

The World After September 11 - part one

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The World After September 11 Part One: The War of Terrorists

Two Reactionary Camps

The appalling September 11, 2001 terrorist crimes against humanity and the slaughter of thousands of innocent people in America has pushed the world to the brink of one of the darkest and bloodiest eras of contemporary history. What the American administration calls an international war on terrorists is in fact the world's entry into a new and destructive phase in the international war of terrorists.

At opposing poles of this bloody conflict stand the two main international camps of terrorism, which have left their bloody mark on the lives of two generations. At one pole, there stands the most enormous machinery of state terrorism and international intimidation and blackmail. This camp includes the American government and ruling elite, the only force, which has used nuclear bombs against people, reducing hundreds of thousands of innocent and unsuspecting people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki into ashes within seconds. A state that slaughtered millions in Vietnam and razed and ruined their country for many years by chemical bombardments. It includes NATO and coalitions of Western governments who from Iraq to Yugoslavia, have destroyed people's homes, schools and hospitals and have taken ransom the bread and medicine of millions of children. It includes the Israeli bourgeoisie and state. They occupy, seize, slaughter and deprive. They bomb and shell refugee camps and shoot scared ten-year-old children taking shelter in their fathers' arms and at school gates. From Hiroshima and Vietnam to Grenada and Iraq, from the killing fields in Indonesia and Chile to the slaughterhouses of Palestine, the track record of this international pole of state terrorism and imperialist intimidation is obvious and irrefutable for all the world to see.

At the opposing pole, there stands Islamic terrorism and the reactionary and vile political Islam. These forces that were once created and nurtured by America and the West themselves during the Cold War as a means of organising indigenous reaction against the Left in Middle Eastern societies, have now become an active pole of international terrorism and one contender in the bourgeois power struggle in the Middle East. The murderous history of political Islam, from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to Algeria and Palestine includes a long list of genocide and appalling crimes. From state and state sponsored killings in Iran and Afghanistan to the daily crimes of Islamic terror squads in Israel, Algeria and the heart of Europe and America, from the bloody suppression of political and intellectual opponents to imposing reactionary and anti-human Islamic laws on people, particularly women, from Islamic beheadings and mutilations, to planting bombs and mass murder in buses, caf  s and discoth  ques - these are the highlights in the track record of these reactionaries

Now, this conflict is going to take hundreds of thousands and probably millions of other victims in Afghanistan tomorrow and in any other corner of the world the day after. This must be resisted.

War Propaganda

Along with this military alignment, we are witnessing the ideological and propaganda alignment of the two camps. Piercing and tearing down this propaganda wall and pulling the truth out from beneath the massive wave of hypocrisy and deceit, which will engulf the world is the first condition of organising an independent rank of freedom-loving humanity against the terrorists' world war.

The ideological banner of extremists in both camps is clearly visible and recognisable from afar. Today's complex world no longer has time for these coarse views. Western and American flag waving and jingoism, racism, the 'clash of civilisations' garbage and such like may only have an effect on the margins of Western society. Western governments and media know that these crude and primitive views and opinions cannot form the ideological and propaganda framework for the conflict they have entered into. In the opposing camp, too, the idea of Islamic Crusade (Jihad), indiscriminate bloodletting, whether for the grace of god and religion, for the 'liberation of Qods (Jerusalem) and the land of Islam from the claws of bloodsucking international Zionism and imperialism,' only succeeds within the ranks of political Islam's extremists and activists. It does not mobilise the masses of people in contemporary Middle Eastern society. The propaganda war and ideological battle dominating the impending bloody military conflict cannot be based on these openly extremist, sectarian and crude outlines. What can eventually draw the vast masses of people in the West and in the Middle East to this war and align them with the two sides of this reactionary hostility are not these primitive ideas but much more sophisticated rationalisations and justifications that are already gaining popularity.

In the Westerners' formula, despite Bush's cowboy gunslinger gestures, 'civilised humanity' is faced with the plague of terrorism. USA is portrayed as the leader of this civilised rank. The objective is to neutralise terrorism and bring terrorists to justice. The issue seems much simpler than the attack on Iraq and the bombing of Belgrade. Who can blame the US government in its military policy when 6,000 of 'its people' have been killed with such brutality? What is more obvious than the American government's military action to smash this terrorism and protect 'its citizens,' and even the people of the world, against subsequent imminent crimes? This time, to be a member of 'civilised' humanity's club, applicants need not have any ethnic, racial or religious qualifications. Applicants - of whatever colour, appearance, religion or background - need only to declare their support for America. This time, the war propaganda is not going to be racial, ethnic, religious or even political. The issue is not maintaining the flow of oil, defending the burgeoning democracy in Saudi Arabia and returning Kuwait to its sheikhs. If American military, once again dons its armour to repeat what it has done innumerable times, it is seemingly for the right to life, the right to travel, the right of people not to be blown up in their homes or on their streets. The crimes of September 11 have given the most powerful ideological and propaganda framework to date for USA and NATO's military intervention in the furthest corners of the globe. At this moment, separating the masses of people in the West from the military policy of the ruling elite of these countries requires Herculean enlightening efforts. This ideological equilibrium could, indeed, change rapidly with new developments, but at this moment, the idea of the 'war of civilised world against terrorism' has put western politicians and media in full control of western public opinion.

