

Orientalism

*The United States
and the Middle East
since 1945*

DOUGLAS LITTLE

Third Edition

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This is not going to be your father's Persian Gulf War.—Slogan at the Pentagon, February 2003

No Americans, no Saddam, all the people are for Islam.—Chant in Baghdad, June 2003

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Not Your Father's Persian Gulf War

The Bush Doctrine, Iraq, and Radical Islam

In September 1943, Warner Brothers released a black-and-white “B movie” entitled *Adventure in Iraq* that recounted the heroic exploits of a Texas-born Flying Tiger and his pretty English passenger on a largely forgotten front of the Second World War. After crash-landing in the desert kingdom of Ghatsi 300 miles west of Baghdad, Doug Everett and Tess Torrence are captured by a wily pro-Nazi sheik whose “fanatical devil-worshipping” followers mark them for human sacrifice. In a classic Hollywood-style finale, the intrepid couple outwit a mob of brutal but stupid Arab thugs and escape death at the eleventh hour thanks to a little Yankee ingenuity, some eye-catching décollétage, and a few well-placed bombs courtesy of the U.S. Army Air Corps. Brimming with orientalist stereotypes and antifascist bravado, *Adventure in Iraq* assured its

wartime audience that brains, muscle, technology, and close ties with Britain were the keys to U.S. success in the Middle East, a region that few moviegoers in Franklin D. Roosevelt's America could have found on a map.

Sixty years later, the steely-eyed Texan who sat in the Oval Office and the quintessential Englishman who resided at Number Ten Downing Street agreed to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom to liberate a real-life "Kingdom of Ghatsi" from a dictator whom many regarded as more ruthless than Adolf Hitler and more fanatical than Osama bin Laden. Just three weeks after the first bunker-busting bombs crashed down on Baghdad on 20 March 2003, U.S. troops swept into the Iraqi capital. Much to the delight of the huge crowd gathered in Baghdad's Firdos Square, a plucky band of GIs looped a chain around the neck of a two-story replica of Saddam Hussein, fired up their armored tow truck, and brought down both the statue and the Ba'athist regime it symbolized. Unlike Operation Desert Storm, which had ended with a whimper twelve years earlier, Operation Iraqi Freedom seemed to have ended with a bang heard round the world. As one senior Pentagon official had prophesied six weeks before the shooting started, "This is not going to be your father's Persian Gulf War."¹

Clad in a military jumpsuit, President George W. Bush stood on the flight deck of the *USS Abraham Lincoln* on 1 May 2003 beneath a banner that read "Mission Accomplished" and assured thousands of cheering sailors that Uncle Sam's blitzkrieg victory in Baghdad had changed everything in the Middle East. "In the images of falling statues," Bush asserted, "we have witnessed the arrival of a new era" that he predicted would bring peace and freedom to a world stunned by the events of 9/11. "The liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terror," the president said, because it sent a clear message that "any outlaw regime that has ties to terrorist groups and seeks or possesses weapons of mass destruction is a grave danger to the civilized world—and will be confronted." Acknowledging that "the transition from dictatorship to democracy will take time," Bush nevertheless vowed to stay the course. "Then we will leave, and we will leave behind a free Iraq."² More than four years later, those words would ring increasingly hollow. With a brutal civil war raging among Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Kurds and with the U.S. death toll closing in on 4,000, by the autumn of 2007 few Americans believed that the Bush administration would be leaving Baghdad anytime soon, and fewer still believed that when the last GIs headed home, they would leave behind a free Iraq.

The bloody quagmire in Baghdad caught many of those who had equated the downfall of Saddam Hussein with a swift and final victory in the global war on terror off guard. When viewed through the longer lens of history, however, some aspects of the war in Iraq actually marked the culmination of more than half a century of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. It was a powerful equation of oil plus Israel plus orientalism familiar to anyone who had come of

age during the 1940s that would predispose Washington to pursue regime change in Baghdad early in the twenty-first century. Yet in other ways, Bush's policies marked a radical break with the past. By inventing a new green threat called "Islamofascism" to replace the outmoded red threat of communism, by literally attempting to export democracy to the Muslim world at gunpoint, and by discarding the Cold War doctrine of containment in favor of preventive war, the Bush administration adopted policies at odds with those of every president from Harry Truman to Bill Clinton. The result was a big-budget misadventure in Iraq whose ending promises to be very different from Warner Brothers' earlier low-budget *Adventure in Iraq*.

Fighting Faiths: Dubya, Osama, and the Road to 9/11

On 6 July 1946, just ten months after V-J Day, George W. Bush was born in New Haven, Connecticut, the eldest son and namesake of a navy pilot who had fought in the Pacific War and who, like thousands of other returning veterans, could never have foreseen America's deep involvement in Iraq sixty years later. During the summer of 1948, the future president moved with his family to Midland, Texas, where his future president father had launched a small oil company. By the time that "Little George" finished grammar school, U.S. interests in the Middle East had come into sharper focus. Both Truman and Eisenhower were committed to maintaining access to Persian Gulf oil, supporting Israel, containing communism, and, whenever possible, controlling Arab nationalism. In 1959, the Bushes relocated to Houston, the oil capital of the United States, where "Big George" soon became a key player in the Texas Republican Party. Meanwhile, George W. Bush headed off to prep school in Andover, Massachusetts, where he chased girls and played stickball while John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson cemented America's special relationship with Israel. Before long, the future president returned to New Haven, where he enrolled at Yale, majoring in history and taking several courses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and American diplomacy. When he graduated with a C average in June 1968, George W. Bush knew precious little about other parts of the world, such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia, that preoccupied many of his classmates. After serving in the Texas Air National Guard and dabbling in Alabama politics, the future president earned an MBA from Harvard in 1975 and then headed back to Midland.³

By the time he stepped into the Oval Office a quarter-century later, George W. Bush had developed a view of the world that was shaped both by his father's experiences and by his own religious faith. Big George emerged as a big figure in American politics during the 1970s and 1980s—first as Nixon's ambassador to the United Nations, then as Ford's director of central intelligence, and finally

as Reagan's vice president—and he had great expectations for his eldest son. At first, Little George proved to be a big disappointment, barely breaking even on an investment in West Texas oil, drinking heavily, and earning a reputation for parochialism in a family that prided itself on cosmopolitanism. After Big George became president in January 1989, however, “Dubya” emerged as one of his father's most loyal and ruthless operatives, battling the Bush administration's enemies in Washington while building a political base of his own in Dallas, where he had managed to purchase the Texas Rangers baseball team. When George Bush lost his bid for a second term to Bill Clinton in 1992, his son took it very personally but vowed to learn from the debacle. Dubya's post-mortem showed that although economic recession, lack of vision, and failure to finish off Saddam Hussein after the First Gulf War had cost his father many votes, it was Big George's inability to mobilize the Christian evangelical base of the Republican Party that doomed his campaign for reelection.

Religious faith had recently emerged as an important aspect of George W. Bush's life. After years of partying hard and being hung over, Dubya decided to seek help during the mid-1980s. Big George put him in touch with the Reverend Billy Graham, a family friend and America's most famous clergyman, and before long the future president quit drinking. “Faith changes lives,” Bush recalled long afterward. “I know, because faith has changed mine.”⁴ When Dubya returned to Dallas in early 1993, he quickly jumped into Texas politics and launched a “faith-based” campaign that would put him in the statehouse in Austin eighteen months later. Despite claims that the new governor was merely pandering for the votes of Christian conservatives, Bush's religious convictions seemed sincere, heartfelt, and muscular. As time went by, Governor Bush came to wear his religion on his sleeve, frequently quoting the words of “A Charge to Keep,” an old Methodist hymn, to remind himself and others that everyone had “a God to glorify” and a “calling to fulfill.”⁵ Soon after he became president in 2001, Bush established an “Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives,” and three years later his administration would claim that faith had the power to change not only America but also the world. One unnamed White House adviser explained it this way in October 2004: Although “the reality-based community” liked to base decisions on “judicious study of discernible reality, . . . that's not the way the world really works anymore.” Truth be told, “we're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality,” Bush's spokesman concluded. “And while you're studying that reality . . . we'll act again, creating other new realities,” because “we're history's actors.”⁶

Halfway around the world, another one of history's actors—Osama bin Laden—was biding his time somewhere in the no-man's-land between Afghanistan and Pakistan, convinced that he too was changing the world through the power of his faith. Osama was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in January 1958, one of

fifty-four children sired by Mohammed bin Laden, a wealthy contractor with close ties to the House of Saud. Trained as an engineer, young Osama became an Islamic activist in the late 1970s, inspired by the writings of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian firebrand who had visited the "sinful" America of Harry Truman a generation earlier and developed a ferocious hatred of secularization, urbanization, and all things modern and Western. "The Crusader spirit that runs in the blood of all Occidentals," Qutb exclaimed in his 1966 masterwork, *Milestones*, "is responsible for their imperialistic fear of the spirit of Islam and for their efforts to crush the strength of Islam." Having embraced Qutb's "occidentalism," bin Laden headed to Afghanistan in 1983, where he helped the mujahadeen guerrillas wage a jihad against the Soviet infidel. Five years later, with the Red Army on the run, bin Laden and other Islamic extremists gathered across the Pakistani frontier in Peshawar, where on 20 August 1988 they founded al-Qaeda, which in Arabic means "the base."⁷

Once the last Russian soldier departed from Afghanistan on 15 February 1989, al-Qaeda turned its attention to America, which Osama bin Laden liked to call "the far enemy." Ironically, throughout the 1980s the CIA, assisted by Pakistan's ISI, had run guns and channeled funds to the Afghan mujahadeen and Arab allies like bin Laden on the time-honored principle that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Ever suspicious of Western intentions, however, Osama regarded the deployment of half a million U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia on the eve of Operation Desert Storm as proof that "infidels" intended to occupy the holy sites at Mecca, and when many of those GIs remained on Saudi soil after the First Gulf War, he called for a jihad. Islamic radicals inspired by bin Laden struck first in New York City in February 1993, where they detonated a truck bomb in a parking garage beneath the World Trade Center, killing six people and injuring more than 1,000. Meanwhile, in March 1996 the Taliban, a group of Islamic extremists whose occidentalism mirrored bin Laden's, emerged victorious from the civil war that had engulfed Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, enabling al-Qaeda to establish a permanent base of operations in Kabul. Three months later, a huge bomb planted by bin Laden's followers rocked an American airbase outside Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, killing nineteen GIs. The violence escalated on 7 August 1998, when al-Qaeda operatives blew up U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, leaving 12 Americans and more than 200 African bystanders dead. Although they were loath to admit it publicly, top officials in the Clinton administration privately acknowledged that, to some degree, both bin Laden and the Taliban were Frankenstein's monsters born of the unintended consequences of America's alignment with anti-Soviet Islamic radicals during the final years of the Cold War, a policy that in retrospect proved too clever by half.⁸

Worse was to come. In October 2000, two al-Qaeda suicide bombers crashed

a speedboat laden with high explosives into the *USS Cole*, a guided missile frigate that was refueling in the Yemeni port of Aden at the mouth of the Red Sea, ripping a huge hole in the vessel's hull and killing seventeen sailors. And then on 11 September 2001, the unthinkable happened. Watching smoke and flames billow from the World Trade Center, bin Laden called the al-Qaeda hijackers who died in the attacks heroic martyrs who proved that Islam truly was a fighting faith.⁹ Standing at Ground Zero three days later, his own faith sorely tested, George W. Bush grabbed a bullhorn and vowed that the United States would fight back. In so doing, he confirmed something that very few Americans could have imagined fifty-five years earlier, when their forty-third president was born—the Middle East was going to be the central focus of U.S. foreign policy for a very long time to come.

