

Counterterrorism in the United States: From a Confident Approach to a Militarized Debacle



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Abstract

After the 9/11 attacks, the United States embarked on a global war on terrorism, which was a campaign that was supposed to help in the fight against terrorist organizations worldwide and prevent further terrorist attacks from happening. The adoption of such a military strategy soon resulted in open wars, most notably in Afghanistan and Iraq. The so-called War on Terror launched by the US in the wake of 9/11 reverberated deeply and for a long time both on U.S. policy and political debate. This paper examines the implementation of the War on Terror practices and it assesses the consequences, such as the militarization of counterterrorism, by taking into account its long-lasting legacies and questioning whether or not it has been a successful approach.

Keywords: *Counterterrorism, United States, War on Terror, Terrorism*

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Introduction

On Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001, the world was shocked when the perfect blue sky in Manhattan started to turn black. Two planes flew into the Twin Towers, one into the Pentagon, and a fourth crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. Altogether, almost 3,000 people were killed and another 6,000 were left injured (Sawe). During the attacks, the extent of the disaster was not yet known, nor was the immense impact this day would have on the United States and the world in the years to follow. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 stood at the start of a new global strategy of the United States, characterized by what President Bush defined as a Global War on Terror. This War on Terror was meant as a worldwide campaign against terrorism; however, many states around the world used this as an excuse to pursue their long-standing policy and military objectives, reduce civil liberties in their country, and violate human rights (Jackson et al. 255). Under the guise of counterterrorism, thus, lots of actions and ideas were being accepted, even though this meant that human rights were being violated. By calling it a war and by starting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, America's counterterrorism had many side effects and unintended consequences. First, it radicalized a large part of the Islamic world, which interpreted the U.S. approach as a war against Muslims, increasing the phenomenon of anti-Americanism (Pew Research Center). Secondly, war-like counterterrorism did not give the U.S. the tools to pursue terrorist actions exclusively as a matter of law and order; in other words, the militarization of it concentrated resources on military apparatuses and damaged the reputation and ability to operate of other civilian agencies, which had traditionally been crucial in fighting against terrorism, understanding its socio-economic causes, and preventing its direst consequences. Lastly, a military version of counterterrorism became a major part of U.S. identity. The question, therefore, arises why militarized counterterrorism in the United States became so ingrained in U.S. policies, what consequences did it have, and which goals did it achieve?

In this thesis, I argue that the immediate and hard reaction of the Bush administration to the 9/11-attacks eventually led to an actual increase of terrorism, leading to the failure of the U.S.' counterterrorism strategy. This failure can largely be explained by the fact that the fight against terrorism became a militarized Global War on Terror, meaning that the socio-political phenomenon of terrorism was fought with almost exclusively military means.

I will divide this thesis into three chapters, all of which contribute to the understanding of the U.S.' use of counterterrorism. The first chapter touches upon the definition of terrorism and counterterrorism, as these are still much disputed terms but important to know in order to fully understand how counterterrorism works. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the history of terrorism, mostly in the United States, from the 1960s until 2001, where I discuss the change from mostly political motivated terrorism to religious motivated terrorism. During the 1960s and 1970s, radical left-wing and right-wing groups around the world expressed their political dissatisfaction through terrorist activities, with left-wing groups seeking to start anti-capitalist revolts. During the 1980s and 1990s, terrorist groups driven by religious, anti-American, or anti-Western motifs started to rise, resulting in attacks such as the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in 1993. Several terrorist attacks during this time period will be discussed in this chapter, as well as the groups performing them, the reasoning behind them, and the way in which the U.S. responded to these attacks.

In chapter two, I will start with explaining how the Global War on Terror was created, the start of an internationally acknowledged counterterrorism campaign. In this chapter I argue that the war on terror was a multidimensional counterterrorism campaign that impacted all world regions, with the military dimension being the most visible and controversial dimension. As part of the war on terror, two major conflicts emerged in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the goal of targeting al-Qaeda and remnants of the Taliban, and ending Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. I furthermore discuss the intelligence dimension, diplomatic

dimension, and the domestic, legal dimension. All these dimensions add to the understanding of the military connotation of the war on terror, and thus also to the influence this strategy has had and why this counterterrorism approach failed.

The third and final chapter will explain how the four American presidents who have inhabited the White House since 9/11 handled the War on Terror and the changes they made to the counterterrorism strategy. I will first discuss George W. Bush and his approach, which was full of hard power and was the cause of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Next, I argue that President Obama seemed to have a whole different strategy, which eventually ended up being more similar to President Bush's approach than initially thought. President Trump's hard approach will be discussed as well, and lastly President Biden's presidency will also be addressed. Analyzing the approaches of the different presidents clearly shows how it is difficult to find the right balance between using hard and soft power, as the dilemma of choosing between using aggressive military forces or focusing more on the prevention of terrorism is complicated. Both approaches have their own advantages and disadvantages. In the end, this chapter also explains in more depth why the U.S.' counterterrorism strategy has failed, which is mainly because of the war the United States made of it.

Throughout this thesis, I will utilize a wide range of literature written by various scholars and experts in this field, as well as U.S. Government documents, and historical revolutions of terrorism in order to get a comprehensive overview of counterterrorism as well as a clear image of the consequences this strategy has had. By critically approaching these works of literature and analyzing them thoroughly, I will answer the questions of what the impact of counterterrorism has been on the United States and many other countries, and also why this strategy has failed. By answering these questions, I will add to the general understanding of the consequences of choosing a counterterrorism strategy, the different dimensions that are part of the strategy, and the difficulty of choosing the right approach.

