

Policy of Preemption or the Bush Doctrine

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Abstract

The paper explains the principles of the Bush Doctrine and the policy of preemption that was essentially the response of the Bush administration to the attacks of 9/11. The paper looks at the arguments of supporters of the Bush doctrine but then explores the position of opponents as well. The paper discusses the rise of anti-Americanism, the contentions that Bush disregards the will and needs of the states he has invaded, the fact that democratization is not working and the lack of evidence about weapons of mass destruction at the start of the second Iraq war.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 were a defining moment in both American foreign policy and the lives of millions of people. The lives that were claimed by the attacks have left thousands and thousands of family members and an entire nation grieving. The attacks that were immediately condemned throughout the world were regarded as the beginning of the war on terrorism in the United States where President George W. Bush announced America was ready to fight back. The “Bush doctrine” as American foreign policy has been called, is essentially the response of the Bush administration to the attacks of 9/11. Initially, it was used to describe the invasion of Afghanistan, but was later broadened as to encompass the famous “policy of preemption” which was claimed to operate on various levels. First of all, this strategy of preemption holds that the United States can attack any country and depose any political regime if they pose a security threat on the U.S. The threat does not have to be immediate, and the security threat can be either terrorism or the development of weapons of mass destruction. This also justified the invasion of Iraq. Secondly, the policy of preemption was described by the administration as a strategy supporting democracy all over the world, especially in the Middle East. The third set of principles of the Bush doctrine refers to a diplomacy tending toward “unilateralism” i.e. “a willingness to act without the sanction of international bodies such as the United Nations Security Council or the unanimous approval of its allies” (Kagan: 17).

The Bush doctrine was further developed in the National Security Strategy paper issued by the White House on September 17, 2002. This paper announced “a new legal as well as strategic concept that would represent a fundamental change from the past” (Gardner: 586): “The United States will not use force in all cases to preempt emerging threats, nor should nations use preemption as a pretext for aggression. Yet in an age where the enemies of civilization openly and actively seek the world’s most destructive technologies, the United States cannot remain idle while dangers gather.” (The National Security Strategy of The United States of America 15 Sept. 2002 in Gardner: 586)

Supporters of the Bush doctrine claim that nuclear weapons pose a deterrent threat to the United States, and that “hopes for a stable and democratized Islamic world, for example, may be short-lived if Iraq or Iran were to acquire such a capability. We see already how the tiny North Korean arsenal - and its proclivities to proliferate - could confound America’s position as the guarantor of East Asian security and democracy.” (Donnelly, *The Logic of American Primacy*) Moreover, they argue that American principles, interests, and systemic responsibilities argue strongly in favor of an active and expansive stance of strategic primacy and a continued willingness to employ military force (Ibid) On the other hand, there are increasingly more voices which support the idea that the preemptive war which lies at the heart of the Bush doctrine has long been viewed as “immoral, illicit, and imprudent” (Bacevich: 2007). In addition, the “quick, economical, and decisive victory in Iraq” (Ibid) that the Bush administration had aimed at has failed to occur as the war has produced different consequences such as heightening the anti-American hatred which already existed, and alienating American friends and former supporters of American foreign policy.

The occupation stage of the Iraqi war that the U.S. is now engaged in is extremely costly, with around \$4 billion per month. Aside from the economic point of view, the military occupation of Iraq is counterproductive in the fight against Anti-American terrorists especially because international cooperation is essential in order to annihilate terrorist organizations, and the U.S. has not received much support in their military operation in Iraq. Moreover, the U.S. occupation of Iraq has cost the lives of hundreds of American servicemen and servicewomen and has left a few thousand wounded or disabled. As far as Iraqi loss of life, the numbers are staggering. According to Associated Press, at least 3,240 Iraqi civilians were killed during the combat stage of operations, i.e. between March and May, 2003 (Preble: 6). Thesis: This paper strives to illustrate that the U.S. occupation of Iraq has contributed to a deeper sense of insecurity at home on the part of Americans, and

has not helped reduce the magnitude of worldwide terrorism. On the contrary, it has increased the wave of anti-American hatred. Also, as far as international cooperation, it has left the United States rather unpopular and lonely.

