# The 'Greater Middle East' as a 'Modern' Geopolitical Imagination in American Foreign Policy

Aylın Güney & Fulya Gökcan

# The 'Greater Middle East' as a 'Modern' Geopolitical Imagination in American Foreign Policy

AYLİN GÜNEY and FULYA GÖKCAN

*Department of Political Science, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey*

*This article aims at analysing how the September 11 terrorist attacks have caused the formation of a new geopolitical vision of an area called the 'Greater Middle East' and how this formation has led to changes in US foreign policy towards this region. To do that, the article first presents a theoretical background against which the modern geopolitical imagination of the USA is formulated. It considers the links between national traumas/myths, geopolitical codes and visions, and foreign policy actions. The article then applies this analysis to the case of the Greater Middle East with respect to how this imagined geography shapes the foreign and security policy of the USA. It concludes that even though this imagined region has been presented in texts as justifying US-led policies with liberal underpinnings, it has in reality laid the ground for and been used for justifying US extra-territorial intervention in the region.*

## INTRODUCTION

The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York were a clear national trauma that has led to a major transformation of the geopolitical codes and vision of the USA. The transformation of the 'Middle East' as an entity in the USA's geopolitical vision into a new concept called first the 'Greater Middle East', and later the 'Broader Middle East and North Africa' proves that the geopolitical codes that define the allies and enemies of the USA have clearly changed. This article mainly takes up this profound change in the geopolitical imagination of the USA with regard to

this region. To discuss this, the article will first introduce the theoretical background and analytical tools. Second, it will consider the factors that led to the birth of the so-called Broader Middle East Initiative as a case that reveals a new geopolitical imagination in American foreign policy. In this respect, it will analyse the ideology, geopolitical codes and vision that led to a redrawing of the map of the Middle East under the Bush and Obama administrations. Last, the article will assess how critical geopolitics, by providing both a theoretical framework and analytical tools, contributes to our understanding of American foreign policy towards the Middle East.

## THEORISING AND DECONSTRUCTING THE 'MODERN GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATION'

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the relationship between *imagined* geographies and the foreign and security policies of states. Scholars of critical geopolitics argue that these policies are enabled by, and productive of, specific geopolitical imaginations,[1] which have framed world politics by providing an overarching global context in which states seek power outside their boundaries, gain control over less modern regions and their resources, and race with other major states in a worldwide pursuit of global primacy.[2] According to John Agnew, it is the combination of all these features that makes the geopolitical imagination peculiarly modern. The emphasis here is on the fact that it is a system of visualising the world through a *constructed* view of the world.[3] Geopolitical imaginations are important in that they provide the ground for publicly justifying a state's foreign policy stance, whilst actually being constructions that serve the national interests of that particular state.

In order to understand how and why these geopolitical imaginations are formed, one needs to deconstruct the concept. The geopolitical imagination, or as mentioned above, the constructed view of the world, is a reflection of the 'geopolitical vision' of a country. This is a broad concept, which includes the representations of a country's (a people's) territorial limits, as well as its geopolitical codes and national mission.[4] The geopolitical vision is thus the main element which determines what kind of geopolitical imaginations a state may have.

One of the essential components in the formation of geopolitical visions are the geopolitical codes of a country. The concept was coined by Gaddis, who defined them as a set of 'strategic assumptions'[5] that a government makes about other states in making its foreign policy. They are "the manner in which a country orientates itself toward the world".[6] In other words, these codes refer to a set of social representations based on national political identity, including ideas about a country's natural

allies and enemies, about the essence of external threats, and about major international problems and ways to resolve them. What makes geopolitical codes critically important is the contribution they provide towards understanding foreign policy making by directing us to the geopolitical component of belief systems. Thus, they are helpful analytical tools in the interpretation of foreign policy actions.[7] According to Taylor and Flint, a number of calculations play a key role in the formation of the geopolitical codes of a country. These concern identifying current and potential allies and enemies, and determining how the country can maintain its alliances and nurture potential allies, identifying how it can counter current enemies and emerging threats, and, finally, determining how it can justify the above-mentioned calculations to the public, and to the global community.[8]

In this respect, the role of national identity and national myths become important in determining the geopolitical codes of a country. The visions of one's country and its position in relation to other countries are formed within particular national myths, which form the basis for geopolitical codes.[9] The representations of the enemy, who tend to be portrayed as barbaric or evil, are tailored for the immediate situation, but they are based upon stories deposited in national myths that are easily accessible to the general public.[10] This is quite important in mobilising popular support behind the foreign policy actions by invoking ideas about a collective mission or foreign policy strategy. These geopolitical codes that ultimately shape geopolitical vision need at least a "them-and-us distinction and emotional attachment to a place",[11] they certainly involve a societal dimension. In this way, ideological reference to national values, as well as to strategic concerns about resources and economics, become important in the formation of geopolitical vision.

