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Preamble

Paradigm shifts often occur in moments of trauma and profound dislocation. After a relatively long period of stability in the international system after 1945, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has ushered in four dramatic powerful quakes in succession to destabilise the balance of power system which had been built around the superpower camps. These quakes have shaken the very foundations of the international systemic structures which had held the system steady for the previous 50 years. The end of the Cold War in 1989 was the first profound dislocation, bringing in its wake two further shocks: the end of bipolarity on the one hand, and; the rapid spread of the capitalist mode of production on the other. Globalization took off, spinning such theoretically diverse perspectives as Fukuyama's 'end of history' and the 'clash of civilizations', first noted by Bernard Lewis in 1990, but popularized by Samuel Huntington in his 1993 Foreign Affairs article.

But the most profound, coming some time later, was by far the most traumatic and horrific. The 11th of September 2001 terrorist attacks on US targets on American soil were a resounding shock to an already uncertain international system. It was this event and its impact on the public psyche which may have finally caused a profound and real paradigm shift. That 9/11 did so in American thinking and foreign policy conduct, particularly in relation to the Middle East, is the subject of this paper.

Looking back, it is clear that the trauma of 9/11 reinforced four existing trends in US policy circles in terms of their conceptualization and responses to the complex and dangerous world around them:

• To ensure American supremacy and predominance in both economic and military and terms;
• To adopt pre-emption as a central feature of US foreign policy;
• To seek to defeat global terrorism and prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, which could also fall into the hands of terrorists; and,
• To spread democracy to the 'greater/broader' Middle East as a political and security imperative of the United States.

It is the latter objective that I have singled out as the main feature of the paradigm shift which has followed the uncertainties of the post-Cold War international system and the end of bipolarity. Democracy promotion has been a strong feature of American foreign policy since the beginnings of the twentieth century, but the form it is taking today and the manner in which it is being articulated and pursued speaks of something quite different. Democracy promotion has become the cornerstone of US' new thinking on the 'broader' Middle East.

The 9/11 Effect

After the horrific events of 11th September 2001, the 'greater' Middle East (including North Africa, Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan) emerged as George W. Bush's main foreign policy preoccupation, and pursued, some have suggested, for very narrowly defined ends.[i] While interest in 'regime change' in Iraq had already been demonstrated from 2000, 9/11 helped in creating a security calculus for the Middle East that not only produced the 'axis of evil' doctrine in January 2002, but also brought into sharp focus in this region the application of the pre-emptive strike doctrine, and the war on terrorism. With regard to the latter, President Bush's 20 September 20001 address to the nation had made US' position clear: 'Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will end until every terrorist group of "global reach"

has been found, stopped, and defeated'.[ii] As the war on terror was unleashing American military power against the al-Qaeda and Taliban strongholds in Afghanistan, the president further elaborated on 7 October that while 'today we focus on Afghanistan… the battle is broader. Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murders themselves'.

In relation to pre-emption, the talk in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was of US preparations for a strike on Iraq for its alleged role in the September attacks and the development of weapons of mass destruction. Although no links were established, after Afghanistan Iraq was to find itself at the top of the US' hit list, with its leader branded as 'evil' by the American president.[iii] Fears of a pre-emptive strike on Iraq were so rife that one of US' closest regional allies, King Abdullah of Jordan, went on the record in October warning of the disastrous consequences of such an act for the region and for the US' finely-balanced anti-terror coalition. He told the *Financial Times* that 'there is no proof of Iraqi responsibility vis-à-vis the September 11 attacks,' and that 'it would be a serious blow if Iraq was targeted and it would be detrimental to the international effort against terrorism'.[iv] Taking no heed, President Bush reinforced his administration's growing anti-Iraq position by hinting twice in two days in November 2001 that action could be taken against Iraq.

By late 2002, the need for political reform (democratization) in the greater Middle East had became an added condition of US' concerns over guaranteeing global security, creating with one stroke a security-democratization nexus in the Middle East region.[v] This was an unprecedented development in this region. Regime change (in the context of countering terrorism and preventing the spread of WMDs in the wrong hands), imposed democratization, and far-reaching reform emerged as the key drivers of the Bush administration's agenda, causing considerable anxiety across the region. If the Clinton legacy was to be summed up as one of 'profound politicization of foreign affairs',[vi] then surely George W. Bush's must be seen in terms of the profound ideologization of the same. By end of 2002 the roots of the Bush doctrine were to be found in the exercise of hard power at the expense of the use of soft power.[vii] Three cardinal principles acted as the drivers of his doctrine: pre-emption as a central feature of US foreign policy, ensuring American supremacy and predominance in military and economic terms through the utilization of whatever means necessary,[viii] and finally, the spread of democracy to the Muslim Middle East, particularly the Arab world, as a political and security imperative of the United States. But it was the post-9/11 war on terror, conducted against al-Qaeda and its related militant Islamist groups, which became the single most important dimension of Bush's interaction with the Middle East. The multi-faceted and multi-dimensional war on terror threatened the stability of many of America's regional partnerships, at the same time as affording the regional actors the chance to jump on the bandwagon of the US-led anti-terror campaign.

