

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY AND SEPTEMBER 11 CENAP CAKMAK

Nearly all political and economic pundits agree that the events of September 11 2001 have changed “everything”, including American foreign policy. The question is whether the degree of change is “remarkable”. In the following pages an attempt will be made to describe some basic aspects of American foreign policy and to determine the implications of terrorist attacks on American foreign policy output.

In a recent book, W.R.Mead refers to the four major schools of thought that have affected the foreign policy making process throughout American history. These schools, Mead argues, have constituted “the basic ways of looking at foreign policy” until now. ‘Hamiltonians’ seek a close alliance between the government and business which includes, in the contemporary context, integration into the global economy. ‘Wilsonians’ emphasize the importance of constructing an international community, establishing the rule of law around the world, and settling international problems within the legal bodies of international organizations. Their foreign policy approach is based on far-reaching cooperation with the rest of the world. The ‘Jeffersonian’ approach differs from the above-mentioned two schools in terms of integrating with the world. While ‘Hamiltonians’ and ‘Wilsonians’ support an outward foreign policy, ‘Jeffersonians’ defend the argument that “American foreign policy should be less concerned about spreading democracy abroad than about safeguarding it at home.” Lastly, the ‘Jacksonians’ focus on the internal security of the US territory, and the wellbeing of the American people.

These schools constitute a leading guide for US foreign policy planners. They have followed the principles set forth in compliance with the gradual or drastic changes as they have occurred around the world. Therefore, the US has successfully adapted itself to new developments in the arena of international politics since its inception. In the 19th century Bismarck attributed the success of the US to chance, coincidence or the special favor of God. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt of the special place of the US as the world’s most prosperous nation and dominant power, upholding as well such noteworthy values as freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

How has the US managed to become the leader of the international community within such a relatively short time? To answer this question, the general aspects of American foreign policy first need to be identified and evaluated.

GENERAL ASPECTS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

The most striking aspect of American foreign policy is its flexibility. It changes as conditions change. Its rate of adaptability to the most current situation is very high. Mead explains this feature of American foreign policy as follows: “American foreign policy is too naïve, too calculating, too openhanded, too violent, too isolationist, too unilateral, too multilateral, too moralistic, too immoral.”

What the above quotation implies is that American foreign policy is changeable, flexible, and adaptable to every condition. In this context, it is possible to argue that the US does not have a constant foreign policy and even that it does not have a foreign policy at all. While it is possible to focus on particular cases and relatively short time intervals American foreign policy as a whole is hard to examine. It is always changing because “[I]ike a kaleidoscope, the patterns of world affairs shift with each spin of the globe. Rising dangers replace receding ones; old problems reemerge.” The aforementioned four major schools help the politicians and foreign policy staffs implement the proper foreign policy pattern in accordance with changing circumstances. This flexibility is one of the most important features of American foreign policy.

One of the leading characteristics of American foreign policy is “pragmatism”. As Albright indicates “ [d]iplomacy requires vision and pragmatism.” In fact, the very variations of pragmatism are embodied into the principles of the four major foreign policy schools. The policy to be implemented is changed in order to draw t the highest benefit from any situation. This is what pragmatism is all about. The history of the US is full of examples of this approach. The most eminent is the country’s federal structure. American federalism was made flexible so that the system could be adjusted to meet changes in society and political life. The constitution has frequently been amended so as to remove the negative effects of disparities within society in the process of forming a strong and unified nation. Glendening and Reeves explain the pragmatic nature of American federalism in the following fashion: “[W]hat we call pragmatic federalism [is] a federalism accompanied by constantly adjusting intergovernmental relations, fashioned to meet current needs, with an emphasis on problem solving and a minimal adherence to rigid doctrine. These relations provide the flexibility that enables the system to endure.”

Another example of American pragmatism is the Monroe Doctrine, introduced by President Monroe in 1823. This doctrine initiated the isolationist foreign policy phase of the United States. The aim was to insulate the US from the rest of the world, and make the internal landscape more prosperous. At first sight, it seems that the proclaimed doctrine was naïve – aimed as it was at such abstract objectives as peace and stability - but closer attention reveals the practical benefits which the ratification of the doctrine ensured to the US. By proclaiming an ‘isolationist’ policy, the US guaranteed to not to interfere in European issues but at the same time it wanted the European states to keep out of “American issues”, especially those relating to Latin America. The doctrine eased the expansion of the US westward, and maintained its influence over Latin America. Furthermore, internal integration was strengthened and the world’s first and largest common market was established. The principles declared by President Wilson after the First World War can be regarded as another example of US pragmatism. These principles advocated free trade, openness of the seas, and general liberties. The purpose was to reach global markets. Within a relatively short time, the United States established its dominance over the global economy.

THE SEPTEMBER 11 TERRORIST ATTACK

On September 11, 2001 “Americans watched on television, in real time, as the twin towers of the World Trade Center burned and their fellow citizens flung themselves to their

deaths from 100 stories up. Americans all watched as the towers imploded, and they all knew that they were witnessing, in seconds, the deaths of thousands of their compatriots in the nation's front yard.”

