

# THE AMERICAN WAY OF WAR: AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

## *La guerra al estilo estadounidense: Afganistán e Irak*

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ABSTRACT. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 placed the United States in a position to exercise its political objectives of securing national interests through military means. The War on Terror waged in Afghanistan and Iraq shi-

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fted the development of U.S. foreign policy, allowing for American leadership to exercise its right to sovereignty and power. The doctrine required a victory in each of the scenarios, and the inability to secure these aims resulted in civil war and insurgency in both countries. Important lessons can be learned from analyzing foreign policy implementations through the use of force, applying responsible sovereignty to pressing transnational security threats and strengthening the international architecture through a multidimensional response.

*Keywords:* United States, foreign policy, war on terror, Afghanistan, Iraq

RESUMEN. Los ataques terroristas del 9/11 incentivaron el uso de la capacidad militar para ejercer los objetivos políticos y defender los intereses nacionales de Estados Unidos. Las guerras de Afganistán e Iraq y la amenaza terrorista en la región, modificaron el desarrollo de su política exterior al ejercer su derecho de soberanía y poder. La estrategia norteamericana requería una victoria, pero fue esa táctica la que provocó una guerra civil e insurgencia en ambos países. El artículo señala las importantes lecciones derivadas de un análisis de la política exterior implementada a través del uso de la fuerza, y de las amenazas transnacionales a la seguridad que requieren de una soberanía responsable que fortalezca la aquitectura internacional a través de una respuesta multidimensional.

*Palabras clave:* Estados Unidos, política exterior, guerra contra el terrorismo, Afganistán, Irak

“Our responsibility to history is clear –  
to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil”  
*George W. Bush, September 14, 2001*

## Introduction

The American Way of Life has over the course of history referred to the national ethos of “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” outlined in the Declaration of Independence of 1776. The American Way of War, likewise refers to the defense ethos of maintaining the right to protect the national interest and sovereignty through the legitimate use of force. At the end of the Cold War, the United States seized the opportunity to become a superpower by exercising leadership on a global stage. Based on the belief of American worldwide preeminence founded on its military, diplomatic, economic and political power, President George H.W. Bush would declare a “New World Order” in which U.S. foreign policy was to be based on geopolitical realism and international multilateralism, led by American interest (Stephenson, 2005: 266).

Despite the humanitarian interventions and wars of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was one issue that remained unattended, or at best not given adequate relevance by the Clinton Administration: U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and, most importantly, the increasing threat of Islamic radicalism to American interests in the region. In spite of the Presidential Directive after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombings (Wawro, 2010: 464), and the 1998 terrorist attacks against the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the United States lacked a coherent foreign and national security policy *vis-à-vis* terrorism.

The foreign policy endeavours, or lack thereof, of the United States in the Middle East during the 1990s would have serious consequences in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Saddam Hussein's defeat by American forces during Desert Storm would ripple across the entire Middle East. Islamic fundamentalists, such as Osama bin Laden, would view the war as a corruption of the holiest of places, Mecca and Medina, and would declare a "holy war" against both the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This sentiment of ostracization between East and West would only be underlined by the failure of the Middle East Peace Process during the Clinton Administration and the Bush Administration, as well as the failed Peacekeeping mission in Somalia in 1993. Furthermore, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 created a need for the United States to enforce policy through power and ultimately war, a need for the exercise of political objectives through military means and the Global War on Terror in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

## 9/11 and the Need to Defend the American People

On September 11, 2001 at 8:46 am American Airlines flight 11 from Boston to Los Angeles hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004:1). What at first instance seemed like an airline tragedy in the heart of Manhattan, would in less than 30 minutes evolve into an imminent threat for the American people and its government.<sup>3</sup> As the world watched the events unfold, one thing was clear: the United States was officially under attack by an apparently unforeseen enemy.

The events of that Tuesday morning were neither unforeseen nor unimaginable. Nineteen terrorists of Middle Eastern decent hijacked four American commercial airliners and killed 2,973 people (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 311). The objective of Al-Qaeda —an Afghanistan based terrorist organization— was to attack the United States at the symbols of its political, military and economic power. Its leader, Osama bin Laden, was convinced that the U.S.A. and its allies were responsible for the misfortunes of the

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<sup>3</sup> At 9:03 am, United Airlines flight 175 en-route from Boston to Los Angeles would fly into the South Tower of the World Trade Center; by 9:37 am, American Airlines flight 77 from Washington Dulles to Los Angeles hit the Pentagon in Washington DC; and finally at 9:57 am United Airlines flight 93 from Newark to San Francisco crashed in a field in Pennsylvania (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 1-3)

Muslim people, and in February of 1988 delivered a Fatwa<sup>4</sup> calling for the murder of any American as the individual duty for every Muslim (Lewis, 1998).

Plans of a terrorist attack within U.S. borders, however, were present in the early 1990s. According to the 9/11 Commission Report (2004: 72), law enforcement and policy specialists within the United States worked under the notion that the country was well equipped to cope with terrorism. The type of terrorism that both the Department of Justice and State Department were qualified to tackle, though, was not a multinational terrorist corporation such as Al-Qaeda.

Born out of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan during the 1980s, Al-Qaeda—or “the base”—sought the creation of an Islamic State that would unite the Middle East and recreate the Islamic caliphate. Created as a “conglomerate of Islamist terror cells in 26 countries” Al-Qaeda was established by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri (Wawro, 2010: 398-394) as Afghanistan fell to the Taliban. For the United States, Afghanistan and its incipient safe-havens for terrorist organizations was neither a national security threat, nor in its immediate strategic interest. In the Middle East and in greater Eurasia, U.S. foreign policy was to focus on the Persian Gulf and the brewing storm.

Al-Qaeda became a global organization with the financial backing of several Gulf States and recruiting stations in many parts of the world (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 55). On February 26, 1993 Ramzi Yousef, an alleged Al-Qaeda operative bombed the World Trade Center, injuring 1042 and killing 6 (Fusco: 1). By 1994, while Osama bin Laden was expelled from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for his involvement with terrorism, the Central Intelligence Agency Inspector General reported the lack of the CIA’s capacity to provide warning of terrorist attacks from abroad (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 93).

