



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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Fact Sheet: Progress in the Middle East: Freedom, Prosperity, and Hope

[President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008](#)

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Today, President Bush attended the Saban Forum to discuss American policy in the Middle East – the past, the present, and his vision for the future. The President believes that no region is more fundamental to the security of America or the peace of the world than the Middle East: a free, peaceful Middle East will represent a source of promise, a home of opportunity, and a vital contributor to the prosperity of the world. Despite some frustrations and disappointments, the Middle East in 2008 is freer, more hopeful, and more promising than in 2001, with Israelis and Palestinians on the path to a two-state solution, 25 million Iraqis free from a brutal dictatorship, and many other examples of a brighter future to come.

In 2001, in the Holy Land, the collapse of the Camp David II peace talks had given way to the second Intifada, killing more than 500 Israelis and Palestinians, and neither side could envision a return to negotiations or the realistic possibility of a two-state solution. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein had begun his third decade as dictator. The Arab Human Development Report revealed high unemployment, poor education, high mortality rates for mothers, and almost no investment in technology.

- **Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States realized that we were in a struggle with fanatics pledged to our destruction.** We saw that repression and despair on the other side of the world could bring suffering and death to our own streets. With these new realities in mind, America reshaped our approach to the Middle East.

Supporting Allies, Isolating Adversaries, And Extending Freedom

In response to the 9/11 attacks, President Bush fundamentally reshaped our approach to the Middle East, based on three principles. We will defend our friends, our interests, and our people against any hostile attempt to dominate the Middle East – whether by terror, blackmail, or the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

1. **President Bush took the offensive against the terrorists overseas, to break up extremist networks and deny them safe havens.** President Bush strengthened partnerships with each nation that joined in the fight against terror. The United States deepened our security cooperation with allies like Jordan, Egypt, and our friends in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia became a determined partner in the fight against terror – killing or capturing hundreds of al Qaeda operatives. We expanded counterterrorism cooperation with partners in North Africa. In addition, we have left no doubt that we would stand by our closest ally in the Middle East – the state of Israel.
2. **The President made clear that hostile regimes must end their support for terror and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) – or face the concerted opposition of the world.** This is the approach the President took with Iraq, Libya, and Iran.
 - **While President Bush has made clear that Saddam Hussein was not connected to the 9/11 attacks, his decision to remove Saddam from power cannot be viewed in isolation from the attacks.** It was clear to President Bush, members of both political parties, and many leaders around the world that after 9/11, we could not risk allowing a sworn enemy of America to have weapons of mass destruction, as intelligence agencies around the world believed Saddam did. The Administration went to the United Nations, which unanimously passed Resolution 1441 calling on Saddam Hussein to disclose and disarm, and offered Saddam Hussein a final chance to comply with the demands of the world. When he refused, the President acted with a coalition of nations to protect the American people and liberated 25 million Iraqis.

- **The President confronted Libya over its WMD program.** Within days of Saddam's capture, Libya's leader, Colonel Qaddafi, announced that Libya had halted its WMD program and would turn over to the United States or destroy its centrifuges, longest-range missiles, and other deadly equipment. Libya's nuclear weapons equipment is now locked away in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Moreover, the Administration persuaded Libya to renounce terrorism and accept responsibility for prior acts of terror, and normalized relations with Libya as a result of its actions.
 - **Working with international partners, we have imposed tough sanctions and supported multiple UN resolutions against Iran for its failure to suspend enrichment.** We have offered Iran diplomatic and economic incentives to suspend enrichment, and we have promised to support a peaceful civilian nuclear power program. While Iran has not accepted these offers, we have made our bottom line clear: For the safety of our people and the peace of the world, America will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapons.
3. **President Bush identified lack of freedom as the principal cause of threats coming from the Middle East.** The War on Terror is an ideological struggle. To advance security and moral interests, America is working to advance freedom and democracy as the great alternative to repression and terror. The President is pressing nations across the region – including our friends – to respect fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech, worship, association, and assembly. The President is supporting the rise of vibrant civil societies and the promotion of freedom through new efforts, including the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative.
- **The President is advancing a broader vision of liberty that includes economic prosperity, quality health care and education, and women's rights.** This Administration has negotiated new free trade agreements in the region, supported Saudi Arabia's accession to the World Trade Organization, and proposed a new Middle East Free Trade Area. We are training Middle Eastern school teachers, translating children's books into Arabic, and helping young people get visas to study in the United States. Millennium Challenge agreements signed with Jordan and Morocco grant U.S. assistance in return for anti-corruption measures, free market policies that promote economic freedom, policies to govern justly and democratically, and investments in health and education. We are encouraging Middle Eastern women to get involved in politics, start their own businesses, and take charge of their health through wise practices like breast cancer screening.

President Bush Is The First American President To Call For A Palestinian State

To advance these principles, President Bush has launched a sustained initiative to help bring peace to the Holy Land. The President has a vision of Palestine and Israel, living side-by-side in peace and security. Building support for the two-state solution has been one of the President's highest priorities. But the President made clear that no Palestinian state could be born of terror, and he backed Prime Minister Sharon's withdrawal from Gaza. The United States has included Arab leaders, because their support will be essential for a lasting peace.

- **Last fall, President Bush hosted a historic summit at Annapolis to bring everyone together to start substantial negotiations.** While they have not yet produced an agreement, important progress has been made, and there is now greater international consensus than at any point in recent memory. Israelis, Palestinians, and Arabs all recognize that the creation of a peaceful, democratic Palestinian state is in their interest. Through the Annapolis process, they have started down a path that will end with the two-state solution finally realized.

Since The President Took Office, The Middle East Has Become More Free, Hopeful, And Promising

While challenges remain in the Middle East, the changes over the past eight years herald the beginning of something historic and new. Iraq has gone from an enemy of the United States to an ally. For the first time in three decades, the people of Lebanon are free from Syria's military occupation. Places like the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are emerging as centers of commerce and models of modernity. The regime in Iran is facing greater pressure from the international community than ever before. Terrorist organizations like al Qaeda have failed in their attempts to take over nations and are increasingly facing rejection.

- **Political and economic reforms are advancing across the Middle East.** Several Arab nations have held free elections in recent years. Women have run for office in several nations and been named to important government positions in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Trade and foreign investment have expanded. Several nations have opened private universities, and Internet use has risen sharply. Expectations about government responsiveness are rising. People are defying the condescending view that the culture of the Middle East is unfit for freedom.

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