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“Why Do They Hate Us?”

Wayne Price

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A small group of militants, hundreds or a few thousand, hated the U.S.A. so much that they spent years planning their attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. They did not care that they would murder thousands of people, mostly working people. They were so perversely dedicated that they were willing to die themselves in the attacks.

Around the world a great many people were pleased by the assault, to the point of celebrating. Many, many more did not support the explosion of the Twin Towers, and even condemned it, but still expressed understanding for the motives of the terrorists. There were few or no political or religious leaders in mostly-Muslim countries or elsewhere who endorsed the attacks. Even the assailants kept quiet; no one took “credit” (if that is the right word). Osama bin Laden denies responsibility and the Taliban regime claims that he is innocent. Yet many people also showed some satisfaction at the attack, a sort of pleasure in seeing the school yard bully get his nose bloodied.

Why do “they” hate “us”? ask many bewildered US workers. The US population is generally ignorant, mis-educated, and deliberately lied-to, about international affairs even more than domestic politics. They see the US as a peaceful and friendly

country, which helps other nations out of good-will, and otherwise wants to be left alone. Suddenly, as they see it, out of the blue, the US was attacked. US working people identify with the national state; since they are kindly and decent people, they assume that their national government is also kindly and decent. Like the terrorist attackers, US workers mentally make a nationalist bloc between the US state (and ruling class) and the US working population. They think of themselves as “America” and say, “we” and “us” when speaking about the national state of which they really know little and have less control.

The “explanation” offered by the US government and media is that “they” hate our “freedom,” our “democracy,” and “our way of life.” This supposed explanation is given most strongly by US figures on the right, who agree with the worst Islamists in opposing separation of church and state, equality for women, and rights for Gays and Lesbians. However, the charge that “they,” in their poverty, resent US wealth, is closer to the truth. (Of course, to understand why so many hate the US is not to justify the few who committed mass murder at the World Trade Center and Pentagon.)

That the USA. is the most powerful state on earth today is well known, but few think through what this implies. For one thing, it means murderous military intervention in the affairs of other countries. The criminal Vietnamese war killed millions of Vietnamese and fifty thousand US soldiers. The Vietnamese people have never really recovered. Then, in the last twenty years, the US has bombed or invaded Haiti, Panama, Grenada, Yugoslavia, Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Iraq, Iran, and, of course, Afghanistan. These military interventions were mostly done against the will of the existing governments, and often in an effort to overthrow the existing governments. There have also been military interventions by proxy, in which the US gave large scale support to “rebel” groups against established governments. The most well-known (and “successful”) were the U.S-supported contra war against

tinued to watch over and “protect” the Kurds and southern Muslims by flying US planes over a large part of Iraqi airspace. Many people do not realize it, but ten years after the Iraqi war, the US is still flying planes over Iraq and still bombing it.

The other method the US used, to pressure Hussein, was an embargo. The Iraqi rulers can only sell a controlled amount of its oil, and buy only a limited amount of food and medicine and other goods. This is supposed to either make Hussein behave or to inspire the military to replace him. As an effective dictator, Hussein has kept his officers under control. Meanwhile, he really does not care that his people starve or lack medicine, so this does not pressure him. At least a half million children have died from this embargo policy. That is many more people than died in the recent attacks on the US. The US rulers are continuing to wage a war on the Iraqi peasants and workers. This is widely known in Europe and in the mostly-Muslim nations, but the US working class has been kept in the dark.

So, there are good reasons for many people to hate the US, in the Muslim nations and elsewhere. Even those who are favorable to the US are usually ambivalent, liking something and hating others. Perhaps some of the hatred is irrational, due to way US imperialism has broken up traditional societies but replaced them only with poverty, chaos, and dictatorship. The program of many oppressed people has sometimes gone into the dead ends of terrorism and religious dictatorship. But they have legitimate grievances. Their working people have suffered far more than working class people in the US have any idea. “Americans” should not be surprised if the evil their ruling class has done abroad should be returned to them.

the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and, again, the US support of extreme Islamists in Afghanistan ... including Osama bin Laden and the predecessors of the Taliban. Now the US state complains when the monster it created in Afghanistan turns on it.

The US state’s military missions, military alliances, and “peacetime” military bases cover the globe. Its European military alliance, NATO, has actually expanded despite the collapse of the Soviet Union. Three decades after the end of the Korean War, a large number of US troops remain in South Korea. US troops remain in Panama, even after the canal was “given” back to Panama. They were useful in seizing Noriega, the Panamanian president, for trial in the US. Bizarrely, a US base remains in Guantanamo, Cuba, all through the reign of Castro. The US was a major supporter of the Pakistani military through the Cold War, including the Afghanistan struggle. The US continued to be friendly to Pakistan, even as that state built up the Taliban. Each of these instances could be argued about, but altogether, they make a pattern of a superpower which throws its military weight around.

The US government remains the most heavily armed nuclear power, with nuclear missiles capable of exterminating human life on earth many times over. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many liberals called for seizing the opportunity to create world-wide nuclear disarmament. Instead, the US plans to break all existing arms control agreements by setting up an unworkable “missile defense shield,” which will only create a new arms race.