It would take four years for the first legal reaction from the United States in terms of anti-terrorism policy, which came in the form of the November 1998 indictment against Osama bin Laden. The indictment defined both Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda’s involvement in the 1993 killing of American Army Rangers and Special Forces in Mogadishu, Somalia, as well as the organization’s responsibility for the August 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania (U.S.A. Attorney Southern District of New York, 1998). In terms of policy enforcement, the Clinton Administration responded with Operation Infinite Reach, sending Tomahawk cruise missiles against suspected Al-Qaeda chemical weapons plants in Sudan (Wawro, 2010: 477).

Operation Infinite Reach would fail to kill Osama bin Laden, as the suspected weapons plants turned out to be a pharmaceutical company. During the 1990s, the Clinton Administration was adamant on fighting terrorism based on international cooperation so as to deny terrorists their safe havens (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 101). On paper, the Clinton Adminis-

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<sup>4</sup> A Fatwa is the ruling by a “respected religious” authority based on the interpretation of Islamic law.

tration seemed to take concrete actions to counter the terrorist threat against the U.S.A. and its interests abroad. The enforcement element of this security policy was a different issue, as the Clinton Administration would consider Afghanistan to be too complex a conflict to put troops on the ground (Wawro, 2010: 483) to eliminate the terrorist threat from its roots.

The growing threat and capabilities of a transnational terror organization such as Al-Qaeda were not understood within Congress —the most representative branch of the federal government<sup>5</sup> (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 104). Up until the 9/11 attacks, terrorism was conceived by U.S. policymakers as a state-sponsored threat or a domestic crime; un-conventional threats such as those posed by Al-Qaeda were not fully attended until the late 1990s with the creation of the Bin Laden unit at the CIA (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 109). The Administration's error in translating the importance of this emerging threat for the U.S. and its interests worldwide would result in the lack of a comprehensive national security policy against terrorism.

The lack of a comprehensive security policy to counter the impending terrorist threat translated into a lack of political will when policy enforcement was concerned. With the 1998 indictment against Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, the CIA estimated Bin Laden to be on the verge of attacking U.S. interests both at home and abroad. An unclear policy for Afghanistan and multinational terrorism would prevent U.S. officials at the CIA and the National Security Agency to launch an operation to capture and kill Bin Laden and his group (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 114). Concerns within the senior Clinton Administration were based on policy grounds, and what would happen in the event that retaliation was carried out by Al-Qaeda.

The challenge with the Clinton Administration's stand on terrorism, and the threat posed by Al-Qaeda in particular, was how attention was channelled toward the threat itself. Rather than focusing on Al-Qaeda as a multinational, un-conventional threat to the United States and its interests abroad, the Administration would insist on applying a conventional response: kill Osama bin Laden and the threat would be mitigated (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 142). Conventional counter-terrorism conceived the leader of such an organization to be the head of all its operations. Modern perceptions of counter-terrorism have proved these multinational terrorist organizations to operate without the need of a charismatic leader such as Osama bin Laden. Under this precept, had Osama bin Laden been eliminated, a deputy or new leader such as Ayman al-Zawahiri would have most likely emerged. When the opportunity

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<sup>5</sup> According to the 9/11 Commission Report, as the United States entered the 21st Century, terrorism was a second or third order priority within congressional committees appointed for national security concerns. National Security policy, was rather focused on Haiti, Bosnia, Somalia, NATO and globalization.

to kill Osama bin Laden in 1998 and 1999 was overseen, no further attempt was conceived until after 9/11.

On October 12, 2000, two Al-Qaeda operatives attacked a US Navy destroyer, the USS Cole, stationed at the Port of Aden in Yemen, tasked with firing missiles on Al-Qaeda. The attack resulted in the killing of 17 American sailors and injuring 39 (Nasrawi, 2000). This would be the final warning before the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and would also serve to indicate that both internal and foreign policy uncertainties under the Clinton Administration had failed to secure the American people. By the time George W. Bush took office, more counter-terrorism funding was needed, and an increase in the budget of the CIA and the FBI was approved (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 202). Policy priorities under the Bush Administration rarely focused on the threat of terrorism to the United States and its interests abroad<sup>6</sup>.

In the summer of 2001, the intelligence community within the United States recognized an increase in the level of reporting on the terrorist threat and planned attacks against the United States and its interests (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 256-262). The lack of specificity within the threats, as well as the pre-eminence seen in the administration in terms of favouring policy results over operational procedures tampered efforts to counter the threat before 9/11. Al-Qaeda was considered an issue of lesser importance and concern in terms of US foreign and national security policy.

On September 2001 terrorism finally became an imminent strategic threat to the United States. On 9/11, the United States suffered the largest loss of life on its soil since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. That evening, President George W. Bush would declare the United States to be fighting a “Global War on Terror”, where no distinction was to be made between the terrorist who committed the acts, and those who harbored them (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 326). Terrorism had now officially become a “big issue” for U.S. policymakers.

## The Global War on Terror

The emerging threat of transnational terrorism provided a unique justification for the exercise of political objectives through military means. In his evening address to the nation on September 11, 2001, President Bush would recall American exceptionalism as he stated:

*“America was targeted for attack because we are the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining. [...]”*

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Bush Administration’s policy priorities would focus on China-US trade relations, Missile Defense, the collapse of the Middle East peace process and the Persian Gulf. Afghanistan and its establishment as a state-sponsor of terrorism were not included.

*The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them. [...] America and our friends and allies join all those who want peace and security in the world and we stand together to win the war against terrorism" (Bush, 2001).*

Seven days later, on September 18, President Bush would sign "Public Law 107-40" which authorized the use of force against those responsible for attacking the United States on 9/11 (Congressional Record, 2001). This law gave the President constitutional power to take action against those who had carried out the attacks—in this case Al-Qaeda—and it also enabled further preventive action in terms of deterring future attacks against the United States; the Global War on Terror had been passed into legislation.