Something Old: Oil, Israel, and Peace for Land

Some aspects of the Bush administration's approach to the Middle East after 9/11 would have been instantly recognizable to Harry Truman and his successors. Take oil. For half a century, U.S. policymakers and oil executives had collaborated to ensure unimpeded American access to Persian Gulf petroleum. To be sure, the rise of OPEC during the 1970s had shifted the balance of power from the multinational oil firms to the producing states and, in the process, strained working relations between Washington and Wall Street. Twenty years later, however, OPEC's clout showed signs of waning, thanks in part to a flood of crude from the Caspian Basin, where post-Soviet regimes undersold their competitors from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Mexico and drove real oil prices down toward pre-1973 levels. With recent firsthand experience of black gold's boom and bust in the badlands of West Texas, George W. Bush entered the Oval Office firmly convinced that when it came to oil, private enterprise and public policy should fit together hand in glove.

Vice President Dick Cheney, who during the mid-1990s had moved from the Pentagon to the board room at Halliburton, a Houston-based oil services multinational, shared this conviction and was determined to apply it to the Middle East. Nine months before he became Bush's running mate, Cheney had explained why. Global demand for oil was rising sharply while existing reserves were steadily shrinking, he told the London Petroleum Institute in late 1999, which meant that "we will need on the order of an additional fifty million barrels a day" within ten years. "So where is the oil going to come from?" Halliburton and other petroleum giants saw only one answer: "While many regions of the world offer great oil opportunities, the Middle East, with two thirds of the world's oil and the lowest cost, is still where the prize ultimately lies."¹⁰ The report on America's energy future that Vice President Cheney

passed along to his new boss in May 2001 recommended that the Bush administration keep its eyes firmly on the prize. Although the United States might reduce its dependence on Persian Gulf oil by relying more on imports from Central Asia, West Africa, and Latin America or by drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Cheney's report predicted that by 2020, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and their neighbors would supply "between 54 and 67 percent of the world's oil." The best way to reduce American vulnerability was to press Middle Eastern oil producers "to open up areas of their energy sectors to foreign investment" by U.S. multinationals.¹¹

In some ways, the American takeover of the Iraqi oil fields two years later seemed to fulfill Cheney's recommendation. As the rumors of war grew louder in September 2002, Ahmed Chalabi, a Baghdad-born exile whom the Pentagon was grooming as Saddam's successor, let it be known that "American companies will have a big shot at Iraqi oil." Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld responded by pooh-poohing petro-politics and insisting that regime change in Baghdad had "literally nothing to do with oil."¹² Nevertheless, developments during the first weeks of the war suggested that the Bush administration did indeed have its eye on the 112 billion barrels of crude that lay beneath Saddam's realm. Few failed to notice that Washington proved far more interested in safeguarding Iraq's oil fields and refineries than in protecting its public utilities, government ministries, or classical antiquities. Fewer still were surprised to see Halliburton first in line for a half-billion dollar contract to begin rebuilding the Iraqi oil infrastructure. And no one batted an eye when the White House sent Phillip J. Carroll, a Texas oilman, to Baghdad in late April as an "adviser" to Iraq's newly reorganized Ministry of Petroleum. Carroll and his advisees predicted that within two months, Iraq would be pumping 1.5 million barrels of crude per day, 60 percent of the prewar figure, and that within three years, daily output would exceed 3 million barrels, most of which was to be exported to underwrite the costs of postwar reconstruction.¹³

By the summer of 2003, however, Iraq's oil production was still hovering at 900,000 barrels per day, while world prices drifted ever upward. Undaunted, Francis Brooke, a petroleum consultant and longtime friend of Ahmed Chalabi, hinted that if U.S. officials were patient, expanded exports of Iraqi crude would eventually break the Saudi-dominated OPEC cartel and usher in a new era of cheap oil. "We have a new ally in the Middle East—one that is secular, modern, and pro free market," Brooke told a reporter in Baghdad on 17 July. "It's time to replace the Saudis with the Iraqis." Yet even as Brooke spoke, anti-American insurgents were mobilizing throughout the country, attacking refineries, hijacking tanker trucks, and dynamiting pipelines. As a result, three years after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraqi oil output stood at just 1.9 million barrels per day, 40 percent below earlier projections.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Riyadh held its petroleum output steady at 10.5 million barrels per day and explained that Washington's requests to step up current production had to be balanced against the financial well-being of future generations of Saudis. When this sparked rumors that the House of Saud was either overstating the size of its reserves or seeking once again to unsheath OPEC's "oil weapon," Saudi officials bristled and pointed the finger at America's seemingly limitless appetite for petroleum. "Everybody is looking at the producers to pull the chestnuts out of the fire," Sadad al-Husseini, who had recently stepped down as Saudi Arabia's oil minister, told a reporter in August 2005. "It's not our problem to tell a democratically elected government that you have to do something about your runaway consumers."¹⁵ Other oil producers proved somewhat more willing to cooperate. In December 2005, Kuwaiti officials announced plans to invite American multinationals to invest in "Project Kuwait," a joint venture designed to expand the sheikdom's oil production, and throughout 2006 the Bush administration encouraged smaller producers from Azerbaijan to Yemen to pump as much crude as possible.¹⁶ Nevertheless, by November 2007, oil was fetching close to \$90.00 per barrel, nearly three times as much as when George W. Bush accepted the Republican nomination for president seven summers earlier, and U.S. gasoline prices regularly exceeded \$3.00 per gallon. Despite the best efforts of the oilmen-turned-policymakers in Washington, secure access to Persian Gulf petroleum at affordable prices seemed more elusive than ever.

Like oil, America's special relationship with Israel also remained a central feature of U.S. policy in the Middle East under George W. Bush. Although he seldom traveled abroad before moving to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Bush had visited Israel in December 1998. During a three-day pilgrimage to the Holy Land straight out of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, he walked the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem and climbed the hill in Galilee "where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount."¹⁷ After accompanying Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon on a helicopter tour of the West Bank that highlighted the narrow Jewish state's geographic vulnerability, Bush quipped: "We have driveways in Texas longer than that."¹⁸ Twenty-six months later, during the first National Security Council meeting of his presidency, Bush greeted the prospect of Sharon becoming Israel's new prime minister as very good news. "We're going to correct the imbalances of the previous administration on the Mideast," Bush told his top advisers on 30 January 2001. "We're going to tilt it back toward Israel."¹⁹

During the next six years, the Texas Republican repeatedly showed that he meant what he said. Although Bush butted heads with Prime Minister Sharon in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, he quickly came to regard Israel as America's staunchest ally in the war on terror. Tel Aviv was always eager to share intelligence on al-Qaeda with Washington, and Israeli officials reminded the

White House that some leaders of Hamas, the radical Islamic movement in Gaza and the West Bank, regarded Osama bin Laden as a hero in the wake of his aerial assault on the United States. When a wave of Palestinian suicide attacks rocked Israel during the spring of 2002 and prompted Sharon to launch retaliatory raids, Bush refused to condemn his old tour guide. Meanwhile, opinion polls revealed steadily rising support for the Jewish state among the American public, who lumped Hamas together with al-Qaeda. Because Sharon's brass-knuckled approach to terrorism resonated so well in Washington, Israel would continue to receive an average of \$3 billion in U.S. economic and military aid per year throughout the Bush era, more than any other country.²⁰

Indeed, American support for Israel had never been broader or deeper than it was early in the new millennium. On Capitol Hill, Democrats reaffirmed their traditional support for the Zionist dream while Republicans cemented their ties with right-wing evangelicals by embracing groups like Christians United for Israel, who termed American support for the Jewish state "God's foreign policy."²¹ A network of pro-Israel interest groups and think tanks with close ties to top officials at the Pentagon and the State Department helped ensure that the views of Ariel Sharon and his successor, Ehud Olmert, would be heard in Washington.²² When Prime Minister Olmert sent troops, tanks, and warplanes into Lebanon in July 2006 to destroy Hezbollah, a radical Shi'ite group supported by Iran, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declined to condemn Israel's action, described the ensuing bloodshed as "the birth pangs of a new Middle East," and told reporters that she "had a lot of sympathy for what the Israelis were dealing with." Washington's steadfast support did not go unnoticed in Israel, where Bush remained more popular than any American leader since fellow Texan Lyndon Johnson forty years earlier. Zalman Shoval, who had served as Israel's ambassador in Washington during the First Gulf War, probably put it best when, in the wake of the 2006 miniwar in Lebanon, he observed that George W. Bush was "possibly the friendliest president we've ever had."²³

Bush's personal popularity in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv notwithstanding, American relations with the Jewish state were often strained during his first term by disagreements over how best to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Like every one of his predecessors since Harry Truman, George W. Bush publicly placed the peace-for-land formula at the center of his Middle East policy. By the summer of 2003, this would take the form of a "road map for peace" linking an end to Palestinian terrorism with a total freeze on Israeli settlements. After becoming prime minister in early 2001, however, Ariel Sharon had encouraged Jewish settlers to build new outposts on the West Bank, especially in strategically important areas east of Jerusalem. Unwilling to accept Bush's road map because it called for freezing settlements, Sharon responded instead with an ingenious peace-for-land package of his own that combined unilateral Israeli

disengagement from Gaza with completion of a new security barrier that would incorporate key parts of the Palestinian West Bank inside Israel.²⁴