Chapter 1: From Political Terrorism to a Global War on Terror

1.1 Definition of Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Decades before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, took place, terroristic violence was already a common phenomenon in the world and in the United States. Even though the exact definition of terrorism is hard to define as there is not one globally understood definition for it, terrorism is commonly understood as an act of violence aimed at non-combatants in order to pursue ideological or political aims and to instill fear in a targeted population (Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists* 11). In the United Nations' Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism from 1994, the justification of terrorism is addressed, saying that "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable" (UNGA,A/RES/51/210, 2), followed by the clarification that "whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked" (2), terrorism will never be justified (2). A hallmark of terrorism is violence, which is used in hideous attacks by terrorist groups to create anxiety, fear, and repulsion on a large scale, not only domestically but also internationally (Sandler 257). In order to decrease the possibility of a terrorist attack, it is important to have an effective counterterrorism strategy to reduce any terroristic activities. The word counterterrorism is a slightly less disputed term, as its definition is merely understood as the measures that are being taken with the goal of preventing or combating terrorism and destroying terrorist networks with that same goal in mind ("Counterterrorism"). It incorporates the strategies, techniques, and military tactics used by the military, the government, and the intelligence agencies in order to fight terrorism. Therefore, a counterterrorism strategy can be described as a coherent plan of the different instruments of national power that is used to suppress terrorists and their networks, rendering

them unable to conduct their plans of using violence and causing fear, making them unable of reaching its aims (Stigall et al. 7).

1.2 Terrorism Getting Political

During the 1960s, the word “terrorism” had a different meaning than it has now. During this time, in the U.S. terrorism was thought of as being an act of violence in order to give off a political statement, performed by Americans. Different groups, often radical left- and right-wing groups, formed a danger for the United States and many other countries in the world, expressing their political dissatisfaction through terrorist activities (Chaliand et al. 209). After World War II, many resistance groups around the world became militantly nationalistic, fighting within their own country, and during the 1960s and 1970s, radical left-wing groups and revolutionary groups started to increase (209). These groups were especially seeking to start anti-capitalist revolts, sympathizing with guerrilla movements that were taking place in the so-called third world countries (Burgess). Not only the United States had to deal with these anti-capitalistic terrorist movements. Many other countries had to deal with these revolutionary groups as well, such as Italy with its Italian Red Brigades, Japan with its Japanese Red Army, Germany with its German Red Army Faction, and in the United States it was especially the Weather Underground that was known for its terrorist activities (Chaliand et al. 227). Political terrorism was a serious issue in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, where they experienced a peak of political terrorism with an average of 120 events per year during the mid-1970s (Ross and Gurr 405). This was not only a trend in the U.S., but in a number of other western democracies the amount of political and oppositional terroristic acts rose to its peak at the end of the ‘70s as well (405). This peak in political-motivated terrorism in the 1960s and 1970s was for a large part due to the fact that these were turbulent decades in the United States. The ‘60s were dominated by important events that belonged to the Civil

Rights Movement, but also by the Vietnam War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King (Pearson). These were all events that had strong political connotations, meaning that many people had a strong opinion about it and thus that these events were also clear causes for political dissatisfaction and protests, and the rise of oppositional terrorism (Ross and Gurr 407). The assassinations of public figures such as President John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X were attacks on what they represented and on their political thoughts and had a deep impact on American society. They were in a position where they could change something and have an influence over a larger group of people, meaning that these personal attacks also gave off a strong message to those who thought the same as they did. With all these impactful events happening during these years, citizens had a lot to oppose to, and it was clear that many did not agree with the way that the United States handled the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the unequal treatment of different races. These problems and different ways of thinking within the country resulted in growing aversion to the government and to those who made the disputable decisions, leading the way to ideologically political motivated violence and terrorism. According to Ross and Gurr, attacks on civil rights workers and Black people by members of the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacists peaked in the early 1960s, which were the years that the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing and voter registration campaigns were happening (415). The attacks on these people were thus obvious, as they were fighting for everything the KKK was opposing to. During the second half of the 1960s, these attacks declined due to the active prosecution of the perpetrators by the U.S. Department of Justice. However, at the same time, there was a rise of terrorist attacks by black militants targeted at police and white civilians (415). From 1968 onwards, it was the Vietnam War that was the cause of many attacks. Militants were strongly opposing the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War, resulting in “a rash of bombings and

other attacks'' (415). Many Americans opposed to the Vietnam War on moral grounds, saying that large numbers of civilians in both North and South Vietnam were becoming the main victims of the war, but also the increasing number of American casualties led to opposing movements (Spector). During the 1970s and 1980s, revolutionary, leftist terrorist groups showed their opinions and ideas by the means of attacks. Groups as such were the Black Liberation Army, the Revolutionary Armed Task Force (RATF), the Republic of New Africa (RNA), and the Weather Underground (Seger 1).

The Weather Underground Organization (WUO), also known as the Weathermen, was a descendent of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a group founded in 1959 that predominantly existed of students and peace groups that aimed to influence the politics of the Democratic party (Ross and Gurr 418). After the SDS became radicalized due to the Vietnam War, the SDS was split in various factions, of which the Weathermen, later renamed the Weather Underground was an important one (418). They wanted to become a paramilitary and elite organization, conducting urban guerrilla warfare that was also being used in other countries, in the United States, and with the ultimate goal of creating a revolutionary party to overthrow imperialism in the United States (418). After the group had gone underground and split into several cells spread across the country, they started to bomb targets across the country in 1970, using tactics they had read in books written by revolutionary and Marxist terrorists (Lambert, "Weather Underground"). From 1970 until 1975, they bombed New York City police headquarters, corporate offices, banks, the Pentagon, the National Capitol, and other government buildings, and claimed the credit for nineteen bombings within these five years (Ross and Gurr 418). For some of these bombings, the Weather Underground gave an explanation for the reasons behind the bombing. They declared, for instance, to have bombed the Agency for International Development in the State Department Headquarters in Washington D.C. on January 29, 1975, because of the interference of the United States in the

Vietnam War (The Weather Underground 2). About this, the WUO stated that “the U.S. government continues to wage war against Vietnam and Cambodia”, and thus “we act in solidarity with the people and liberation forces of Vietnam, and in harmony with the millions of US people who are actively struggling to demand that the US get out of Indochina” (2). They switched to peaceful acts of political organizing in 1975. As the Weather Underground disappeared, so did most of the domestic acts of terror. A small East Coast faction of the WUO remained underground and joined forces with several people from the Black Liberation Army in 1979, calling themselves the Revolutionary Armed Task Force (RATF) (Ross and Gurr 420). This group had more support than the Weather Underground did, however, they never visibly carried out a campaign of political violence and were not as known by Americans (420). They went out of business during the first half of the 1980s, due to several arrests of RATF members (420).

