

The Propaganda Of Terror And Fear: A Lesson From Recent History

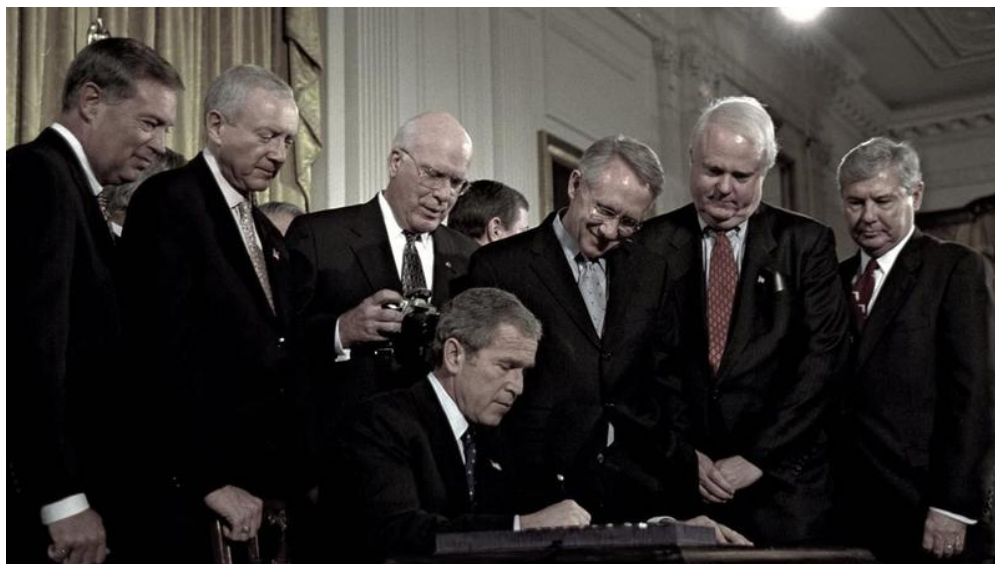


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The ongoing and unfolding reactions to the Coronavirus look set to have **wide-ranging and long-lasting effect on politics, society and economics**. The drive to close down all activities is extraordinary as are the measures being promoted to isolate people from each other.



The deep-rooted fear of contagious disease, hardwired into the collective consciousness by historical events such as the 'Black/Bubonic Plague' and maintained through popular culture (e.g. the Hollywood movies *Outbreak* and *Contagion*), means that people are without question highly susceptible to accepting extreme emergency measures whether or not such measures are rational or justified. *The New York Times* called for America to be [put on a war footing](#) in order to deal with Corona whilst [former Army General Stanley McChrystal](#) has been invoking his 9/11 experience in order to prescribe lessons for today's leaders.

At the same time, political actors are fully aware that these conditions of fear and panic provide a critical opportunity that can be exploited in order to pursue political, economic and societal objectives. It is very likely, however, that the dangers posed by the potential exploitation of Corona for

broader political, economic and societal objectives latter far outweigh the immediate threat to life and health from the virus. A lesson from recent history is instructive here.

9/11 AND THE GLOBAL 'WAR ON TERROR'

The events of September 11 2001 represent a key moment in contemporary history. The destruction of three skyscrapers in New York after the impact of two airliners and an attack on the Pentagon, killing around 3000 civilians, shocked both American and global publics. The horror of seeing aircraft being flown into buildings, followed by the total destruction of three high rise buildings within a matter of seconds, and the spectre of a shadowy band of Islamic fundamentalists (Al Qaeda) having pulled off such devastating attacks, gripped the imagination of many in the Western world.

It was in this climate of paranoia and fear that extraordinary policies were implemented. The USA Patriot Act led to significant [civil liberty restrictions](#) whilst the mass surveillance of the digital environment became normalized.

In the United States torture was authorized in the name of preventing terrorism whilst the Guantanamo Bay facility in Cuba became a site in which accused individuals have been held without any adequate legal protection or due process.

Remarkably, the individual accused of leading the alleged 9/11 plot, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who 'confessed' to CIA interrogators after being 'waterboarded' 183 times, has [recently received his trial date](#), set for January 11 2021 and 20 years after 9/11. Civil liberty restrictions, mass surveillance and torture were only a sub-strand of the major war-fighting-policy that was enabled by 9/11.