In the opposing pole too, a sophisticated and relatively effective ideological framework in defence of political Islam and Islamic terrorism is taking shape. Not many dare to openly defend the slaughter of thousands of people in America. Even the beasts ruling over Iran and Afghanistan have had to restrain their words. Openly defending political Islam and Islamic terrorism will not be the propaganda banner of this pole. The Islamic side in the war of terrorists will rely on an effective but old formula for justification of Islamic terrorism, a formula which has been one of the foundations of petit-bourgeois 'anti-imperialism' in the Third World, particularly in the Middle East. Seven years ago, in the wake of a wave of Islamic murders in Israel, Egypt and Algeria, we clearly exposed and condemned this reactionary defence of terrorism in an editorial column of the journal 'The International.' It is not inappropriate to quote that short article here:

'A wave of Islamic murders has engulfed the Middle East and North Africa. The victims of this wave are the most ordinary of ordinary people. In Egypt and Algeria, they shoot at and behead foreign nationals - be they workers, tourists or pensioners. They bomb and kill school children at school gates. They kill young girls who do not submit to forced marriages. In Tel Aviv, they murder unaware pedestrians - children, old and young - on streets and on buses. And heroically, from Israel to Algeria, they reassure a stunned humanity that this 'armed struggle' will continue.

'There was a time when the traditional and 'anti-imperialist' Left would look upon the blind violence and unrestrained terrorism of Third World and anti-western currents if not with admiration then at least with toleration. In their opinion, the injustice suffered by deprived nations and oppressed people justified this terrorism as a legitimate reaction. The terrorism of Palestinian groups, Islamic organisations and the Irish Republican Army - whose victims were increasingly unprotected and unaware civilians - were prime examples of this 'permissible' terrorism in recent past. A terrorism, which seemingly responded to past and present injustices; a terrorism, which seemingly appeared as a reaction to the inhuman and brutal policies of oppressive powers and governments. Interestingly, throughout the years, the Israeli government has also used this exact abuse-excuse rationalization; that is by alluding to the indescribable genocide carried out by Nazis and anti-Semitic groups in various countries against the Jewish people, they have justified the brutal suppression of the deprived people of Palestine and the daily killings of Palestinian youth.

'From a communist standpoint, this type of rationalisation and the blind terrorism erected on it in the Middle East - whether by Arab and Palestinian organisations or the state of Israel - is regarded as bankrupt and is condemned. There is not the slightest real and legitimate relationship between the appalling calamities that have befallen the Jewish people in this century and the suppression and crimes committed by the extremist right wing government in Israel against the Palestinians. There is not the slightest real and justified relationship between the sufferings of the deprived people of Palestine and the terrorism of Islamic or non-Islamic organisations attributed to these people. Bourgeois state and factions are exploiting and capitalising on the suffering of the deprived people. Condemning and eradicating this terrorism by the working class, particularly in countries of the region, is an essential condition for placing the workers in the leadership of the social struggle to end the age-old miseries of the people of the Middle East.

'It seems the new wave of Islamic murders, particularly in North Africa does no longer even require such political justifications. A turban and a gun are sufficient to begin this despicable Jihad against humanity. This is Islamic

gangsterism and its source is the ruling regime in Iran. And it will be in Iran where it will be smashed. (Mansoor Hekmat, The International, November 1994)'

With the intensification of this conflict and particularly with the imminent US and NATO attack on Afghanistan, the 'anti-imperialist' defence of Islamic groups and rationalisation of their terrorist actions by reference to Israel and America's crimes and oppressive acts, can once again gain foothold among the people and political parties of the Middle East and also among sections of the traditional radical and intellectual Left of western societies. The main ideological refuge of Islamic gangsterism and Islamic reaction in this power struggle will not be the worn-out and openly anti-human religious and Islamic slogans, but rather the so-called 'anti-imperialism' of the religious-nationalist and petit bourgeois apologists. No popular movement can succeed against the war of terrorists without exposing and breaking the ideological framework of this hypocritical war propaganda on both sides of this reactionary conflict.

What is the Conflict Over?

For both sides, this is a power struggle. Terrorism is one reality of this conflict, but this conflict and the imminent war are not about terrorism. Everyone knows that US entry into Afghanistan and even Ben Laden's arrest will not dampen the terrorist campaign by Islamic groups against the West, and will not bring more security to those who live in Europe and America. On the contrary, it will increase the danger. The Palestinian question is where America and the Islamic movement come directly face to face. But this conflict is also not really about the resolution of the Palestinian question. The declared policy of USA, that is a 'massive, sustained and comprehensive' military war will clearly exacerbate both issues - the Palestinian question and Islamic terrorism. Not only this, but also a possible civil war in Pakistan with serious regional and global consequences, and deep governmental crises in seemingly stable Middle Eastern countries could be the initial result of this military policy. They are well aware of this. Nonetheless, for USA, the main issue is the consolidation and expansion of its political and military hegemony and dominance over the world as the only superpower. The resolution of the Palestinian question or fighting Islamic terrorism is not the objective of this policy. Consolidation and expansion of America's global position, within the context of pressures and opportunities created by the September 11 crimes is the main aim of this policy.