1.3 A Change in Motivation: International and Religious Terrorism

During the mid-1980s, leftist, revolutionary terrorist organizations were silenced by the investigations of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), who investigated and arrested many extremists due to the new Smith Guidelines of Attorney General William French Smith that were implemented in 1983 (Smith and Damphousse 8). These new guidelines weakened the restrictions on the FBI, making it easier for them to start a full investigation and allowing all types of police techniques to be used for the investigation, except for mail opening, wiretapping, and photocopying the outside of envelopes (“EPIC – The Attorney General’s Guidelines”). Even though it seems as if leftist extremism was silenced and made room for right-wing extremism, terrorism from the left remained a concern in the United States (Seeger 3). During the 1980s, seventy-five percent of the acts that were officially declared as acts of political, domestic terrorism were perpetrated by left-wing groups (3). Although left-wing

extremism remained dangerous, it is true that right-wing extremism seemed to increase during the 1980s and 1990s.

This increase happened simultaneously with the development of terrorism driven by another ideology, namely terrorism conducted by internationally located groups that were driven by religious, anti-America, or anti-Western motifs. These terrorist groups were mostly against the interference of the United States with international politics and the growing role the U.S. was playing in the world. The best-known instances of terrorism in the United States, before the attacks of 9/11, all happened in the 1990s and forced the United States to confront terrorism and actively respond to it. When talking about terrorism in the 1990s, it mostly is the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and the bombing at the Olympic Games of 1996 in Atlanta that people are talking about (Smith and Damphousse 1). The Murrah Federal Building bombing in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, is a well-known terrorist attack by right-wing terrorists. At first, it was suspected that Middle Eastern terrorists were responsible for the attack, however, the focus quickly centered on Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, two former U.S. Army soldiers who were associated with the extreme right-wing and were part of the militant Patriot movement (Jenkins, "Oklahoma City Bombing"). They manufactured a massive bomb existing of fuel oil and two tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, which killed a total of 168 people and injured more than 500 ("Oklahoma City Bombing"). This attack remained to be the deadliest terrorist attack in the United States until the September 11 attacks. McVeigh and Nichols were suspected of being connected to the Patriot movement, a right-wing group that "feared authoritarian plots by the U.S. federal government and corporate elites" ("Oklahoma City Bombing"). Out of this movement, armed militia groups were formed who justified their existence and actions by claiming that they had the right of armed self-defense against a, what they argued, oppressive government

(“Oklahoma City Bombing”). Following the attack, the militia movements and other armed extremist groups were intensively investigated and observed by law enforcement officials, and due to public revulsion and strong actions by the government, the influence and size of the militia movements eventually decreased (Jenkins, “Militia Movement”).

During the 1980s, and especially during the 1990s, the United States came to realize that it is not only confronting dangers based on domestic, political reasons, acted out by Americans, but also serious challenges from international-based terrorists. The United States’ role in the world changed and they became more involved in international politics, which automatically led to being an easy target by those who detested that interference (Savun and Philips 879). As a response to these increasing international threats, the counterterrorism responsibilities of the FBI were expanded in 1984 and 1986, permitting the FBI to apply federal jurisdiction when a U.S. national is taken hostage, attacked, or murdered by terrorists in another country or when the interests of the United States are attacked (Watson). When in 1993 a bomb went off in a parking garage under the World Trade Center in New York City, the FBI began to focus their investigations more on Sunni extremism and the radical international jihad movement that was emerging (Watson). The bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 was, until then, the deadliest act of terrorism committed by a non-American that had taken place on U.S. soil, as it killed six people and injured more than thousand. Whereas the United States used to be challenged and attacked outside its own borders, this came to an end on that day. The plan that main conspirators Ahmad Ajaj and Ramzi Yousef were aiming for, was to make the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapse, hoping to kill thousands of people in and surrounding the towers (Lambert, “World Trade Center”). According to Jessica Stern, a former member of the staff of the National Security Council, some 50,000 people would have been killed if the perpetrators had not made a minor mistake in the placement of their bomb, which would have made this attack maybe even worse than

the attack of 9/11 (Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists* 76). Ramzi Yousef later explained that he committed this act of terror to “avenge the sufferings Palestinian people had endured at the hands of U.S.-aided Israel” (CNN Editorial Research, “1993 WTC Bombing”). Yousef had also planned to bomb several U.S. airplanes in the Far East, aiming to kill as many Americans as possible (Pillar 34). This anti-Americanism, but also the American support of Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, became an important reason for Islamic countries and terrorist organizations in the Middle East to hate and attack the United States and to blame them for the suffering of the Palestinian people.

1.4 A Globalizing World and the Globalization of Terrorism

The reasoning behind the proliferation of terrorism, both political and religious, and then especially terrorism aimed at the United States from the other side of the world, can be found in the rise of globalization and the increase in influence that the United States started to have on the rest of the world. During the 1980s and 1990s, people from all over the world, including terrorists, had the ability to travel and communicate through satellite phones and the upcoming internet. The news became available to more people and more countries, which spread the news of American presence overseas and spread the idea of what was often seen as “American cultural and economic intrusion” (Pillar 36). The role that the United States had in the world was changing, which led to them being more powerful and influencing more people and states around the world. As the United States was, and still is, the premier power in the Western world, they were an exposed and attractive target for terrorist activities aimed at the Western, non-Islamic world (36). The great influence of the Western society on the rest of the world, on cultural and economic aspect, with the United States as its leader, makes it a vulnerable and tempting target for terrorist activities and thus makes it even more important to have a working and effective counterterrorism strategy (Pillar 37). As the United States and

its officials came to realize that the dangers of international, ideological, and religious terrorism were increasing and becoming more realistic, which called for strict counterterrorism measures, they did not realize that a stunning attack as that of September 11, 2001, would shake their country and world in the near future.