Behind this mountain of military might is an economic drive, a need to dominate the world economy and draw wealth from all the world. That the US is so much richer than the “Third World” countries is widely admitted. Not admitted is that the US is rich because these other nations are poor. Their ruling classes may share in the riches of the US/European/Japanese ruling classes, but the poverty of their masses is the wealth

of that world ruling class. The US is the main beneficiary of modern imperialism. Unlike the old colonialism, there are few countries which the US state owns outright, except for Puerto Rico and several islands and peoples in the Pacific, peoples who have as much right to self-determination as any large nation.

Otherwise, US capitalism's domination of the world is neo-colonial: the oppressed nations have "independent" national states, with their own governments, flags, and postage stamps, but their economies are still completely dependent on the world market. They cannot develop their industries, plan their economies, or decide on a balance of production and consumption, by themselves. Which national economy dominates the world market? Only one, that of the US capitalists. The US economy serves as a giant magnet, pulling all other economies toward it (and its junior partners and sometime competitors, the Western European and Japanese national capitalism's). Loans to build up national economies? Go to US banks or to world financial institutions (World Bank or International Monetary Fund) dominated by the US. Want to build modern industry? Get investments from US capitalists. Need modern chemicals or machinery or medicines? The international patents are owned by US companies. As a result, the poor, exploited, nations are deeply in debt to the richer, imperialist nations, especially the US. The nations of Africa have had to fight hard to get the slightest break from US firms to produce cheaper medicines for AIDS.

The Soviet Union controlled its empire in Eastern Europe by military force, as the British used to control their worldwide empire. But US capitalist imperialism only uses force as a last resort. First, it holds the world together through its economic might. In the poverty-riddled lands of the Arab East and in other oppressed nations, there is enormous resentment of the domination of US wealth over their economies. Often this comes out as hostility to US cultural products, such as movies or music or foods. Whatever the faults or virtues of US movies

are willing, in their military weakness, to use terrorist attacks on Israeli workers. As long as the Israeli government, with US support, does not adapt to living with Palestinians (by withdrawing both troops and settlements from the Occupied Territories, for example), it will continue to enrage Arabs and Muslims against both itself and the US.

The other issue which has particularly angered many Arabs and others has revolved around the US war with Iraq. Like many other dictators, Iraq's Saddam Hussein was supported by the US state when it seemed convenient. For eight years, the Iraqi regime was in a pointless but bloody war with its neighbor Iran. The US rulers were pleased that Iraq was weakening the Iranian regime. The US provided intelligence to the state of Iraq, permitted Hussein to buy hard-to-get weaponry, and helped him in other ways.

But, as bin Laden was later to do, Hussein turned on the US. He decided to invade Kuwait, a small but oil-rich country. It had one of those monarchical-feudal regimes, which oppressed the large number of Palestinians and non-Arabs who worked there. Due to the oil, and to the challenge to its authority, the US state made an issue about this particular atrocity.

Suddenly Saddam Hussein was declared a very bad man and a vast military force was assembled to defeat Iraq. And it was defeated, partly because the Iraqi soldiers (workers and peasants) would not fight for their government.

In response to this defeat, Iraqis rose up to overthrow the government, especially Shiite Muslims in the South and Kurds in the north of Iraq. But the US state did not want a revolution. It might destabilize the region, upsetting all those friendly dictatorships. Freedom for Iraqi Kurds might stir up the Kurds under the control of the Turkish allies. The US rulers hoped to replace Hussein with another military ruler, different from him only in being more cooperative with the US. So the US army stopped short of destroying the Iraqi military. It left Hussein enough to reestablish his role. Instead the US military con-

tians in a (by definition) “Jewish state.” Half of the others live in the West Bank (of the Jordan River) or on the Gaza Strip, under Israeli occupation. The other half is scattered among the Arab nations and elsewhere.

For some time now, most Palestinians and their organizations have accepted the reality of Israel. They know it will not go away and cannot be militarily defeated. Therefore they have only asked for self-determination on what is left of Palestine, on the West Bank and Jordan. The Israeli state has controlled these areas for 35 years now, the longest military occupation of another land in recent history. While pretending to negotiate (the Oslo “peace process”), actually the Zionists have expanded the number of their settlements in the these Occupied Territories, as well as the size of the settlements. This has been spearheaded by reactionary Jewish fanatics, the mirror image of the Islamic fanatics. But it has had the support of the various Israeli governments, both liberal and conservative. The state has linked the settlements by a network of roads and military garrisons. The Palestinian areas have been carved into unviable islands. Meanwhile, the Israeli state has insisted on the right to own virtually all of Jerusalem, while the Palestinians have only asked for half. Not surprisingly, the so-called peace process died of its own hypocrisy.

