

THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST AND REFORM IN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S IDEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT. In pursuit of its foreign-policy goals, the administration of President George W. Bush has attempted a dramatic reshaping of the vision of the Middle East in the American mind. References to the “new” or “greater” Middle East now include countries far outside traditional concepts of the region, including those in West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. The administration argues that this region is defined not by cultural (Arab) or religious (Islam) characteristics but by a lack of democracy; hence a grand strategy is needed to execute reform. This article examines current U.S. efforts to achieve reform in the region, the components of the ideological construction of the New Middle East, the perceived role of Iraq, Turkey’s potential role as a “model” for the region, and responses from the region to current U.S.-led reform efforts. *Keywords:* *George W. Bush, geopolitics, identity construction, Middle East, political geography, presidency.*

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks the Middle East, largely ignored by the George W. Bush administration since the inauguration eight months earlier, became a central focus of U.S. foreign policy. The region, and the virulent Islamist ideology adhered to by terrorist groups such as al-Qa’ida, were perceived as a threat to the U.S. national interest. In response, the Bush administration identified a need for an activist, preemptive policy “defending the United States, the American people, and our interests at home and abroad by identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders” (White House 2002a). The decision by the administration to engage the region on these terms marked a radical departure from decades of U.S. Middle East policy that had placed primary emphasis on the stability of regimes in the region, regardless of their level of democratization and civil-society participation, and on securing a steady supply of oil, while ensuring the survival of the state of Israel by providing it with military and economic support.

Today, the administration’s Middle East policy rests on a two-pronged approach. The first is an aggressive pursuit of identified terrorists and the regimes that support them through the so-called war on terror. The application of this approach can be seen clearly in the ousting of the Taliban in Afghanistan, closer cooperation with foreign security services, an increased U.S. military presence in the region, and the occupation of Iraq. The second prong, the focus of this article, is the democratic transformation of governments in the region, thereby making them less likely to harbor terrorists or tolerate activities that promote terrorism.

At the root of this Middle East policy is a very specific geographical conceptualization of the region, formed in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. This article examines that conceptualization and outlines how the creation of the newly constructed

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