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Bridging the Gap between the Sacred and the Secular in the History of American Foreign Relations

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Diplomatic History, Volume 30, Issue 5, 1 November 2006, Pages 783–812,
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2006.00588.x>

Published: 09 October 2006

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With the eruption of global hostilities between two universalistic, mutually

exclusive ideologies, the president of the United States sought to rally Americans, and people around the world, to the cause of spreading freedom and democracy. What was most striking about his rhetoric was its explicit grounding in religious dogma and imagery. “The defense of mankind against these attacks,” the president told an audience at the onset of the crisis, “lies in the faith we profess—the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God.” “Democracy,” he proclaimed three years later in the midst of an increasingly unpopular, stalemated war, “is first and foremost a spiritual force.” At a subsequent occasion, he warned against complacency because “we are under tremendous attacks” and stressed that Americans must remain vigilant and “establish the fervor, the strength of our convictions, because fundamentally Democracy is nothing in...

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Online ISSN 1467-7709

Print ISSN 0145-2096

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