American Militarism in the Post 9/11 Era: A New Phenomenon or the Continuation of a Military Tradition?

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Abstract

Was the militarization of American foreign policy and the subsequent invasion of Iraq something new and unique caused by the events of September 11, 2001? Or, is militarism part of old American traditions that were in place well before the events of that day and the administration of George W. Bush? This article examines the campaign to mobilize the American public behind the Iraq War of 2003, and argues that American militarism had taken shape long before the attacks of 9/11. This militarism has deep roots in a culture that is obsessed with the military, associates militarism with morality and evangelical Christian values and finally the American South's 'Culture of Honor,' which is in favor of hawkish approaches to defense and foreign policy issues.

Keywords: American Militarism, US Foreign Policy, Iraq War, War on Terror, 9/11, Military Culture

1. Introduction

Great Civilizations often used military power to expand their empires. Sending an army across the empire's borders was also a way of projecting influence and power. Indeed many civilizations used the art of war to their benefit, resulting in large empires. The kingdom of Alexander the Great reached all the way to the borders of India. The Roman Empire controlled Europe from the Celtic regions of Northern Europe to the Mediterranean shores of southern Europe. The Mongol Empire, which was the largest contiguous empire in history, stretched from Southeast Asia to Europe. The Ottoman Empire, in the sixteenth century, stretched from the Persian Gulf in the east to Hungary in the northwest; and from Egypt in the south to the Caucasus in the north. At the height of its dominion, the British Empire controlled 444 million people living on25 percent of the world's land surface (MacMillan, 2003) (Vance, 2004). Today the United States, while having less than 5 percent of the world's population, has the largest and most technologically powerful economy in the world with a GDP surpassing 16 trillion dollars, which equates to one fifth of the global economy (CIA, 2014).The military spending of the United States exceeds the military spending of all the other nations of the world combined (Berkowitz, 2003). While the recent economic crisis, coupled with the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought the power and influence of the United States to an all time low, the US still remains the world's most powerful nation-state.

On September 11, 2001 the United States mainland was attacked after nearly two hundred years (the last attack on the American mainland was by the British in the War of 1812, while the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 took place in Hawaii). Apart from the human suffering and the financial destruction it caused, the event had an important effect on the American psyche, as will be explained in the following section. In the post-9/11 era many scholars have identified significant changes in American domestic as well as foreign policy, affecting the entire international community. Scholars such as Frank Rich (2006), Eric Alterman and Mark Green (2004), Andrew Bacevich (2013) and Robert Kagan (2008) have studied the new foreign policy approach of the United States in the post 9/11 period.The new American foreign policy as directed by the neo-conservatives, who were now occupying key position of power, would return US foreign policy to the old doctrine of John Quincy Adams that regarded preemption, unilateralism and hegemony as its three main pillars. As part of this new direction, the US would try to strengthen its global hegemony by firmly controlling, by military force if necessary, the Middle East, which supplies a major share of the world's energy supply. By being in control of the Middle East the US would ensure its place as the world's sole superpower well into the 21st century.

All of this would take place as part of the new 'War on Terror' supposedly aimed at combating external terrorism responsible for the attacks of September 11th.

Even though Iraq was not involved in the attacks of 9/11, on March 20th 2003, the United States attacked the country as part of the War on Terror, resulting in the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. The war resulted in nearly half a million civilian casualties based on conservative estimates (Sheridan, 2013) to a million casualties based on others (Reuters, 2008).The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that the war has resulted in 4.7 million Iraqi refuges, which is equal to about 16 percent of the Iraqi population(UNHCR, 2008). The war also resulted in over four thousand, four hundred American casualties(US Deparment of Defense, 2014), as well financial costs estimated to eventually exceed three trillion dollars (Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008). This situation has been unlike what was expected by the US administration and the American public.

