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# **International Terrorism Post-9/11**

Comparative dynamics and responses

**Edited by Asaf Siniver**

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- 42 The Algerian press, for example, has repeatedly reported on recruitment networks being dismantled, particularly in El-Oued, in the past year. That such networks tend to be spontaneous is revealed not only by press reports but by an interesting interview on Al-Jazeera in January 2008. See [www.memriiv.org/clip/en/1659.htm](http://www.memriiv.org/clip/en/1659.htm).
- 43 J. Keenan, 'Waging War on Terror: The Implications of America's New Imperialism for Saharan peoples', *Journal of North African Studies*, 10:3-4 (2005), pp. 619-647.
- 44 P.C. Schmitter, 'Three Neofunctional Hypotheses About International Integration', *International Organisation*, 23:1 (1969), pp. 161-166.
- 45 S. Lavenex, 'EU External Governance in "wider Europe"', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11:4 (2004), pp. 680-700.
- 46 The term 'securitization', in this context, is taken to mean the process by which a policy tool or instrument becomes 'an instrument which, by its very nature or by its very functioning, transforms the entity ... it processes into a threat' (T. Balzacq, 'The Policy Tools of Securitisation: Information Exchange, EU Foreign and Interior Policies', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46:1 (2008), pp. 75-100).

## 4 Strategic confusion

### America's conflicting strategies and the war on terrorism

David Hastings Dunn and Oz Hassan

The unprecedented controversy generated by the foreign policy of George W. Bush has not ended with the President's return to Texas. Indeed, the battle to justify and vindicate his policies and to see their continuation under the new administration continues to animate the American foreign-policy debate. Through both the publication of documents professing *A Charge Kept* and concerted appearances by former Vice President Richard Cheney declaring that American should continue with Bush's War on Terror, the controversial goals, methods and policies of the Bush years remain central to the American debate on how it should relate to the world and the threats it faces. While President Obama has tried to move the country and the debate on, for President Bush's supporters any such change of course would not only demonstrate a lack of US will but would catastrophically endanger the American people.

One of the defining features of the narrative espoused by proponents of the Bush administration's foreign policy is that it represents the War on Terror as possessing a homogenous core. What President Bush termed the 'War on Terror' is therefore being framed as if there is an instruction sheet from which a route can in fact be mapped out. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that this is not the case. Rather, the 'war on terrorism' was the product of a remarkably dynamic process, which evolved rapidly after 11 September 2001 and continued to develop well into the Bush administration's second term in office. In its post-9/11 policies, the administration showed a remarkable tendency to re-evaluate definitions of what constituted a threat, and what response was required to deal with it. As a result, in analyzing Washington's response to the 9/11 attacks it is possible to identify three distinct strategies pursued by the administration:

**Strategy One:** The War of Terrorism as counter-terrorism.

**Strategy Two:** As pre-emption and pre-eminence.

**Strategy Three:** The 'Freedom Agenda' pertaining to democratic imperialism.

Notably, while these three strategies were distinctive in their policy focus, each new strategy represented an additional focus and response rather than a replacement policy. With each accumulative strategy building upon the one that preceded it, the conceptualization of the War on Terror was broadened, directly

impacting on perceptions of how it should be fought. This point is of critical importance for understanding the Bush legacy, not least because it problematizes the notion of the War on Terror being based on a single unified strategy. This chapter sets out how and why these different approaches were adopted, and shows how Washington's conceptualization of the problem developed as a response both to events and its own internal policy processes. What is evident from such an analysis is that all three strategies were to some extent internally contradictory, while also contradicting one another.

To structure this analysis and demonstrate its key insights, it is useful to apply a series of questions to each of the three strategies;

- 1 'Who attacked our country'?<sup>1</sup> i.e. who are the enemy?
- 2 'Why do they hate us?' i.e. what is their motivation/why did they do it?
- 3 'How will we fight and win this war?' i.e. how shall we respond?

These three questions were originally articulated by President Bush in an address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American people on 20 September 2001. During this address the administration sought to answer its own questions both rhetorically and in policy terms. In setting out both these questions and an initial set of answers, the White House also provided a useful mechanism by which to evaluate the way in which the war on terrorism evolved, both rhetorically and substantively. By doing this it is clear that distinctive strategies were adopted.

### Strategy One: countering terror and ridding the world of 'evil'

The initial response to the attacks of 11 September 2001 was rapidly decided. Without knowing who had in fact perpetrated the attacks, President Bush, on board Air Force One, told the Vice President, 'We're at war.'<sup>2</sup> In the days following the attacks, this was to become the dominant framing for the administration's construction of the events, as the President openly declared that 'The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were *more than acts of terror. They were acts of war.*'<sup>3</sup> Yet, in constructing a war the President was forced to answer a larger series of questions about the nature of that 'war'. A larger narrative had to be constructed, that 'grasped' together and integrated into a whole scattered events, therefore rendering them intelligible. It was explicitly to this task that the Bush administration turned to on 20 September 2001 as they began answering three distinct questions:

- 1 Who are the enemy? The administration's answer to this question was that the enemy was both terrorists and governments that support them:

Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.... 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.

- 2 Why do they hate us? In the initial aftermath of the attacks, the enemy was simplistically characterized as 'evil'. Indeed, this was a theme that Bush would make his own, especially in his less-scripted explanations of the attacks. On the night of the attacks, for example, his first response was that 'Today, our nation saw evil'.<sup>4</sup> Three days later, Bush expressed similar sentiments, 'Our responsibility to history is clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.'<sup>5</sup> Notably when Bush referred to the enemy as 'evil', this was more than just a term of strong disapproval. Rather, an explicitly ontological claim was being made which reflected Bush's assertion that 'We know that *evil is real*, but good will prevail against it'.<sup>6</sup> Evil in this context was portrayed as part of the moral furniture of the world, and was very much a component of the President's religiosity.

Characterizing the enemy in simplistic binaries also allowed the Bush administration to claim that the enemy was motivated by an atavistic rejection of modernity. The administration seamlessly transformed claims that 'Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them', to larger claims that

They hate what we see right here in this chamber [the US Capitol Building] – a democratically elected government... They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.... These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life.... They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions – by abandoning every value except the will to power – they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, the administration's answer, explaining why the United States was attacked, was that they are evil, they hate our freedom, and they want to destroy us. Such an answer was firmly rooted in the identity of the attackers constructed by the Bush administration, which portrayed the threat as apolitical, even pre-political or pre-modern.

