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**Intro:** Welcome to the Let’s Talk Government Podcast. A podcast that is provided for you by the department of government at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Located in Minnesota in the United States. I am your host Dr. Pat Nelson, the chairperson of the department of criminal justice. I want to thank you for joining us as we explore different topics related to government. Some may be surprising and some may not, so please enjoy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Welcome to Episode 28 of the let's talk government podcast, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the war on terror. I am joined by Dr. Abdulla Battah from the International Relations program in the department of government at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Dr. Battah’s teaching and research focuses on international relations theory, international political economy, international conflict resolution and middle east comparative politics. So Dr. Battah, what was the 9/11 terrorist attacks to you and then what followed? How did that impact you and your perceptions?

**Dr. Battah:** Well, first of all, I must tell you I, it all started on highway interstate highway 55. I was driving down you know I drive from the Twin Cities to MSU, a hundred miles basically. And along the way I listened to PBS service into KSTP, I listened to KFAN and some of the others. And at that moment, which I recall quite vividly I was listening to KFAN and they interrupted what they were doing by noting, almost casually, that a little plane hit one of the towers. And you know they commented on it this is like a state thing and they commented on it in a joking way. And then we moved closer to Mankato, this was just before 9 a.m. and I had a class at 9:30 and more so **[inaudible]** actually, and then as I was going there, there is a second one, and it began to hit everybody that I said oh this is really deliberate and serious. I got to campus and into my classroom 206 I had world politics class there and I had a TV there. So the students had put the TV on because they wanted to watch. And I came in and I told them just keep it as it is the door was open on the other side in the main hallway. And I see Carol Sue's very peeking in to see basically you know the TV, she enters, you know. Of course she and I were not in the best term, so to speak, but at that moment she looked at me I looked at her, and you could say there was a link, you know as humanity that it was exposed to both of us in each of us, I guess. And then she entered and stood there, we all looked, and we saw the second tower falling apart. And part of the announcement said that the U.S. government is directing all flights to the U.S. to go to Canada. For a moment we joked about, you know, it's got to be that bad because like, while you're afraid of them hitting United States but you tell them go ahead and go to Canada. And so you know that is vivid in my memory. And I tell you that probably for two weeks after that we could not have any normal discussion about any of the topics. And it was relevant because my class was world politics and of course you know these issues are very much of the center of what we talked about so it was relevant and timely, but I imagine even in the sciences they have similar discussions. So that's what I recall about but of course all the big things that ensued after that.

**Dr. Nelson:** Right and I actually watched the second plane hit a tower. I was in training and somebody came in and said, a plane just hit the World Trade Center let's turn on the TV and literally I saw the second plane hit. So you just, when you see something like that or experience it you just take a breath because you just know everything is shifted right? So three days later, after 9/11 on September 14th, president George Bush gets authorized the authorization for use of military force against terrorism. And this was directed at Afghanistan. So from your perspective as a scholar of comparative politics and world politics, what did that mean to you and what did you see happen after that?

**Dr. Battah:** Well, I mean, first of all, the question is who did it? And I remember you know I did some interviews and I didn't have much information but I was confident to saying that the axel behind this, the bad guy behind this is not a state. And it had been talked about some of the things we're not really sure but I can be sure that it was not a state like Iraq, for example.