Chapter 2: Fighting Global Terrorism through Global War

2.1 War on Terror

The attacks on September 11, 2001, were the deadliest terrorist attacks in history, as they killed approximately 2,996 people and injured more than 6,000 (Sawe). On this day, Islamist insurgents hijacked four commercial airplanes before crashing them into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. A fourth hijacked airplane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania without reaching its intended target, but still killing all its passengers. Even though this event was shocking and may have changed the United States and even the world, the attacks did not fully come out of the blue. In the years before 9/11, the United States had dealt with multiple attacks performed by Islamist insurgencies, which makes it possible to say that 9/11 was already long in the making (Holloway 2). As aforementioned in the previous chapter, terrorism got a religious dimension during the 1980s and 1990s, of which 9/11 was the tip of the iceberg and the start of the Global War on Terror.

The term “War on Terror” is globally used to describe the campaign launched to fight terrorism after the attacks of 11 September 2001 had taken place (Jackson et al. 249). On that day, George W. Bush announced the start of the Global War on Terror, which became a global counterterrorism campaign that “represents the beginning of a new phase in global political relations and has important consequences for security, human rights, international law, cooperation and governance” (Jackson et al. 249). This became the most extensive and expensive global conflict since the Cold War, and the global impact of this war has been profound, with both intended and non-intended changes (Jackson et al. 250).

2.2 War-Making

The war on terror was a multidimensional counterterrorism campaign. It has impacted all world regions and can be looked upon from different dimensions. In their book, *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction*, Jackson et al. have managed to explain the war on terrorism seen from these different dimensions, including military, intelligence, diplomatic, legal, and domestic dimensions.

The most visible and controversial aspect of the global fight against terrorism is its military dimension, which makes it possible to define it as a true war. Whereas police forces were used to fight terrorism during the previous decades, the War on Terror was made mostly through the deployment of the military. So, instead of investigating the matter and the network behind the attacks, the U.S. decided to use hard, militarized power. Two major conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan emerged from the war on terrorism, alongside many smaller but also serious military operations in states such as Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and the Philippines (250). A U.S.-led military campaign was launched in October of 2001, titled Operation Enduring Freedom. This operation is affiliated with counterterrorism operations in other countries, however, it primarily refers to the war in Afghanistan that emerged out of the war on terrorism. Operation Enduring Freedom mostly targeted al-Qaeda and remnants of the Taliban, aimed at the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan by both these groups (CNN Editorial Research, "Operation Enduring Freedom Fast Facts"). Over sixty states joined this operation, including states such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Pakistan, France, and Russia (Jackson et al. 251). By November, they succeeded in collapsing the Taliban regime and in driving out al-Qaeda, however, this military dimension took a more controversially disputed turn when Iraq was invaded in 2003. The war on terrorism was initially focused on Afghanistan, but when U.S. military bases in neighboring countries were established and the confidence in Afghanistan's transition to a pro-western state increased, Operation Iraqi

Freedom was launched to end Saddam Hussein's regime (252). Although Iraq was not involved in the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration had advocated an attack on Iraq before 9/11, and thus saw this as an opportunity to mobilize support for a war against Iraq (Hinnebusch 220). They saw this war as crucial in transforming the Middle East, and at the same time the Muslim world, in a way that suited U.S. interests. In February 2003, a month before the U.S. invaded Iraq, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell gave a speech to the United Nations in which he legitimized the war on Iraq by claiming that "the facts and Iraq's behavior show that Saddam Hussein and his regime are concealing their efforts to produce more weapons of mass destruction" (Powell). The speech was set out to explain Iraq's weapons program in detail, however, the intelligence later confirmed that this program was non-existent, and Powell himself called this speech a "blot" on his record (Breslow). The Bush administration furthermore claimed that Hussein had connections with al-Qaeda and that the combination of having Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and connections to al-Qaeda meant that Iraq formed an imminent threat to the United States. More than forty states contributed to this operation, despite the continuing international concerns about the legality of this war (Hinnebusch 220). Research conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2006 found that the citizens of countries such as Great Britain, France, and Spain, all allies of the U.S., saw the presence of the U.S. in Iraq as a danger to regional stability as well as to world peace. As America's motivation behind starting the war in Iraq was to create more stability, it seems as if this idea was working counter-productive. Instead of seeing them as allies, the position of the U.S. started to change, and anti-Americanism around the world increased (Pew Research Center). Just three weeks after the start of the war, Hussein's regime collapsed, making room for looting, violent resistance, and organized crime that made use of the collapsed security infrastructure in Iraq (Jackson et al. 252). As a result of the collapsed regime and security infrastructure, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was established, which was mostly

occupied with trying to manage the problems of looting and violence (252). In the months and years following, organized resistance forces emerged in Iraq, and the Taliban regrouped in Afghanistan, causing the CPA troops to now fight against a serious insurgency of more than 100,000 troops of rebellions (252). According to Jackson et al., thousands of Coalition troops and many hundreds of thousands of Afghans and Iraqi civilians have been killed in the ongoing violence that started in 2001 (252). Instead of investigating the socio-political roots of the problem, the U.S. decided to militarize their counterterrorism strategy.