- 3 How to respond? Given the above, the administration's response was to 'bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies'.<sup>8</sup> This would be achieved by directing 'every resource at our command – every means of diplomacy, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war – to the disruption and defeat of the global terror network'.<sup>9</sup> And, as part of that process, 'we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism ... any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime'.<sup>10</sup> The US response can be summarized as a desire to eliminate al-Qaeda, its associates and supporters since they were beyond negotiation or accommodation. As Bush remarked, 'I want justice. There's an old poster out west, as I recall, that said, "Wanted: Dead or Alive."<sup>11</sup>

### Strategy One in practice: the war on terrorism as counter-terrorism

The way in which the administration conceptualized the threat, as articulated by the answers to its own questions, signaled how US foreign policy would respond in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The model adopted for this strategy was traditional counter-terrorism techniques plus a policy focus on Afghanistan where the preferred approach was regime change. In practice, this meant a policy response typical in many ways to that which followed previous terrorist attacks: the identification and pursuit of the suspects internally and externally through the criminal-justice system, with the clear indication that if they lay beyond national and international legal reach then a military response could be expected. The level of the response, however, was different. There was an enormous effort to interdict and dismantle the financial side of the terrorist operation.<sup>10</sup> Groups and individuals also had their assets frozen. Al-Qaeda suspects and supporters were rounded up on a global scale (over 3,000 in number) and intelligence agencies worldwide were redirected toward the new threat priority.

The Bush administration also desired an approach that went beyond the typical pattern of responses that had characterized the 1990s. Frustrated at the way that terrorist attacks had been dealt with in the past, Bush had long made it clear that he wanted a more robust response to terrorism, stating, 'I'm tired of swatting flies. I'm tired of playing defense. I want to play offence. I want to take the fight to the enemy.'<sup>11</sup> What this meant in practice was a war on many fronts pursuing al-Qaeda and its associates using traditional instruments of American statecraft, diplomacy, aid packages, intelligence work, collaboration between traditional law-enforcement agencies on an international scale, and renewed efforts and concerns at counter-proliferation. Bush wanted a response that went beyond treating the acts as criminal. Consequently, the administration responded as if the attacks were an act of war, and deployed the full panoply of the national security establishment.

For an administration that had initially signaled the limits of America's international involvement, the events of 9/11 prompted a reordering of US international engagements. As one administration official observed, in the wake of 9/11, 'nothing now is in the category of unimportant. Small countries, failing states, all become crucial in the war against terror.'<sup>12</sup> The nature of the threat was global, and the government would need to enlist the entire international community in its fight to eradicate it. Thus, Congress was quick to vote its annual dues to the UN while the administration sought a UN Security Council Resolution condemning the attacks on the US. While the US became more internationally engaged, it did not, as many expected, become more multilateral in its approach. While it increased its involvement on the world stage, it was very clear that this was to be on its own terms. This was nowhere more apparent than in President Bush's often repeated statement in the immediate aftermath of the attacks that 'You are either with us or you are with the terrorists.'<sup>13</sup>

This bifurcated approach meant a shift in relations with certain key states, most notably Russia, China and Pakistan. While these relationships had formally

been strained by concerns over regional issues, human rights and political freedoms, these were subordinated as the global war on terrorism became the overarching rationale in US foreign policy. Accordingly, Moscow's policy toward Chechnya was both downgraded as an issue and recast as part of the global problem of international terrorism. Additionally, the US decision to support China's branding of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement as a terrorist group was a move designed to establish reciprocal support in the war against terrorism.<sup>14</sup> In return for this support, Washington showed a new attitude toward China's hostility toward democracy in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the deterioration of Russian democracy and free media.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the most dramatic bilateral transformation was evident in US-Pakistan relations, as the Bush administration chose to put aside concerns over proliferation, Kashmir, democracy and human rights, and embrace the Musharraf regime. This was in stark contrast to the 1990s, when Pakistan was the target of US economic sanctions and diplomatic censure, especially after it exploded a nuclear device in 1998. However, under the rubric of more pressing strategic goals of the War on Terror, Pakistan was to become one of the US's most important partners in its new campaign. In the words of Thomas Carothers, 'The cold shoulder that Washington turned toward General Pervez Musharraf after he seized power in 1999 has been replaced by a bear hug.'<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, by March 2004 the Bush administration granted Pakistan 'Major Non-NATO ally' status.<sup>17</sup>

The pattern of prioritizing more immediate interests, perceived through the original construction of the War on Terror, was indicative of the wider counter-terror strategy. In Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the establishment of US airbases took priority over concerns about human-rights abuses and political freedoms.<sup>18</sup> In the Philippines and in Indonesia, differences over human rights were controversially set aside and training missions established between local armies and the US military.<sup>19</sup> In the Middle East and North Africa, the administration forged more intimate ties with regimes in the region such as Tunisia and Algeria. In its support for anti-terrorism measures, the US has found itself condoning measures that suppress freedom of expression in those countries.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, a 2003 report for the United Nations Development Program was critical of the US-led War on Terror for 'giving ruling regimes in some Arab countries spurious justification for curbing freedom'.<sup>21</sup> What was true for Arab states was also true for America's approach toward Israel. Although Washington recognized the need to make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the logic of its own position meant that it was also loathe to condemn Israel for pursuing its own fight in the 'war against terrorism'. Thus, although Israeli military incursions into the Palestinian territories and its policy of assassinating the leadership of Islamic terrorist organizations was clearly stoking support for such radical Islamic groups, little was done to bring an end to these actions. Similarly, while the Bush administration announced its support for the creation of an independent Palestinian state and a renewal of the Middle East peace process, they were accompanied by a call for a new Palestinian leadership 'not compromised by terror'.<sup>22</sup> It was an approach that showed the limits of the Bush administration's *realpolitik* policy. While it

was willing to compromise on many issues and interests in many of its international engagements, its approach to the war on terrorism was pursued in practice with as little nuance as the administration's 'with us or against us' rhetoric.

Identifying 'terrorism' as the enemy meant that the 'administration failed to differentiate between tactics and objectives'.<sup>23</sup> Instead, the administration pursued what Elliot A. Cohen referred to as the '9/11 rules', in which the dichotomous declaration that you are either 'with us or against us' led the administration to 'help our friends, punish those who impede us, and annihilate those who attack us'.<sup>24</sup> This level of parsimony, however, created serious complications in the task of dealing with al-Qaeda. In adopting this approach, it multiplied the number of its foes and unnecessarily limited the number of allies it could use in its fight against al-Qaeda. Such an inflexible approach failed to identify priorities, while treating states as uncomplicated unitary actors. Without nuance in the model, Iran was seen as the enemy due to its pro-Hezbollah position, despite being anti-al-Qaeda. Conversely, Israel was seen as an ally, and therefore the US failed to criticize it for its approach to the Palestinian territories. The approach failed to take account of the fact that winning the support of a government and condoning its authoritarian tactics may be counter-productive in the wider war of ideas.

The contradictions inherent in the limited application of the Bush administration's *realpolitik* approach, however, did not become immediately apparent in the application of the strategy, in part due to the pace of international events. The culmination of the implementation of the first strategy was the war in Afghanistan and the decapitation of the Taliban regime. The operation was conducted primarily with US Special Forces and airpower working together, with the Northern Alliance providing the forces on the ground. This combination resulted in the rapid fall of the Taliban regime in Kabul with negligible American casualties. It did not, however, provide the basis either for the apprehension of al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives in the country or the establishment of a stable domestic order in Afghanistan. Indeed, American action dispersed rather than destroyed its enemy without significantly changing the milieu from which the terrorist groups emerged. Despite pledges of aid and assistance, the US showed little interest in nation-building beyond the establishment of new institutions in Kabul. The mission was more decapitation than democratization.

