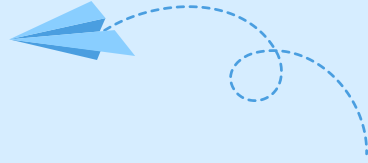# The United States and Its War on Terror

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| Introduction

Due to its reserves of oil and natural gas, the Middle East is of an utmost importance for the United States of America. The US foreign policy in the region dates back to the end of World War II. During the Cold War, US initiatives were mainly aimed at the prevention of the establishment of a Soviet Union influence. In the 1970s, the United States replaced Britain as the main security force in the region that ensured that Western countries had access to the natural resources. In the beginning of the 21 century, the USA began its War on Terror in the Middle East (Yew, 2007). The US War on Terror is a campaign aimed at eliminating the threat of terrorism and preventing its occurrence. According to the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, international terrorism is an activity that involves "violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law," appears "to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping," and occurs "primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S." (FBI, n. d.). The definition underlines that the terrorism threatens both people and governmental regimes.

At the same time, the first US attempts to fight terrorism date back to the

1980s. The administration of Ronald Reagan introduced the first insights on the American view on terrorism, which was defined as a type of warfare that had to be addressed with warfare (Toaldo, 2013). This approach included using pre-emptive strikes against terrorist facilities and eliminating any target that had a relation to violent activities. Moreover, there was a perception that terrorism relied on a network of sponsor states which contributed financially. As a result, the fight against terrorism foresaw the overthrow of the regimes established in those countries (Toaldo, 2013). However, the anti-terrorism concept as well as war on terror, contributed to the creation of the terrorism instead of addressing it. In particular, the US invasion of Iraq introduced favorable conditions for the spread of radical Sunni groups, such as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Besides this, the United States provided support for terrorist and paramilitary organizations, including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Taliban, and al-Qaeda. As a result, the US is not fighting terrorism, but creating it to ensure its presence in the Middle East.

The USA and the Rise of ISIS

Over a short period, the Islamic State has become more than a terrorist organization. The group has developed a sophisticated structure and succeeded in establishing its control over large territories of the Middle East, including regions in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, and Afghanistan (Lamy & Masker, 2016). ISIS has officially declared that it is gradually moving to its main aim, which is the introduction of the caliphate state based on the principles of Islam.

Despite the fact that the United States recognizes ISIS as a threat to international peace and security, US actions in the Middle East have resulted in the rise of the organization. The Islamic State was established in 2013 by the representatives of insurgent groups from Iraq and Syria (Weiss & Hassan, 2016). The Iraqi insurgents began their activities in the region earlier in 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq (Weiss & Hassan, 2016). In particular, the militant group known as al-Qaeda in Iraq introduced a four-stage plan of the Iraq War. The plan included expelling the US forces from the country, establishing the Islamic rule in the region, expanding the conflict to the secular neighbors of Iraq, and declaring a war on Israel (Weiss & Hassan, 2016). Another aim of the organization was to free Sunnis from Western oppression. Additionally, the jihadist fighters started to come to Iraq to oppose the US and its allies in the region (Alexander & Alexander, 2015).

While the United States and its allies contributed to the establishment of a democracy in Iraq and provided the basis for further development, the transformations did not take place in the country. They were limited by the key role of Islam and its influence on the views of the Muslim population. Thus, the US was unable to introduce a democratic regime in the region, which has benefited ISIS and facilitated its development. Indeed, ISIS did not exist till the United States invaded Iraq. The regime of Saddam Hussein was not a democratic one, but the leader was capable of restraining the extremist aspirations of the Islamic groups. With Hussein's removal, the vacuum of power occurred in the country (Hill, 2012). The United States did not manage to introduce a regime capable of

introducing order and security. As a result, the social breakout was a matter of time, and the radical Islamist organizations, such as the Islamic State, began their activities to undermine the US authority in the region. The position of the United States was getting even weaker as it was not able to provide an even basic functioning government or deliver primary social services, such as electricity. When the United States destroyed Hussein's regime, they replaced it with an administration led by Shiite representatives. Sunni areas of the country began to experience discrimination. The unemployment among the Sunnis grew, because many factories closed due to the attempts to introduce free market policies. Moreover, the Sunni upper class was gradually deprived of its assets and political influence. The United States did not manage to ensure religious integration and unity within Iraq (Hill, 2012). As a result, the insurgents increased their activities and attracted members from the other countries of the region.

Under the US rule in Iraq, the intensity of terrorist activities increased. Al-Qaeda opened its branch in Iraq, which has become one of the most violent radical groups and has given rise to the Islamic State. Iraq became a new war zone as occupation forces faced rapidly increasing violence not only from the citizens that opposed the US-led interim government, but from the representatives of the Sunni and Shiite religious factions engaged in sectarian conflicts (Berkin et al., 2014). Violence and terrorism increased dramatically, resulting in American and Iraqi casualties.

