

The American Foreign Policy in the Middle East after the 9/11th Terrorist Attacks

السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية في الشرق الأوسط بعد هجمات 11 سبتمبر الإرهابية

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Abstract

The following paper aims to shed some light on the American foreign policy after the 9/11th terrorist attacks. It starts with a historical overview of the American foreign policy since the very early years of the making of the nation then, goes through the most significant historical periods of America. The American foreign policy was characterized, for a long time, by isolationism before and during World War I, then it moved gradually to interventionism by the end of World War II after the attacks of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese forces. Since then, the U.S. became a super power thanks to their huge programs of armaments. The growing interests of America in the Far and Middle East urged them to use this military superiority to safeguard these interests. The 9/11th terrorist attacks were a good opportunity for the strong lobbyists of arm manufacturing to launch their so-called war against terror and led to a big change in American foreign policy.

Keywords: American Foreign Policy; Terrorism; Patriot Act; Global War

ملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تسليط الضوء على السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية بعد هجمات 11 سبتمبر الإرهابية. بدأنا من خلال لمحة تاريخية عن السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية منذ السنوات الأولى من نشأة الأمة، ثم عبر أهم الفترات في التاريخ الأمريكي. اتسمت السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية، لفترة طويلة بالعزلة قبل وأثناء الحرب العالمية الأولى، ثم انتقلت تدريجياً إلى التدخل بنهاية الحرب العالمية الثانية بعد هجمات القوات اليابانية على ميناء اللؤلؤة. منذ ذلك الحين، أصبحت الولايات المتحدة قوة عظمى بفضل برامجها الضخمة للتسلح. حثت المصالح المتزايدة لأمريكا في الشرق الأقصى والشرق الأوسط على استخدام هذا التفوق العسكري لحماية هذه المصالح. كانت الهجمات الإرهابية في الحادي عشر من سبتمبر فرصة جيدة لأعضاء جماعات الضغط المسيطرين على تصنيع الأسلحة لشن حربهم المزعومة ضد الإرهاب وأدت إلى تغيير كبير في السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية؛ الإرهاب؛ قانون الوطنية؛ الحرب الشاملة

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Introduction

The 9/11th terrorist attacks in America have been at the origin of drastic changes in international relations. The U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has taken a dramatic direction after the global war against 'terrorism' was declared under many pretexts, among which are: national security and revenge. The 9/11th terrorist attacks were perpetrated by nineteen individuals belonging to a terrorist group called al-Qaeda, a terrorist group based in Afghanistan. In an attempt to take their revenge for the human as well as the material losses caused by the attacks, the U.S. declared war to this small and poor country leading to the massacre of thousands of people. However, many specialists assert that the real reason after this war is related to the strategic location of Afghanistan on the Caspian Sea and the abundance of its natural resources.

The 9/11th attacks are considered among the most noticeable events in the modern history of the U.S. They are viewed as the most important terrorist acts launched on the American soil. Some people view these attacks as a calculated conspiracy against America and the democratic values it has always defended. However, many historians and political analysts believe they were simulated by the Americans to find the pretext for intervening in Afghanistan, then in Iraq by showing themselves in the clothes of the victim of terrorism.

The nature of the American foreign policy before the 9/11th attacks needs to be evoked before one would indulge in talking about the changes that occurred after the attacks. A historical approach based on the analysis and interpretation of events in the past, with the aim of deducing generalizations is adopted in this paper.

The following research questions are raised:

- Has the American foreign policy changed after the 9/11th attacks?
- Were these attacks the real reason for changing the direction of the American foreign policy?

The main hypothesis set in the present paper is that American foreign policy has always been dictated by pressure groups and lobbyists who only care about their own interests. The 9/11th attacks were just a pretext to carry on a pre-planned policy.

1. History of the American Foreign Policy before the 9/11th Attacks

This implies that a country withholds from interfering with other countries. When a government has isolationist viewpoints, it believes that world affairs should be more restricted, and less active than a government who has an internationalist standpoint.

After many years of isolationist foreign policy, where they remained away from the affairs of other countries, the U.S. changed this policy to

safeguard their interests. 'Isolationism', which is characterized, as Braumoeller (2010) states, by: 'the voluntary and general abstention by a state from security-related activity in an area of the international system in which it is capable of action.' Isolationism was adopted by the U.S. in the early years of the formation of the new nation. It was illustrated in total isolation from the world affairs. This new nation was politically and economically weak under the slogan of 'A Nation in Formation' and that is why they preferred to remain isolated. However, this policy could not be called total isolationism. McKeever and Davies (2014) have clearly stated that in the early years of the new nation, the American foreign policy was not as isolationist as it was thought to be. When the Americans fought their war of independence, they were backed by some European colonial powers, mainly France, and economically, American exports had increased due to its backing by the European great powers. Therefore, America could not be totally isolationist because its economy was dependent on international commerce.

