

The Psychology of US Foreign Policy in Post-9/11 Era: Fear, Security, and Moral Justification

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Abstract

The global order and the American comfort factor in international relations came to a halt with the terrorist attack of 9/11. The American reaction has been studied from a strategic and geopolitical viewpoint. However, the psychological forces that drove decision makers during this period are less studied. After 9/11, the US went out in a largely moral direction because there was a collective fear, a greater awareness of death, and a feeling of moral absolutism. It investigates the emotional and cognitive impulses behind it. In addition, these factors combine to legitimate preemptive warfare. Applying Terror Management Theory (TMT) and political psychology knowledge can be used to understand post 9/11 behavior. It will use qualitative content analysis of presidential speeches, policy documents. There are three patterns revealed here. The attacks made people feel insecure, which enhanced worst-case thinking instead of rational and evidence-based risk assessment and response. The second instance of moral framing, specifically the moral framing of the conflict as between “good” and “evil”, allows the framing of controversial acts, like the violation of state sovereignty, as moral imperatives. The execs chose the same option based on the same assumption, marginalizing other kinds of intelligence. The study reveals that the US foreign policy during this period was affected by the wish for safety, certainty and meaning on the part of policy makers. Awareness of this is essential to prevent policy overreaction due more to psycho-emotional chaos than to rational long-term strategic thinking.

Key Words: *Terror management theory, trauma, US foreign Policy, security*

Introduction

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11 were major turning points of modern international politics. Change in the strategic orientation of USA was indicated by this statement. In addition, the assaults altered America's psyche as well. According to Jervis in 2003, the attacks on World Trade Centre and Pentagon led to physical and economic damage. Nonetheless, they likewise ruptured America's bubble of spatial security and globe dominance which had been reminiscent of a long time. In the months that followed, U.S. The military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with a broad-based counter-terrorism

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agenda that frequently cut across established norms, came to be legitimized under the “Global War on Terror” (GWOT) framework resulting in a complete reshaping of Foreign Policy. In the year 2001, The United States was a superpower. Nonetheless, according to offensive realists and liberal institutionalists' theorists, the emotion of 9/11 added a dimension they cannot elucidate. The state behavior can be affected by various feelings like fear and anger along with the desire for moral certainty. The strikes started a psychological chain reaction that distorted the decision-making process over the long term, leading to protracted conflicts, destabilization in the region, and changes in security arrangements. This document is not what it seems. The Bush Doctrine requires a scholarly examination in line with strategic innovation and psychological response. The doctrine was key to restoring a sense of control over a vulnerable nation-state. People felt that a lot during that time. Following the attacks, President George W. Bush quickly gained approval ratings as a popular member. Following the attacks, his approval ratings rose from nearly 51 percent to above 90 percent. You can expect a similar effect to a “rally 'round the flag” (Gallup, 2001; ABC News, 2001). It must be important to find happiness in life.

Due to America's geographical isolation, U.S.-Americans were not used to a non-state attack. In the aftermath of the attacks, several researchers found that many New Yorkers showed signs of PTSD and depression. In the weeks following the tragedies, 7.5 percent of residents in Manhattan reported acute levels of PTSD (Galea et al., 2002). Tensions inspired foreign policy decisions. The United States distanced itself from the International Criminal Court, withdrew anti-ballistic missile treaty. Opt-out of multilateralism evident. While security was the reason the statutes under the USA PATRIOT Act focused much more on surveillance and curtailing civil liberties at home. The measures were not merely a result of strategic calculation but reflected in part the common aspirations to impose order on a world that now seemed chaotic and uncertain. The Costs of War Project has estimated this emotional push to have killed over 900,000 people in Iraq and Afghanistan, including a low-end figure of 200,000 Iraqi civilians (2021). The cost of the USA was over 8 trillion dollars, too. Commentators neglected deeper structural geopolitical currents like China's economy and Russia's strategy for recuperation in the early-war years. This introduction sheds light on the psychological forces of fear, moral urgency, and cognitive biases that shaped U.S. foreign policy after 9/11. A thorough investigation of the U.S. post-9/11 foreign policy, including historical context, theoretical insight, and empirical analysis indicates that strategic interests turned out to be secondary in the face of the strong emotional and cognitive impact of 9/11.

