

# The US Hegemonic Constraints and Global War on Terrorism: An Aftermath of September 11, a Theoretical Perspective

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**Abstract:** The horror and measure of the synchronised suicide attacks on the United States homeland of 9/11 eclipsed anything ever experienced in terrorism. The operation was carried out with ambitious scope and dimensions; impressive coordination and determination of the 19 aircraft hijackers that killed themselves, the aircrews, the passengers on board, and the entire 3,000 persons at the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The episode was due to the America's commanding position and its orchestrated unilateral and predominant control on the economic, political, monetary, technology and cultural levels. The paper therefore examines the 9/11 attacks by the on al-Qaeda US and the world view on the episode. The paper concluded that, US as a liberal democratic state, has not lived up to the expectations of maintaining international norms. Its unilateral use of force throws up the US into critical examination as a leading apostle of democratic principles in the international systems. Its committed and self-professed war against global terrorism needs to be embraced and recognized by others, as legitimate.

**Keywords:** Hegemony, Terrorism, Unilateralism, Unipolarism, Aggression, Invasion.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the horror and measure of the synchronised suicide attacks on the United States homeland of 9/11 eclipsed anything ever experienced in terrorism. The operation was carried out with ambitious scope and dimensions; impressive coordination and determination of the 19 aircraft hijackers that killed themselves, the aircrews, the passengers on board, and the entire 3,000 persons at the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Even the observers of international terrorism did not escape the deep emotional and psychological impact of the attacks (Hoffman, 2002: 303; Fitzpatrick, 2003: 244). The end of the Cold War threatened global peace and security. Before this time, bipolar deterrence allowed each state to control its allies. It inhibited regional or global hegemony from wielding absolute power and resorting to aggression. Even the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the disintegration of former Yugoslavia were not likely to erupt before the demise of the Soviet Union (Haass, cited in Benvenisti, 2005: 2).

The world today has observed America's commanding position and its orchestrated unilateral and predominant control on the economic, political, monetary, technology and cultural levels. In the Western world, it was affirmed that the arrogant and overbearing of the US brought the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Ikenberry, 2002: 2). After the September 11, the entire world had levelled several critical issues and concerns against the preponderant nature of American power: unprecedented constraints and primacy, its use of power and how it is being perceived by other states in the world. The terrorist attacks on the American territory, despite its unipolarism, still face significant external threats above its realm of great power competition. The US responses against these threats have impacted significantly upon the vital 'soft' foundations of its power- the perceived legitimacy of US global leadership, values and ideology and its benign image. The deployment of 'hard' military instruments to combat these global threats must be exercised with great cautions because of its 'blowback' or unpremeditated effects of a country's foreign policy actions (Goh, 2010: 78).

The neo-realist assumption confirms that states are interested in increasing their power calculus and influence (absolute gains), juxtaposes the manipulation of public outrage by the United States at the terrorist attacks of September 11 to support an illegal invasion of Saddam Hussein's government (Lamy, 2008: 129; Tuathail, 2003: 587). Keohane (cited, in Lamy, 2008: 132) affirms that the 9/11 terrorist attack on the USA was the creation of broad coalition framework against terrorism, that are made up of states and key global and regional institutions. In international system, neo-liberals support the principles of multilateralism and are critical of the pre-empted and unilateral use of force in the 2002 Bush Doctrine. As argued by the neo-liberals, the US invasion of Iraq absolutely undermines the influence and legitimacy of the regional and global (multilateralism) institutions that operated effectively during the Gulf War (1990-1) and Afghanistan (Lamy, 2008: 132).

This paper explores some of the issues (values, norms, ideology; legitimacy and foreign policy options of the US) raised by the episode of the September 11. It further gives an explorative context of the neo-realist, neo-liberal and constructivists assertions on the role played by the US after the 9/11 attacks and the nature of the international politics, and further contributes to the existing lexicons and literatures of International Relations discipline.

## 2. THE US HEGEMONIC POWER AND SEPTEMBER 11: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Hegemonic power refers to the willingness of the superpower states to maintain and sustain an international order, and its ability to commit itself to the norms, or legal doctrines of that order, and the willingness and acceptance of the smaller states, or allies as legitimate. Hegemony helps the superpower to play the rules when it suits its interests and purposes (Ikenberry, cited in Risse, 2003: 5). The measurement and determinants of hegemonic power capability of any state can be disaggregated into two elements: 'hard' military and resource based power (aggregate power); and 'soft' ideational and institutional power. The former (military power) is anchored on realist ideology, while the latter is based on the neo-liberals who looked beyond military might of state to economic (multilateralism) relations and institutions (Goh, 2010: 79). 'Soft' power, according to Joseph Nye, implies 'intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions, while the 'hard' power is associated with tangible resources like military and economic strength (1990a: 181). The realists and liberals view of 'soft' and 'hard' power dichotomy fits best into the analysis of the US hegemony and its roles after the 9/11 attacks.