Convinced that a ministate in Gaza linked to Palestinian enclaves on the West Bank was better than nothing, Bush sent Sharon a letter in late 2003 laying out the details. In exchange for pulling out of Gaza and dismantling West Bank settlements less than three years old, Israel could retain several key population centers near Jerusalem and would not need even to discuss further withdrawals from Palestinian territory until all forms of terrorism ended, period. Dov Weisglass, Sharon's fixer-in-chief, spelled out the implications in October 2004. "The disengagement is actually formaldehyde," he told a reporter, because "it legitimizes our contention that there is no negotiating with the Palestinians . . . until [they] turn into Finns."²⁵ A month later, Yasser Arafat died and was succeeded as president of the Palestinian Authority by the irrepressible Mahmoud Abbas, who surprised everyone by showing considerable interest in learning Finnish. Sharon and Weisglass were quick to question the new president's toughness and dependability. "With your permission," an unnamed Israeli intelligence officer told an American journalist who asked about Abbas in January 2005, "I think he has olives, not balls."²⁶

With aid and encouragement from Washington, Abbas soon demonstrated that he had a bit of both. During the months ahead, Palestinian security forces gradually restored order to the West Bank, suicide bombings declined sharply, and Abbas announced plans for parliamentary elections in which U.S. officials expected his Fatah Party handily to outpoll Hamas. Meanwhile, the Bush administration worked to keep the disengagement plan on track, criticizing Sharon when he hinted that Israel might expand further into the West Bank and praising him when he pulled out of Gaza on schedule in August 2005. Two unexpected developments early in the new year, however, derailed the peace process. On 4 January 2006, Sharon suffered a massive stroke and was succeeded as prime minister by Ehud Olmert, a right-wing apparatchik whose popular approval rating among Israelis soon plunged to single-digit levels. Three weeks later, Mahmoud Abbas and Fatah lost the elections to Hamas, and Ismail Haniya, an Islamic radical who opposed Israel's right to exist, became prime minister. Throughout 2006 and into 2007, Hamas guerrillas battled Fatah militias and lobbed Qassam rockets into Israel. On 17 June, Abbas forced Haniya to resign, ceded control of Gaza to Hamas, and instructed Fatah to form a new government based on the West Bank. In mid-September, Secretary of State Rice flew to the Middle East, where she told Olmert and Abbas that the man in the Oval Office was still convinced that the peace-for-land formula held the key to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Whether her two listeners would agree remained an open question.²⁷

Something New: The Green Threat, a Tsunami of Democracy, and Preventive War

Although some of George W. Bush's policies—his interest in Persian Gulf oil, his friendship with Israel, and his faith in a peace-for-land solution—were old news, he believed that the collapse of the Soviet Union during his father's administration meant that America could finally scrap containment in favor of a new approach to the Middle East. While Bill Clinton struggled during the 1990s to bring order to a chaotic world increasingly wracked by ethnic and religious conflict, critics detected signs that a new "green threat"—radical Islam—was supplanting the earlier "red threat"—international communism—that had kept every president from Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan awake at night. In his own syntactically challenged way, George W. Bush hinted at the changing color of the threat during an Iowa campaign stop in January 2000. "When I was coming up, it was a dangerous world, and you knew exactly what they were. It was us versus them," candidate Bush explained, "and it was clear who they were. Today, we are not so sure who they are, but we know they're there."²⁸

For nearly a decade, a vocal group of nervous Middle East watchers had been prophesying a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and America that would make the "us versus them" rivalry between Moscow and Washington seem tame by comparison. Worried that the Clinton administration was paying too much attention to economic globalization and too little to Islamic fundamentalism, Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington published a widely read article for *Foreign Affairs* in 1993 entitled "The Clash of Civilizations" in which he argued that on the eve of the new millennium, culture mattered more than economics or ideology. "Faith and family, blood and belief, are what people identify with and what they will fight and die for," he concluded in a follow-up article. "And that is why the clash of civilizations is replacing the Cold War as the central phenomenon of global politics."²⁹ Two years later, Huntington expanded these ideas into a best-selling book. "Wherever one looks, along the perimeter of Islam, Muslims have problems living peaceably with their neighbors," Huntington pointed out with an eye to recent strife from Southeast Europe to Central Asia. "Islam's borders are bloody, and so are its innards."³⁰ Echoing Huntington, neoconservative academics like Daniel Pipes called radical Islam the last and most dangerous of the totalitarian ideologies spawned during the twentieth century and accused the Clinton administration of "appeasement" for negotiating with Arab radicals like Yasser Arafat.³¹

Bernard Lewis, the Princeton historian who had actually coined the phrase "clash of civilizations" in his seminal essay "The Roots of Muslim Rage," offered a much more explicit portrait of the looming green threat in late 1998 in

the pages of *Foreign Affairs*. Lewis's short think piece, "License to Kill," included an annotated translation of Osama bin Laden's recent "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders." Evoking the specter of civilizational warfare, bin Laden claimed that the American troops currently stationed in Saudi Arabia were really latter-day Crusaders who were occupying and plundering Islam's holiest sites and humiliating millions of Muslims. Lewis translated bin Laden's chilling punch line as follows: "To kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able, . . . until their armies, shattered and broken-winged, depart from all the lands of Islam, incapable of threatening any Muslim." Although he admitted that not all Muslims endorsed bin Laden's "license to kill," Lewis insisted that the threat was all too real. "Terrorism," he concluded, "requires only a few. Obviously, the West must defend itself by whatever means will be effective."³²

As far as George W. Bush was concerned, the catastrophic attacks of 9/11 merely confirmed just how accurate Huntington, Pipes, and Lewis were. His gut reaction was to wage religious war. Vowing to "rid the world of the evil-doers," Bush told reporters on 16 September that "this crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while." To be sure, the president was reluctant to cast himself publicly as a "crusader" and shied away from inflammatory rhetoric, but privately he was determined "to kick some ass," as he put it on the day the twin towers came down.³³ The first kick came in early October, when U.S. warplanes struck Afghanistan after the Taliban rejected Bush's ultimatum to expel al-Qaeda. After bin Laden condemned the United Nations for supporting the American air war against his Afghan hosts and called for a global jihad, Toby Gati, the former head of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, believed that al-Qaeda was close to getting what it had wanted all along—a battle royal between Islam and the West. "This reinforces my belief that we are doing the right thing in bombing him," Gati noted on 9 November 2001, "because if we don't want this to be a war of civilizations, we have really got to get rid of a person who is intent on making it that way."³⁴

The U.S. military made short work of the Taliban regime, which collapsed just before Thanksgiving and was quickly replaced by a pro-Western government headed by Hamid Karzai. Ridding the world of al-Qaeda and its leader, however, proved considerably more difficult. Having tracked Osama bin Laden for several years, the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency initially expected quick results. "Get bin Laden, find him. I want his head in a box," the CIA's Cofer Black had told anyone who would listen in the days immediately following the 9/11 attacks. "When we're through with them, they will have flies walking across their eyeballs."³⁵ Al-Qaeda's leaders holed themselves up inside fortified caves in the unmapped reaches of eastern Afghanistan, however, before

slipping across the border into Pakistan in December 2001. "He's kind of like Elvis," an American soldier in Kabul explained when asked about Osama's whereabouts five months later. "He's here, he's dead, he's alive."³⁶ Undaunted, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, a leading neoconservative who counted Lewis and Huntington among his friends, insisted that the Bush administration would defeat the green threat the same way its Cold War predecessors had beaten back the red threat in Southeast Asia. "Al-Qaeda is not a snake that can be killed by lopping off its head. It is more analogous to a disease that has infected many parts of a healthy body," Wolfowitz told a congressional committee on 26 June 2002. "Our intention . . . [is] not only to deprive the terrorists of a sanctuary in Afghanistan where they could safely plan, train, and organize, but also to capture and kill terrorists, and to drain the swamp in which they breed."³⁷ The CIA and the Pentagon would eventually capture or kill dozens of al-Qaeda operatives, but it was a big swamp, and despite Wolfowitz's braggadocio, Osama bin Laden was still issuing videotaped calls for jihad against America five years later.

Meanwhile, the United States was swept by an anti-Muslim "green scare" that rivaled the Cold War "red scare." Racial profiling of Arabs at airports and elsewhere, aggressive surveillance of Muslim groups across the country, and frequent color-coded "terror alerts" raised public fears of internal subversion to levels unmatched since the 1950s. Six months after 9/11, Steven Emerson, a self-styled expert on Islamic fundamentalism, published *American Jihad*, a hair-raising account claiming that al-Qaeda and similar groups had established hundreds of front organizations from New York City to Los Angeles.³⁸ For his part, Daniel Pipes reminded readers that the McCarren-Walter Act, a vestige of the anticommunist hysteria of the McCarthy era, was still on the books and could be used to justify the internment of Muslim Americans during a national emergency.³⁹ The Bush administration stopped short of invoking such emergency powers, but the Justice Department and the newly created Department of Homeland Security did make aggressive use of the USA Patriot Act and invoked the specter of Islamic terrorism whenever critics worried about possible violations of civil liberties.

With the publication of Norman Podhoretz's *World War IV* on the sixth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the new green threat received a catchy name—"Islamofascism." A "founding father" of neoconservatism whose disciples included Steven Emerson and Daniel Pipes, Podhoretz offered a blunt prescription for defeating Muslim radicals at home and abroad in September 2007. Americans must begin by "identifying the enemy as Islamofascism," they must accept that "the struggle against this nebulous enemy should be given the name of World War IV," and they must give the White House all the tools necessary to assure victory.⁴⁰ Podhoretz's message resonated well with Bush, who had praised

Israel a year earlier for striking a blow against Hezbollah and “Islamic fascism” in Lebanon. “We can take the philosophical high ground,” Bush insisted, but “part of the challenge in the 21st century is to remind people . . . that in moments of quiet, there’s still an Islamic fascist group plotting, planning and trying to spread their ideology.”⁴¹

Other observers, however, worried that the war on Islamo-fascism would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Colin Powell, who served as secretary of state during Bush’s first term, did not mince words. “Look, 9/11 was a huge traumatic shock to us,” he told a reporter in the spring of 2007. “But the Cold War is gone. All the theologies and ideologies that were going to supplant ours are gone. The communists, the fascists—get serious! The few authoritarian regimes that are left around are peanuts!” After mentioning Venezuela, Cuba, and Belarus, Powell concluded: “We can’t let terrorism suddenly become the substitute for Red China and the Soviet Union as our all-encompassing enemy, this great Muslim-extremist, monolithic thing from somewhere in Mauritania all the way through Muslim India. They’re all different. It’s not going to come together that way.”⁴² Nevertheless, as the Bush administration drew to a close, Podhoretz’s call to arms seemed to have more traction than Powell’s words of caution.

