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11 SEPTEMBER 2001 – THE CONSEQUENCES FOR AMERICA

During the last decade, no event had greater influence on the international situation than the terrorist attack on America. It is often said, that it marked the true beginning of the 21st century, showing the world the scale of the danger, forcing governments to look for exceptional precautionary measures, causing strong turbulence in the international arena.

There is no doubt, that the attack of Al-Qaeda on the USA determined the direction and nature of America's foreign policy. This was due to the fact, that on 11 September 2001 Americans suffered an unimaginable shock. It was not only about the tragic nature of the situation: the scale of destruction, the number of casualties, the drama of this spectacular event. The attacks on New York and Washington dispelled the illusion of many Americans, that their country is a safe fortress, separated from the world by two oceans and protected by its unprecedented military power. Even the Japanese attack on Pear Harbor on 7 December 1941 was greatly significant, in the

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psychological sense, as it took place on the outskirts of the American territory - de facto overseas.

This time, the very heart of America was hit and this is why Americans lost their sense of security, which determined their attitude towards the outside world for decades, but also influenced American foreign policy. Instead, they were faced with fear and, as a result, terrorism became the biggest challenge for the United States. The war on terror, like the war on communism before, became the meaning and number one priority of American policy. "This policy was formed in the atmosphere of public anger and based on the fear caused by the attacks" - later wrote Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The USA was also deeply humiliated. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon showed, that even the greatest power cannot protect the most spectacular symbols of its domination. That was a very painful blow - in the psychological sense - provoking reflection, but also creating the need for revenge. It was this need for revenge which became the driving force of the administration of George W. Bush. The decision was made - almost immediately - to fight back. America was wounded by the Islamic terrorists and decided to crush them. Perfectly sensing the social mood of hurt pride and lost sense of security, Bush became, from one day to the next, a leader and a "war" president, determined and ready to take risks, politically strong. The destruction and elimination of terrorism became the



historic mission of the Bush administration, as if appointed by God.

But the attack on America, its spectacular nature, caused an animated reaction of the rest of the world as well. Compassion and solidarity with the Americans were prevailing at first. People realized the scale of the danger which even the greatest military power could not resist. It can be said, without exaggeration, that in September 2001 the USA received an unprecedented dose of support, understanding and readiness for cooperation. The effect of this almost universal solidarity was the UN's acceptance of the Washington's anti-terrorist actions and the unprecedented application of the fundamental art. 5 of the Washington Treaty, concerning collective defense ("all for one, one for all"), by NATO. The ad hoc created support coalition for the USA (anti-terrorism coalition) was joined, apart from the whole Europe, also by other countries, beginning with Russia and its former republics, through China, Arab countries, Latin American countries, Australia, ending with India and Pakistan. A truly unprecedented situation.

The Bush administration had an excellent chance of using this dramatic situation to create something good, a new model of international relations forming at that time. To maintain this cooperative action, or at least to develop some ground for cooperation, was one of Washington's biggest challenges. It was not only about strengthening the USA's ties with its allies, but also the consolidation of



American leadership, leadership based on cooperation and rules accepted by all sides, the confirmation of American primacy, inspiring trust and awe, not fear and repulsion. From today's perspective one can say, that the G. W. Bush administration did not use this chance. What is more, they squandered the great trust put in the USA and the ability to exert huge influence on the international situation. The moral strength, that America had in September 2011, became severely depreciated and substituted with general feeling of hostility and aversion.

Why did this happen? To a large degree, because of the colossal strategic and tactical errors committed by Bush's teams while waging the war on terrorism. Even though they were, paradoxically, acting in good faith. The American military intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001, where the terrorist responsible for the attack on America, Osama bin Laden, was hiding, was still approved of worldwide. From this victorious - as it then seemed - phase of the war on terror, the Bush administration reach a conclusion, that the American military potential is limitless. With that assumption, as well as the conviction, that the war on terrorism, which - because of the revolutionary foreign policy based on fanaticism and hate - knows no compromise, requires a completely new strategy, they almost revolutionized international relations. This is the nature of the "Bush doctrine", seriously considering military action in their policy, departing, when necessary, from multilateral



actions in favor of unilateral ones, permitting military preventive actions, all for one purpose - the promotion of democratic values.