These events had the most extraordinary impact on Americans and on people around the world. “September 11 has changed everything ... nothing will ever be the same again’. Such statements became commonplace. According to one writer “ the old political clichés had lost their meaning” but at the same time “change does not occur overnight.” If so, what is the true impact of September 11 on American foreign policy-making?

There has been not been sufficient time even now to determine the tendencies of American foreign policy after September 11. However, it is still possible to make some predictions and interpretations about short-term tendencies and approaches. The immediate response was to declare a war against “international terrorism”. Initially this declaration was made by the Secretary of State. However, “he made a very natural but terrible and irrevocable error. To declare war on terrorists or, even more illiterately, on terrorism, is at once to accord terrorists a status and dignity that they seek and that they do not deserve. It confers on them a kind of legitimacy. Do they qualify as belligerents? If so, should they not receive the protection of the laws of war?” This was not a response that was very well chosen. There were other solutions that might have been more appropriate. It is true that the threat of international terrorism cannot be met with conventional foreign policy means, of which the most salient ones are negotiation and compromise but this does not mean that the only possible solution is war. Haass underlies the legitimate basis of war in the American view: “Our right to self-defense is unquestioned.” What this statement means is that the US will act unilaterally, excluding the cooperation of international community if necessary.

The other immediate response of the United States to September 11 was the declaration on September 17 2001 of a “National Security Strategy”. Actually, former presidents have proclaimed similar strategies under the impact of other dramatic events in US history including the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. What is common among these events is that all these events have caused the proclamation of a new strategy. The declaration of a new strategy means that the former strategy was inadequate in the sense of being unable to prevent crippling blows being struck at the US. The strategy declared by the Bush administration is similar to the Clinton approach, but with differences in details and emphasis. In this context, post-September 11 strategies cannot be counted as a purely new approach towards a deep crisis that the United States is facing. What the new National Security Strategy stresses is the following:

The NSS is careful to specify a legal basis for preemption: international law recognizes "that nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger of attack." There's also a preference for preempting multilaterally: "The United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community." But "we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country.”

It is very clear – and more clear than ever following the war against Iraq - that the Bush administration is determined to use unilateral force if it cannot secure enough international support for a particular course of action. Obviously, this is quite contrary to the approach of the Wilsonian School, which seeks international cooperation when taking action during a

serious crisis. However, “[p]reemption in turn requires hegemony.” So, this may create a problem for the US. The response of the rest of the world to efforts by the US to become a hegemonic power is not predictable. The reason for the US acting alone is summarized as follows:

“The suicide plane attacks that killed several thousand innocent office-workers in New York, nearly two hundred military personnel in Washington, D.C., and several hundred passengers on the four hijacked flights were not seen in the United States as crimes against “the international community” to be appropriately dealt with by the United Nations, a body for which Americans have little respect. For them the attacks were outrages against the people of America, far surpassing in infamy even the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.”

Therefore, the first conclusion that can be drawn from the post-September 11 shift in American foreign policy is that the United States has discarded the consent of international community as a prerequisite to action. The Bush Administration itself has shown the validity of this commentary: “Bush's message to the world, first delivered on September 20, 2001, was this: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” Either you stand with civilization and good (us), or with barbarism and evil (them). Choose. And to those nations that choose wrongly, beware. Under the hammer of the Bush doctrine, Pakistan was forced to relinquish its long-time support of the Taliban and its tolerance of al Qaeda, and Saudi Arabia had to confront the fact that 15 of its own disaffected citizens shaped under its fundamentalist Wahhabi brand of Islam had carried out the attacks. The truth, however, is that a year later there is still very little clarity about the real direction of U.S. foreign policy and the war on terror.”

Although not clear, this is a tendency to become a hegemonic power. Is this tendency a new phenomenon in American foreign policy? According to one observer: “Some of these complaints about the American superpower are not new; indeed, the violent protests that another unilateralist president, Ronald Reagan, touched off with his visits to Europe in the 1980s were worse than those that greeted Bush on his last visit.” Actually, the state of the international community already confirms the evolving hegemonic character of American foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. For example: “To quash the International Criminal Court (ICC), for example, the administration threatened in June to withdraw all funds for UN peacekeeping. Global warming may be occurring, as an administration report finally admitted in the spring, but the White House nonetheless trashed the Kyoto Protocol that the international community spent ten years negotiating, and it offered no alternative plan.”

What this implies is that September 11 did not cause a dramatic change in US foreign policy. The hegemonic behavior of the United States cannot be attributed to post-September 11. It was in fact the collapse of the Soviet Union that caused the United States to emerge as the single superpower.

A SHIFTING PARADIGM?

In the light of foreign policy applications, the top priorities of the American foreign policy agenda, and the four fundamental foreign policy schools which have driven American

foreign policy for about two centuries, it can be concluded that the United States has not been implementing a purely new foreign policy after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The post-September 11 foreign policy of the US is hard to identify in a clear fashion. It does seem a little bit vague. There is no consensus among scholars over its content. While some argue that the US has created a shifting paradigm after September 11, others assert that the new agenda is only a slightly new version of the former American foreign policy. Therefore, what is already clear - given the available data - is that future direction of American foreign policy cannot be estimated. But whatever the new shape of American foreign policy, the basic characteristics of American politics will continuously affect the whole output. Political decisions are set so as to obtain the maximum benefit and satisfaction.

