January 2015


Maximiliano E. Korstanje

University of Palermo, Argentina

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.pacificu.edu/eip

Recommended Citation

Book Review


Maximiliano E. Korstanje
University of Palermo, Argentina


The attacks on the World Trade Center generated great concern and severely shook American society, lasting up to today. The 9/11 Commission report was an all-encompassing document written by authorities to describe and understand the events by which the nation remained unprepared. By reviewing thousands of documents, interrogations and interviews, this text reinforces the belief that America not only was facing one of its most important threats, but also needs to prevent an attack of this caliber in the future. As a tribute to the victims of this tragedy, it alludes to combine real facts, extracted from verifiable sources with ideological discourses. This is the reason why we have to place this text under the lens of scrutiny.

At some extent, the consulted sources are not academic works or published papers in peer review journals, but also governmental reports issued to make precise the contexts and reasons of terrorism. A profound and careful reading
suggests two important aspects. First and foremost, although there is a massive
dataset, authorities and politicians have no accurate information how terrorists
avoided the x-ray machines, which scrutinized the passengers at airports or how
they entered into the cockpit: “We do not know exactly how the hijackers gained
access to the cockpit. FAA rules required that the doors remain closed and locked
during flight” (p 5).

The point of entry in the discussion appeals to the compliance of the govern-
ment in the attack. This theory of conspiracy, which points out some incongru-
ences of the approved version of facts, provides with another alternative story of
9/11. The Administration would somehow support the intelligence so that terror-
ists planned the attack (supposedly to expand its economic intervention towards
the world). Since this has no empirical validation, the lack of information to un-
derstand a coherent argument creates a gap, which is fulfilled by speculations.
After all, 9/11 was constructed around a great mystery.

In addition, some of the hijackers not only had their visas expired but also
were educated in the U.S. and Europe. Secondly, government was not familiar
with the attack lest by mass media. CNN was the first media reporting what origi-
inally authorities, the president and the vice-president thought was an accident.
The specialized agencies in homeland security, even the FAA headquarters, fol-
lowed intense protocols in communication that affected a rapid counter-answer to
the civil airplanes hijacking. Although both of these observations can be fine, it
allowed the adoption of two major policies of Bush’s administrations in the years
after 9/11. On one hand, the borderlands were strengthened and illegal migrants
were closely screened; even a great wall was constructed to prevent migration
from Mexico. At this stage, many migration forms and requirements and inter-
national covenants were indefinitely cancelled and the U.S. unfortunately closed
its doors to the world. On another, it led to “radical conservatives” to introduce
policies to fights against the autonomy of agencies proper of “deliberative democ-
racy”. From its inception, the United States has focused considerable attention to
the division of powers, as well as the autonomy of agencies to regulate the life of
peoples. Starting from the premise that 9/11 resulted from the weakness of central
administration to intervene in autonomous institutions, the document appealed to
a centralized view of presidency with tight control of all agencies. Of course, this
was mandatory simply because they (the Muslim world) hate us. In this excerpt
shown below, the report reconstructs a biased image of Muslim world as associ-
ated to “radicalism” and fundamentalism.

“We learned about an enemy who is sophisticated, patient, disciplined and
lethal. The enemy rallies abroad support to Arab and Muslim World by de-
manding redress of political grievances, but its hostility toward us and our
values is limitless. Its purpose is to rid the world of religious and political
pluralism, the plebiscite, and equal rights for women” (p. xvi).
Terrorists not only hate the democracies because their liberty, but also blame the United States for all their evils. This extremist view of the West leads Bin Laden to operate into thousand and millions of minds. He offers “the eternal salvation” inducing people to commit suicide against American targets. Following this, Americans are the preferred targets rather than any other nationality. The Bin Laden’s ideology is forged in the anti-democratic sentiment.

Bin Ladin also relies heavily on the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb. A member of Muslim brotherhood executed in 1966 on charges of attempting overthrow the government, Qutb mixed Islamic scholarship with a very superficial acquaintance with Western history and thought (p. 51).

However, what are the sociological reasons why the Muslim world paves as fertile ground to this authoritarian ideas? The document explains that after Muhammad’s death, two factions struggled to impose their views of Islam: Sunni and Shia. The former signals to the idea the new leaders should share Muhammad’s blood while the latter one refers to a different thesis, namely, personal characteristics of leadership would be enough to guide the faith. This division leads to extremist to think “parliaments” are in opposition to the “caliphate,” running the risk that democracy opens the doors to new rulers who can alter the Islamic world and its politics. To what extent Islam becomes a “fundamentalist” cosmology depends on its impossibilities to accept democracy as a valid form of government.

The rest of the book gives examples and facts to validate the previous discussed argument. What it ignores is not only that “terrorism” coexists with democracy, but also terrorist learned their tactics and values of extortion from us. Beyond the thousands of victims, who lead us to classify this attack as a criminal act, the document takes the opportunity to instill an ideological message that obscures more than it clarifies. Far from being objective, the document is delineated to cause specific effects in politics and economy as well as producing an ideological explanation of terrorism, conducive to Bush’s administration.