What is strikingly clear about this counter-terrorism strategy is that it was remarkable for its lack of political context and naivety. The construction of the 'war on terrorism' was apolitical, characterized as a product of 'evil' rather than as a symptom of a political problem, let alone a political grievance. There was no apparent attempt to identify or address underlying causes. This was a policy pursued as if there were a finite number of terrorists, who could be tracked down and eliminated. This 'scorecard' approach led the US to act as if it was engaged in a manhunt, with Osama Bin Laden paralleling a James Bond villain that existed in an apolitical universe. Asked what his approach would be in September 2001, Bush said, 'To kill the terrorists', and then as an afterthought, 'Or to capture them and bring them to justice'.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the administration did

not demonstrate any appreciation that this was a dynamic, politically motivated enemy whose international support could be influenced by the way the US responded. The enemy became all terrorists, whether global Islamists or local or regionally ethno-nationalist, yet the fight was against a tactic rather than a specific enemy. This broadened America's task considerably, with few obvious net benefits. There were successes in disrupting al-Qaeda's financial operations and terrorist planning operations. Yet Afghanistan was a mixed success. Al-Qaeda training camps were shut down and the Taliban removed from power. However, as the Bush administration left office, conflict persisted and it was clear that whatever the President meant by 'bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies', it did not deliver Osama bin Laden, who remained beyond the reach of American power.

### Strategy Two: pre-emption and pre-eminence

The rapid collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in late 2001 laid the foundations for the next evolutionary development of the war on terrorism. Al-Qaeda operatives had been routed (or at least dispersed) and the operation had also achieved regime change at a remarkably low cost. Indeed, with media outlets reporting how Afghans celebrated the removal of a tyrannical regime, the Bush administration was able to talk of the American military as liberators that would rebuild Afghanistan and turn a former enemy into an ally. Such a regime-change strategy was therefore perceived as an attractive model, which, following soon after Kosovo in 1999, led to 'a profound optimism that we can do it — we can invade a country halfway round the world and bring about a reasonable settlement'.<sup>26</sup>

Simultaneously to the Afghanistan experience was the White House's strategic assessment of the terrorist threat. Following 9/11, 'Cheney became the self-appointed examiner of worst-case scenarios' and began to 'think the unthinkable'.<sup>27</sup> Central to this approach was the assumption that 9/11 had been less a failure of intelligence than it was a failure of imagination. No one had thought of this threat and so new imagination had to be applied to threat assessment. It was an approach that led to the conflation of America's threats. What if, Cheney asked, America's enemies got together? What if rogue nations supply the material and al-Qaeda supplies the martyrs? The logic linking the two was simple. An enemy that sought weapons of mass destruction has attacked the US. At the same time, there were states which were enemies of the USA that were seeking to build weapons of mass destruction and were known to have armed terrorist groups in the past. In such circumstances, it was argued, it would be foolish to either wait for a positive connection between these two enemies to be proved or until after such an attack had occurred.<sup>28</sup> Thus, for the Bush administration, the answers to its own same set of questions began to change. They didn't replace the old ones, but they expanded their scope.

1 Who are the enemy? The enemy was still the terrorists and the governments that support them, but the definition was widened. The enemy became not

only all terrorists and the regimes that support them, but also tyrants with WMD and their rogue regimes.

2 Why do they hate us? This too was expanded. They attack us because they are evil, but also because of the nature of their regimes, and because America is an impediment to their ambitions. Indeed, as President Bush declared, 'Terror cells and outlaw regimes building weapons of mass destruction are different faces of the same evil. Our security requires that we confront both.'<sup>29</sup> This conflation was to find its most prominent articulation in the January 2002 State of the Union Address, under the title of an 'Axis of Evil'.

3 How to respond? The enemy needed to be hunted down and eliminated, but that was not enough. Regimes that harbor them need to be changed, as do states that might support them. A crucial difference here was a lowering of the threshold of reasonable doubt. States that were regarded as potential attackers became the focus of America's evolving strategy. Regime change and nation-building grew out of these answers, and the model was to be Iraq.

#### *Strategy Two in practice: the war on terrorism as pre-emption and pre-eminence*

In the 2002 State of the Union Address, the Bush administration provided its first public articulation of its second strategy in the War on Terror. The President identified three 'rogue' regimes as comprising what it described as an 'axis of evil aiming to threaten the peace of the world': Iran, Iraq and North Korea. All three states had a record of supporting terrorism (but not al-Qaeda) and had embarked on programs to build weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons and the long-range ballistic missiles to deliver them. All three were accordingly warned to desist from such activity or face serious consequences. It was a speech that signaled that America's tolerance of openly hostile states was radically reduced.

Whereas Iraq and the other 'Axis' states had formally been seen as regional problems that could be deterred and contained, they were now viewed as potential accomplices in the War on Terror. The rules of the game had fundamentally been altered. No longer was policy coming from Washington to be evidence led, but rather a dichotomy had been constructed between analysis and action. This disarticulation created a scenario where the *possible* was to be deemed more important to strategy than the *probable*. Or, as Sir Richard Dearlove, head of the UK intelligence agency MI6, noted before the Iraq war, 'the facts and intelligence' were being 'fixed round the policy'.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, as Paul Wolfowitz argued, 'Anyone who believes that we can wait until we have *certain knowledge* that attacks are imminent has failed to connect the dots that led to September 11.'<sup>31</sup> It is for this reason that Iraq's *potential* capability to build WMD and its *potential* to supply them to terrorists was latched upon as justification for its high threat status in Washington.<sup>32</sup> As Donald Rumsfeld would later confess:

The coalition did not act in Iraq because we had discovered dramatic new evidence of Iraq's pursuit of weapons of mass murder. We acted because we saw the evidence in a new light, through the prism of our experience on September 11th, 2001.<sup>33</sup>

The development of the pre-emption doctrine was in a sense the extreme expression of the 'with us or against us' test. Rumsfeld had been advocating pre-emption since shortly after the attacks. 'You can't defend at every place at every time against every technique,' he argued, 'you have to take it to them, and that means pre-emption.'<sup>34</sup> As an official policy, the strategy evolved throughout 2002, with an important address by Bush at West Point in June, reiterating that 'if we wait for the threat to materialize we will have waited too long', we need 'to take the battle to the enemy, to disrupt his plans, and to confront the worst threats before they emerge.'<sup>35</sup> What was new and radical in this approach was not America's willingness to contemplate pre-emption so much as the centrality of this option within the overall strategy. Deterrence and containment were being superseded because 'Deterrence – the promise of massive retaliation against nations – means nothing against the shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend.' Thus, 'Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.'