At the same time, the US position fuelled suspicion in virtually every Muslim state capital. Friend and foe alike feared the consequences of further large and direct interventions in the Middle East. But as will be shown, Middle East responses to the 'Bush challenge' were by no means uniform. In broad terms, the differences were two things. Over emphasis when it came down to the war on terror and the hunt for al-Qaeda; and over substance when it came to the spread of democracy to the Arab world and the 'greater Middle East'. Ironically, as most of America's Arab allies were autocracies of the first order any way, already engaged in their own bloody campaigns against radical Islamist groups, the strengthening of security relations with the United States in the global war on terror not only helped them consolidate these security ties with the US, but at the same time afforded them the opportunity to tighten their grip on power without much fear of retribution from the West. But not all Middle East states warmed to America's war on terror. Saudi Arabia, for example, 15 of whose nationals were amongst the 9/11 al-Qaeda conspirators and bin Laden himself was of that country, felt the heat of US reactions; as indeed

did Iran, though for very different reasons. But other MENA countries, from North Africa through to Oman and Yemen found common cause with the United States in this campaign. Ruling regimes in Egypt, Jordan and several Gulf Arab states formed the Middle East frontline in the anti-al-Qaeda drive, sweeping up in the process many of their own Islamist opponents. Even Sudan, Syria and Libya, which were not known for their affections for the US, joined the bandwagon.

But the democratization drive did get virtually every state's back up. From Iran westwards, Washington's agenda was seen as blatant interference in domestic affairs of sovereign international actors. Saudi Arabia and Egypt in particular, both close US allies it must be emphasized, objected most strongly to the tenor and content of the administration's reform agenda.

The New Paradigm in Action
The fall of Baghdad in the spring of 2003 has for the first time since the Iranian revolution of 1979 added real impetus to the Arab Shias' cries for a stronger political voice in the Arab world. The fall of Iraq's Sunni-dominated Ba'ath regime has enabled the Shia to emerge as a powerful political force in the Arab world, and by virtue of their numbers in such an strategically important country as Iraq, has given them a greater hand than ever before in the shaping of the political map of the fractured and highly polarized Arab system.

The fall of Baghdad at the hands of the US armed forces in April 2003 lifted, possibly for good, the centuries-old Sunni domination of Mesopotamia and the pivotal Shia sites of central and southern Iraq. In the words of Ali Allawi, 'for the first time in modern history, the fall of the regime confronted Iraqis with the question of where their true loyalties and identities lay'.[ix]

As we have witnessed since, the end of the Ba'ath regime instantaneously and effectively invigorated the Shia communities of Iraq, mobilizing them into mass action. Within months of the fall of Baghdad several hundred ulama and their families decamped from their refuge in Iran (and elsewhere) and returned to the cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kazemiah... to rediscover their holy pasts and to engage in the task of rebuilding their country. Some came with their new Iranian families, but most came to build new homes and help in the rebuilding of the Shia holy sites and cities. They all also brought with themselves massive extra power. Though low key at first, the marking of the two key Shia festivals of Ashura and Tasua in Najaf and Karbala in late spring 2003 demonstrated to the world for the first time in generations the cultural depth and vigour of Shiism in Iraq. The same act also gave fright to those Sunni neighbours who had for years feared the emergence of a 'Shia international' that would openly challenge their interpretation of Islam, on the one hand, and also ultimately threaten their regimes by demanding more rights for the Shia minorities in those states, on the other. King Abdullah II of Jordan's 'Shia crescent' problem was already rearing its head when the same festivals were being marked in Lebanon and Pakistan with equal vigour.