Geopolitical vision, therefore, turns out to be the translation of national identity concepts into geographical terms and symbols.[12] Because ideas about national identity collide with power structures in the world and with other geopolitical constraints, geopolitical visions are developed in order to cope with such threats. The ultimate aim is to maintain pride, or just to legitimise aggression.[13] National identity is continuously rewritten on the basis of external events, and constructed dangers. This in turn translates itself into the foreign policy stance of a country. In this way, the link between national myths and foreign policy stances becomes quite important.[14]

This section has summarised how national identity and myths play a role in the shaping of geopolitical codes, and geopolitical vision, and in turn lead to a modern geopolitical imagination in a country's foreign policy. In the light of this theoretical background, the next section addresses the question of how the geopolitical imagination of the Greater Middle East has shaped American foreign policy of the last decade.

## UNDERPINNINGS OF THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATION OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

In order to grasp how the new US geopolitical imagination of the Middle East provides a ground for justification of the state's foreign policy stance and national interests regarding the region, it is essential to understand the post–Cold War regional power structures that shaped US views concerning the region. The geopolitical vision of the USA changed, especially after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The newly emerging geopolitical land-scape, with its multi-polar structure, broadened the northern and eastern borders of the Middle East, and Eurasia started to become important with an increasing US interest in the oil and natural gas reserves of the Caspian Sea and Central Asian republics.[15] US interests were revealed in the writings of leading statesmen, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, who regarded Eurasia as the "Grand Chessboard"[16] with the United States, Russia and China as prin-cipal players in this geo-strategic zone. Strategic planners in the United States noted that China, India and other Asian countries relied heavily on Middle Eastern suppliers, so were far less likely than Western allies to back US policies in the Middle East, especially if their energy needs were at stake. The positioning of US forces in the oil heartland and along critical sea routes was therefore considered to be a necessity. This geo-strategic vision was evident even before the September 11 attacks. For example, on 17 August 2001, Deputy Secretary for the Department of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, referred to the ability to "project and sustain US forces in distant anti-access or area-denial environments [as] ranking high on the list of prior-ities."[17] That is, the United States felt duty-bound to prevent hegemonic command by any single great power except itself over the combined resources of Eurasia's landmass.[18] The USA's regional concerns, shaped by interest-based realist assumptions, were thus quite influential in the formation of its geopolitical vision of the region. Considering this large picture, a geopolitical vision suggesting possible threats against US regional interests, hegemony and control, provided a constructed view of the region. In this respect, the regional balance of powers, the role that the US would play in this geopolitical landscape, and US ambitions to control the region and its resources helped to determine the evolution of US foreign policy in the Middle East. These pre–September 11 assumptions provided the ground for the USA's geo-political imagination, formed in order to justify the projection of US foreign policy into the region.

At this point, it is essential to consider the role of September 11 and the national trauma it caused in the emergence of the geopolitical codes of the country and their translation into a geopolitical imagination during the last decade. The September 11 attacks on US soil caused a national trauma for the USA. These attacks had a profound impact on US society and the state, not only because of the scale of this terrorist attack, but also due to its timing.

This massive attack came at the turn of the twenty-first century when the USA's national self-esteem was at its peak, when it had come to be regarded as the world's hegemonic leader. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist world had brought about the indisputable victory of the USA, and US global hegemony had come to dominate the resulting new world order. However, this hegemonic position was not a long-lasting phenomenon. The gradual replacement of the communist threat with the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism was evident in the 1990s, even before the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, when US targets were hit in Kenya. However, rather than these sporadic attacks, the crucial turning point that caused a national trauma and led to a reshaping of the geopolitical imagination of the USA and a redrawing of the landscape of the Middle East was the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. The significance of the event was that the USA suffered a large-scale attack against its own territory for the first time. This attack was found to have been conducted by the Islamist terrorist organisation, *Al-Qaeda*, which had developed into a network based in various Middle Eastern states and beyond. It was quite clear then that, with these attacks, new enemies had to be defined by the US people as well as the administration. In his immediate reaction to the event, Bush declared, "Over time it's going to be important for nations to know they will be held accountable for inactivity. You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror".[19] This major world event signified that there would be no room for neutrality and tolerance in the "war on terrorism". To sum up, the US "war on terrorism" constituted a solid ground for the formation of a new geopolitical code which was triggered by the national trauma generated by the September 11 attacks. The following section, considers how this geopolitical code translated itself into a geopolitical vision intended to provide legitimacy for US military and political presence in the Middle East.