For the Islamists also, this is a power struggle. Neither the suffering of the people of Palestine nor the historical injustices of the West to the East are the source of this terrorism. The Islamic movement is striving to reverse its falling fortunes and ultimately to expand its position in the bourgeois power structure of the Middle East. Terrorism and blind enmity with anything that is Western or Westernised is their main political capital in a society and among a people who rightly see America and Israel as the main causes of their deprivation and rightlessness. Peace in the Middle East, the formation of an independent Palestine, the end of discrimination against the Palestinian people, will herald the demise of the Islamic movement in the Middle East. Terrorism is the Islamic movement's main tool in further deepening the national, ethnic and religious splits in the Middle East and keeping alive this conflict as political capital and a source for its power. Despite the military pressure brought about by America, the Islamists will welcome this confrontation.

To form an independent popular movement against this unprecedented and deadly confrontation of international terrorist and military poles, the truth of these trends and events must be taken to the people. The war propaganda and rationalisations dished out by belligerent camps must be exposed. Events of September 11 and the policy being pursued by USA have important regional and global consequences. They will profoundly change the political and ideological complexion of the world. Politics in Iran will also be acutely influenced by these events. It is necessary to address the main issues in these developments and the fundamentals of a principled communist policy.

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The World After September 11 - Part Two

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The World After September 11 Part Two: Where is the 'Civilised World?'

Barbarity is not Inevitable

The war of terrorists can be the beginning of one of the bloodiest eras of contemporary history. Already, hundreds of millions of people are bracing themselves. But this prospect is not inevitable. The scene is not restricted to the two sides of this conflict. There is a third force, a sleeping giant who can turn the situation around. If this giant awakes, this era can be the beginning of positive changes and the realisation of ideals in the world which humanity had given up on during the final decades of the last century. Bush, Blair, Khamenei, USA, NATO and political Islam do not know that there really is a civilised humanity, a civilised world, which could rise up and defend itself against the war of terrorists. Despite the darkness and terror that they have placed before us people, the 21st century does not have to be the century of capitalist barbarity. These are decisive days.

The media does not reflect the real intellectual and ideological makeup of the world. They give their own version, the dominant version, the version of the ruling class. A version that suits them. Militarism, terrorism, racism, ethnicism, religious fanaticism and profit worship are headline news but do not have a firm place deep down in the minds of the majority of the people of our times. Even a cursory look at the world shows that the vast masses of the people are more to the left, more altruistic, more peace loving, more egalitarian, more free and more freedom-loving than governments and the media. The people on both sides of this appalling conflict have no desire to dance to the tune of the leaders of the bourgeoisie. The gunslinging American administration immediately realises that despite one of the most horrendous terrorist crimes, despite the live broadcast of the perishing of thousands of people in an instant, despite the sorrow and rage which takes hold of anyone who has not sold their conscience to some material interest, still this same horrified western society, these very people who are daily brainwashed, these very people who are from dawn to dusk 'educated' by the ruling ideology of racism and xenophobia, call for 'caution, fairness, justice and a measured response'. The people of the Middle East who are conceived as zealous Moslems and members of the 'Islamic civilization' - be it in the sick minds of clerical rulers in Iran and Afghanistan and the assorted sheikhs of the Islamic movement or in the deluxe studios of the CNN and BBC - are mourning with the people of America and rising in the condemnation of the genocide of September 11. It does not take a genius to realise that the majority of the people of the Middle East despise political Islam, that huge segments of the people of Western Europe and America are fed up with Israel's injustices and sympathise with the deprived people of Palestine, that the majority of western people want an end to the economic sanctions against Iraq and can put themselves in the shoes of heartbroken Iraqi parents who are losing their children to shortage of medicine, that the vast masses of the world's decent and honourable people are on neither side of the war between Bush and Bin Laden - old friends and

present-day rivals. This civilised humanity has been silenced under the barrage of propaganda, brainwashing and intimidation in the West and East, but it has clearly not accepted the garbage. This is a massive force. It can come to the fore. For the future of humanity, it must come to the fore.

And here lies all the difficulty - to bring to the fore this massive force. In the war of terrorists the battle lines are drawn, camps are defined, resources and forces are mobilised; this is a vast military, political and diplomatic confrontation. Despite all the ambiguities, the intellectual and political framework of this war, for leaders of both camps, are clear. In our camp, however, in the camp of humanity, which must confront this terrifying prospect, all is ambiguous.

Undoubtedly, resistance against the war of terrorists is now growing in various countries. But as much as the Islamists and USA need a clear strategy and theory and a unitary and workable outlook, this popular movement also needs an intellectual and political banner and a series of practical strategic principals. Various political movements, particularly those on the Left will strive to guide and lead this resistance. The question is what outlook will lead this 'Left' itself.

In Part I of this article, I wrote that alongside the hawks in both poles - American militarism and Islamic fascists - there are indeed two more sophisticated, refined and 'respectable' set of arguments defending the two sides of the conflict. Alongside US militarism, and supporting it, there are those who promote the formula of the war of 'the civilised world against terrorism'. Alongside the murderers in the Islamic movement, there are those who justify Islamic terrorism with the familiar 1970's religious-nationalist and Third World-ist 'anti-imperialism.' But none of these rationalisations will have any serious influence in the people's resistance movement. Centre-right parties and groups in the West on the one hand and the remains of the traditional left student-intellectuals of the previous decades in East and West on the other will be the main customers of these crafty formulations in the propaganda war on both sides. What could politically and conceptually derail the potentially powerful movement of the world's progressive people is, in my opinion, the pacifist and futile liberalist outlook and efforts to maintain the status quo (merely trying to prevent a US attack on Afghanistan) or status quo ante (returning to pre-September 11).

