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Anti-terror war weakens U.S. role in world

by Xinhua Writers Yi Aijun, Ran Wei

WASHINGTON, Sept. 8 (Xinhua) -- As it turns out, the unprecedented attacks on U.S. soil on Sept. 11, 2001, have transformed the country tremendously.

A decade later, the country is still mired in two costly and bloody wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while the war on terror as a whole does not seem to be drawing to a close -- a situation analysts say was purposely designed by al-Qaida to weaken U.S. power.

WEAKENED ROLE

In direct response to the attacks, the Bush administration launched the "global war on terror," under which Afghanistan and Iraq were turned into battlefields in quick succession.

On Sept. 20, 2001, in his address to a joint session of Congress and the nation, then U.S. President George W. Bush said the "war on terror" began with al-Qaida, but it did not end there. "It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated," he said.

A decade later, that goal remains a tall order. Even worse, the wars have tarnished the U.S. image and weakened its power, as means of detention and torture were applied to prisoners, and skyrocketing defense expenditures have contributed to the ballooning budget deficits and national debt.

"I think we're moving back to a situation where the U.S. has more of a normal position in the world, still the largest economy, but there are lots of other economic centers of powers," Richard Sylla, an economist at New York University School of Business, told Xinhua.

The 9/11 tragedy and the ensuing anti-terror wars affected the U.S. role in the world, said Martin Indyk, vice president and director of the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution think tank.

He said the United States was the only superpower left standing after the collapse of the Soviet Union at the time, but al-Qaida succeeded in provoking a land war by orchestrating the 9/11 attacks, first in Afghanistan in October 2001 and then in Iraq in March 2003.

The land war was "purposely designed by them to suck the U.S. into a situation in which we will be stuck and they will be free to attack our military forces."

Indyk said that the United States played into the hands of al-Qaida, thus complicating its relations with the Arab world, and helping Iranian influence grow in the Middle East. This cost the United States a tremendous amount of lives and money, the former U.S. official said, adding that this has had "a profound influence" on the U.S. standing in the world.

Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato

Institute think tank, spoke along the same lines.

Carpenter said the United States launched two "unnecessary and seemingly endless" wars in addition to wasting hundreds of billions of dollars on largely ineffectual security measures at home.

"That has decimated our strength and wasted additional hundreds of billions of dollars. The al-Qaida leadership has to be thrilled by the foolish, shortsighted U.S. response to the 9/11 attack," Carpenter said.

"Actually I would argue, if al-Qaida had a strategy for how it wanted the U.S. to respond to the 9/11 (attacks) in a way that would undermine U.S. strength and played into the hands of al-Qaida and other radical Islamist elements, Washington responded exactly the way that al-Qaida hoped," he said.

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