It can be suggested therefore that there was another important dimension to 'Muslim politics' which had been overlooked by the Bush policy makers in Washington as they prepared to wage war on Iraq: that of an intra-Islamic dispute being violently contested in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. Salafi Islam took on the US as well as the Shias as its common enemy, unleashing violence against both in equal measure. Ironically though, 9/11 brought an unexpected, but badly-needed, sense of purpose to the Muslims, whose own civilization was already tearing itself apart over ideology, purpose, governance, distribution of political and economic power, and control of the Muslim agenda in a post-bipolar world. Many commentators had failed to notice, for example, that before 9/11 an intensive 'clash of civilizations' was already going on in

Afghanistan between various Muslim states supporting or fighting the Taliban. Today, this same kind of turf war is going on in Iraq. Where it will strike tomorrow, nobody can tell, but the rise of the Shia will grow to impinge on many domains hitherto assumed to be the prerogative of the Sunni majority in the MENA region. The movement we can surely detect; its direction and intensity, however, is much harder to predict at this stage.

On another front, the impression of intervention as part of a grand strategy was further reinforced by the democratization component of the Bush doctrine. President Bush brought this issue to the forefront of his national security strategy in November 2003, in the course of two major speeches, delivered in Washington (6 November) and London (19 November) respectively.[x] In speaking of a 'forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East,' he spoke of the need to change America's relations with the region. In Washington, the president put the emphasis on the need for reform, 'the freedom deficit,' he said, 'has terrible consequences for the people of the Middle East and for the world. In many Middle Eastern countries poverty is deep and it is spreading, women lack rights and are denied schooling, whole societies remain stagnant while the world moves ahead'.[xi] In London, however, he was more critical of the inter-state bargain between the West and its authoritarian elites. He said that 'we must shake off decades of failed policy in the Middle East…in the past [we] have been willing to make a bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. Longstanding ties often led us to overlook the faults of local elites. Yet this bargain did not bring stability or make us safe. It merely bought time, while problems festered and ideologies of violence took hold'.[xii]

Together, these speeches demonstrated his administration's Wilsonian appetite for democracy promotion in the Middle East, and the Arab world in particular. The forward strategy of freedom was to become as controversial in regional terms as the war on terror and its associated pre-emptive military campaign in Iraq.

The elements of the democratization campaign as a security imperative of the United States found even more concrete expression in the United States' 2004 'Greater Middle East Initiative'. In this, the impact of 9/11 as cause of paradigm shift is laid bare. The initiative, in its original form was brought to international attention by Vice-President Dick Cheney at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in January 2004, being called 'the most ambitious U.S. democracy effort since the end of the Cold War'.[xiii] Its existence was made public a year after the Arab world's own 'Arab Charter', which Saudi Arabia tabled in January 2003. The charter, which was seen as a revolution of sorts in its own right, had called for 'internal reform and enhanced political participation in the Arab states'.[xiv] The later US plan, by contrast, had encompassed a wide range of diplomatic, cultural and economic measures. The GMEI had deliberately moved the agenda on by calling for the United States and its European allies and partners (in the G-8 Group, NATO, and the EU) to press for and assist free elections in the Middle East, foster the growth of new independent media there, press for judicial reforms, help create a 'literate generation' by helping to cut regional illiteracy rates in half by 2010, train 'literacy corps' of around 100,000 female teachers by 2008, finance the translation of Western classical texts into Arabic to foster better understanding of the West amongst Muslims, establish an European-style Greater Middle East Development Bank, an IFC-style Greater Middle East Finance Corporation to assist the development of larger enterprises, and give $500 million in micro-loans to small entrepreneurs, especially women, in order to spur 1.2 million small entrepreneurs out of poverty.

The concern from the region, however, was that the 2004 US initiative, as its predecessors in 2003, had tried to explain its arrival in purely Western security terms – 'So long as the region's pool of politically and economically disenfranchised individuals grows, we will witness an

increase in extremism, terrorism, international crime and illegal migration,' its early 2004 draft stated.[xv] Furthermore, there was a concern that the initiative perceived the region in largely Cold War terms. It, for example, spoke of creating MENA security structures based on the 1975-launched Helsinki process and NATO's Partnership for Peace programme. It anticipated that a complex set of security structures could bring six Middle East countries, including Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Qatar and Israel, into partnership with NATO. But, leaving such prominent regional players as Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia out of such regional security arrangements would only fuel discontent, creating new divisions, and breeding further instability across national boundaries.