The main influences on the American foreign policy development could be summarized in the following:

a-The French Revolution

The French Revolution, which lasted from 1789 to 1799 led to many wars in Europe and the Americans chose to remain neutral and far from any kind of intervention. The Americans had shown a lot of enthusiasm towards the French because their revolution was very appealing to them, and at the same time, they were seeking strong relations with the French and their republican principles. The Americans hoped for democratic reforms that would strengthen their alliance with the French and transform France into a republican ally against aristocratic and monarchical Britain. Thomas Jefferson was fond of the principles of the French Revolution that he created the Democratic-Republican Party. The French Revolution, however, brought many social reforms and unrest that frightened the Americans. It became more radical ending in the execution of King Louis XVI and consequently entering into war against Monarchical Countries (Great Britain and Austria). A war, where the Americans remained neutral, because they knew the disastrous economic effects wars could have.

b- American Idealism

During the administration of George Washington, he brought the 'Neutrality Proclamation' defining the position of the Americans as to the war in Europe. It stipulated that the United States should, with sincerity and good faith, adopt a friendly and impartial policy toward the belligerent powers. Many were reluctant to accept this line of conduct claiming that the cause of France should be backed since the French were the only allies of the Americans during their war of independence. The American Idealism was

The American Foreign Policy in the Middle East after the 9/11th Terrorist Attacks

embodied in the myth of American superiority which led Americans to be convinced to take on a truly isolationist position from the start. The Jefferson administration faced increasing restrictions on American shipping from both Britain and France. Remaining faithful to its principles of non-involvement, the U.S. government passed the 'Embargo Act', which closed American ports and banned exports. However, this act had greatly harmed the American economy and led President Jefferson to re-open the American ports again in order to make the economy better (McKeever and Davies, 2014).

c- From Isolationism to Internationalism

During World War I, the Americans remained neutral and were able to strengthen their economy by making great incomes from selling to both sides of the conflict. The U.S. position confirmed the view that they should avoid embarrassment in Europe by adopting a total isolationist position even in the face of the aggression of the Germans in the 1930's. This position changed in World War II with the Americans entering a new phase, which is internationalism. Many politicians opposed the new trend in American foreign policy. Nevertheless, this did not prevent President Roosevelt from helping Britain and the Soviet Union in their fight against Germany, although, he was prevented by isolationist opposition from declaring war.

Hitler's alliance with Japan and his decision to attack Pearl Harbor, on December 1941 made it easier for Roosevelt to convince the Congress to declare war against Japan. So, this led Germany to declare war against America. Therefore, America, which spent the two past decades before World War II avoiding military engagement, found itself completely involved in war across both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. This war allowed America to appear as 'the world's dominant economic and military power'. Recovering from the Great Depression, America was able to lead the world out of the economic chaos of the previous two decades.

d- The Cold War

At the end of World War II, a different war began. This war was the war of ideas, politics and economics. It was called the Cold War. The Cold War was a series of related events between the two polar powers, the Soviet Union leading the communist world and the United States leading the capitalist world. It was characterized by the tension between America and the Soviet Union from the late 1940's until the late 1980's. Historians pointed that the American political and economic systems are supported by the threat of military power in order to create a post-war economic order that would serve the American interests.

In his description of the idea of liberty for the Americans, McCauley (1989) claims that it evolved from the English revolutionary ideas starting from the Civil War and from the philosophy of John Locke which calls for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. He added that this liberty was

illustrated in the fighting of Americans and their winning of liberty against Great Britain, and later they had the liberty of free enterprises. He thought also that both Soviet and American arms participated in defeating Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany.

McCauley (ibid.) talked about the ‘détente’ of American Idealism in the 1970’s. He said that it was not caused by the defeat of the Soviet Union, but by the Communist Vietnamese. Because after the intervention of the Soviets into the world conflicts in South-East Asia and in the revolution in Africa by the invitation of France, and playing with the rules of Washington in Moscow, President Reagan saw that the world is not running as the Americans want. Therefore, this led him to describe Russia and the Soviet Union as ‘The Evil Empire’.

The source of the main clash between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was the Russian historical tradition of centralized and autocratic government opposed with the American democratic government. In addition to that, Cincotta et al.(2003) said that the Cold War has developed as disagreements about the shape of the Post-War World which created suspicion and distrust between the United States and the Soviet Union. The first conflict between them was about Poland, since Moscow wanted it to be influenced by the Soviet model. On the other side, Washington wanted it to be run by an independent and representative government and to follow the Western model.

e-The Strategy of Containment

Containment is an American policy that appeared during the Cold War in the 1940’s. During the presidency of Harry Truman, the main objective of this policy was to stop the spread of Communism by using military, economic, and diplomatic strategies. Containment is considered as a characteristic feature of the Cold War, since it was a response to the movements of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, Korea, and Vietnam in order to broaden the influence of Communism. It is originated from Kennan’s report, which was submitted to the defense secretary James Forrestal in 1947, in which he translated the word containment from the French expression ‘Cordon Sanitaire’, which was used to describe the Western policy toward the Soviet Union.