What was also novel was what the administration meant by 'pre-emption'. This was hinted at in the most formal statement of the pre-emption doctrine, the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS02)*. Here the administration explained that while 'international jurists often conditioned the legitimacy of pre-emption on the existence of an imminent threat ... [w]e must adopt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries.'<sup>36</sup> Although left undefined in this document, the implication was that America would not limit its actions to the narrow circumstances prescribed within the definition of pre-emption where an attack was imminent and unavoidable, and would reserve onto itself the right to take *preventive* action. In doing this, however, the US was undermining the internationally accepted limits on the use of such a resort without adequately defining the scope and legitimacy of its new definition.

Reactions to this shift in strategic approach were swift and critical. Brent Scowcroft questioned the benefit of exulting to the status of declaratory policy an option that the US had long included in its list of policy responses, 'As a declaratory policy it tends to leave the door open to others who want to claim the same right. By making it public we also tend to add to the world's perception that we are arrogant and unilateral.'<sup>37</sup> This point was reiterated by Henry Kissinger who warned against the development of 'principles that grant every nation an unfettered right of pre-emption against its own definition of threats to its own security'.<sup>38</sup> For Heisbourg the adoption of an 'ill-defined and open ended strategy of forceful pre-emption' was likely to be corrosive of alliance relations given the reluctance of the European powers to replicate such an approach.<sup>39</sup> UN Secretary General Kofi Annan similarly warned that such action 'could set precedents that resulted in a



proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without credible justification'.<sup>40</sup> Other concerns were more practical. The US intelligence community was concerned that a pre-emptive attack that threatened regime survival was more likely to induce use of WMD than any other scenario.<sup>41</sup> Still others were concerned about the reliance of such a strategy on intelligence which at the best of times is an inexact art. For James Dobbins, such a policy set a much higher threshold for the integrity of secret intelligence, concluding that, 'It is one thing to expand one's defences on the basis of inconclusive evidence; it is quite another to attack a foreign nation on that same basis'.<sup>42</sup>

The articulation of the pre-emption strategy, however, was a central aspect of the Bush approach. It was meant as a statement of intent and thus of deterrence. It was also a key component of the Bush administration's stated intention to establish and maintain security for itself and its values through military pre-eminence. The *NSS02* document put American power at the center of its strategy with the proclamation that 'We will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations amongst the great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent'.<sup>43</sup>

The document also stated the administration's hegemonic intentions, in its assertion that the US intended to maintain military dominance against all challenges and discouraging all rivals from even contemplating such competition. At the heart of this document, and indeed of the strategy, was an extraordinarily ambitious undertaking, the stated willingness, as Rhodes observes, 'to use American military hegemony not simply aggressively and unilaterally, but globally' in pursuit of a liberal empire.<sup>44</sup> It was, however, the pre-emption aspect of the strategy that gained most attention when the document was released, and while it was asserted as a general principle, it was clear from the outset that Iraq was the place where the new doctrine would be applied.

The administration was clearly intent on conflating al-Qaeda and the Saddam Hussein regime, claiming that,

We know that Iraq and the al-Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy – the United States of America. We know that Iraq and al-Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some al-Qaeda leaders who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq. We've learned that Iraq has trained al-Qaeda members in bomb making and poisons and deadly gases. And we know that after September 11, Saddam Hussein's regime gleefully celebrated the terrorist attacks on America.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, for the Vice President, regime change was necessary because the American calculus had changed. Thus Cheney warned that Iraq might use the threat of its WMD capability to blackmail the world and thus 'seek domination of the entire Middle East' and 'take control of a great portion of the world's energy supplies'.<sup>46</sup> For Cheney, the 'thing that is different about Iraq' was 'its government and its regime and its past history. The fact that he [Saddam

Hussein] has launched ballistic missiles against Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, [Israel, Iran. He's twice invaded his neighbours.'<sup>47</sup> As far as the Bush administration was concerned, therefore, it was the nature of the regime – which it regarded as hostile and beyond diplomatic engagement – that constituted the nature of the threat. It was on this basis that Washington concluded that 'regime change' in Iraq was both desirable and necessary.

The construction of the Iraq threat as the embodiment of the doctrine of pre-emption provides a variety of interesting perspectives of the second strategy of the war on terrorism. Not least of these was the fact that Iraq became Washington's target of choice not because it was strong but because it was weak. It was less because it was an immediate threat than because it was immediately vulnerable. After 12 years of sanctions and no military modernization during the period following the decimation of its army in 1991, war, when it came, was guaranteed to be one-sided. The only possible force equalizer that the Iraqis possessed was the recourse to chemical or biological munitions. Interestingly, this was a threat that Washington regarded as manageable, and the war was fought in the context of that threat. The administration's expectations about how American forces would be greeted after the fall of the regime, and about how easily Iraq could be transformed at little cost into a model secular, democratic Middle Eastern state, also informed its focus on Baghdad.

Of equal interest in this threat construction, as with other past threat-construction exercises, was the narrowness of the focus. The process was narrow even by the administration's own terms. Of the three Axis of Evil states, Iraq was arguably the most contained militarily by the (extended) no-fly zones and economically by the UN sanctions regime. Iran, by contrast, is well advanced in its nuclear ambitions and was as heavily involved in the sponsorship of Palestinian suicide bombers as Iraq. Like Iraq, North Korea was in breach of its international obligations with regard to its WMD programs, but the manner of those breaches has been more blatant and aggressive than any statement from Baghdad. Furthermore, in contrast to Iraq, Pyongyang has succeeded in developing a small nuclear arsenal and is an active proliferator of ballistic missiles. Like Iraq, both Iran and North Korea are openly hostile to Washington's international agenda and clearly fail the 'with us or against us' test. While the deterrent effect of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons may explain the absence of American attention toward it, the same cannot be said for Iran.

The theory set out in the *NSS02*, was put into practice between March–May 2003 as Operation Iraqi Freedom was executed. The swift American military victory and the collapse and disappearance of the old Iraqi regime appeared to vindicate the Bush strategy. Exuberance and hubris led the administration to assert 'Mission Accomplished', while certain sections of the Washington political community called for similar military action elsewhere. Iran and Syria were touted as obvious next candidates. 'Everyone wants to go to Baghdad, real men want to go to Tehran'<sup>48</sup> became the boastful line of the neo-conservatives. Yet several factors checked this momentum and gave cause to question the continued validity of an American doctrine of pre-emption worth its name. The most

immediate of these impediments to the further application of this strategy was the failure of the Americans to discover the WMD on which the case for the immediate invasion of Iraq was justified. The lack of any evidence of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, or even of any ongoing programs to produce them, was widely seen as undermining the American case for war. The second factor was the inability of the American occupiers to provide security, civil amenities and a semblance of order. The faulty assumptions on which Operation Iraq Freedom were built and justified, were a setback for the Bush administration in both practice and in principle. The popularity of the occupation forces continually declined as support for the insurgents increased, resulting in what was just short of a full-blown sectarian civil war. As a result, the continued US military presence in Iraq consumed America's political, economic and military resources on a grand scale.