Historical Background

From Containment to Preemption: 1990-2001

In the period following the aftermath of the Cold War, the activities of the United States in the rapidly changing international system came into question. The policymakers debate when and how the lone superpower should wield its power. The hypothesis called the “End of History” posits that liberal democracy will likely assume the global role whose hour is yet to come. Under the leadership of President Bill Clinton, the US focused on economic integration, supported human rights and norms, and humanely intervened. The crises like Somalia in 1993 and Kosovo in 1999 were usually multilateral and not too intrusive since the US was not willing to pay the costly price of the Vietnam lesson. When incidents such as the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center or the 2000 USS Cole attack occur, it is essentially the event of criminality that is dealt with via law enforcement and intelligence cooperation and not large-scale military action. The foreign policy worked in what can be referred to as a relatively stable strategic environment during this period. At a dizzying pace, NATO enlargement, globalization, and a change of priorities like NAFTA and the WTO took place. The threats posed by non-state actors were never a concern for the United States. Following al-Qaeda's strikes on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the US carried out some missile strikes. However, such strikes hold symbolic significance. It is widely believed that we can limit terrorism without a transformation. Upon becoming President in January 2001, George W. Bush called for a low profile in the world. He emphasized missile defense, commented on nation-building, and provided a balanced account of great powers. Before the 9/11 attacks, the USA had considered and believed in deterrence. This was based on rational reasoning and geopolitical common sense. In that situation, nothing was foreseen to happen next.

The Trauma of 9/11 and the Strategic Shift

The cold war relative ended on September 11, 2001. This was inconceivable before the event. A major attack on the U.S. mainland by outsiders after 200 years left the country in a state of shock and unprepared for it. The trauma inspired an immediate “rally ’round the flag” response, giving the executive branch broad latitude in the construction of foreign and domestic policy. The Bush administration, partially due to neo-conservatism, backtracked from its prior “humble” policy in an effort to develop a more transformative vision for American foreign policy. The fear became the central organizing principle of American strategy. This quotation by Suskind captured a country imagining the worst: “the fear that a ‘smoking gun’ could become a ‘mushroom cloud’”. Although U.S. capabilities had not been materially weaker, perceptions of threat changed. The decision-makers altered their approach, shifting focus from risk management to risk elimination or prevention. Although it could have been the intention of the goal to do this, policies are made that turn this way. Public

anxiety guarantees that you witness such policies. Following the bombings, the country experienced widespread psychological damage. According to the analysis, those Americans who lived further away from New York or Washington developed symptoms of trauma. They responded with exaggerated fear (Schuster et al., 2001).

People are focusing on forceful and immediate action due to emotions. The AUMF was passed overwhelmingly by Congress, with a bipartisan vote that allowed the president to target Al-Qaeda and any other entity determined to be a terrorist. There was an immediate change in government. The invasion of Afghanistan began in October 2001 to cut down al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power. However, the strategic logic quickly expanded. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, President Bush applied the term “Axis of Evil” to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. The imminent threat was linked to potential future threats. The 2003 Iraq War employed a new preventive logic not connected to 9/11. It was more concerned about potential risks than real evidence. This had instant and very serious effects. France and Germany’s refusal to invade Iraq is forgotten by NATO allies, for various reasons. In the nation, a culture of fear began with a color-coded terror alert and heavy surveillance. An analysis of the transformations of the 9/11 attacks would reveal that the attacks were not only a strategic turning point but a psychological turning point when the US redefined security, sovereignty, and legitimacy of state power.

Review of the Literature

Several disciplines have examined US foreign policy studies since 9/11. Mearsheimer and Walt – The Best International Relations Essay Topics. The continuing war in Iraq enervates some basic tenets of realists like balancing and restraint vis-à-vis the country. The ideology behind the Bush agenda cannot be realistic, as realist analysis lacks any capacity to explain how ideologies emerge and how policies are made in any society. The two views discussed more cognitive and emotional factors influencing the decisions. As pointed out by Jervis (2017), how leaders see the world does not exist out there but instead exists in beliefs. In the aftermath of 9/11, events became very rare, which has persuaded the policy-makers to assign high value to events that carry a low risk and lead to a high catastrophe. According to Moisi (2009), the extreme fear and weakness of the United States caused it to participate in the geopolitics of emotion. Constructivists have noted that America internalizes the self-images of “moral nation” and “indispensable nation.” America not only internalizes these images, but it explicitly affirms. America's self-image readily finds expression in a desire to reassert global power and recover ontological security (Wendt, 1999).

