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## Legacy Agenda, Part II The Bush Doctrine and the Long War

By Thomas Donnelly and Colin Monaghan

*The White House has recently taken important steps to ensure that the tenets of the Bush Doctrine endure beyond the end of President George W. Bush's administration, including a new strategy in Iraq and an increase in the size of U.S. land forces. But as time grows short, the president needs to attend closely to three matters. The first of these—a surge in U.S. efforts in Afghanistan—was discussed in the February 2007 edition of National Security Outlook, is a need as obvious and pressing as Iraq and an important factor in the urgency of rebuilding land forces, especially the Army. The second and third factors are less frequently discussed but essential for the long-term viability of the Bush Doctrine and the continuation of the Pax Americana: articulating a strategy for the “Long War” in the greater Middle East and devising a genuinely global response to the rise of China. This issue of National Security Outlook is devoted to the second factor, the strategy for winning the Long War in the Middle East.*

Although the global conflict in which the United States is currently engaged may have begun in Afghanistan, it certainly will not end there. As explained in the first *National Security Outlook* in this series, Afghanistan remains a prominent front in the War on Terror, and American efforts there will play a crucial role in determining the outcome of the fight against Islamic extremists. Recognizing the significance of the fight in Afghanistan, President Bush recently ordered an increase in the number of American forces there and requested \$11.8 billion over the next two years to help strengthen the nascent Afghan democracy.<sup>1</sup> The United States simply cannot afford to fail in Afghanistan, nor can it afford to fail in Iraq. Far beyond any questions about Saddam Hussein's dealings with terrorists and violent Islamists, success in Iraq is inseparable from any hope for a more stable, more representative

political order in the region. But there is an even greater challenge to reckon with: America's leaders must also look to the wider Middle East and, indeed, the entire Islamic world.

In order to succeed in a struggle that will be fought on multiple fronts and will demand sacrifices from future generations, a sound strategy for fighting the Long War must be established. Though it may be unreasonable to expect President Bush to lay out a finely detailed approach to a war that will certainly endure for decades beyond the end of the current administration, it is imperative that he set out a general framework for future strategy-making and establish a hierarchy of strategic priorities. The Long War will ultimately be won or lost by future administrations and future generations of Americans, but it is up to President Bush to set the tone in the fight for the future of the Middle East and the Islamic world and to ensure that the principles of the Bush Doctrine endure.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not everyone is prepared to admit it, the United States is in this struggle for the long haul, and it is time to build the foundation of a strategy that will lead to victory.

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## The Origins of the Long War

The attacks of September 11, 2001, shocked Americans not only because they were difficult to witness, but also because they were difficult to explain. We wondered: What had we done to deserve such a pitiless strike on innocent civilians working at the World Trade Center? Why did they hate us? “War” in the Middle East meant Israelis versus Arabs or Iraq versus Iran. “Terror” meant attacks on far-flung American embassies or military outposts, and fighting it was a job for the Justice Department, not the military. The conflicts of the years since then have only served to compound our confusion. President Bush initially declared a “Global War on Terrorism,” driving the Taliban from power in Afghanistan without capturing or killing Osama bin Laden. Al Qaeda the organization became al Qaeda the movement. Saddam Hussein was deposed in Baghdad, but the subsequent chaos spawned a vicious sectarian war in Iraq. The War on Terror had become the Long War.

What does that mean? Properly understood, the Long War is a struggle for the political future of the Islamic world, especially the Arab Middle East. It is a remorseless revolutionary conflict brought about by the inability of the region’s governments—the artificial, post-colonial states created in the aftermath of World War I—to establish any lasting legitimacy in the eyes of their people. Collectively, these regimes comprise a catalogue of failed or failing states. Politically, they have neither secured nor sought the consent of the governed. Militarily, they have defended the rulers at the expense of the ruled. Economically, they have exploited their natural resources while devoting scant attention to the development of their human resources. Culturally, they have embraced a volatile mix of postmodern licentiousness and premodern tribalism. It should come as no surprise that this brittle system is close to breaking. The status quo cannot hold; the only question has to do with the outcome and character of the revolution to come.

It has become apparent that revolutionary Islamic government—a political order given by God rather than made by man and based upon religious authority rather than secular accommodation—represents a reaction to the failures of legitimacy of current states. Whether in the form of Iran’s revolutionary Shiism or the radical Sunni alternative expressed by al Qaeda and its fellow travelers, theocracy is the immediate alternative to the autocracies, sultanates, and kingdoms now entrenched in the region. This is already a bitter and violent contest, but it is also

almost certain to expand in scope and in lethality. It is a war fought in the shadow of nuclear weapons.