The claim that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction was central to the current administration's decision to wage war against Iraq. By invoking this particular reason, the supporters of the war knew that they were appealing to one of America's greatest fears, i.e. the prospect of anti-American terrorists seizing control of nuclear weapons. As President Bush formulated it, preemptive war was seen as a solution of deterring other nations that might have been in the process of developing nuclear weapons programs: "for diplomacy to be effective, words must be credible, and no one can now doubt the word of America." (George W. Bush, press release January 20, 2004 as quoted in Preble: 26). The administration claimed that the United States' involvement in Iraq determined countries such as Libya, Iran and North Korea to abandon their initial plans to develop weapons of mass destruction. Nonetheless, Iran and North Korea have openly reaffirmed their desire to expand their nuclear programs.

American foreign policy has not been exactly coherent (Gardner: 585). America has offered its support to Israel which clashed with the attempts to work with Arab states. Collaboration with the British impeded better relations with the emerging countries of the Middle East, and also threatened to undermine the security of the region that these very ties were meant to protect (Kuniholm: 433). This incoherence has only deepened in the last few years, and has given rise to a number of suspicions within the international community. The presence of U.S. troops in Iraq does not eliminate the threat of nuclear weapons. In fact, since the allies have not been able to locate any such weapons on the Iraqi territory, American occupation sends troubling signals about American foreign policy and the U.S.'s intentions as far as other nations of the world. These suspicions are directly linked to Iraq's oil resources and have generated the idea that the United States is an imperialistic state. These suspicions have been used by Al Qaeda

and other terrorist organizations in their attempt to recruit new members.

President Bush argued that the war against Saddam Hussein was part of the large scale war on terrorism waged by America after 9/11. Nonetheless, Al Qaeda still maintains terrorist cells throughout the world, even in developed countries. Nevertheless, the center of Al Qaeda has remained in Afghanistan where the Taliban rule has been preferred to open civil war. In fact, the organization has benefited from the situation in Iraq. As with all major terrorist organizations, a poor and humiliated population is an easy prey. Al Qaeda has found support in Iraq where its anti-American propaganda deeply resonated with the Iraqi people. At first, the administration had domestic support for going to Iraq as Saddam's regime was presented as "a threat of unique urgency" (George W. Bush, Project for the New American Century, "Statement on Post-War Iraq" in Preble: 14) which determined Americans to view Iraq as a anti-American dictatorship that possessed weapons of mass destruction, and thus needed to be neutralized (Preble: 15). The link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda has not been proved, and Saddam's involvement in 9/11 has remained solely an element of American administration rhetoric, as President Bush associated Saddam's dictatorship with terrorism: "The battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September 11, 2001." (G.W. Bush, 2003). However, no proof of this association has ever been located. This lack of proof has generated domestic disbelief in the Iraqi war, but more importantly perhaps, it has enhanced the anger and resentment felt by Iraqis towards the U.S. and its citizens. Furthermore, it has worsened America's image throughout the world and has severely discredited the U.S. "war on terror".

The conflict is not between civilizations but within states, within cultures and within an increasingly global community "over the values and ideas that underpin modernizations and the norms and directions of modern civilization" (Kuniholm: 426) The enemy of democratic states is international terrorism, an elusive enemy which cannot be confronted without international cooperation (Kuniholm: 430). Furthermore,

if states support terrorist organizations, and help them propagate and gain new members, international cooperation must be targeted at the states in question so that their support is annihilated. This has been one of the explanations for the American presence in Iraq. However, the presence of American troops has not considerably changed the situation in Iraq where democracy has still not penetrated the collective conscience or the political system. In fact, American involvement in Iraq might actually suppress such political and social development. The violence has spread from Sunni to Shiite communities (Preble: 54) and from central Iraq to regions in the south and west (Ibid.).