American plans for military intervention to Afghanistan were not developed as a response to September 11. They existed before the terrorist attacks. Therefore, it could be argued that the attacks on September 11 accelerated the implementation of those plans and gave an opportunity to the US to extend the scope of the plans. If history had not witnessed those terrible events, it is still likely that the US would have intervened in Afghanistan. According to this interpretation, the response of the US in the immediate aftermath of September 11 cannot be regarded as a new policy inclination. Pragmatic American foreign policy attempted to maximize its benefits and pretended to formulate a war against terrorism. In this regard, the question of why the US has been so interested in Afghanistan may be asked. This question is answered by Gokay:

“Why Afghanistan? Afghanistan occupies a strategic position in the geopolitical landscapes in general, and the geopolitics of the oil and natural gas resources in particular. Afghanistan has been in an extremely significant location spanning South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. In addressing this issue, I will outline the economic and political significance of the international competition over oil and natural gas reserves of the region, central Eurasia, in which Afghanistan is located. In my opinion, the US administration has significant political/ military and economic reasons to try to turn Afghanistan into a base for American military operations in the region. There can be no doubting Afghanistan's strategic importance to the US.”

The immediate reaction to terrorist attacks enabled the United States to realize both the following aims: fighting against terrorism, and settling over strategic landscape.

The end of the Cold War, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist bloc, was a turning point in world politics. The new unidentified era has provided the US with enormous new opportunities in dealing with major international issues. With its “pragmatic” foreign policy the US has responded to several issues so as to derive the most beneficial output for itself: “From the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and various post-Yugoslav wars, to American/ NATO responses to numerous political and economic crises in the post-Soviet space, and more recently to America's "war on terrorism" in Afghanistan, there is an important underlying thread. Although these various wars and conflicts have /had certain regional dimensions, they are primarily the US response to the opportunities and challenges opened by the demise of the Soviet Union. All have been connected to one big central course of action: the manoeuvres of the US, and its allies in Europe, over the division

of resources and political/ military control of Eurasia. All these interventions have enabled the US to gain a strong foothold in the lands between Europe to the west, Russian Federation to the north, and China to the east, and turn this strategic region increasingly into an American "sphere of influence". Thus the starting point of the American military response to Afghanistan is rooted in the changed international environment created by the end of the Cold War.

There is an ongoing debate among international affairs experts on how to define the new characteristics of American foreign policy after September 11. Rahman claims that "it is now clear that the terrorist attacks were a critical turning point for both the United States and the international community. September 11 fundamentally changed the nature of international relations and US foreign policy as well." This argument suggests that there is a sharp change in American foreign policy after September 11. Hirsch does not agree. In his article entitled "Bush and the World" Hirsch states that NATO has invoked – for the first time since its inception - Article V of its charter, which says that an attack on one of the members is an attack on all. However, Donald Rumsfeld sent his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, to NATO member countries to give them the message that exercising Article V would not be necessary, since "*the mission would define the coalition*". This clearly means that the US wanted to act alone in fighting against terrorism.

As indicated above, the US is already a hegemonic power. The reaction to September 11 events confirms the hegemonic character of the US but this evolving hegemonic role is not new. In December 5, 1996, President Clinton used the term "the indispensable nation" in describing the US. Therefore, the United States was a hegemonic power even before September 11. What September 11 did was show the practical application of that power. This hegemonic role of the US is probably best articulated by Vagts: "Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the shapers of American foreign policy are showing some signs about the US hegemonic position or at least of thinking of hegemony as a form of leadership rather than command."

CONCLUSION

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, it has often been said that nothing would remain the same in the future world. It was therefore expected that US foreign policy would change significantly especially in the Middle East. During and after the Cold War several Middle Eastern countries have played a crucial role in US foreign policy making. However, there has been no drastic change in the US foreign policy after September 11. Of course, there have been new openings and approaches but they might be better described as the "evolution" of foreign policy rather than anything that is drastically new. Thus, there is no shift as the following observations demonstrate:

1. US-Israeli relations have continued as they were before the terrorist attacks. In fact the US has increased its support for Israel while criticizing some Israeli military operations.
2. . In the US, there emerged some doubts about Saudi Arabia. It has been claimed that this country has been showing the same patterns as Iran before the Islamic Revolution. In fact

despite tensions which have arisen between the US and Saudi Arabia after September 11 the Saudis have continued to give the US almost the same support as before. .

3. It can be asserted that terrorist attacks strengthened the US position against Iraq.
4. Turkey, as a unique secular and democratic Muslim country, has become very important for the US. After September 11, contrary views on an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq were the main issue in US-Turkey relations but Turkey has expressed full support for the US war on terrorism.

To conclude, US foreign policy as a whole has not changed remarkably after the terrorist attacks. As Mead remarks: "These dramatic changes ... did not alter the underlying structure of the American foreign policy system. The four schools continued to play a vital role in American foreign policy as the nation struggled to cope with the aftermath of the September attacks."

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