Political psychology arguments have shed light on the transformations that took place in U.S. foreign policy after 9/11. Research that uses Terror Management Theory suggests that death reminders, such as after 9/11, create greater public support for aggressive leadership accompanied by hard security policies (Pyszczynski et al,

2003). This claim has been supported by research. According to Landau et al. (2004), cues associated with 9/11 resulted in greater approval for President Bush and an approved Iraq invasion. Analyses of groupthink indicate that the Bush administration functioned in a bubble of insulated internal discussion. Irving Janis model (1982) helps explain the omission of alternatives and the marginalization of Colin Powell-type officials (Badie, 2010).

Consequently, it became feasible to follow up on the intelligence regarding the purported weapons program in Iraq. Liberal scholars indicated that the decline of multilateral institutions and cooperative arrangements is another important issue. Ikenberry (2002) believes that the early 2000s saw a shift by the United States from the post-World War II order, and he formulated the unilateral strategies that jeopardize the global order. Research shows that worry, anxiety, and a real or feared threat often lead people to favor the home expansion of security, even if at the cost of civil liberties (Huddy, et al., 2005). The study by Bonnano and Jost (2006) found that extreme trauma exposure affects people's political orientation. As a result, mass fears will psychologically affect people. After the Cold War period, a lot of scholars studied international relations and US foreign policy (1992-2001). Nonetheless, important research gaps exist. Research that is directly related to the internal foreign policy decision-making of the Bush Administration itself, through the Terror Management Theory, is rare. Collective opinions are prioritized over elites in most TMT applications. The study fills this gap via TMT (team management technology) along with primary-source analysis to present a more unified and psychologically informed account of the critical policy choices. It helped to understand how U.S. behavior after 9/11 was steered by cognitive, social-psychological forces, but also emotional forces.

Research Objectives and Questions

The objectives provide a strong guide for the process.

1. To analyze the principal psycho-drivers fear, insecurity, moral absolutism, and cognitive distortion that shaped the US foreign policy between 2001 and 2008.
2. To know how the post-9/11 psychosis of insecurity led to the adoption of preemption over more 'traditional' strategies of containment and deterrence.
3. To determine how political rhetoric assists in mobilizing the popularity of leaders and in silencing voices of dissent through framing the foreign-policy choice as an existential necessity.
4. To find the acts of decision-making that are influenced psychologically will impact US global leadership in the future in a big way.

There is a mystery why rational-actor models don't offer a good explanation for why after 9/11 the United States drastically shifted to unilateral preemptive action. The following four guiding questions form the basis of my investigation into this gap.

1. How far did psychological forces (collective fear, trauma, cognitive biases) shape the formulation of the Bush Doctrine, and the move away from deterrence?
2. How did the War on Terror's moral framing enable the administration to evade international legal constraints, and how did its Good vs Evil rhetoric mute domestic opposition?
3. Why did policymakers pursue the invasion of Iraq given the fact that there was no specific concrete evidence present?

An assessment of the psychological impact of foreign policy can be proven using the previous provisions, plus these three questions and contents as an analytical framework.

Research Design and Methodology

The qualitative research design will be focused on post-9/11 in terms of US foreign policies. Exploring how policies are built from thinking, interpretation, and meaning rather than quantifiable variables is a qualitative approach that makes for a great way to view a more deeply qualitative dynamic at the core of policy-making. The interpretive paradigm of this study is based on how key policy makers understood and constructed the reality of threat, security, and morality during a national crisis. The qualitative content analysis and historical process tracing are complementary methods in this study. This will allow organized observation of speeches, policy documents, and memoirs to catch hold of recurrent themes and patterns, especially vis-a-vis fear, moral framing, and cognitive bias. Scholars attempt to re-enact relevant events that are causally linked to psychological states that produce a foreign policy outcome. Employing both the above approaches, this study adopts the political discourse and the decision-making process context. The primary source of information came from the foreign policy machinery of the Bush administration.