The destructive consequences of the Iraq War coupled with the expose of the Bush administration's dubious arguments in justifying the war has led to numerous accusations by political analysts and scholars, that the Bush administration and his neo-conservative allies hijacked the American public, following the events of 9/11, to follow their own militaristic agendas. However, the discussion on the militarization of American foreign policy after the events of 9/11 has rarely addressed one highly important topic which this article seeks to examine: Was the militarization of American policy and the subsequent invasion of Iraq something new and unique caused by the events of 9/11? Or, is militarism part of old American traditions that were in place well before the events of that day and the administration of George W. Bush? The article will seek to answer this question by studying the events and atmosphere after 9/11 and the administration's clever use of these events prior to invading Iraq. Subsequently, the article will examine underlying American historical roots and traditions that have helped militarize the United States and build support for wars such as the invasion of Iraq. Concluding remarks will answer the main question of the article as well as give some thought about the future of America.

2. Using the Fear Factor

The Bush administration's efforts to convince the American public that Saddam's Iraq was an imminent threat to the United States and needed to be attacked preemptively, and the subsequent approval of the American public, must be understood against the backdrop of the events of September 11th and the ensuing 'War on Terror.'As noted earlier, on September 11th, the United States mainland was attacked after nearly two hundred years. The psychological impact of the attacks were tremendous as Americans had not witnessed any attacks on their homeland for generations, and the sight of people jumping off to their death from the World Trade Center truly shocked them. Other more minor acts of terrorism in the following months including the 'Anthrax letters' as well as the 'Sniper Attacks in Washington D.C.' only heightened the tense atmosphere, even though it was later revealed in both cases that they were cases of domestic terrorism.

A Pew Research Center poll conducted after the 9/11 attacks, on September 13[th]to September 17th 2001, found that 71 percent of Americans had felt depressed, 49 percent had difficulty concentrating, and 33 percent reported having trouble sleeping at night. Eighty one percent of those polled said they were constantly tuned in to news reports, while 69 percent said they were praying more as a result of the attacks (The Pew Research Center, American Psyche Reeling From Terror Attacks. Overwhelming Support for Bush, Military Response, 2001). Another Pew poll conducted two weeks after the attacks found that 53 percent of Americans were worried that they or their families would become victims of terrorism (The Pew Research Center, Military Action a Higher Priority than Homeland Defense but Guarded Confidence in Military Success, 2001). The feeling of being under threat also gave way for increased support of military actions and more acceptance of 'sacrifice.' The first Pew poll found that 77 percent of Americans backed military force 'even if it means thousands of casualties' (The Pew Research Center, American Psyche Reeling From Terror Attacks. Overwhelming Support for Bush, Military Response, 2001). The attacks also led to more hawkish views and acceptance of extreme measures. For example the first Pew poll after September 11[th]found that 67 percent of Americans favored CIA assassinations overseas in pursuing suspected enemies of the United States (Ibid).

Another more interesting survey done by Zogby International on November 3rd to November 5th 2001, nearly two months after the attacks, found that 54 percent of Americans believed that the use of 'Strategic Nuclear Weapons' by the United States would be 'effective' in America's fight against terrorism, while 42 percent thought the use of 'Biological Warfare' would be effective (Zogby International, Majority of Americans say nuclear weapons would be effective in war against terrorism, November 2001). Even though according to Zogby, the percentage of Americans supporting the use of strategic nuclear weapons had dropped to 21 percent by March 2002 (Zogby International, Zogby Tracking Report Change of U.S. Middle East policy favored; Use of strategic nuclear weapons opposed in fight against terrorism, March 2002), the fact that a majority of Americans, in the months following the attacks, supported the use of such extreme measures in order to fight terrorism, speaks volumes of the physiological status of Americans and the extent they were willing to go in order to 'protect America.'

This sense of fear of new terrorist attacks and the urgency to fight it, brought about overwhelming support for measures to 'combat terrorism' in whatever form necessary. By looking at poll data from Gallup, which frequently surveyed the American public regarding a possible invasion of Iraq to remove Saddam from power, one can see that the highest percentage of approval for the measure was in November 2001at 74 percent, which was much higher than the second highest approval rating of the measure at 64 percent on the eve of the war in March 2003 (Gallup G. , 2003). Interestingly enough in November 2001, most administration officials including Bush had not even started their campaign to convince the American public to attack Iraq. In fact a New York Times/ CBS News poll done two weeks after the 9/11 attacks found that only 6 percent of Americans believed that Bin Laden had collaborated with Saddam Hussein for the terrorist attacks (Berke & Elder, 2001).