The September 11 incident was not an isolated act of psychotic individuals cut off from society; neither is the USA's impending military action. The world prior to September 11 was not in equilibrium, but rather was proceeding on a deteriorating path. There are important economic, social and political problem behind these events. These problems have pushed the world in this direction. These problems and issues must be addressed. September 11 is how political Islam is addressing these issues. The same way that bringing the Taliban to power, destroying Baghdad, starving the people of Iraq, suppressing the people of Palestine, bombing Belgrade and now the 'long war with terrorism' are how the leader of capitalism in the USA and Europe have dealt with these underlying contradictions. Today's events are moments in an on-going and dynamic situation. The people's movement against this developing reality cannot be a movement calling for calm and demanding 'Hands off Afghanistan!' Calling for peace and keeping the status quo is not only unrealistic, not only utopian, but also not just, not progressive and not useful. The popular resistance movement against the war of terrorists can only be organised around positive solutions to the critical political and economic problems of our times and around an active position - not for maintaining the status quo but rather for changing it. We have had our own independent agenda and solutions for all the problems that have been pushed to the fore, such as the North-South question, the Palestinian question, the question of Iraq, the question of political Islam, the question of Afghanistan and Iran, the question of militarism and USA and NATO's hegemonism in the new world order,

the question of racism and fortress Europe, etc. These must form the agenda and the banner of the popular resistance movement against the war of terrorists. This is the difference between us and the peace campaigners and pacifists, who do not see or are indifferent to the divisions, contradictions and instability of the world prior to September 11. If we had an agenda to change the world prior to this incident, then a principled position in the current situation means following the same agenda in the new situation. We do not intend to leave Afghanistan under the yoke of the murderous gang of Taliban, we do not intend to live under the rule of a trigger-happy USA, we do not intend to tolerate political Islam or Islamic governments in the Middle East, we do not intend to accept the statelessness of Palestinians and their everyday suppression. We did not want terrorism, be it Islamic and suicidal or military and uniformed and high-tech; we do not accept the poverty of half the world; we do not want fortresses and barracks around Europe, we will not succumb to racism and ethnicism. Neither the September 11 crime nor the imminent heroics of NATO in the Hindu Kush, should turn an active movement for changing the world into uncritical and aimless retiring lot calling for peace and quiet and a return to the day before.

The 'humanitarian' and 'peace' movement is not the right response to today's situation. But the influence of this movement, particularly among ordinary people in western society - because of people's belief in non-violence, humanism and their spontaneous sense of caution - is extremely widespread. This position condemns USA's intervention in Afghanistan, but shirks its responsibility to fight Taliban's rule. It condemns racism and incitement against Moslems but does not see any reason to put pressure on the USA and Israel in defence of the people of Palestine. This position wishes Jack Straw success in his trip to Iran so that hopefully this pole of Islamic terrorism can be tamed and pacified, despite the fact that this policy strengthens the rule of these wolves over the people in Iran. This position defends the civil rights of Moslems in European countries, but in order to prevent 'tension' rejects and opposes criticism of the Islamic veil and lack of rights of women in Islam and Islamic communities. This position appeals to all to back off and to leave the situation as it was before. If this movement goes to dominate the minds and actions of discontented people, then civilised humanity will leave the stage to Western and Eastern terrorists. If there is to be a future, it is in the formation of an active, progressive and freedom-loving policy at the forefront of the people's ranks. This is the duty of communists. New communists. Marx's communists. This is our task.

In part III, I will deal with the fundamentals of an active policy against the war of terrorists. But it is necessary to briefly address the most pressing issue of the day, which is the USA's imminent attack on Afghanistan. 99 percent of the people of the world know and can clearly explain why USA's military attack on Afghanistan and even the arrest and or killing of Bin Laden which is the declared aim of this operation and seems technically very improbable, not only doesn't diminish the danger of Islamic terrorism against America and Britain but rather greatly increases it. It is very clear that the US and British governments are themselves aware of this fact. But they seem to regard a Hollywood or James Bond adventure easier to feed to the people. A mad lone millionaire or gangster in a remote part of the world - Saddam, Milosevic, Bin Laden etc. - intends to destroy the civilization and American heroes are sent off to save the world. But their own analyses shows that political Islam and Islamic terrorism does not have a central headquarters, unified command and an hierarchical organisation; it is an international movement made up of government agencies and circles, various organisations, networks and circles, which are weaved together in a series of official and unofficial relations, as an underground movement, with extensive degree of initiative at the local level. For the West, entering Afghanistan is the start of a wider military and political campaign. Capturing or killing Bin Laden and the accomplishment of some kind of US revenge would naturally reduce the urgency of further military operations for the US administration and calm the American

