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Introduction

THE NEW AMERICAN CENTURY

In March 2003, the United States and its coalition partners commenced a large-scale military assault on Iraq in order to terminate the Saddam Hussein regime. This followed the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, the subsequent termination of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the start of the global war on terror. The Iraq War was said to be concerned with Iraq's development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction, but that was disregarded after such systems could not be found and a second motivation, Iraq's support for al-Qaida and other paramilitary groups, was emphasised, even though there was little evidence of any such relationship.

In the four years since 9/11, the global war on terror resulted in many tens of thousands of people being killed and many more seriously injured. By mid-2005, well over 10,000 people were being detained without trial in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo and elsewhere, a bitter insurgency in Iraq was continuing, security in much of Afghanistan was deeply problematic and the determined if disparate al-Qaida movement continued its many activities, not least with the London bombings in early July.

Even so, and in spite of the many problems the United States faces in the Middle East and Central Asia, President Bush has made it clear that a military confrontation with Iran should not be ruled out. With the deep US antipathy to the government

in Tehran, the presumption of a nuclear weapons programme and the suspicions of a developing Iran/Iraq Shi'a axis, there is now the prospect of a third war in the region, adding Iran to Iraq and Afghanistan.

To a large extent, the current US military posture in President Bush's global war on terror stems from the powerfully expressed vision of a New American Century – an international system built on American economic values and orientations. It is a vision of almost messianic proportions, has been present within American conservatism for several generations, but has come to the fore in the ten years from 1995.

After the election of George W Bush in November 2000, the outlook of a New American Century was very quickly evident in US policies on issues such as arms control, trade and climate change, with a vigorous unilateralism frequently replacing a rather more multilateral norm. The outlook became much more heightened in the immediate wake of the 9/11 attacks but the resultant military actions have failed to bring stability and peace to Iraq and Afghanistan, neither have they prevented many further attacks by paramilitaries linked to the al-Qaida movement. It is therefore open to question whether the idea of a New American Century will survive and thrive, or whether it will be a short-lived phenomenon as the United States is forced to come to terms with its current predicament. This book seeks, in one particular way, to throw light on this.

THE OPEN DEMOCRACY GLOBAL SECURITY SERIES

Shortly before 9/11, an unusual new web journal was started, Open Democracy, describing itself as 'a channel for knowledge, learning, participation and understanding that is not owned by a media corporation, does not serve a special interest and does not adhere to a single ideological position'. As part of its early development, and just after 9/11, a weekly Global Security column was started that sought to analyse the developing war

on terror, trying to put in perspective the unfolding conflict. Since October 2001, some 200 articles have been published on a weekly basis.

An earlier book (*A War on Terror: Afghanistan and After*, Pluto Press, 2004) brought together about 40 articles written between October 2001 and December 2002, and tracking the development of the war in Afghanistan and the subsequent evolution of al-Qaida and US counter-terrorism actions. It covered a period in which the prospects of a war with Iraq were increasing but did not deal specifically with it. As the introduction to that book concluded:

Some mention is made of the developing crisis with Iraq, but that is in many ways a separate and very substantive issue. It is not central to this particular set of articles and perhaps deserves more detailed attention on another occasion.

This book is that ‘occasion’ and uses a similar format, with around 55 articles brought together in chronological order and grouped into chapters, each with a short introduction. The first four chapters give an almost week-by-week account of the Iraq War from the start in March 2003 through to September of that year. Later chapters extend the period for close to another two years, with the focus on Iraq but covering the developing crisis with Iran.

The articles constitute an attempt at contemporary analysis with the disadvantages and advantages of that approach, and might best be taken with other published analysis produced with the benefit of hindsight. The normal mechanism has been for a particular contribution to be written mid-week, for publication on the Open Democracy website on the Thursday evening of a given week. The articles are therefore very *immediate* in their perspective. Moreover, since they persistently attempt to analyse events and developments in a predictive context, they can certainly prove at fault on occasions. At the same time, the series builds up into an overall narrative that can also serve as

a reminder of how ideas developed and changed, pointing to issues that can easily be lost a few months or years later.

The articles are reproduced here almost exactly as written, with just minor grammatical corrections and a small amount of editing to avoid excessive repetition, but with no adjustments in analysis. The information contained in them is gained from a very wide range of sources, some of the most commonly used being US broadsheets such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe* and *Los Angeles Times*, other newspapers from the UK, France, Israel, Pakistan and elsewhere, military journals such as *Defense News*, *International Defence Review*, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, *Jane's Intelligence Review* and *Aviation Week* and numerous websites but especially the BBC, al-Jazeera, Juan Cole's *Informed Comment*, *Truthout* and *Asia Times*.

Some particularly significant news items are sourced to sites in the articles and a few are given as detailed references. Much more comprehensive sourcing is available by going to the individual articles, all of which are available with free access on the Open Democracy website – <www.opendemocracy.net>, and following the links provided.

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Visits to Iran, Pakistan, China, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Japan have supplemented these discussions

and I have particularly valued a long-term and continuing association with the Oxford Research Group and the UN University for Peace in Costa Rica. Working at the Department of Peace Studies at Bradford University has been a particular pleasure. Fellow members of staff have been a continual source of information and ideas, and the 350 students from over 40 countries, some of them with many years of experience in conflict zones, bring a quite extraordinary wealth of knowledge to the Department.

Paul Rogers
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