The new American strategy - so clearly based on the military factor - broke the rules of the former international order. It was also a manifestation of American power and arrogance. It caused a shrill reaction from the international community. People were afraid of American hegemony, a vision of the world, in which America would decide who is a threat and what actions must be taken. Some of America's European allies reacted very critically. In this case, the almost confrontational attitude towards Washington was the expression of Europe's rebellion against the American leadership, a release of hidden grudges and complexes towards America, as well as an attempt to manifest its autonomy in undertaking actions. The effect was an unprecedented breakdown in the transatlantic system, which constituted an important factor for the American position in the world. -

The USA military intervention in Iraq was a dramatic manifestation of the "Bush doctrine", fraught with consequences. When attacking Saddam Hussein in March 2003, America acted. To some degree, on its own - without the mandate of the UN and NATO's loyal support, with strong opposition from, among others, France, Germany and Russia. It was also criticized by the majority of the public opinion in Europe and countries all around the world. The universal dislike for America, the superpower acting arbitrarily, by force and



contrary to rules, was growing. Iraq also turned out to be one of the greatest mistakes of the Bush administration, even assuming that some of the motives of the intervention were right. It exposed the incompetence, ineptitude and excessive "wishful thinking" of the authors of the operation. The credibility of America, the professionalism of its intelligence agencies and the honesty of its politicians were undermined, but most importantly, its reputation as a superpower was strained. This impression was strengthened by the failure to stabilize the situation in Iraq and, later on, the intensification of fights with rebels in Afghanistan. The feeling that the American giant is not so strong anymore provided some satisfaction, but also created an urge to make use of this fact. Other smaller powers and countries, demanding a bigger part in deciding about international matters or willing to demonstrate their new abilities, received a clear signal: America is no longer as strong as we thought it to be.

The lowering of the prestige of the United States caused by such morally questionable incidents as Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib only complemented the negative consequences. One of the American chief assets, influencing its rank and standing in the world, was questioned - its soft power, meaning certain values and rules characterizing America. It resulted in the depreciation of the role of the USA in the world, but also the



escalation of terrorism and chaos in different parts of the globe.

In order to make the picture complete, one needs to add, that the weakening of the USA's position was also the result of a new geopolitical constellation. During the last decade, changes in the international order took place, which made the USA's situation even more complicated. The Bush administration, focused more on fighting terrorism than other priorities of their policy, did not react to those changes with necessary efficiency and determination. It was the appearance of new superpowers, defined mostly by their economic potential - China, India, the European Union. The political (and military) power of Russia grew, Iran and North Korea seemed somewhat dangerous as well. Latin America, in turn, started becoming not only more leftist, but also anti-American. In this new world of different powers, America began to lose its rank of the hegemonic leader able to impose its point of view and its solutions. This meant the end of the monopolar world order. It was increasingly harder for the United States to exert causative influence on the course of matters. The USA's rank weakened even in the transatlantic system (problems with forcing the American point of view through in NATO), despite the absolute indicators of American power still being considerable. But the strength of the competition increased, so as their political ambitions.

The conclusions, that might be drawn from the examination of the actual situation, seem



quite unambiguous - the America's ability to shape the situation in the world decreased, as well as its ability to solve problems and overcome challenges. America lost the capability of forming coalitions and jointly realize goals as well. It also gained an incredible skill of creating coalitions against itself. The USA lost much of its moral strength, which constituted an important element of the American political identity. Anti-Americanism, hidden under the name of "anti-Bushism", became an almost universal phenomenon. The Bush's team squandered the chance, that they had after 11 September 2001, to build something good and constructive using the great charge of political and humanitarian support and solidarity, which resulted from the terrorist attack on America. First of all, however, it squandered the chance to strengthen the American leadership in the world. These observations, coming to mind with the 10th anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, seem truly sad.



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