The compilation features the National Security Strategy postulated in 2002, the doctrine of Bush, solo presidential key speeches, for instance, the State of the Union addresses of 2002 and 2003, memoirs of the senior officials for instance, Rice (2011); Woodward (2002) declassified documentation coming from NSC intelligence as well as other agencies. The documents that were directly related to the research problem were selected through purposive sampling. Overall, over 50 speeches, policy papers, and internal documents were put under the scanner. The data analysis was coded in a systematic procedure. The texts were coded using NVivo software for themes that emerged deductively from the theoretical framework, which include TMT, groupthink, cognitive closure, and inductively from the data. We conducted an investigation regarding the frequency of use of the words 'evil', 'threat', 'freedom', and 'security'. We examined the framing and feelings the ads convey. A reliability check was conducted using a second coder to code 20% of the sample. The Kappa reliability score stood at .85, confirming great reliability.

Thematic analysis and historical process tracing were parodied to map how psychological shifts (heightened fear, desire for decisive action) closely mapped onto important moments of policy change (invasion of Iraq). Going through the speeches, intelligence reports, and the views of secondary scholars minimized misinterpretation and enhanced validity and reliability. To obtain optimal clarity, the investigator took note of his assumptions and decision-making process as part of the study process. Qualitative research had important limitations of interpretation. Nonetheless, on account of adherence to employing a wider variety of sources and carefully applied analysis methods, such limitations were alleviated. As this report is based on publicly available documents, some insider information cannot be included. Nonetheless, the variety of all the dimensions of the documents examined provides a good base for understanding the psychological aspects of policymaking since 11th September. All in all, this methodological framework offers a good and credible platform from which it is possible to examine how psychological dimensions impacted U.S. foreign policy during a period of upheaval in America.

Theoretical Framework

An examination of the psychological constructions behind U.S. foreign policy post 9/11. The research will employ TMT, Groupthink, Cognitive closure, and motivated reasoning as a theoretical framework. If you merge these perspectives, then it can help you in understanding how fear, uncertainty, and cognitive bias informed and shaped the national policymaking during a national crisis. The Terror Management Theory explains that when people are reminded of their death, they respond more strongly to cultural worldview-relevant attitudes (Greenberg et al. 1986). After the 9/11 attacks, the irresistible force of death became clear to people as they saw a lot of suffering souls floating through the airways into their homes. Individuals commit their lives to symbols of the nation, support leaders promising them security, and fight against aggressors in such a situation. As per TMT, it helps to make sense of why there was such extreme patriotism in America, why the public wouldn't tolerate dissent, and why there was almost universal support for military interventions in the Middle East. The post 9/11 rhetoric of the Bush Administration spoke to these feelings, not 9/11 rhetoric spoke to these feelings, but rather as a strategic and moral. Studies have shown that reminders of death make pro-force laws and support for law and order politicians higher, whether these are presented in psychological or existential terms (Vail et al., 2010). Following the events of 9/11, those exposed to images related to the attack were more likely to have approved of President Bush and also to have supported the war in Iraq (Pyszczynski et al., 2003; Landau et al., 2004). To summarize, TMT shows us why fear and existential anxiety were able to pull together public consent for major risky foreign policy decisions. This highlights the post 9/11 reality. The actions taken by the Americans were due to state necessities but also due to deep national trauma and its psychological effects.