A second, crucial dimension to understand the military connotation of the War on Terror is the role that intelligence played in it. On domestic intelligence level, the US has reorganized its intelligence services and increased the funding of these national services as part of their counterterrorism plan. A part of this dimension is also the establishment of new intelligence programs, with an example being the controversial Operation TIPS program (Jackson et al. 253). This program encouraged civilians to report any suspicious behavior to the authorities, aiming at recognizing and stopping alleged terrorists on time. At a more international level, a program that was set up as part of the U.S.' counterterrorism strategy, was the extraordinary rendition program, also called irregular rendition or forced rendition (Ryan). This program, carried out by government agencies of the U.S., was the practice of "transferring a prisoner to a foreign country for the purposes of detention and interrogation" as this "exempted detainees from the legal safeguards afforded to prisoners under US and international law" (Ryan). Many terrorist suspects that were picked up as part of this program were detained in Camp X-ray at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba or in states that did not always meet the human rights standards, and this was reason for criticizing the program (Ryan). The prisoners were subject to imprisonment without trial and were facing the possibility of torture, all of which is against the international human rights law (Ryan). Throughout the years, many detainees attempted to commit suicide, which was, according to humanitarian and human

rights organizations, due to their living conditions (Howell 30). Where the Bush administration and the U.S. military saw this as prove that the detainees were psychological unstable and “crazed killers — terrorist madmen” (30), the human rights experts saw these detainees as stressed-out victims who were so traumatized by the way they were detained that they saw suicide as their only option (30). Furthermore, another global campaign was launched that belongs to the intelligence dimension. A campaign was set up to track and intercept any financial support going towards terrorists, as this was an important way of income for terrorist organizations (Jackson et al. 254). Many individuals and organizations suspected of being involved with terrorists or terrorist organizations have hence been sanctioned and put on a blacklist by the United Nations.

Another aspect to be highlighted to understand the breadth of the War on Terror is the use of diplomacy. The U.S., indeed, used diplomatic tools to expand first and foremost military alliances and not to seek a resolution to the conflict. In other words, diplomacy was bent to the military mains of the War on Terror. The U.S. launched efforts “to maintain a global coalition of partner states and organizations in this conflict” (Jackson et al. 254). In order to succeed fighting against terrorism, the U.S. deemed it to be necessary to stand strong as allies with other states and form a coalition that can help each other in this war (254). However, states that were not immediate allies were lured into this coalition by bilateral aid programs and by a public diplomacy campaign built to counter the ongoing anti-Americanism in the Middle East (254). Having allies and wanting more allies is a typical feature of a war, proving once again that this War on Terror was really perceived and handled as a war. The U.S.’ counterterrorism policy mostly existed out of hard power, nonetheless, the US revitalized its use of global soft power by trying to counter anti-Americanism through the use of media (254). Even public diplomacy served the purposes of such an ongoing and totalizing war. An undersecretary of state for public diplomacy initiated “a TV and newspaper

advertising campaign to show the Muslim world that Americans shared their most cherished values of faith and family and that Arab-Americans lived in prosperity amid tolerance” (Cull 44). The U.S. established television and radio stations and broadcasted public service announcements, all with the aim of restoring the American reputation on a global level and especially in the Muslim world (Cull 44). It was important to get as many allies as possible to fight terrorism, and therefore more faith in the U.S. was needed and the anti-American sentiment had to go. As mentioned before, this did not work in the way as they had planned. As Cull explains in his research, the problem with this advertising campaign was that it was “answering a question that no one was asking” (44). This campaign was mostly focused on showing the Muslim world that Arab-Americans were living in prosperity and that they were being tolerated, even though the problem was the American policy in the Middle East (44). With its research, Pew Research Center discovered that anti-Americanism was an increasing worldwide phenomenon from 2002 until 2006, even though the U.S. tried to change its image in a positive way during these years. Especially in Muslim countries the phenomenon of anti-Americanism was strong, which was caused by the war in Iraq as many Muslim countries began to fear the U.S. as a threat to Islam (Pew Research Center).

For the final dimension, which is the domestic, legal level, the war on terror changed a lot of things as well. Nearly every state in the world introduced new domestic counterterrorism legislations, making the legal dimension an important aspect of the War on Terror (Jackson et al. 254). The UN Security Council even adopted a new resolution that required every state that is part of the UN to inspect and revise their counterterrorism legislation with the aim of all member states having a legislation that is complied with the internationally agreed on terrorism conventions (255). New and more extensive counterterrorism legislations were adopted by nearly every state in the world and by many international organizations, such as the European Union, the United Nations, the Organization

of the Islamic Conference, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the African Union (255). Even though this was all done with the goal of preventing terrorism, it was cause for concern as well. Human rights advocates were worried about these new legislations, as they did sometimes strengthen law enforcements powers dramatically and were not always in line with human rights (255).

2.3 Institutionalizing the War

Immediately after the attacks of 9/11, much effort was put into shoring up American national security to protect the United States from the threat of international and external terrorism. Over thirty states in the U.S. changed their terrorism laws and took new measures, and new counterterrorism agencies were established (255). At the federal level, more than 130 pieces of legislation related to 9/11 were introduced in the year after the attacks, of which 48 bills and resolutions were approved or signed into the law (Villemez). The PATRIOT Act of October 2001 was one of these newly created pieces of legislation. This act allowed the use of nationwide search warrants, empowered the Secretary of State to label any domestic or foreign group as a terrorist organization without having to review it, increased the surveillance powers that the US government had, and enabled the possibility of deporting any immigrant being accused of raising money for (suspected) terrorist organizations (Jackson et al. 255). Especially at US airports the security changes were immediately visible. Only two months after the attacks had taken place, Congress passed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act which federalized airport security (Villemez). Prior to the passing of that act, every airport handled its own security, however, this was now in the hands of the newly established Transportation Security Administration. New procedures with stricter passenger and luggage screening were implemented, and an array of machines and procedures were added to the security protocols, scanning for destructive items and weapons (Villemez).

Along with the new legislations and acts, new government agencies were created as well.

According to the Bipartisan Policy Center's National Security Preparedness Group, 263 government organizations have been either created or redesigned following the attacks, of which the Department of Homeland Security is the largest newly founded institution (6).

Overall, many domestic measures have been taken to improve the domestic security and to improve the counterterrorism strategy of the United States.