The European countries who were once suffering from Nazi rule are, now split into two camps: The Western European countries attempting to develop their democracies, and the Eastern European countries, which remained under the military and political authority of the Soviet Union. The U.S. allied themselves to those countries opposed to the dominance of the Soviets. They, even, contributed to the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO to counter-balance the growing military power of the Warsaw Pact.

As for the conflict in Korea, the U.S. intervened by helping the South against the North which was pro-communist. This war ended with the division

The American Foreign Policy in the Middle East after the 9/11th Terrorist Attacks

of the country into two parts North and South Korea in 1953. In Vietnam, the American involvement was more dramatic with thousands of human casualties on both sides ending in 1975 when the North Vietnamese captured the city of Saigon.

2. The 9/11th Attacks and the American Reaction

American Airlines flight number 11 had left Boston and was taken over by the hijackers. They attacked the World Trade Center northern tower. After 15 minutes, another United Airlines flight number 175 from Boston followed the same way striking the Southern tower. One hour later, an American Airlines flight number 77 hit the Pentagon in Washington DC killing some 200 people. Another United Airlines flight number 93 targeted the White House, but it was taken over by the passengers to a forest in Pennsylvania southeast of Pittsburgh. Weeks after the attacks, mysterious envelopes containing ‘anthrax powder’ were posted around the country. These envelopes, which contained a powerful and lethal germ were sent both to famous personalities in the political and information fields and to anonymous citizens. So, the Senate was closed for weeks for decontamination, and a general wave of terror followed these chemical attacks. However, unlike the previous terrorist attacks, this time there was a fear of a chemical threat of bio-terrorism.

After the decline of the Cold War between the United States and the USSR, the 9/11th attacks opened the door to a new war against the terrorists of Al-Qaeda. This new war against the new enemy was called the ‘Global War on Terror’. After the attacks, the terrorist network, which caused these events, was identified and America started military operations in Afghanistan with the help of its allies. Within few weeks, the United States overthrew the Taliban regime, which was suspected of offering shelter and support to Al-Qaeda. The American reaction toward the 9/11th attacks could be illustrated in three main acts which are: the launching of the Global War on Terror, the passing of the American Patriot Act of 2001, and the creation of the 9/11th Commission in the late of 2002.

a- The Global War on Terrorism

The Global War on Terrorism was used, for the first time, by President George W. Bush on September 2001 where he stated in a formal speech to Congress that: ‘Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them’. This war was considered as a different war against a new enemy. It was qualified by President Bush as a new ‘Crusade’; a term that explained to a far extent the intent of the president and his administration. The coalition that was to lead the military campaign was led by the United States and the United Kingdom. They were backed by many other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as well as non-NATO

countries. The campaign was against al-Qaeda and other militant organizations with the purpose of eliminating them from Afghanistan and Iraq.

b-The Patriot Act

U.S. government enacted the Patriot Act in 2001 as a response to the 9/11th terrorist attacks. The U.S. Congress recognized the great threat that terrorism represented for America and the whole free world. It was considered as a tool to intercept and obstruct any terrorist attacks in the United States and abroad by enhancing law enforcement to prevent money laundering. President George W. Bush signed the patriot act on October 26, 2001. The main aim of this act is to unite and strengthen America by providing appropriate tools required to intercept and obstruct terrorism. It allowed the law enforcement agencies (FBI and CIA) to use wiretaps and recordings to track terrorists. Although it gained approval of the Democratic and Republican parties and both Houses in Congress, it raised many questions as it came to be applied mainly for undermining the civil liberties of the citizens. Unconstitutional activities following the Patriot Act allowing FBI agents, for example, to conduct secret search or record phone calls without a probable cause of crime, raised criticism of the Act.

c-The 9/11th Commission

Also known as the ‘The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States’ is also another act passed to face the terrorist attacks. The 9/11th Commission is an independent commission created by congressional legislation and signed by President George W. Bush in the late of 2002. It was charged of preparing a complete survey about the circumstances surrounding the terrorist attacks, including preparedness for and the immediate response to the attacks. Therefore, the Commission is mandated to provide recommendations designed to guard against future attacks. On July 22, 2004 the Commission released its public report, which provides a complete account of the circumstances surrounding the 9/11th terrorist attacks and awareness for and an immediate response to the attacks. This report was so exhaustive that it raised doubts about the terrorist attacks as a whole. The authors of the 9/11th commission presented details about the attacks in such a way as if the members of this commission were part of the attack. One can read about Atta, his phone calls, when he checked in the airport with details that raised suspicion. Why did people, who have all this information, remain vulnerable and unable to take any preventive measures? The reaction of the U.S. government was very harsh especially in the military campaign against Afghanistan and Iraq, which resulted in thousands of civilian casualties.

