
War on Terror, or Interests and Ideology? Reframing U.S. Foreign Policy Before and After 9/11

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Opinion Paper

Since September 11, the U.S. has been involved in a global “war on terror” mainly in Arab and Muslim countries. Not much has been altered in U.S. foreign policy despite the rhetoric of and hopes put on the new U.S. administration. Both U.S. administrations, the Republican and Democrat alike, have been using the carrot and the stick policy (or what is called in the academy, soft and hard power) to make sure that everyone falls in line with U.S. foreign policy agenda. These carrots include economic as well as political and diplomatic support. They also include propaganda promotion including what is called “winning the hearts and minds.” The sticks on the other hand, are economic, political and diplomatic sanctions, declaring open wars, (for instance in Afghanistan and Iraq), supporting wars instigated by “allies” (like Israel) and pressuring other countries to initiate war on their behalf (as in Pakistan), along with covert operations around the globe and additional threats of war and hostilities.

These policies are complementary and can be grouped in one category if one is to follow an ethical approach to politics. All these policies are various forms of terror as they aim at forcing people to change their positions in accordance with U.S. interests. This is a core principle in the U.S. foreign policy which has never changed by any new U.S. administration. Therefore, despite of all the rhetoric, their aim is behavior modification of others, rather than employing real compromises or finding a middle ground in difficult situations. Behavior alteration of those with whom the U.S. engages itself with has been its mode of politics since its inception. This strategy has been built around three tactics; inducement, threat of use of force, or the use of force when everything else fails. The strategy was first used with Native Americans and later with everyone else.

Despite all evidence provided by scholars, analysts, and journalists, the U.S. and its spokespersons keep accusing its opponents of being inflexible. Like so many other claims, this is the work of pathology of projection: the U.S. does something and then accuses its opponents for doing that same thing. This pathology of projection is embedded in Orientalist and colonialist mentality that has been at work since the rise of Western modernity. For instance the U.S. occupied Iraq, killed, raped, and tortured its people, and then turned around and blamed the Iraqis for a culture of violence. “Why are Iraqis so violent?” many Americans ask, oblivious to their own violent behavior and how it structures the responses to it. This pattern is a replica of White settlers’ behavior against Native Americans as Norman Finkelstein shows in *History’s Verdict: The Cherokee Case*, committing the most brutal violence against Native Americans, and then described the Native Americans for being violent.

While the U.S. is free to do and say what it wishes, those on the receiving end of its policies on the other hand should not be obligated to accept U.S. claims and justifications for such policies. For one, people living in the region—Arab and Islamic World-- are the ones who have been paying the price for these policies, and second, critical thinking requires from us not to be fooled by rhetoric, especially if we have learnt something from history. The argument that 9/11 changed everything and that the U.S. was forced to respond to real threat is misleading.

The post 9/11 U.S. policy can be better understood in its historical context. As Ibn Khaldoun (14th century Arab scholar) reminded us centuries ago that the state’s policies of expansion are reflective of the state’s origin and self image or self-perception, and how the development of the state is shaped by these issues and its interests in expansion and appropriations as shown in history.

To understand U.S. foreign policy better, one needs to keep in mind the origins of the U.S., initially as a state soaking in the blood of Native Americans and in appropriating the resources of their continent, then benefitting from a parasite economy of slavery on the backs of African Americans, and afterwards, developing into an

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imperialist force that has been looking for plunder wherever it can be found around the globe.

In his work on anti Arab racism in the U.S., Steven Salaita argues that “manifest destiny” and other core principles in the settler colonial structure of the U.S. continue to frame its domestic and foreign policies against those who are deemed non-White/civilized. This settler colonial mentality, a mentality of the “besieged” has been at work since then. White settlers from early on were dominant yet felt besieged, carrying with them the sense of persecution with its puritan narrative from Europe, and committed all forms of aggression while feeling or at least presenting themselves as being “besieged” victims. This dynamic is still at work as we have seen much of it during the so called Cold War, and with every conflict the U.S. is engaged in whether against Iraq, Iran, or elsewhere.

After dominating the continent, and crossing the oceans, especially after World War II, the U.S. rose as a global power (Empire), as Norman Finkelstein in the *Holocaust Industry*, has argued, making the Holocaust as the most important event in history, has been a useful tactic for the U.S. to present itself in the image of a good empire. This was also useful for Jewish elites in the U.S. and in the west in general including Israel, so that both parties through this historical narrative could claim moral superiority and cover up for their crimes, and try to silence criticism whenever it arises.

Definitely, the pattern of these policies in history is still at work and has a racial marker, since the main targets of such plunder are non-White/non-Europeans. This has remained the case, despite the recent election of the Black president—Barak Hussein Obama, who in order to be elected, had to deny his middle name and stress upon his white family lineage and Christian “values.” Not to forget his assurance to Israel and its friends, that he will be as obedient and loyal to the state of Israel as any American president before him. One should not forget that he promoted the idea of expanding the Afghanistan war into Pakistan. It is unimaginable to have a president in the U.S. elected based on his peace platform. More or less, to win an election, the candidate must show militaristic ambitions and intentions, even though some are more blunt about that

than others, and less sophisticated in their rhetoric than others. Having as a more intelligent president does not mean better conduct as we have seen with Bill Clinton who waged wars for “liberation” and continued sanctions on the Iraqi people that killed over a million.