The history of worker unions is fraught with violence, death and blood. Although now these organizations seem to be legally represented, most of them were historically aligned to left-wing movements coming from Europe, Germany and Italy. The industrial revolution was prerequisite for workers to think in terms of collective organizations. The American Federation of Labor was founded in 1886. One of the main strengths was the power of negotiation with the owners of capital. James Joll explains that first anarchists were depicted as dangerous by the ruling class press and the politicians who did their bidding in Gilded Age America. The United States government waged chronic war against unions beginning at the end of the Civil War and continuing until the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s. The first syndicalists that defied the state were labeled as terrorists. These workers professed a nonnegotiable fight for oppressed classes,
which have been relegated by the capitalist aristocracies (Joll, 1979). At the end of WWII the American ruling class achieved a double-capitulation domestically and abroad, such as the famous plan Marshall worked as a catalyst to undermine the ever-growing worker demands in Europe, while the CIA consorted with gangsters and former Nazis and Fascists to subvert and terrorize workers, their unions, and their political parties (Ganser, 2005). At the same time, legislation such as the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act restricted the political activities of unions and blunted workers’ only weapon against exploitation—the strike. The problem of communism seems not to be the anti-capitalism values it represents, but its potential effects on workers, a threatening influence that would jeopardize the American economy (Skoll & Korstanje, 2013).

G. Skoll explains that the function of the state is to maintain the hierarchical status quo by exerting power and violence over populations. In times of low conflict, the legitimacy of the state rests on the market that confers certain stability. In the context of relative chaos and disorder the state resorts to violence to refashion the threatened order. Similarly, the market mediates among human beings by imposing a state of gratification in lieu of constraints, but the moment the control weakens, fear replaces gratification as the motivator to legitimate the ruling order (Skoll, 2008). The United States historically developed a red scare not because of the anti-capitalist values of communism, but primarily for its effects on workers. Communism was not just a reaction to the accumulation of capital by the bourgeoisie, but also gave workers a consciousness, a discourse to guide their fight. The first anarchists and communist migrants surveilled and jailed by many states contributed to the formation of workers’ union. States rejected the aliens but accepted and reorganized their ideas in a manner suitable to the long-term interests of capital and the ruling class. Capitalist societies domesticated the dangerous lessons of Marx in two different ways, (a) creating a wide sentiment of fear to communism and (b) re-organizing the discipline of workers to the capitalist state (Skoll & Korstanje, 2013); this means giving entertainment and leisure as valid options. Although anarchism was repressed by the state, its ideological core remained in capitalism. While radical anarchists were persecuted and deported by the government, some other more subtle voices were added to worker union organization, struggling to gain some benefits. At the time society exerted violence to destroy “anarchism”, adopted the strike as a legal alternative conferring the workforce some advantages that resulted in modern tourism industry such as wage enhancement, and working hour reductions. From that moment, tourism and terrorism was inextricably intertwined. What inside is called a strike beyond borders receive the name of terrorist attack.

To what extent a strike is considered a legal mechanism to present certain claims while terrorist attacks are discouraged seems to be a matter that specialists do not examine properly. A closer view reveals that there are similar processes in both, a strike and terrorism. As a vaccine is used to inoculate the virus, to
strengthen the body’s immune system, strikes are a process of dissent and discord that mitigate the negative effects of conflict. After all, strikes are merely the collective effect of workers withholding their labor. There is nothing violent or threatening about them, except to those who depend on other people’s work to sustain themselves—i.e., the owners of capital. In their struggle with workers, the ruling class uses as one if its weapons the construal of strikes as taking consumers as hostages. Whenever passengers are stranded at an airport or train stations because of problems between owners and unions, the sense of urgency facilitates the things for stronger ones. Businesses and terrorism organizations are not concerned about the vulnerability or needs of passengers. The latter ones are manipulated as means for achieving certain goals. In a world designed to create and satisfy psychological desires, consumers as holders of money, are of paramount importance for the stability of system. The threat that represents the consumers and the derived economic loses are enough to dissuade owners from the worker’s claims. In these types of processes, typified by law, the State not only intervenes, mediating between both actors, but also it is in charge of leading negotiations. Nonetheless, if negotiations fail, the state uses its armed force might to force the workers back to their jobs. An early historical example is the great rail strike of 1877 when federal troops were withdrawn from the occupied former Confederacy to kill strikers, terrorizing the mass of rail workers to end the strike. Capitalism creates and allows state-mediated strikes in order to replicate. Under the old Fordist model, more benefits, money, and rights for workers result in further consumption. As Fordism fades, so do unions and strikes. Today, the reproduction of capital follows a different dynamic as seen in zones attacked by terrorism. Like the example of 9/11 Ground Zero in New York demonstrated to the world, capitalism creates the necessary conditions of disasters in order for the site to be recycled and commoditized in a tourist attraction (Klein, 2007)

What this review likes to remind is that “Unions”, as state-legitimated organizations, are circumscribed by law, terrorists are considered “demons.” Ostensibly, so are corporations, but as recent statements by the U.S. Attorney General make clear, the law only applies to small corporations (Sorkin 2013). Huge transglobal corporations and their leaders, especially in the banking industry, are too big to jail. Like terrorists, airline corporations speculate, and when that does not pay off, they call for the force of the state to protect their interests. The classic example is the strike by U.S. air traffic controllers’ strike of 1981, the strike that finally broke the back of organized labor in the United States. When civilian air traffic controllers withheld their labor, the U.S. government replaced them with military controllers in the service of the airlines’ business interests. The degree of vulnerability of consumers, who often are trapped in strikes and their insensitivity to their needs, is another common asset. The boundary between business as usual and intimidation through fear is not only politically fabricated, but also built by means of the selective memory. Not necessarily, we ascribe to the belief that ter-
terrorism is business by other means, but to reconsider the thesis that tourism is of voluntary nature and seek to help residents of the visited destinations. Rather, if we take the necessary attention, as specialized literature does, to the economic nature of tourism, we might speculate that the industry is based on a spectacle, and as Guy Debord (1967) reminded us, spectacle is congealed capital, commodities. Worker unions in tourism and hospitality vary according to the legal context of their countries. To what an extent a strike will affect the economy of country will depend on many factors, but what is important to debate is how Western terrorists, most of them, educated in Western universities employ these tactics in their holy war to extend capital and imperial control throughout the globe.

REFERENCES