The American Foreign Policy in the Middle East after the 9/11th Terrorist Attacks

3. The American Foreign Policy after the 9/11th Attacks

The foreign policy of the United States towards the Middle East has completely changed after the 9/11th terrorist attacks. The war in Afghanistan led to the massacre of thousands of people without reaching its objectives. The war was not successful in eradicating terrorism and spreading democracy was not possible. The Americans found themselves involved in another war. In 2003, they declared war to Iraq with a new pretext this time: the search for arms of mass-destruction, or chemical weapons. The regime of Saddam Hussein asserted it destroyed the entire Iraqi chemical arsenal and the United Nations experts accompanied the disarmament operation. However, the Americans insisted on pursuing their plans for war in Iraq. They were looking for pretexts to declare war and for them a peaceful solution was not an option. Spreading freedom and democracy was again a myth that the American citizens themselves never believed.

a- The U.S Duplicity on Democracy

The promotion of democracy was the core of the foreign policy of President Bush towards the Middle East. This strategy was issued by neoconservatives and was based on the principle of spreading democracy through changing the regimes in the Arab world. They were able to convince the president that changing the regime in Iraq would bring about a democratic transformation of the Arab world as a whole. Bush promised to help the Iraqi people establish a peaceful and democratic country in the heart of the Middle East. (White House Archives.org)

This democratization policy was based on six main points that turn around the importance of freedom as a universal right for all human beings. Being free will automatically drive people to opt for living a liberal country because dictatorship often leads to terrorism while democracy leads to peace. Ensuring democracy in a country, like Iraq, will lead to a domino effect in the whole Middle East and is likely to enhance American security and national interests.

However, reality is completely different and the big chaos of today's Iraq is the result of the American invasion. Corruption and complete economic crises in Iraq as well as in other countries where the American intervened directly or through their Gulf 'War Agents' led to great disasters, not only in Iraq, but also in countries like Syria and Yemen. Thousands of daily casualties are enumerated among civilians and infrastructure. The search of interests from the part of the 'Gods of War' seems to make American politicians so blind that they could not stop the destructive process they have triggered. The American government is supporting autocratic regimes, whether they respect democracy and human rights or not, is not very important as long as they serve the American interests.

b- The Universality of Freedom

The Universality of Freedom was a major characteristic of Bush's foreign policy. He believes that any human being has the right to live free. He asserted that:

Liberty and justice are right and true for all people everywhere. No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them. Fathers and mothers in all societies want their children to be educated and live free of poverty and violence. No people on earth yearn to be oppressed, aspire to servitude, or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police. (White House, The National Security Strategy 3)

The paradox is that many Arab countries like Saudi Arabia or Egypt are very far from ensuring the minimum standards of freedom or democracy. In Countries where political opponents are sent to jails without any charge or fair trial, no freedom of speech is allowed and yet no regime change was imposed on them. Israel is another failure of the American foreign policy because the Americans seem to justify the atrocities it is committing everyday against the Palestinians. Israel is a Jewish state where citizenship is based on the principle of blood kinship. Israel did not grant any right to the Palestinians, let alone allowing them to establish their own state. However, the Americans have never condemned these racist actions which are not consistent with the American image of democracy (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006).

The U.S. double standards on democracy and freedom are very clear towards Palestinian and Lebanese elected governments. Many people believe that the Bush administration is seeking to restore pro-American regimes rather than democratic systems in the Middle East. The belief of President Bush that democracy can be enforced with military force was subject to fierce criticism by experts in international relations as well as specialists in sociology. Fukuyama (2007) asserts that fixing a society according to a given model is not an easy task because it requires ambiguous social engineering that the Americans do not master. Otherwise, they would have solved their own local problems of crime and poverty.

Conclusion

U.S. foreign policy has been very influential in the Middle East as well as in many other parts of the world. It is supposedly, based on the American democratic principles and how to export them to the rest of the world. However, it was completely unsuccessful. The American values of democracy and justice are often ignored when it comes to practice. Using double standards in dealing with different countries seems to be omnipresent in American foreign policy. The 9/11th terrorist attacks have disabled America as a superpower because the U.S. governments have always sought their own interests and in many cases at the expense of the ideals around which America was founded. Taking revenge from the terrorist group that attacked America

The American Foreign Policy in the Middle East after the 9/11th Terrorist Attacks

should have never been the pretext for destroying whole countries. American pragmatism and individualism have allowed them great economic success and unprecedented levels of development. Nonetheless, many people expect a very close collapse of this empire since it lacks justice and the necessary moral values that could preserve it.

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