**Dr. Nelson:** Right.

**Dr. Battah:** And why was I sure about it? Because I was asked why would you be so sure about it? I said because it took lot of secrecy, a lot of deliberate action, secrecy that the states cannot do. You know, this is not, I mean assure you if it had been a state, it would have been foiled, it would have been disrupted and we would have known about it before even it happened. It had to be something else. And that is yet to emerge and of course, ultimately, the you know, the finger was pointed to Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda the group before in 1998. And of course you know what followed from that was a number of initiatives that literally changed the world as we know it. I mean and relationships among countries and even in society the domestic changes that were affected. There were changes in the Middle East as a region, there were global changes as well. So, 9/11, and the war on terror basically brought all of that about so to speak. And I must say that, you know as people have noted many times before, that the war on terror or war on terrorism is a nebulous term. You know, it's like you say a war on democracy, a war on poverty. It seems to be saying something but there's nothing concrete in the air so to speak. But what it did, however, the terminology is give a cover for an open-ended warfare. That's really the value. If you want to see value, that's the value of it. It's basically instead of saying this is a walk with the **[inaudible]** and then you know, the actual mission is accomplished and go home. But this was open ended and global in its reach.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well and exactly right. You are using the war on terror or terrorism depending on what you're quoting, you get to attack different targets, you don't have to focus. Because initially our focus was on Afghanistan. And then within a year now we're focused on Iraq. And we've done drone strikes in Iraq and Iran, in Yemen and Syria. So I mean the whole area has been covered. I mean Pakistan, we did missions into Pakistan that's where they got Osama Bin Laden, where they killed him was actually within the Pakistan borders so it's very interesting.

**Dr. Battah:** The countries were affected. I mean you could basically say that if the countries were **[inaudible]**, in one way or another a war. And it became an umbrella cover, so to speak, not just for the two wars you have spoken about, but for isolated strikes whether they're through drones for example, or other means. It became also a cover for dictatorial regimes everywhere in the middle east and everywhere in Africa and elsewhere, to hunt down the dissidents and their opposition and the notion we are fighting a global term. So it became a useful cover for all sorts of after, so to speak.

**Dr. Nelson:** So could you just speak to that a little bit more because our listeners might not be aware. But could you give an example or two of the dictatorial regimes that use this war on terror to basically hunt their opposition?

**Dr. Battah:** Well I mean if you take a Pakistani **[inaudible]** you know, partner with it in a bigger way than other countries, according to their current president and **[inaudible],** He says that by the involvement of the Pakistani government over 70,000 Pakistanis were killed. Meaning that government turned against its own people and you could imagine that wreaks havoc in a country that to begin with is impoverished and so add to itthat you know complication. And essentially it's kind of an egregious that would make for a **[inaudible].** You could consider what happened in Syria, for example, in Iraq, you know, the war on ISIS in the Syria, Iraq region and now of course Afghanistan.And they are in meshed you know in there.But dissidents and opposition groups and individuals prominent or otherwise have been suppressed in a big way in Egypt. Of course Syria has a civil war and Saudi Arabia-- Saudi Arabia, the slightest criticism of the government, even insinuation of criticism, lands you in prison and basically nobody knows what happens to you and there are several scholars, someof them are quite sick because of age or disease and they are behind bars. And the case, you know with other countries, the CIA started a program called rendition in which it captures people, presumably suspected of terrorism or plotting, I suppose. And then, it sent them to countries that will guarantee they'd be tortured.So they went to Jordan, they went to Egypt, they went to Poland and other places, and other additional program and the idea is to extract confessions from them.And through methods such as pulling their nails and doing all sorts of, you know, toss up to them and so things like that, you know, were all over the place.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well it's interesting you brought that up because I mean, we know it happened before, but since the 9/11 and coming to light about the torture and taking citizens from one country to another to interrogate them and torture them, has really kind of come to light and makes you wonder how we tolerate that. But all the people have to say is we don't want another 9/11 and people are like oh yes okay, it's okay, when it's really not okay.

**Dr. Battah:** Well yeah I mean you know I think people are naïve because they think well you know if it's our government that’s doing it, they must have good reasons. In fact, you know if you take just the case of Guantanamo, and you say well you know there are about 780 people that were captured and brought to **[inaudible].** About 800 you know some 32, I believe, of them were released without a charge. Without the charge. Now, mind you, some of them had been helpful 10,12,13,14 years. You know one of them was a 15-year-old Canadian and he was released and Canada you know apologized to him and his family and I think gave $10 million Canadian dollars to him. Guantanamo today still has 39. Only two have been convicted.

**Dr. Nelson:** Right.

**Dr. Battah:** Now we're talking about 19 years afterwards, 20 years afterwards to convict. I mean you think you're holding that for all of those years you know, you would bring some charges against them and you would convict them. Why would you otherwise hold them?