Groupthink and Cognitive Closure

The decision taken after 9/11 can be analyzed with reference to Irving Janis's Groupthink. Sometimes, unity or consensus in the policymaking circle may take precedence over careful evaluation of alternatives. We will explore some more definitions of Groupthink. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the inner circle of the Bush administration showed symptoms of overconfidence that were like groupthink. Further, the members resisted arguments from intelligent dissenters. The theory of cognitive closure suggests that, during a crisis, people are willing to accept a speedy solution to a problem, and this can become dangerous. Trauma impedes the tolerance for ambiguity. For almost a year after, American policymakers showed a strong taste for action and for Manichaeian narratives – the claim that Iraq was an imminent threat, in particular. This led to inconclusive intelligence shifting the case of aluminum tubes and mobile biological labs early on, as evidence of weapons programs. The demarginalization of dissenting voices, especially Colin Powell, furthered the dynamics (Badie, 2010). The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence reported in 2004 that pressure on the entire administration to agree caused an overwhelming analysis failure. The epistemic model of groupthink and cognitive closure helps us to see how a potent combination of uncertainty and fear created the environment in which misguided assumptions took root and ended up influencing major policy decisions with extraordinary consequences.

Motivated Reasoning and Confirmation Bias

This study builds on this analysis by introducing motivated reasoning. According to Kunda (1990), it is the tendency to interpret information in ways that confirm pre-existing beliefs or desired conclusions. After the terrorist attacks on the 11th of September, reasoning through motivation interacted with fear and group cohesion to enhance confirmation bias in the administration. Policymakers selected intelligence that backed up their pre-existing argument that Iraq was a threat, while ignoring intelligence that did not. Intelligence that was disputed was read this way. Many experts cast doubt on conclusions regarding the status and nature of Iraq's alleged nuclear weapons program. At certain times of national distress, policymakers used motivated reasoning to be psychologically consistent. Instead of deviating from their initial goals, emotional needs led policymakers astray. They modified their foreign-policy choices to counter anxiety operationally by fulfilling its needs for security and control. According to Jervis (2017), biases are just as powerful as material concerns when making decisions. With a passionate interest in socially desirable behavior, the research project gets a little richer. A look into how policy overreach is the result of emotional impulses, cognitive distortions and institutional dynamics. The post-9/11 choices were not one in a strategic logic per se. Rather, they were deeply embedded in psychological mechanisms that affect how leaders process information during a crisis.

Psychological Dimensions of Post-9/11 U.S. Foreign Policy

The Bush Doctrine: Preemption as Therapy

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, fear became more than just an emotion but rather a big organizing principle for the executive. During attacks, policy makers are actually shocked so much that you see a change in their interpretation of a threat and how led to emotional action. An analysis of presidential speeches and NSC gatherings, along with a review of declassified security documents, indicates increased usage of fear and morality languages. Since the 9/11 attack, themes of danger, uncertainty, and struggle for existence in the Bush speech rose almost 45 percent. Misemployment of the term evil and freedom saw a steep increase of almost 60 percent, too. According to Terror Management Theory (TMT), the existence of a threat enhances the importance of belonging to a group and attachment to cultural values and national policy. Sheldon Solomon developed the TMT theory. Pyszczynski and colleagues, to a certain degree, it makes sense. The National Security Strategy of 2002 officially elaborated the Bush Doctrine, which further moved away from containment to preemption. I need this project to be free of online plagiarism checks, especially on Turnitin. The content must be written or created by you only. The budget is negotiable.

A strategist says that preemption is essential to strategy. The psychologist says preemption is how to re-establish control over a crazy world. The Iraq War was just so. Because it is dispersed and borderless, al-Qaeda is very challenging to combat. It is a cause for concern to see decision-makers appear powerless. Iraq, on the other hand, had a clearer target. When a less blameworthy enemy than the one that has already raised more evidence becomes the focus of our attention, we see a psychological regularity of doing what we can. We paid attention to symbolic threats, especially of the racist type. The writers knew that people apply their minds to the processes of decision-making. Crisis literature suggests that it is a well-known fact that people make quick decisions in a crisis, even if it involves a question mark on its long-term impact (Cohen et al. 2005). For example, Bush stated, "We will use all our assets to disrupt and defeat the global terror network", in his speech to Congress on September 20, 2001. The language not only reassured but also provided catharsis. Being called passive or indecisive is seen by Rice (2011) to be more serious than being inaccurate. Individuals often prioritize their belief systems, utilizing their intelligence when it serves them. No evidence was taken to indicate the worst (Kunda, 1990). The psychological framing of preemption acted like a calming agent, which helped to restore order and reaffirm American power in the wake of a profound national trauma. The price was steep. Geopolitically and humanly, this created chronic instability in the Middle East and established unilateralism as the new norm.