The terrorist attacks paved the way for the establishment of the Bush Doctrine that sought to abolish terrorism and spread freedom worldwide, with no distinction being made between the terrorists and those who harbored or supported them.<sup>7</sup> With a Manichean approach to a global threat, neoconservative policymakers embraced the opportunity to establish U.S. leadership by means of raw force. 9/11 determined that securing American interests at home and abroad was their right of sovereignty. In implementing this action, the United States would see itself exercising its role as a global power; determining that only the establishment of democracy and the toppling of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan would assure security worldwide. Foreign policy, as the Bush Administration conceived it in the days and weeks after the terrorist attacks, had to focus on the successes and failures of past presidencies<sup>8</sup> (Stephenson, 2005). Rampant globalization and multilateralism were replaced with power politics in an era of emerging threats.

The Global War on Terror—an exercise of political objectives through military means—would evolve into two distinct wars: Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. While the War in Afghanistan, or Operation Enduring Freedom as was coined by the military leadership, was a war waged as a response to the direct threat of Al-Qaeda being harbored by the Taliban, Operation Iraqi Freedom would be justified on pre-emptive grounds. The results of each differ in terms of regional security as well as foreign policy implications for the United States, yet they have become pivotal in understanding both the Bush Doctrine and the Bush Era.

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<sup>7</sup> The main elements of the Bush Doctrine held that Washington would use its military power to topple totalitarian regimes that menaced the United States, preempt terrorist attacks and spread democracy (George W. Bush White House, 2002)

<sup>8</sup> The 1990 Gulf War was considered a success in that it had subdued Saddam Hussein, while the humanitarian interventions under the Clinton Administration were to be considered failures.

## Operation Enduring Freedom: Afghanistan, the First Asymmetric War of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

On the evening of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush convened with senior members of his Administration to discuss the United States' response to the terrorist attacks. Military action was initially conceived, however it was agreed that a diplomatic response would first be organized by the State Department. On September 13, an ultimatum was handed to the Taliban: surrender Bin Laden and senior Al-Qaeda deputies (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the USA, 2004: 332). Convinced that the demands made by the United States would not be met, President Bush and his "war council" sought the creation of a war plan for Afghanistan that would destroy Al-Qaeda's infrastructure.

The war plan for Afghanistan consisted in U.S. Special Forces teams providing intelligence, targeting and air support to the Northern Alliance<sup>9</sup>, which would pave the way for conventional ground forces to arrive days later (Wawro, 2010: 493). The objective of the U.S. war plan for Afghanistan was to eliminate terrorism as a threat to the American way of life, by focusing on foreign entities that chose to support terrorist organizations by providing them with a sanctuary (Gordon, 2001). In the case of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Taliban regime had opted to harbor Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, and therefore the use of force had to be focused on Afghanistan.

The Global War on Terror was designed to demonstrate to the world that a heavy cost was to be paid for those who harbored any group that threatened U.S. interests both at home and abroad. Senior Bush Administration officials were aware that a war could not be launched against Afghanistan without a strong coalition force. State Department and Defence Department consultations with the international community and NATO resulted in 58 countries offering troops, general aid, airspace, search and rescue equipment as well as personnel and medical assistance teams for the war effort (Gerleman, Stevens & Hildreth, 2001). On September 20, 2001 in a Joint Session of Congress, President Bush declared the United States' Global War on Terror, with a first attack to be launched against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and with no distinction being made between the terrorists and those who harbored them.

Between September 21, 2001 and October 2, 2001 military plans were drawn for the War in Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom was conceived in a four-phase plan that would initially see U.S. and allied troops deployed to the region, followed by air-strikes and special operations attacks that would target key Al-Qaeda and Taliban positions; ground troops would follow in the third phase, and finally focus was made on civilian and military operation tasked with security and stability operations (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon

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<sup>9</sup> The Northern Alliance, also known as the United Islamic Front, consisted in ethnic Pashtun anti-Taliban forces that controlled north-eastern and north-central Afghanistan.



the USA, 2004: 338-339). On October 7, 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom officially began.

In the first few months of Operation Enduring Freedom, the Taliban army shrunk away. The unique configuration of the Taliban army, one made up mostly of infantry and guerilla forces (Rogers, 2004: 5) allowed for Enduring Freedom to develop as the first asymmetric war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Key Taliban strongholds such as Mazar-e-Sharif, Bamiyan, Herat and finally Kabul would fall to the Northern Alliance and Coalition Forces in the early weeks of November 2001 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011). As territory was won over in Afghanistan, the fourth phase—the reconfiguration and securitization of the country—was put into operation.

For the United States, within the fourth phase, emphasis had to be made on eliminating Al-Qaeda from its territory, yet this could not be achieved without the assistance of the international community. In November of 2001, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1378, calling on the central role of the organization in supporting the Afghans in the establishment of a transitional administration (United Nations Security Council, 2001). With the Taliban surrender of Kandahar on December 9, 2001, major combat operations concluded that same month.

Although Osama bin Laden—the highest valued target of Al-Qaeda—was not found in the first few months of Operation Enduring Freedom, the overall mood was nonetheless that of success due to the Taliban's surrender of Kandahar on December 9, 2001 (Katzman, 2012, p.8). Secretary of State Colin Powell would subsequently proudly announce that Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan had been destroyed (Wawro, 2010: 498). For policy and defence planners in Washington, the development of Enduring Freedom up until December 2001 boosted approval for the Bush Administration's war.<sup>10</sup> Compared to Operation Desert Storm in 1991, a lighter and more agile U.S. force had been able to wage an asymmetric war and won.<sup>11</sup> U.S. military and political hegemony was regaining its role.

Victory however, was claimed too soon. Committed Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants were able to weather the initial wave launched by Enduring Freedom. Guarded by the mountainous terrain of Eastern Afghanistan, they managed to retreat to the valleys and mountains of Tora Bora, close to Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (Wawro, 2010: 496). The political gains both at home and abroad at this point of Enduring Freedom managed to hamper the attempts to

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<sup>10</sup> According to the Gallup Poll (Gallup Inc., 2012), approval ratings for the Bush Administration ran from 80% after the 9/11 terrorist attacks to 89% in the first weeks of Operation Enduring Freedom.

