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# 2001: The "War Against Terror"

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By the Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site.

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**I**n the midst of the hysterical war mongering of the U.S. government and a state-controlled media that knows no shame, it is more than ever necessary to retain one's composure and one's ability to think, analyze and reason. It is surely appropriate to mourn the terrible loss of life on September 11. But sympathy for the victims, their families and friends should not blind anyone to the fact that powerful sections of the U.S. ruling elite view this tragedy as a welcome opportunity to implement a militaristic agenda that has been in the works for more than a decade.

Modern wars require a pretext, a *casus belli* that can be packaged to the public as a sufficient justification for the resort to arms. Every major war in which the U.S. has been involved since its emergence as an imperialist world power – from the Spanish-American War of 1898 to the Balkan War of 1999 – has required a catalytic event that inflamed public opinion.

Whatever the nature of such trigger events, they never proved, in the light of sober historical analysis, to be the real cause of the wars that followed. The actual decision to go to war – while facilitated by the change in public opinion produced by the *casus belli* – flowed in each instance from more essential considerations rooted in the strategic political and economic interests of the ruling elite.

The September 11 attacks have been seized on as an opportunity to implement a far-reaching political agenda for which the most right-wing elements in the ruling elite have been clamoring for years. Within a day of the attack, before any light had been shed on the source of the assault or the dimensions of the plot, the government and media launched a coordinated campaign to declare that America was at war and Americans had to accept all the consequences of wartime existence.

The policies now being advanced – an open-ended expansion of U.S. military action abroad and a crackdown on dissent at home – have

long been in preparation. The U.S. ruling elite has been hampered in implementing such policies by the lack of any significant support within the U.S. population and resistance from its imperialist rivals in Europe and Asia.

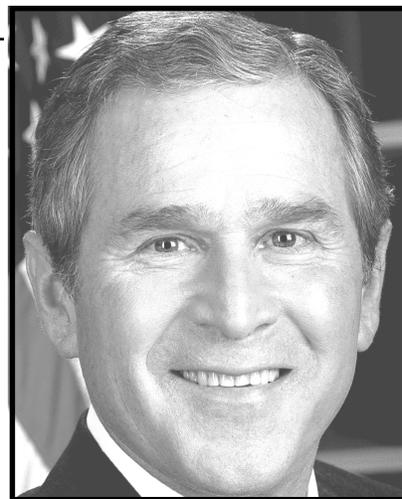
The Bush administration exploited the public mood of shock and revulsion over Sept. 11 to advance the global economic and strategic aims of U.S. imperialism. He has the full support of a debased media and a Democratic Party that is more than happy to end any pretense of opposing the Republican right.

On Sept. 13, Bush all but admitted as much, declaring that the atrocity carried out two days before provided "an opportunity to wage war against terrorism." He said this war would be the focus of his entire administration. Such unabashed militarism would have been unthinkable prior to September 11. The assault had, in the parlance of imperialist real politik, created new facts.

Without having begun to seriously investigate, let alone explain, the very strange circumstances surrounding the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, the Bush administration and the media have declared that all-out war is the only possible response. This is before the government has even established the political identity of the terrorists, or answered troubling questions about how such an elaborate plot – apparently involving dozens of conspirators operating within the U.S. – could have gone completely undetected by the FBI, CIA and other intelligence agencies.

Nor have the Federal Aviation Administration, the Air Force or the FBI explained the failure to issue an alert or attempt to intercept the hijacked airliners as they made for the nerve centers of the U.S. financial and military establishment.

For all the claims of sorrow and sympathy, there could not have been a more timely or fortuitous event for the Bush administration than the attack on the WTC and the Pentagon. When



**"President"**  
**George W. Bush (2000-?)**

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Bush awoke on September 11, he presided over an administration in deep crisis. Having come to power on the basis of fraud and the suppression of votes, his government was seen by millions both in the U.S. and around the world as illegitimate.

The very narrow social base of support for his administration was rapidly eroding in the face of a deepening economic slump. Unable to advance any solution to the growth of unemployment and catastrophic losses on the stock market, facing criticism over the evaporation of the budget surplus and reversing its pledge not to spend Social Security funds, the administration was showing signs of internal disension and disarray.

A front-page, *New York Times* article (Aug. 20) expressed fears within ruling circles that world capitalism was descending into a global recession: "The world economy, which grew at a raging pace last year, has slowed to a crawl as the U.S., Europe, Japan and some major developing countries undergo a rare simultaneous slump.