It was precisely because of the ambiguities attached to the initial proposal that President Husni Mubarak of Egypt 'denounced with force the ready-for-use prescriptions proposed abroad under cover of what are called reforms'.[xvi] The voices of some other Arab leaders, including those from Jordan, Morocco, Syria, were added to this objection, all rejecting the plan as an external imposition as the news of it began to filter out in February 2004. 'No matter how well-intended the Americans and Europeans say their initiatives are, it will take more than words to comfort skeptical Arab rulers and a worried Arab public. The regimes see many signs suggesting that the United States is determined to enforce change or 'reforms,' while the public—initially desperate for real reforms—suspect that the foreign calls for democracy are only an excuse to interfere in the region and redraw it in accordance with the West's own interests. The occupation of Iraq and the disinterest in Palestinian suffering have reinforced those fears', noted the *Cairo Times*.[xvii]

The role of the US factor has been in evidence in the political processes of an ally such as Saudi Arabia, as well as in those of an adversary such as Iran. In Iran's February 2004 parliamentary elections, in which Iran's conservative forces manipulated the electoral roll in order to ensure the defeat of the reformist camp in the poll for the Seventh Majlis, one could feel the ghost of US power present in every debate. In the end, a real fear of the US' policy agenda in the Persian Gulf sub-region encouraged the success of the conservative factions in the parliamentary elections. The irony of the impact of the US factor in these elections has been deliciously captured by an editorial in the *Guardian* newspaper, which read as follows: 'Tension between the secular and religious in Iran is nothing new. What has changed is the external context. Iran feels tremendous pressure, principally from the US, over nuclear arms, terrorism, human rights and the occupation of neighbouring Iraq and Afghanistan… Alive to these threats and exploiting them, anti-western mullahs seem to be circling the wagons. Thus has George Bush's grandiose bid to democratise the Middle East helped produce in Iran the exact opposite; a democratic derailment'.[xviii] Is the US' democratization drive for a pluralist future in the Middle East in fact further de-democratizing the region? Are its double-standards and contradictory policies in fact emboldening the conservative and radical forces in the Muslim Middle East, while undermining the position of the very progressive reformists it desperately needs to see in power in order to push through the roots and braches reforms it wants to see introduced? With the region now regarding the United States as part of the problem, it is hard to predict how Washington intends to nurture the rise of democratic forces in the region, and see democracy introduced when one of the first acts of such democrats (as much in response to the demands of their constituents, as their own conscience) will be to condemn the US superpower for its occupation of Iraq, for the behaviour of its troops and political agents there, for its unconditional support for Israel and blatant disregard for international law and norms in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and for its continuing support for many of the region's authoritarian regimes. Is a direct but unintentional outcome of the Bush doctrine the birth of an illiberal democracy as the norm that the peoples of the region will have to endure in the twenty first century? It is still too early to tell, but much of the outcome will depend on what kind of an Iraq emerges from the ashes of war and decades of destruction. It is hard to see how the administration's other noble goal of democratizing the

Middle East can be squared with the underlying currents which have driven the Bush doctrine in the president's second term.

Conclusion

President Bush's second term was welcomed by many commentators as the opportunity to consolidate the democratizing pusch of the Bush doctrine. Typical of these was Harvey Sicherman, who reflected optimistically on the Bush administration's balance-sheet: 'As President Bush begins his second term, his policy to transform the Greater Middle East faces crucial milestones. America is committed to nurturing new democracies in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, an astonishing about-face since 9/11 for an Administration originally hostile to nation-building altogether. Thus, it may be said that whatever the prospects in the Middle East, U.S. foreign policy itself has surely been transformed. Will it work? A thousand obstacles obstruct the way, yet some things have begun to move. Insofar as elections signal a potentially democratic direction, 2005 begins with important auguries for the development of local partners capable of working with the United States. Sharon's new government gives proof of his readiness to withdraw from Gaza. The vote for Abu Mazen ratified a potential Palestinian partner for peace. Renewed Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, taken in tandem with local legislative and party elections scheduled for late this year, could give a big boost to a nascent Palestinian democracy'.[xix] Sicherman went on to argue that 'for the advocates of democracy in the Middle East, the Palestinian and Iraqi elections focus on a quintessential virtue: citizen choice. Yet this beginning, potentially the birth throes of popular government, should also remind us of the distance yet to go. These polls will matter little if in the end those who oppose democracy can abort the results through violence. U.S. policy will still be poised on the brink of failure so long as that battle remains in doubt'. It would be ironic to reflect on the shortcomings of the Bush strategy since when looking at the Middle East, were it not for the tragedy of what has unfolded in the meanwhile: Iraq is little more than a basket case as we approach the twilight of the Bush presidency, Palestine (in the heart of the Levant) is in real danger of 'somaliazation', fires burning in Lebanon are in constant danger of blowing out of control, and Iran seems ready for a fight with the US (and whomever that stands alongside it) more or less at any cost.