**Dr. Nelson:** Right.

**Dr. Battah:** Violations-- gross violation of human rights and I think it's because it's out of sight, it’s in Guantanamo, no one wants to do business in the United States, they're not afforded the same rights, you know. So people, it happens to the bad guy so anybody that's there is a bad guy. And that's it, they're condemned. Now what happened of course in 2014 swap for releasing hostages, one hostage, one Sergeant was captured—U.S. soldier captured by the Taliban. And in 2014 you know, there was a swap of prisoners and some Taliban leaders and members were released in an exchange to their sergeant. One of them now is an acting Prime Minister. And then about five, six of them have officials in the government of the Parliament. Those absurd in Guantanamo. You know, that's part of the legacy, I guess.

**Dr. Nelson:** It is a sad part because I mean, they created their own classification for the military combatants in Guantanamo so that they didn't have to treat them as prisoners of war, yet they were not afforded our constitutional protections in the United States. It's such a sad legacy so. So let's transition from that. How does that legacy, the Guantanamo, the CIA, taking citizens from one country to another to torture, how does that change the view of the United States to the rest of the world, the political world?

**Dr. Battah:** Oh, I think tremendously. I mean, you know you say the United States is trying to you know bring democracy to the east and I say that to the people there when I travel, they laugh at me. They say of course that's a joke, you know I mean it's a funny joke. Or maybe it's not too funny because well, the United States need to be a model of it in the first place by treating the Muslims in the country you know because of Islamophobia and the rest of that, the United States needs to act based on the rule of law. But it hasn't really shown that. The United States needs to you know, because of their abuse is like for example what happened in Abu Ghraib prison and the tortures. And those were displayed in people taking videos as they were torturing prisoners. And of course in ISIS. Use of private military security companies like Blackwater and others. And the shooting of civilians, innocent civilians in the source square, for example, it's like fly over and shoot everybody it was like, you know, it was-- there's nothing

to it. And of course all of that is displayed now a days by the social media, by Al Jazeera, by CNN, and people see that. They say, oh look what the United States is doing. And that, in many ways takes that criticism from their own government because their governments can justify what they're doing because he is, in that sense, doing it. And so that no longer-- I mean I grew up in Jordan and I read in books about the U.S. Civil War, Abraham Lincoln and fleeing of the slaves, so on, so forth. And the image was really glowing. And I know before that, the United States was great in the Middle East because it had not been a colonial power like the British and the French and Woodrow Wilson advocated self-determination. Well, so the image was really positive of the United States, but in the past several decades all of that actually went away. And you know in IR we speak about soft power and their soft power, their meter went down to zero. The United States used to really have a big age when it comes to that. So what's the big difference between the United States and the Soviet Union? The United States is a democracy that advocates for human rights and all of that, all of those glowing terms were on the side of the Soviet Union. It’s an atrocious dictatorship, it's brutal. Now, you see there's not much of a difference. The United States supported dictators, like Russia, supplies them with weapons, supplies them sometimes with two sides of a conflict, you know with weapons, the United States engages in all sorts of nefarious activities. The CIA is linked to a lot of different negative things and the image has been really badly you know impacted.

**Dr. Nelson:** So that's our political image. What about the economics of the war on terror? Has it impacted any of the regions, like the Middle East, Pakistan, Afghanistan, economically that we've been conducting this war on terror?