The first step toward defeating Islamo-fascism was to make the establishment of democracy in the Muslim world a central feature of the new national security doctrine emerging in Bush’s Washington. Norman Podhoretz would put it this way in *World War IV*: “Those of us who support the Bush Doctrine believe that this case—for making the Middle East safe for America by making it safe for democracy—is all but irrefutable.”⁴³ Ten years earlier, Podhoretz had helped establish the Project for the New American Century, a neoconservative think tank whose agenda included exporting democracy to the Middle East and whose statement of principles was signed by Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and a half-dozen others who would later accept important posts in the Bush administration.⁴⁴ The new think tank evoked the legacies of Woodrow Wilson, whose vow to “make the world safe for democracy” had galvanized congressional support for war in 1917, and Henry R. Luce, the editor of *Time* magazine, who had prophesied in 1941 that by joining the democratic crusade against fascism, the United States would usher in a postwar “American Century.” Indeed, the Project for the New American Century’s goals could have been written by Wilson or Luce. Not only did Americans “need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values,” Podhoretz and his colleagues averred in 1997, Americans must also “promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad,” particularly in the Middle East.⁴⁵

To some degree, the Project for the New American Century echoed previous policies in the region, where for more than forty years U.S. officials had pressed

for political reform, economic development, and social modernization to inoculate pro-Western Muslim regimes against revolutionary change. The new think tank broke new ground, however, by suggesting that occasionally American interests might best be served by exporting democracy at gunpoint to places like Iraq. One of the most vocal proponents of overthrowing Saddam Hussein was Paul Wolfowitz, who had long lamented Washington's failure to impose regime change immediately after the First Gulf War in 1991, when Iraq was seemingly ripe for democracy. Even if "Iraq isn't ready for Jeffersonian democracy," Wolfowitz remarked eleven years later on the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, toppling the Ba'athist tyrant in Baghdad would send an important signal to the entire region. "I think if it's significant for Iraq, it's going to cast a very large shadow," Wolfowitz explained, "starting with Syria and Iran, but across the whole Arab world, I think."⁴⁶ Condoleeza Rice placed this argument into a more general framework. "We do not seek to impose democracy on others," she told the Council on Foreign Relations on 1 October 2002. "Our vision of the future is not one where every person eats Big Macs and drinks Coke—or where every nation has a bicameral legislature with 535 members." Insisting that the Bush administration wished only "to help create conditions in which people can claim a freer future for themselves," Rice looked forward "to one day standing for these aspirations in a free and unified Iraq."⁴⁷

A few days earlier, Donald Rumsfeld had established an "Office of Special Plans" at the Pentagon headed by Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, who worked closely with Iraqi exiles like Ahmed Chalabi and Ali Allawi to ensure that Rice's vision would become reality sooner rather than later. Allawi, who would join the first post-Saddam cabinet in Baghdad as minister of defense, recalled that the Pentagon's point man for Iraq had "peculiar qualifications for a person charged with determining the fate of an Arab state" and was particularly troubled by Feith's close ties with Israel's Likud Party. According to Allawi, Feith "carried into his job an extreme version of the usual neo-conservative associations with right-wing policy institutes" and a firm conviction "that the post 9/11 order gave the USA a unique opportunity to alter the political landscape in the 'greater' Middle East, that is, all countries between Morocco and Pakistan."⁴⁸ Feith's most prominent ally among the exiles was Kanan Makiya, who had exposed the crimes of the Ba'athist regime just prior to the First Gulf War in *Republic of Fear*, a book published under a pseudonym to protect the author from Saddam Hussein's secret police. After hearing Makiya tell Pentagon planners during the first weeks of 2003 that regime change in Iraq could trigger a series of democratic dominoes in the region, Feith's boss, Paul Wolfowitz, drew parallels with the collapse of the Soviet empire and predicted that a post-Saddam Middle East would be like "Eastern Europe with Arabs."⁴⁹

Across the Potomac in Foggy Bottom, the State Department was completing

its own “Future of Iraq Project,” which would reach very different conclusions. Americans needed to be careful what they wished for, Richard Haass, one of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s closest advisers, had remarked as early as November 2002. “No one should confuse promoting democracy with holding parliamentary elections the next day—in which case the Islamists would do well.”⁵⁰ In March 2003, the *Los Angeles Times* got hold of a secret State Department report whose title said it all: “Iraq, the Middle East, and Change: No Dominoes.” Drafted by Wayne White, deputy director of Foggy Bottom’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the report cautioned that “liberal democracy would be difficult to achieve” in Baghdad and “could well be subject to exploitation by anti-American elements.” The report’s conclusions “were not all that extraordinary,” White recalled three years later, because U.S. diplomats had long been aware “that the region’s populations were (and are) predominantly more anti-American, anti-Israeli, and militantly Islamic than their existing governments.” And that meant “that EVEN A SUCCESSFUL EFFORT IN IRAQ, both militarily and politically, would not only fail to trigger a tsunami of democracy in the region, but potentially could endanger long-standing U.S. allies in the Middle East, like Jordan, not the region’s anti-U.S. autocrats.”⁵¹

White’s warning, however, was drowned out by a chorus of bellicose rhetoric from war hawks like Thomas Barnett, a key member of Rumsfeld’s brain trust whose much-discussed article, “The Pentagon’s New Map,” appeared in *Esquire* magazine a few days before the invasion of Iraq. Insisting that toppling Saddam Hussein was “not only necessary and inevitable, but also good,” Barnett argued that “the only thing that will change that nasty environment and open the floodgates for change is if some external power steps in and plays Leviathan full-time.” Terming Iraq “the Yugoslavia of the Middle East,” he predicted that “as baby sitting jobs go, this one will be a doozy, making our lengthy efforts in postwar Germany and Japan look simple in retrospect.”⁵² A year later, Barnett expanded these ideas into a best-selling book that offered an even blunter prognosis. “It is not enough for the Bush administration to say that our new strategic focus is an ‘arc of instability’ that stretches across the Muslim-dominated regions of North Africa, the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia,” Barnett insisted. “America needs to understand the larger global conflict we join when we seek to transform Iraq from ‘rogue regime’ to model Arab democracy. It is an enduring conflict between those who want to see disconnected societies like Saddam’s Iraq join the global community defined by globalization’s Functioning Core and others who will do whatever it takes in terms of violence to prevent these societies from being—in their minds—assimilated into a ‘sacriligious global economic empire’ lorded over by the United States.”⁵³

Despite Barnett’s arrogance and bombast, the bloody fighting in Iraq soon revealed that American democratic theory and Middle Eastern political reality

were truly worlds apart. Nevertheless, neoconservatives both inside and outside the Bush administration remained deeply committed to exporting democracy to Iraq. One of the most eloquent was Fouad Ajami, a Lebanese-born expert on Arab nationalism whose close ties to the Pentagon and White House had prompted one critic to label him “a native informant” on the eve of the war.⁵⁴ In a May 2005 *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece entitled “Bush Country,” Ajami insisted that despite the deepening insurgency in Iraq, democracy was spreading throughout the region because “a conservative American president had come bearing the gift of Wilsonian redemption.”⁵⁵ Although he adopted a more wistful tone a year later, Ajami still gave the Bush administration high marks for good intentions in his new book, *The Foreigner’s Gift*. Ajami’s former colleague Paul Wolfowitz and other neoconservatives “had come to this war with a genuine belief that the wider Arab world was in desperate need of reform, and that Iraq offered the right setting for a campaign to rid the Arab world of its political and cultural malignancies.” Whether or not the Arabs ever overcame their “road rage” and their “culture of terrorism” and expressed gratitude for the gift of democracy, Ajami insisted that America’s decision to launch a preventive war in Iraq had not been a mistake.⁵⁶

The most controversial and confusing aspect of the new national security doctrine fashioned by neoconservative strategists during the first two years of the Bush administration was the endorsement of preventive war. International relations theorists have always been careful to distinguish between “preemption” and “prevention.” Preemptive war is “a war of necessity” triggered when a nation discovers a clear and imminent threat to its security—enemy armies gathering on its borders, enemy warships steaming toward its coast, or enemy bombers flying toward its airspace—and strikes just before those enemies inflict harm. Preventive war, by contrast, is “a war of choice” in which the threat to national security is neither clear nor imminent. In such a case, one nation typically possesses a significant military advantage, it suspects that another nation eventually intends to inflict harm, and it chooses to strike first, “shooting on suspicion” in order to prevent the other nation from ever launching an attack. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 marked the start of a Japanese preventive war that the American military might have preempted had Franklin D. Roosevelt realized just how imminent the threat was.⁵⁷

Throughout the Cold War, American leaders had from time to time considered launching preventive attacks against the Soviets, the Chinese, and other military rivals, but in the end they chose never to shoot on suspicion and opted instead for the doctrine of preemptive war. Following the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991, however, neoconservative strategic thinkers claimed that the United States had become the world’s sole remaining military superpower, with responsibility for establishing “a new world order” by aggressively pro-

moting democracy and by forcibly preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Beginning in 1997, the Project for the New American Century issued a series of reports highlighting the world's vulnerability to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) should rogue states like Iraq and North Korea acquire ballistic missiles. On 26 March 1998, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and a dozen other founders of the neoconservative think tank signed a letter to President Clinton arguing that Saddam Hussein's long-standing interest in acquiring WMD and his brutal treatment of the Iraqi people made him a legitimate target for preventive war. Once they settled into their new offices at the Pentagon three years later, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz drew up plans for regime change in Baghdad and dreamed of a high-tech antiballistic missile system to protect the United States from WMD.⁵⁸

Preoccupied with protecting America from rogue states like Iraq, the Bush administration did not pay sufficient attention to the fine print in a March 2001 report issued by the Commission on National Security/21st Century, a bipartisan panel headed by former senators Gary Hart and Warren Rudman. "States, terrorists, and other disaffected groups will acquire weapons of mass disruption and mass destruction, and some will use them," Hart and Rudman prophesied. "Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers," unless the new administration paid greater attention to the threats posed by dysfunctional and disintegrating states in the Third World, where terrorists thrived.⁵⁹ In early May Vice President Dick Cheney did express such concern about "the vulnerability of our system to different kinds of attacks," some homegrown and "some inspired by terrorists external to the United States [like] the World Trade towers bombing, in New York" in 1993. "If you're going to uncover threats to the U.S., and hopefully thwart them before they can be launched," Cheney concluded, "intelligence is your first line of defense."⁶⁰ Yet even after Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet handed President Bush himself a briefing paper on al-Qaeda entitled "Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in US" on 6 August 2001, no one in Washington connected the dots.⁶¹

In the wake of al-Qaeda's surprise attacks on 11 September 2001, however, preventive war quickly became the preferred option inside the White House. "The Pearl Harbor of the 21st century took place today," George W. Bush confided in his diary the night the twin towers fell, and America must ensure that it never happen again.⁶² Having missed the warning signals that might have prevented 9/11, Bush and his advisers took the offensive in "the global war on terror" during the autumn of 2001 in Afghanistan. Well aware that Osama bin Laden was eager to acquire WMD, early in the new year Bush designated the three countries most likely to provide them—Iraq, Iran, and North Korea—as "an axis of evil" whose leaders were guilty of abetting terrorism. With the approach of summer, the neoconservatives at the Pentagon had persuaded the

president that the best defense was a good offense. The 9/11 attacks, Bush told the graduating class at West Point on 1 June 2002, confirmed that the logic of the Cold War no longer applied and revealed “new threats” that required “new thinking” in a new century. “Deterrence—the promise of massive retaliation against nations—means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend,” and “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.” Insisting that “the war on terror will not be won on the defensive,” Bush said that “we must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge.”⁶³

Three months later, the Texas Republican’s tough rhetoric became official policy when the White House released “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” a document reminiscent of Harry Truman’s NSC-68, that would quickly be christened “the Bush Doctrine.” Arguing that both terrorists and the nations that encouraged them were “enemies of civilization,” the doctrine lumped secular radicals like Saddam Hussein together with Islamic extremists like Osama bin Laden and blurred the differences between preemptive and preventive war. “The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security,” but the 9/11 attacks showed that “traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and targeting of innocents.” Insisting that there was now a “compelling case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack,” the Bush Doctrine announced that “to forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”⁶⁴ Reading between the lines, obviously the White House was implying that “taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves” constituted preemption, not prevention.