The dynamics of U.S. politics are systemic/ structural and no one person, on its own, can make a radical or meaningful shift. For example, having Black police sheriffs did not end police brutality against Blacks in the U.S. Thus, one should not expect much change in U.S. foreign policy as that would require it to first acknowledge and deal with its original sin, then repent, pay reparations to all those who have suffered at its hands, and then try to go forward in a manner that is free from supremacy and racism.

The talk of change of strategies and policies in the U.S. in recent months has only been a result of the defeat, first at the hand of Iraqis, and then Afghans, who in spite of suffering great losses helped the world in undermining the powerful image of the ugliest empires in history. It is only when in trouble that these arrogant powers talk of “change,” and hence the examination of failures, so that the next time they can achieve more successful brutality. Therefore, one should not expect radical departure from U.S. policy agendas in the Arab and Muslim world, and for that matter everywhere else, as U.S. interests are derived from and are dictated by greed and racism.

This argument is based on the fact that there is hardly any meaningful change of U.S. foreign policy in the post World War II and the rise of U.S. to global power, especially in the Middle East. Since the creation of the state of Israel, United States linkage to Israel became known as a “special relationship,” intertwining its regional interests and heavy Jewish lobbying in the United States, and dividing the world into the West as -Judeo Christian, and the East as-Islamic Arab (Shahid Alam, the New Orientalism). During the so called “Cold” War (a racist terminology for defining it as such since it was Cold for Europeans and Americans, but not for Third World people), politics of the U.S. exhibited a strong hostility towards Third World national liberation movements (Joseph Massad), especially so against Arab nationalism (James Petras, Azmi Bishara).

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Thus, targeting the Middle East particularly and Arab and Islamic countries in general is not only connected to economic interests (greed) but also to the racial thinking. The fact that there is a Jewish lobby in the U.S. that promotes hostile policies towards Arabs and Muslims (Mearsheimer & Walt) does not negate that, but to the contrary, keeping in mind that Jews and Israelis are European and Western, as they self confess, and have managed to fit into the global imperialist system quite well (Shahid Alam, Jonathan Cook, James Petras).

In the recent past and even now these policies continue to remain the same, although using different strategies. For instance, the U.S. championed the build-up of Islamic militant groups and helped in creating what is called today the militant global Jihad network and its militant ideology, with the help of other states such as France, Britain, Israel, and local regimes such as that of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (Ahmad Rashid, Farzana Sheikh). The claim then was that these policies were due to U.S. “fear” of the spread of Communism in what became known as the policy of “containing Communism.” Leaving these claims aside, the reality of such policy was that everyone who did not go along U.S. dictates was branded as “Communist,” and thus, the U.S. supported, and even created some, Islamic militant groups as a way to undermine left, nationalist and progressive politics in the Arab and Muslim countries and to make sure that these countries either remain as puppets in the hands of the U.S., or plunge into chaos and or instability (Robert Dreyfuss). That these policies remained intact even after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union only exposes the paradigm of “containing Communism” as only a hoax for expansion and suppression of self determination of people in the region. For example, books that were produced by U.S. institutions such as the University of Nebraska that taught militancy, hatred, and reactionary social ideologies, continued to be produced till 1996 and delivered to the students in madrasas in Pakistan and the relationship with Taliban in Afghanistan also continued (John Pilger, Mahmood Mamdani). Therefore, it would be correct to argue, that the war against communism was never only about communism, and similarly the war on

terror has its own motives, which previously were and still are about U.S. expansion, greed and racism.

Moreover these doctrines and declarations such as “war on terror” are only excuses and cover-ups. For U.S. policy of global hegemony needs a pretext and the need for enemy is a result of that, making Islam a substitute for Communism, helped by propaganda by propagandists such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, and many participants in U.S. media and entertainment industry (Edward Said). Doctrines such as “dual containment” or the “one percent doctrine” do not reflect the truth just because they have been declared or theorized, but rather are a tool and pretext to justify policies of expansion, aggression and intervention. These policy declarations and doctrines are needed because the U.S. always needs a new enemy to pursue global hegemony (Noam Chomsky, James Petras)

The infamous Henry Kissinger once said: “It is stupid to be an enemy of the U.S., and quite dangerous to be its friend.” While Kissinger has made many racist and unintelligent statements in his career, this one ought to be reframed to be more accurate. It is not that states chose to be enemies or friends of the U.S.; it is often the choice of the U.S. itself in accordance to its greed, and racism that frames its national interests and policies. Regardless of the position of the opponents, these U.S. interests and ideologies and racial thinking mark the lines between “enemies” and “friends,” categories that keep shifting according to its interest. Thus, as Mamdani argued, the U.S. helped in creating Al-Qa’ida, and in empowering the Taliban in Afghanistan, who Ronald Reagan once described as similar to the “Founding Fathers” of the United States, and later the same groups became the ultimate bad Muslims over night. As long as they were serving United States interests they were good Muslims, but the moment they became an obstacle to U.S. interests, they were labeled as the ultimate evil, and used as an excuse to further U.S. hegemony and expansion even against countries and societies that were victims of Al-Qa’ida and Taliban brutal politics.