**Dr. Battah:** Yeah I mean, of course. I mean pick out countries where the world was conducted in a big way, Afghanistan and Iraq for example, that these were devastated, their infrastructure was the best. Talk about water facilities and talk about roads and bridges and so on, so forth. All of that requires a lot of money and a lot of this causes a lot of hardship for the people. And Iraq in particular, well both of them I guess, your era has suffered for a decade long under the sanctions led by the United States, brutal sanctions. By 1995, it was said by the experts that looked at it, a lot of them were worse than any of the U.S. that over half a million children in Iraq died due to the sanctions. And in fact, Mrs. Albright was asked about that in a 1995 interview on 60 minutes and Leslie Stahl asked her, what do you think about half a million Iraqi children dying that are linked to this? he said. He asked her, do you think it's worth it is it? Yes, I think it’s worth it. Mrs. Albright was then the U.S. ambassador of the UN, shortly after became the secretary. There’s a video of that on YouTube that 60-minute piece. So, the **[inaudible]** were devastated of the sanctions. The most severe and comprehensive statues, ever. Ever. And so the country was really under them and you know people thought, well, the United States would invade Iraq people will line up in the speech and cheer the American troops as liberators. Now this is where the neoconservative saw the idea. And not only that, the world would be paid for by Iraqi oil. And of course all of that turned upside down. The neoconservatives were simply, you know, dishing out a bad deal for the United States. If **[inaudible]** found a deal for the United States, how could you-- how could the Iraqis, and certainly some of them will cheer, no doubt. But the vast majority of the Iraqis suffered under Saddam Hussein's endeavor and of sanctions, Saddam Hussein was a bad guy. But from their perspective, he was their son of a bitch. But the U.S. was the enemy. So a comparison you know, that Saddam Hussein would look relatively better and there is some innocence for his era nowadays I guess because of the chaos and the actual instability in Iraq is part of that legacy. The creation of a governmental system, that is basically designed to fail because it is similar to their system that exists in Lebanon at its core concepts Yoshino system, which basically divided the power among the different professional groups. But what happens, this is based on demographics. Demographics change, which means then you have instability along the way. I mean the United States wants to put democracy in Iraq but for sure it didn't want it to have a democracy similar to that United States where everybody is a citizen you know, divided among this group or that group you know. But that's the legacy in Iraq and you still have here almost on a daily basis of killing. Now Afghanistan is a different story because Afghanistan you know had a number of governments in the 70s and the Soviets invaded and of course you had a link to war against the Soviet Union and the United States participated in that. The United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to help the so called Mujahideen and to help Osama Bin Laden against the Soviets. The irony, the United States the moment the Soviets left with Gorbachev, the United States said goodbye, we'll see you later. Surely they wouldn't recognize that the country's been devastated, and need infrastructure, and need to have a limitation, and need to help set up its government. But it approached it immediately into a civil war and the Civil War made for a failed state that became, you know a place that is conducive for Osama bin Laden and his group to come back to, they have actually left. they come back to a safe haven for them because of instability their government is fighting, you know, a civil war. And I look at our withdrawal nowadays and I say that's exactly what happened in the 1980s. I mean, this is, is that deliberate or what? I mean is it—are PR officials really ignorant. I mean, you want to make a deal with the Taliban, which the proper administration did, you know they signed an agreement with them. Okay. Well, for the sake of Afghanistan and stability for usage so that it doesn't become a field of state and a safe haven for terrorists, help them a little bit. They want they want to reconnect, they want to join. Now, we're spending our time saying, well you know their government, this is, you know, the government does not have women in it, it doesn't have minorities in it, it doesn't have this, doesn't have that in it. Well, I'm not really sure how much of a question was that during the U.S. **[inaudible].** Quite frankly, as a country that’s been given time to stand on its own feet and partially in ways that don't have to necessarily be, you know, kind of mid stipulations and announce, you made a deal with the money to make those deals with them. Why didn't you stipulate that we will get you out of Afghanistan provided you do A. B. C. D, and ISIS didn't do that. But I looked at the media and I hear the announcement people are so, you know, they are so pleased because women are not really included in the government. To me it's like if that was so important for the United States they would put up with that as a stipulation. Right, I mean I realize all of that, you know emphasis, which I think is extraction rather than a real thing you know. And I should note, you know, the important point about Iraq. Iraq, the President Bush said it is part of the war on terror. But everything else about it says, it shouldn't have been Iraq. Iraq’s war is not, you know, parallel to that of Afghanistan. The United States invaded the sovereign country illegally. Illegally under international law. That's why in the Security Council, countries did not support. That's why we put together with this book **[inaudible]** of the winning. Not the war that George W. Bush led into Iraq is not the same as the war that is lead under the rubric of the United Nations. Just an illegal war and imagine the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis that were killed, the devastation of the instability of there. I think to lump it under the war on terrorism without questioning, is to do injustice to the fact that this was an aggressive war by the United States and the reason the United States got away with it, because it can. Not because of right or justice.