It is also a war fought in the part of the planet that supplies the energy resources for the world’s industrial nations—both the mature economies of the West and the emerging economies of India and China. Thus, though it is a contest among the relatively weak, it is also a contest that greater powers cannot ignore. The danger is that, as in the Balkans a century ago, unresolved local conflicts will embroil outsiders and become a flash point for an even wider war.

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And so it is that the conduct and outcome of the Long War may be the central narrative of international politics in the coming century. The stakes for the United States—the world’s sole superpower, the preeminent power in an international system aptly described as the Pax Americana, and the guarantor of stability in the Persian Gulf—could hardly be higher; friends and foes alike will take their cues from American victory or defeat. Similarly, any successful American strategy for the Long War needs to account for both the global importance of the conflict as well as the intensely local quality of particular campaigns. And despite the conventional wisdom that U.S. strategy must integrate all elements of national power and all agencies of the U.S. government, the U.S. military must still lead the way: this is, we should not forget, a war.

## Discontent in the Middle East and the Islamic World

The Islamic world has long been unstable and violent. Decades before its final collapse, the Ottoman Empire was regarded as “the sick man of Europe,” and its grip on power eastward from Istanbul had grown ever weaker by World War I. The new states carved in the settlements following World War I, while often approximating the lines of Ottoman provinces, were neither inherently

stronger nor more legitimate than the Ottoman ones. These were new arrangements whose shape and structures were inseparable from European colonialism. As Bernard Lewis has written:

The Ottoman Empire had provided the Middle East with a structure and a protective screen, sheltering it from the many dangers that threatened from the outside. Now, all that was gone. There was now no lack of protective screens, but the protection, such as it was, was given by European powers against one another, and this was of small concern to most of the inhabitants of Middle Eastern countries.<sup>3</sup>

The character of these post-colonial nationalist governments has been repressive and unrepresentative. These are failed and failing states. Islamic radicalism, be it Shia and Iranian or Sunni and Arab, can only be understood as a response to this broad state failure. Our enemies are engaged in a struggle to replace the current governments with structures inspired by religious law, under which religious authority and political authority are one. In time, they hope to install a renewed caliphate across the Islamic world, one that would equally suppress minority Muslim sects as well as non-Muslims.<sup>4</sup> That is a distant goal, to be sure: Islamic revolutionaries have thus far enjoyed only the most modest of successes. Iran is the exception that proves the rule, and its Shia character limits its appeal and power—though its acquisition of nuclear weapons will add a destabilizing and unpredictable element. On the Sunni side, only the Taliban's Afghanistan was an overtly radical state, but despite its isolation and paucity of resources, simply providing a sanctuary for al Qaeda created the conditions for the 9/11 attacks. The greater danger is from nominally "normal" states that harbor radicals and sympathizers and tolerate and abet revolutionary groups as long as their focus is outside the host state; these groups become a de facto, if imprecise, form of state power. Pakistan has used its support for radical groups to pursue its strategic ends in both Afghanistan and Kashmir and to offset its weaknesses vis-à-vis its primary strategic competitor, India.<sup>5</sup>

While politics gives the Long War its logic, it is faith—in the largest sense—that imparts the grammar and rhetoric of what is and will remain a bitter contest. President Bush mischaracterizes the struggle when he defines it as an "ideological struggle."<sup>6</sup> While the war is not a "civilizational" war of the West against Islam, we mislead

ourselves by downplaying the value of faith to our enemies, and by similarly downplaying the lack of faith—not merely the attenuation of Christian or other religious practices but the loss of belief in liberal politics in the West outside the United States—among our alleged allies.

## Toward a Strategy for the Long War

Any workable American strategy for the Long War must more carefully consider who our friends are as well as who the enemy is. What explains the ever-deepening reluctance of Western Europeans to fight alongside the United States in the Middle East? Beyond policy disagreements and the visceral hatred of President Bush, an internal European loss of confidence leaves these countries ill-prepared for a war against fervent believers. Modern European societies are increasingly "post-liberal" as well as postmodern; there is an evaporating reservoir of belief that limits their own ability to assimilate immigrants to a common national purpose, let alone assimilate the Islamic world to a common international purpose. The Islamists have taken their fight to Europe with great success—not in overthrowing Western European governments, but in ensuring that the Europeans will not intervene in the Islamic world.