Chapter 3 – Counterterrorism, Presidents, and Failure

3.1 The Political Foundations for the War on Terror: George W. Bush

Since the attacks on 9/11 took place, four different US presidents have inhabited the White House, meaning that four different presidents have had to deal with the War on Terror. All four had different ways of handling this war and had different thoughts regarding counterterrorism and how to make it a success. The first one is President George W. Bush, who was the President during the 9/11 attacks and who announced all the measures taken that were discussed in the previous chapter. Bush's presidency, which lasted from 2001 until 2009, is mostly recognized for the events surrounding the 9/11 terror attacks, of which the Patriot Act, the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, and the widely discussed wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are the most noted events. Only three days after the attacks, on September 14th, Congress passed "The Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists" (AUMF), a resolution that authorized the president to use all force that seemed necessary and appropriate against those that planned, committed, authorized, or aided the attacks (Eliassen Restad 5). This granted President Bush unlimited powers in fighting the War on Terror. For the Bush administration, concentrating on the executive power was a clear priority, as they believed that, in a time of crisis, "it was vital to give the Chief Executive the power he needed to keep America safe" (Eliassen Restad 6). They did not fear to pursue policies that the international community regarded as contravening to the established international law, even though this meant that human rights were being violated. As previously mentioned, human rights critics argued that this way of accepting everything that was supposedly part of the counterterrorism strategy would negatively affect the basic human rights of many people around the world (Jackson et al 255). Governments of different countries could now take the opportunity to pursue their long-standing military and policy objectives, violate human rights, and reduce civil liberties under the guise of counterterrorism.

They could now defend all their choices and changes by saying that this was part of their counterterrorism strategy, which can then also be used for the wrong reasons. Bush used the fear of more terrorist attacks to legitimize a war on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and because of its presumed possession and manufacturing of weapons of mass destruction the war was popular among Americans. While the Bush administration and many other Republicans saw the war as successful, the popularity of the war decreased during the following years (Gregg). As seen in the previous chapter, the reasons to start the war in Iraq turned out to be unjust because no weapons of mass destruction were found in the country, however, more than 4,000 Americans died in the insurgency over the next eight years, meaning that it may be possible to conclude that thousands have been killed for the wrong reasons (Gregg).

3.2 Changes or Continuity? Obama's Approach

Whereas Bush's counterterrorism approach was perceived as being overly aggressive, President Obama's strategy was sometimes criticized as being too soft, seeming to be "prone to idealism and wishful thinking" (Stern, "Obama and Terrorism"). He chose an approach combining the use of electronic forces, security assistance to intelligence forces and the military in allied countries, and targeted killings often committed by drones (Stern "Obama and Terrorism"). Contrary to Bush's immediate and aggressive way of countering terrorism, Obama believed that it was crucial to find and address the underlying causes of terrorism as well. Even though these plans seemed to be drastically different from Bush's strategy, Obama's counterterrorism program was more similar to Bush's than it initially appeared to be. According to Obama, the United States' way of handling the War on Terror was conflicting with "established domestic and international law" (Eliassen Restad 6). He presented clear policy alternatives, which were especially focused on the issues regarding detainees suspected of being terrorists and the torture of these detainees, declaring that the

United States would no longer practice torture, and that the controversial Guantánamo Bay prison in Cuba would be closed (Eliassen Restad 6). He never succeeded in closing Guantánamo Bay, and although he took a stance against military commissions and detainees being held indefinitely, he signed the National Defense Authorization bill in 2011, making the indefinite detention of terror suspects lawful (Eliassen Restad 7). Regarding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Obama was very clear in his thoughts and actions, namely that the U.S.' military efforts should be focused on Afghanistan rather than on both Afghanistan and Iraq (Wallenfeldt). As the Taliban was resurging in Afghanistan, all focus should be on them, leading to the deployment of an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan and the official ending of Operation Iraqi Freedom (Wallenfeldt). According to Jessica Stern, an academic on terrorism who also served on the National Security Council staff of President Bill Clinton, the removal of all U.S. troops from Iraq, which many saw as too soon, was the reason why the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) had the opportunity to emerge and win terrain in Iraq and Syria (Stern "Obama and Terrorism"). ISIL, also known as ISIS or IS, is a jihadist organization that uses violence and terror and formed, and still is forming, a significant threat to the United States and the rest of the world. The rise of ISIS demonstrated how Bush's counterterrorism policies as well as Obama's choices regarding Iraq failed to win the War on Terror. As Stern discusses, the Obama years perfectly showed the dilemma faced when trying to protect a country from terrorism. Responding to terrorism by the means of military forces and often aggressive, immediate responses, can end up in the favor of terrorists, however, using preventive strategies such as civic engagement and watching certain communities takes time and may take too long ("Obama and Terrorism"). Where his predecessor was known for his quick decision-making, Obama was more willing to look at and listen to alternative viewpoints before making a decision. He would first consider all options before jumping into action (McCracken 783). Even though his way of working was different from that of Bush,

and he seemed more interested in the use of soft power, in the end not much has changed during Obama's presidency regarding the use of war to fight terrorism. The U.S. military and intelligence agencies have continued to use as much deadly force as during the Bush presidency, mostly by means of drone strikes, which was still a controversial form of hard power, and the U.S. detention center in Guantánamo Bay remains open ("Obama and Terrorism"). Terrorism was still not fought from its socio-political roots.