The heightened sense of fear and urgency however was starting to decline in the months following the attacks. A Pew survey found that worries over new terrorist attacks had dropped to 52 percent in December 2001, down from 73 percent in October. The same poll found that 60 percent of Americans were very closely following news regarding terrorist attacks in December, down from 78 percent in October (The Pew Research Center, Worries Over New Attacks Decline. Terrorism Transforms News Interest, December 2001). The only thing necessary to sustain the overwhelming support for the 'War against Terrorism' was for new terrorist attacks to take place or at least threats of new terrorist attacks to continue. That is exactly what the Bush administration did. Whether this was done out of genuine fear of terrorist attacks or as a propaganda campaign to keep Americans scared and worried cannot be fully determined. Having said this, it is clear that in numerous instances the administration used these "threats" to its advantage.

Six months after the attacks a new Homeland Security Advisory System was established under Homeland Security Presidential Directive 3. Responsibility for developing, implementing and managing the system was given to the U.S. Attorney General, who was John Ashcroft at the time. The new system would alert federal, state and local governments as well as the American public on the current level of terrorism threat. The system, which is often called the 'Terrorism Threat Level', has five colors signifying the threat level as:

Red (Severe): Sever Risk of Terrorist Attacks
Orange (High): High Risk of Terrorist Attacks
Yellow (Elevated): Significant Risk of Terrorist Attacks
Blue (Guarded): General Risk of Terrorist Attacks
Green (Low): Low Risk of Terrorist Attacks

Each level triggers different actions by federal, state and local governments as well as different security levels at airports and public facilities. There are no published criteria for determining the threat levels so according to critics it has become a source of government manipulation. In fact research done at Columbia University has shown that raising the threat levels as well as public statements regarding terrorism by the administration, especially the president, had resulted in an increase of public fear regarding terrorism as well as a rise in Bush's approval ratings (Stannard, 2006).

Since the start of the terrorism alert system, the threat level has never been lowered to Green (Low), or Blue (Guarded), meaning that the lowest threat level since March 2002, when the system was established, has been Yellow which means a 'Significant Risk of Terrorist Attacks'(Strohm, January 2008). The threat level has repeatedly been raised to Orange and has been raised to Red once in August 2006. In the months before the Iraq invasion the threat level was raised to orange in September 2002 on the first anniversary of the attacks.

The threat level was again raised to orange for twenty days on February 7th to February 27th, just a month before the invasion. Attorney General John Ashcroft, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge and FBI Director Robert Mueller announced the rise in the threat level on February 7th. In the announcement which was highly publicized, Ashcroft said 'reporting indicates an increased likelihood that al-Qaeda may attempt to attack Americans in the United States and/or abroad in or around the end of the Haj, a Muslim religious period ending mid-February 2003…Recent intelligence reports suggests that al Qaeda leaders have emphasized planning for attacks on **apartment buildings, hotels** and other soft or lightly secured targets in the United States' (emphasis added) (CNN, Ashcroft, Ridge, Mueller announce threat level increase, 2003). Raising the threat level to 'high risk' without any clear indication of where or how a terrorist attack may happen would raise the concerns of the American public. A poll done by Gallup on February 7th to 9th showed that the number of people concerned about becoming a victim of terrorism compared to those not worried had doubled from a few weeks earlier (Lee, August 2004).

Issuing vague but provocative terrorism related alerts was in fact the way the Bush administration 'informed' the public. For example in the days leading up to the Memorial Day holiday of 2002, Cheney said that terrorist attacks were 'almost a certainty, it could happen tomorrow, it could happen next week, it could happen next year'(Cheney, 2001). The next day FBI director, Robert Mueller said 'There will be another terrorist attack. We will not be able to stop it. It's something we all live with.' At the same time intelligence officials told the American public that terrorists wanted to topple 'tall apartment buildings' with explosives, telling Americans to report any suspicious behavior (CNN, Officials: Terrorists may target tall apt. bldgs, 2002), while a couple of days later Donald Rumsfeld said 'We do face additional terrorist threats and the issue is not if but when and where and how,' also adding that terrorists will 'inevitably obtain weapons of mass destruction.' A couple of days later, John Ashcroft through a television hookup from Moscow announced that FBI agents had arrested a 'known terrorist' that intended to explode a 'dirty bomb' in the United States, even though the 'terrorist' being referred to, 'Jose Padilla', was a Chicago gang member who had been arrested weeks earlier without any nuclear material what so ever (Alterman & Green, 2004). The so called 'threat' was announced four days after FBI whistle-blower Coleen Rowley testified before Congress that 9/11 might have been prevented if the FBI flight-school warning had reached federal agents investigating ZacariasMoussaoui, the '20th hijacker' of the 9/11 attacks(Dickinson, 2008).