<sup>11</sup> During Operation Desert Storm, 3,000 military units were flown on a daily basis, hitting around 200 targets, while it took ten aircrafts to hit one target. During Operation Enduring Freedom, the number was reduced to 200 units a day, hitting the same amount of targets, and one aircraft had the capability to hit two targets in a single run (Global Security, 2012). In terms of costs, Desert Shield and Desert Storm had been billed at \$124.2 billion (Spratt Jr., 2002) while Enduring Freedom billed at \$3.8 billion at the end of major combat operations.

capture Osama bin Laden and end the War on Terror. According to a report issued by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2009), Tora Bora was hit with 100 air strikes a day, yet only 100 American commandos were on the scene searching the caves and paths, and calls for reinforcements were rejected by the American military command.

As 2001 ended, focus on Afghanistan began to shift. Although Osama bin Laden had yet to be captured, the Taliban had been driven out and now the international community in the form of the United Nations and NATO's International Security and Assistance Force would carry out reconstruction. Following the Department of Defense's war plan for Afghanistan, the key was to focus on having a light "footprint" in the country. Focus had begun to shift to a more important target in the eyes of the Bush Administration: Iraq.

## Operation Iraqi Freedom: the First Preemptive War of the 21st Century

With the political gains from Operation Enduring Freedom and the international community's sympathy after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President Bush pushed for the abolishment of terrorism and the spreading of freedom worldwide. Ideologically justified on both American exceptionalism and biopolitical notions of contingency,<sup>12</sup> the Doctrine and the Global War on Terror sought to expand America's democratic influence by means of military power. After success was declared in Afghanistan the shift to Iraq was made by arguing that Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups were likely to use Saddam Hussein's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs).

For U.S. policymakers, the justification for military operations in Iraq was two-fold. Along with the alarming risk of terrorists obtaining WMDs from Saddam Hussein's alleged stockpile, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and its hegemonic design for the Persian Gulf posed a clear threat for American interests (Krauthammer, 1990: 27). As neoconservatives within the Bush Administration perceived it, the 1991 Persian Gulf War had proved an opportunity for the United States to establish itself within the greater Middle East, however failure to remove Saddam Hussein from power had thwarted these aspirations. The pronouncement of the Global War on Terror was the ideal scenario to justify a new American invasion of Iraq.

Although senior officials within the Bush Administration affirmed that military and intelligence services had proof<sup>13</sup> that Saddam Hussein was producing

<sup>12</sup> Contingency, from a biopolitical perspective refers to the ability to secure the welfare of the population as well as the state's rule (Dillon & Lobo Guerrero, 2008, p.280).

<sup>13</sup> On December 20, 2001 and until the run-up of Operation Enduring Freedom, New York Times journalist Judith Miller would cover Iraq's alleged WMD program and publish findings from key sources and Iraqi defectors. The Bush Administration used her articles—in particular one published on September 8, 2002 on the purchase of aluminum tubes allegedly intended as

Weapons of Mass Destruction and that these were likely to fall into the hands of terrorists, the reality was far more complex. Coined by President Bush as part of the “Axis of Evil”,<sup>14</sup> Iraq was a sovereign secular state that produced 2.5 million barrels of oil per day<sup>15</sup> with overall reserves estimated at 115 billion barrels (Kumins, 2006: 1-2). Alienated since 1991 from its regional neighbors and surrounded by the American military,<sup>16</sup> Iraq had the presence of a United Nations led observer mission. Established after the Persian Gulf War under UN Security Council Resolution 687, the international community had determined that Iraq could not and should not develop weapons of mass destruction (United Nations Security Council, 1991).

Saddam Hussein’s failure to abide by the United Nation’s resolutions<sup>17</sup> gave the Bush Administration leverage and material to prepare a war plan for Iraq. As early as December 2001, Pentagon officials including Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz began to focus on the case against Iraq (Shane & Mazzetti, 2007). Based on the so-called “risk of inaction”, the United States and the world faced a scenario where terrorists were likely to purchase WMDs via Saddam Hussein’s authoritarian regime. The alleged ties to terrorist networks at that time represented what Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld would determine as the “unkown unknowns”<sup>18</sup> facing policy makers and military planners.

In a June 2002 speech to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, President Bush stated, “all nations that decide for aggression and terror will pay a price. We will not leave the safety of America and the peace of the planet at the mercy of a few mad terrorists and tyrants” (Bush, 2001). In other words, the risk of inaction was seen as being far greater than the risk of acting in the moment, Operation Iraqi Freedom was on its way to become the first preemptive war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Bush Administration perceived that if the Iraqi state and its military could collapse to a small American force —as had happened with Afghanistan’s Taliban— then other rogue states such as Iran and Syria would hesitate to confront the United States (Wawro, 2010: 545).

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components of centrifuges to enrich uranium (Miller & Gordon, 2002)— as a case for the war against terror in Iraq (Foer, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> The “Axis of Evil” term referred to Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

<sup>15</sup> As estimated in the Iraqi Oil Production CRS Report for Congress (2006), these figures refer to daily production between 1999 and 2001.

<sup>16</sup> As of 2002, the United States had military bases and/or a military presence in Bahrain, Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Diego Garcia.

<sup>17</sup> Between 1992 and December 31, 2002 the United Nation’s Security Council adopted 39 resolutions pertaining to Iraq. Two in particular, Sec/Res 1051 (1990) and 1284 (1999), called for specific weapon inspection mechanisms.

<sup>18</sup> In a February 12, 2002 News Briefing, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared “[...] there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; this is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns —the one we don’t know we know [...] it is the latter category that lead to be the difficult ones” (Department of Defense, 2002). These “unknown unknowns” are those events that surge as a result of policy decisions that the administration or military leaders do not know they do not know and will therefore result in a long-term future problem.

As with Operation Enduring Freedom, any military action that the United States took against Iraq was seen as requiring the assistance and participation of America's friends and allies. In a September 12, 2002 address to the U.N. General Assembly, President Bush would focus on Iraq and its failure to comply with previous U.N. Security Council Resolutions such as Resolution 687. Furthermore, President Bush would urge the Security Council to act in the face of Iraq's violations (Browne, 2003). As Security Council Resolution 1441<sup>19</sup> was drafted and inspections of Iraq's weapons sites arranged, the Bush Administration calculated that if war was to be waged against Saddam Hussein it had to be in the spring when coalition troops would be able to drive to Baghdad and eliminate all trace of the Iraqi dictator (Wawro, 2010: 548).