Shortly after unveiling his new national security strategy, Bush visited Cincinnati, where he made a melodramatic case for regime change in Iraq. Likening the situation to the Cuban Missile Crisis four decades earlier, when JFK had raised the specter of a U.S. first strike against Soviet bases in the Caribbean, Bush told his Ohio audience on 7 October 2002 that “America must not ignore the threat gathering against us” in the Persian Gulf. “Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.”⁶⁵ Although the evidence that Saddam Hussein was about to develop WMD and that he was supporting al-Qaeda was actually far from clear, the White House pulled out all the stops to secure support for war on Capitol Hill on the eve of the 2002 off-year elections. Claiming that the alleged purchase of weapons-grade uranium yellowcake

from Niger in West Africa was the final step in Baghdad's plan to build an atomic bomb, the Bush administration convinced Congress on 11 October to authorize the use of military force against Iraq. In the end, U.S. troops would never find any weapons of mass destruction, and Joseph Wilson, a retired U.S. diplomat whom the CIA had sent to Niger in July 2002, subsequently revealed that nine months before the fall of Baghdad, the Bush administration knew that rumors that Iraq was after West African uranium were simply not true.⁶⁶ Despite the president's alarmist rhetoric about "preemption," the absence of a clear and imminent danger meant that Operation Iraqi Freedom was really a case of "preventive war," a subtle but important distinction well worth remembering as Americans ponder the implications of the new Bush Doctrine.

Resurrecting the Vietnam Syndrome: Quagmire on the Euphrates

In theory, the Bush administration's preventive war in Iraq was supposed to uproot Saddam Hussein's "Islamofascist" regime and replace it with a functioning democracy that would serve as a role model for the rest of the Arab world. In practice, however, Bush found himself trapped in a quagmire that came to look more and more like the American debacle in Indochina a generation earlier. As in the Gulf of Tonkin, so too in the Persian Gulf, the White House would misrepresent the nature of the threat facing the United States. As in Vietnam, so too in Iraq, the Pentagon would misunderstand the enemy and would overestimate the importance of America's technological superiority. And as in Southeast Asia, so too in the Middle East, U.S. policymakers would underestimate the challenge of nation-building in the midst of a brutal civil war. Not surprisingly, by 2007 the man who launched the war in Iraq had become America's most unpopular leader since Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, the men who presided over the war in Vietnam.

Deposing Saddam Hussein had been among George W. Bush's highest priorities long before the 9/11 attacks. The Middle East had been the only item on the agenda for the new administration's first NSC meeting on 30 January 2001, and the principal topic for discussion that day had been "How Iraq is destabilizing the region." According to American intelligence, not only had Saddam Hussein resumed his quest for WMD, he was also bankrolling Palestinian suicide bombers and encouraging anti-American terrorists throughout the region. Secretary of State Powell urged the president not to overreact and insisted that the U.N. economic sanctions in force since the First Gulf War and the ongoing American military presence in northern Iraq, where the U.S. Air Force maintained a "no-fly zone," had effectively contained Saddam Hussein.⁶⁷ Throughout the spring and into the summer, however, senior officials in the Office of

the Vice President and the Department of Defense built a case for regime change in Baghdad. As early as 1 April 2001, the Pentagon's Paul Wolfowitz stunned Richard Clarke, who served as America's first-ever National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, by claiming that Saddam Hussein had helped al-Qaeda plan the bombing at the World Trade Center eight years earlier. Insisting that the threat of "Iraqi terrorism" was all too real, Wolfowitz told Clarke: "You give bin Laden too much credit."⁶⁸

Five months later, Wolfowitz's boss was at his desk in the Pentagon when al-Qaeda hijackers crashed a Boeing 757 into the building. Within hours, Donald Rumsfeld was talking about retaliation, not only against Osama bin Laden but also against Saddam Hussein. "[Get] best info fast. Judge whether good enough hit S.H. at same time. Not only UBL [Usama bin Laden]," he told an emergency meeting at the National Military Command Center. "Go massive. Sweep it all up."⁶⁹ Six days later at Camp David, the president himself pointed the finger squarely at Saddam Hussein. "I believe Iraq was involved, but I'm not going to strike them now," Bush told his national security advisers. "I don't have the evidence at this point."⁷⁰ As the meeting broke up, however, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld told Richard Clarke that after the Pentagon put bin Laden out of business in Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein would be next. "Having been attacked by al-Qaeda," Clarke retorted, "for us now to go bombing Iraq in response would be like our invading Mexico after the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor."⁷¹ No hard evidence would ever surface linking the Iraqis to the 9/11 attacks, but as U.S. forces closed in on Taliban strongholds in Kabul and Kandahar later that autumn, President Bush confirmed that he did indeed have broader goals in the Muslim world, including regime change in Baghdad. America faced "a long struggle and a different kind of war" that could last for years on battlefields that stretched "beyond just Afghanistan" to Iraq and many other countries, he told reporters on 7 November 2001. "It's not one of those Kodak moments." Three weeks later, Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh paid a call at the White House amid rumors that his country might soon become "a second Afghanistan" unless it helped the United States root out al-Qaeda base camps in southwest Arabia. Insisting that Yemen was eager for America's help in fighting terrorism, Saleh urged his host not to confuse Saddam Hussein with Osama bin Laden and quoted an old Arab proverb: "If you put a cat in a cage, it can turn into a lion." Not missing a beat, Bush retorted with some West Texas wisdom. "This cat has rabies," he told Saleh. "The only way to cure the cat is to cut off its head."⁷²

Chief among the cat killers was Paul Wolfowitz, who accelerated planning for a preventive war against Iraq under the auspices of the emerging Bush Doctrine. Nicknamed "Wolfowitz of Arabia," he later summarized the "three fundamental concerns" behind the American invasion of Iraq. "One is weapons of

mass destruction, the second is support of terrorism, the third is the criminal treatment of the Iraqi people," Wolfowitz told a reporter. "The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was the weapons of mass destruction as the core reason." Wolfowitz was quick to point out, however, that the first and second concerns were tightly linked. "What September 11th to me said was [that] this is just the beginning of what these bastards can do if they start getting access to so-called modern weapons," and no one should forget that "Saddam Hussein was the only international figure other than Osama bin Laden who praised the attacks" on New York and Washington.⁷³

Although the evidence that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction was no stronger than the evidence that he had helped plan the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the White House claimed otherwise and moved inexorably toward a showdown. When asked why he was so determined to topple Saddam, George W. Bush hinted in the autumn of 2002 that his motives might be very personal. "After all, this is a guy that tried to kill my dad at one time," Dubya reminded reporters, referring to rumors that Iraqi intelligence had planned to assassinate Big George during a visit to Kuwait shortly after the First Gulf War.⁷⁴ Ironically, in March 1991 Bush's father had actually decided to contain the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad rather than destroy it because, as he and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, recalled in their joint memoir seven years later, "we were concerned about the long-term balance of power at the head of the [Persian] Gulf" and were convinced that "breaking up the Iraqi state would pose its own destabilizing problems."⁷⁵ In an op-ed piece published in the *Wall Street Journal* on 15 August 2002, Scowcroft told George W. Bush "Don't Attack Saddam" and offered him some advice that many suspected came from America's forty-first president. "The United States could certainly defeat the Iraqi military and destroy Saddam's regime. But it would not be a cakewalk," Scowcroft warned the White House. "On the contrary, it undoubtedly would be very expensive" and, even worse, "it would undermine our antiterror efforts." Whether or not these words of caution originated with Big George, Dubya chose to ignore them. Indeed, when asked by Bob Woodward whether or not he had conferred with his father about the wisdom of regime change in Iraq, George W. Bush could not remember, but was quick to add: "You know, he is the wrong father to appeal to in terms of strength. There is a higher father that I appeal to."⁷⁶

General Anthony Zinni, the former head of America's CENTCOM, who had managed to maintain peace in the Persian Gulf during the late 1990s by containing Saddam Hussein, was not convinced that George W. Bush was appealing to the "right" father. Indeed, as CENTCOM's current commander, General Tommy Franks, prepared for an invasion, his predecessor grew more and more nervous.