"[M]any experts say the world is experiencing economic whiplash, with growth rates retreating more quickly and in more of the leading economies than at any time since the oil shock of 1973."

The economic crisis compounded a host of foreign policy dilemmas confronting the Bush administration. Washington's policy in Iraq was in a shambles, with sanctions crumbling and the U.S. facing open opposition from France, Germany, Russia and China to its plans for maintaining sanctions and intensifying its vendetta against Saddam Hussein. On a many issues – missile defense, global warming, an international criminal court – the U.S. was in open conflict with most of its nominal allies.

The growth of social protest and anti-capitalist sentiment was expressed in the wave of "anti-globalization" demonstrations, which revealed the extreme isolation of the governments of all major powers and rising popular discontent over their right-wing policies, seen to be embodied above all in the Bush administration.

In the aftermath of the September 11 terror attack the Bush administration, aided by a cynical and sophisticated media campaign, has been working to whip up a patriotic war fever that will enable it to overcome, at least temporarily, its immediate problems, while creating the conditions for profound and lasting changes on both the foreign and domestic front.

In the name of national unity, the Democratic Party has given Bush a blank check to wage war, increase military spending and curtail civil liberties. As one commentator aptly put it, "We will be operating as if we have a national unity party. That means alternative voices will be suppressed."

The *Washington Post* spoke for the liberal establishment on September 14, calling for the curtailment of democratic and civil rights. Entitled "New Rules," the editorial declared: "[I]f replying to that attack is truly to become an organizing principle of U.S.

policy, as we believe it should – if the U.S. is to undertake the difficult and sustained campaign against those who threaten it – then neither politics nor diplomacy can return to where they were.... This is most of all true as Congress and others discuss the possible need to sacrifice privacy, freedom of movement or other liberties to the needs of domestic security."

Tens of billions of dollars will be pumped into the economy in the form of military and security spending. The viability of what remains of the social safety net – Medicare and Social Security – will not stand in the way of pursuing the twilight struggle of good versus evil proclaimed by the White House and Congress.

Every restriction on the exercise of U.S. military might and the CIA will be lifted. For years the most reactionary within the ruling elite, in the editorials of the *Wall Street Journal* and right-wing think tanks, have agitated to end the "Vietnam syndrome" and called for the unbridled use of military force to secure the interests of U.S. imperialism. Now they see the opportunity to realize their agenda.

Leading spokesmen of both parties are demanding the rescinding of the presidential order banning the use of assassinations as a tool of foreign policy. The Democrats agreed to vote for a resolution giving the White House virtually unlimited authority to go to war against any nation that it claims is aiding or encouraging terrorists. There is little doubt that one of the first targets for a massive bombing campaign, combined with a ground invasion, will be Iraq. Other countries are certain to follow.

As one military officer said on September 12, "The constraints have been lifted." Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the contemplated mili-

tary action will "not be restricted to a single entity, state or non-state entity." Georgia Democrat Zell Miller was more blunt in expressing the bloodlust that prevails in government circles: "Bomb the hell out of them. If there's collateral damage, so be it."

Senator John McCain said the U.S. should "not rule out any force short of nuclear weapons." *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, in a piece entitled "World War III," wrote that while the September 11 attack "may have been the first major battle of World War III, it may be the last one that involves only conventional, non-nuclear weapons."

Americans, at a moment of enormous grief, are told they must accept the prospect of having their sons and daughters sent to distant parts to kill and be killed, to fight an enemy or enemies yet to be named, and at the same time acquiesce to the gutting of their democratic rights.

What they are not being told is that the U.S. corporate and financial elite, in the name of a holy war against terrorism, intends to rain death and destruction on countless thousands of people in order to realize global aims it has long harbored. Can there be any doubt that this crusade for "peace" and "stability" will become the occasion for the U.S. to tighten its grip over the oil and natural gas resources of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and the Caspian? Behind the pious and patriotic declarations of politicians and media commentators stand the long-cherished designs of U.S. imperialism to dominate new parts of the world and establish global hegemony.

**Source:** "Why the Bush administration wants war," September 14, 2001. <[www.wsws.org/articles/2001/nov/2001/afgh-n20.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/nov/2001/afgh-n20.shtml)>

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