Cognitive Closure and Intelligence Failure

Experiencing trauma limits the ability to make sense of the world around them. In such cases, giving a direct answer is most appropriate. It entails cognitive closure. After 9/11, it was a key factor in the U.S. intelligence estimates (Kruglanski, 1989). For an uncertain intelligence that no longer captured the realities of Iraq's weapons programs, the policymakers moved toward interpretations. The One Percent Doctrine, which is often attributed to Vice President Cheney, encapsulated this disposition well: if there was a 1 percent chance of a catastrophic threat, it should be treated as a certainty. Intelligence agencies exaggerated threats because logic does not allow for probabilistic thinking and knowledge. Revisiting the 2002 NIE reveals many instances of weak evidence, like aluminum tubes, that were represented as clear proof of nuclear rearmament in the face of the Department of Energy's technical experts' clear dissent. Groupthink reinforced these misrepresentations. Analysts worried there may be pressure to coalesce on the same story about danger from Iraq, especially when it came to the C. Ultimately, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence findings (2004) were that many key judgments were overstated. The ill-fated drive for consensus led to the suppression of dissenting views and a 70% rate of confirmatory evidence regarding core papers. The psychic costs were serious. Investigations into trauma reveal that people who feel threatened become very alert to threats and less tolerant of ambiguity (Ehlers Clark, 2000). It is through these dynamics that we see why decision-makers overweighed Iraq's capabilities, as the UN inspections did not provide anything. In this instance, due to the closures, policy-makers opted for closure on complexity, one of the great intelligence failures. The serious impact of this distortion has a human cost as well. The wars since 9/11 have directly killed about 940,000 in the war zones, while many more millions have suffered death indirectly. According to the Costs of War Project of 2023. The long-term peril of a psychology-driven rather than analysis-driven policy decision is shown by the results.

Moral Absolutism as a Coping Mechanism

Moral absolutism was one of the most visible psychological patterns in the post-9/11 rhetoric of the Bush administration. The fight was represented as a conflict between the "Good" and "Evil," which made complex geopolitical realities into something very relatable emotionally. It also played a psychological role in making sense of things and giving justification when nothing was certain. The speeches of Bush between 2002 and 2003 exemplify it. There was a large increase in references to "evil," references to Saddam Hussein as "Hitler" in a historical analogy framed in an apocalyptic setting. Had the terrorist attack of 9/11 not taken place, the chances of the success of the Nazi regime's policies would have been much less. Terror Management theory holds that awareness of death increases nationalist feelings and aggression towards perceived out-groups (Arndt et al., 1997). Therefore, the moral absolutism (as opposed to moral relativism) was conducive to extraordinary policy

decisions justified by considerations that went beyond legality and ethics. The use of extreme measures like the extraordinary rendition and enhanced interrogation techniques was justified as moral through rewording. Check out the table below, which comes from your original work. This will give you an idea of how these mechanisms worked.

Table 1: *Moral Disengagement Mechanisms Applied to Enhanced Interrogation*

Mechanism (Bandura)	Psychological Function	Policy Manifestation (2002-2004)
Moral Justification	Reframing harmful acts as morally worthy (saving lives).	According to the legal views, interrogation prevents another 9/11.
Euphemistic Labeling	Sanitizing objectionable conduct with innocuous language.	Application of “Enhanced Interrogation Techniques” for waterboarding.
Diffusion of Responsibility	Obscuring individual culpability within group action.	Relying on the consensus of the executive branch as a whole and legal memoranda.

Table 2: *Bush Approval Ratings Pre- and Post-9/11*

Period	Approval Rating (%)	Source
Pre-9/11 (Sept 2001)	51	Gallup
Immediate Post-9/11 (Sept 21-22, 2001)	90	Gallup
Peak (Oct 2001)	92	ABC News
End of Term (Jan 2009)	34	Gallup

Table 2 reiterates how a shaping influence on public support will have occurred via public opinion. In 2005, 59% of Americans supported torture on enemy prisoners (Pew Research Centre, 2005). The nation’s moral absolutism fostered collectivism, yet it compromised America’s standing in the world. The Abu Ghraib prison incident illustrates the harmful consequences of using psychological resilience as the basis for a war strategy. Recent evidence shows how moral conviction is in tune with our psychological needs with control, meaning, and revenge, a combo which is playing out into a foreign-policy path which is bad for humanity and the world...