Another example was raising the threat level to Orange in September 2002 which coincided exactly with President Bush's speech on the 9/11 anniversary in which the campaign to sell theIraq war to the American public was going to start with full force. The 'threat'was announced by Bush on September 10th, while Cheney was flown to a 'secure location,' while Ashcroft announced that Al-Qaeda intended to target the 'transportation and energy sectors,' again using very vague language that can basically mean anywhere, anytime and with any means, enough to scare many people (Ibid).

Allegations for raising the threat level for political purposes were commonly pointed out by critics of the war and the Bush administration. Two years after the invasion, allegations were turned into facts when Tom Ridge who had resigned as Homeland Security Secretary in February 2005, talked about the flimsy evidence used to elevate the threat level. He elaborated by saying 'Sometimes we disagreed with the intelligence assessment. There were times when some people in the administration were really aggressive about raising the threat level, and we said, 'For that?!'' and adding that he often disagreed with officials who wanted to elevate the threat level, but was often overruled (Hall, 2005).

The campaign to sell the Iraq War to the American public was a well-coordinated effort involving the highest levels of officials in the administration, which used various arguments and techniques to convince the American public that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was an immediate and grave threat to the security of the United States. The administration's two main strategies was to reiterate in different arenas and by different individuals on multiple occasions, that Iraq was linked to terrorism and Al-Qaeda and that Iraq already possessed chemical and biological weapons and was very close to obtaining a nuclear weapon. The nuclear weapon argument was very important in creating a sense of urgency, that's why the administration would repeat that Iraq was 'six months to a year away' from a nuclear weapon. The effort was conducted in a very professional manner by the White House's 'Iraq Group' and with the help of some of the country's best public relations companies such as the Rendon Group (Rich, 2006). The cumulative effect of all the speeches, statements, interviews, news stories, etc. was that support for the invasion was gradually raised among the American public.

This campaign used the sense of fear and the need for protecting the nation against terrorism among the American public very consciously. An American public that was worried about new terrorist attacks was constantly being fed vague 'terrorism alerts' without any clear details of what people should do in response. At the same time the threats from Iraq's WMDs were constantly repeated, which was in effect linking the two issues together. In essence, fear of biological and nuclear terrorist attacks on major American cities was used to drum up support for the war.For example Bush in the highly important 2003 State of the Union address, which raised support for the military confrontation with Iraq by 10 percent (from 67 percent before the speech to 77 percent after the speech) (CBS News, 2003), said 'The United Nations concluded in 1999 Saddam Hussein had biological weapons materials sufficient to produce over 25,000 liters of anthrax; enough doses to kill several million people…Saddam Hussein had materials sufficient to produce more than 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin; enough to subject millions of people to death by respiratory failure….Saddam Hussein had the materials to produce as much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX nerve agent. In such quantities, these chemical agents could also kill untold thousands' (Bush, 2003). Using such alarming language, while at the same initiating a massive project called 'Bioshield' headed by Dick Cheney to 'protect' the nation against 'biological attacks,' while the memories of 9/11 were still fresh among many Americans, was a decisive factor in convincing Americans to attack Iraq and the militarization of American policy.