The strategy of pre-emption was designed to deter and defeat America's enemies, and the invasion of Iraq was the clearest expression of that intent. Yet the question must be asked, was it anything more than a strategy designed specifically for Iraq? At a rhetorical level, the administration never wavered from its commitment to pre-emption and the pre-eminence strategy. Indeed, it claimed that Libya's decision to abandon its quest for WMD and the subsequent dismantling of its chemical and nuclear programs as evidence of the coercive effect of the American strategy. In terms of its own actions, however, the administration's policies gave a different impression. In its approach to Syria, an array of sanctions on Syria's government and banks became the preferred strategy after Syrian officials were implicated in the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's killing. State-authorized terrorism was met with sanctions and not force. With North Korea, the administration engaged regional powers in a multilateral diplomatic initiative to share the pressure on Pyongyang and the responsibility if further action should be necessary. Indeed, the Chinese were quick to illustrate how intelligence failures over Iraq should urge caution toward North Korea.<sup>69</sup> With regard to Iran, too, the US allowed the United Nations to take a prominent role in outlining what was acceptable within Tehran's treaty obligations, while Iran challenged Washington's 'assumption train', rebutting claims that its nuclear program was weapons-related.

Given such circumstances, by the time the Bush administration left office, Iraq looked more like a demonstration of the limits of American power than its ability to shape events. Regime change was the easy part when compared to the Herculean task of creating a functioning and secure order thereafter. In this respect, both Afghanistan and Iraq – vastly expensive and difficult undertakings – have not provided models worthy of emulation. Far from proving an additional front to defeat the terrorists, America's action, especially in Iraq, clearly exacerbated the situation. Despite President Bush's calls to 'bring 'em on', America's occupation of Iraq, together with some of its actions there, encouraged more Islamic radicals to take up arms against its military with negative results. Paradoxically, rather than being a reaction to the supposed links between Iraq and al-Qaeda, the invasion and occupation proved to be a self-fulfilling prophecy in

creating Islamic militancy and al-Qaeda-linked terrorism. Similarly, rather than inducing caution in the capitals of rogue states, the threat of pre-emption may well have increased the threat from some states. According to Thomas Friedman, the Syrians were 'so convinced that they [we're next on the Bush hit parade that they have been easing the entry of anti-US guerrillas into Iraq – because the more preoccupied the US is there, the less likely it is to invade Syria.'<sup>50</sup> In the wake of Iraq, and the regional impact it had, it can be seriously doubted whether Bush's pre-emption doctrine was worthy of the name.

### **Strategy Three: the Freedom Agenda and the forward strategy**

The Bush administration's third strategy in the War on Terror can be seen as an implicit recognition of the limitations of preceding national strategies. In effect, the Bush administration's 'Freedom Agenda' was the quintessential expression of a liberal grand strategy for the Greater Middle East, characterized by its emphasis on the domestic nature of other states as vitally important for the attainment of American security and material interests. For this third strategy, promoting both American self-interest and values, in the form of 'freedom' and 'democracy', was seen to be symbiotic; enhancing both American global influence and creating the conditions for peace, prosperity and freedom throughout the region. Such thinking was an expansion of the logic laid out in the NSS02, where it was argued that there was a linkage between democracy promotion and pre-emption in both theory and practice.<sup>51</sup> That is, the willingness to strike down rogue states was seen to provide an obligation to replace the old regimes with representative governments, which would produce democratic states. Successful or not, Afghanistan and Iraq were seen to be paradigm examples of this. Indeed, the Bush administration continuously espoused the idea that the removal of both regimes would create a 'domino effect' and promote democratization throughout the greater Middle East more broadly.<sup>52</sup> Notably the qualitative difference between democracy promotion, envisioned under the 'Freedom Agenda', and the 'domino effect' espoused as part of the justification for the Iraq War, was that the Bush administration was now placing democracy-promotion as both a method for engaging with the Middle East, and for countering terrorism, not as a subsidiary result of the pre-emption strategy. This became evident in November 2003 when President Bush argued that the United States would pursue a 'forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East'.<sup>53</sup> Under this strategy, the administration acknowledged, as the President himself later declared, that 'We cannot rely exclusively on military power to assure our long term security.'<sup>54</sup> This was a clear indication that the Freedom Agenda was the product of the evolving and expanding answers to the administration's three questions.

- 1 Who are the enemy? The enemy was still the terrorists and the governments that support them, but now included tyrannical and authoritarian regimes that repressed the democratic aspirations of their populous.

- 2 Why do they hate us? They hate 'us' because 'they' are evil, but they are evil because of the lack political and economic freedom. That is to say, that the form of terrorism that manifested itself on 11 September 2001 was a symptom of the political and economic conditions within authoritarian states in the Greater Middle East.
- 3 How to respond? Through counter-terrorism, pre-emption and regime change if necessary, but also by bringing about the political, social and economic transformation of the Greater Middle East.

### *Strategy Three in practice: Freedom Agenda and the forward strategy*

The evolution of the Bush administration's thinking about the causes of terrorism was at its most developed in the promulgation of the Freedom Agenda. This stood in sharp contrast to the initial denunciations of al-Qaeda as an 'evil' that could be caught or killed. This avowedly liberal strategy, notable for its ideological underpinnings, offered both an explanation of the causes of terrorism and its solution. The diagnosis was that 'As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export.'<sup>55</sup> Consequently, to solve such a problem, the administration argued that, 'if the Middle East joins the democratic revolution that has reached much of the world, the lives of millions in that region will be bettered and the trend of conflict and fear will be ended at its source.'<sup>56</sup>

Interestingly, President Bush employed both his own religiosity and 'democratic peace theory' to legitimize the notion that promoting democracy in the Middle East was in America's national interest,

The freedom agenda is based upon our deepest ideals and our vital interests.... We believe that freedom is a gift from an almighty God, beyond any power on Earth to take away. And we also know, by history and by logic, that promoting democracy is the surest way to build security. Democracies do not attack each other or threaten the peace.<sup>57</sup>

In short, Bush's third strategy was arguing that 'the advance of freedom leads to peace'.<sup>58</sup> This was in sharp contrast to the first strategy that treated terrorism as if it emerged and popped like glittering bubbles from a swamp; instead, the third strategy wanted to drain it. That is to say, the Freedom Agenda attempted to go beyond dealing with the symptoms of the problem, the terrorists and their sponsors. It was a strategy seeking to address the causes of terrorism and other discontents. It was adopted partly in recognition of the scale of the problem, made even more obvious after events in Iraq, and partly as a realization that, with the present state of the Middle East, 'it would be reckless to accept the status quo'.<sup>59</sup> It was also unusually self-critical of previous American foreign policy toward the region, but also paradoxically, by implication, of its own initial and concurrent strategy in the war on terrorism, stating that 'Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing

to make us safe, because in the long run stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.'<sup>60</sup> And furthermore,

