

From the Post Cold War to the Post 9/11 Era: Did 9/11 Really “Change Everything”?

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The American people are told, again and again, that 9/11 “changed everything.” Is this really true?

The answer is both yes, and no.

Yes, because 9/11 prompted policies of regime change, preemptive strike, and humanitarian intervention, which, in turn, triggered the wars and military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen and Libya. At home, it provided justification for the institution of the Patriot Act, Homeland Security, outsourcing of torture, restriction of personal/civil liberties and the ballooning of the Pentagon budget.

And no, because the militaristic policies and security measures that were thus put into effect in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks had been in the making for nearly a dozen years before the attacks took place.

There is overwhelming evidence that the US policies of preemptive strike and regime change started not with the collapse of the World Trade Center in 2001 but with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Beneficiaries of war dividends, that is, the military-industrial-security complex, were alarmed by the demise of the Soviet Union, by the end of the “communist threat” as the ready-made justifier of continued escalation of the Pentagon budget, and by the demands for “peace dividends.” “What we were afraid of was people who would say . . . ‘Let’s bring all of the troops home, and let’s abandon our position in Europe,’” acknowledged [Paul D. Wolfowitz](#), Undersecretary of Defense under President Bush Sr. “It’s hard to imagine just how uncertain the world looked after the end of the Cold War.”

Not surprisingly, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, and in the face of widespread demands for “peace dividends,” the powerful interests vested in the military-security complex moved swiftly to fend off such demands by successfully inventing all kinds of “new threats to the national interests of the United States.” Instead of the Soviet Union, the “menace of rogue states, global terrorism, and militant Islam” would have to do as new enemies. Having thus effectively substituted “new sources of threat” for the “communist threat” of the Cold War era, powerful beneficiaries of military spending (working through the Pentagon and a number of militaristic think tanks like the Project for the New American Century, Center for Security Policy, Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs and National Institute for Public Policy) managed not only to maintain but, in fact, expand the Pentagon budget beyond the Cold War years.

The 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden, global terrorism, and US military aggressions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere in the Muslim-Arab world can be

better understood against this background: the systemic or internal dynamics of the military-industrial-security complex as an existentially-driven juggernaut to war and militarism that, in the aftermath of the Cold War era, needed all kinds of enemies and boogymen in order to justify its continued usurpation of the lion's share of the public finance, or the US treasury.

Major post-Cold War US military strategies such as regime change were formulated not after the 9/11 attacks, or under President Bush Jr., but under President Bush Sr., that is, soon after the demise of the Soviet Union. The early 1990s Pentagon architects of those strategies included the then Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, Paul D. Wolfowitz, then Undersecretary of Defense, Zalmay Khalilzad, then a Wolfowitz aide, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, then principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Strategy and Colin L. Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Most of what the Pentagon team crafted in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War was published as a government document under Cheney's name as America's "Defense Strategy for the 1990s"—the document also came to be known as Defense Planning Guidance.

Almost all of the Pentagon's post-Cold War aggressive military strategies such as preemptive strike, expansion of NATO, regime change, nation building, or humanitarian intervention can be traced back to the notorious Defense Planning Guidance of the early 1990s. As [James Mann](#) (of the Center for Strategic & International Studies) put it, "What the Pentagon officials had succeeded in doing, within months of the Soviet collapse, was to lay out the intellectual blueprint for a new world dominated—then, now and in the future—by U.S. military power."

Although President Clinton did not officially embrace Cheney's Defense Planning Guidance, he did not disclaim it either. And while he slightly slowed down the growth in the Pentagon budget, he too had his own share of military operations abroad—in Somalia, Iraq, Haiti, and various provinces of the former Yugoslavia. The Federation of American Scientists has recorded a list of US foreign military engagements in the 1990s which shows that in the first decade after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, that is, under Presidents Bush Sr. and Bill Clinton, the United States engaged in 134 such operations. Here is a sample: Operation Eagle Eye (Kosovo), Operation Determined Effort (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Operation Quick Lift (Croatia), Operation Nomad Vigil (Albania), Operation Desert Thunder (Iraq), Operation Seva Verde (Columbia), Operation Constant Vigil (Bolivia), Operation Fundamental Response (Venezuela), Operation Infinite Reach (Sudan/Afghanistan), Operation Safe Border (Peru/Ecuador), Operation United Shield (Somalia), Operation Safe Haven/Safe Passage (Cuba), Operation Sea Signal (Haiti), Operation Safe Harbor (Haiti), Operation Desert Storm (Southwest Asia), and many more.

With the accession of George W. Bush to the presidency, all the Pentagon contributors to the notorious 1992 Defense Planning Guidance also returned to positions of power in the government. Cheney of course became Vice President, Powell became Secretary of State, Wolfowitz moved into the number two position at the Pentagon, as Donald Rumsfeld's deputy, and Lewis "Scooter" Libby, became the Vice President's chief of staff and national security adviser.

Although George W. Bush's administration thus arrived in the White House with plans of "regime change" in the Arab-Muslim world, it could not carry out those plans without a pretext. The 9/11 attacks (regardless of who planned and carried them out) provided the

needed pretext. The evidence thus clearly shows that, contrary to the claims of many critics, including some distinguished figures like Noam Chomsky, 9/11 served more as an excuse, or bogeyman, than a “trap” laid by Osama bin Laden in order to bleed and disgrace the United States by prompting it to wage war and military aggression against the Arab-Muslim world.

The administration wasted no time manipulating the public’s fear of further terrorist attacks to rally support for the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. As the administration was preparing for the invasion of Iraq in early 2003, it also dusted off the Pentagon’s 1992 Defense Planning Guidance and promoted it as the “Bush Doctrine” for the new, post-9/11 world. The post-9/11 version of Defense Planning Guidance retains—indeed, strengthens—all the major elements of the 1992 version, although at times it uses slightly modified terminology.

That the U.S. military response to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and its response to the collapse of the World Trade Center in 2001 were basically the same should not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the dynamics and profit imperatives of the business of war: continued increase of the Pentagon budget and continued expansion of the sales markets for the war industry. The pretexts or tactics for pursuing higher war dividends may change (from the “threat of communism” to the “threat of rogue states, or global terrorism, or militant Islam”) but the objective or strategy remains the same—permanent war and, consequently, continuous escalation of the Pentagon budget and higher profits for the interests vested in military/security capital.

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