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America Still Entangled in War in Middle East — 18 Years After 9/11

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Before President George H.W. Bush sent U.S. military forces into Iraq in 1991, commentator Pat Buchanan, who had previously worked for presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, warned that once the United States became entangled in the Middle East, it would be difficult to ever extricate ourselves from the region.



Today marks the 18th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 radical Islamic attacks upon America, which occurred a decade after Buchanan's warning, and the United States remains entangled in the Middle East. Just yesterday, American warplanes dropped 40 tons of bombs on an island in the Tigris River said to be "infested" with members of ISIS.

While that would seem to be a good thing — wiping out members of that terrorist organization — the irony is that had the United States not overthrown Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, ISIS would likely not even exist.

Today marks President Donald Trump's third September 11th as president, and he remembered the victims of the 9/11 attacks, the first responders — many of whom are said to have died from respiratory problems caused by inhalation of the Twin Towers debris — and U.S. troops who have been serving in Afghanistan since shortly after the attacks. American forces were sent to Afghanistan by President George W. Bush to attack the Taliban, the oligarchy then ruling the country. The Taliban had allowed al-Qaeda to use Afghanistan as a sanctuary while planning the 9/11 attacks upon the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. On 9/11 one plane — thought to be on its way to crash into either the White House or the Capitol — crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, when passengers heroically took control of the plane away from the hijackers.

Most of Trump's speech at the Pentagon was spent honoring the nearly 3,000 people killed that day. "For the families who join us, this is your anniversary of personal and permanent loss," Trump said. "It's the day that has replayed in your memory a thousand times over. The last kiss. The last phone call. The last time hearing those precious words, 'I love you.'"

Trump placed a wreath of flowers — a mixture of red, white, and blue — at the memorial site.

Vice President Mike Pence delivered a short talk in Shanksville, while members of Congress held a moment of silence on Capitol Hill.

Because many Americans believed that Iraq's government was behind, or at least cooperated with those who attacked the United States on 9/11, President Bush was able to persuade Congress to authorize a



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military assault upon Iraq in 2003, with the goal of removing Hussein from power. While American forces quickly achieved that goal, the power vacuum left by the removal of Hussein led to the unleashing of radical Islamic terrorists in Iraq, including ISIS.

While Hussein was a brutal dictator, he apparently had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, and in fact, acted as a restraining force on Islamic radicals in Iraq, specifically, and in the region generally. The weakening of Iraq has also contributed greatly to the emergence of Iran as a feared regional power. Hussein also protected the nation's Christians from Islamic radicals, but now the Christian community in Iraq has almost been wiped out.

So while many Americans cheered after F-15 and F-35 warplanes carpet bombed Qanus Island just north of Baghdad, no doubt killing ISIS fighters holed up there, the successful attack only highlights the continued presence of the American military that Buchanan warned about almost 30 years ago.

This followed the breakdown of peace talks between the United States and the Taliban this past week. Fourteen thousand U.S. service members remain in Afghanistan. More than 2,400 Americans have been killed in Afghanistan since 2001. U.S. forces were originally part of a combat mission of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but the NATO mission ended in 2014.

The growing unpopularity of the wars in the Middle East contributed to the Republicans losing control of Congress in 2006 and the White House in 2008, just as the Vietnam War greatly damaged the Democratic Party in the 1960s.

Today, a majority of Americans appear to believe the war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting, according to a poll by the Pew Research Center. In the poll, conducted in May, 59 percent of all adults said the war was not worth fighting, as compared to 36 percent who said that they believe it was worth fighting. Amazingly, 58 percent of veterans do not believe the war was worth fighting.

Part of the reason that Trump won the White House in 2016 was that he pledged to pull U.S. troops out of Afghanistan. Back in 2000, Governor George Bush of Texas was able to score political points by promising a "more humble" foreign policy after several years of nearly incessant deployments by President Bill Clinton.

With the breakdown of talks between the United States and the Taliban, it now appears as though the war in Afghanistan will not only continue, it may actually intensify.

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