

War on Terror: The Middle East Dimension

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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INTRODUCTION

It is an understatement to say that the attacks of September 11, 2001, were transformative events, both for how Americans view their own sense of security and for how America engages with the world. Osama bin Laden may have declared war on the United States years ago, but it was only on this date that the United States recognized the enormity of the war being waged upon it.

Still, as President George W. Bush stated in his address to the nation on September 20, 2001, "Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of 'global reach' has been found, stopped, and defeated." And, he continued, in launching the strikes against Afghanistan on October 7, 2001: "Today we focus on Afghanistan, but the battle is broader. Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murderers themselves."

Although the current battle is being fought in central and south Asia, these principles -- which constitute what can be called the Bush Doctrine -- have special resonance in the Middle East. This region is home to organizations that share both ideology and methodology with the perpetrators of September 11, and to state sponsors of such groups of "global reach." It is the region in which bin Laden targeted his immediate operational objectives -- that is, evicting American presence from the Arabian peninsula and overthrowing the regimes in Riyadh, Cairo, and Amman. And it is the region in which he has sought popular sympathies through an appeal to the Palestinian cause and through the atavistic call to expel Jews, Christians, and "Crusaders."

Focusing on the Middle East dimension of the campaign against terrorism is timely and urgent for reasons that go beyond al-Qaeda's local connections. There are aspects of the threat to U.S. interests that are particular to this part of the world: the frightening spread of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery; the ongoing challenge to the international system posed by Iraq; and, perhaps most of all, the reluctance that many U.S. allies in the region exhibit in confronting their own religious militants and in countering messages of intolerance that are standard fare.

In October 2001, just days after the shocking attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, The Washington

Institute convened its annual Weinberg Founders Conference to address the Middle East dimension of the war on terror. Over the course of three days, key U.S. and Middle Eastern scholars, experts, diplomats, journalists, and decisionmakers came together to examine and debate such themes as the common interests that regional states have in cooperating against terrorism; the different strategies that regimes have adopted in dealing with their Islamist challenges; the impact of September 11 on the Israeli-Palestinian arena; the problems and prospects of maintaining the antiterror coalition; and the role of democracy as an antidote to the region's ills. This edited volume includes the individual remarks and panel discussions from that conference. Taken together, these presentations provide valuable context for understanding the regional implications of the U.S.-led antiterror campaign, along with the ramifications of that campaign for U.S. policy in the Middle East.

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