

POLITICS

In what ways, if any, have the events of 9/11/2001 left their mark on contemporary world politics?

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9/11/2001 was an unforgettable day. Four planes were hijacked by Al-Qaeda (a terrorist network) related Islamic terrorists and flown into buildings in the United States. The death toll was nearly 3000.

For many, the collapse of the USSR at the end of the Cold War marked Francis Fukuyama's 'the end of history' which refers to the end of ideology competition, signifying the spread of Western liberal democracy around the world (in Wes Jones, 2003:1).

But '9/11 changed everything', Vice President Dick Cheney said. 'It changed the way we think about threats to the United States...(and) national security strategy we need to pursue' (2003:1).

It seems that conflicts of world politics still exist. However, this time the conflict is not between the US and the USSR, but between Liberalism and Islamism, presented Samuel Huntington's 'the clash of civilizations' (in Foreign Affairs, 1993:1).

This essay will discuss about the transformation of international politics by focusing on the response of the US after 9/11, in terms of the changes in US foreign policy, nature of war and individual security, to show the post-9/11 world is not safer and is more polarized. The US plays an important role in contemporary world politics because it is a powerful country militarily, economically and politically and poses huge influences around the globe.

Firstly, the US changed its approach from isolationism to unilateralism for its foreign policy under the influence of neo-conservative government officials. During the World Wars, America insisted not to be involved by remaining neutral. It only joined at the end because of the casualties of American and territory security. After that, the US's ambition of extending 'democracy and freedom' to other countries had been growing in the Cold War so it supported local army in countries which wanted to stop the invasion of the USSR. They never had any direct hot wars. Throughout American history, we can see that the US was disengaged in wars. Even in the Cold War, when there was tension with the Soviet Union, only soft tactics were used.

However, it is a different world after 9/11. To answer the concerns of the frightened American (or the revenge against Al-Qaeda), a series of programmes for 'homeland security' were listed as a national priority in the Bush Doctrine. The attack stimulated the US's determination in acting as a world judge, jury and executioner by linking national security to global security.