Presented at the time as America's 'New Pearl Harbour', 9/11 provided the conditions for a series of major regime-change wars which persist until today.

Critically, these wars have not been primarily about combatting 'Islamic fundamentalist terrorism'/Al Qaeda, but rather attacking 'enemy' states. Indeed, the evidence that the 9/11 event and the alleged threat of 'Islamic fundamentalist' was then exploited in order to pursue a geo-politically motivated set of regime-change wars which had little connection to the purported Al Qaeda threat is well established.

Former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, Wesley Clark, [famously went public in 2006/7](#) stating that immediately after 9/11 he had been informed that the US was intending to attack seven countries within five years including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Somalia, Sudan and Iran. Clark stated:

He [the Joint Staff officer] picked up a piece of paper, he said I just got this down from upstairs, from the Secretary of Defence's office today, and he said this is a memo that describes how we are gonna take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finishing off Iran.

Clark's claims have recently been corroborated by retired Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson (chief of staff to Colin Powell and Iraq War planner) who stated that [he had actually seen the same plans](#) Clark was referring to many months prior to 9/11:

My first briefing in the Pentagon from an Air Force three-star general in February of 2001 I almost fell off my chair because their briefing included on the one hand the Air Force's ability to take out 80 to 90% of the targets in North Korea in the first few hours of an aerial strike on that country to hey when we do Iraq we're gonna do Syria and Lebanon and we're going to do Iran and maybe Egypt ... but this was more than that [just contingency planning] Wes Clark is right they had these plans they were going to go right through all these countries that they felt threatened Israel all through those countries that they felt threatened 25-30% of the world's oil passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

[Documentary evidence for these claims](#) has come by way of the UK Chilcot Inquiry into the 2003 Iraq War. For example, a report quoted a British embassy cable, dated 15 September 2001, explained that '[t]he "regime-change hawks" in Washington are arguing that a coalition put together for one purpose [against international terrorism] could be used to clear up other problems in the region.' Another document released by Chilcot shows British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George Bush discussing phases one and two of the 'war on terror' and when to hit particular countries. Blair writes:

If toppling Saddam is a prime objective, it is far easier to do it with Syria and Iran in favour or acquiescing rather than hitting all three at once.

The regime-change wars that have flowed directly and indirectly from 9/11 continue to this day. War and conflict continues in Afghanistan and Iraq whilst the nine-year-long war in Syria has borne witness to [extensive and illegal policies](#) pursued by Western governments including the funding and arming of extremist groups coupled with support for groups [actually aligned with Al Qaeda](#). Iran continues to be subjected to US hybrid warfare tactics including sanctions and covert operations whilst the threat of military action is very clear and present.

The human cost of these wars, built upon the ruthless exploitation of public fear of terrorism in order to pursue multiple 'regime-change' wars, has been huge. According to the Brown University 'Costs of War Project', the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have killed a [combined 480,000 to 507,000 civilians](#), coalition military members, and foreign fighters, with an untold number having been maimed and disfigured. [IPPNW estimated that the first ten years](#) of the 'war on terror' in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan killed 1.3 million people.

Since 2011, in Syria alone, over 400,000 people have died as a result of war. The [numbers of people displaced](#) as a result of these conflicts are also extremely high; wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria have wrought a combined 9.39 million refugees, 10.78 million internally displaced peoples, and 830,000 asylum seekers. In addition, there are persisting and very serious concerns with respect to the possible involvement of state actors with the event of 9/11.

Recent and critical developments regarding the events of 9/11 include the publication this week of [the University of Alaska study of the WTC7 Collapse](#) which confirms that the official US government investigation was wrong if not plain fraudulent. Other important developments include [publication last year](#) of the [9/11 Consensus Panel](#) evidence and increasing scrutiny of the official narrative from [mainstream academics](#).

Overall, the 9/11 global 'war on terror' is [increasingly coming to be understood](#) particularly across the world as, first and foremost, a remarkable propaganda campaign designed to enable violent conflict in the international system and with its effects and objectives being far wider and deeper than had been suggested by official narratives regarding the need to combat Al Qaeda.