We must shake off decades of failed policy in the Middle East... [since] in the past [we] have been willing to make a bargain: to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. Long standing ties often led us to overlook the faults of local elites. Yet this bargain did not bring stability or make us safe.... As recent history has shown, we cannot turn a blind eye to oppression just because the oppression is not in our own backyard. No longer should we think tyranny is benign because it is temporarily convenient.... We will consistently challenge the enemies of reform and confront the allies of terror. We will expect a higher standard from our friends in the region.<sup>61</sup>

At a rhetorical level, this amounted to strong implied criticism of both Egypt and Saudi Arabia in particular. Yet the announcements of the new strategy also included caveats. 'The movement of history will not come quickly' Bush cautioned, stating, 'we must be patient with others' and recognize that 'the Middle East countries have some distance to travel',<sup>62</sup> plus, 'working democracies always need time to develop... and this makes us patient and understanding as other nations are at different stages of this journey.'<sup>63</sup> These caveats lowered both the force and immediacy of the other statements. Indeed, as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) was launched, Secretary of State Colin Powell was eager to emphasize the 'partnership' element of this flagship democratization program.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, as a senior Bush administration official hastened to add, the US was not planning 'to abandon long-term allies such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt because of their lack of democracy', but would offer 'positive reinforcement for emerging reform trends'.<sup>65</sup>

Problematically, while the Bush administration was eager to assert that 'Our part as free nations is to ally ourselves with freedom wherever it occurs',<sup>66</sup> the ambiguity of such statements made it extremely difficult to operationalize. Ultimately, the administration was deploying essentially contested terms, such as 'freedom' and 'democracy', which made translating rhetoric into praxis difficult at best; offering ideological convictions was no substitute for detailed empirical subscriptions. With a lack of strategic guidance, the Freedom Agenda took one step forward before taking two steps back. In turn, this led to MEPI funding projects in a 'hodgepodge' and near-sporadic manner.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, as J. Scott Carpenter confessed in his role of overseeing MEPI:

We don't know yet how best to promote democracy in the Arab Middle East. I mean we just don't know. It's the early days.... I think there are times when you throw spaghetti against the wall and see if it sticks.<sup>68</sup>

By 2006 it became highly evident what exactly had 'stuck' as an approach. Namely the Bush administration had adopted a policy of conservative radicalism.<sup>69</sup> The approach was *radical* to the extent that it insisted on political

democracy, yet *conservative* in its desire to safeguard the socio-economic privileges and power of the established order to secure regional stability. However, what was noticeable about such a strategy was that the radical side was being targeted at regimes that opposed US influence in the region, while the conservative side was the approach adopted for friendly allies in the MENA. As the Bush administration oscillated between emphasizing both of these elements, it enabled double standards in the Freedom Agenda to emerge.

For regimes that challenged American influence in the region, such as Iran and Syria, the price of such opposition was the Freedom Agenda's radical side. This insisted on regime change and political democracy. This was not to be done through military intervention, as in Iraq, but rather the State Department in conjunction with the Defense Department set up a new Iran-Syria Operations Group; the aim of which was to couple diplomatic pressure with the Iran Democracy Program and the Syria Democracy Program. These programs utilized MEPI funds and personnel to bolster internal dissidents and exile groups wanting US-supported regime change.<sup>70</sup> However, the acme of the radical side was targeted at the Palestinian territories. Having been surprised by the electoral success of Hamas in 2006, the Bush administration speedily overturned its dedication to democracy promotion and set about its archetypal response to the rise of an Islamist regime. Despite being democratically elected, the US, along with the European Union, responded swiftly by cutting off aid to the Palestinian Authority and refused to work with the Hamas-led government.<sup>71</sup> More problematic, however, was the covert initiative from within the Bush administration to supply new weapons and training to Fatah, designed to remove the democratically elected Hamas-led government from power.<sup>72</sup> While this attempt failed, leading to a civil war in the Palestinian territories, it demonstrated a guiding rule underpinning the Freedom Agenda strategy. The United States would aspire to promote democracy in the Middle East if, and only if, the results of this did not challenge its influence and other interests in the region. Thus demonstrating how 'making other people free is said to be the goal of US foreign policy; but the natives are expected not only to accept the offer of freedom but also to show their gratitude.'<sup>73</sup>

Conversely, regimes that helped to maintain American influence in the region were offered the *conservative* side of the conservative-radicalism dyad. This aspect of the Freedom Agenda was designed to generate stability through liberalization, with democratization being a secondary long-term goal. Indeed, this distinction is crucial because, while 'democratization' signifies a move toward greater degrees of political participation in existing governmental systems, 'liberalization' can mean any reform that enhances the individual freedom enjoyed by a citizen. Thus, unlike Iran, Syria and the Palestinian territories, when it came to regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Yemen, the Bush administration never advocated regime change through military action, democratic populism or civil disobedience. Indeed, this was reflected in the Freedom Agenda programs, which showed an overwhelming emphasis on low-risk gradualist policies that emphasized promoting evolutionary reform of

existing status-quo regimes. This was not democratic reform as much as it was the promotion of the conditions for eventual democratic reform, highlighting that the Freedom Agenda was a strategy that construed democracy as a long-term project emerging out of a 'social and economic context that should be prepared'.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, when MEPI was launched to operationalize this policy, it was criticized for its timidity in the way it spent its budget, most of which went toward helping governments promote free trade.<sup>75</sup> This led some US officials to argue that MEPI was more a 'philosophical commitment' to democracy promotion than a radical new approach.<sup>76</sup> Despite such a euphemism, it was clear that the Freedom Agenda, as Amy Hawthorne of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace argued, was not 'really designed to press for reforms. The stated purpose is to promote "reform" in Arab countries, but it also is designed to support pro-American governments and pro-American policies.'<sup>77</sup>

Conspicuously, when the radical side of the agenda was emphasized, the Bush administration portrayed 'freedom' and 'democracy' as entities that could be created from outside. Stress was placed on the universality of freedom, which merely required tyrannical regimes to be removed and the natural aspirations of the 'human spirit' to come forth. Yet, with the conservative side of the approach, it was implicitly acknowledged that the inherent nature of democracy meant that it could not be imposed from the outside; it was a gradual process that America simply didn't have the power to decree. Given this juxtaposition, it became highly evident that the Bush administration placed an economic strategy at the heart of its conservative approach. Indeed, it relied on a modernization thesis to legitimize a 'gradualist' and 'sequential' understanding of how political economy related to democratization in the region. Upon launching the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA), President Bush argued that

The Arab world has a great cultural tradition, but is largely missing out on the economic progress of our time. *Across the globe, free markets and trade have helped defeat poverty, and taught men and women the habits of liberty.* So I propose the establishment of a U.S.-Middle East free trade area within a decade, to bring the Middle East into an expanding circle of opportunity, to provide hope for the people who live in that region... *By replacing corruption and self-dealing, with free markets and fair laws, the people of the Middle East will grow in prosperity and freedom.*<sup>78</sup>

