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Prompt 1: Explanation of Shift in US Foreign Policy Post 9/11

After the events that occurred on September 11th, 2001, the US policy makers were unsure how to retaliate. But they did not know how 9/11 would change their politics for years to come. At that point in time a majority of the policy makers took the neoconservative view on international politics, believing that the threat that the Taliban, Al- Qaeda and other terrorist organizations played were even worse than originally expected. The policy makers, namely the Bush administration, felt that it was necessary to protect the US from any perceived threat, because threats were far worse than what others admit them to be. Also, the US got into a war with Iraq in an attempt to bring peace to a turbulent part of the world. Some of the reasons for the war were to spread democracy around the world and help the US become more secure by removing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) from Iraq. The change in perception and beliefs on how democracy should be spread reveal how policies have changed in the administration since 9/11.

Prior to 9/11, the Bush administration knew that there was a threat to US security by al- Qaeda, according the 9/11 Commission Report. So, the question remains, why did the administration not act rationally and attempt to stop an attack by Osama Bin Laden or any of his organizations? The main reason is that the administration was not 100% sure that there would be an attack. The administration did not perceive threats as more frightening than once believed. Also, prior to 9/11 and post WWII, no country or group had ever attempted to check the United States’ power in an significant way, such as the roughly 3,000 civilian deaths on 9/11/01. Because no attack at that level had occurred, the administration did not believe that rouge attacks could threaten the US. These ideas on the US’s power came together giving the Bush administration a false feeling of security, a belief that they had so much power and that no one could do them harm. That belief and security came about after the breakup of the USSR in 1991.

Post Cold War there was a tremendous boom for the United States, both economically and in terms of power, no other countries could compete with the United Sates. The world turned from bipolar to unipolar, with the United Sates being the top country in charge. With no country to check the US’s power, economic growth occurred, based on trade. Larger amounts of trade between the US and Asia stimulated money for the US giving them even more power. This large amount of wealth and unchecked power made the US feel that no harm could be done to them. Then, 9/11 occurred.

9/11 was the turning point for both the Bush administration and the foreign policy of the United Sates. The change came about from the beliefs of the neoconservatives in positions in power in the government, most notably those in the Bush administration. The Bush administration felt that not only should it punish the evil doers responsible for 9/11, but it also must spread its ideas into the areas of the world. They believed that they needed to spread their ideas that capitalism and democracy are the most important features of successful countries. The administration forced these ideas on the country of Iraq. The US felt that their goals were universal and shared by every country. Therefore they believed that other countries would join in the fight alongside the US in ending the tyranny that ruled Iraq. However they were wrong.

The US had the wrong impression of other countries of the world. America felt because every other country believed these ideas, they would also fight alongside the US for them. This was not the case, because although many nations might have agreed with the US, they did not support them with troops. This shows the changing of viewpoints from pre to post 9/11. Prior to 9/11 the US was basically only dealing with itself, and not meddling in other countries affairs (with a few exceptions). However post 9/11 not only did the US feel it needed to tell other countries how to run their government, they also believed others would be behind them in this respect. This shows how 9/11 changed foreign politics for the US. The Bush administration wanted to take a dictator out of power in Iraq; they believed that they were being humanitarians and helping the people of the world. The best way America felt it could help the people of the world was by spreading democracy.

The US “will support democracy everywhere, but we will commit blood and treasure only in places where there is strategic necessity--meaning, places central to the larger war against the existential enemy, the enemy that poses a global mortal threat to freedom” (Fukuyama 2004, 5) . 9/11 had changed the way the US viewed the world. Prior to 9/11, the US was not willing to “commit blood and treasure” without there being a good reason. The events that occurred on 9/11 changed the US’s focus from simply speak up for democracy and capitalism, to sending troops to needy areas, the needy areas being the places that threatened the US. The US did this to attempt to stop those who could do them harm, namely Iraq. But, there is a problem with this view of how to handle foreign policy.

The idea that not only does America need to be safe, but it also must makes it rivals believe what the US believes was its downfall. The US planned to look for WMD’s so that it could be protected from other sorts of attacks, but “From the outset in Iraq, we[America] have never matched our objectives to our means” (Ross 2007, 35). The US does not have the means to accomplish all we wish to do. America wants to be safe from another terrorist attack, and change our opponents’ views on how to run their country. This changing of opinions is very difficult, and America might not have the means to change peoples’ minds. This idea came from the neoconservatives seeing themselves as humanitarian in nature. They believed that they had to stop a country from acting poorly as well as stop the source of the bad decision-making, namely the government. America promoting the idea that democracies do not fight democracies, would help them, because it gives America more security from other threats. This is known as the Democratic Peace approach, and it is part of the view of neoconservatives. The opposition, on the other hand, views foreign affairs differently.

The following quote explains the difference “While realists believe that we will be safer by seeking to avoid unnecessary broils, neocons believe that we will find more safety using our power to try to fashion a more benign world order” (Walt and Muravchik 2008, 21). The realists believe that the reason the US got into the Iraq war was for security reasons. They feel that security is the most important thing that states yearn for. Giving a state security allows it to grow. They believe that the Iraq war started because the US wanted its security from other countries. Realists thought that by removing the once thought real WMD’s from Iraq and taking down the dictator (while not necessarily setting up democracy) was the basis of the war. This is incorrect however, because, the neoconservatives were answering to a higher humanitarian power of trying to remove an evil ruler who it just turns out could threaten the US.

In conclusion, 9/11 changed the way that the government of the United States runs. It showed the US that it is not a perfect country that cannot be harmed simply because it is at the top of the power structure of world politics. It also revealed an innate humanitarianism in the then current president. It showed that the Bush administration wanted to spread the views of the United States around the world, at the cost of going to war with Iraq as an attempt to get rid of the threat of another attack similar to 9/11.