## A New Yet Controversial Geopolitical Code: The "War on Terrorism"

The development of this new global conjuncture following the September 11 attacks led to a redefinition of enemies and friends – to redefining the geopolitical codes, which had up until the late 1980s been dominated primarily by the Communist threat. The new geopolitical code was no longer the ideological wars waged against the Communist world, but the war on terrorism. The key official document that revealed this change was the National Security Strategy of 2002, also referred to as the 'Bush Doctrine'. This doctrine is particularly important in revealing the change in American geopolitical imagination by designating different countries as hostile or friendly,[19] as well as by defining actions needed to achieve new foreign policy objectives.

The new open-ended war on terrorism would be a means through which US military power would be directed towards trying to secure the homeland against both domestic enemies and foreign foes.[20] President Bush identified Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an 'axis of evil' for their alleged efforts to develop and potentially use weapons of mass destruction or provide such weapons to terrorists. The Bush administration claimed that these states, labelled as 'rogue states' had hostile designs, revisionist aspirations and were engaging in destabilising regional behaviour. They became a central and explicit concern of US policy, especially regarding the Middle East and Persian Gulf, both of which were extremely important with respect to US interests in the region. Particularly worrisome was the possibility that weapons of mass destruction might proliferate, and especially that nuclear weapons might spread into the hands of hostile powers and pose risks for the USA both at home and for its overseas interests in this region. The formulation of the concept of 'rogue state' has proved to be remarkably useful. This category helped to legitimise US interactions with such states as Iraq, Iran, Libya and Syria because it provided a specific link to America's own self-image and its relationship with the world.[21] That is, if a state behaves as a rogue power, breaking US-defined rules of conduct or attacking neighbours, it furnishes both the rationale and necessity for a US response.[22]

The definition of new enemies for the USA was determined in accordance with the support they provided to terrorist networks. The first target was therefore Afghanistan, which was perceived by the administration as a failed state after its takeover by the Taliban in the mid-1990s.[23] Al-Qaeda was believed to be sheltered in the zones under Taliban control, so the war on terrorism needed to target Afghanistan. From this perspective, any "failed state" that could provide the necessary conditions for the emergence and survival of terrorist networks was considered as a possible threat and enemy.

A more problematic geography, also a target of the war on terrorism, was Iraq. The Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq was accused of several 'crimes': possessing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that could jeopardise American interests in the region; seeking domination of the entire Middle East to take control of a great portion of the world's energy supplies; directly threatening the USA and its partners throughout the world; and potentially subjecting the USA and other nations with nuclear blackmail.[24] The Bush Doctrine stated that the strategy to deal with this 'rogue state' was 'pre-emption'. President Bush stated: "I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer."[25] Accordingly, the next step that US power projection in the region took was to invade Iraq in March 2003.

However, the rationale for the war on Iraq was dissimilar to Afghanistan, where the threat and the enemy targeted was Al-Qaeda. The Bush administration attempted to justify the invasion of Iraq on three pretexts. The first was the war on terror declared after 11 September 2001 when,

against all the evidence, Saddam Hussein was presented in the United States as an accomplice, if not a sponsor, of Osama bin Laden. The second was the claimed threat of WMD, which eventually turned out to be false. However, as the first two pretexts faded, a third grew in importance: to make Iraq so attractive a democratic model that it would set an example to the entire Middle East. Thus, the war itself started to be considered as a form of 'political engineering', a tool to reshape a country and the entire region of the Greater Middle East[26] and secure the USA's long-term geopolitical goals. However, the lack of legitimacy for the Iraq war, the human rights abuses exposed to the whole world, the failed democratisation of the country, and rising anti-Americanism point to the fact that the age of US dominance in the Middle East has ended.[27]

As critical geopolitical theory suggests, justification is an important component of the geopolitical code which legitimises US hegemonic leadership. From this perspective, the "war on Iraq" undertaken in the name of the "war on terror" lacked this dimension due to the increasing anti-American reaction to it. In this light, the US had to justify its presence in the region. The war on Iraq led to a deterioration in the international image of the USA that had developed in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, and put its hegemonic role in peril by questioning its legitimacy. It was exactly at that point that the idea of the Greater Middle East Initiative arose as a further justification of US power projection in the region, redrawn on the mental map of US strategists.

## FROM THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE "BROADER MIDDLE EAST": THE TRANSFORMATION OF A GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATION

As mentioned above, geopolitical codes such as the war on terrorism, which included extra-territorial power projection, needed to be justified to the global community as a whole. This led the Bush administration to rely on the ideological tenets of the Bush doctrine. Although the influence of neo-conservative ideas on foreign policy can be disputed,[28] it was nevertheless an important element, which acted as a link between national myths, missions and foreign policy formation. Berggren and Rae argue that, especially in the aftermath of September 11, the Bush presidency's discourse started to emphasise 'democratic evangelism', and it began to appear as the most important component of the administration's neo-conservatism. The ideology was backed by several core beliefs: that the USA is an exceptional hegemonic power with a strong adherence to the expansion of democratic values; that the values that the USA promotes are the universal values that would be welcomed by any nation; and that the homeland security and hegemonic position of the USA can be ensured through the spread of US military and political power.[29]

