

The Era of Regime Change

Bush Doctrine: U.S. foreign policy post 9/11

On the 20th of January, 2001, the 43rd President of the United States, George Walker Bush, was sworn into office on Capitol Hill. Though he ran on the Republican ticket, his administration stood out from the quintessential platform of traditional American conservative values. President Bush's eight years in office set the stage for a new era in U.S. politics—neo-conservatism.

By conventional definition, neo-conservatism is an ideal that differentiates the world between two camps: liberal/democratic regimes whose citizenry can thrive under the auspices of freedom and liberty and authoritarian/totalitarian regimes whose system of governance is a prima facie case of despotism. Simplistically put in binary good/evil terms, the former camp represents the western/capitalist block whereas the latter camp represents the eastern/communist block. Hence, the world is comprised of both good and evil elements and the neo-conservative approach in dealing with this phenomenon is to enact policies of proactive engagement which tackle the problems head-on, using all means necessary rather than refrain itself to restrained policies of management and containment. Neo-conservatives justify their unorthodox approach to world affairs by insisting that the ends justify the means, in their shared opinion that national security is best attained through the implementation of the Democratic Peace Theory doctrine, by actively promoting freedom and democracy abroad, empowering the progressives, endorsing the moderates, granting foreign aid, intervening militarily wherever needed.

The Democratic Peace Theory was authored in 1795 by philosopher Immanuel Kant in his book *Perpetual Peace* where he outlined his viewpoint that democracies do not fight each other. The theory makes the case that democracies are intrinsically peaceful as opposed to bellicose insofar that democracy dilutes the prospect for an unrestrained potentate to arise and threaten the peace. The theory goes on to posit that democratic countries are hesitant to engage in armed conflict with other identified democracies as democracy erodes potential causal elements that otherwise could be apparent. During the latter part of the 20th century, the Democratic Peace Theory was refined by several researchers working independently and has, since the 1990s, been one of the prevalent research areas in international relations. But, this theory has also attracted scepticism from critics who argue that it is broadly based on a generalisation without taking more complex, esoteric factors into consideration.

In the period spanning the latter part of the 1980s and 2000s, with the rise of militant Islam and the fall of Soviet communism, the above paradigm shifted from what was a previously linear east/west set of differences between the world's two major powers, the former Soviet Union and the United States, to include parts of the Middle East and the Far East where strategic regional ties were forged between allies, with the United States allied with Israel and South Korea, and Russia allied with Israel's neighbouring Arab states, the Persians in Iran and North Korea. Both these geographical areas have strategic meaning. The Middle East is the Levant where Europe, Africa and Asia meet and is the gateway from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal—an important shipping route. The Korean peninsula, too, is important in terms of trade and commerce, and it serves as a strategic hub to exert regional influence.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States, under the leadership of George W. Bush, ostensibly toughened its stance on foreign policy. It called for regime change in places where despotic and tyrannical regimes ruled; a policy thought to have emanated from the American Enterprise Institute—a hawkish right-wing think-tank with affiliation to neo-conservatives. The Bush Doctrine of pre-emptive war, published 20th September, 2002, was stated explicitly in the National Security Council text of "National Security Strategy of the United States" in which the President is quoted as having said:

“We must deter and defend against the threat before it is unleashed...even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack...The United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”

~ George W. Bush

Bush's predecessor, President Clinton, also promoted the Democratic Peace Theory in a 1994 State of the Union address saying:

“Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don't attack each other.”

~ Bill Clinton

Whilst in the midst of a transition, of major combat to attrition, with wars fought both in Afghanistan and in Iraq, President Bush expressed the policy agenda for the Middle East during a press conference in 2004 in which he moulded his words to the doctrinal concept of the Democratic Peace Theory:

“Democracies don't go to war with each other, and the reason why is the people of most societies don't like war...I've got great faith in democracies to promote peace, and that's why I'm such a strong believer that the way forward in the Middle East is to promote democracy.”

