

# Op250 READING | THE NEW ENEMY

## MEANING OF 'THE ENEMY' IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Dating back to its conception, the United States of America have been involved in state-to-state, world, and domestic conflicts. It of course began with England and the Revolutionary War. From there, the enemy has been England again (War of 1812), itself (Civil War), Spain (Spanish-American War), Germany and their allies on two separate occasions (World War I and II) the Soviet Union (Cold War, Vietnam, Korea), and now terror? Each war that the United States has been involved in over the last 250 years has been against a nation-state, and having clear group that they are fighting against. However in 2001, the center of international focus and security shifted for the United States; the focus of security and the perceived enemy became something that was not entirely understood or known, terror.

Throughout the United States history, the nature of the enemy has changed tenfold. Of course in each of the wars that are mentioned above, the U.S. met the enemy with a hard approach or military action; there are however many other tactics and practices that the United States have taken in undermining and countering the enemy. The use of narratives and propoganda are ways of which the U.S. have marginalized and made an enemy of the "other". However, the current state of the United States has blurred the realities of who this "other" truly is. During the Cold War, there was no question as to *who* the enemy was, communism and its states. As for today, many question what constitutes fear and 'terror,' and should each entity that causes this feeling be met with the America military approach? Many people thought they understood who the United States were fighting after the attacks on 9/11, however the focus quickly turned to the "Axis of Evil" (as famously coined by President George Bush at the time), which was the arrangement of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea—none of which were al-Qaeda. This exemplifies the idea of *who*, or even *what*, the United States were actively fighting against starting in 2001. The 'enemy' has certainly changed since the fall of Nazi Germany in the 1940s, yet enemies have not stopped existing for the

United States. This READING will look at some of the aspects of becoming an enemy, how the U.S. has approached these enemies, how today and yesterday's enemy might be the same or rather different.

### Questions to consider:

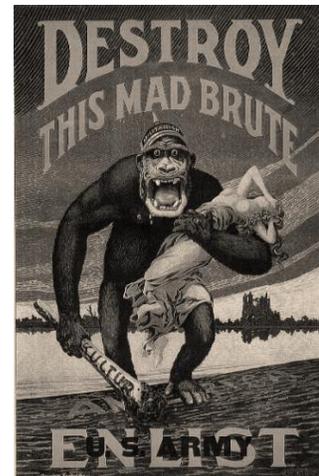
- How has the *concept* of the enemy changed in America over its history?
- In the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century has presented wars such as the "War on Drugs" and the "War on Terror", are these enemies? Do they pose more or less of a threat than an enemy such as the Nazis or Soviet Union?

## Dehumanization of the enemy

Dehumanization is something that two enemies have done to one another for the history of conflict. The most obvious and well-known cases instances of this are in genocidal, ethnic cleansing instances. Leading up to and during the Holocaust, the Nazis referred to Jews as rats. In Rwanda, the Hutus called the Tutsis cockroaches.

Psychologists have tried to explain this in the past and what they have come up with is that it is difficult for humans to kill or target other humans. In dehumanizing the enemy, this lifts the human element from the situations all together, making it easier for the human to commit this atrocity against a "pest" or "rodent".

The United States has also used these tactics. In United States' history, African Americans were referred to as apes and were considered to be three fifths of a human being. The United States also depicted Germans as gorillas with clubs in World War I (right). The United States have continued to use similar tactics into the most recent *War on Terror*.



Demonizing or dehumanizing doesn't always come in the form of political cartoons or cinema. Narratives and rhetoric have been used by countries to depict an enemy or convey a message about the "other". The "War on Terror", as declared by the George W. Bush, called for a new enemy that countries, both the United States among many others, have never faced before; an enemy that could not be pointed to on a map or one that could be understood in typical, state-like ways. The U.S. was no longer fighting fascism or communism - they were fighting an obscure idea of terror. A battle against something "evil" removes basic characteristics that make someone human; the United States practiced this exact tactic in both the Cold War and the War on Terror, referring to the enemy as "evil", giving devilish characteristics to human beings, therefore easing the conflicting desires that separate the two entities at its root.

## The War on Terror and what it means

On September 11, 2001, four passenger planes were hijacked. Two were flown into two of the World Trade Center buildings, one was crashed into the Pentagon, and the last one was brought down by the passengers on the plane in a field in Pennsylvania. This changed the world entirely, shifting countries' focus toward terrorism and protecting against it. Five days later, President George W. Bush made a speech and coined the phrase "war on terror" or war on terrorism that started a movement against the "evil" that committed the catastrophic acts. In a later speech made by President Bush, he cleared up who specifically the enemy was and why they attacked the United States that day.