Historically, the US according to Ikenberry (cited in Goh, 2010: 79), American grand strategy since the Second World War has been noted with the use of military instruments ('hard' power), and the proliferation of multilateral institutions. American officials boasted and lectured other states of American virtue, claiming the US as a benevolent hegemon. Clinton boasted about the success of the American economy as a model for others, which was described as an 'indispensable nation'. In contrast, while others argued that the United States still needs the cooperation of some major countries in tackling global issues (Huntington, 1999: 37). The US parochial notion portrays the principle of unilateralism, rather than multilateralism under which cooperation is sought to attaining liberal economic framework further exacerbates the realist's ideology of the US military and economic might. In pursuing its self-appointed and unrestrained global security management role. Its limits within the international legal norms were stressed, compelling US and global interests to be recognised as compatible with, or tolerated, by international law. This shows the clearest example of the so-called "Bush Doctrine" of attempting to justify pre-empting military action against Iraq in 2001 (Benvenisti, 2005: 3).

In another dimension, constructivist approach to the study of international politics underscores the hegemonic character of the US. The exercise of power and mechanism through which compliance is sought involves the projection by the dominant state of a set of norms accepted by leaders in other states (Ikenberry and Kupan, 1990: 283). While the process of socialization is determined by a constitutive exogenous and domestic norms and factors, and such state like the US needs to constantly utilize pervasive power in order to convince states to imbibe and embrace its normative and institutional structures (Lupia and McCubbins, cited in Goh, 2010: 79-80). The 9/11 attacks provide an excellent illustrations of the dynamic role and impact of norms, values, identity and ideology of states in international relations. Violent conflicts are difficult to comprehend in isolation of set of political, legal and moral norms and rules. The event of 9/11 and the war against global terrorism remind us of the critical roles played by norms and institutions. These serve as a regulatory mechanisms defined to constrain choices within which individuals pursue their interests or preferences. Norms express what states and other groups are; where they belong and of the kind of roles they play within a continuum, which

defines identity in terms of: them vs. us, good vs. evil, friends vs. enemies, civilized vs. barbarian (Hurrell, 2002: 186). Two dimensions to US 'soft' power include:

- (i) The appeal of American values and culture
- (i) The US Foreign Policy and Legitimacy

**Values and Ideology:** "11 September" is replete with ideological, cultural values and symbolic content. In international relations, scholars tend to sum up the absence of religion among the factors that influence states. On September 11, a figure whose identity is public religion that is not privatized dares to refashion secular politics and culture, that directly challenges the authority structure of the international systems. The attack had its root attached to public religion. The religious radicalism of the Muslim world tends to project the US as a powerful symbol of the exploitative hegemon that represses 'Other' and/or as an instrument whose uprising and incitement will aid the propagation and furtherance of fundamentalist cause (Goh, 2010: 80; Philipott, 2002: 67).

The 9/11 attacks were rooted on "Islamofascism" that has emerged in many parts of the world (Fukuyama, 2002: 32). As evinced by one of the moderate Muslim leaders in Britain, "the attacks was execrable, it was understandable because the United States was just too domineering" (Guardian, cited Cox, 2002: 270). In essence, the US was embroiled in an intra-Muslim ideological war as a result of its perceived hypocrisy, while propping up and nursing aggressive and imperialistic regimes (Doran, 2002: 23; Goh, 2010: 81).

In 2002, the Bush administration held with much conviction to bring down the stronghold of the Taliban that opposes Western ideology and to be replaced with Islamic caliphate. His regime skilfully influenced the 2002 Congressional elections and the international community of the virtues and morality of the invasion of Iraq (Tuathail, 2003: 866).

George Bush, in speeches justifying the invasion of Iraq in 2001, he affirms that:

*"Saddam Hussein and his terrorist allies must be met now where it arises, before it can appear suddenly in our skies and cities. Saddam Hussein's outlaw regime threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder. We must meet that threat now, with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities"* (Bush, quoted in Tuathail, 2003: 866).