Failing to present a case for the War against Iraq at the U.N. Security Council,<sup>20</sup> the United States pursued its military options. On March 19, 2003, 48 countries joined the United States's "Coalition of the willing"<sup>21</sup> and proceeded to invade Iraq (42<sup>nd</sup> Communication Squadron, 2006). U.S. policymakers justified the invasion based on Saddam Hussein's ties to Al-Qaeda and his country's illicit production of WMDs. Between March 19 and March 21, 2003, the coalition launched a "Shock and Awe"<sup>22</sup> air campaign aimed at decapitating Iraq's leadership. On March 21, 2003, the ground invasion portion of Operation Iraqi Freedom began with three U.S. Army divisions, one maritime division, a British division and

<sup>19</sup> U.N. Security Council Resolution 1441 (2002) not only authorized new weapons inspections for Iraq, but it also set forth a final opportunity for the country to comply with its disarmament. Although not explicit within the Resolution, there was a recall of previous resolutions which pursued the use of "all necessary means to uphold and implement" on behalf of member states.

<sup>20</sup> Between November 2002 and March 2003, U.N. inspectors under Security Council Resolution 1441 searched Iraq for Weapons of Mass Destruction. After 16 weeks, the U.N. Monitoring, Verification, and Inspections Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) conducted 750 inspections at 550 sites (Squassoni, 2003). No substantial evidence for the United Nations Security Council Members was presented that Iraq was in breach of Resolution 1441 and that military action against the Saddam Hussein regime was required. The Bush Administration would remain adamant that Iraq did indeed possess weapons and was hiding them from inspectors. On February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell briefed the Security Council on Iraq's attempts to evade weapon's inspections and the regime's link to terrorist networks (Squassoni, 2003: 15).

<sup>21</sup> The countries included in the Coalition of the Willing were: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Palau, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Singapore, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Spain, Tonga, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uzbekistan. Of these 49 countries, only 7 had troops participate in the invasion: the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia, Poland, Portugal and Denmark.

<sup>22</sup> "Shock and Awe" is a military doctrine referred to by Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade and coined in 1996 by the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University in Washington D.C.. This doctrine is based on the presumption that the will and perception of the enemy can be affected by the use of overwhelming power and dominant use of force (Ullman & Wade, 1996, p. 19).

247 tanks and 145,000 troops driving from Kuwait to Baghdad (Wawro, 2010: 551-552). The capital of Iraq would fall to coalition troops on April 9, followed by Tikrit on April 15, and Basra on April 6, 2003.

Eager to prove the successful war campaign of Operation Enduring Freedom, on May 1, 2003 on board the warship U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln and under a banner that read, “mission accomplished”, President Bush declared:

*“My fellow Americans, major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed [...] the battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and still goes on [...] the liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terror. We have removed an ally of Al-Qaida and cut off a source of terrorist funding” (CNN, 2003).*

This success was attributed to the process of de-Baathification, a strategy implemented by the U.S. Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq,<sup>23</sup> Paul Bremer. De-Baathification was the political process of purging the country’s institutions —particularly the military— of Saddam loyalists.<sup>24</sup> With this strategy in full effect, the United States and the Coalition of the Willing focused on security and reconstruction efforts within Iraq. In an American exceptionalist logic, the United States had invaded Iraq in the name of liberty and peace for the entire world. The Iraqis —under a western democratic model— would now be able to enjoy the freedoms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. More importantly, America had shown the world its military might and power.

For American policy planners in charge of reconstructing and securing Iraq, the scenario would begin to change as the insurgency started to spread around the country beginning in August 2003. No Weapons of Mass Destruction were ever found within Iraq, nor would Saddam Hussein be captured until December 13, 2003, and tried and executed three years later. Contrary to what Secretary of State Colin Powell had declared at the United Nations in early 2003, the evidence was never obtained and the entire justification for the war in Iraq fell through. Operation Iraqi Freedom had been an exercise of politics by other means.

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<sup>23</sup> The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was established in 2003 as the transitional government headed by the United States and Coalition members with executive, legislative and judicial functions in Iraq until June 2004. The Administration Offices were within the high-security area of Baghdad known as “The Green Zone” (Coalition Provisional Authority, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> On paper, de-Baathification seemed logical, yet the Central Intelligence Agency would later point out that the process affected almost anyone that had worked in a government position under Saddam’s regime (Wawro, 2010: 556). In the first few months of the process, 30,000 Baathists were removed from various ministries across Iraq (Otterman, 2005). Incapable of finding a stable job and clearly discontent with their new situation, these Iraqis would later become ideal candidates for the insurgency.

## Mission Creep: Afghanistan and Iraq

For American foreign policymakers and strategists, the end of the Cold War brought about the realization that war should not be waged amongst democracies. Based on this logic, western liberal democracy and a free market economy were to become ideal models for the exercise of U.S. foreign policy—it became a standard. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 would only exacerbate this democratic security paradigm and the United States, following its own exceptionalist ideology determined that action had to be taken to punish those who threatened the free world and prevent these events from reoccurring. Policy would be enforced through the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

For coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, American policy planners, as well as for the civilian population within these Middle Eastern countries, victory would be claimed too soon. “Mission creep”, the term used to define the extension of the military’s job beyond its original parameter while gradually increasing the number of forces (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009), would come to characterize the Global War on Terror. The original war plan consisted in eliminating the threat of terrorism to American interests at home and abroad. In order to do so, the United States sought to eliminate the operational capabilities of Al-Qaeda from within Afghanistan. Once the security situation in both Iraq and Afghanistan began to deteriorate, the mission objective shifted from counterterrorism operations to counterinsurgency and nation building (Bowman & Dale, 2009: 4).