Nevertheless, Sicherman's perceptive analysis reminds one of an earlier set of equally insightful comments made by the president of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in November 2002.[xx] Shortly before the Iraq war, a Bush insider and Pentagon staffer confided to the *New Yorker* magazine that 'you have the phenomenon that this greater freedom that came to Latin America, that came to various parts of Asia, largely missed the Middle East. And there is all kinds of writing on the subject, on whether there is anything inherently incompatible between either Muslim culture, or Arab culture, and this kind of freer government. This Administration does not believe there is an inherent incompatibility. And if Iraq had a government like that, and if that government could create some of those institutions of democracy, that might be inspirational for people throughout the Middle East to try to increase the amount of freedom that they have, and they would benefit both politically and economically by doing so'.[xxi] What a difference five years can make, when set against the reality on the ground in Iraq.

What is now widely acknowledged, therefore, is that the difficulty that the administration continues to face well into its final term is how to square its militaristic instincts with the implementation of long-lasting reforms in the Middle East. Being a prisoner of its own 9/11-driven doctrine, the way forward seems to be found only in the efforts to deal with the inconsistencies of the war on terror itself.[xxii] While there is time, this has to be refined by the administration[xxiii] before it can safely take forward any strategy of freedom so loudly announced back in 2002, or indeed be able to hand on a positive legacy from its adventures in the Middle East to the next American administration.

[i] See for example, Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, *Behind the War on Terror: Western Secret Strategy and the Struggle for Iraq* (Forest Row, East Essex: Clairview Books, 2003).

[ii] The White House website.

[iii] 'Afghanistan is just the beginning of a war on terrorism,' he said in November 2001. The Guardian, 27 November 2001.

[iv] Financial Times, 31 October 2001.

[v] Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

[vi] Richard N. Haass, 'The Squandered Presidency – Demanding More from the Commander-in-Chief', Foreign Affairs, vol. 79, no. 3, May/June 2000, p. 139.

[vii] As much was clear from the Bush administration's National Security Strategy document unveiled in September 2002. The strategy of pre-emptive strike formed the very heart of this document.

[viii] The phrase used is 'to dissuade potential adversaries from… surpassing, or equalling, the power of the United States'. See the White House website for details.

[ix] Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 132.

[x] The former was to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the National Endowment of Democracy, and the latter was at the Whitehall Palace to mark his official visit to the UK.

[xi] 'Bush on Democracy in the Middle East', Washington Post, 6 November 2003.

[xii] 'President Bush Discusses Iraq Policy at Whitehall Palace in London', Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 19 November 2003.

[xiii] Robin Wright, 'U.S. Readies Push for Mideast Democracy Plan', Washington Post, 28 February 2004.

[xiv] Arab News, 17 January 2003.

[xv] Ibid.

[xvi] Wright, Op. Cit.

[xvii] Khaled Ezzelarab, 'Everyone Else Wants Reform', Cairo Times, 26 February-3 March 2004.

[xviii] 'Iran: Supremely Subversive', The Guardian, 19 February 2004.

[xix] Harvey Sicherman, 'U.S. Policy in the Middle East: On the Brink', Foreign Policy Research Institute, 12 January 2005.

[xx] 'The Next War: Richard Holbrooke, Jeffrey Goldberg, Lawrence Wright, Isabel Hilton, and Leslie Gelb Discuss America's Next War', The New Yorker, 18 November 2002. Then, as American military planners were putting the final touches to their war plan, Leslie Gelb said, 'I think we're about to cross a Rubicon, and in modern times it's every bit as fateful as Caesar's crossing. I believe we should cross it, for [Saddam Hussein] really is a serious threat, and a danger. And it's important for us to go after him, to get rid of him. But I shudder at my beliefs and my conviction that we should do this, because I think this act of war will set off momentous events. This is a war maybe beyond anything we've done since the end of the Second World War, in its potential overflow into our lives here and abroad. I think it has the potential to do more to the world and to us than Korea, than the first Gulf War, and maybe even Vietnam. I think the war as a military battle will probably be over quite quickly. U.S. military might, at this point, to fight a straight-up conventional war, is awesome. And Saddam is weaker. Whatever his tactics will be, the shock of American military power in a straight-up military battle will be fearsome. I think it's what happens after the victory that engages us and worries me. Good things can come of it, and I hope they will… At the same time, it is a terrible roll of the dice. And it could unleash a terrible anti-Americanism, and a fanaticism, an active fanaticism, even beyond what we've seen'.

[xxi] Nicholas Lemann, 'After Iraq: The Plan to Remake the Middle East', The New Yorker, 17 February 2003.

[xxii] Ian Shapiro, *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy against Global Terror* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[xxiii] Gilles Andreani, 'The 'War on Terror': Good Cause, Wrong Concept', Survival, vol. 46, no. 4, Winter 2004-05, pp. 31-50.