Moreover, the USA was responsible for funding and providing material

support for the terrorist organizations in the Middle East. One of the sources of income of ISIS is the revenues from oil sales. According to the reports, the Islamic State receives money from selling oil to about 40 countries, including the members of the G20 (Durden, 2016). The United States has also contributed to the material assistance to ISIS with its War on Terror. When ISIS captured the territories in northern Iraq, it also got access to the arms, munitions, and equipment left by the Iraqi Army, which was funded and trained by the United States. Estimations indicate that since 2003, the USA spent around 25 billion dollars on the Iraqi Army and security forces (Kane, 2014). Some of the US officials, including Hillary Clinton, have already recognized the fact that ISIS uses US weapons to guarantee its control in the region (Clinton, 2014).

Some of the scholars think that the establishment of the Islamic State can even be beneficial to the United States. For instance, ISIS provides the USA with opportunities to invade the region due to the existence of the threat to national security and interests of the country. An important feature of the Middle East is the emergence of oil-producing states, such as Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar (Lust, 2014). The invasion of one of the countries of the region gives USA an opportunity to access the oil reserves and reduce its dependency on the import of natural resources. In addition, the United States can use the threat of ISIS to attack its enemies in the Middle East, as well as to justify its expansionist policies.

At the same time, some of the officials deny any relations between the

United States and the Islamic State. The representatives of the US embassy in Beirut underlined that "any suggestions that the United States ever considered recognizing the Islamic State of Iran and Levant as anything other than a terrorist organization, or had any role in its creating, is patently false" (Kianpour, 2014). However, despite the fact that the United States did not have the intention to create any extremist organization in the Middle East, their actions contributed to the increase of terrorist activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead of creating democratic regimes, the United States destabilized sovereign countries and promoted the spread of terrorist networks. The War on Terror was a justification that allowed the USA to invade oil-rich countries and secure its national interests.

The US policy in Afghanistan and the Taliban

The establishment of the Taliban dates back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. For the United States of America, Afghanistan was the center of strategic interest during the Cold War. As a result, the USA trained and supported factions in Afghanistan, as the country was interested in opposing the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union demonstrated its readiness to establish its control over Central Asia, the United States began to support the Mujahedeen group in Afghanistan, which later evolved into the Taliban. However, the United States not only supported the group materially but also contributed to the establishment of its radical views. In particular, the Reagan Administration, together with

the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, began to recruit and support individuals with extreme views of Islam to fight against the Soviet Union (Segrest, 2002). The United States established one of the biggest CIA operations to "harness the energy of Afghan resistance to the Soviets and expand it into a holy war, an Islamic jihad, which would turn Muslim countries within the Soviet Union against the communist regime" (Segrest, 2002, p. 225). As a result of the operation, the CIA managed to recruit almost 100,000 radical Mujahedeen. Besides, the USA provided the group with assistance equal to about 6 billion dollars (Segrest, 2002). The United States defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan with the help of the Mujahedeen. However, the country then faced a bigger problem, as the US created a powerful terrorist organization.

Since 1989, the United States and the international community did not pay attention to the continuing civil war in Afghanistan. Moreover, the United States tolerated the establishment of the Taliban in 1994. The pro-Taliban US policy can be explained by the national interests of the United States. The US Administration believed that the Taliban could provide security for roads, as well as gas and oil pipelines, which would link the states of Central Asia to the international markets through Pakistan rather than Iran (Saleh, 2009). The Taliban even promised to assist in the reconstruction of oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia to Afghanistan and Pakistan. As a result, the USA could receive access to these natural resources.

However, after the September 11 attacks, US President George W. Bush declared a war on international terrorism stating that "those who make war on the United States have chosen their own destruction" (Rashid, 2002). In 2001, the United States and the International Security Assistance Force launched a campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, the USA and its allies did not manage to eliminate the terrorist group. On the contrary, the actions of the United States caused increased terrorist activity in the region due to the fact that Afghanistan had become the destination country for extremists (Alexander & Alexander, 2015). Similarly to Iraq, the country experienced a vacuum of power, and the Taliban established its influence there.

Conclusion

Thus, the US War on Terror has begun before the September 11 attacks. In the 1970s, the United States supported radical Islamic groups in Afghanistan in order to fight against the Soviet Union. With the beginning of the intervention in Iraq, the US-supported Iraqi Army not only failed to provide security in the country, but also lost all weapons, munitions, and vehicles, which were used by ISIS. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the United States assisted the Taliban and ISIS with necessary funding and material supplies.

Moreover, the US War on Terror has created extremists organizations and motivated them to fight invaders rather than eliminated the threat of terrorism in the world. The USA did not manage to establish a democratic

regime in Iraq. On the contrary, it was not even able to provide the population of the country with the necessary services, such as access to schools, health care, or electricity. While the rule of Saddam Hussein provided stability in Iraq, the US authority failed to build a democratic country and facilitated the extremist tendencies in the region. The country slowly succumbed to the regime of extremist groups.

As a result, the US policies in the Middle Eats have led to increased terrorist activity in the region. The United States contributed to the establishment of favorable conditions for the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and its spread in the world, as well as had a relationship with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.