“Look at Saddam—what did he have? . . . He didn’t threaten anyone in the region,” Zinni told a reporter shortly after Baghdad fell to American troops. “It was a pain in the ass, but he was contained. He had a deteriorated military.” What worried the retired general most on the eve of the invasion, however, was Franks’s decision to scale back dramatically the size of the U.S. invasion force from what Zinni himself had projected five years earlier in CENTCOM’s OPLAN 1003-98.⁷⁷

Other high-ranking officers still on active duty shared Zinni’s concern that the Bush administration was seriously underestimating how many troops would be needed to topple the Ba’athist regime and maintain order afterward. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had arrived at the Pentagon in January 2001 determined to make the U.S. military leaner and meaner. For more than a decade, Andrew Marshall, who headed the Defense Department’s in-house think tank, the Office of Net Assessment, had argued that “a revolution in military affairs” was occurring that would eventually make massive troop build-ups like the one prior to the First Gulf War unnecessary.⁷⁸ When Rumsfeld applied Marshall’s theory to Iraq, he concluded that by relying on speed, stealth, and technology, America could win a second war in the Persian Gulf with a force much smaller than the 400,000 GIS called for in OPLAN 1003-98. By early 2003 Rumsfeld, Franks, and Wolfowitz, drawing on lessons from the recent war in Afghanistan, believed that a small but highly mobile ground force of perhaps as few as 60,000 troops assisted by precision air power could achieve victory in Iraq with minimal U.S. casualties. Army chief of staff Eric Shinseki, who had served in Vietnam, worried that the new war plan had quagmire written all over it. When asked by Congress on 25 February 2003 how many Americans soldiers would be necessary to depose Saddam Hussein and establish a stable and secure Iraq afterward, General Shinseki replied: “Something on the order of several hundred thousand.” Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz regarded Shinseki’s estimate as outrageously high, pressed him to retire early, and put the finishing touches on their plans for a lightning war.⁷⁹

The White House framed the impending conflict in the Persian Gulf as the first real test for the new Bush Doctrine. Dismissing calls from France, Germany, and the United Nations for further inspections and continued negotiations as appeasement, President Bush mobilized a “coalition of the willing” and readied an invasion force of 240,000 troops, two-thirds of them American, in early March. With the blessing of British prime minister Tony Blair, Bush issued an ultimatum on St. Patrick’s Day calling for Saddam Hussein to step down, approved a preliminary air assault on Baghdad forty-eight hours later, and then ordered Tommy Franks to commence Operation Iraqi Freedom on 20 March. When the drive toward the Iraqi capital stalled briefly a week later, some critics wondered whether the man in the Oval Office had any regrets. None at all, came the reply from Roland Betts, a close friend who had helped

Bush purchase the Texas Rangers fifteen years earlier. "The only time I've seen him second-guessing himself," Betts told the press on 29 March, "was when he said that we shouldn't have traded Sammy Sosa."⁸⁰ As Rumsfeld had predicted, the Pentagon's new military tactics soon proved so effective that Saddam Hussein probably wished he had been traded to the Chicago White Sox instead of Sosa. General Franks and his troops performed brilliantly and Iraqi forces did not. Once U.S. forces regained their momentum in early April, Baghdad and other Iraqi cities fell in quick succession. When President Bush declared on 1 May that "major combat operations" in the Second Gulf War had ended, only 138 GIS had been killed in action, fewer than in the First Gulf War twelve years earlier.

Although new tactics made winning the war far easier than many had predicted, inadequate plans for postwar reconstruction virtually ensured that America would lose the peace. Serious planning for a post-Saddam Iraq did not get under way until January 2003, when the White House asked Jay Garner, a retired general who had overseen relief efforts in Iraqi Kurdistan during the early 1990s, to head the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA). Plagued by logistical problems and poor coordination with U.S. military forces, Garner and ORHA watched helplessly in late April as thousands of looters pillaged homes, stores, and government ministries throughout Baghdad and destroyed the capital's infrastructure. Asked by reporters whether ORHA could have done more to maintain order, Garner retorted: "We ought to look in the mirror and get proud and stick out our chests and suck in our bellies and say, 'Damn, we're Americans.'"⁸¹ Not everyone was so enthusiastic. "Somebody in ORHA is supposed to take charge, but I have never talked to anyone," Captain Tom Hough, who stood guard at an oil refinery just outside the Iraqi capital, complained a few weeks later. "I don't know how to rebuild countries. But I'm wondering, Where *are* the people who rebuild countries?" There was no easy answer. "I don't have any idea what the Bush policy is," Hough confessed. "I don't know what they are planning for the future of Iraq. No idea. I am just trying to get things done here. We are making it up as we go along."⁸²

Concluding that Garner and ORHA could not get the job done, Bush sent L. Paul "Jerry" Bremer, a retired diplomat and counterterrorism expert, to Baghdad in early May to run the American-controlled Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Like their predecessors in ORHA, CPA officials did their planning on the fly and literally made things up as they went along, which soon led wags to speculate that the acronym actually stood for "Can't Produce Anything." For his part, Bremer quickly developed a reputation for being a smug, inflexible, thin-skinned know-it-all. Because he shared Bush's faith that free elections and free markets would make free people, Bremer set out to democra-

tize Iraq at warp speed. Within sixty days of his arrival in Baghdad, Bremer had disbanded the Iraqi army, purged Ba'ath party members from public life, and appointed a hand-picked governing council to plan the first post-Saddam elections.⁸³ Nevertheless, more and more Iraqis questioned whether Uncle Sam had any real solutions for what ailed their homeland, and many of them began to turn from politics to religion. "No Americans, no Saddam," an angry crowd chanted outside Bremer's headquarters in late June, "all the people are for Islam."⁸⁴ The average Iraqi's reaction to the U.S. experiment in nation-building was probably captured best, however, by the young man who told a reporter on a Baghdad street corner shortly after Bremer's arrival: "You have to build your own country by yourself and throw the Americans out."⁸⁵

By the summer of 2003, throwing the Americans out seemed to be high on many "to do" lists in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. The slow pace of nation-building in Kabul, for example, meant big trouble for the Bush administration's favorite Afghan, President Hamid Karzai, whose showdown with anti-American warlords was creating just enough chaos to lend credence to rumors that al-Qaeda was regrouping for a new jihad against the 8,500 U.S. troops still in Afghanistan. Fifteen hundred miles to the southwest in Riyadh, a pair of truck bombs killed eight Americans and twenty-six others in mid-May, signalling that Osama bin Laden and his followers were more determined than ever to drive the United States out of Saudi Arabia.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf was walking a political tightrope in Islamabad, where his support for Bush's war on terror prompted Islamic extremists to call him an apostate, secular reformers to call him a tyrant, and everyone to call him an American stooge. To make matters even worse, there were also ominous signs from Tehran that the moderate regime of President Mohammed Khatami, a reformer who had worked for six years to limit the power of the mullahs and improve relations with Washington, was losing ground to Islamic extremists like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who believed Iran should acquire nuclear weapons and help its Shi'ite brethren across the Shatt al-Arab defeat America.⁸⁷

Of greatest concern, however, was the appalling situation in Iraq itself, where reconstruction was moving at a snail's pace, real self-government remained months away, and Ba'athist and Shi'ite militants had begun to attack U.S. forces with mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and improvised explosive devices ("IEDs" in the Pentagon's lingo). By July 2003, small bands of fighters from almost every corner of the Muslim world were filtering into Iraq, fueling the homegrown resistance with their fiery calls for jihad against the infidel army of occupation. "I believe that there's mid-level Ba'athist, Iraqi intelligence service people . . . [who] are conducting what I would describe as a classical guerrilla-type campaign against us," General John Abizaid, the Arabic-speaking West

Pointer who succeeded Tommy Franks as commander of CENTCOM, acknowledged on 16 July. "It's low-intensity conflict, in our doctrinal terms, but it's war, however you describe it."⁸⁸

Eight days later, Donald Rumsfeld bristled when reporters drew parallels between the emerging low-intensity conflict in Iraq and the war in Vietnam a generation earlier. Noting that he had "gone to the dictionary," the secretary of defense insisted that America faced neither a "guerrilla war" nor a "quagmire" in the Middle East. "That's someone else's business," Rumsfeld concluded. "I don't do quagmires."⁸⁹ Before the summer was out, however, U.S. policymakers faced not only a widening insurgency but also brutal sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shi'ites and the collapse of the Iraqi economic infrastructure, all of which called into question the CPA's plan to build democracy. When the Bush administration refused to rethink its democratization project, Ghassan Salamé, a United Nations official serving in Baghdad, suggested that a new "ideological-industrial complex" must be in control in Washington. "This is not the Corps of Engineers, this is not the American pragmatist problem-solver," Salamé concluded in the autumn of 2003, but rather "unknown Americans, Americans with an ideology, with a master plan, . . . with interests—somehow missionaries."⁹⁰

During the following four years, George W. Bush insisted again and again that the United States must "stay the course" in Iraq in order to win the global war on terror. Nevertheless, most of the "benchmarks" by which "America's first MBA president" monitored the situation in Iraq indicated that all was not well. In the summer of 2004, there were just 135,000 GIs on the ground, barely enough to win battles and far too few to hold areas freed from insurgent control. As a result, General Ricardo Sanchez, whom Abizaid tapped to command U.S. troops in Iraq, adopted a "whack-a-mole" strategy designed to keep anti-American guerrillas off balance by hitting them hard wherever they popped up. Because he realized that increasing the size of the U.S. occupation force would necessitate extending the average soldier's tour of duty indefinitely, General Sanchez did not request additional troops but relied instead on 30,000 private security guards provided by firms like Blackwater USA and DynCorps International for additional firepower and logistical support. Kyle Hendrick, who worked for a third firm called Triple Canopy, told a reporter in August 2005 that the Pentagon had in effect out-sourced part of the war in Iraq to some heavily armed private soldiers who "looked like extras in Mel Gibson's *Road Warriors*" and who all too often shot first and asked questions later.⁹¹

Over the long haul, the Bush administration hoped to solve the manpower problem by building a new Iraqi army that could "stand up" so that Americans could "stand down," but in the short run, most GIs felt as though they were trapped in a real-life Middle Eastern version of Hollywood Vietnam war films

like *Apocalypse Now* or *Full Metal Jacket*. "From what I see," Private Chris Frosheiser e-mailed his parents shortly before he was killed by an IED, "its goin to take a lot longer then Rumsfeld and GW are saying to get this shit hole up and running."⁹² When violence flared in Baghdad, Fallujah, and Najaf, Pentagon planners seeking effective tactics against urban guerrillas turned to Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 masterpiece *The Battle of Algiers*, a fictionalized account of the brutal French counterinsurgency campaign against Algerian insurgents half a century earlier, for guidance.⁹³ Meanwhile, more than a million Iraqis fled to Syria, Jordan, and other neighboring lands during 2006 to escape the violence, and another million were internally displaced from their homes because of what amounted to Sunni and Shi'ite ethnic cleansing. A year later, those numbers had doubled.⁹⁴ The Bush administration tried to regain lost momentum by sending a "surge" of 30,000 fresh U.S. troops to Iraq during the spring of 2007, but few Iraqis or Americans expected this to turn the tide in the war. "It's bad and it's not going to get better," First Sergeant Timothy Johnson told reporters in Baghdad in early September. "We're not going to make a difference, not in the short term. Maybe if we stayed here forever."⁹⁵

In a scene reminiscent of one forty years earlier, when Pentagon officials had assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that victory was just around the corner in Vietnam, General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker arrived on Capitol Hill on 10 September 2007 seeking continued support for the war. General Petraeus, who had won praise during the first months after the invasion for employing "grass roots" counterinsurgency tactics to quell violence in Mosul before succeeding Ricardo Sanchez as commander of the entire U.S. war effort in 2006, insisted that there was indeed light at the end of the tunnel in Iraq. By bringing American troop levels up to 169,000, he assured Congress, the White House's controversial "surge" was finally making it possible to extend his successful "bottom up" approach to Anbar and other provinces throughout the country. The political situation in Iraq, by contrast, was much gloomier. Confirming that support for Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's dysfunctional cabinet was dwindling rapidly in Baghdad, Ambassador Crocker acknowledged that "extensive displacement and widespread sectarian killings by al-Qa'ida and other extremist groups have gnawed away at the already frayed fabric of Iraqi society and politics." Nevertheless, Crocker believed that if America was patient, "a secure, stable democratic Iraq at peace with its neighbors is attainable."⁹⁶