Modeling both wars on perceived policy gains—approval ratings at home and the imposition of a new defense doctrine—would prove as hindsight in assessing risk over gains. By politically justifying two wars on national security concerns—Afghanistan as a reaction to a direct attack on U.S. soil and Iraq as a preemptive action to hinder the use of WMDs by terrorists—the Bush Administration limited its actual success rate. Calling both wars a victory in the early stages, would be detrimental at home and abroad.

Civil war and insurgency arose in both countries, and presented a scenario far from that of security and reconstruction promised by the Americans and the Coalition troops. As the Bush Administration prepared to wage war on Iraq, focus shifted away from Afghanistan and the security situation became dire. The International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) led by NATO countries and the United States assumed control along with the provisional government of Hamid Karzai. The country’s unstable and fragmented populations were, however, still a breeding ground for both Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The 2001 fight for Tora Bora had pushed radical Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants to withdraw with their weapons intact and the ability to regroup in Pakistan (Rogers, 2004: 92-101).

In response to the precarious security situation in Afghanistan, U.S. troops launched “Operation Anaconda” in March 2002 with the intent to destroy militant Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in the mountainous regions above Shah-e-kot (Rogers, 2004: 106). The operation was viewed as a substantial victory, yet there were still insecurities of how much damage the insurgent groups would be able to do on

Coalition troops and on the efforts to secure and stabilize Afghanistan. Although Enduring Freedom and subsequent ISAF operations had destroyed 80% of Al-Qaeda's infrastructure (Wawro, 2010: 510), the organization survived in other counties and it would continue to wage and inspire terrorist attacks against the west. President Bush's Global War on Terror shifted its initial objective of eliminating the threat of Al-Qaeda as it focused on Iraq.

Persuaded by neoconservative affirmations that American dominance would put an end to terrorist groups and states, the Bush Administration held a strong case against Iraq and its alleged WMD program. Once "mission accomplished" was pronounced by President Bush, the de-Baathification of Iraq would prove to be the beginning of chaos, as it would overflow into insurgency. Moreover, Al-Qaeda would take advantage of a radicalization-prone situation and recruit resentful sympathizers into their ranks.

Aware of the importance of effectively reconstructing and stabilizing Iraq, President Bush would direct Jay Gardner and then Jerry Bremer to manage the transitional process (Wawro, 2010: 560). The objective of the new Iraqi representative government was to implement the Bush Doctrine within the Middle East and demonstrate to rogue states what was in store if they dared to contradict American policy purposes. The imposition of American political will on Iraq was interrupted by the Iraqi insurgency, which began on August 19, 2003, when the U.N. headquarters in Iraq were targeted with a suicide bomb (Newsweek, 2003).

With a doctrine focused on a quick victory and even quicker exit so that Iraq would soon be part of America's allies in the Middle East, an adequate counter-insurgency strategy and policy was never formulated by the Bush Administration. Without the ability to secure the country, no viable post-conflict reconstruction strategy would ever succeed. Furthermore, rather than winning the "hearts and minds"<sup>25</sup> of the Iraqis, American troops were turning the civilian population against them by means of collective reprisals to put an end to the insurgency (Wawro, 2010: 561). During the holy month of Ramadan in October 2003, the Coalition and Iraqi military infrastructure suffered a series of attacks fuelled by the rising insurgency.

The importance of the Iraqi insurgency would lie in the implications for America's Global War on Terror. While the Bush Administration continued to perceive Iraq as a country liberated from its radical Baathist oppressor, many Iraqis disagreed and sectarian violence overcame the country. Iraq would become Al-Qaeda's training and recruitment ground as foreign fighters arrived from across the unsecured borders to join Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi's Al-Qaeda in Iraq (Wawro, 2010: 571). Rather than ending the Global War on Terror, the Bush Administration had effectively expanded it and found itself in the middle of a quagmire.

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<sup>25</sup> "Hearts and minds" refers to persuading people that their best interests are served by the success of counterinsurgency by convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting is pointless. Over time, the successful implementation of "hearts and minds" will generate grass-roots trusted networks within society and displace the enemy (US Army, 2006).

As sectarian violence and insurgency spilled over in Iraq, Afghanistan would see its first electoral process during October of 2004 when Hamid Karzai became the first democratically elected president (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011). During 2004, Afghanistan's democratic and stabilization process would be the focus of the United Nations and NATO as the United States sought to win the Iraqi insurgency. Between 2005 and 2006 Afghanistan would see significant increase in violence<sup>26</sup> as Afghans reacted to the lack of access to basic services and the inability of government and coalition forces to effectively secure the country (Jones, 2008).

In the spring of 2007, NATO and ISAF forces responded with attacks against an anticipated Taliban offensive in the southwestern Helmand Province (Katzman, 2011: 19-20). Throughout 2008 the Taliban would wage a significant offensive as it expanded its operations in districts previously held by the coalition, increasing its terrorist attacks in Kabul, and even attempting to assassinate Hamid Karzai (Walsh, 2008). In view of the increasing violence, attention was finally refocused on Afghanistan. The war, rather than having ended swiftly and inexpensively was on its way to resurgence. By mid-2008, an additional 30,000 troops were requested by General David Mckieran,<sup>27</sup> only half would be committed by the Bush Administration (Katzman, 2011). As President George W. Bush prepared to leave office, the Global War Against Terror was far from over and would soon become a concern of the new administration.

## Restructuring U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East

The United States justifies its military actions abroad as legitimate state policy. Based on its exceptionalist nature, American foreign policy has been designed to attend its global leadership responsibilities. In the case of the Middle East, specifically in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. foreign policy has been characterized by a distinctive exercise of power relations: war. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Bush Administration managed to focus on both policy and war by justifying a security concern—terrorism—with an underlying neoconservative agenda.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which claimed the lives of nearly three thousand people on American soil, are commonly attributed to the security omissions of the Bush Administration. However, security oversights in terms of the threat of terrorism to the United States were the joint responsibility of previous administrations. Furthermore, they are also an indirect result of previous foreign policies in the region. The 1991 Persian Gulf War led by the United States against the Iraqi regime and staged in surrounding Gulf States, would result in a turning point for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Osama bin Laden and

<sup>26</sup> Between 2004 and 2005, the number of suicide attacks increased from 27 to 139, bombings shifted from 783 to 1,677 and armed attacks tripled from 1,558 to 4,542 (Jones, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Commander of the International Security Assistance Force from June 2008 to June 2009 when he was replaced with Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal.