Our traditional Middle Eastern allies are in a similarly brittle position. The long-time pillars of American policy—states like Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan—are almost as much a part of the problem as the solution. They are ruled by autocrats whose repressive habits served as the original cause of Sunni radicalism. Egypt was the home of the original Muslim Brotherhood movement and its founder Sayyid Qutb, as well as that of al Qaeda representative Ayman al-Zawahiri. Jordan was the birthplace of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, whose efforts probably did the most to stir sectarian strife in Iraq. Saudi Arabia was built from a desert kingdom in large measure because of Wahhabi energy and zealotry, and of course was where Osama bin Laden conceived al Qaeda. Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state, has become increasingly Islamist—a deep irony given the profoundly secular origins of its ruling civilian and military elites. No one should discount the survival abilities of leaders in Cairo, Amman, Riyadh, or Islamabad, but we must understand that there are limits to their cooperation with the United States and that these status-quo-loving regimes will, over time, be profoundly opposed to liberalization and democratization—movements that pose a threat to their own power.

Therefore, in order to bolster the legitimacy of these regimes while also adhering to the principle that political transformation is necessary throughout the Islamic world, the United States must convince the ruling elites that slow, gradual liberalization and democratization could serve to strengthen the appeal of these governments to their populations. Indeed, the path from authoritarianism to stable democratic governance has been well marked in recent decades.<sup>7</sup> In many cases, the only alternative to these corrupt and oppressive regimes is an extremist religious movement. It is no coincidence that those in power have often turned a blind eye to these radical organizations, while completely suffocating the emergence of any alternative, moderate political forces. If the only substitute for corrupt monarchs and autocrats is rule by violent religious extremists, then the established regimes can easily persuade many—especially in Washington and in the West—that the status quo is preferable to the chaos and uncertainty that democratization would likely unleash.

Yet if these regimes continue on their current course, the Islamist threat within their own borders can only grow stronger. In order to avoid the inevitable conflict that would ensue between the rulers and the extremist forces—one in which extremists are increasingly better positioned—gradual changes within the present systems must occur. For example, minimizing corruption, permitting the establishment of local political organizations, and giving the people a greater voice in local affairs could provide these populations with a stake in the continuation of the ruling regimes. As it stands, the peoples living under these regimes have little—if any—stake in the preservation of the current order. Gradual reforms could help enhance the legitimacy of these regimes and demonstrate to the populations that a better future could be attainable without turning to the violent extremists. Simply put, the ruling elites must begin to share power to earn the consent of the people they govern and neutralize violent extremism.

Thus, our long-term allies are most likely to come from the countries whose political transformation we aid: Afghanistan and Iraq. Similarly, countries on the periphery of the Muslim world, from North Africa to Southeast Asia as well as India, present excellent candidates to become important partners for the Long War. First of all, the Bush administration has rightly recognized that strengthening weak states, especially struggling democracies, is preferable to intervening after it is too late. Likewise, the 9/11 Commission recognized that U.S. strategy needed to focus on “remote regions and failing states” and to “find ways to extend [the United States’] reach,

straining the limits of its influence.” Among the remote regions that most concerned the commission were “the Horn of Africa, including Somalia and extending southwest into Kenya; Southeast Asia, from Thailand to the southern Philippines [and] Indonesia; [and] West Africa, including Nigeria and Mali.”<sup>8</sup>

The enemy we face in the greater Middle East and throughout the Islamic world clearly recognizes the magnitude of this multi-front, multi-generational struggle and has articulated its aims. In his 2005 letter to al-Zarqawi, al-Zawahiri lays out his plan to “expel the Americans from Iraq” and “extend the jihad wave to secular countries neighboring Iraq.”<sup>9</sup> Our enemies recognize that a defeat for democracy in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the greater Middle East would be a devastating blow to democratic forces throughout the Islamic world. They fight so tenaciously because, as British prime minister Tony Blair has said, “[If] these countries become democracies and make progress, that will be a powerful blow against both the extremists’ propaganda about the West and their whole system of values.”<sup>10</sup>

Creating a sustainable strategy for a war certain to last decades and play out across a complex landscape demands a mix of consistent principles and tactical flexibility. The Bush Doctrine well articulates the principles and sets the correct strategic goal: political transformation in the Islamic world. But the United States has employed a variety of military methods, a combination of both the “direct approach” (regime-changing interventions) and the “indirect approach” (for example, the “Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative,” helping ten countries in the Maghreb and across the southern boundary of the Sahara Desert). The danger is that the difficulty of political transformation in the Arab heartland and the relatively good prospects for success along the Muslim periphery, where local cultures are often inhospitable to the austerity of Salafism or Wahhabism, and where Iranian-inspired Shiite revolutionaries have little if any hold, will force subsequent administrations to shy away from the Long War’s central front. It will be necessary to practice the indirect approach—but such an approach alone will not be sufficient.