This was the introduction for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. They successfully carried out an attack against the most powerful country in the world. A country that has not been invaded since 1812 and has only been attacked on its soil once in the last one hundred years was suddenly viewed as vulnerable. Researchers have called terrorism a "**weak man's game**", however this attack sent shockwaves throughout the entire western world. Bush addressed the threat that al-Qaeda posed to the United

### Terrorism: A weak man's game

Terrorism is considered to be a "weak man's game" because, historically, terrorism has never been successful in completing its goals. While there is much discussion as to what constitutes terrorism, many researchers know terrorism to be a tactic that is destined to fail.

States and the entire world, saying they hate America for their freedoms, their democracy, and their way of life. When discussing the War on Terrorism specifically, he said, "Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated".

The impact of this speech has been lasting. The United States began and has continued to fight against terrorism since that infamous speech.

## **The enemy: Al-Qaeda**

Osama bin Laden and his terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, successfully carried out multiple attacks on the United States; two different instances against the World Trade Center in New York in 1993 and then again in 2001, and a successful attack on the USS Cole in the 1990s. Al-Qaeda certainly garnered major attention from the United States and the world after the attacks on September 11th, however President George Bush waged a *War on Terror*, not on al-Qaeda after the attacks that were carried out against the United States. This was a complicated decision by the United States because they are fighting *terror*.

**Let's do an activity—below you will find a world map, point out where *terror* is:**



While there are no country names on the map, it does not matter because *terror* is nowhere to be found. Let's extend this activity to assume that President Bush had

waged war against al-Qaeda, can we find them on the map anywhere? Many people are quick to point to Iran, Iraq, Syria, or Pakistan, however this cannot be done with any sort of confidence from a student, President Bush, or anyone in-between. Yes, the United States and their affiliates are able to destroy al-Qaeda training facilities, hideouts, and bases, but the nature of the threat (and war for that matter) was against something that was (and remains to be) unable to be seen.

The ideology of al-Qaeda is a complex, distorted view of a religion. It is important to understand that those who carry such an ideology within the Islamic religion are miniscule and largely refuted. The basics of the ideology will be outlined, however the important question of *why* will be explored in more detail to understand the underlying reasons why a group like al-Qaeda has become the *new enemy* of the United States.

As mentioned, the ideology is complex. With this understanding, the simplest explanation for their ideology stems from the idea that religion should be pure and the original teachings should continue to prosper. This means that all laws made by man are unjust and contradictory to their interpretation of their faith, and all secular governments are plaguing the world of their practices, customs, and governance. This is where the conflict comes from, because al-Qaeda views the United States as being an influence on the countries that are found in the Middle East, where al-Qaeda's ideology believes it rightly belongs. They feel that the only way to achieve the end of establishing a religious homeland (or Caliphate as they call it) is to use violence against all non-believers of their religion (also called Infidels), i.e. the United States.

This again raises the question of *why*. Why has the United States looked at groups such as al-Qaeda as the new enemy? Of course the reason the United States has been involved in the Middle East, fighting the War on Terror, has been because of the attacks against them on 9/11; whereas the reasons for continually fighting have remained blurred. The world at large has agreed that al-Qaeda is in-fact, the enemy, however the discussion for how to deal with this enemy has been one of the least agreed upon discussions in the politics since 2001.

## COLD WAR VS. WAR ON TERROR

With the understanding of the War on Terror and then with previous knowledge of the Cold War, we are faced with a discussion of how they differ. The two "wars" are some of the most unique and controversial wars that the United States have been a part of in its history, yet they have embodied far more than the dropping of bombs and firing of weapons, but rather the ideological divides, the propaganda battles, the economic differences, and the political turmoil that each country (and non-state actor in the War on Terror instance) has faced. While these two wars are sometimes looked at together, they have vastly different seeds that allowed them to grow in their respected sizes.

In fighting these "wars", the United States was faced with the desire to stop the spread of what they are facing. In the Cold War were smaller wars that branched off, representing the domino effect of communism becoming the enemy to democracy in the bipolar world that prevailed following the Second World War. In the desire to stop the spread of communism, the United States engaged in multiple wars, most notably Vietnam and Korea, in hopes to thwart the spread of the communist system. After the attacks on September 11, 2001, there was a worldwide desire to thwart the spread of *terror* around the world. This of course led to the War of Terror, including the efforts to stop this expansion of an ideology. This, however, has posed problems that were not facing the United States during the time of the Korean Conflict or the Vietnam War, such as the role of religion and the role of technology.

