

Empty platitudes, jingoism mark Boston bombings anniversary

By Kate Randall
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The one-year anniversary of the Boston bombings was marked on Tuesday with a daylong commemoration, highlighted by a tribute ceremony at Hynes Convention Center attended by victims, their families, first responders, political leaders and others.

One year ago, two pressure cooker bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three people and injuring another 264. Many of those injured still struggle to recover, having suffered severe injuries, including amputations. They and the greater community look for answers as to why the tragedy took place.

The official commemoration of the bombings, however, provided little insight into the events of April 15, 2013 and their aftermath. There was virtually no explanation by the local media or in the remarks of politicians of how the alleged suspects in the bombings, the Tsarnaev brothers, were able to operate unhindered despite numerous warnings to the FBI about the terrorist inclinations of the elder brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev.

The lockdown of Boston four days after the bombings—when area residents were told to “shelter in place” and the city was placed under de facto martial law—was essentially sanctioned as the legitimate response. Tributes abounded to the “heroes” of law enforcement who eventually killed Tamerlan Tsarnaev and captured his younger brother, Dzhokhar.

At the tribute ceremony, the remarks of bombing survivors and Democratic Party politicians were interspersed with religious bromides and musical performances. The focus was on “healing” and “moving forward”—not on understanding the events and the response of the authorities to them.

Tom Menino, who was mayor at the time of the bombings, praised the police, the resilience of the

victims and the medical community that treated them, and urged those present not to focus on the past. Current Mayor Marty Walsh quoted scripture and offered the platitude: “We have survived the dark night to face the future with hope and confidence.”

Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick made a vague reference to the police response to the bombings and the subsequent lockdown of the city, commending “the law enforcement officials who meticulously and methodically worked to solve this crime and find the killers.”

In an interview with the local NBC affiliate broadcast earlier Tuesday, Patrick laughed off the police state operation. He provided the following implausible explanation for instituting the lockdown in the early morning of Friday, April 19, after the shootout that ended with the death of Tamerlan Tsarnaev.

“We learned about a taxi that had been stopped in Fenway with one or two suspicious persons, and one or two explosive devices,” the governor said. “We learned about a person who fit the description of the younger Tsarnaev who was running in the vicinity of the Moakley Courthouse.”

This served as the justification for flooding thousands of National Guard troops and police, backed by armored vehicles and Blackhawk helicopters, into an area encompassing about 1 million people, and having police with automatic weapons carry out warrantless house-to-house searches of entire communities.

Patrick said he had two conversations with President Barack Obama during the lockdown and the president told him at one point that he couldn’t maintain it “indefinitely.” The “shelter in place” was finally lifted nearly a day later, with Dzhokhar Tsarnaev still at large. Patrick smirked as he related to the reporter, “Well, then a half an hour later, we found him. It was

just extraordinary.”

Vice President Joseph Biden represented the Obama administration at the commemoration event. In his remarks, which were pointedly political in comparison to the speeches of other speakers, he exploited the tragedy of the victims and the survivors’ struggle to heal to advance US militarism and the “war on terror.”

“You’re living proof that America can never, never be defeated,” he said. “You have become the face of America’s resolve, not unlike what happened in 9/11; the face of America’s resolve for the whole world to see.”

Biden continued: “They try to instill fear so that we will jettison what we value the most and what the world most values about us.” These values, he asserted, are “an open society, our system of justice, our freedom of religion, our access to opportunity, the free flow of information and ideas across the country, the willingness and capacity to gather anywhere in any numbers and say what we believe.”

This is a remarkable depiction of “American values” in the context of the police state response to the Boston bombings and the subsequent revelations by former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden of massive and illegal spying by the NSA. Biden passed over these inconvenient contradictions, bellowing to his audience that with next Monday’s running of the Boston Marathon, “You will be sending a resounding message around the world; not just to the rest of the world, but to the terrorists, that we will never yield, we will never cower.”

He concluded, “America will never, ever, ever stand down. We are Boston. We are America. We respond, we endure, we overcome, and we own the finish line. God bless you all and may God protect our troops.”

The vice president’s jingoistic appeal must have struck not a few of those victims and their families in attendance as both inappropriate and distasteful.

Another theme running through Biden’s speech, as well as the media commentary on the one-year anniversary of the bombings, is that there was something uniquely Bostonian about the actions of ordinary people that day—those who risked their lives to attend to the wounded, and the doctors, nurses and others who sacrificed to help victims recover.

Praising the bravery of an individual who came forward to help one of the victims, Biden said, “The

normal human instinct is to run from, not to” danger. In fact, it is shown time and again in such catastrophes—both “natural” and man-made—that ordinary citizens instinctively sacrifice and render aid to those in need. It is the official response of the authorities that is consistently lacking.

In the wake of the Boston bombings, the political establishment has sought to whitewash the actions of the police agencies and conceal their role from the public. Tuesday’s official commemoration continued this trend with a joint effort by the media and the politicians to exploit the tragedy so as to advance a reactionary political agenda.

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