The main strategy of the administration, which was conducted successfully, was to include the Iraq War as part of the 'War on Terror' and thus classify it as a response to the 9/11 attacks which had created feelings of depression, fear, patriotism as well inclinations towards hawkish foreign policy interventions in an American public who traditionally had held isolationist views towards foreign policy. A Gallup poll conducted ten days after the start of the Iraq invasion in March 2003, asked the American public 'Do you feel that you have a clear idea of what the war in Iraq is all about -- that is, what we are fighting for?', 81 percent said Yes. The number was even higher for the Afghanistan War, in which 89 percent of Americans said Yes in November 2001. Compare these numbers with the same poll conducted in May 1967 with regards to the Vietnam War in which only 49 percent of Americans knew what they were fighting for. Even the poll numbers from the Second World War which is called 'The Good War' were not as high, with 73 percent to 59 percent saying 'Yes' in November 1942 and March 1944 respectively (Gallup A. , 2006). In reality no war could compare with the overwhelming understanding and support for the War on Terrorism that was fought supposedly to 'protect' the American homeland. Framing the Iraq War as part of the War on Terror was in effect the administration's key tool in winning the consent of the American public for the invasion of March 2003.

3.Deeper Roots

3.1 Obsession with the Military

In 2015 the United States will spend nearly half a trillion dollars on defense (US Government, 2014). When other defense related expenses such as the money spent on Veteran's affairs, emergency discretionary spending and supplemental spending for the defense department as well as the defense related activities of other departments is added, the bill usually exceeds 1 trillion dollars annually (Higgs, March 2007). Even based on official Department of Defense spending, the United States spends more on defense than all the other nations of the world combined (Berkowitz, 2003). The United States has military forces in 130 countries of the world, numbering a total of 190 thousand military personal (Dufour, 2013) (Global Security, 2014).

Closer examination shows however, that while the current level of defense spending has reached new highs, such high levels of spending have more or less existed for most periods following World War 2 (U.S. Military Spending, 1946–2009). In fact when the numbers are calculated based on the percentage of defense spending to GDP, there is a relative decline since the 1940s to the present (Spring, 2007). Thus relative to the general economy, defense expenditure has not expanded. In fact official figures show that the share of military expenditure, which was over 34 percent of GDP during World War 2 and around 10 percent in the 1950s, has been constantly declining, reaching less than 4 percent in 2013 (Frohlich & Kent, 2014) (Spring, 2007). Thus while the current defense spending is tremendously high compared to the other sectors of the American government, however this is not an unprecedented phenomenon, even when studying the hike in defense spending following the years after the 9/11 attacks. In fact excessive military spending has been part of how America functions for much of the twentieth century.

A report prepared for the US Congress, examining the instances of the use of United States Armed Forces abroad in the 1798-2007period, showed that the US had used its military overseas hundreds of times (Grimmett, 2008). While many of these instances were minor military interventions, others including the war with Mexico of 1846, the War with Spain of 1898, the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean Warof 1950-53; the Vietnam War from 1964 to 1973; the Persian Gulf War of 1991, the Afghanistan War of 2001 and the Iraq War of 2003, involved massive ground invasions.

3.2 Moral Wars

One of the sources for American militarism has been the framing of wars in terms of American ideology and values. This has led to the belief, even if hypocritically, that America was fighting for the sake of 'goodness' and 'universal values' such as democracy, human rights and freedom. This has led to the belief that American military supremacy is something good, a force on the side of humanity against the forces of 'evil', even if in reality it was used for achieving self-serving geopolitical and hegemonic goals. It is under this light that Theodore Roosevelt calls the war of 1898 with Spain in Cuba, a war for the 'Freedom of Cuba'; Woodrow Wilson called World War 1 the struggle for 'democracy' against 'selfish and autocratic power.' Franklin D. Roosevelt classified the war against Japan as a contest that pitted 'democracy against imperialism' and Harry S. Truman called the Cold War a struggle between 'a free world' and a 'totalitarian' one (Bacevich, 2005) (Roark & Johnson, 2005). Thus the Bush administration has in no way set a new precedent when it called the War on Terror a war for 'freedom' and named the Afghanistan War, 'Operation Enduring Freedom,' and the Iraq War, 'Operation Iraqi Freedom.' It should come as no surprise when Americans call the President, the commander in chief of the United States Armed Forces, the 'Leader of the Free World.'

