

The toxic historical legacies of September 11th

On September 11, 1973, the democratically elected Chilean government of Salvador Allende was overthrown by a military coup covertly instigated by the CIA. The U.S. role was a culmination of its decades of political and economic pressure on Chile and interference in its affairs. The subsequent atrocities of Augusto Pinochet's authoritarian regime eventually made Chile a pariah on the world stage and an inconvenient ally for the U.S.: **3,216 Chileans were killed or disappeared, 40,000 imprisoned and tortured, and over 200,000 sent into exile during Pinochet's 17 years in power.**

Many U.S. citizens protested the U.S. role in Allende's overthrow and demanded accountability. They also stood up against U.S. military, economic, and political support for other right-wing dictatorships in Central and South America and its war-making throughout the world.

On September 11, 2001, nearly 3,261 people were killed in coordinated al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon using hijacked commercial planes. (The third leg of the attack was planned for the United States Capitol but thwarted by brave passengers and crew who brought the plane down. 44 lives were lost on that flight.) **Over 9,400 civilians and first responders have since died from illnesses related to 9/11.**

Much of the world stood in unity and solidarity with the United States after these attacks. Many victims' families and other U.S. citizens proclaimed that "Our grief is not a cry for war." But the U.S. government chose to respond instead by using the tragedy as the pretext to start a 20-year war on Afghanistan and an eight-year war on Iraq, the latter based on carefully curated lies about weapons of mass destruction.

In the name of this "war on terror," over 940,000 people, more than 432,000 of them civilians, were killed by direct post-9/11 war violence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan between 2001-2023. "Indirect" civilian deaths caused by these wars' destruction of economies, healthcare systems, infrastructure and the environment are estimated at 3.6 to 3.8 million, bringing

the total death toll to at least 4.5 to 4.7 million and counting. (See: <https://costsofwar.watson.brown.edu/costs/human>).

Today, the Trump administration openly embraces war against other countries and against citizens and residents of the United States as its "go to" strategy. But the building blocks of these wars were put in place for decades prior to the MAGA takeover.

Participants in a Columbia University symposium held at the end of August to explore the impact of post-9/11 policies on democratic and human rights argued that the policies that the Trump administration has locked into place have been built on actions that were taken under previous administrations over the past 25 years. They cite a few examples from that recent history:

- Immediately after 9/11/2001, the Patriot Act was passed to expand government surveillance powers; later, "material support" laws were expanded to target certain kinds of political speech and to use the Espionage Act against journalists' sources. (*Note: The Department of Homeland Security and ICE, currently terrorizing our communities, were also established under this act.*)
- Prisoners were tortured in U.S. military facilities in Afghanistan, Iraq and at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The CIA and the military adopted torture policies there that eventually found their way into places like Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo. (*And, arguably, into today's immigrant "detention centers".*)
- The CIA and the U.S. military deployed armed drones to carry out hundreds of targeted killings, including in places far removed from actual battlefields.
- Surveillance programs began to proliferate, from surveillance of Muslim communities to digital surveillance operations of unprecedented scope and reach.

(See: https://www.democracynow.org/2026/9/11/jameel_jaffer_azmat_khan).

It is our responsibility to learn our history and its consequences and work to alter its trajectory. The urgency has never been greater.

Silence is not an option.

Resist this Endless War. Resist fascism now (before it's too late.)

<https://newhavensundayvigil.org>

New Haven Sunday Vigil for Peace and Justice

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