Of course, the action of the US toward the invasion of Iraq might reflect the power dynamics that is obtained in the anarchy system, by which states gain more power at the expense of other actors (Dunne and Schmidt, 2008: 98). The realist view of the structure of the international systems underscores the US arrogant, parochial interests, hypocrisy and inattentive empathy toward the pains; hardship and tragic plight of the powerless states, its failure to engage in cross-cultural dialogue are pervasive and deeply rooted. In the eyes of some, US largely ignored terrorism as a global issue until faced with the attacks of the 9/11 on the Pentagon and World Trade Center (Peterson, 2002: 75-76).

Among the most compelling and obvious manifestations of foreign resentments were the expressions of joy from some groups after the eruption of the 9/11 attacks on America (Peterson, 2002: 76). The combination of material envy bears a deep-seated ethnic and religious sect, which has been exploited by fundamentalists to press and achieve their ideological cause (Goh, 2010: 81). In essence, the Bush crusade against terrorism to defend justice and liberty shared by the global community, its values, norms and ideology are being questioned within the ambit of international legal constraints (Bush, cited in Goh, 2010: 81).

### 3. THE US FOREIGN POLICY AND LEGITIMACY

The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001 could be explained using two main approaches. These include the socio-political factors that generate the fundamentalist and extremist cause and their allies; and the characters, which provide for grievances and attacks. The scrutiny of US foreign policy after the September 11 underscores the overbearing and negative effects of American projections of power. This, however, affects the foundation of American 'soft' power and its hegemony, precisely after the Cold War (Goh, 2010: 81).

Smith's structural view of American unipolarism affirms two views: that the United States would withdraw from international entanglement after the demise of the Soviet Union, no global cause to structure US foreign policy, nor any

clear reason for the US to continue to stand as a world policeman (Goh, 2010: 81; Smith, 2002: 172), stands as a stabilizing factor. Rather, we need to emphasize the sociological conceptions of threat perceptions and interests as an important role for transformations of identity in the liberal institutional settings (Wendt, 1992: 393). According to Ikenberry (2010: 49), the United States has 'made its power safe for the world', through institutionalized coalition of partners by reinforcing the stability of mutual beneficial relations. While Haass (cited in Goh, 2010: 82) observes that other states cannot oppose unilateral action by the US, and its intervention globally seems much costly if opposed, by, other states and allies. On this note, wielding 'soft' power is a more effective option in American foreign policy.

Against this background, the attacks of the 9/11 were to some extent based on the retaliation against the United States use of threats, strikes and force in Iraq (1991), Somalia (1993), in Bosnia (1994), Haiti (1994), and the superficial view of its unparalleled military might (Benvenisti, 2005: 4). Johnson (cited in Goh, 2010: 82) also stresses a 'blowback' that refers to the unintended results of secret American interventions as a retaliatory response by terrorist groups or rogue states against prior US action. In 1997, American Defence Department confirms the relationship between an American foreign policy and terrorism against the United States:

*"As part of its global power position, the United States is called upon frequently to respond to international crisis and employ forces around the world. America's position in the world invites attacks simply because of its presence. Historical data shows a strong correlation between US involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States" (U.S. Defence Department, quoted from Eland, 1998: 2).*

From the above, the US commitments and radicalism against global terrorism underscores what Peterson (2002: 78) recognizes as animosity against America foreign policy issues by the Middle East. Accordingly, the US foreign policy on security issues is fashioned out toward achieving its interests at the expense of others in the international systems. American foreign policy should be conducted toward embracing social norms of other states. The al-Qaeda views the US policy as antithetical and alien to Islamic doctrines. Analysts from the Western world have been discreet about debunking the connection between US foreign policy and anti-American terrorist activity (Goh, 2010: 83).

More specifically, George Bush provided a context in which American could comprehend and embrace foreign policy goals by changing the global context that had made them possible. In his characteristic manner, he called for a global war against the perpetrators and depicting them as evil, laid the foundation of American consciousness for his militaristic approach against Saddam Hussein's regime. Thus, the US has been noted for maintaining a sweeping national identity and norms with the entire humanity, with its own lofty distinctiveness, as the basis for claiming righteousness to lead the world (McCartney, 2004: 400).