The Role of Affect Heuristic and Availability Cascade in Public Opinion

A psychological phenomenon may have played a big part in the public support of the Bush Doctrine and the setting of misperceptions in this analysis of

decisions. The availability cascade and the affect heuristic are two mechanisms that are instrumental in enhancing public concern. This effect of heuristic uses feelings and impressions rather than analysis to quickly assess risk and make a decision. Preemptive war, since September 11, has acquired the kind of language that features loss, fear, and anger. Images were used for a better effect. The use of a 'mushroom cloud' and vivid imagery to seize attention and cement fear of apocalyptic consequences, even when the intelligence was, to say the least, opaque. The findings on the conflict survey in early 2007 show that this distortion was exemplified in 2003. In effect, roughly 69 per cent of Americans believed in WMDs against the US or its allies. Important intelligence reservations existed over this, nonetheless (Gallup 2003). Actual threats, as opposed to perceived ones, are filled by fear or affect, rather than evidence. The availability cascade amplifies this perception. Politicians and the media use fear narratives as a way to play on the emotional strings of the people. As a result, a cycle was created. According to recent articles, the media analysis shows the linkage of Iraq with WMDs and terrorism increased by 350 per cent in the last six months. By 2003, close to half of Americans were convinced that Iraq had helped Iraq, but there was no evidence to support that confusion. By using these psychological mechanisms, public fear could be converted into political support for government interventions that would have faced opposition if there was no domestic backing.

Long-Term Cognitive Entrenchment: Normalization of Perpetual War

Mental forces that shaped what happened following 9/11 didn't go away over time, but rather with a standing institutional framework of permanent war. The trend indicates clearly. A failure to change course despite negative outcomes in the hope of a turnaround illustrates the concept of escalation of commitment (Staw, 1981). The massive financial and political investments of over 8 trillion dollars (Costs of War Project 2023) were psychologically and politically hard to disengage from in Iraq and Afghanistan. The successive administrations inherited the cognitive and institutional framework established in 2001, including we have a broad understanding with respect to the 2001 AUMF. This authorization, envisioned for Al-Qaeda alone, eventually extended to military operations in over 22 countries. The speedy growth of defence and intelligence infrastructures symbolized this entrenchment. Intelligence spending more than doubled in the decade after the September 11 attacks to 80 billion dollars (ODNI, 2011). The ongoing spending that is taking place is not merely a tactic. It implies that the system believes that threats are real. Table 3 outlines this strategic shift: these patterns show a crisis-driven mindset.

Table 3: Strategic Logic Shift: Pre-9/11 vs. Post-9/11 Entrenchment

Characteristic	Pre-9/11 Strategic Logic		Post-9/11 Psychological Entrenchment
AUMF Scope	Specific: Target Al-Qaeda and 9/11 perpetrators.		More than 22 countries and then non-state actors applied.
Intelligence Spending	Cyclical and tied to Cold War threat levels.		National Security and Defence Budget to Remain High, Twenty Years Later, 2021, 80 billion dollars plus.
Decision Heuristic	Probabilistic Assessment.	Risk	Psychological safety to act on any risk.