Classifying the use of military force overseas as a necessary good to protect freedom and human rights has led to a sense of righteousness about the US military among the American public. This is why the military ranks among the best institutions, higher than the presidency and the congress, in terms of public approval. Such a world-view also makes criticizing the military a very difficult and unpopular choice. When decisions of war are criticized, as was the case with the Iraq War, it is usually the decisions made by politicians sitting in Washington that are criticized as opposed to the US military. In fact all US politician running for office make it known that they strongly 'support the troops,' even if they are against the war. In the few instances where the actual troops are criticized, as was the case in the final years of the Vietnam War, the American public has redeemed itself by 'honoring' war veterans, in this case Vietnam veterans. That is why politicians like John Kerry, who ran against Bush in 2004, still reminded the public of their services in Vietnam, going as far as declaring thathe is 'reporting for duty' during his opening line in his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention, while at the same time shunning throughout his campaign the fact that he had been a strong opponent of the war back in the 60s (Rich, 2006). The fact that being an anti-war activist, even if that war is Vietnam, is so unpopular among the American public speaks volumes of the militarization of American society.

3.3 The South's 'Culture of Honor'

The South of the United States is credited for being a unique and distinct region of the country. The existence of fields of study such as 'Southern politics', 'Southern history', 'Southern culture' and even 'Southern music' are testament to this fact. Scholars point to various elements of this distinctiveness including conservative views in politics, fundamentalist and evangelical Christian religious beliefs, a history of military defeat and occupation, delayed industrialization, racial domination as well as southern military traditions and the 'culture of honor.' The culture of honor, which according to research is common among native-born white male Southerners, means that challenges or insults never go unanswered or unpunished. Politically, this means more hawkish viewpoints on defense and foreign policy issues, which includes support for governmental use of force in international affairs (Slocum, 2007).

In the 'culture of honor' of the South, a male who perceives a challenge or an insult is widely expected to confront the other party. Not responding would be seen as 'unmanly,' someone who can be 'pushed around' or taken advantage of easily. Research shows that the political ramification of this culture makes southerners pro-defense, pro-military ethics, higher support for the use of capital punishment; greater opposition to gun control legislation; and more lenient treatment of a person who wounds or kills someone in defense of self or property (Ibid).

Studies have shown that southerners are more likely to enroll in military school (Andrew, 2001) and the rate of military enlistments are higher in southern states (Kane, 2006), while military bases and personnel are located disproportionately in the south (Phillips, 2003).Since 1965 the South which had traditionally been a stronghold of the Democratic Party shifted towards the Republican Party which was closer to the South's religious conservative as well interventionist foreign policy views.

3.4 The Christian Right

America was founded by deeply religious Puritans, who believed that Americans were God's'chosen people' and that they were creating a 'New Jerusalem,' or as John Winthrop put in 1630:'a city upon a hill.' Today America is still one of the most religious countries of the Western World, with many Americans still believing in American Exceptionalism. One of the most influential Christian groups of the past few decades has been Protestant Evangelicals. American Evangelicals, who number around a hundred million, wield enormous influence in Washington's decision-making process. Religious Americans, who were upset by the counter-culture of the 1960s, became increasingly involved in politics. Even though for several generations protestant evangelicals had anti-war traditions, starting from the Second World War they became more pro-war, with clergies like Billy Graham leading the way. The move to the right however was not done until the Vietnam War during which Christian conservatives saw the efforts of the anti-war movement as turning people away from God and moral values. By the 1980s the Evangelicals had become a potent political force on the right. Many of these conservative Christians believed that the United States along with Israel enjoyed a special status in the eyes of Lord and thus were 'less restricted' in their use of force (Bacevich, 2005).

Tying religious fever with idealistic foreign policy goals, which often resulted in military showdowns,has played an important role in the militarization of America in the past few decades. It also helped frame Bush's War on Terror as a fight of 'good against evil,' with Franklin Graham, the son of Billy Graham, calling Islam a 'very evil and wicked religion' (Goodstein, 2005) and with the National Association of Evangelicals declaring that 'most evangelicals regard Saddam Hussein's regime- by allegedly aiding and harboring terrorist, as already having attacked the United States'(Bacevich, 2005). In fact religious Christians formed a major share of the American public who supported the war in Iraq. A Pew poll done on the eve of the war in March 2003, found that 77 percent of evangelicals supported the war, compared with 62 percent support among Catholics and mainline Protestants, 36 percent support among African-American Protestants and 44 percent support among people who said they were atheists or had no religious affiliation (The Pew Research Center, Different Faiths, Different Messages, March 2003).By October 2005, when the Iraq war had largely gone sour and with Bush's approval rating declining to a mere 37 percent in the country overall, his approval rating was still 64 percent among white evangelicals (Carnes, 2006).