Two months before his testimony, however, Crocker had confessed that patience was already in short supply. "In the States, it's like we're in the last half of the third reel of a three-reel movie, and all we have to do is decide we're done here," Crocker told an interviewer in July 2007, "and we leave the theater and go on to something else." From his perch in Baghdad, however, things looked

very different. "Out here, you're just getting into the first of five reels," he sighed, "and as ugly as the first reel has been, the other four and a half are going to be way, way worse."⁹⁷ Three reels or five, critics of the war in Iraq on Capitol Hill and Main Street foresaw no happy ending. "I have seen this movie," Anthony Zinni had remarked in April 2004 as the Bush administration prepared to load the second reel. "It was called Vietnam."⁹⁸

Orientalism at the End of the American Century

As in Vietnam, so too in Iraq, the longer the war lasted, the stronger all the old orientalist stereotypes about Asians and Arabs became. During the first days of the occupation, an epidemic of looting and robberies prompted unlucky American victims to liken their assailants to Ali Baba and his forty thieves.⁹⁹ Before long, U.S. troops came to regard their Iraqi adversaries as wily orientals, ungrateful thugs, or religious fanatics. In the heat of battle, it is easy to demonize the enemy, especially in a place like Iraq, where the Pentagon's undersized expeditionary force endured a string of car bombs, ambushes, and kidnappings. Asked by a reporter how things were going in October 2003, one GI manning a checkpoint near Baghdad offered a blistering assessment. "If you really want to know," he told a reporter, "I'm sick of being in a country where lying is the national pastime."¹⁰⁰ First Sergeant Karl Wetherington made the same point far more graphically six months later after Iraqi insurgents kidnapped, killed, and mutilated four Blackwater USA contractors in Fallujah. Insisting that the butchery was the inevitable result of an innately violent and vicious Islamic culture, Wetherington told a reporter: "I hate the motherfuckers. Muslims are worthless. I don't mind Iraqis — they're okay — just Muslims."¹⁰¹

Lieutenant General Jerry Boykin, whom Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had tapped to lead the Pentagon's new counterterrorist unit, used somewhat more diplomatic language to cast the war in Iraq in religious terms. At prayer breakfasts and right-wing pep talks during 2003, Boykin insisted that America's greatest foe was not Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein but rather Islam itself. "The enemy is none of these people I have showed you here," he told a Florida audience after one of his inspirational slide shows. "The enemy is a guy called Satan." Islamic radicals had targeted the United States not because they were unhappy with U.S. policies but simply because they hated Americans. "They're after us because we're a Christian nation," Boykin concluded. Calling for what amounted to a new crusade against an old infidel, Boykin recalled with pride how he had felt when talking to a captured Somali guerrilla leader in Mogadishu a decade earlier: "Well, you know what I knew, that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol."¹⁰²

Americans eager to understand what motivated Islamic zealots like Osama

bin Laden frequently turned to Middle East “specialists” whose views, when stripped of their academic jargon, were at bottom not much different from Boykin’s. One such expert was the late Raphael Patai, whose assertion that Arabs were congenitally violent and oversexed brutes was resurrected in a posthumous third edition of *The Arab Mind* that quickly became a must read at the Pentagon as the Bush administration prepared for war with Iraq.¹⁰³ Colonel Norvell De Atkine, a West Point graduate who taught strategy at the Army’s Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, set the tone in the foreword: “At the institution where I teach military officers, *The Arab Mind* forms the basis of my cultural instruction.” Arabs were prisoners of religious stultification and tribalism, De Atkine added, which trapped them in “a pervasive cultural and political environment that stifles development of initiative, independent thinking, and innovation.”¹⁰⁴ When Seymour Hersh, the dean of American investigative journalists, interviewed U.S. military officials about torture at Abu Ghraib prison a year later, many confirmed that the army’s use of sexual humiliation as a technique to “break” Iraqi prisoners was based on a careful reading of *The Arab Mind*.¹⁰⁵ Although critics charged that Hersh had exaggerated the importance of Patai’s book, by 2004 it was required reading both for the CPA’s “Operation Iraqi Freedom Seminar” in Baghdad and for the U.S. Army’s counterinsurgency course at Fort Carson, Colorado.¹⁰⁶

Despite what Hersh’s sources told him about Patai’s book, however, the most influential academic expert on the Middle East in George W. Bush’s Washington remained Princeton’s Bernard Lewis. Four months after September 11th, the *Atlantic Monthly* published a piece by Lewis entitled “What Went Wrong?” Eschewing Patai’s use of popular psychology, Lewis took aim at Arab autocrats like Saddam Hussein. “For the oppressive but ineffectual governments that rule much of the Middle East, finding targets to blame serves a useful, indeed an essential, purpose—to explain the poverty that they have failed to alleviate and to justify the tyranny that they have introduced,” Lewis concluded. “They seek to deflect the mounting anger of their unhappy subjects toward other, outside targets.”¹⁰⁷ Among those inside Bush’s inner circle most intrigued by Lewis’s orientalist writings was Vice President Cheney, who by late 2002 was emerging as one of the administration’s leading war hawks. Looking for a pretext for toppling Saddam Hussein, Cheney made Lewis his frequent dinner partner in the months preceding Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Princeton historian obliged by providing an ingenious rationale for regime change in Iraq based on what had occurred eighty years earlier in Turkey, where Kemal Ataturk, a secular modernizer, had launched a “revolution from above” designed to westernize his country politically and economically while leaving Islam as the odd man out. “The Islamic world is now at the beginning of the 15th century,” Lewis told a reporter after Saddam’s fall, while “the Western world is at the beginning of the

21st century.” The best antidote to radical Islam, he concluded, was an “Arab Atatürk” who could trigger a “Reformation” and bring Iraq and its neighbors into the modern world.¹⁰⁸

Top State Department officials, however, argued that the American quest for an Arab Atatürk had a greater chance of success if Washington relied more on public relations and diplomacy and less on political manipulation and military force. To this end, Secretary of State Powell established an “Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim World” in January 2003. The advisory group’s eighty-page report, *Changing Minds, Winning Peace*, appeared ten months later and did not make for pleasant reading at the Bush White House. Emphasizing that “hostility toward America has reached shocking levels” throughout the Middle East, the report confirmed that “shortly before the war against Saddam Hussein, by a greater than two-to-one margin, Muslims surveyed in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan said the United States was a more serious threat than Iraq.” Throughout the Muslim world, the men and women whom the advisory group interviewed were “genuinely distressed at the plight of the Palestinians and at the role they perceived the United States to be playing, and they are genuinely distressed by the situation in Iraq.”¹⁰⁹ In not so many words, the report suggested that, with all due respect to Jerry Boykin and Bernard Lewis, “they hate us because of our policies, *not* because of who we are.”

The advisory group may have gotten the diagnosis right, but its principal prescription—a multimillion dollar public diplomacy campaign—quickly fell flat. After seizing control of Saddam Hussein’s television system, for example, the State Department launched a “Shared Values” media blitz profiling Arab-American celebrities like Tony Shaloub, but Iraqi viewers dismissed the programming as Madison Avenue spin designed to distract attention from the U.S. occupation.¹¹⁰ When White House ideologues launched their own public relations offensive later in 2003 to sell the Arab world on Bush’s “open market” approach to economic development, they were inadvertently betrayed by incompetent linguists, whose oxymoronic translation of concepts like “privatization” as “castration” and “multilateralism” as “polygamy” evoked bawdy laughter from Baghdad to Beirut.¹¹¹

There was nothing funny, however, about the uncontrollable violence engulfing Iraq. In August 2003, Jerry Bremer testily implied that the carnage confronting the CPA in Baghdad was inevitable, like street crime from an episode of *Law and Order* or *CSI Miami*. “When you are an occupying power you have not only responsibilities but, as you exercise those responsibilities, you’re going to have friction,” he told a reporter. “It happens. More people get killed in New York every night than get killed in Baghdad.”¹¹² During a visit to Clark University two years later, Bremer continued to insist that regime change in Iraq

had made the streets of America more secure by extirpating the roots of terrorism and preventing al-Qaeda from making Baghdad the capital of a “global anti-American Islamic caliphate.” Vehemently denying that de-Ba’athification had been a mistake, he compared Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler and urged everyone to read *An End to Evil*, a new book by two of the Bush administration’s favorite neoconservatives, Richard Perle and David Frum. Bremer summarized their chief argument as follows: America has a moral responsibility to export democracy to the Muslim world, whether Arab radicals and Islamic militants like it or not. A quick look at Frum and Perle’s book confirms that they regard militant Islam as the driving force behind a new “axis of evil” whose ideas, like those promoted earlier by fascism and communism, are antithetical to everything that the United States holds dear. “Nobody thinks that it will be fast or easy to bring democracy to the Middle East,” Frum and Perle confessed, but if America is to win this “war of ideas,” Americans must become more comfortable with the idea of war.¹¹³

Natan Sharansky, a Soviet dissident-turned-Israeli politician, was also high on the Bush administration’s reading list because his new book, *The Case for Democracy*, echoed Frum and Perle’s views. At first glance, “the case against democracy in the Middle East appears compelling,” Sharansky confessed. Free elections, religious tolerance, and women’s rights were foreign concepts throughout most of the Muslim world, he claimed, and autocracy, despotism, and dictatorship were the default settings from Riyadh to Rabat. With proper guidance from the United States, however, Sharansky believed, even Arabs would “prefer a *free* society to a *fear* society.”¹¹⁴ President Bush invited Sharansky to the White House after the November 2004 elections and endorsed his ideas on the steps of the U.S. Capitol two months later. “I felt like his book just confirmed what I believe,” Bush told reporters afterward. “That thinking, that’s part of my presidential DNA.”¹¹⁵

There were indications that other Americans shared Bush’s orientalist DNA. High on the *New York Times* best-seller list during the final weeks of 2004, for example, was Nelson DeMille’s novel *Night Fall*, in which New York City detective John Corey discovers that al-Qaeda shot down TWA Flight 800 over Long Island Sound in July 1996 with a surface-to-air missile as a dress rehearsal for 9/11. “What’s the definition of a moderate Arab?” Corey asks his partner. “A guy who ran out of ammunition.”¹¹⁶ A few days before Bush’s second inaugural, Fox television launched the fourth season of its highly rated action series *24* with a story line featuring Kiefer Sutherland as Jack Bauer, a lone wolf battling a Muslim “fifth column” inside America. After a wake-up signal from al-Qaeda, Islamic sleeper cells kidnap the secretary of defense, murder innocent school girls, and attempt to convert America’s nuclear power plants into weapons of mass destruction.¹¹⁷ Far blunter than the Fox network, columnist