Historically, the United States' wars have been largely political and economic, not having to be concerned with a phenomenon such as religion, however this changed after 9/11. The United States were facing an ideology rather than a political system; battling an unknown entity of which they did not understand. This is not to say that religion did not play a factor in the Cold War. When battling the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the battles were done through propaganda and economic production. When fighting the War on Terror, the United States was using propaganda,

similar to that used in the Cold War<sup>1</sup>, military action in multiple countries, and minor humanitarian efforts throughout the Middle East. This is contrary to the mostly propaganda efforts, with very minor military action (and none at all directly against the Soviet Union) and little to no humanitarian efforts at all during the Cold War. While the threat the Soviet Union posed compared to all of those who constitute terrorists is quite different, it is most important for the United States to engage in attacking the enemy properly. Much of the beginning effort of the United States to fight in the War on Terror was in attempt to help to issue of poverty in the Middle East, yet there was and continues to be no evidence to support that those who are poor join terrorist organizations. The United States attempted to approach the War on Terror by addressing these perceived root causes of the threat, whereas this was not always the case during the Cold War.

### The incident at Abu Ghraib



In 2004, images of torture and abuse leaked to the media, uncovering the treatment of prisoners by the U.S. army. This proved to dehumanize the enemy further, while also incite more anger against the U.S. and negatively affecting their legitimacy in their fight against the terrorists.

Furthermore, the propaganda battle is where the most parallels can be drawn between the two wars. The act of dehumanizing the enemy in both cases was clearly present. During the Cold War, especially during the proxy war in Vietnam, such language to dehumanize all of those within the Vietcong and all of those who believed in communism was used freely in cartoons, television, newspapers, and movies throughout the entirety of the war. These efforts were no different during the War on Terror, best exemplified during the incident at **Abu Ghraib**

and in nearly every speech in the months following 9/11 by President Bush. The process of using dehumanizing language has aided the United States, as well as groups like al-Qaeda against the U.S., in committing violence against the "other" that they are battling.

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<sup>1</sup>While the propaganda was not the *exact* same, many of the common themes were used. The idea of "they hate our freedoms" and "they hate our way of life" are the ideas that were used during each war. These are the ideas that the US's way of life is overly superior and people hate them for it.

Defining the enemy as an "other" is a tactic that has been used throughout human history, easing the struggle of desiring their eventual end. What drives this "othering" mentality is one that divides two groups, of which is apparent in both the Cold War and War on Terror.

The ideological divide between the East and West was a defining difference during the Cold War, being the seeds of the conflict that sprouted the ongoing war throughout the second half of the 20th century. The ideology of communism, while vastly different from that of the ideological difference found in the War on Terror, the base of the difference is the same. Look at the two quotes below:

1. *"Americans are asking 'Why do they hate us?' They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."*
2. *" All political dissenters have been executed, imprisoned, or exiled. All academic freedom has been eliminated. All major newspapers and radio stations have been seized."*

The two quotes, while focusing on different aspects, directly address the hatred and detestation from the enemy against the United States' freedoms. The first quote comes from President Bush after the 9/11 attacks, while the second comes over 40 years prior, President Kennedy on the realities of communist regimes around the world, specifically referencing Cuba in this speech.

### Questions:

- How does the "enemy" change the culture within the United States?
- What are some things that were "normal" fears during the Cold War that aren't now during the War on Terror?
- Should we consider the Cold War and the War on Terror as ideological wars over anything else?

## WHAT IS NEXT?

Starting their rise in the mid-2000s and flexing their full capabilities in 2013 and 2014, ISIS, since being proclaimed as just the Islamic State, have been uncovered as the new(er) enemy in the U.S. War on Terror. The Islamic State, once a sect of al-Qaeda, was believed to be the richest, most brutal terrorist organization that has walked the earth. These claims drew massive attention in their direction, leading to their catastrophic demise in 2016-2017 with a world-wide effort in thwarting their existence. While their land presence has considerably diminished, the reality of the threat has since transcended borders and turned into a battle on the virtual dimension of the internet. This is something that was begun by al-Qaeda, however has taken hold and almost mastered by the Islamic State.

While the nature of the enemy has changed, the enemy itself has remained the same since 2001. The days of traditional state enemies such as the Soviet Union is gone, however the ideological battles have remained much of the same. What this means is that, just like we see today, the battle of Communism vs. Democracy is a battle of ideology. Battles of ideology are grounded in the ideas of nationalistic supremacy, believing your own ideology is more superior to the conflict one. The United States started the 21st century fighting a terror ideology, something that is non-existent. Since this, the focus has altered to the ideology of the groups that are considered to be terrorists, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Traditional state-to-state conflict has since diminished with the collapse of the Soviet Union, however in recent years, flashes of these traditional enemies have persisted. The likes of Russia, Iran, and North Korea have been the subjects of great attention from the U.S. government, certainly being on the horizon of whatever the *new enemy* will be at the completion of the War on Terror.

### Discussion:

- What do you think will the *new enemy* be once the War on Terror ends or fades?
- Is comparing the Cold War and the War on Terror a valid comparison? Why or why not?
- Has the "enemy" in the U.S. changed since 2001? How so?