domestic scene until and only until the next Islamic terrorist attack. But this is a small step in a wider, military and political move in the Middle East, whose eventual extent is not yet revealed. In the final analysis, this is a show down with political Islam, that is the reactionary movement that the West itself found in the peripherals of Middle Eastern society and brought to the fore to confront the emerging Left in the developing capitalisms of these countries as well as to pressurise the Eastern bloc. This power struggle could remain limited, but due to the un-centralised and extremist nature of political Islam and Islamic terrorism, it is more likely that it will lead to a more fundamental and total confrontation. However, political Islam cannot survive in the Middle East without Western support, let alone in a confrontation with the West. So far, the intensification of the battle between secularists and Islamists in Pakistan and the revival of Khatamites and the resumption and escalation of factional infighting within the Iran's Islamic rulers is an indication that the battle between the West and political Islam could act as a detonator for serious changes in the balance of power within the bourgeois factions in Middle East to the disadvantage of Islamists.

What could be said about the America's attack on Afghanistan? Is 'Hands off Afghanistan!' a progressive and principled position? The people of Afghanistan and its opposition will tell you otherwise. The prospect of Taliban's downfall, a gang of murderers and drug dealers, has spurred political forces in Afghanistan. The demand for the overthrow of the Taliban is a humane and progressive demand. We must not allow the legitimate and just opposition to American militarism to be interpreted as leaving Afghanistan in the hands of Taliban. This is one living example of the incorrectness and insufficiency of the call for calm and the defence of the status quo. The people of Afghanistan have been waiting for a lifetime for Taliban's downfall. No doubt, the US will not enter Afghanistan for the liberation of that country. They brought the Taliban to power. This time they may weaken it but de facto accept its existence. They have promised (the Pakistan ruler) Gen. Musharraf that the next government of Afghanistan will be to Pakistan's liking. They are to remove these beasts and replace them with others from the same breed. The principled position is the participate in overthrowing the Taliban shoulder to shoulder with the people of Afghanistan and the progressive opposition, and fighting for the establishment of a government elected by the people of that country. This must be imposed on the West, USA and the United Nations. Any attack by the US forces and its allies against civilians in Afghanistan and the destruction of cities, villages, infrastructures and people's livelihood must be condemned. Any attempt to impose another gang on the people of Afghanistan through wheeling and dealings between USA, Pakistan, Iran and any other state is condemned. But the overthrow of Taliban by foreign armies is not in itself condemnable. Taliban is not a legitimate government in Afghanistan. It must be overthrown. The question is the government that is to replace it and the guarantee that the people of Afghanistan must have regarding their right and opportunity to decide the political system in their country.

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The World After September 11 - Part 3

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The World After September 11 Part Three: The Demise of Political Islam

Outside today's two opposing reactionary poles - the militarism of US and Western governments on the one hand and the camp of political Islam and Islamic terrorist groups on the other - the prevailing climate for the majority of the world's humanitarians and peace-lovers is one of apprehension and trepidation. It is a climate of despair. Everyone is anxious about the deteriorating situation - the escalation of an insane, terrorist race, the killing and flight of hundreds of thousands of innocent Afghan people, chemical and biological attacks in the west, a political eruption in Pakistan, 'laptop' atomic bombs falling into the hands of political adventurers, religious fanatics and international criminals, 'the USA's new war' and a new phase in global bloodletting on a scale that only the USA has been and is capable of. The slogans and protests of the world's decent people has been mainly focused on maintaining the status quo (stopping the US attack on Afghanistan or returning to the pre-September 11 situation). This is a humanity, which has no hope for a better future. At best, it calls for calm. It wishes to avoid bombs, war and violence. A humanity that despite its naïve, duped and docile daily image knows the brutal and heinous nature of the monsters that have entered this war - political Islam and US militarism. A humanity that simply wants to avoid the next catastrophe at any cost. The dominant policy within the wide spectrum of forces that oppose the war (and this includes relics of marginal Left groups in Europe, which prior to September 11, would not agree to anything less than a 'world revolution') is to call for calm, to attempt to halt the current trends and to return to before September 11. Pacifism is the dominant tendency in the resistance movement. And this is an extremely harmful policy that not only does not prevent the next disasters and its consequences, but actually guarantees their taking place.

The pacifist policy and concentrating on the military and armed aspects of the confrontation and the ensuing physical violence actually does harm since it causes political paralysis in people. The condition for preventing this terrorist race and this wave of explosions, destruction and mass murder that they have in store for us is people's intervention in Europe, America, the Middle East and the so-called Third World in the real political processes behind these events - a participation based on an active and positive agenda. If this happens, the future does not have to be bleak.

It is necessary to unearth these political trends and facts from beneath the war propaganda.

Behind the Official Propaganda: Terrorism and Political Islam

I do not think that anyone, even in the US army, believes the story that the September 11 atrocity was the work of a fanatical group taking orders from someone called Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan who has a personal and blind enmity with the USA, 'democracy' and the American 'way of life'. The western media are insistent that this incident was not 'the work of Moslems' and has not emerged from 'the teachings of the Koran'. Seasoned journalists are careful not to make any reference

to Israel and the Palestinian question. They say linking the Palestinian question to this terrorist attack would mean conceding that this action has been instrumental in making the West pay attention to the Palestinian question. Consequently, instead of political Islam and Israel, they point us to Bin Laden and Afghanistan. The USA's war with Taliban in Afghanistan is an important event with long lasting consequences for the region and the world. This war will definitely affect the future of political Islam and even the Palestinian question. It has nothing to do, however, with capturing and punishing the perpetrators of September 11 and will even increase the possibility of terrorist actions against the West (I will return to this issue).

