

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4345>



USA

# Crises, Craziness and "Security"

- IV Online magazine - 2015 - IV491 - December 2015 -

Publication date: Tuesday 29 December 2015

---

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

---

**Donald Trump's call to ban Muslims from entering the United States set off a political and media firestorm that's raging as we go to press. But Trump's latest outrage essentially lit the match to underbrush that was ready to be ignited. Trump himself is not so important – a vicious demagogue, but not a mass organizer or leader. What matters, following the carnage of the "Islamic State" attack in Paris and the San Bernardino mass shooting, is the climate in which the priority target of opportunity for racist reactionaries has become Muslim refugees, immigrants, communities and mosques.**

Harassment and sometimes physical attacks on Muslims in the United States can't be understood separately from the hatred that produced the murderous attack at the Colorado Planned Parenthood office, or the racist attempted murder of activists in Minneapolis occupying a police precinct station in response to yet another cop shooting of a young Black "suspect."

Jamar Clark was one of 1209 people killed so far by police in the United States in 2015, according to statistics compiled by the British paper The Guardian as of early December. (We won't detail here how this reflects a continuation of racist and nativist themes in U.S. history – for further discussion, see Malik Miah's overview [here](#))

Donald Trump and what he represents must be seen as a symbol and symptom of a sick society and political system. Practically all the Republican candidates wanted to play with the fire of anti-Muslim bigotry, but without getting burned. It was Jeb Bush who first suggested admitting only those Syrian refugees who could prove they're Christian.

Other presidential candidates and governors already called for slamming the borders shut to refugees, or closing "suspicious mosques" – Ben Carson, Ted Cruz, Chris Christie, Texas governor Greg Abbott and Indiana's Mike Pence among other sleazy characters. Some 31 governors sued to block refugees from entering their states.

When Trump previously called for "registering" Muslims in the United States, the Republican leadership could have denounced him as unfit to be president. They didn't. Now, by calling for excluding Muslims from U.S. shores, Trump has focused the world's attention on the actual meaning of the Republicans' message to their voting base, and thereby blown it up in the GOP's face – performing a kind of public service, in his own perverse and sick fashion.

Globally, Trump's ravings can be damaging for Washington's imperial projects – given perceptions around the world that he might be the next U.S. president, although the real-life chance of that happening is essentially zero.

Even attempting Trump's proposed ban, of course, would shatter U.S. international relations, not only with Middle Eastern "strategic partners" but even more widely. (Imagine the United States telling Nigeria that its Christian citizens can visit, study or work here but not its Muslims, or informing India that Hindus and Sikhs may be welcome but Indian Muslims need not apply...) That's one reason why the "responsible" Republican establishment now has to find a way to sideline him.

## Distorted Debate and Denial

Before the Paris and San Bernardino massacres; before the video of the Chicago police murder of Laquan McDonald

and the city's year-long coverup; before "the Godzilla El Niño" and before the Paris Climate Summit looked more like the "Bomb Syria Summit;" before all this, the new year might have seemed the moment to ponder a surreal and somewhat comical electoral spectacle. But events have intervened to confront the other-worldly craziness of the U.S. election with the real-world thing.

The most critical issues facing the country and human life on the planet have generally not been discussed — and when they are, the "solutions" proposed are the wrong ones. Will the carbon-reduction goals of the Paris "COP21" summit — as modest as they are in relation to the scale of the crisis — crash on the political reefs of U.S. Congressional rejection and Big Oil money? Only in the United States, after all, are climate change science and warnings of unfolding disaster widely regarded as a fraud and a plot to destroy "our way of life."

Unfortunately climate change, while inexorable under the regime of capitalist production and carbon-dependent energy, doesn't conform to the political cycle. Taking the Florida example, with rising sea levels Miami will end up underwater but not during the political careers of Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush...

On war and "security," Republicans (and some Democrats) accuse the Obama administration of "weakness" in the face of the "Islamic State" threat. In reality, Western powers' bombing of Syria and Libya, and rightwing rhetoric of "war with radical Islam," both drive more embittered Muslim young people, especially in Europe, toward the ISIS recruiters.

In particular cases such as the San Bernardino murderers Syed Farooq and Tashfeen Malik, we don't know what underlying pathology might have caused them to plot a killing spree and leave behind their six-month old baby — just as we often can't say why some particular white youth turns to neo-nazi ideology. What we can say is that, as a social phenomenon, the brutal narratives of ISIS and imperialism clearly reinforce and "confirm" each other.

While the San Bernardino murders are distinctive in their apparent pseudo-"Islamic" motivation, they're also the latest of more than 350 "mass shootings" (defined by four or more victims) in the United States this year! Only in America — and this statistic doesn't even count killings or violent assaults from domestic abuse, for example.

The individual American's risk of death or mayhem from that kind of violence is vastly greater than the danger of being a victim of a terrorist attack. But the anti-Muslim backlash that Trump and other rightwingers whip up draws from the deep reservoir of fear among (mostly) white people for their own and their families' future.

