

The United States Diplomacy: The Era of the War on Terror

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The Global War on Terror (GWOT) was a worldwide military campaign initiated by the United States after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, aiming to combat international terrorism. It involved not only military operations but also extensive political, economic, intelligence, and legal measures [1]. The GWOT consisted of three main military operations, the first of which was the fight against Al-Qaeda.

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, Al-Qaeda was identified as the primary enemy and publicly admitted responsibility for the attacks. Then U.S. President George Bush demanded that the Taliban, which controlled Afghanistan at the time, immediately hand over Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who was hiding in the country. However, the Taliban refused to comply, stating that the USA have not provided sufficient evidence to prove Osama bin Laden's guilt. That prompted the USA and its allies to launch Operation «Enduring Freedom» on October 7, 2001, aimed at overthrowing the Taliban regime and targeting Al-Qaeda [1].

By the end of 2001, the Taliban had been expelled from most parts of Afghanistan, but insurgents adopted guerrilla warfare tactics, prolonging the conflict for years. In July 2011, the U.S. began a gradual troop withdrawal, eventually completing the withdrawal on August 31, 2021. This war became the longest-running military operation in history of the USA, and the withdrawal date is seen as the official end of the Global War on Terror. Beyond Afghanistan, the USA also conducted military operations against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, Yemen, Kenya, and Western Sahara [2].

The next phase of the Global War on Terror is generally considered the U.S. military operation in Iraq, known as Operation «Iraqi Freedom» (2003 – 2011). The operation began on March 20, 2003. The official reasons for the war included: the possession of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq, and programs to develop such weapons, links between Saddam Hussein's regime and terrorist organizations (especially Al-Qaeda) and plans to transfer weapons of mass destruction to terrorists' organizations, and severe human rights violations [3].

However, post-war investigations revealed that intelligence provided by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell contained significant errors, with some evidence even being fabricated. This caused the legitimacy of the invasion to be widely questioned, leading to a major diplomatic scandal [4]. Although Hussein was overthrown and a transitional government was established, anti-U.S. armed groups continued their resistance. On December 15, 2011, Washington officially announced the end of its military operations in Iraq [3].

After the downfall of the Hussein regime, Sunni Arabs of Iraq fear that Shi'ite Arabs and Kurds will unite against them and oppress them in revenge for past

injures. They also afraid loss of their Sunni identity in an Iraq they no longer dominate. The insurgency also originated among Ba'athist remnants, especially the ruling family and its enforcers, who could expect to find no place in the new Iraq [5]. The resulting Sunni uprising and increased regional instability led to the rise of the Islamic State (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, IS or ISIS). The rapid expansion of territories controlled by terrorists, large-scale executions, and a series of terrorist acts have prompted other countries to take decisive action.

In September 22, 2014, the USA led the formation of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, consisting of more than 80 countries, and launched Operation «Inherent Resolve» [6]. Key U.S. victories in this war included, for example, the liberation of Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, in July 2017; the capture of ISIS's self-proclaimed capital, Raqqa, Syria, in October 2017 and the killing of IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2019 [7]. Although ISIS lost all its occupied territories, its terrorist network still persists. In December 2021, the U.S. declared the end of combat operations against ISIS in Iraq but retained around 2,500 troops to assist local security forces and continue targeting IS militants [8].

Over the 24 years of that the Global War on Terror has been going on, it has had a huge impact on international relations and American diplomacy. Some early successes of the War on Terror included preventing new large-scale terrorist attacks on U.S. territory, capturing or killing many Al-Qaeda leaders, and strengthening international cooperation in counterterrorism [2]. However, it is widely believed that the failures of the USA counterterrorism efforts outweighed their successes.

The Global War on Terror cost over \$8 trillion, with limited tangible results [9]. The war in Afghanistan decentralized the Al-Qaeda network, leading to the formation of numerous localized terrorist groups, making terrorism more fragmented and harder to eliminate. American military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq also fueled widespread anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world. The aftermath also showed limited success: the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021, terrorist organizations continued to recruit globally, and terrorist attacks persisted in Western countries. American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq not only failed to bring stability but also exacerbated chaos in the Middle East. The number of war refugees and displaced persons from the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Syria is estimated at over 38 million [10].

Furthermore, the War on Terror significantly damaged the U.S.'s international reputation, casting doubt on its credibility as a reliable partner and raising widespread skepticism about the accuracy of U.S. intelligence. American government was also repeatedly accused of using torture and unlawfully detaining innocent individuals during the War on Terror, with the Guantanamo Bay detention camp becoming a notorious symbol of U.S. misconduct [11].

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