The Bush administration's means of justifying the war on terrorism, including the war on Iraq, involved a unilaterally proposed liberal international order grounded in US military and political power. As Jonathan Monten argues, this view appeared to be contingent on the belief that US power is the sole pillar that upholds the liberal world order conducive to the principles that the US believes in.[30] That is, the current grand strategy of privileging liberalism and democracy perfectly matches mainstream American political traditions and national myths. Therefore, it can also be regarded as being one of the national beliefs of the country, in the sense that US nationalism has historically been defined in terms of both adherence to a set of liberal, universal political ideals and a perceived obligation to spread those norms internationally.[31] The USA's view of itself as being the nation with a mission to expand democracy and democratic values provided a sophisticated ground for its attempts to justify the unjust war in Iraq and other possible targets.

The ideology of the Bush Administration regarding democracy promotion developed from the belief that emerged in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The 2002 National Security Strategy Document contended that there was an unparalleled US position of primacy that created "a moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across globe." Thus, the USA would actively work "to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets and free trade to every corner of the world."[32] It was based on the assumption that the root causes of Islamist extremism lay in the repressive nature of Middle Eastern regimes.[33] However, this time, the Middle East was conceived of as a wider geography including various 'rogue' or 'failed' states that posed a danger to US interests. This newly envisioned geography, called the 'Greater Middle East' (GME), was put forward in a November 2003 speech by President Bush before the National Endowment for Democracy. In this speech, Bush reiterated his commitment to promoting democracy in Iraq. He likened his 'forward strategy of freedom' in the Middle East to earlier US commitments to see democracy spread throughout Eastern Europe. However, the 'forward strategy of freedom' enunciated by President Bush appeared to promise something quite different: high-level political emphasis, direct connection to the most fundamental security interests, and a wider geographic scope, which included Afghanistan and Pakistan as well, not only the Arab world and Iran.[34] The idea of the Bush administration was that the Greater Middle East Initiative needed to be a reprise of the Helsinki process, which had contributed to bringing post-war Europe together. Bush's initiative was seemingly intended to be a vital, visionary complement to the war on terrorism.[35]

In April 2004, approximately a year after the war on Iraq started and seven months after the first release of this idea, the USA presented its ideas again in the form of a set of proposals for a Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) to the G-8 states, to be adopted at their June Summit on Sea Island,

Georgia, USA. The reasons for the initiation of such a proposal were made explicit in the draft version of the report. It stated that "the Greater Middle East region, which refers to the countries of the Arab world, plus Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and Israel, poses a unique challenge and opportunity for the international community".[36] The proposal referred to the 2002 and 2003 United Nations Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR), and noted that the Arab authors of these reports pointed to three important conditions that threatened the national interests of all G-8 members: lack of freedom, knowledge and women's empowerment. The document listed a number of statistics that reflected a region standing at a crossroads, and argued that "so long as the region's pool of politically and economically disenfranchised individuals grows, we will witness an increase in extremism, terrorism, international crime, and illegal migration, thus a direct threat to the stability of the region, and the common interests of the G-8 members".[37] The document further stated that "demographic changes, the liberation of Afghanistan and Iraq from oppressive regimes, and the emergence of democratic impulses across the region together present the G-8 a historic opportunity . . . G-8 leaders should forge a long-term partnership with the Greater Middle East's reform leaders and launch a coordinated response to promote political, economic, and social reform in the region."[38] The initiative aimed at promoting democracy and good governance, building a knowledge society, and expanding economic opportunities, thereby diminishing the chances of targeting the US and other Western interests.

In this manner, the invasion of Iraq was meant as an attempt to create an example of democracy in the heart of the Middle East. Iraq would become an attractive democratic model that would set an example to the entire Middle East. Thus, the war itself started to be considered as a form of 'political engineering', a tool to reshape a country and the entire region of the Greater Middle East and secure the long-term geopolitically imagined political/national interests of the United States. From a critical perspective, it is possible to claim that the GMEI and its missionary claims would legitimise US involvement in the region, and prove that in the context of the GMEI the war on Iraq was a necessary and just war, the pursuit of which was the prime responsibility of civilised nations and common humanity. Combined with these attempts to justify extra-territorial military interventions, the war on Iraq, projected as a component of the new geopolitical code of the war on terror, would be legitimised.