Within this schema, economic 'freedom' was paramount. Capitalism was seen as the heart of democracy because it would produce wealth that, it was assumed, would 'trickle down' and lead to higher levels of mass consumption. In turn, this would produce a well-educated middle class that would demand cultural changes favorable to democracy, such as increased secularism, and therefore weaken the role of Islamic identities. In effect, a theory of political change was consistently put forward that posited modernization as a functionalist and economic outcome of capitalism. This was not a radical challenge to friendly regimes, but rather provided them with a policy they desired to prevent their regimes facing legitimization crises.<sup>79</sup>

The appeal of this approach was located in the manner in which it appeared to favor both parties. Middle Eastern regimes were able to accept such an agreement in the belief that economic reforms would allow them to alleviate the poor social conditions that threaten their power; the US was able to pursue a strategy that many believed would dilute the appeal of Islamist groups and move the region slowly to stable liberalized democracies. This apparently symbiotic relationship was appealing because of its gradualist emphasis in which the US need not directly challenge friendly regimes, consequently allowing cooperation to ensue on security and other economic concerns. In effect, it provided the default foundations upon which the Freedom Agenda was constructed, by offering the illusion of a 'silver bullet' to Middle East reform. Accordingly, it mirrors Edward Ingram's insight about pax-Americana, which favors 'trade and investment without rule whenever possible, but with rule when unavoidable'.<sup>80</sup>

The Freedom Agenda, however, was undermined from its very conception by the first two strategies. After 9/11, the US embarked on a policy of 'extraordinary rendition', which sent contradictory messages to secure more immediate goals in the War on Terror. This raised serious credibility issues regarding the sincerity of the Freedom Agenda to observers in the Middle East and beyond. Not only was the Bush administration willing to curtail international law, but the notion that it was promoting 'freedom' in the Middle East appeared ironic given that the CIA was utilizing Middle Eastern prisons for 'torture, indefinite detentions, and disappearances'. Indeed, as former CIA agent Bob Baer argued:

If you want a serious interrogation, you send a prisoner to Jordan. If you want them to be tortured, you send them to Syria. If you want someone to disappear – never to see them again – you send them to Egypt.<sup>81</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed by Michael F. Scheuer, the former Chief of the CIA's Bin Laden Unit, in which he stated:

There were no qualms at all about sending people to Cairo and kind of joking up our [the CIA] sleeves about what would happen to those people in Cairo in Egyptian prisons.... I don't care what happens to the people who are targeted and rendered.... Mistakes are made.... They are not Americans. I really don't care.... I never got paid, sir, to be a citizen of the world.<sup>82</sup>

Such a serious contradiction did not, however, go unnoticed, with Representative Bill Delahunt, Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight, arguing that

These extraordinary renditions are utterly inconsistent with our broader foreign policy goals of promoting democracy and the rule of law, the very foundations of civil society. These practices have brought us universal condemnation and have frustrated our efforts to work in a concerted way with our allies in fighting terrorism.<sup>83</sup>

The case of extraordinary rendition not only demonstrated a dependency on the very regimes the Bush administration claimed to want to reform by promoting democracy and freedom, but more problematically under the rubric of security demands, the Bush administration utilized for its own purposes the very conditions it claimed were the cause of terrorism. If this was not tragic enough, the assault on Iraq brought with it other serious credibility problems as the pictures of abuses at Abu Ghraib demonstrated.<sup>84</sup> This was a far cry from President Bush's claim that 'the torture chambers and secret police are gone forever'.<sup>85</sup> Accordingly, it is little wonder that, despite all the grand rhetoric that accompanied the Freedom Agenda, this third strategy was largely met with derision and cries of hypocrisy.

### The Bush legacy and the Obama administration

The Bush administration's approach to the war on terrorism proved remarkably dynamic. It evolved from a narrow conception of the enemy to definitions and strategies that became progressively broader and more ambitious in scope. The questions that the administration set itself in identifying who and why it was fighting after September 2001 provided a useful framework for evaluating how the administration's thinking, strategies and policies developed. As such, the administration demonstrated not only a willingness to adopt approaches in response to the dynamics of events, but also a willingness to question the very basis of its foreign policy approach. Yet, with three competing strategies – one based on *realpolitik*, the second on the doctrine of pre-emption and pre-eminence, and the third based on 'democratic imperialist' ideas or what Pier Hassner described as 'Wilsonianism with boots'<sup>86</sup> – it is little wonder that the Bush administration's approach to the war on terrorism was riddled with contradictions. This in turn creates a very confusing milieu in which to judge the Bush legacy. Far from passing the Obama administration a homogenous approach to be followed, the new administration has inherited a bewildering set of policies that it is both pursuing and seeking to untangle.

Despite campaigning with the slogan 'Change we can believe in', however, the Obama administration has already demonstrated that it has not radically broken with its predecessor. The current administration's counter-terrorism strategy, unsurprisingly, has strands of both continuity and change. The Obama administration has rejected the use of torture and harsh interrogation tactics, while also ordering the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. However, while this dealt with one of the most controversial facilities, others such as Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan have remained open. Moreover, the Obama administration has continued to grant the CIA authority to carry out renditions, in which suspects are picked up and often sent to a third country for questioning. The logic of this was asserted by an administration official who argued:

Obviously you need to preserve some tools – you still have to go after the bad guys.... The legal advisors working on this looked at rendition. It is controversial in some circles and kicked up a big storm in Europe. But if done within certain parameters, it is an acceptable practice.<sup>87</sup>

Evidently the Obama administration has decided to retain some of the practices adopted as part of the Bush administration's first strategy in the War on Terror. Indeed, with a refocusing on Afghanistan, which Obama has called the 'central front on terror', the Obama administration is in fact expanding the first strategy. This is not only demonstrated in the doubling of the US military presence in the country, but also with regards to US policy toward Pakistan.<sup>88</sup> The current administration has been willing to adopt a unilateral policy that targets suspected terrorists within sovereign Pakistani territory.<sup>89</sup> This is part of Obama's strategy of letting Islamabad know that he will be making greater demands than his predecessor, and if needed will curtail US military aid. Such a strategy is the embodiment of Bush's first realpolitik strategy, with some tinkering at the edges. As such, Obama's policy has not signaled that 'Bush's war on terror comes to a sudden end', as some *Washington Post* headlines have suggested.<sup>90</sup>

Similarly, despite predictions that the Obama administration would abandon the Freedom Agenda, this has not been the case. There has certainly been a more cautious approach to asserting the need for democratization in the Middle East, namely because of the manner in which the Freedom Agenda has been so closely associated with the war in Iraq. Thus, as President Obama has asserted:

I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation on any other.<sup>91</sup>

However, the President, who has demonstrated his desire to place democracy promotion at the heart of US foreign policy since sponsoring the 2005 ADVANCE Democracy Act (ADA),<sup>92</sup> hastened to add:

That does not lessen my commitment, however, to governments that reflect the will of the people. Each nation gives life to this principle in its own way, grounded in the traditions of its own people.... But I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere.

