



The Bush Doctrine—Reading

1 Following World War II, the United States began a decades-long struggle with the Soviet
2 Union to stop the spread of Communism. This confrontation was called the “Cold War” because
3 no “hot” war broke out directly between the two countries.

4 U.S. foreign policy was based on the concepts of containment and deterrence. Containment
5 meant stopping the spread of Communism. Deterrence meant preventing an attack through
6 threats of massive retaliation [very large response]. The Cold War ended with the break-up of the
7 Soviet Union in 1991. While the United States emerged as the most powerful nation in the world,
8 the attacks on September 11, 2001, proved that even powerful nations like the United States were
9 vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

10 After the September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush developed a new American
11 security strategy to prevent terrorists and dangerous regimes from developing, acquiring, or
12 using weapons of mass destruction. The new strategy, called the Bush Doctrine, also pushed for
13 the expansion of democracy in Middle Eastern Muslim countries and elsewhere in the world.

14 **Background of the Bush Doctrine**

15 The Bush Doctrine embodied principles that had been advocated by U.S. Department of
16 Defense officials in the administration of the current president’s father. The officials
17 unsuccessfully backing the changes in policy during President George H.W. Bush’s

18 administration included Paul Wolfowitz, who became a deputy defense secretary under George
19 W. Bush, and Lewis Libby, who became Vice President Cheney’s Chief of Staff.

20 Following the devastating terrorist attacks in 2001, Wolfowitz and others pressed for an
21 immediate attack on Iraq. Secretary of State Colin Powell, however, persuaded President Bush to
22 first attack the Al Qaeda terrorists and the Taliban regime harboring them in Afghanistan.

23 On September 12, 2002, after a sharp debate within the Bush administration over what to do
24 about Iraq, the president addressed the United Nations. He warned that if the United Nations did
25 not disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction (banned by the United Nations after the 1991
26 Gulf War), the United States would act unilaterally in self-defense. After various U.N. efforts,
27 the United States decided to act with a “coalition of the willing” (a group of allies) to remove
28 Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. The coalition included Great Britain and 29 other nations. It
29 did not include any Arab states or some NATO members, including Canada, France, Germany,
30 Belgium, and Norway. On March 20, 2003, the coalition forces, consisting mainly of U.S. and
31 British troops, invaded Iraq. The Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein was toppled. To date, no
32 weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq.

33 **The National Security Strategy and the Bush Doctrine**

34 Many observers saw the actions of the United States as part of a new American defense plan.
35 They pointed to a document released by President Bush’s administration in September 2002
36 called “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America.” Reflecting the long-
37 held views of Wolfowitz and others, this new strategy became known as the Bush Doctrine.
38 Three of the main points are:

39 **1. Pre-emption.** The Bush Doctrine favors pre-emption, or striking first, over the old ideas of
40 containment and deterrence. In a world of terrorist organizations, dangerous regimes, and
41 weapons of mass destruction, the National Security Strategy document warns that the United
42 States “cannot let [its] enemies strike first.”

43 The National Security Strategy notes that international law permits nations to take pre-
44 emptive action against a nation that presents an imminent, or immediate, threat and that the
45 United States has long followed this policy. In the past, an imminent threat looked like “a visible
46 mobilization of armies, navies, and air forces preparing to attack.” Today, however, terrorist
47 organizations and certain countries may not use conventional armies and navies. Instead, they
48 may use acts of terrorism and possibly “weapons of mass destruction—weapons that can be
49 easily concealed, delivered covertly, and used without warning.” Therefore, the idea of
50 “imminent threat” must be adapted “to the capabilities and objectives” of these enemies.
51 According to the Bush Doctrine, the United States should stop terrorist organizations and nations
52 such as Iraq and North Korea before they are able to threaten or use these weapons and tactics
53 against the United States.

54 Critics of the Bush Doctrine say it is not a policy of pre-emptive war but preventive war. A
55 *pre-emptive war* is one against an enemy preparing to strike right away. A *preventive war* is one
56 against an enemy that will pose a danger in the future. They also worry that American preventive
57 wars may encourage other nations to justify attacks on their enemies as “pre-emptive” wars. The
58 National Security Strategy cautions other nations not to “use pre-emption as a pretext for
59 aggression” and explains that the “reasons for [American] actions will be clear, the force

60 measured, and the cause just.” Yet critics say that this policy will make it hard for America to
61 succeed when trying to stop other countries from using “pre-emption” to start a war.

62 **2. Act Alone, If Necessary.** The Bush Doctrine identifies several ways to achieve the
63 security of the United States: establishing new military bases in the world, developing defense
64 technology, expanding intelligence gathering, and diplomacy. While the Bush Doctrine favors
65 cooperation with allies and international institutions like the United Nations, it also says that the
66 United States “will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary,” to defend itself. They point out that
67 the United Nations includes nations that may work against the best interests of the United States.

68 Critics argue that the Bush Doctrine implies that America will do what it chooses without
69 regard to international organizations or agreements. This approach, they say, undermines the
70 authority of these international efforts to combat many problems—such as drug-running, slavery,
71 and terrorism—that are also important to the United States. They also worry that a willingness to
72 use preemptive military force may turn this “last resort” policy into a “first resort” tool. By going
73 it alone in the world, American power loses its legitimacy and the United States is seen as a
74 bully.

75 Supporters of the Bush Doctrine respond that the administration believes deeply in working
76 with other countries whenever possible. For example, the coalition of nations that fought the
77 2003 Iraq war with the United States had many member nations.

78 **3. Extend Freedom.** The third major element of the Bush Doctrine is for the United States to
79 “extend the benefits of freedom across the globe” in order to build “a balance of power that
80 favors freedom.” The National Security Strategy states that the United States should do this by

81 championing “nonnegotiable demands of human dignity,” including the rule of law, freedom of
82 worship, and respect for women. In addition, the strategy calls for the United States to promote
83 world economic growth through capitalist free markets and free trade.

84 Critics of this part of the Bush Doctrine say it is not realistic. They point out that it took
85 democracy centuries to take root in Western societies. Societies such as Iraq, which have no
86 democratic tradition, cannot be expected to form democratic institutions quickly. They think the
87 costs of nation-building will prove staggering. Other critics think it is wrong for us to impose our
88 way of life, especially our capitalistic system, on other people.

89 Supporters of spreading democracy see it as America’s responsibility to the world. They
90 point to Japan and Germany after World War II to show that democracy can grow quickly and
91 successfully. They say the cost of building democratic societies is far less than the cost of
92 fighting undemocratic ones. They believe that a government chosen by the people and responsive
93 to their needs is a desire of people everywhere, not just in the United States.

94 **Implications of the Bush Doctrine**

95 Democracies in the 21st century are not sure how to defend the safety of their citizens.
96 Today’s enemies do not always fight wars with large armies or ships. Aircraft carriers and
97 nuclear missiles cannot stop a single person who has a suitcase filled with weapons of mass
98 destruction. Yet democratic nations need ways to protect themselves against such attacks. The
99 entire world will observe and study whether the Bush Doctrine addresses this problem for the
100 United States.