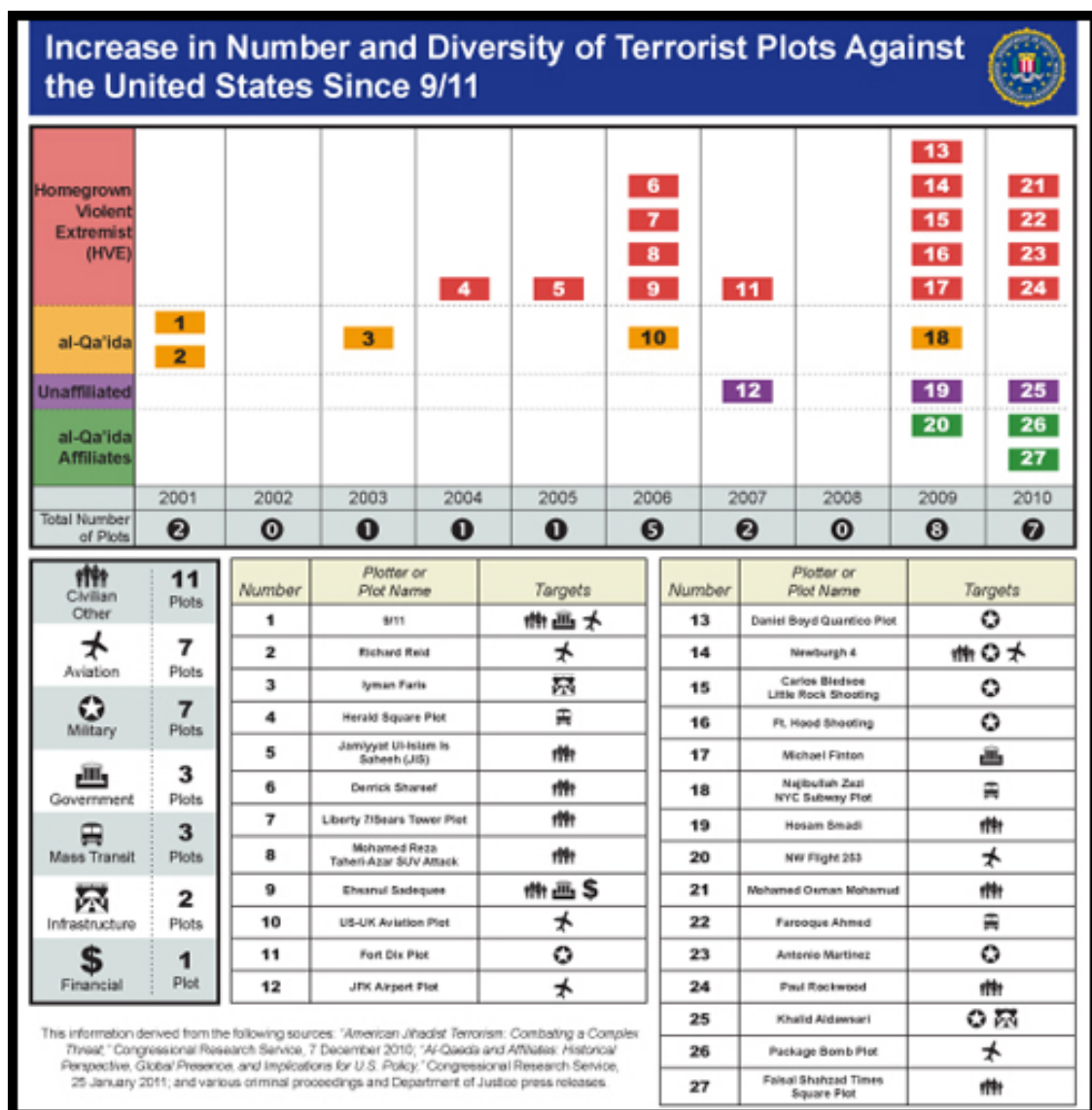
Claiming to respond by 'acting preemptively against such terrorists' (The White House, 2002:6), America did not connive to autocratic regime in the Middle East in return for cheap oil and stability anymore (Cox, 2011:76) but even to combat when there was only suspicion, without paying attention to constraints posted by the United Nation (UN) (Young and Kent, 2013:537). Thus they started the 'war on terror'.

The first target was Afghanistan, to hunt for Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind of 9/11 and the leader of Al-Qaeda. America tried to implement a regime change by overthrowing the Taliban government but it did not help to create a central authority to stabilize Afghanistan and it ended up as pure devastation (Young and Kent, 2013:568), which further developed anti-Americanism and therefore encouraged more people to join and fund terrorist groups.

In 2003, the US switched their focus to 'axis of evil' – Iraq, after claiming they killed or caught some core members of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan (but indeed most members moved to the neighbor country, Pakistan). Bush, whose father was the target of an Iraqi assassination attempt, convinced to the public that 'it's no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and that he intended to use them against US and its allies' (Young and Kent, 2013:575), but secretly agreed that Iraq 'had better targets' (The BBC, 2004). It raised a question that they were interested in threats posed by a state, even though Al-Qaeda is a transnational non-state entity. This longest war in American history took many innocent lives in Iraq. The so-called liberation of Iraq was seen as an unwelcome occupation, with more insurgents rebelling against America (Young and Kent, 2013:582).

Consequently, the US's unilateralism has made the world more conflicted and unstable. Not only through 'increasing the motivation, strength and capability of terrorist groups operating against the US and its western supporters' (Young and Kent, 2013:558), but also the negation of the success of the Cold

War in the past. Mearsheimer and Walt predicted rightly that the war might trigger negative long-term costs if it went badly with regards to 'high U.S. casualties, significant civilian deaths, a heightened risk of terrorism, or increased hatred of the United States in the Arab and Islamic world' (2003:1). The figure below (O'Brien, 2011:1) shows terrorist attacks becoming more frequent and diverse after 9/11.