The significance of the GMEI for a critical geopolitical analysis is, as Falah and Flint examine, how the war on terrorism was justified and how the USA, as the hegemonic power, constructed its military extra-territoriality in a system of sovereign states. According to them, the project of the Greater Middle East aimed to justify the USA's presence in the region in both soft and hard power terms, in order to prevent the decline of the USA's hegemonic role.[39]

Indeed, the justification of foreign policy stances is a key component of a geopolitical code, so when a more nuanced interpretation of the language of the GMEI is made, it can tease out the way in which references to democracy, etc., are actually the means by which realist practices are justified. In the case of the GMEI, US justifications and methods for its presence were not portrayed in terms of power politics, for that would emphasise material interests. Instead, values were emphasised and the global actions of the world leader were portrayed as benevolent actions that would benefit all.[40] That is, the creation of the Greater Middle East region was a new geopolitical imagination based on modern premises, in that the Bush administration was approaching this project with tools drawn from offensive realism. It aimed to prevent, by every possible means, the emergence of any serious rival or combinations of rivals to the US, and oppose even the ability of other states to play the role of great power within their own regions.[41]

The timing of the increased emphasis on democracy promotion as the ultimate goal of US foreign policy can be attributed to the hegemonic decline that coincided with the decreased legitimacy of its role with the unjust war declared on Iraq. As Flint puts it, this was a time when the world leader faced a challenge symptomatic of the beginning of a period of de-concentration and hegemonic decline.[42] The National Security Strategy Document clearly stated that it was time to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength. Monten argues that military actions and ensuing democracy promotion programmes in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to their immediate security motivations, were driven in part by the neoconservative desire to restore US strength and credibility. They also aimed at reversing popular reluctance about the use of force, and reversing perceptions of US weakness and failure of will. The language of the NSS balanced an identification of a threat to US society and people, in terms of continued terrorist attacks, with a global commitment to promoting a particular vision of order, including economic relationships.[43] Thus, the GMEI appears as a perfect example of American internationalism in this respect.

The GMEI was a clear indication of the attempt by the USA to forge its global leadership in this region by integrating these 'failed states' into the modern world that it had in mind. This was seen as a way to prevent the spread of terrorism from these countries. The war on Afghanistan and Iraq were thus perceived by the USA to be two opportunities to begin transforming the whole region of the Greater Middle East. It seems therefore that discourse and policy concerns carrying a neo-conservative imprint were coming to be increasingly used as a pretext or justification to shape the geopolitical code and the geopolitical imagination of the USA. The projection of power in newly imagined geographies, such as the Middle East, was one outcome of this new geopolitical code and vision. In short, 'global social engineering' became a primary goal of the USA because it had acquired the capability to use military intervention as a means of forcing political change.[44]

Another influential pretext was the new US strategic vision that can be termed 'integration' into a Western and American set of values and modus operandi. Falah and Flint refer to this integrative power of 'prime modernity'.[45] According to this view, state and inter-state political institutions that can support the hegemonic power's global project of an open economic space are repackaged as the necessary foundations for a way of life that has been defined as modern and therefore should be wanted by most states.[46] They further argue that prime modernity is used to construct a prime morality.[47] Thus "faltering states" are identified as those whose economic practices, political institutions, and civil society do not meet the preferred definition imposed by the USA. Next, such states are equated with terrorism, with terrorism against the USA being portrayed as a crime against the 'basic' moral values of humanity.[48] This integration strategy in turn creates its own set of exclusions, with forms of violence awaiting those who are either unwilling or unable to be incorporated.[49] Although geopolitical actions under the guise of world leadership provide material benefits for the United States, this self-interest becomes equated instead with benefits for the whole world. Such benefits are presented and defined through values.[50] Flint further argues that if the calculations of war are traceable back to material interests, such as access to oil, then governments must usually emphasise values and ideas in justifying their foreign policy, especially when it involves invading another country. The world leader must therefore convince its international as well as domestic audience, that the actions are for the benefit of all rather than its own interests. In this respect, the GMEI represents a US search for allies. Flint also argues that the power of the world leader rests not on its military strength alone, but rather on a package of innovations that it claims will benefit the whole world. The central ingredients of this package are national self-determination and democracy, or the rule of law. Together, these "innovations" combine to form the integrative power of the world leader: the collection of ideas, values, and institutions designed to bring order and stability to the world. Regarding GMEI, this theory of integrative power of prime modernity contextualised the positions, objectives and problems of the region. It also facilitated the opportunity to establish alliances guaranteeing US world leadership and regional interests. That is why this theory constituted a solid ground for justification for the US extra-territorial activities.

In conclusion, the Bush era ended with serious questions and suspicions regarding US military presence in the region, despite all the attempts to justify the Bush administration's faulty geopolitical calculations. In this sense, the harshest criticisms were raised by the new American president, Barack Hussein Obama, whose slogan was "change". The following section is intended to analyse the possible changes and continuities of US geopolitical imagination of the region after the Bush era.

## AMERICAN GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS UNDER THE OBAMA PRESIDENCY: CHANGE OR CONTINUITY?

As already discussed, geopolitical codes and geopolitical visions determine the geopolitical imaginations of a country, and thus determine the foreign policy actions of administrations. The replacement of the Bush administration with the Obama administration after the November 2008 elections leads us to consider whether there has been an apparent change in the geopolitical imagination of the USA with regard to the Greater Middle East.