## Great Power Competition

For the foreseeable future, outside actors will continue to play an influential role in determining the fate of the Middle East. As Middle East historian Albert Hourani once said, “[He] who rules the Near East rules the world;

and he who has interests in the world is bound to concern himself with the Near East.”<sup>11</sup> The two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, were consistently jostling for position in the Middle East throughout the Cold War. Established and emerging powers have indicated through word and deed that they intend to challenge the United States in the decades to come for influence in the region.

Therefore, also necessary is to fit America’s Long War strategy into a larger global strategy and, in particular, to recognize that the Middle East—whose energy resources are key to the international economy—could become a locus of great-power competition. This is essential for building alliances in the future, particularly with India, but it is equally essential in shaping China’s rise. The keys to creating a “responsible stakeholder” in Beijing may well lie in the Middle East as much as in East Asia.

However, China’s reach will extend far beyond its immediate neighborhood and even the Middle East. It is aggressively seeking to bolster its influence throughout resource-rich Africa, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean—the United States’ own backyard. Just as important to achieving victory in Afghanistan and establishing a sound strategy for the Long War is developing a truly global response to the rise of China, using all the political, economic, and military means at America’s disposal. China’s emergence will have significant implications for nearly every aspect of U.S. foreign policy in the decades to come, and if the Bush Doctrine is to remain the foundation of America’s policy beyond 2008, then the United States must have a plan to operate and lead in an international system in which China plays an active and influential role.

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*AEI editorial assistant Evan Sparks worked with Messrs. Donnelly and Monaghan to edit and produce this National Security Outlook.*

## Notes

1. George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President on the Global War on Terror” (speech, AEI, February 15, 2007), available at [www.aei.org/publication25630/](http://www.aei.org/publication25630/).

2. The Bush Doctrine is encapsulated in a set of policies articulated in the national security strategies released by the White House in September 2002 and March 2006. The national security policies commonly associated with the Bush Doctrine can also be found in President Bush’s *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, and many of the president’s major addresses on the War on Terror. See National

Security Council, *The National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2002 and 2006), available at [www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html) (accessed February 26, 2007); National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2005), available at [www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq\\_strategy\\_nov2005.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_strategy_nov2005.html) (accessed February 26, 2007); and National Security Council, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2006), available at [www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/) (accessed February 26, 2007).

3. Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 354.

4. Frederick W. Kagan, “Myths of the Current War,” *National Security Outlook* (February 2006), available at [www.aei.org/publication23941/](http://www.aei.org/publication23941/).

5. Thomas Donnelly, “Choosing among Bad Options: The Pakistani ‘Loose Nukes’ Conundrum,” *National Security Outlook* (May 2006), available at [www.aei.org/publication24416/](http://www.aei.org/publication24416/); and Thomas Donnelly, “Countering Aggressive Rising Powers: A Clash of Strategic Cultures,” *Orbis* 50, no. 3 (Summer 2006), available through [www.aei.org/publication24349/](http://www.aei.org/publication24349/).

6. This has been the president’s constant refrain. In his January 10 speech on charting “a way forward in Iraq,” President Bush defined the war as “the decisive ideological struggle of our time.” See George W. Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation” (televised speech, White House, Washington, DC, January 10, 2006), available at [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html) (accessed February 21, 2007).

7. Examples include Chile, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, and Taiwan.

8. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 366–67.

9. Ayman al-Zawahiri, “English Translation of Ayman al-Zawahiri’s Letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,” *The Weekly Standard*, October 12, 2005, available at [www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/006/203gpaul.asp](http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/006/203gpaul.asp) (accessed February 21, 2007).

10. Tony Blair, “A Battle for Global Values,” *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 1 (January/February 2007), available at [www.foreignaffairs.org/20070101faessay86106/tony-blair/a-battle-for-global-values.html](http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20070101faessay86106/tony-blair/a-battle-for-global-values.html) (accessed February 21, 2007).

11. Quoted in Richard N. Haass, “The New Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 6 (November/December 2006), available at [www.foreignaffairs.org/20061101faessay85601/richard-n-haass/the-new-middle-east.html](http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20061101faessay85601/richard-n-haass/the-new-middle-east.html) (accessed February 21, 2007).