**Dr. Nelson:** That is such a good point because the war in Afghanistan was very-- was heavily supported. It was supported by the UN, it was supported by other countries because there was clear evidence of the link to Afghanistan, but the Iraqi war was not. So I would like to take you to one other country before we kind of wrap up. How does this impact our relations with Iran right now? I mean we've been sanctioning them for generations as well, we're drone striking.

What do you think about that?

**Dr. Battah:** Yes, and of course you know, this has been taking place over the course of the revolution there in 1979. And there are supposed to be hostages and held up for 444 days. Things are sour there, during the Iraq war we supported both Iraq and Iran simultaneously. The Reagan administration said Iran, you know, is a terrorist attacking country, we will never negotiate with them or deal with them. And we discovered of course from the Iran **[inaudible]** that oh in fact they were dealing with them and supplying them with missiles and so on and so forth. Ollie North was part of that deal. But I think Irani’s were happy about that. In the 1990s you know the bush and the Clinton administration continued with that. The Clinton administration said it should dual containment, dual meaning of Iraq and Iran. Now what happened, you know subsequent to 9/11? The Iranians had major overtures to the United States that they understand, they will support the United States and indeed materially they did support it in Afghanistan against the Taliban. There was a shared interest there. And in Iraq, they didn't. But, because of course they supported the Shia, they are in power now. Now, if you say well you know who won the war in Iraq? The easy answer is Iran. Iran turned out to be the beneficiary of the war in Iraq because it had put in power all of those people that had been three years, I guess, in into hiding basically, they’re Iraqis, but they were you know very much Stooges of the Iranian government. And the war in Syria now, you know against-- I just, Likewise, the beneficiary of that is Iran and Russia. And, well to a lesser extent they get to be here and to some extent. So Iran actually, after 9/11 basically wanted to come close the United States and support the United States, put aside you know all the issues that had been there.

But what happened, President Bush made a big speech in which he identified what he called the axis of evil countries and he named Iran as one of the three, Iraq being one and North Korea being another one. And of course, the message was sent the United States then following this invaded Iraq, Iran and North Korea got the message. The reason why the United States did that is because Iraq competed in **[inaudible]** and the weapons didn't have nuclear weapons and so that made the North Koreans hasten to get theirs and so all of the rhetoric about North Korea went away, right? And they have developed, you know a number of nuclear warheads that Iranians have been doing their very best to acquire nuclear weapons. Realizing that, that may be the only thing that would keep the United States from attacking. So I would think that policy was counterproductive unfortunately and Iran has gained the upper edge in it.

**Dr. Nelson:** That's very interesting. And President Bush did rely on that Axis of Evil kind of harkening back to the world war two imagery, where most of his supporters would have been at the right age at that time so. All right so Dr. Battah, would you like to give us some closing-- some of your closing thoughts on maybe, how is the war on terror going to keep progressing or the impact on the future here?

**Dr. Battah:** I mean I think it will continue. Because as I said the **[inaudible]** covers about 80 countries or so. Companies have realized that they have a cover. So you see now, countries that want to suppress their minorities have a free have to do that. Look at China, for example, you know with their minorities, particularly their Muslim minorities, look at Myanmar, look at India in Kashmir and the Muslim in there. The Arab Spring revolutions were promising for a moment or two, but the counter revolutionary basically using the war on terror, a cover for them, came back and harshly put down their opposition and instability in the region. The region is a whole lot more unstable than it had been before civil wars rage on Yemen. And Syria and Iraq is on the verge of breaking up as well. This group cannot speak against their governments and it has really been you know terrible for promoting human rights, and democracy, and free speech, you know, and the rest of that. Not to mention, of course the domestic you know impact here.