3.3 Trump's Choices

As President Obama aimed at a less violent counterterrorism policy in his campaign, President Donald J. Trump promised the opposite. He promised that, if he would become the president, he would not mind using the U.S. military to kill people, even if they were non-combatants (Hussain). And thus, during his presidency, numbers of civilian casualties in America's foreign conflicts have drastically increased as the result of many attacks justified in the name of the fight against terrorism (Hussain). The Trump administration had a strong preference for the use of hard and forceful military responses in their counterterrorism program, and they were willing to enable more military action by downgrading protection concerns for civilians (Brechenmacher and Feldstein 59). He wanted to defeat ISIS and other terrorist organizations and did not hesitate to use whatever means he deemed necessary to do so. Only seven days after his inauguration, President Trump signed the executive order 'Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States', banning individuals from seven different countries from entering the United States (Milton 87). Regarding the war in Afghanistan, Trump has been changing his mind through his presidency. Where he chose to deploy an additional 4,000 troops to Afghanistan in 2017, he decided to withdraw all but 2,500 troops from the war in 2020 (Golby). After talks with the Taliban in which they guaranteed that they would stop targeting major Afghan cities and U.S. forces,

refrain from allowing any terrorist group to use Afghanistan as a home-base for international attacks, and start peace talks with Afghan president Ashraf Ghani, the Trump administration agreed on the withdrawal of all U.S. and NATO forces by May 2021 (Golby). However, the Taliban did not keep its promises, while the U.S. kept withdrawing its troops. As Jim Golby, former special adviser to Vice Presidents Joe Biden and Mike Pence, argues, “Trump’s willingness to ignore the conditions his own envoy had placed on the Taliban disrespected our allies and partners, who— despite not being attacked on 9/11— stuck by us for 19 years, sacrificing more than 1,000 of their soldiers and billions of dollars from their treasuries” (Golby). President Trump’s approach to counterterrorism was making cooperation more difficult, and making the U.S. appear to be a less reliable ally (Golby).

3.4 Biden’s Challenges

As President Joe Biden’s presidency is only a few months old, not much can be said about his counterterrorism strategy and his way of handling the War on Terror. However, on April 14th, 2021, he announced an important decision about the ongoing war in Afghanistan. In a speech he told Americans, and the rest of the world, that he would withdraw all U.S. troops by September 11, 2021, exactly twenty years after the 9/11 attacks. He justified that choice by saying the following: “I believed that our presence in Afghanistan should be focused on the reason we went in the first place: to ensure Afghanistan would not be used as a base from which to attack our homeland again. We did that. We accomplished that objective” (Biden). He furthermore explains how they, after delivering justice to Bin Laden in 2011, stayed in Afghanistan for another decade, even though their reasons became more and more unclear, and the terrorist threat had dispersed across the globe instead of mainly in Afghanistan. Because of that, “keeping thousands of troops grounded and concentrated in just one country at a cost of billions each year makes little sense to me and to our leaders” (Biden). He

explains that he consulted closely with allies and partners, as well as with military leaders, intelligence personnel, and Afghan President Ghani, and that “we went to war with clear goals. We achieved those objectives. Bin Laden is dead, and Al-Qaeda is degraded in Iraq—in Afghanistan. And it is now time to end the forever war” (Biden). The consequences of this full withdrawal are unclear, but time will tell if Biden has made the right choice.

3.5 Presidential Legacies

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, finding the right balance between hard and soft power is difficult with the issue of counterterrorism. The dilemma of choosing between the use of aggressive military force or focusing more on prevention is a complicated one, as both ways have their advantages and disadvantages. However, as the U.S. has mostly made use of hard, military power in their counterterrorism strategies after 9/11, scholars have conducted research on how this forceful way of countering terrorism has worked, and especially on the reasons why and the ways how this strategy has failed. In the years following the 9/11 attacks, the Oxford Research Group published several analyses in which they took a critical stance on the War on Terror. In these analyses, they argued that the way the U.S. used their strong military as a response to the attacks was both dangerous and maybe even disproportionate and working the other way around (Rogers 3). As seen in chapter one, terrorism is a phenomenon from all time, however, fighting it with the extensive global use of wars was something new. Their forceful response was certainly not a way to promote global stability and peace, even though that was one of their main goals, and it could also even turn out to be extremely counterproductive to U.S. security interests. As Rogers argues, such a hard and direct response was understandable, considering the horrific nature of the 9/11 attacks and the number of people affected by it, however, this does not mean that this way of responding and this counterterrorism strategy was the right way to successfully fight terrorism (3).

A couple of months after the 9/11 attacks, in January 2002, President Bush spoke about the success of the War on Terror in his State of the Union Address, and he told the American citizens how the war would proceed. By this time, al-Qaeda had been dispersed and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan had been terminated, and Bush stated that the nation “rallied a great coalition, captured, arrested and rid the world of thousands of terrorists, destroyed Afghanistan’s terrorist camps” (Bush), all being reason enough to believe that the war on terror was progressing in favor of the U.S., and that this was a victory. As previous speeches were mainly focused on al-Qaeda, this speech made clear that the emphasis was no longer on al-Qaeda, but that the so-called rogue states, states that are considered as a threat to world peace, mainly Iran, North Korea, and Iraq, would from now on become more important in the fight against terrorism. About these rogue states Bush said:

“States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred” (Bush).

In his briefing paper, Rogers explains the outcomes of the War on Terror eight years after its start. He states that almost all analysts agree that the outcomes of the War on Terror have been totally different than what the Bush administration initially anticipated on (Rogers 8). Instead of creating a peaceful, pro-western Afghanistan, a violent and deadly war had been going on for many years, involving a still increasing number of NATO troops, and Afghanistan’s neighboring country Pakistan was now also experiencing an evolving crisis of insecurity (8). Even though many terrorists had been killed and al-Qaeda was actively, and supposedly successfully, fought against, Afghanistan had not become more stable, and al-Qaeda had not been defeated. As Rogers explains, “the very act of going to war elevated the al-Qaeda movement to the status of a global threat worthy of a formidable military response