One of the goals of the Bush doctrine is to spread democracy to the Middle East. In fact, the central claim that supporters of the Iraqi occupation have formulated is that the US troops are contributing to the creation of a stable and democratic Iraq (Preble: 45). Moreover, they have argued that governments in neighboring countries could follow in the path of Iraq and adopt peaceful democratic regimes. This is however easily contradicted by a few historical and social considerations. Ethnic and religious cleavages prevent such a scenario from ever becoming reality. Since its creation, Iraq has been a nation torn between immense social inequalities and religious differences. The lack of education has also worsened the situation of the Iraqi people. In fact, this lack of education combined with extreme poverty account for the appeal of terrorism among common Iraqis. Moreover, Iraq has no experience in liberal and pluralistic government hence America's attempt to create and impose such a regime is likely to fail. It is extremely difficult to craft a regime that will also function when put into practice especially when it is imposed through military intervention. A study conducted in 2003 has shown that only 4 of the 16 military operations through which the United States aimed at changing a government resulted in the establishment of democracy (Pei, Minxin; Kasper, Sara in Preble: 46).

The process of democratization largely depends on historical developments and cannot be reduced to a matter of imposing the right institutions in

Iraq. Democracy is based upon political freedom which can only be acquired by a state when the latter benefits from economic growth, a solid level of education and a coherent national identity (Preble: 49). Given the ethnic turmoil, low rate of education and the high percentage of Iraqi people living below the poverty line, it is obvious that the United States cannot simply change the political life of the country.

The level of hatred for Americans is growing, and the populations of the Middle East are without a doubt, the center of this hatred. Islam is not a nation, but many Muslims express a kind of religious nationalism, and the leaders of radical Islam, including Al-Qaeda seek to establish a theocratic nation or confederation of nations that would encompass a large portion of the Middle East and beyond. Like national movements elsewhere, "Islamists have a yearning for respect, including self-respect, and a desire for honor" (Kagan: 23). Complete withdrawal would be synonymous to a reaffirmation of American's intentions not to suppress the aspirations of the Iraqi people. This could be much more than a mere symbolic gesture, as the populations inhabiting this region of the world would no longer feel as threatened and controlled by America, which in turn, might lead to a decrease in terrorist activities directed at the United States. As far as the domestic response to the occupation of Iraq, it is important to note here that American intervention in Iraq is no longer supported at home where policymakers have been confronted with a severe loss in domestic support for the war (Preble: 58).

In order for these anti-terrorism efforts to be successful, they must draw on an internationally accepted code that not only stipulates the norms of behavior for states in the region, but also the elements of cooperation (Kuniholm: 435). Although there are "reasonable-sounding theories as to why America's position should be eroding" (Kagan: 20) as a result of global opposition to the war and the unpopularity of the current administration, there has been little measurable change in the actual policies of nations, other than their reluctance to assist the United States in Iraq (Ibid). However, American occupation of Iraq has

also created the image of an imperialistic America which has isolated itself from its traditional allies by focusing on reshaping world politics. In this sense, President G.W. Bush has been accused of wanting to establish world order according to his own principles disregarding the will and needs of the states that he has invaded, such as in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq. In turn, this has given rise to an immense wave of anti-Americanism which has deteriorated the image of America worldwide. By withdrawing militarily from Iraq, the message that the United States would be sending would be extremely powerful. Both the Middle East and the rest of the world would be reassured that the intention of America is not to take control of the oil resources as it has been speculated. Furthermore, the American administration must acknowledge the fact that the process of democratization is highly complex, and that democracy cannot be simply carried and implemented from one place to another. American foreign policy must redirect towards real threats such as global terrorism, and must consider embracing a position that will allow America to resume international cooperation which would end its phase of loneliness and unpopularity.

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