Islamic terrorism is a fact of our times. This terrorism is one of the main pillars of political Islam's strategy. Political Islam is a reactionary regional, and now global, movement that is nourished by the West and Israel's historical injustice toward Arabs and specifically the people of Palestine. The statelessness of Palestinians and the oppression of the Palestinian people by Israel and its Western allies are a main source of hatred for the West and the USA in the Middle East. More importantly, the Palestinian question and the USA and West's continued unwavering support for Israel against the Arabs both during and after the Cold War have created a huge economic, cultural and psychological rift between the people of the Middle East and the West. But the ability of political Islam to shift from the margins of Middle Eastern societies into the mainstream and to capitalise on this discontent in its endeavour for political power is all directly owed to the West and USA. Political Islam as a criminal movement with a widespread power base is the creation of the West and USA. They have created this monster and unleashed it on the people of the Middle East and now the world. Political Islam was the West's tool during the Cold War against Russia and against the emerging labour and Left movements and revolutions in many countries of the region. It was a means of preventing the Left from taking power in the region after nationalist governments reached an impasse during the '70s and '80s. The Palestinian question and the existence of Islamic governments in the Middle East are the pillars and foundations of Islamic terrorism. Any popular progressive and active policy must begin from this very point:

1) Resolving the Palestinian question. This historical problem must be resolved. The Palestinian people must have their own independent state. We must force Western governments and the USA to end their one-sided support for Israel. Israel must be compelled to accept peace and Palestinian independence. The resolution of the Palestinian question is the most important element in confronting political Islam and Islamic terrorism and is one of the main aspects of a progressive and active agenda in the current situation.

2) The West must end its reactionary support for Islamic and backward governments and various parties in the Islamic movement in the Middle East. Without Western backing, the Islamic regime of Iran would not have come to power or remained in power. Without the West's support, the assorted sheikhs in Saudi Arabia and large and small emirates would not maintain their brutal and reactionary rule and their system of slavery. Without the West's support, not only Taliban but also the preceding groups of Moslem Mujahedin could not have turned Afghanistan into an immense human tragedy. If the West's military, diplomatic and political support for Islamic movements were to end, the people of the region would quickly overthrow these governments. The demand to overthrow Islamic governments and to prevent dealing and wheeling between Western governments and USA with these reactionary governments must be another important aspect of the anti-terrorist platform of any progressive and popular movement.

3) The economic sanctions against the people of Iraq must end. The suffering of the people of Iraq has turned this into the 2nd Palestinian question in the minds of the people of the region. It is a living proof of Western and US

terrorism in the Middle East. The economic sanctions have helped perpetuate the reactionary Iraqi government and pushed back the people of Iraq away from politics to a daily battle for physical survival. The struggle for an end to economic sanctions against Iraq is another vital element in a progressive platform against Islamic terrorism.

4) We must actively defend secularism in Moslem-inhabited countries and in Islamic and Islam-ridden communities in Western countries themselves. The shameful idea of cultural relativism (leaving people at the mercy of 'their own culture') and the systematic and theorised failure to defend people's, particularly women's, civil and human rights in these countries and communities, have given a free hand to political Islam to intimidate people and incite the youth. Universal human and civil rights must be the standard and any compromise with religion and reactionary religious rule to the detriment of human rights must be condemned.

Islamic terrorism is a reality. Terrorism is not the work of Moslems, but it is the official policy of the Islamic movement. This is a phoney movement created by the West in the context of the Cold War and amidst an anti-communist confrontation with workers and freedom-lovers in the Middle East. It is a weak and frail movement. It does not enjoy serious moral and political support in the region's major countries. It is out of step with the region's social realities. Without the West's support, political Islam would be defeated by socialism and secularism in the region. In Iran, which like Palestine is one of the main scenes where the fate of political Islam shall be sealed, the demise and downfall of political Islam has already begun.

In the Next Part

* The US war in the region, which has started in Afghanistan is not a war against terrorism, since it not only does not address any of the conditions necessary to fight terrorism (which I referred to earlier), but it even relies on sections of that very Islamic movement. Nonetheless, in my opinion, the USA has entered into a confrontation with political Islam. This is a power struggle. This conflict will logically lead to the weakening of political Islam. But the objective of the West is not the elimination of political Islam. It rather seeks to weaken it, tame it and remould its ranks in order to create a new equilibrium. The war in Afghanistan is about redefining the West's relationship with political Islam. We must break this framework and thwart this new reactionary alliance. We must pursue our own independent policy for ridding the region of this reactionary force much more rigorously under the new conditions.

* The pacifist position does not see this new conflict between the West and political Islam, does not recognise its importance for the people of Middle East who have been victims of this reactionary movement and for future political developments. The pacifist rank shirks its responsibility towards these realities. We must take our criticism of this pacifist and cautious position into the popular movement against terrorism and militarism.