~ George W. Bush

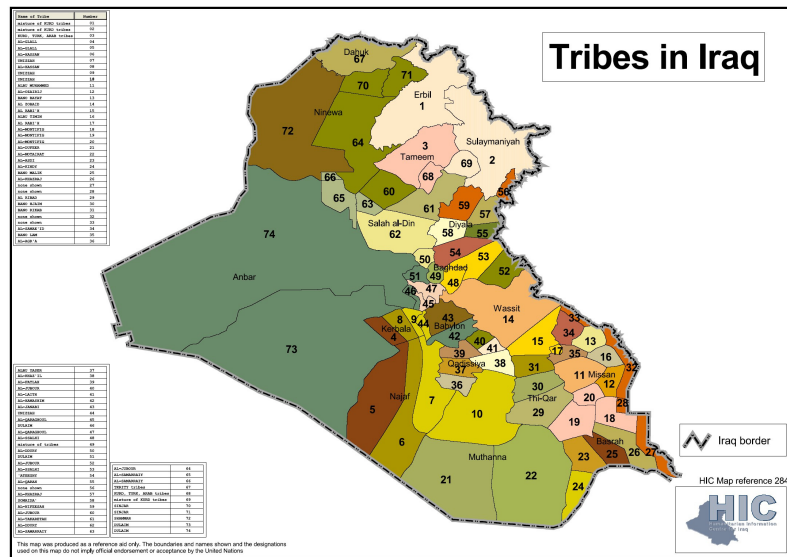
There technically exist just two democracies in the Middle East—Israel and Lebanon. These two democracies have been in confrontation with one another, at the behest of a guerrilla group called Hezbollah—a Shiite proxy backed by Iran and Syria. These are not isolated examples. History recounts that France, under Napoleon, waged war from 1852 to 1870, and so did Serbia between 1877 and 1914, and Ethiopia and Eritrea also between 1998 and 2000, as have Pakistan and India from 1947 to the present time. If these examples are anything to go by, it is the notion that Immanuel Kant's theory has its drawbacks, evidently. Whilst it may be a perfectly valid statement to suggest that democracies are less prone to wage war with other like-for-like democracies, it would be inaccurate to firmly state that democracies do not go to war with each other.

Conceivably, the dilemma of this theory is an oversimplification of a concept which is more convoluted, especially so when history, culture, religion, demography, diversity, and politics dictate the measure by which civilisations can coexist, whether in conflict or in harmony. U.S. foreign policy post 9/11 has made the Middle East the focal point in its strive for democratization, where fundamentalist and hostile regimes previously reigned. The authoritarian theocracy of the Taliban in Afghanistan was replaced with a new government, under the leadership of Hamid Karzai, and Iraq was deposed of its despotic regime, the Ba'ath party, with Saddam Hussein at the helm.

Following arduous American-led lustration processes of de-Ba'athification in Iraq and of de-Talibanisation in Afghanistan, which had involved the dismissal of every single government official and senior security officer remotely related with these previously ruling factions, scores of members of parliament and civil servants were cast away by the wayside, and a vacuum ensued after the withdrawal of coalition troops from these countries. The vacuum quickly filled with armed gangs of dissident groups, with each vying to take over the mantle and topple the democratic processes, which to Islamists are anathema and incongruous with their fundamentalist, extremist ideologies.