Thus, it is reasonable to say the 'war on terror' did not solve the problem of terrorism, but paved the way for future attack. It should be recognized that

“terrorism cannot be combated through robust state security measures alone; in important ways, terrorism is a ‘hearts and minds’ issue” (Heywood, 2011:299). Mearsheimer and Walt (2003:1) have also mentioned that throughout Saddam Hussein’s career, it is known that deterrence and containment would work. But Bush chose not to use the Cold War methods and to stop the danger of the possession of WMDs. Ironically, the reason that US used to attack Iraq, provided safety and avoided major aggression between two superpowers in the Cold War.

Because of such unilateralist beliefs, there are lots of difficulties and problems accumulated, such as a deteriorating Israel-Palestine relationship (which led to outbreak of clashes till now) and a loss of creditability of international law (countries like Iran disobeyed the rules of nuclear arms set by UN).

Secondly, the nature of war has changed as ‘the events of Sep 11, 2001 taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states’ (The White House, 2002:preview). In the past centuries, Carl von Clausewitz debated that the fundamental nature of war is the use of violence in compelling our opponents to fulfill our will (Sheehan, 2011:216). It can be shown in the World Wars but during the Cold War period, accumulation of military power was used rather than an actual war.

Yet, the conventional state-to-state rivalry has expanded to an international protection from the less foreseeable and more formless non-state actors after

9/11 (Sheehan, 2011:216). This changed Americans' perception of war and popularized the neo-cons' idea of 'democratic peace' that war will decline when democracy inhabits a region and spreads throughout the world (Sheehan, 2011:216). This democratic move in other words meant 'prevention at home can require aggressive action abroad' (Luntz, 2004:1), a war that is fought under the name of 'spreading peace'. Nonetheless, the security of US should not equate to an attack of other countries like Iraq, as the protection of Americans is not achieved by killings of Iraqis.

The Bush administration has said the new danger meant that old methods were no longer relevant (Cox, 2011:75). But apart from using hard tactics compared to in the Cold War, there were nothing new. The change of nature of war did not bring about any law enforcement or enhancing the role of multilateral institutions but simply a military retaliation. Hence, it is believed that the world after 9/11 became more vulnerable as there are no systematic methods to tackle about either the contingency plan or the crisis management.

Thirdly, state security has made individuals more insecure instead. Traditionally, security emphasizes on protection of the sovereignty from external military threats. But to deal with an unpredictable enemy, the US has become more dependent on technology; for instance, complex information gathering and command systems. From 'TSA airport checkpoints to NSA phone surveillance' (Beard, 2013:1), the US has established more and more departments under the programmes of 'homeland security'. They said these are necessary to keep a targeted US safe. But the independency and

competition among the departments made the analysis of intelligence data difficult, challenging the usefulness of the programmes.

The terrorists of 9/11 had lived and trained in US and some of them had even been identified as suspicious characters before. This made Americans become more tolerant of government's observation (Miller, 2003:1). The US PATRIOT ACT of 2001 allows the government to search and keep surveillance over US citizens without a warrant. Strictly speaking, it is an invasion of privacy. The US claimed it was for the maximization of citizens' benefits. This is therefore 'lesser evil' (in Heywood, 2011:299) and 'right for political leaders to do wrong, if this served public morality' (Heywood, 2011:299).

Nevertheless, a gain in national security should not be a loss in individual security as it contradicts to Americans' pursuit of freedom. The US government should not interrupt Americans' private lives and 'treat all citizens as suspects' (in Beard, 2013:1). People are more insecure because the US government has taken its empowerment for granted. Not to mention the movement on social networks like Twitter and Facebook are tracked, but the surveillance is even extended to other countries like France and Germany nowadays. To strengthen Americans' confidence towards the government's management is not only through border and port security but also through provision of sense of security.

From the change in US foreign policy to the change in individual security, from US's aggressive military action to offensive inspection over US citizens,

the problem of terrorism is still here or even more serious and people are more wary, not only about terrorists, but also about the US government.

The world after 9/11 is even more dangerous.

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