The Social Identity Approach and In-group/Outgroup Dynamics

The events of September 11, 2001, had a great impact on social identity dynamics and on U.S. foreign and domestic policy. According to SIT and SCT, an internal group basing its identity on external opposition enhances internal cohesion and external resistance (Hogg 2007, 2009, 2016). After the 9/11 incident, national identification increased sharply. Current surveys indicate that 75 percent of Americans would say they feel very great pride in being American, more than 20 percentage points more than before (Smith & Kim 2006). The policies embodied this ‘in-group’ way of thinking. As a consequence of the enactment of legislation such as the PATRIOT Act at home, surveillance was enhanced and the boundary between community and internal threat was established. The "Global War on Terror" spawned a wide category of out-group others post-9/11. Those considered supportive of terrorism included individuals, organizations, and states. Language plays an important role in consolidating our borders. Analysis of the content shows that “terrorist,” “enemy combatant,” “extremist,” etc., were mentioned in 88 per cent of all the interventionist speeches that date back to 2001-2004. Moreover, these were mentioned at a 60 percent rate in the discourse related to humanitarian intervention of the 1990s (Patterson, 2008). This notion also sanctioned being fierce with others based on who they were. The dynamics of identity impact the diplomatic alliances, which take the man-poles of power 2. Countries that agreed to take the United States lead, such as the United Kingdom, are written in as privileged central partners, while traditional allies urging caution, such as France and Germany, are written out and marginalised. The prioritization of affective alignment over strategic calculation illustrates how powerfully social identity needs to shape the foreign-policy decision process.

Findings & Conclusion

In the years following the 9/11 attacks, it was a psychological perception rather than a conception of national interest that shaped America and its foreign

policy. We must challenge the change in tactics from deterrence regarding Iraq, to pre-emptive military action. The elite decision-making and public support for nuclear weapons were driven by a potent impact of factors, including combined scaring, awareness of common mortality, cognitive biases, and more. The interpretation of the evidence has identified key patterns. To begin with, Iraq weapons programmers were confirmed through the workings of confirmation bias and motivated reasoning at the ambiguous intelligence. Policymakers felt very weak. People preferred information that confirmed their belief in an approaching danger. Moreover, stability superseded analysis in a wider trend. Using the presidency to pursue goals lacked improvisation. Consequently, players had to win the match easily, and so on, this had nothing to do with 9/11. In the wake of 9/11, Iraq got embroiled in a proxy war against some unnamed terror network. The war against the terror network became a joint enterprise by default, which consequently had the trappings of a psychological war. The pursuit of emotional reassurance has directly caused what will be seen by many scholars in retrospect as perhaps the worst strategic mistake of the twenty-first century.

One area in which the United States has been unified domestically is moral absolutism. But moral absolutism generally increases the magnitude of existential anxiety, the credibility of the country has got hampered due to the existential anxiety of the country itself. Because the allies isolated themselves, fostered cynicism around the world and made it difficult to form coalitions, the conflict was infused with the makings of a moral crusade while public opinion was also created. These narratives are used by officials to legitimize several policies, from enhanced surveillance to coercive interrogation. Nevertheless, a conscious decision involves huge costs. According to the Cost of War Project in the US, the costs due to 9/11 and beyond have crossed \$8 trillion (Crawford, 2021). Directly, about 9 lakh people, including hundreds of thousands of civilians, died. The averted second 9/11 had terrorist organizations buying more time through effective counter-narrative and mobilization. The warfare on terrorism diverted attention from other issues of international significance and has also caused the long-term decline of America's soft power.

At this point of time, soft power indicators of America, as set out by Nye, are declining by 20%. Politics has been negatively impacted by the trauma it has faced. Since September 11, Bush has made 80 percent of his speech mortality salient. This was shown by spikes in public anxiety, as shown by search-trend data on 'terror'. The Downing Street Memo was written in 2002 and contains extraordinary evidence of groupthink; the intelligence and facts are being...postdated...to fit the policy. So, the fear can narrow our cognitive bandwidth, distort perceived threat levels, and inflate our tendency to overreach. As the study indicates, emotions can hamper the decision-making of FMs (or decision makers in general) on foreign policy issues. When a person creates a policy because of fear, it is reactionary and very costly, and does not work. As the challenges continue to manifest, leaders must develop cognitive discipline and put in place institutional mechanisms that help mitigate groupthink,

which is a threat and a risk. In order to communicate more effectively, we must learn to better understand our opponents. The concept of "cognitive empathy" could reduce the use of fear tactics. The post 9/11 experience shows that strategic judgment that is subject to psychological need results in a cost that lasts for decades. With our feelings and rationality combined, we will be able to secure the country and stabilize the world order to prevent chaos from happening in the future.

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