The electoral debate has mostly been around a false and distorted set of arguments about "security" that millions of people feel slipping away. For example, how many tens of thousands of U.S. troops should go back into Iraq and Syria to keep us "safe" — or should the United States rely on massive air power and some unnamed regional "partners" to put the "boots on the ground?" Posed that way, of course it's a question with no answer, just a road to endless wars.

The escalating U.S., European and Russian bombing campaigns over Syria — working at cross-purposes, and all creating large-scale civilian carnage — are likely to make the desperate refugee flight from Syria even worse. As the statement of the French New Anticapitalist Party put it immediately after the Paris massacre by the "Islamic State," [The cruelty of imperialist wars results in the cruelty of terrorism](#).

Yes, the Paris massacre is a spillover from the set of catastrophes that imperialism brought about — in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya — both through direct military invasion and through the rise of religious-totalitarian fanaticism that imperial powers and regional client regimes enabled, cultivated, encouraged and ultimately found they could not control.

Yassamine Mather puts it well: "What we are seeing is the inevitable consequence of decades of supporting Islamists in the Middle East to defeat secular and leftwing forces" decades of the "special relationship" with those who finance and support jihadism." She cites in particular "those countries that openly finance and arm IS" notably Turkey, Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Persian Gulf." ([Weekly Worker, November 19, 2015](#))

The Obama administration can't seem to pressure its NATO partner Turkey to seal the border against ISIS's recruits and oil shipments, or Saudi Arabia to block money transfers that fund ISIS operations. Meanwhile, Washington actively supports the operation by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf States that is destroying the entire country of Yemen, whose population has essentially no escape route. Try to find a Republican or Democratic candidate of any stripe calling attention to this catastrophe!

## Real and False Security

Can the United States build a "big beautiful wall" (as Trump calls it) to keep out Mexicans, Central Americans and mythical Middle Easterners trying to infiltrate by way of the southern border? Will the country be safer by resuming waterboarding (Trump: "you bet your ass I would") or keeping the Guantanamo prison camp open forever, as the Republican congressional majority demands?

To turn the argument rightside up requires looking at the real threats, and their causes, that face people's lives. There's no threat that Syrian refugees fleeing the destruction of their homeland will bring terrorist fighters into the United States. There's a real danger that the bigoted rhetoric of opportunistic politicians will lead to escalating attacks on Muslim communities and mosques.

Underlying the hysteria of the U.S. election are the insecurities that people live with every day, and the reality that these are not experienced at all evenly. It may produce some feelings of unity when governments and politicians proclaim that "terrorism threatens us all," but it's an illusion that somehow "we're all in this together."

The terror that African-American families face includes kids getting shot by police, persistent massive structural unemployment, home foreclosures and evictions, the destruction of public education, and the resulting endemic violence that kills young people by the thousands, swells for-profit prisons and cripples whole communities.

Latino communities fear the terror of immigration raids that rip families apart. Muslims, and sometimes others mistaken for them, are subjected to street attacks and harassment that many analysts describe as worse than immediately following 9/11 in 2001. Those are not fears that afflict most white Americans.

Yet what about the insecurities that do face tens of millions of working-class people "both white and people of color? Yes, they exist and are very real indeed. Millions still go without health care, and if Republicans in state houses and Congress get their way, many millions more would lose what they've gained under Obamacare and expanded Medicare programs.

Job insecurity is rampant with the near-collapse of unions and the global corporate takeover that's only accelerated under the terms of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). Stress and overwork are killers in themselves as people struggle to make ends meet in a low-wage economy with a growing "precarious" job sector.

The electorate is bombarded with drivel about "simplifying the tax code" "Ben Carson's flat-tax "tithe" and Ted Cruz's idea to abolish the IRS standing out for their silliness "all based on the rich and super-rich paying less,

while massively increasing military spending and balancing the budget through fantasy accounting. None of them deal with the real state of the economy, crumbling infrastructure or ballooning education costs, let alone with the desperate urgency of converting from fossil fuel dependence.

## Where's the Alternative?

The most serious issues facing our society and the world aren't being raised in this two-year presidential campaign of the capitalist parties, except when Bernie Sanders speaks out on issues like the Fight for \$15, the TPP and the disaster facing the African-American community. For the most part, however, the issues that matter most are being posed in the streets, by insurgent movements.

These are the mostly African American and mostly young folks who clogged Chicago's Michigan Avenue shopping district on Black Friday, proclaiming that there's no business as usual after the city stonewalled the murder of Laquan McDonald and the police destruction of evidence during mayor Rahm Emanuel's reelection campaign " and now spearheading the movement demanding his resignation.

They are the activists at COP21 who said that neither terrorism nor a "state of emergency" would keep the climate catastrophe protests off the Paris streets. The Black students and anti-racist allies confronting recalcitrant administrations at the University of Missouri, Princeton, Yale and Ithaca College. Fast-food and Walmart workers saying loud and clear that they will win \$15 an hour.

Those are the movements that will transform society " and yes, in the course of doing so, change the electoral equation too.

[Against the Current](#)