You know the Patriot Act and the amendments that followed that and their impact on the first amendment and their impact on the Fourth Amendment, as well. Islamophobia, right wing nationalism, not just in the United States, in Europe and India and in a lot of other places. So this is, this is something that I think will continue for some time unfortunately and governments are emboldened to take those measures. Anytime you criticize the government they say what you're doing it number one, number two, we're fighting terrorists. And it’s just like okay, well, you know everybody defines who their terrorists are you know. And your terrorist may not be necessarily my terrorists but nevertheless, everybody now is free to define their own you know terrorists. Not to mention the legacy in terms of money. I mean, staggering amounts of money spent on those wars. I think the Brown Watson Institute issued the report, anyone report for the past several years. And the last one was on September 1st, it said that the war on terror, you know the cost. Part of it is a future cross for the veterans and so on and so forth. About $8 trillion, $8 trillion dollars they estimate 900,000 people approximately died. They estimate you know loss of a lot of civilians. Hundreds of journalists, some of them were you know attacked.

I mean, U.S. forces in Iraq attacked journalists on the 15th floor of the Palestine hotel in Baghdad. They attacked the headquarters of Al Jazeera and Baghdad, as well as in Kabul. It's a tough day to be a journalist I mean this is like, you know of course they had you know their journalists they so called embedded. Can you imagine embedded? I mean, you could easily say embed you know as opposed to embedded because a journalist will see whatever you want them to see. If they are embedded, if they're sitting in your tank, or they're sitting in your Humvee, okay they're essentially hostages to you. So anyway, but you know that's, I think that you know there is so much that will continue based on you know this war. We don’t know if there will ever be a clear cut in any of that or the changes that have taken place I think will last for generations to come. And not to mention the fact that in the Middle East, our support for the dictators, has if anything, increased, because the dictators play along. You know, you just pay money, you just do arm twisting with them, you pressure them, they do what you want. Certainly democracy and I speak, you know, to groups and they say you know democracy importing democracy. And I tell them, think about it. Really, if you want to take the U.S. government perspective, do you really want there to be democracy in these countries?

Think about it. Don’t answer right away and democracy will work for you to basically negotiate with legitimate popularly elected people who will have the backbone to stand up for you if they don't like what you're doing. But I think you could you threaten them, you could bribe them, you know they can more easily be malleable and do what you want to do, and that's what we have in the Middle East and ISIS is now supporting in a bigger way than it did before those you know dictators. And you know you would imagine there'll be a bigger, there will be a flash at some point. The United States presence has also expanded and increased. That will have you know-- that would have what one scholar called the low back at some point. And it's important that we all know that. People are not crazy and doing things bad to us, isn't as though they say, oh, I woke up this morning I really want to kill some Americans. Why, because I wanted to. You know they don't realize that you know there are some things that people worry about like you and I worry about. I mean look at the shift, dramatic shifts the United States took under those circumstances to go, you know, the United States had been biased **[inaudible]** I would say that’s 90%. But now it's still 100%. With the Trump administration, recognizing Jerusalem, which the Israeli government had accepted that Jerusalem would be under-- would be subjected to negotiations. No, the Trump administration said no, this is not to be subject to the negotiations, we recognize it as your capital, we're going to move over the embassy there. And okay so here you tamper on international law, other solutions you know and what would the people that are impacted by this negatively say? Thank you, United States you know you're kind of, you're so great to just kind of do things that you're helping us I mean, we'd love that kind of help, you know.

**Dr. Nelson:** There's so much more we need to talk about. I love talking with you, Dr Battah because you bring such a global perspective that, as I'm sitting here like we need to talk about some more things so. Well thank you for your time. Again, such interesting conversations and there are generations that have been impacted by the war on terror and sanctions, that we seem to forget about here in the United States. So, I appreciate you joining me.

Dr. Battah: thank you very much I really appreciate you doing those podcasts. I think we need them and this was the right time to be here.

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