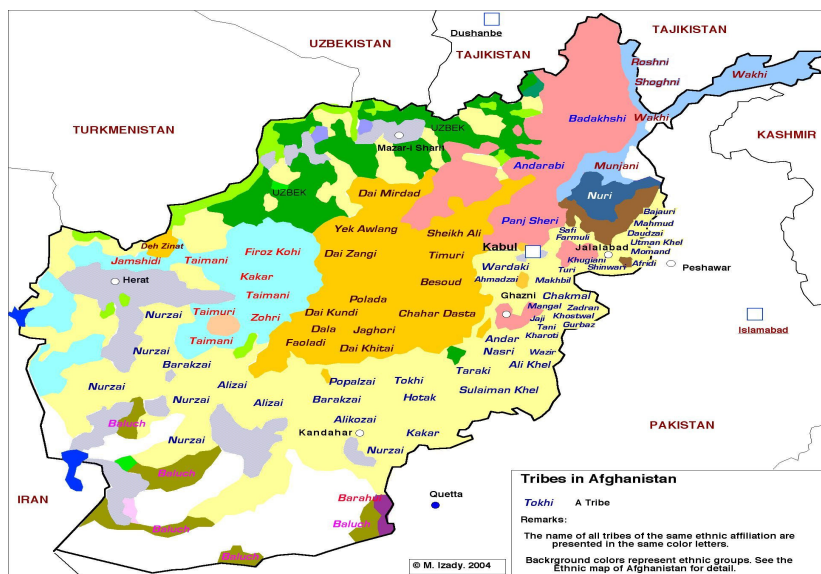
Bringing about stable democracy to the shores of these regions has shown itself to be nigh on impossible. The failures in achieving the desired results could be attributed to the occidental's lack of comprehension of the Middle Eastern mindset, modus vivendi and tribal norms, notwithstanding that the borders of Afghanistan and Iraq historically had been drawn by colonial rulers, having lumped diverse ethnic groups together.

When viewed from an atlas, the sheer complexity of the human distribution is obscure in its true dimension. The real map of Iraq is a diverse structure of scattered tribes that is composed of Shia Arabs, Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds, Turks, Yazidis, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, Bahá'ís, and others.



2014 has witnessed the rise of the Islamic State, abbreviated as IS, ISIS or ISIL. Their stated goal is to usher in a caliphate and extend the borders beyond existing lines.

With Afghanistan, a similar parabola is illustrated when the map is divided by tribal proportion. This reality is not isolated to just these countries. Wherever colonialists have set foot, you are likely to find this kind of structure. South Africa is one such country, having enfranchised its native citizenry.



If the wars fought in Afghanistan and in Iraq had truly been for noble causes, to free people from tyranny and to democratize their countries, there is still some way to go before these missions can be deemed a success. For reasons already stated, these goals will likely remain just a *fata morgana*. A more viable solution might well have been to Balkanize these regions according to tribal demography, as the proverb advises: *Good fences make good neighbours*. One valid example is the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE consists of a conglomerate of interdependent states, governed by hereditary ruling families. The emirs each govern their state, in peace and in full harmony with their neighbours. Democracy in the UAE is nonexistent but, the underlying paradox is that in that region, democracy could have undesirable consequences. Following is an excerpt of an interview with Omar Sharif talking to Al-Hayat TV on 26 May, 2008:

“The American policy is completely wrong. It is a large and rich country, with great possibilities, and everything, but they don't understand what is going on in the rest of the world. They just don't get it. I lived in America for a long time. Only 10% of all Americans have a passport. In other words, 90% never left America. They may have gone to Mexico or Canada, because they don't need a visa or a passport to go there. 90% of them don't know... You show them an unmarked map of Europe, and ask them where France is, and they don't know. Ask them where Italy is... Okay, Italy they know because it looks like a shoe. They don't know anything. They are ignorant. I said to Bush, even before he entered Iraq: Forget about all that. We, the Arabs... We are not like [regular] countries. We are sects. This is how we have always been. Egypt is the exception, because we Egyptians are a people that... [I said to Bush:] If you enter Iraq, what will you do with the Sunnis, the Shiites, and the Kurds? You will drown there. You have Iran and Syria next to you—these are Shiites, and those are Sunnis. What do you know about all these things!? You will drown there.”

~ Omar Sharif

Interviewer: *“How did he respond?”*

“He didn't believe me. I told him that I come from the east and I know... He said: “No, there must be a democracy there!” I said to him: We don't have a democracy, and we never will. You'll see, because people like me prefer to go to the neighbourhood sheik. I like going to him, and he resolves all the problems. If someone stole from you, or something, you take him to the neighbourhood sheik, and you say: This man stole from me. The sheik says to him: Return the money, or never come back to the neighbourhood.”

~ Omar Sharif