Throughout this awful history, the US state has been the major ally of Israel. The Palestinians fight with stones or small arms. Israel fights with US-made helicopters and weapons, as well as its own (it is an open secret that Israel has nuclear bombs). All US politicians assert their undying support for Israel. Billions of dollars have been given to Israel by the US state. This is partly due to the domestic strength of the pro-Israel lobby, but Israel is useful to US imperialism in controlling the Arab states. In war after war, Israel has beaten the Arab armies. In fury and frustration, many Arab workers and peasants have turned from the secular movements which are willing to recognize Israel. Some look toward fanatical religious parties who

or fast-food, what is really being expressed is a fury at imperialism, not necessarily a dislike of international culture.

In over 50 years since the end of World War II, world capitalism has simply been unable to industrialize the poor nations of the South. Most of Africa remains destitute. A few world regions have developed some industry, especially in Southeastern Asia. But even these, the most successful, remain developed in a most uneven and unstable fashion, as becomes clear in any economic crisis. The people of Eastern Europe and Russia thought that overthrowing Soviet state-capitalism would make them like Western Europe. Instead, they are like Latin America. The industrialized nations of before World War I were the US, Western Europe, Russia (barely), and Japan. Today, these are still the industrialized nations — with Russia still barely among them. World capitalism has maintained the international imbalance of economic development.

In the Arab and Muslim regions, this inequality is easy to see. There are many nations filled with desperately poor people. The vast wealth of petroleum oil has helped a layer of people in a few nations-but even these nations have been unable to develop even relatively independent economies. The US industrial economy is built on cheap, widely-available oil. Transportation depends on gasoline. Food depends on oil-based fertilizer and pesticides. Clothing, housing, and other things widely use oil-based plastics. Considering that this is a nonrenewable resource, as well as terribly polluting and a cause of the greenhouse effect, this oil-using habit will someday have to be cut way back. But meanwhile, Westerners’ high standard of living requires this cheap, available oil, while the people of the Arab East, the source of most of the oil, remain marginalized, unindustrialized, and poor.

Inside these poor countries, the political results are what would be expected, namely a lack of democracy and freedom. The US state prides itself on its democracy, but this has only been possible because of its great wealth, built in part on the

poverty of other peoples. Due to its wealth, US corporate rich have been able to give up some crumbs to the working classes, when the working class forces them to. To prevent revolutionary struggles, the US ruling class has been willing, under pressure, to provide some of its bounty to buy off layers of the middle class and working class. This creates popular contentment and a willingness to channel grievances through the political process. But the rulers of the poor nations of the South do not have the wealth to buy off their working populations. To keep them down, they must be repressed. At best they go through cycles of government, from corrupt, authoritarian, "democracies," to overt dictatorships (kings, generals, ayatollahs, mullahs, leaders of socialist parties, or little brothers of the poor)-and then back again. They may go from a fake "democracy" to a revolutionary or Islamic dictatorship, and go back again, never really winning self-management for working people.

The exploited people of the Arab East know full well that the US state props up the kings of Saudi Arabia and Jordan as it once helped the Shah of Iran, and now works with the dictator of Syria. All over the world, the US state has supported dictators. When US leaders declare that the "terrorists" oppose us because of our values of "democracy" and "freedom," it is a sick joke.

US rulers pick and chose which dictatorships to be horrified at and which to make allies. They pick and chose which atrocities to condemn and which to ignore. For example, they publicized the horror of Yugoslavian "ethnic cleaning" of the Albanian Kosovars in order to justify their bombing campaign against the Milosevic regime. Meanwhile, they have ignored the decades of almost genocidal war waged by the US ally Turkey against its Kurdish citizens. Turkish Kurds have been denied the right to speak their language, to associate in political parties, or to determine their national fate. This has been backed up by military campaigns of great brutality, including the torture of Kurdish leaders and the extermination

of whole villages. The US public is not aroused about this because the US government and media have not emphasized it. The Turkish military has been a useful ally against Iraq, Yugoslavia, and now Afghanistan.

Similarly, the Bush administration has welcomed the support of the present Russian government against the Afghan rulers. Meanwhile the Russian state has been running a years-long assault on the people of Chechnya, which is still within the Russian borders. To deny the Chechens' independence, the Russians have been waging a most vicious war against them, destroying much of their nation. But Chechnya, a nation with many Muslims, is near Afghanistan and the Afghan people know all about it.

But what most angers people in the mostly-Muslim nations has been two things: US support for Israel and the continued US war against Iraq. Israel is the result of the Zionist movement, an effort to plant European people in the "Third World" land of Palestine. Zionism's aim was to create a Jewish State, a state of "the Jewish people" everywhere in the world, as opposed to the people of whatever religion who actually lived there. It intended to occupy all the land supposedly held by the ancient Hebrews 2000 years ago. Its justification was the Jewish bible — and a promise by the British empire (the "Balfour Declaration"). The main people who were actually living there were not to be consulted of course and could not be, because these goals required dispossessing those Palestinian Arabs. A Jewish population, fleeing from the after-effects of Hitler's genocide, was channeled into Palestine to replace the original population (who had had nothing to do with European atrocities). Through a series of wars, massacres, and supposedly legal actions, the Palestinian peasants and workers were mostly dispossessed. Their lands, their farms, their orchards, their villages, and their cities were taken away. They are not allowed to return nor granted compensation. A small number still live in Israel as second class citizens, Muslims and Chris-