CORONA VIRUS: A NEW 9/11?

The lesson of 9/11 is that major events can become what scholar Peter Dale Scott describes as deep events which are exploited by political actors in order to precipitate and manage major political, economic and social shifts. 9/11 became, in effect, the deep event that enabled 20 years of unfettered Western warfare abroad and severe civil liberty restrictions and extensive surveillance at home.

At the time of 9/11 many people in the West were terrified of terrorism. Public opposition to the invasion of Afghanistan (the first regime war to flow within months of 9/11) was almost impossible without being accused of being reckless in the 'fight against terrorism' or of being an 'Al Qaeda' sympathizer. Muslims throughout the West were widely despised. US President George Bush declared that 'you are either with us or against us'. The parallels with what is happening today are obvious.

Is the Coronavirus a new 9/11, a new deep event? We cannot yet be sure, as of this writing. Perhaps the current strategy of suspending basic liberties will work to effectively eliminate all threats posed by the virus. Governments will then restore the civil liberties currently being suspended and all will fairly quickly return to the way things were before. Perhaps the economy will confidently weather the fallout from the 'lockdowns' and everything will return to business as usual.

And perhaps a sober 'lessons learned' review will lead to public health officials developing reasonable and balanced plans, such as developing sufficient capacity for rapid testing and tracing, which can be deployed the next time a sufficiently dangerous virus starts to spread thus avoiding terrifying publics and implementing draconian measures that inflict significant damage to the social and economic fabric of society.

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Or perhaps not. It may be that, as [British journalist Peter Hitchens has been warning](#), the loss of liberty and basic rights will continue indefinitely as governments greedily hold on to their increased powers of control over their citizenry.

Similarly, Italian journalist [Stefania Maurizi has warned about the risks](#) in Italy of state authorities, hostile to open societies and the political left, exploiting Corona in order to increase their control.

An obvious concern here is whether there will be a permanent impact on mass gatherings and protests. James Corbett warns of a permanent state of [‘medical martial law’](#) and there is certainly the very real possibility of the normalization of government-imposed quarantine and other freedom of movement restrictions.

Margaret Kimberley of the US-based Black Agenda Report warns that Corona may be used as a way of covering up [both economic crisis and collapse](#). She notes that the Federal Reserve ‘recently threw Wall Street a \$1.5 trillion lifeline which only kicked the can down the road. The can has been kicked ever since the Great Recession of 2008’. The likely destruction of small businesses might allow for ever greater corporate chokehold on the economy with more people forced into the corporate workforce.

There is certainly the danger that COVID-19 will be exploited in order to distract from severe economic problems whilst also enabling the pursuit of new economic strategies which worsen rather than mitigate the social inequalities that already tarnish Western countries.

And, of course those actors behind the regime-change wars that flowed from 9/11 may use the Coronavirus to increase pressure on the countries they have been targeting for the last 20 years and those they wish to target in the future.

Already we have seen the regime-change advocate [John Bolton blaming China for the Corona Virus](#) whilst [the New York Times reported that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo](#) and national security adviser Robert C. O’Brien were ‘arguing that tough action while Iran’s leaders were battling the corona virus ravaging the country could finally push them into direct negotiations’.

ABC news report that, despite the Coronavirus, [US and UAE troops have held a major military exercise](#) ‘that saw forces seize a sprawling model Mideast city’. It is also worth noting here the recent US assassination of Iranian General Solemani and the on-going proxy battles between US forces and Iranian-backed groups in Iraq. The possibility of Corona being exploited in order to further the regime change wars we have seen over the last 20 years is extremely likely and it would be naïve in the extreme to think otherwise.

Whatever the COVID-19 event may or may not be, the fundamental lesson of the last 20 years is that governments can and do exploit, even manipulate, events in order to pursue political, social, military and economic objectives. Fearful populations are frequently irrational ones, vulnerable and malleable. Now is not the time for deference to authority and reluctance to speak out.

It is time for publics to get informed, think calmly and rationally, and to robustly scrutinize and challenge what their governments are doing. The dangers of failing to do this likely far surpass the

immediate threat posed by the Coronavirus.

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