Notably, where President Bush articulated the promotion of freedom with his own religiosity, the Obama administration has shifted to viewing it as a human-rights issue. While both Presidents have shared a common belief that the values of freedom and democracy are universal, there are points of departure over how these values should be promoted. Where Bush pronounced the use of free markets to deliver Middle Eastern states to its 'single sustainable model', the Obama administration has been eager to signal an alteration by using foreign assistance for 'dignity promotion'.<sup>93</sup> This is certainly not a radical departure from the sentiments that lay behind MEPI, and given the global financial crisis it is not clear how this

signal will be translated into praxis. Moreover questions over exactly how serious the Obama White House will pursue its promise of foreign assistance have been raised, especially given the prolonged failure to nominate a new director of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). This has been a source of tension between the White House and the Department of State, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arguing that 'it's hard to justify not having our full government in place six months after we started'.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, with Obama arguing that 'Our problems must be dealt with through *partnership*',<sup>95</sup> it is difficult to see any far-reaching shift between Bush's Freedom Agenda and that set by the new administration; the conservative side of the conservative radicalism dyad has remained.

The greatest political change from the Bush to Obama transition, however, has come in the form of the latter's rejection of radicalism. Indeed, it is perhaps best to characterize Obama's foreign policy as one of 'conservative pragmatism'; characterized by an emphasis on diplomatic engagement rather than regime change. Indeed this shift was signified in Obama's inauguration, when he argued that 'we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist'.<sup>96</sup> This has certainly been an approach adopted toward Syria, in which the Obama administration has decided to send an ambassador, ending a four-year isolationist policy. This followed a series of high-level meetings between the administration's special envoy for the Middle East, George J. Mitchell, and the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, while President Obama has elected to keep sanctions against Syria in place, Assad has informally invited Obama to Syria for talks, demonstrating that relations between the two countries may be thawing.<sup>98</sup>

A policy of engagement has also been extended toward Iran. Indeed, despite the disputed 2009 Presidential elections in Iran, leading to the Iranian government clamping down on mass demonstrations and opposition, the Obama administration has sought to maintain the promise of an open door for discussions. As President Obama confirmed after these events:

We've got some fixed national security interests in Iran, not developing nuclear weapons, in not exporting terrorism, and we have offered a pathway for Iran to rejoining the international community.... We will have to assess in coming weeks and months the degree to which they are willing to walk through that door.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, Vice President Biden has added, 'If the Iranians respond to the offer of engagement, we will engage'.<sup>100</sup> Yet, with the Iranian regime facing the most severe internal challenges since the rise of the Islamic Republic in 1979, it appears that the Obama administration may have to heed Harold Macmillan's warning about 'Events, dear boy. Events.'

Despite this apparent new era of engagement, it is not entirely legitimate to claim that this is a radical break with the Bush administration. Indeed, having failed to get its own way by the exercise of its unilateral power, the Bush administration did embrace a more multilateral policy as its time in office drew to a close. Over North Korea the administration engaged the regional powers in a

multilateral diplomatic initiative to share the pressure on Pyongyang, while with regard to Iran, the US allowed the United Nations to take a prominent role in outlining what is acceptable within Tehran's treaty obligations. This was an admission of powerlessness in the face of the intransigence of these recalcitrant regimes. Moreover, with the Iraq War, amongst other policies, demonstrating that America simply is not powerful enough to stand alone in the world, the Bush administration was forced to realize that being isolated internationally is a position from which very little can be achieved. Accordingly, the implications of the Iraq invasion on American foreign policy more broadly are considerable. This is a legacy that greatly curtails and shapes the policy options available to Obama.

The legacy of the Iraq War has not been lost on the new President. Indeed, as Obama tries to repair America's damaged international reputation, he has made some bold public admissions, the acme of which was that 'Unlike Afghanistan, Iraq was a war of choice', and that 'events in Iraq have reminded America of the need to use diplomacy and build international consensus to resolve our problems whenever possible'.<sup>101</sup> This is a bold admission that Iraq has severely curtailed America's room for diplomatic maneuver. Moreover, with the Obama administration setting out a timetable that withdraws all American troops from Iraq by 2012, it is clear that this administration is accepting the limitations of American power. As President Obama set out this new timetable, he made it clear that

What we will not do is let the pursuit of the perfect stand in the way of achievable goals. We cannot rid Iraq of all who oppose America or sympathize with our adversaries. We cannot police Iraq's streets until they are completely safe, nor stay until Iraq's union is perfected. We cannot sustain indefinitely a commitment that has put a strain on our military and will cost the American people nearly a trillion dollars.<sup>102</sup>

What this amounts to in sum is that the Bush legacy lives on through the Obama administration, with elements of the first and third strategies set out by Bush being accepted. It is the same wine being poured, although perhaps a little more matured and certainly served in a better-packaged bottle. Yet, because of the inherently problematic nature of the second strategy, the Obama administration has been forced to accept the limits of American power and is trying to reconstruct international perceptions of America as a benign exemplar, in a world that is increasingly becoming multi-polar. Whether this strategic confusion, packaged as policy change, can survive its own contradictions for long remains to be seen.

## Notes

- 1 All quotations in this section are from President Bush's 'Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People', 20 September 2001, unless otherwise indicated, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.
- 2 See B. Woodward, *Bush at War* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2002) pp. 17–18.
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## 5 American counter-terrorism through the Rewards for Justice Program, 1984–2008

Steve Hewitt

After the attacks of 11 September 2001, a dual-headed consensus emerged in various quarters: that human intelligence (HUMINT) was crucial in aiding counter-terrorism efforts against al-Qaeda and that the United States for a variety of reasons had failed to generate the required HUMINT. To address the perceived problem on the domestic front in 2002, the administration of President George W. Bush introduced a new program to, in effect, enlist millions of Americans as potential informers.<sup>1</sup> The program, the Terrorism Information and Prevention System (TIPS) sparked a firestorm of political protests, including comparisons to the former German Democratic Republic, stretching from the left side of the American political spectrum all the way to the right. Congress quickly killed the plan before it could be enacted.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, another program for recruiting informers from outside of the United States to supply information about terrorists and terrorism that predated TIPS, the Rewards for Justice Program, expanded dramatically in the aftermath of 9/11, paying out tens of millions of dollars to informers, while facing little in the way of scrutiny, particularly with respect to its effectiveness.

It is the second of these programs, the Rewards for Justice Program, which is the focus of this chapter. Despite its long history, the program remains largely unexamined. The significance of Rewards for Justice in terms of American counter-terrorism is multifold: it reveals the limitations of the human intelligence capabilities of American intelligence agencies both well before and after 9/11; it potentially represents an American challenge to the sovereignty of other countries; it demonstrates a flawed conceptualization on the part of the US government toward al-Qaeda and related ideologically motivated terrorism; it speaks to the evolution in American conceptualizing of counter-terrorism, particularly within a criminal law framework, since the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Finally, it raises important questions about how complex addressing terrorism can be, and how difficult it can be in assessing the success of counter-terrorists efforts.

### The HUMINT gap

One of the apparent consensuses in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001 was the need for increased HUMINT regarding terrorism.<sup>4</sup> In turn, there