Al-Qaeda would use this military intervention as one of the justifications towards declaring a global war—in their terms a *jihad*—<sup>28</sup> against the west.

Lacking a comprehensive understanding of the threat of non-traditional terrorism organizations such as Al-Qaeda, and giving priority to at-home situations,<sup>29</sup> hind sighted the Clinton Administration from elaborating a viable national security policy. Before the Global War on Terror, traditional threats emerged over time and referred to armies within state borders; post 9/11 threats come from transnational networks. Although the risk assessment existed, it would take the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> to determine that threats were no longer localized, rather they were mobile and they had the means to attack whenever and wherever.

In response to terrorist attacks, the United States would spawn the exercise of America's right of power to wage war, based on its right to defend its citizens as the threat of Al-Qaeda would not cease to exist until force eliminated it. The Bush Administration's legitimacy of power originated from the notion that facing a new non-traditional threat, contingency governance had to be enforced to secure U.S. interests at home and abroad. Contingency in this case involved a single policy action: all means necessary were to be taken in order to respond to the threat and to prevent it from happening again. The case for the Global War on Terror at home and abroad reveals how U.S. power politics and relationships are played on a global scale, more importantly it highlights the central importance that Middle and Central Asia play in the grand chessboard of American influence.

Characterized by two distinct wars, portrayed as inherently similar, the Global War on Terror presented new conflict scenarios for U.S. foreign and defense policy. In countering a new type of threat—a global terrorist network—the Bush Administration envisioned that without state support these networks would in essence fail to operate effectively. The 2001 war in Afghanistan allowed for the Department of Defence under Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, to wage wars in a smaller, more effective way. In terms of foreign policy, the declaration of the Global War on Terror allowed the United States to portray itself again as a global leader, while making it clear to the world that any attempt to undermine its security at home or abroad would be met with severe power.

Inherent distinctions can be perceived within a similar policy justification and approach. The war in Afghanistan was one waged on security concerns, an exercise of the United State's right of sovereignty. Operation Iraqi Freedom and its justifications at home and abroad are perceived as a political exercise based on the continuation of war by other means. The American way of war suggests that the United States carries out its power relations through the use of force when the perceived gains are seemingly more viable than the risk of not acting.

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<sup>28</sup> The word *jihad* bears many shades of meaning in the Islamic context, from expressing a struggle against a person's evil inclinations, to working for the moral betterment of Islamic society (Ali, 2002: 37). Because Islamic law does not condone the use of violence—except in the act of self-defense—*jihad* alludes to the protection of the right of the exploited and the suppressed.

<sup>29</sup> Refer to the Monica Lewinsky case in the White House.

In order to prevent another terrorist attack against the United States, it was necessary to destroy Al-Qaeda's key infrastructure within Afghanistan. This meant taking military action against the country, for the Taliban had decided to harbor the terrorist network. From the very onset, the War in Afghanistan was fought against a backdrop of political gains and interests. Aside from obtaining political leverage at home, the United States reassured its role as a military leader that could rapidly react to any rogue state. Within this paradigm, senior Bush Administration officials pushed to make a case against Iraq —another member of the so-called Axis of Evil. This political action would derive in attention from the increasingly alarming security situation.

After the relative success during the initial months of Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. policy planners within the Administration concluded that an attack on Iraq was not only justified, but that it was prone to be a success. Saddam Hussein and his regime supposedly held Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), furthermore there were alleged ties between the Baathists and terrorist organizations.<sup>30</sup> Obtaining a preemptive justification for war, the Administration focused on the consequences for the western world and its allies if Iraq increased its regional power through the development of WMDs. The call for preemptive action within the Bush Doctrine allowed for the perception that such actions were legitimate; at least under an American exceptionalist paradigm the United States and its allies were acting under a self-defence policy.

The Bush Administration's failure to capture Osama bin Laden and the botched war in Iraq would prove that effective preemptive policy was easier in ideological terms than in practical ones. In the short-term, Al-Qaeda was not eliminated, WMDs were never uncovered, and acts of terrorism both at home and abroad were not entirely prevented.<sup>31</sup> Underlying factors for the protraction of the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq can be found not only in the dangers of imposing a preconceived model of liberal western democratic values abroad, but also in the pursuit of long-term gains via short-term methods.

The belief that democracies do not fight wars among each other has been one of the pillars of American foreign policy since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly after the fall of the Berlin wall. However, the paradigm shift ensued by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the Global War on Terror have proven that partial democratization in unstable nations is often a breeding ground for the rise of belligerent nationalism and war (Mansfield & Snyder, 1995: 5). The lack of an ef-

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<sup>30</sup> According to Geoffrey Wawro (2010: 474), Al-Qaeda deputy Aiman Al-Zawahiri, in his justification for a *jihad* against the United States pointed out the 1991 Persian Gulf War and American military strikes against Iraq in the late 1990s as reasons for this holy war. Al-Qaeda and Iraq on purely ideological terms were perceived as rivals —Saddam Hussein represented the corrupt semi-secular governments within the region that Al-Qaeda sought to destroy.

<sup>31</sup> Major terrorist attacks that arose as a result of the war against terror in Afghanistan and Iraq include: the Madrid March 11, 2004 train bombings; the July 7, 2005 London bombings; the July 2006 train bombings in Mumbai; the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai; and numerous car-bombs and attacks in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

ficient reconstruction and stabilization project for Afghanistan was heightened by a lack of domestic policies within the country. As the United States focused on a politically motivated war in Iraq, many Afghans increasingly lost confidence in the government lead by Hamid Karzai (Smith, 2011). The lack of trust within their own institutions would similarly spiral towards the regime's international backers; for the Taliban and those remnants of Al-Qaeda, they would result in ideal candidates for the growing insurgency.

