

The motivation behind America's new expansionist policy

Posted on March 21, 2018

Imperial Foundations of the United States

Those who have read American history, know that the United States was formed through imperialism. The European nations that wanted to expand their territories directly invaded this part of the world. Once captured, the new colonies were settled by the European invaders. Even after settling down, the newly formed nation-state of America remained in a constant struggle to expand itself (*September 11 and American Foreign Policy*).

Imperialism in America is the military and economic philosophy that mentions that the U.S. influences and controls other nations. Such power is the newest form of colonialism. The idea of American Imperialism was introduced during the Mexican-American War. However, America was an imperialistic country before that. According to distinguished historians like Sidney Lens and Paul Kennedy, America has always been imperialistic. According to Noam Chomsky, "The United States is the one country that exists, as far as I know, and ever has, that was founded as an empire explicitly" ("Post 9/11 US Foreign Policy").

Throughout history, the U.S. has fought other nations and acquired their territories. Starting from acquiring lands from the Native American Indians to fighting a bloody war against the Spanish Empire, the country has always been on the offensive. However, the U.S. itself feels that for it to be regarded as a power, it needs to influence other countries, either militarily or economically (Jones). This idea is supported by the Americans as well, as they believe that the U.S. is a victim and not the offender, contrary to the global belief. The U.S. government has always told its people that it is a beacon of political freedom, democracy, and human rights. It has shown its people that other nations are against it because they do not like its idea of freedom. This, the Americans believe, is a strong reason to go to war with any other country that the U.S. government thinks is standing in its way.

From Territorial Conquest to Modern Foreign Policy

Over the years though, the U.S. foreign policy has become refined. In the early days, when the American colonists were invading native Indian territories, it did not have to prove itself to anybody. Later, during its involvement in South America, it merely told foreign nations that the Americans were involved in an internal affair and did not want international intervention. However, after 9/11 the U.S. foreign policy changed.

Previously, the United States had gone to war against various nations and had been labeled as the villain. This negative, the U.S. felt was a hindrance to its quest to become a global superpower. The United States, at one point, was hated by the regimes of various nations, and leaders like Gaddafi and Castro Fidel openly declared their hatred for the U.S. To change this image, as well as keep the imperialist goals alive, the U.S. joined NATO. In fact, according to some analysts, NATO is just a tool to keep its imperialistic desires alive. They claim that NATO was created primarily to fight [United States wars](#). The primary objective behind NATO was the power to pursue imperialistic aspirations without being held back by international institutions.

George W Bush and the Return of Military Expansionism

At the turn of the century, when George Bush was elected President of the United States, things changed dramatically. His predecessor, Clinton had not focused much on the military, putting a gap in American Imperialism between the Cold War periods until the turn of the century. However, the new president was set to reignite the candle of imperialism. This time, though, it felt the need not to become a villain, so it began giving reasons for its every military adventure.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Jones), the Bush administration declared that the United States was vulnerable to terrorist attacks. It claimed that these terrorists were living in absolute “rogue nations,” that were providing safe havens to them, as well as weapons and cash to carry on their terrorist activities. President George Bush said that these terrorists were against the American values of political freedom, democracy, and human rights and, if not fought against, would kill more Americans.

On September 20, 2001, President Bush gave a speech before a joint session of Congress, in which he declared terrorism U.S.’s primary focus.

The War on Terror and the Mobilization of American Power

“We will direct every resource at our command – every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war – to the destruction and the defeat of the global terror network,” Bush said.

This speech is remembered because of what he said. “[W]e will pursue nations that provide aid or haven to terrorism,” said Bush. “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

9/11 thus changed American politics, foreign policy, and military policy. Suddenly, the United States,

which had been building military bases in Eastern Europe and Africa until a couple of years ago and expanding its territory in South America, became defensive. The speeches given by U.S. political leaders indicated that it was under attack. However, overseas military bases continued to be built and the country continued to recruit more young men in its army.

Preventive War and the Strategic Logic of the Bush Doctrine

One of the most evident changes in American foreign policy is its newly established focus on preventive and not only pre-emptive action. This is known as the Bush Doctrine. Most countries use preemptive strikes in times of war when they think that there are chances of an attack from the enemy.

However, when the U.S. went to war against Iraq in March 2003, it expanded its policy and included preventive action. The U.S. government briefed the public that the Iraqi Government had amassed weapons of mass destruction, as well as nuclear material that could be used to produce atomic weapons ("The Effects of 9/11 on US Foreign Policy -"). The Americans even related Saddam Hussein to Al Qaeda and declared that Hussein might be supplying nuclear weapons to the terrorists. Hence, the U.S. justified the Iraqi invasion by calling it a preventive step to protect Americans from terrorists.

Hence, looking at the situations during and after the turn of the century, it is evident that the age-old policy of U.S. expansionism in a way suitable for an adventurer can no longer apply. The U.S. cannot survive as a villain. As it grows globally stronger and expands its territories in far-flung areas, it also creates dangerous rivalries against powerful groups. It, therefore, needs to build a support base. It needs its people to support it. It requires the American people to believe in their country's innocence. Therefore, the statement that America's expansionist interests are defensively motivated is closer to the truth.

References

Jones, Steve. "How Did US Foreign Policy Change after 9/11?" *ThoughtCo*,
<https://www.thoughtco.com/us-foreign-policy-after-9-11-3310293>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2017.

"Post 9/11 US Foreign Policy." *E-International Relations*,
<https://www.e-ir.info/2012/08/14/post-911-us-foreign-policy-continuation-of-new-imperialist-ambitions/>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2017.

September 11 and American Foreign Policy.
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/september-11-and-american-foreign-policy/>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2017.

"The Effects of 9/11 on US Foreign Policy -." *Eddie Copeland*, 18 Apr. 2013,

<https://eddiecopeland.me/the-effects-of-911-on-us-foreign-policy/>.