The militaristic approach employed by the Bush administration against Hussein's regime underscores what (Dunne and Schmidt, 2008: 103-104) the leading realist scholars termed the 'apparent convergence between post-September 11 attacks and the circle of violence predicted by the realist theory'. The realist account of the attacks was contradictory. To start with, the attacks on the US territory were perpetrated by a non-state actor, which contradict the norms of the Westphalian order that war occurs between sovereign states. Also, their method of attack was unconventional, nor did the al-Qaeda's intention was to conquer the territory, but to challenge the ideological hegemony and supremacy of the West. Against this background, the leading states in the international systems, especially the US, suddenly characterized the attacks, as the machination of certain territorial states- the Taliban government of Afghanistan, being the most example of a pariah state. Coupled with this, the United States quickly link the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime with its global war on terror, rather than identifying the perpetrators (al-Qaeda) as transnational criminals. The Bush administration and its allies reacted and categorized them as enemies who had to be conquered via conventional military apparatus (Dunne and Schmidt, 2008: 104). Though the neo-realists believe in the basic objectives of states as their ethic responsibility. In the words of Smith (cited in Dunne and Schmidt, 2008: 102), an ethic of responsibility is usually used as a reason d'état for flouting the laws of war, as demonstrated by the US dropping of bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Smith argues that leaders usually find it difficult with realist formulation of an 'ethic responsibility', while conversing leaders to always weigh the consequences of their actions. In case of the Bush decision to launch retaliatory attacks against the Middle East, the consequences of his policy action were never weighed before the war. The consequences of action must embrace basic institutional constraints of appropriate checks and balances and public opinion.

Also, beyond the US national frontiers, US officials have accepted these risks and consequences on the assumptions that the terrorist states with the possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) pose serious threats to US security. The Bush regime saw the opportunity to use the intervention in Iraq to bring transformation and modernization of the Middle East, and the acceptance of its values and institutions by the region and people. Thus, the US commitment to embrace such risk venture is unequivocal and is taken by the provoking proclamation that the United States will be prepared to employ force pre-emptively against its enemies (Mastanduno, 2005: 184). In the words of realists, it is fear that drives the Bush administration toward its attacks against Iraq. The term given to this debate is “security dilemma”: many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others (Jervis, 1978: 169). According to Wheeler and Booth (cited in Dunne and Schmidt, 2008: 102), security dilemmas exist when the military might of state engenders an indeterminable improbability in the mind of another states either for “defensive” reasons (to improve its security in an uncertain way), or “offensive” reasons (to change the prevailing status quo to its own benefits). The Iraq invasion by the Bush regime was based on defensive purposes and security threats posed by the terrorist groups, while the threats and the attacks posed by the al-Qaeda networks were calibrated against the US on offensive purposes. This is to change the existing status quo and the hegemonic global dominance of the US.

Moreover, the US foreign policy during the Bush Administration and its attacks against Iraq were not benign. The Bush administration tried to mobilize international supports from its allies, through the United Nations for a war on Iraq, which reflects that the US has to avoid excessive unilateralism and interventionism for political diplomatic purposes. In effects, this is based on the perception of shared and common interests, norms and values, which certainly involves observation of consultations, recognising international and their norms- generally paying a lip service to the established rules and regulations for its selfish interests (Goh, 2010: 88).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The atrocity of the 9/11 on the American soil has been a text-book of historical facts that can never be over emphasized in human history. It once again reminds us of the critical implications of unilateralism and hegemony in the era of globalization. It is also to remind us of the impacts of terrorist groups or al-Qaeda as a powerful trans-national actor in opposing Western ideology. The end of the Cold War marked a significant shift and change from bi-polarism to unipolarism. The change which had led to the reshaping and redirection of states’ foreign policies (Mastanduno, 2005: 177). After the 9/11, American hegemony, preponderant nature of power and its unprecedented constraints have been called into question. In essence, the United States was embroiled in an intra-Muslim ideological war as a result of the perceived hypocrisy, while propping up and nursing aggressive regimes (Goh, 2010: 78, 81; Doran, 2002: 23).

Ideally, US as a liberal democratic state, has not lived up to the expectations of maintaining international norms. Its unilateral use of force throws up the US into critical examination as a leading apostle of democratic principles in the international systems. Its committed and self-professed war against global terrorism needs to be embraced and recognized by others, as legitimate. The 9/11 attacks on the American soil calls for a critical review and re-evaluation of its foreign policy and power politics that portrays it as a domineering state, by the al-Qaeda or terrorist groups across the world, especially the Middle East.

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