Meanwhile, the United States and the NATO coalition responded by an increased deployment of troops, an initial wave of 25,000 in 2007 (Smith, 2011), although generals on the ground requested more —30,000 were required by mid-2008. The political planners in Washington had to face the negative repercussion of waging an asymmetric war. Irregular warfare as that present within Afghanistan cannot be solely won “by the purchase of blood” (Brown, 2005: 277). The winning of “hearts and minds” of the Afghani population would not be presented as a military strategy until General Stanley McChrystal took charge of the ISAF in June 2009 under a new Administration.

In the case of the War in Iraq, the overall military exercise did eventually reach its objective —eliminate Saddam Hussein from government and establish a pro-American interim administration. In an attempt by the United States to prove a defence policy of “shock and awe” at the same time that its national and foreign policy benefited, the post-conflict security and reconstruction scenario had significant gaps. Convinced that the population would welcome the “liberating” coalition troops, no planning for counterinsurgency was conceived for Iraq. Moreover, the de-Baathification of Iraq failed to contemplate that loyalists were not only located in the army.

Furthermore, the Iraqi stabilization and reconstruction plan created by the United States failed from within the structure: internal communication. State Department policy planners clashed with military troops on how to develop Iraq as a country after the war. The needs of the people on the ground —either civilian or military— were lost in a myriad of bureaucratic transactions before they reached Washington. Confident in the success of America's military, and similar to the situation of Afghanistan, insufficient number of troops would be initially sent to Iraq. The Coalition Provisional Authority could not do its work unless security was assured, and there were not enough Coalition Troops available to support the CPA's reconstruction efforts (Chandrasekaran, 2006: 47).

The lack of a counterinsurgency strategy due to confidence in a quick withdrawal from Iraq was overlooked when President Bush pronounced in 2003, “mission accomplished”. Overlooking the most important role of post-conflict reconstruction, and possibly even one of the main pillars of American exceptionalism, the Bush Administration failed to focus on securing and developing the country. After many years of avoiding another “Vietnam Syndrome,” such oversights by the Bush Administration would lead them to a predicament within the region as 20,000 additional troops were requested by General David Petraeus for Iraq in 2007 (Wawro, 386). After three years of a conflict that was designed to last no

more than a couple of months, the American military plan would finally begin to focus on an integral stability operation based on security, politics, diplomacy, and economics.

## Conclusions: Lessons to be Learned

The formulation of U.S. foreign policy through the use of force leads to several lessons to be learned in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although military devices to achieve contingent governance policy at the time seemed to be effective, the problems lay within the overall contextualization. By miscalculating both wars, American power was consumed rather than heightened at the end of the Bush Administration. Moreover, global terrorism seemed to pose the same amount of threat as in the days after 9/11, although more aware of it, the West and the United States had yet to defeat the enemy. Military dominance in both scenarios lacked invincibility, and even though American and coalition troops enjoyed tactical and technological benefits, they continued to be hind-sighted by the tribal Taliban and insurgents.

In facing the threat of terrorism through the use of military force as strategically envisioned during the Cold War, the Bush Administration failed to perceive that terrorism and radicalization require a long-term structural strategy rather than just the use of force. Instead of proving American political and military power, ten years after the tragic events of 9/11, the world would perceive the United States as an entity that had failed at translating its strength and primacy in securing them from threats (Haas, 2009: 189). With the arrival of the Obama Administration in 2009, early critics were able to confirm that the United States was eager to modify the initial war strategy by declaring the end of the Global War on Terror and shifting focus to Al-Qaeda declaring the military effort as “Overseas Contingency Operations” (Wilson & Kamen, 2009).

Power would be transferred to the newly formed government in Iraq, and before leaving office President Bush would guarantee the departure of all U.S. forces from Iraqi cities by 2009 and from the rest of the country in 2011.<sup>32</sup> In Afghanistan, the new Administration would shift policy goals from nation building and counterinsurgency to preventing the emergence of the country as a safe-haven for Al-Qaeda and its affiliates (West, 2011: 7). On May 2, 2011, on the orders of President Obama, United States Special Forces killed Osama bin Laden after a targeted operation on his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan (Office of the Press Secretary, 2011). With the death of Osama bin Laden, emphasis was made on an eventual withdrawal; American troops are envisioned to fully retreat from Afghanistan by 2014.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> In August 2010, President Barack Obama announced the end of the American Combat Mission in Iraq; by October 2011 the announcement was made that 39,000 troops would be removed from the country by the end of the year. On December 18, 2011 the last convoy of U.S. troops officially left Iraq (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> President Obama announced on June 22, 2011 that “by the end of [2011] 10,000 troops will be removed from Afghanistan, and we will bring home a total of 33,000 troops by next

The question remains —how can American foreign policy be effectively reshaped in the region to prevent radicalization and terrorism from resurging? The issue with war as policy implementation is that it will always be restrained by the very nature of domestic policies: short term results that will justify the use of force. The Obama Administration could have focused on stabilizing both Iraq and Afghanistan rather than quickly pulling out troops. By recognizing that insurgency and terrorism go hand in hand —as do the policies and strategy designed to counter both— the incoming Administration would have likely secured approval at home and abroad. The United States needs to articulate effective political will at home in order to carry out its military capability to secure American interests at home and abroad. American foreign and national security policy will be strategically enhanced by emphasizing the notion of understanding the complexities of the Middle East, including Afghanistan and Iraq.

U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East —in particular its activities in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia— should consider concentrating on securing the establishment of legitimate national authorities. Emphasis needs to be made on the avoidance of clear-cut predetermined Western models of governance that fail to adapt to the distinct paradigms of the region. U.S. policy within Afghanistan is working on negotiating with the Taliban in order to achieve much-needed tribal approval of the current national authority. If cooperation is achieved, then the possibility of working on underlying problems within the region could become viable. The United States must assume responsible sovereignty and exercise its leadership in strengthening security within the international architecture. Political and economic interests are an important part of the foreign policy decisions made by the United States, yet current and future global affairs need to focus on how to effectively participate in building national capacity to support local strategies. The American Way of War must focus on effectively addressing global transnational threats and actively engaging to meet the multidimensional demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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summer, fully recovering the surge [...] After this initial reduction, our troops will continue coming home at a steady pace as Afghan security forces move into the lead [...] By 2014, this process of transition will be complete” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2011).

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