At one point in time, Ibn Khaldoun argued that some educated people were proud of being ignorant. However, neither then nor now, can ignorance and apathy be a basis for justice, prosperity and peace.

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The U.S. propaganda against and among Arabs and Muslims that switched from encouraging religious militancy to encouraging pacifism and complacency ought to be challenged and exposed. After decades of promoting hatred and militancy (Robert Dreyfuss), they have come to study education in Pakistan, propose modifications in education and religion, tell the Pakistanis, Arabs and Muslims in general, that they need to reform and catch up with modernity (dictated by the U.S. and Europe). Such interference is cultural molestation at its best that adds insult to injury. While reforms are not a bad idea, they should include religions and education systems of other countries including Israel and the U.S. promote, if not as much, more hatred and militancy.

Nevertheless U.S. propaganda has been quite successful in achieving its goals and creating some confusion. It is Orientalism revisited and Orientalism like the work of colonial education leads some insiders to a sense of inferiority or even the adoption of an Orientalist mindset (self inflected Orientalism). Championed by propagandists like Bernard Lewis, Orientalism, for decades has been advocating the image of the bad Arab: Arabs are to be blamed for everything, even Islam. We are not informed about how modern Islamic fundamentalist ideology is specifically Arab, where much that ideology can be traced to Mauwdudi and Al-Afghani. Of course for the intelligent people in the U.S. and elsewhere in the West who till recently all such names could be confused with being Arab.

The larger aim of such propaganda is to split forces and create demoralization and deflect the blame from those responsible for it. Furthermore, if there is fundamentalism in Muslim societies, it also exists in Hindu, Jewish, and Christian societies, and all must be fought against rather than singling out only one. But the main question for such policy makers is not fundamentalism per se.

Just as the war against Communism was not much about Communism as such but about expansion, hegemony and plunder, so is the war on terror. The U.S. continues to manufacture, invent, and even create one enemy after another only to carry on in its path of the original sin, in order to escape from facing its origins, and to remain in a state of denial. There has hardly been any meaningful

difference in the U.S. foreign policy during or after the Cold War. Neither the Old Middle East nor the “New Middle East” slogans championed by the U.S. (conservatives and liberals alike) mimicking Israeli officials’ terminology, has substance and is more of a pure propaganda. It was and still remains a strategy of colonial mindset fed with racism and greed that requires the working of divide and rule, and sometimes quit if direct control is not possible or needed anymore. Instability and an organized chaos are very much at the heart of such policy, so as to keep these countries and societies busy with each other, and provide opportunity for the U.S. to intervene if and when it wishes to. Crumbs (money) will be sprinkled around in the meantime to show U.S. “generosity” to “win the hearts and minds,” or in other words to bribe some within these societies so that it can have “willing cooperators”.

In the meantime, these U.S. policies in the region are dictated by Israeli agendas for regional hegemony through U.S. power. Francis Fukuyama, an early insider of the neoconservatives in the U.S. woke up after the failure of the war in Iraq and argued in *America at Crossroads*, that many of the neoconservatives such as Richard Pearle and Wolfowitz were Jewish Americans who confused Americans with Israeli interests and promoted policies after 9/11 that serve Israel not the U.S. Yet, as James Petras argues, the Jewish lobby in the U.S. goes beyond the right wing conservatives. There is a broad support for Israeli policies among Jewish Americans, who have been dominating U.S. foreign policy in the region to serve Israeli hegemony over Arab and Islamic countries.

In the end, it is important to propound that every state has its original sin, and until that is either confronted, dealt with, and healed, the sin will continue to haunt, and push forth again and again. This, the U.S. has not done, as only then will there be a possibility for change, a change that takes into account the fact that the world is to be shared with others and not dominated.

In the meantime, people in the Arab and Muslim world should press on their governments to be more transparent in their policy decisions and pursue policies according to their own interests, rather than on behalf of the U.S. This must be done after sufficient time of deliberation and discussions

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about all kinds of challenges and the many possible options that need to be faced because after all, the U.S. like every empire before it will go, but it is the people who remain. Reform plans should be indigenous, and based on broad consensus rather than threats and inducements from the outside. This is because policy results are what people in that country will live with, and they are the ones who should be making the decisions and implementing the results after long deliberations and general broad consent. These policies should also not be decided by a few, because these few are not the representatives of society at large.