4. Conclusion: An Amplification of Existing Trends

Since the initial days of the founding of the United States, Americans have believed that they have a role to 'to renovate the condition of mankind' and in the words of Henry Clay to place the United States at the 'center of a system which would constitute the rallying point of human freedom against all the despotism of the Old World.' These ideas of the just and benevolent cause placed on America's shoulder was shared by many US leaders in the early days of the republic, including George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Quincy Adams and later on by Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century the United States was already intervening militarily in Central and South America (Kagan, 2008).

With the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the subsequent American involvement in the Second World War, any isolationist thought left in the American psyche disappeared, and with the Cold War that ensued, the path towards the militarization of American foreign policy began. In his farewell address to the nation in January 1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower called upon the nation to keep a careful eye on what he called the 'military-industrial complex' that had developed in the post-World War II years (Turley, 2014). During the same period C. Wright Mills was warning of a 'military metaphysics,' which meant a military approach to solving international problems and the discounting of the likelihood of finding solutions except through military means (Bacevich, 2005). After the disastrous Vietnam War, several different factors helped in militarizing America even further. After the war the neo-conservative movement slowly grew in influence and popularity, particularly in the 1980s. At the same time the Christian Right coalition among evangelicals took shape, which preached and supported militaristic agendas.

The US Military as well as military strategists sought to rebuild and expand the military to avoid future failures. Political elites sought to redeem a war-torn country by reestablishing the celebration of soldierly values. Also, traditionally in the United States, armies were raised in times of crisis and then disbanded, for example the one million strong army of the Union at the end of the Civil War in 1865 was reduced to a mere 57 thousand within a year. This was the case after the Civil War, World War I and World War II. Since the end of the Cold War however this approach has been set aside and the US retains large number of soldiers in times of peace (Bacevich, 2005).

By September 2001, American militarization had long taken shape. A decade earlier the US military had intervened militarily with overwhelming force in the Persian Gulf to protect its national interest, a move that was supported by a majority of the American public. The events of 9/11 only amplified this process, giving it a sense of urgency and necessity. With the attacks on the American homeland, a greater majority of the American public was willing to support risky military interventions abroad. Polls showed that an unprecedented 91 percent of Americans supported America's war in Afghanistan. Also a majority of Americans supported the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003 (Rich, 2006).

Although the American nation supported the Iraq War initially, support for the war declined very rapidly. A comparison of the Iraq War with the Vietnam War done by Gallup in August 2005 showed that that support for the Iraq war declined more rapidly than in the case with Vietnam. By August 2005, 54 percent of the American public thought the 'war was a mistake,' compared to 41 percent for the same comparable period in the Vietnam War (Newport & Carroll, 2005). This, even though more than twice as many U.S. troops were deployed to Vietnam in 1970, thanin Iraq by the end of 2005 (334,600, compared to approximately 160,000 troops) and while the death toll for American troops in Iraq had only reached 2,000 in the last quarter of 2005, compared to Vietnam where nearly 54,000 U.S. troops had been killed by the end of 1970(Page, 2005). In the Iraq war, by the third quarter of the third year, a majority of Americans believed the war was a mistake. In the case of the Vietnam War it was not until the third quarter of the fourth year of the war (August-September 1968) that a majority of Americans said the war was a mistake (Newport & Carroll, 2005).

Although the current atmosphere in American society is different than the one witnessed at the end of the Vietnam War, Bush's War on Terror and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the high costs associated with them have been a point of concern for the American public and a challenge to American militarism. The election of Barack Obama in the November 2008 presidential elections was a testament to this. In fact under the orders of the US President all American troop were withdrawn from Iraq at the end of 2011, and Obama plans to end U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan by 2016 (Holland, 2014). Like the 'Vietnam Syndrome' however, the current anti-war sentiment in the United States might be short lived. If this happens to be case, then another wave of American militarization might be well in the works.

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