at least some of the perpetrators were under surveillance, the media frenzy over the need for even more intrusive spying powers is absurd. But that does not prevent it from proceeding at full blast.

The Paris attacks and their aftermath follow what has by now become a standardized pattern. US-led wars lead to terror attacks in the imperialist countries by forces set in motion by the imperialists themselves. It turns out that the perpetrators were known to the state and in many cases were being tracked. Yet, somehow, the intelligence and police agencies had no foreknowledge.

The media swings into action to exploit popular shock and foment an atmosphere of insecurity and fear in order to justify further military aggression abroad and the abrogation of democratic rights at home.

This historical pattern is never raised, the better to impede any critical appraisal or political understanding of such events within the general population. Nevertheless, there is a vast chasm between the media image of popular support for war and anti-democratic measures and the real sentiments of the broad masses of people. They are aware that events such as the Paris killings are completely bound up with the wars in Central Asia and the Middle East—which they do not support.

The entire establishment media is complicit in war crimes abroad and a criminal attack on democratic rights at home. The lavishly paid pseudo-journalists and news anchors who transmit state propaganda in the guise of “news” should be held accountable by the international working class, along with their corporate paymasters.

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