* Because of the global and historical dimensions of this confrontation, the ideological and psychological characteristics of the people of world today, particularly in the West, are very different from the period of the attack on Iraq and even Yugoslavia. With people's mass participation in politics and civil struggles, US militarism will come out of this conflict politically weakened. With the active intervention of progressive forces, the current conflict which is itself about aspects of the new world order after the fall of the Soviet Union, can turn into a mass critique of this entire notion, re-examining the USA superpower status and its continued military intimidation of the world. From the point of view of freedom and equality, this is a much more important debate than the future of political Islam.

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The World After September 11 - Part 4

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The World After September 11 Part Four: After Afghanistan

Afghanistan: War or Aerial Terrorism?

There is no war in Afghanistan. War logically requires at least two sides. What is currently taking place is the USA's bombing of Afghanistan. In this newfound tactic of the world's sole superpower and self-appointed international sheriff, terror and intimidation on a mass scale have formally replaced war. After Vietnam, it has been decided that American society is not to witness any more soldiers returning in body bags from far away battlefields. The price for this will now have to be paid by the unlucky civilians of that wretched country which, in the half-baked theories of Dr. Strangeloves at the National Security Council and the US State Department, is now deemed to be the bastion of the USA's latest arch enemy and the newest leader of the 'Evil Empire'. The casualties that the US military avoids will instead be taken a hundred times over from innocent civilians who are barely scraping a living in a typically poor and marginal country of the world. One day, it is the Iraqi people who hit the jackpot; another day it is Yugoslavia, Libya or Afghanistan. In the cover of darkness, from high-flying out-of-reach planes and from warships and submarines tucked away in far away oceans, they hurl tens of thousands of tons of bombs and missiles at people and their cities. They boast that they will send the pounded country 'back to the stone age,' and yet they insist that the morally 'smart' American bombs are programmed to only hit the guilty. The aim is to intimidate; to intimidate the whole society; to rule by fear - fear of death and displacement, fear of total destruction of a whole economy and civil society; to the point where society is paralysed and resistance becomes impossible. Today, the US ground troops are only the hounds that are to bring the lifeless prey back after the shooting ends and the dust settles.

No one can condemn a declaration of war on the Taliban - even if it is by the USA and West. The Taliban must go and can only be removed by force and by military action. The enmity between the West and the Taliban is much preferable to their hitherto friendship. No one will stand in the way of the removal of murderers who were first installed by the West itself. But there is a difference between war and terror. The US and UK actions in Afghanistan are terrorism. The bombing of cities and residential areas must be condemned and stopped. Worthless myths about the Taliban's military prowess and Afghanistan's history of bringing superpowers to their knees only reinforce and feed into US and UK terrorist methods. The Afghan Mujahedin was merely a facade for the West and the USA in their war against the Soviet Union. The Taliban is a criminal drug gang that was created by the West with the assistance of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. They can turn their switch off and remove them within weeks. But aerial terrorism is safer, more spectacular, more fitting for a superpower, and more likely to teach the discontented people of the world a lesson in the virtues of obedience. We must oppose these inhumane methods.

From Taliban to Political Islam

The US and UK action in Afghanistan, even if it leads to the downfall of the Taliban and Bin Laden's death, will not diminish the threats of Islamic terrorism against the West; it will escalate it. Western leaders are fully aware of this and even publicly warn citizens. However, the choice of Afghanistan as the first theatre for the US 'revenge' for the September 11 atrocity has two fundamental reasons.

Firstly, even if the USA concedes that Islamic terrorism and the anti-Western hatred it nurtures on is a political problem with a political solution, it does not see a solely political response to such a huge physical and military attack inside the US on September 11 as a sufficient and satisfactory response. Militarism is part and parcel of the official ideology in the USA and a foundation of its identity as a superpower. Thus, to the US government, an attack on the USA can only be appropriately answered with an attack on someone else, somewhere else. For the USA, only a military response can 'avenge' September 11, irrespective of the roots and causes of political Islam and Islamic terrorism. This military action must be huge and must represent the 'wrath and power' of the USA; it must display its ruthlessness. A huge military action, however, requires a large theatre. War needs a battlefield.

Afghanistan has not been chosen because Bin Laden is there, on the contrary, Bin Laden has been chosen because he is in Afghanistan. There are many like Bin Laden, heads of Islamic terrorism who live openly or clandestinely in Iran, Britain, France, Egypt, Pakistan, Lebanon, Palestine, Chechnya and Bosnia. The idea that Islamic terrorism has a pyramid structure and a defined hierarchy with Bin Laden at the top is ridiculous. Who believes that [Iranian Ayatollah] Khamenei has been working under Bin Laden in this terrorist hierarchy? The key is Afghanistan, a land that can be the scene of a huge military action. Afghanistan is the only possible theatre for 'US revenge' on the massive and frightening scale promised by the US administration. Today, there is no such military target area outside Afghanistan. And even here, Western leaders complain of the lack of tall buildings and large bridges to destroy.