by the world's sole superpower'' (8). The main difference with the normal way of seeking justice for suspects of criminal activity, is that the U.S. decided to use military force rather than using traditional law enforcement and bringing the suspects to court (Thrall and Goepner 3). This time, no police investigation or trial was set up, but instead a war full of military force and, what seems, sudden actions, was started. Instead of finding the roots of the problem and trying to solve this, the goal was to act assertive and to pre-emptively strike to destroy terrorist organizations, kill terrorists, and to destroy their ability to ever conduct terrorist operations again (3). The danger and downside of this military strategy was that, instead of recognizing al-Qaeda as a movement that arose from a radical part of the Islam and fighting it with legal means, a war was started that could easily be interpreted as an assault on the Islam, giving al-Qaeda the opportunity to claim themselves as being the defender of Islam and thus raising sympathy and creating anti-Americanism at the same time (Rogers 8). Anti-American sentiments also increased as a result of the Iraq war, which was also perceived as a threat to the Islam by many. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center from 2000 until 2006 shows how America's image in the world changed through the years, and also why. They found that since the start of the Iraq war, many people in Muslim countries began to view the U.S. as a threat to Islam, and that in the five majority Muslim countries surveyed, which are Indonesia, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Pakistan, solid majorities of the surveyed citizens said that they are worried that the U.S. would become a military threat to their own country (Pew Research Center). All of this was mainly caused by America's way of handling the war and their usage of hard power (Pew Research Center). Instead of focusing on why people become terrorists and on the choices they made regarding the attacks and the places of the attacks, which is necessary for further prevention, the whole strategy was focused on fighting and defeating them. The estimated cost of the War on Terror is put around one trillion US dollars, however, only a tiny fraction of that money has gone towards prevention strategies, such as

steering people away from extremism (Gardner).

Another decision of the U.S. that seems to have been fatal for America's counterterrorism strategy, is President Bush's choice of extending the war from Afghanistan to Iraq. Not only because of the aforementioned idea that this war in Iraq was interpreted as a war against Islam, but also because this shift in focus resulted in not paying enough attention to further developments in Afghanistan (Rogers 8). The war in Afghanistan has led to the proliferation of new terrorist groups in multiple different places in the world, many of which claiming to have ideological links to al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement (Jackson et al. 260). During the war in Afghanistan, terrorists fled to neighboring countries, starting new, al-Qaeda affiliated, groups in countries such as Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen by 2010 (260). Instead of only being located in the known places in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda now had the opportunity to elevate its global status and importance and to depict themselves as one "meaningful challenger to U.S. and Western global hegemony" (Jackson et al. 260). By scattering and decentralizing al-Qaeda, it became harder to counteract them as a whole. When the attention was more centered on Iraq, the different al-Qaeda affiliated groups and Taliban militias were growing and starting a new insurgency in Afghanistan (Rogers 8). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the same happened when President Obama decided to withdraw all American troops out of Iraq. Due to this withdrawal, a power vacuum emerged which gave ISIS the opportunity to win terrain in Iraq and to start their global terrorist activities from there. In the end, it seems that, instead of reducing the risk of terrorism around the world, the War on Terror and the way the different presidents used this campaign caused an increase, with the global counterterrorism campaign promoting the behavior that it seeks to prevent and becoming terrorism's best ally (Zulaika 52). The legacy of the preceding three Presidents is that the American way of using hard power to fight terrorism is now deeply rooted in the American political debate, making it hard to turn this approach around.

Conclusion

The War on Terror has played an important role in world politics during the last ten years, but it has especially played an important part in the domestic politics in the U.S. and in particular for what concerns strategies and policies. Before the attacks of 9/11 took place, the phenomenon of terrorism was mostly socio-political. Political extremists were being treated as domestic threats and criminal actors, thus investigated and arrested. When the power and influence the U.S. had in the world started to increase, terrorist groups driven by anti-Americanism mixed with religious ideals, started representing a new challenge to the United States.

After President George W. Bush officially declared the opening of a Global War on Terror, numerous states around the world, including the U.S. itself, took measures in order to fight terrorism domestically through measures that went beyond classical paradigms of law and order. This resulted in a series of new laws and policies, and in the launch of the Patriot Act and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. Around the world, many states used this as an opportunity to act out long-standing policy and military objectives, and reduced civil liberties in their country, often resulting in human rights being violated. The controversial Operation TIPS program is an example of a measure taken by the U.S. that was violating human rights according to human rights critics, as it meant that prisoners were being transferred to a foreign country to interrogate and detain them there. This exempted these detainees from having any trial, and they were facing the possibility of torture. All these new measures taken against terrorism resulted in changes in multiple dimensions, with the military dimension being the most prominent and disputed one. The war on terror had therefore an important military connotation. The U.S. decided to make a war out the fight against terrorism, which led to the war in Afghanistan and the controversial war in Iraq. They chose

to fight terrorism with hard power and approached the socio-political problem of terrorism with almost solely military means.

In my research I wanted to analyze what consequences such a militarization of counterterrorism has had on the United States, and how successful this strategy has been during the last couple of decades. Living in a world where terrorist attacks still take place, with for example the attacks in Paris in 2015, Sri Lanka in 2019, and Utrecht in 2019, it is clear that counterterrorism has failed and has not prevented all terrorist attacks from happening. After researching this, I found out that this is because terrorism has socio-political roots, meaning that reasons behind terrorist attacks go deeper than saying that it is caused by religion, which is the message that the U.S. seems to have given of since 9/11. The reason behind many terrorist attacks in the U.S. had something to do with the power that the U.S. had in the world and the Americanization of other regions, and therefore, America's strategy of even showing more of this power was working counter-productive. As seen in the previous chapters, the U.S. used hard power and was mostly directly targeting terrorists and their resources, however, in order to solve the problem of terrorism, its root causes should be understood and dealt with at first. This militarized, hard way of using counterterrorism is now fostering new terrorism, mostly acted out by those who are opposed to the use of military means by the United States – and in turn it generates military reactions too, as exemplified by the case of ISIS. President Bush, President Obama, and President Trump all used different forms of hard, militarized power to fight terrorism, and not all the consequences of this approach were positive as it did also result in many deaths among combatants as well as non-combatants. President Biden and presidents in the future will have to make the difficult decision between using hard and soft power, however, as the militarized, hard way of using counterterrorism is now ingrained in the political debate, it will be hard to fully change this approach. Fighting violence with violence seems to have caused a vicious circle out of which

it is hard to escape. Because the U.S.' response to the 9/11 attacks was reminiscent of a retaliatory action, the terrorists responded in the same retaliatory way, which ultimately resulted in a failing counterterrorism strategy. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said: "Missiles may kill terrorists, but I am convinced that good governance will kill terrorism".

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