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"Yep, he lassoed the Middle East"

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Whether you laud it or villify it, Bush's foreign policy toward the Middle East is bold and aggressive. It is controversial and polarizing. It is not a doctrine: vision came after the implementation. Ready, shoot, define, and refine best describe its evolution. Assessments of it commonly contain uncertainty and criticism. The latter is attached to his persona. Either you like him or hate him. How could a former governor who knew more about the Texas Rangers and passionately cared more about tax cuts, in less than three years launch a policy that called for regime change and political behavior modification in the Middle East? It did not evolve; it was jump started. The Big Bang theory in foreign policy creationism. September 11 meant destroying the Taliban and al-Qaeda network; that flowed into the broader war on terrorism, to rebuilding Afghanistan, to reforming the Palestinian Authority, to regime change in Iraq, to by-passing Arafat, to rebuilding Iraq, to pushing democracy and social change on sclerotic Middle Eastern Arab political cultures. Where previous American presidents were content to protect the territorial integrity and political independence of Arab states, Bush wants to go where no president has gone before: his is a zealous commitment to prescribe political behavior inside borders of Middle Eastern states. It is not only specifying regime change, it aims to define what institutions regimes should adopt. For the Bush administration, freedom and democracy are the other side of a war on terrorism.' This is not compassionate conservatism, it is evangelical liberalism. When Saddam was not removed from power in 1991, some argued it was "better to know the devil you see, than to worry about the one you have not yet met." What if there are elections, but they become one man, one vote, one time? Either out of conviction or profound naivete, past reservations of turning out Saddam were jettisoned. Bush's policy has shifted from being unilateral to a multi-lateral undertaking, particularly after the conclusion of the June 2004 G-8 summit, and John Kerry's broad-sides of alienating allies. Where it was once pre-emptive it is now consultative if not collaborationist. Where in early 2004 alone, it was presented as one size fits all for reform, it is now more nuanced. There is an understanding that Morocco is not Oman, and Jordan is not Saudi Arabia. Ask any analyst of the Middle and they will volunteer that the chances of transforming Arab political culture to democracy or pluralism is not possible, or at least highly unlikely. No one is calling for Saddam to return to power, few Middle Easterners hide their

unrestrained delight at his capture. And in the same breath , a bleak scenario is painted for the future where Iraq turns into a radical Islamic state like Iran, where instability in Iraq spills over onto other Gulf oil-producing countries, and where catastrophic economic and financial dislocations send shockwaves through globalized interconnectedness. Most Arab commentators blast Bush for his imperial demand for reform. While there are some who say democracy is unlikely to emerge in Iraq, there is also an estimate that some form of informal pluralistic decision-making will take hold there under a loosely hung together federal system. And in the last eight months since he articulated his reform initiative for the Middle East, a cottage industry of reports, declarations, statements, reactions, and changes have emerged like measles all over the Middle East. Love it or hate it, Bush is physically and philosophically making the Middle East churn. And suppose over time a measure of reform emerges in the Middle East. Won't George W. in his memoir with a \$15 million advance, and entitled "My Calling" claim that the liberals instituted a witch hunt against him, that there never was truth stretching in his White House, and that he was singularly responsible for regime change and political reform in the Arab Middle East. While I lost full faith in George W.'s foresight when as managing owner of the Texas Rangers he let Sammy Sosa go to the Chicago White Sox in 1989, I might have to rethink my estimate of him down the yellow-brick road.

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