To be able to assess whether there would be any change in this respect, it is necessary first to understand the geopolitical codes of the Obama presidency. Although a National Security Strategy Document had not been released at the time this article was written, official statements by President Obama signal some hints with respect to new foreign policy objectives. Under the new administration, the Greater Middle East, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, is still seen as vitally important. The establishment of a regional balance in the best interest of the USA seems to be one of the top priorities. The release of this strategy was first made by President Obama in an official statement: "I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future. . . . To achieve our goals, we need a stronger, smarter and comprehensive strategy."[51]

Thus, the war on terrorism continues to be the prime geopolitical code of the Obama administration. In his article, "Renewing American Leadership", Obama argues that the threats of this century come from rogue states allied to terrorists and from rising powers that could challenge both America and the international foundation of liberal democracy. They come also from weak states that cannot control their territory or provide for their people.[52] However, the focus of the war on terror has shifted from Iraq to Afghanistan. The reasons for this shift are various. First, the invasion of Iraq was meant as both a preventive war and as an attempt to create an example of democracy in the heart of the Middle East – an operation of regional political engineering.[53] However, the vision behind this form of hegemony has been severely challenged by the aftermath of the war on Iraq, which according to some analysts has acted as an obstacle to the realisation of the goal of democracy promotion within the context of the Greater Middle East project. The lack of legitimacy in waging the war on Iraq, the human rights abuses exposed to the whole world, the uncertain democratisation of the country, and rising anti-Americanism (even in countries like Turkey, which used to be a strong ally of the United States throughout the Cold War period) suggest that the age of US dominance in the Middle East has ended. The war on Iraq appears to be a grand strategic failure,[54] with consequences that have damaged the very foundations of the GMEI. The USA is widely

considered to have a 'hidden strategy' for not just spreading its values, but also securing its interests.[55] Obama has criticised the military-based solutions that led the US into war on Iraq and regards it as the "wrong battlefield"[56] and a "tragically misguided view."[57]

However, the ongoing emphasis on military force as an instrument of American power in Afghanistan illustrates that previous geopolitical codes are still in place under the Obama presidency. Obama states that "we [the USA] must refocus our efforts on Afghanistan and Pakistan, the central front in our war against al Qaeda." A recent decision on troop deployment made by Obama should therefore be treated as the continuation of this military option. In February 2009, he authorised sending an extra 17,000 US troops to Afghanistan. He criticised Bush's obsession with Iraq, saying that "Afghanistan had not received the strategic attention, direction and resources it urgently requires".[58] To him, Afghanistan should gain strategic priory because the "Taleban is resurgent in Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda supports the insurgency and threatens America from its safe-haven along the Pakistani border."[59] The new US administration plans to balance this integrated strategy of including Afghanistan and the Pakistani border region with the withdrawal of US troops in Iraq. On the future of the Iraq war, Obama announced the withdrawal of most US troops located in Iraq by the end of 2010.[60] Considering the Iraqi morass in which America is stuck, he said, "Now our soldiers find themselves in the crossfire of someone else's civil war. . . . This war has fueled terrorism and helped galvanize terrorist organizations. And it has made the world less safe. . . . In a civil war where no military solution exists, this redeployment remains our best leverage to pressure the Iraqi government to achieve the political settlement between its warring factions that can slow the bloodshed and promote stability."[61] In this sense, the reversal of declining US prestige, credibility, and leadership resulting from Bush's Iraq legacy has become one of the main concerns of the Obama administration.

Democracy promotion as a justification for the war on terrorism continues to have importance for the Obama administration as well. In the new American presidency under Barack Obama, there seem to be fundamental changes regarding the ways in which the USA promotes democracy abroad rather than emphasising the establishment of democratic structures in the Middle East. His plans to modify legally problematic aspects of the war on terrorism would restore the America's declining prestige and show its commitment to the expansion of democracy in this challenging region. It seems that there is a shift in US priorities: in the new era, the aggressive and unilateral methods of the Bush administration will be abandoned, although the strategic significance of the expansion of democracy is still recognised. Thus, with the Obama presidency, there seem to be fundamental changes regarding the ways in which the US promotes democracy abroad. Obama has declared: "We benefit from the expansion of democracy. Democracies are

our best trading partners, our most valuable allies and the nations with which we share our deepest values. Our greatest tool in advancing democracy is our own example. That's why I will end torture, end extraordinary rendition and indefinite detentions; restore habeas corpus; and close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay."[62]

Regarding those regional actors labelled as the "axis of evil" by the Bush administration, Obama seems to prefer using diplomatic channels. He has stated that "throughout the Middle East, we must harness American power to reinvigorate American diplomacy. Tough-minded diplomacy, backed by the whole range of instruments of American power – political, economic, and military – could bring success, even when dealing with long-standing adversaries such as Iran and Syria."[63]

