

# Bush's Inaugural Address:

## Reactions from the Arab and Iranian Press

Jan 25, 2005



### Brief Analysis

In his inaugural address on January 20, President George W. Bush declared that "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." What follows is a sampling of reactions to the president's remarks from the Arab and Iranian press.

Cautiously Optimistic "The Arabs will welcome his speech. No right-minded Arab man, woman, or child would like to live under tyranny. No Arab would like to be deprived of free speech, free media and the right of movement; we all aspire for it. We want to be like our peers and counterparts in Europe and Asia. We also have a dream -- like the American Dream -- of upward mobility, of bettering ourselves, of providing a better future for our children. For all this we need peace. . . Bush has to realize that his inaugural speech should be followed by a policy of rapprochement and dialogue. . . America ought to be a harbinger of peace and progress, and it can -- provided it listens to people outside its own realm and provided that it realizes that there is a just and divine power that watches not only over America as Bush prayed but also over the whole world." -- Khaled Almaeena, Arab News, January 23, 2005

"People will interpret Bush's speech in many different ways. There will be those who say it is simply an attempt to improve the image of the U.S., or those who say it is a strong resolve to change for the better. There will be those who will also say it is merely an attempt to conceal other problems. Whatever it may be, the U.S. administration has been given a unique chance, the best ever, to restore trust in true U.S. values, as well as improving an image which has been distorted by its mistakes." -- Zayn al-Abidin al-Rukabi, al-Sharq al-Awsat (London), January 22, 2005

[Translation provided by BBC Monitoring]

### Skeptical

"The prevalent negative and skeptical Middle Eastern reaction to Bush's speech once again reflects the massive perceived gap in this region between America's rhetorical commitment to democracy and freedom and its foreign policy tendencies to support autocrats and dictators. Analysts and ordinary citizens alike will see at least seven specific problems with Bush's ideas and approach. . . . These concerns will be widely echoed around the Middle East and other parts of the world in the days to come -- not because people dislike Bush's rhetoric on freedom, but rather because they have mainly felt the negative, often destructive, consequences of American foreign policy in recent years." -- Rami Khouri, Daily Star (Beirut), January 22, 2005

"Is the new Bush really new? Will the second Bush be better than the [first] Bush? The ideas which he held in his inaugural address seem good; however, they are very old. America is with him; America, which is still ignoring how the world looks at it and only admits the 'facts' that suit it, speaks with the expressions that relieve it, and even still thinks that it is working with direct and special divine inspiration, or more specifically with George W. Bush who repeated in front of the world his missionary acrobatics. . . . The second Bush said that U.S. policy is based on the attempt to rally the support of democratic movements and institutions in all countries and communities. This is a

really noble goal, especially if it expressed a coming policy that we do not know yet, because the policies that we knew so far are faced with criticisms and disappointment from these democratic movements and institutions, and even from all the democrats who were disappointed by the mirage that was created and soon eliminated by America. . . . Freedom is a great human value; nevertheless, it is not an American mission. The U.S. had glories in the field of freedom; however, all this expired. Freedom today is a different concept and one cannot depend on the Pentagon alone to achieve it." -- Abdulwahab Badrakhan, al-Hayat (London), January 22, 2005

"The long history of America's relations with the dictators around the world bears out the fact that the U.S. has often turned a conveniently blind eye to the authoritarian regimes in its own camp. Throughout the Cold War era, the U.S. and the now-dead Soviet Union operated on the principle of 'their tyrants and our tyrants.' Would, under Bush, America change its traditional policy? Although the president has admitted his predecessors ignored the problems of the states run by dictators, it's doubtful if he can reverse the U.S. policy of tolerating authoritarian regimes." -- Editorial, Khaleej Times (Dubai), January 23, 2005

#### Unimpressed and Unconvinced

"Although the inauguration speech was so full of rhetoric that it resembled the spiel of a nineteenth-century snake oil merchant, the seriousness of Washington's resolve to translate the rhetoric of 'freedom' and 'liberty' into more ill-advised cowboy gun slinging cannot be underestimated. Bush, indeed, has a strong mandate from the American electorate, and the United States is the sole world superpower. Politically and militarily, U.S. influence and strength are beyond doubt. These are dangerous combinations and this region has good reason to be worried. As many commentators have mused, by wanting to explain everything through 'freedom,' Bush has ended up explaining nothing. It is up to the world at large to fill in the blanks. Hopefully, there is room for influencing those foreign policy 'blanks,' before they are filled in by those in Washington who would like nothing more than to see U.S. forces toppling statues in the central squares of Tehran and Damascus and who knows where else." -- Editorial, Daily Star (Beirut), January 22, 2005

"Claiming responsibility for liberating the people of the world and establishing freedom and democracy, stressed repeatedly in Bush's statements, was not new. World nations are very familiar with Bush's terminology and concepts, as well as the language he uses to convey them. In Bush's and his neo-conservative assistants' terminology, democracy and peace may be presented to nations by resorting to force and using bombs and missiles. This is regarded as an American-style harbinger of peace and security in the world." -- Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1, January 21, 2005 [Translation provided by BBC Monitoring]

"The democracy which President Bush's administration is preaching is a bloody democracy that has cost the people of Iraq 100,000 martyrs so far, and hundreds of thousands of wounded. . . . The Arab citizen hates America for two main reasons. The first is its support of repressive and barbaric regimes, and the second is its support of Israeli aggression. As long as U.S. policies remain as they are, all American speeches about democracy and freedom will continue to be but ink on paper." -- Editorial, al-Quds al-Arabi (London), January 21, 2005

"President Bush in his inaugural speech made sure to completely deviate from any reference to the Real World. Instead, he recited one of the most pompous speeches ever uttered by an American president. . . . One can only hope that more Americans will manage to triumph over the overpowering fear and confront their government's self-destructive foreign policies. Without an awesome awakening, the 'kinder, gentler America' shall always succumb to the mad policies of a mad government." -- Ramzy Baroud, Jordan Times, January 24, 2005

This special report was compiled by Naysan Rafati. ❖

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