Secondly, as we said in part III, what is being settled behind the conflict with the Taliban and Bin Laden is the relationship and balance of power between the USA and the West with political Islam. 'The long war against terrorism' is the code name for a show down with political Islam. From the USA's point of view, it is a power struggle, which must sooner or later define the more lasting characteristics of a new world order after the fall of the Soviet Union. Political Islam, a by-product of the Cold War, has emerged as a bourgeois contender for political power in Middle Eastern countries as well as in 'Islamic' communities within Western societies. This force is either in power or has significant political leverage in parts of the world, e.g. in significant countries like Iran and Pakistan. It is a player in the fight over the future of Palestine and Israel. In the former Soviet Republics, it is making mischief close to sensitive nuclear arsenals. In the West, thanks to Saudi Arabia's money, local state subsidies and the corrupt ideology of cultural relativism, it is recruiting the youth in Islam-ridden areas in droves. For the West, this political Islam is no longer the tool and the puppet that served them well in the containment of the Soviet Union, in preventing the Left from taking power in the anti-monarchy revolution of Iran, and in creating problems for Arafat and Arab nationalism. Now, this creature is more ambitious. It has its own agenda. It has come out from under the West's patronage. And on September 11, from the US point of view, political Islam went one step too far. A terrorist attack of this scale in the heart of the USA set off this inevitable power struggle. These events are essentially moments and stages of a power struggle between the USA (& the West) and political Islam. From the USA's point of view, this is a struggle with Islamic states, Islamic parties and the entire political Islamic movement. The Taliban is the weakest, most vulnerable and most hollow symbol of political Islam's power in the Middle East and consequently the most suitable point of entry to a comprehensive power struggle. The USA's victory in Afghanistan does not affect, militarily and practically, the foundations of political Islam's power. They know

this. The main centres of power are primarily in Iran, Saudi Arabia and in Islamic organisations in Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. This is, however, a power struggle, and not a life and death battle. Afghanistan is the only arena, at least in the current framework of the world, where there could in fact be a military conflict between the USA and political Islam. It is the only arena where 'the long war against terrorism' can begin with a dramatic and spectacular military action without causing total havoc.

This is a Political Conflict

'The long war with terrorism' is actually a power struggle between the USA and political Islam. After Afghanistan, the confrontation will be essentially political, even if both sides occasionally turn to specific military and terrorist actions. The USA's objective in this war is not to eliminate political Islam. Contrary to the self-congratulatory propaganda of the so-called Reformist faction in Iran, it is not the political skills of Mr. Khatami that has 'saved Iran from bombardment'. An attack on Iran and such a bombing campaign against that country is not part of the West's agenda at all. The notion that the USA will enter into military conflicts with country after country according to the list of those it has once labelled terrorist is extraordinarily superficial. The USA's objective in this show down is neither to eliminate political Islam nor even to overthrow Islamic governments, but rather to impose its own political hegemony and define the rules of the game. From the USA's point of view, the Islamic movement must know its boundaries. It must limit its field of operation to the region, understand its own place and recognise the USA's special position. Not only can Islamic governments remain in power, but also even terrorism is still permissible on the condition that its victims are the communists and the Left in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey. But an attack on American soil is going too far. The USA wants to take this lesson and this equilibrium to the Middle East. This is a power struggle and not a confrontation over Islam, liberalism, Western democracy, freedom, civilisation, security or terrorism. This is a battle between the US superpower and a regional political movement with a global reach, which is contending for power in the Middle East. It is a struggle for defining spheres of influence and political hegemony. The West does not intend to establish Western democracies in the Middle East. The USA, Pakistan, Iran and a whole bunch of other reactionaries in the region are already busy plotting to impose another despotic and backward regime on the people of Afghanistan. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the Gulf Emirates, the most reactionary regimes in the world today, are openly or tacitly on the side of the West in this conflict. Even if Islamic governments fall, the preferred alternative of the West will be the local and regional Right wing and reactionary parties, military juntas and police states.

The USA Does Not Make History

But the West does not determine the future. The current US policy and actions will inevitably shatter the present political framework in the Middle East, but other forces will determine the alternative relations that will take shape. Undoubtedly, the confrontation between the West and political Islam will weaken the Islamic movement, Islamic parties and Islamic governments. But this confrontation does not take place on an empty stage. The Middle East, like the West, is the scene of a confrontation between social movements that have existed prior to the conflict between Western bourgeoisies and political Islam and which have shaped political developments in all societies. The West's conflict with political Islam, despite its importance, is not the engine and the moving force of history. On the contrary, it is itself placed within this history and is defined by it. The conflict over the new world order has more important players. Social classes and their political movements, whether in the West or the Middle East, are facing each other over the political, economic and cultural future of the world. It is these movements that will determine

the final course of these events, irrespective of the current designs and demands of Western statesmen and the leaders of political Islam.

As far as the Middle East is concerned, even if the West aims at a mere marginal retreat of political Islam and definition of a new framework for coexistence, the secular, Socialist and progressive movements in the region will nevertheless come to the fore in these new conditions. For example, in my view, political Islam will be overthrown in Iran, not because the West pursues such an objective, but rather because the people of Iran and the worker-communist movement at their head will overthrow the Islamic Republic. The defeat of the Islamic Republic will be the biggest blow to political Islam. If the resolution of the Palestinian question is the precondition for removing the political, intellectual and cultural sources of the growth of political Islam, the defeat of the Islamic Republic in Iran is a precondition for smashing political Islam as a movement aspiring for political power in the Middle East. Without the Islamic Republic of Iran, political Islam will become a marginal and sterile opposition in the Middle East.

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