Another declared cardinal principle of the new administration in dealing with the war on terror is multilateralism. Obama has declared his wish "to renew American leadership in the world, to rebuild the alliances, partnerships, and institutions necessary to confront common threats and enhance common security. Needed reform of these alliances and institutions will not come by bullying other countries to ratify changes [the USA hatches] in isolation."[64] His emphasis on the reinforcement and rearrangement of international cooperation, especially on the matter of security, can be considered as the sharpest distinction between the two presidencies. In the same speech, he insisted on the use of multilateral means in case of security threats: "When we do use force in situations other than self-defense, we should make every effort to garner the clear support and participation of others".[65] These declared tactical changes illustrate that the principle of legitimacy in re-designing the geopolitical code of "war on terror" would be one of the main distinguishing features of the Obama presidency. In this sense, the "change" is intended to restore a declining US hegemony and credibility as the offshore balancer.


CONCLUSION


Within the theoretical framework of critical geopolitics, it can be concluded that US foreign policy after the September 11 attacks led to the identification of new enemies and threats. Hit by terrorist attacks at a time when it was defined as the world's sole hegemonic power, the US began a struggle to resurrect its global leadership role by targeting those countries that, in its view, had embraced terrorism and terrorists. Since then, the war on terror has dominated US foreign policy as the main geopolitical code.

However, the task of the construction of this new enemy was not free of problems, especially when it was carried out by a hegemonic power. The difficulty in justifying the war on Iraq to the international community further jeopardised the role of the USA, as its role changed to being an unjust invader of a

sovereign state's territory. It was at this point that the emphasis on democracy promotion in the region of the Greater Middle East started to come to the forefront. Analysis of US foreign policy in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, regarding specifically the so-called Greater Middle East, leads to the conclusion that the GME is a long-term geopolitically imagined region that serves the national interests of the USA. It is an expression of the geopolitical codes of both the Bush and Obama administrations; although the latter has changed the target geography from Iraq to Afghanistan, but as a merely tactical rather than overall change in its geopolitical imagination.

It seems that the geopolitical codes and the vision of the USA will not change under the Obama presidency. The war on terrorism is still a very important geopolitical code, and the Greater Middle East (particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan) is still the target geography in US military power projections beyond its territory. The 'forward strategy of freedom', launched under the Bush Doctrine, still continues under the Obama presidency. The policies involved in this vision appear to be justified by promoting democracy in the so-called failed states, and integrating them into a US-dominated prime modernity. In this light, the shift of emphasis from Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan can be regarded as an effort to get back the credibility that the US lost once the shortcomings of its democracy promotion policies in Iraq were revealed to the international community.


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## NOTES

1. L. Bialasiewicz, D. Campbell, S. Elden, S. Graham, A. Jeffrey, and A. J. Williams, 'Performing Security: The Imaginative Geographies of Current US Strategy', *Political Geography* 26/4 (May 2007) p. 406. See also J. Agnew, *Geopolitics. Revisioning World Politics*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge 2003).

2. Agnew (note 1) p. 1.

3. Ibid., p. 6.

4. D. Newman and S. Peters, 'Geopolitical Images and Discourses: Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East', *Third Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting*, Montecatini Terme and Florence, 20–24 March 2002, pp. 1–4.

5. G. Dijkink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Vision. Maps of Pride and Pain.* (London and New York: Routledge 1996) p. 12.

6. C. Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics* (London and New York: Routledge 2006) p. 55.

7. H. Starr, 'Joining Political and Geographic Perspectives: Geopolitics and International Relations', in M. D. Ward (ed.), *The New Geopolitics* (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach 1992) p. 5.

8. P. J. Taylor and C. Flint, *Political Geography: World Economy, Nation-state and Locality*, 4th ed. (Harlow: Prentice Hall 2000) p. 6, cited in Flint (note 6) p. 56.

9. Flint (note 6) p. 127.

10. Ibid., p. 58.

11. Dijkink (note 5) p. 11.

12. Ibid., p. 14.

13. Ibid., p. 146.

14. Ibid., p. 5.

15. B. Ferrari, 'Geopolitics – A Critical Assessment of the 'Great Game' in and Around the Caspian Sea', available at <http://www.ciari.org/investigacao/geopolitics_greatgame_caspiansea.pdf>.

16. Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books 1997).

17. S. Carapico and C. Toensing, 'The Strategic Logic of the Iraq Blunder', *Middle East Report* 239 (Summer 2006) p. 7, available at <http://merip.org/mer/mer239/carapico_toensing.html>.

18. E. T. Fakiolas and T. Fakiolas, 'Pax- Americana or Multilateralism? Reflecting on the United States' Grand Strategic Vision of Hegemony in the Wake of the 11 September Attack', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18/4 (Fall 2007) p. 65–66.