Ann Coulter ridiculed Arab Americans who claimed that the brutal tactics the Bush administration employed against alleged “enemy combatants” amounted to torture. “It’s completely insane stuff. ‘The government flew me to Las Vegas and made me have sex with a horse,’” she sneered in April 2005. “Liberals are about to become the last people to figure out that Arabs lie.”¹¹⁸ A year later, while promoting her new book, *Godless*, the sharp-tongued pundit captured headlines by equating withdrawal from Iraq with appeasement and by branding Bush’s critics as cowards who were afraid to stand up to “Arab savages.”¹¹⁹

Although George W. Bush was careful not to demonize Arabs or other Muslims as savages, he embraced the war in Iraq with religious intensity as part of a broader battle against global terror and vowed that American democracy would triumph over oriental despotism. “From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth,” Bush reminded the American public as he took the oath of office for his second term on 20 January 2005. “So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”¹²⁰

When the Iraqi people went to the polls ten days later to elect their first post-Saddam parliament, the White House regarded the purple ink on millions of index fingers as proof that democracy was on the march in Baghdad. Because most Sunnis had boycotted the elections, however, Shi’ites and Kurds dominated the new cabinet, which could not prevent Iraq from descending into a gruesome civil war that saw the streets littered with hundreds of corpses and the routes out of the country lined with thousands of refugees. When, in February 2006, Sunni terrorists destroyed the Askariya Mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest shrines in Shi’a Islam, the violence escalated and U.S. policymakers privately began to use words like “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide.” Tempers flared at the White House as top officials realized that the Iraqi government was no match for Moktada al-Sadr, whose Shi’ite Mahdi Army controlled Baghdad’s slums, or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Sunni thug who liked to behead Americans and then post the grisly results on the Internet. “Where’s George Washington? Where’s Thomas Jefferson?” George W. Bush snapped in frustration in March 2006. “Where’s John Adams, for crying out loud? He didn’t even have much of a personality.”¹²¹

Nevertheless, many critics of Bush’s war in Iraq remained convinced that the real problem lay in Washington, not in Baghdad, and some wondered whether a better question might be: Where’s John Quincy Adams? George W. Bush and John Quincy Adams actually had several things in common. Both had degrees from Harvard, both had fathers who served one term in the White House, and

both had become president themselves despite having lost the popular vote. Unlike George W. Bush, however, John Quincy Adams entered the White House in 1824 with much experience abroad and with even more expertise in foreign policy. During his eight-year stint as James Monroe's secretary of state, he had developed a deep appreciation both for the limits of power and for the power of ideas. Not surprisingly, when some on Capitol Hill called for the United States to help liberate Latin America from Spanish tyranny, Secretary of State Adams counseled caution. "America, with the same voice which spoke herself into existence as a nation, proclaimed to mankind the inextinguishable rights of human nature," he remarked on 4 July 1821. "But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy." In not so many words, John Quincy Adams was saying that exporting democracy was risky business in places like Latin America, where radical social forces were proving difficult to control.¹²²

Although uncontrollable monsters, some of America's own making, seemed close to destroying all hope for democracy in Iraq by early 2007, President Bush remained more determined than ever to stay the course. On 27 February, Andrew Roberts, a self-styled "reactionary" and author of *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900*, had lunch at the White House with the old history major in the Oval Office, who was evidently reading the new book in his spare time. An unabashed advocate of imperialism as a civilizing force, Roberts entitled his first chapter "Shouldering the White Man's Burden," he praised Winston Churchill for standing firm in the face of fascist and communist totalitarianism, and he regarded Britain's withdrawal from the Middle East after the Suez Crisis as a capitulation to radical Arab nationalism that eventually led to the 9/11 attacks. According to Roberts's wife, Susan Gilchrist, Bush really liked what he read. "I thought I had a crush on [my husband]," she told a reporter afterward, "but it's nothing like the crush President Bush has on him." And with good reason, for Roberts compared Bush favorably to many of the nineteenth-century historical figures whom the forty-third president had studied four decades earlier at Yale. "The so-called 'neo-conservative' drive to export liberal democracy actuated British statesmen such as George Canning and Lord Palmerston," Roberts explained, "just as the concept of pre-emptive warfare was practised by the Royal Navy in the Napoleonic Wars." Most important, Roberts insisted that Bush's battle against terrorism was the twenty-first-century equivalent of Churchill's battle against Nazism. "George W. Bush has not invented a new doctrine," Roberts concluded, "he has simply adapted an old one to new and equally terrifying circumstances."¹²³

As pleasant as it must have been to be compared to Palmerston and Churchill, however, President Bush might have been better served by reading a bit more broadly. To a syllabus that already includes books by Natan Sharansky and Andrew Roberts plus David McCullough's biography of John Adams, he might

consider adding at least one volume of fiction—Gary Shteyngart’s tragicomic novel *Absurdistan*. Upon arriving in a fictionalized former Soviet republic in the Caspian Basin that loosely resembles Azerbaijan, Shteyngart’s protagonist, a Russian American named Misha Vainberg, tries unsuccessfully to prevent civil war between two feuding ethnic groups, the Sevos and the Svanis, both of whom are connected to rival U.S. multinationals seeking control of Absurdistan’s oil. Shortly before Sevo activist “Sakha the Democrat” is executed by a Svani death squad, he ponders the meaning of democracy. “The Americans have really been helping us out. Xerox machines, free use of the fax lines after nine p.m., discounted Hellmann’s mayonnaise from the commissary, five thousand free copies of *An American Life* by Ronald Reagan. We know what democracy looks like,” Sakha observed. “We’ve read about it. We’ve seen Century 21. But how do we make it happen here? Because frankly, Mr. Vainberg, once the oil runs dry, who in the world is going to know we even exist?”¹²⁴

Thirty-five years before *Absurdistan* appeared in print, Ali Ahmed Said, the informal poet laureate of the Arabs known throughout the Muslim world as Adonis, wrote “The Funeral of New York,” another item that George W. Bush might want to add to his “must read” list. “Call it a city on four legs heading for murder,” Adonis began his poem. “New York is a woman holding, according to history, a rag called liberty with one hand and strangling the earth with the other.” Then in lines that eerily prefigured 9/11, he continued: “In spite of all this, you pant in Palestine and Hanoi. East and West you contend with people whose only history is fire. . . . Let statues of liberty crumble. Out of corpses now sprout nails in the manner of flowers. An eastern wind uproots tents and skyscrapers with its wings.” Lest there be any doubt about his message, Adonis mixed poetry with foreign policy in his punch line: “To cats and dogs the twenty-first century! To people, extermination in this the American century. . . . Let us be the executioners. Let time keep floating on the sea of that equation: New York plus New York equal a funeral. New York minus New York equal the sun.” Adonis actually penned his poem in Greenwich Village, less than two miles from the construction site where workers were putting the finishing touches on the World Trade Center. During his brief time in New York City, Adonis made many American friends, but he was also outraged by American foreign policy. As he saw it, Ho Chi Minh and Yasser Arafat were brothers in the struggle against imperialism. In short, Adonis detested the original American Century in 1971, just as he detests the Project for the New American Century today.¹²⁵

After reading some Arab poetry and some American fiction, the president might want to take a closer look at a thin volume of nonfiction that has been on his bookshelf for nearly a year—*The Report of the Iraq Study Group*. In March 2006, Congress established a bipartisan commission on Iraq chaired by Lee

Hamilton, an Indiana Democrat, and James A. Baker, a Texas Republican who had served as secretary of state when George W. Bush's father sat in the Oval Office. Nine months later, the panel issued a report that made grim reading at the White House. Calling conditions in Iraq "grave and deteriorating," the Baker-Hamilton commission recommended a two-pronged exit strategy as the best alternative among a set of bad options. First, the State Department should engage two of Iraq's neighbors—Iran and Syria—in a constructive diplomatic dialogue designed to stem the flow of external support to the insurgents. Second, the Pentagon should shift its emphasis from fighting the Sunni and Shi'ite militias to training the Iraqi army and police, who could help foster the internal reconciliation necessary to end the bloodshed. Above all, the White House "must not make an open-ended commitment to keep large numbers of American troops deployed in Iraq." Admitting that "there is no path that can guarantee success," the bipartisan panel was convinced that some combination of these "external" and "internal" initiatives should make it possible to bring most of the GIs home from Iraq by the spring of 2008.¹²⁶ After thumbing through the Iraq Study Group's report, however, the president decided that America must "stay the course" in Baghdad and proceeded to invite Andrew Roberts to lunch at the White House.

The final addition to George W. Bush's personal library, of course, should be Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*. Although he never made it to Mesopotamia, Twain spent the summer of 1867 in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, the birthplace of Adonis, watching Americans make fools of themselves. From the moment that the good ship *Quaker City* steamed through the Strait of Gibraltar headed for the Eastern Mediterranean, most Americans have assumed that their country's wealth and power would provide the moral authority necessary to control the Middle East. During the last half of the twentieth century, America would finally have the opportunity to test the validity of that assumption, and the results as witnessed in Iraq early in the new millennium have been painful to behold. Although the author of *Innocents Abroad* would have understood the peculiarly American brand of expansionism that propelled the United States into the Middle East, he would probably have questioned the wisdom of stepping between the Arabs and the Israelis. He would likely have viewed corporate solutions for tapping oil from the Persian Gulf, White Revolutions in Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's Iran, and U.N. resolutions designed to bring peace to the Holy Land as well intended but misguided, and he would almost certainly have regarded covert action and military intervention as foolish yet predictable.

We can be very sure of one thing, however. The creator of Huckleberry Finn and the founder of the American Anti-Imperialist League would regard George W. Bush's current attempt to export democracy at gunpoint in Iraq as the second coming of Theodore Roosevelt's conquest of the Philippines a century earlier

—another misguided and preventable war of choice whose chief victims were deemed to be backward, barbaric, and badly in need of U.S. help. It is hard to know which number from the autumn of 2007 would have appalled Mark Twain more—the \$1 trillion that the Iraq war was likely to cost American taxpayers or the 655,000 “excess” Iraqi civilian deaths that the war had caused.¹²⁷ With trademark irony, Twain summed up his own close encounter with the peoples of the Middle East 140 summers ago this way: “We bore down on them with America’s greatness until we crushed them.” As George W. Bush ponders the deepening quagmire in Iraq, he would do well to read a little less Andrew Roberts and a little more Mark Twain.