19. 'Bush Says It Is Time for Action', *CNN* (6 Nov. 2001), available at <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/ret.bush.coalition/index.html.>

20. Dijkink (note 5) p. 12.

21. Agnew (note 1) p. 122., S. E. Miller, 'The Iraq Experiment and US National Security', *Survival* 48/4 (Winter 2006–2007) p. 18.

22. B. Rubin, 'U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rogue States', *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3/3 (Sep. 1999) p. 72.

23. Ibid., p. 73.

24. T. G. Carpenter, 'The Imperial Lure: Nation Building as a US Response to Terrorism', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 17/1 (2006) p. 36.

25. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/o8/20020826.html> in S. Hurst, 'Myths of Neo-Conservatism: George W. Bush's "Neo-Conservative" Foreign Policy Revisited', *International Politics* 42 (2005) pp. 41–42.

26. D. J. Berggren and N. C. Rae, 'Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and Evangelical Presidential Style', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36/4 (2006) pp. 619, 621.

27. H. Furtig, 'Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The Interregional Order and US Policy', *Middle East Journal* 61/4 (Fall 2007) p. 632.

28. R. Haass, 'The New Middle East', *Foreign Affairs* (Nov./ Dec. 2006), available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20061101faessay85601/richard-n-haass/the-new-middle-east.html?mode=print>.

29. S. Hurst, (note 25) p. 77. Hurst argues that neo-conservatism has been a marginal influence on a foreign policy which has been primarily characterised by conservative nationalism.

30. M. Gurtov, *Superpower on Crusade* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publisher 2006) pp. 33–35. J. Monten, 'The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism and Democracy Promotion in US Strategy', *International Security* 29/4 (Spring 2005) p. 112.

31. Ibid., p. 113.

32. National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Sep. 2002), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>.

33. C. Hobson, 'A Forward Strategy of Freedom in the Middle East: US Democracy Promotion and the 'War on terror'', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59/1 (March 2005) p. 39.

34. 'Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth', *Middle East and North Africa Briefing, International Crisis Group*, Brussels/Amman, 7 June 2004, available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2795&l=1>.

35. M. Ottoway and T. Carothers, 'The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start,' *Policy Brief, Carnegie Endowment* (29 March 2004), available at < http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Policybrief29.pdf>.

36. 'G-8 Greater Middle East Partnership Working Paper', Al-Hayat, *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, United States Committee for a Free Lebanon and the Middle East Forum (13 Feb. 2004), available at <http://www.meib.org/documentfile/040213.htm>, p. 1.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. C. Flint and G.W. Falah, 'How the United States Justified its War on Terrorism: Prime Morality and Construction of a 'Just War'', *Third World Quarterly* 25/8 (2004) pp. 1379–1399.

40. Flint (note 6) p. 99.

41. Agnew (note 1) p. 123.

42. Flint (note 6) p. 72.

43. Ibid., p. 73.

44. Ibid., p. 115.

45. Flint and Falah (note 39) p. 1382.

46. Ibid., pp. 1382–1383.

47. Ibid., p. 1390.

48. Ibid., p. 1392.

49. Flint and Falah (note 39).

50. Flint (note 6) p. 101.

51. 'What's New in the Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan', *The Briefing Room* (27 March 2009), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Whats-New-in-the-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/>.

52. B. H. Obama, 'Renewing American Leadership', *Foreign Affairs* (July/Aug. 2007) p. 1.

53. P. Noel, 'The New US Middle East Policy and Energy Security Challenges', *Politique Etrangere* 2 (2006) p. 3, available at <http://www.ifri.org/files/politique_etrangere/Article_Noel.pdf>.

54. G. J. Ikenberry, 'The End of the Neo-Conservative Moment', *Survival* 46/1 (Spring 2004) pp. 10–11.

55. G. J. Ikenberry, 'Why Export Democracy? The 'Hidden Grand Strategy' of American Foreign Policy', *The Wilson Quarterly* 23/2 (Spring 1999) p. 6, available at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/exdem.htm>.

56. 'Remarks of Senator Obama: The War We Need to Win', Washington, DC, 1 Aug. 2007, available at <http://www.barackobama.com/2007/08/01/the_war_we_need_to_win.php>.

57. Obama, 'Renewing' (note 52) p. 1.

58. 'US to Boost Troops in Afghanistan', *BBC News* (18 Feb. 2009), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7895951.stm>.

59. Ibid.

60. 'Obama Outlines Iraq Pullout Plan', *BBC News* (27 Feb. 2009), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7914061.stm>.

61. B. Obama, 'Obama on US Policy in Middle East', *Council on Foreign Relations* (2 March 2007), available at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/13074/>.

62. 'Obama on Foreign Policy', *Washington Post* (2 March 2008) available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/02/AR2008030201982.html>.

63. Obama, 'Renewing' (note 52).

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.