

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE CASE FOR DEMOCRACY AS A LONG TERM NATIONAL STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

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President Bush used his second inaugural speech to define an extensive new mission for American foreign policy based on promoting freedom around the world. On several occasions the president has stated "It is the policy of the United States," to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in the world. Throughout his presidency, President Bush has religiously argued that there is an inextricable link between freedom and peace, and between democracy and security. The policies he laid out on January 20, 2005, have become known as the Bush Doctrine. Since the onset of democratization in the mid-1970s, the world has seen a significant increase in the number of countries governed by democratic regimes, however, in the Arab-majority countries, the impact of this political revolution is limited. Nonetheless, opinion surveys show popular support for democracy in the Middle East is high. This project will provide a valid argument that the United States must continue to pursue democracy in the Middle East as a key component of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America beyond January 20, 2009 when President Bush leaves office.

THE CASE FOR DEMOCRACY AS A LONG TERM NATIONAL STRATEGY

When George W. Bush took office in January 2001, few expected that promoting democracy around the world would become a major issue in his presidency.¹ During 2001, the Bush administration did not even address the issue of promoting civil societies, rule of law, free elections and open political processes as major issues of their agenda.² During the 2000 presidential campaign Bush and his advisors made it clear that they favored great-power realism over idealistic notions such as nation building or democracy promotion.³ Four years later President Bush used his second inaugural speech to define an expansive new mission for American foreign policy based on promoting freedom around the world, it was clear that the president's interests in democracy was more than a passing fancy.⁴

The policies championed on January 20, 2005, have become known as the Bush Doctrine. However, the idea that the advance of democracy beyond one's shores is vital to the security enjoyed within them is not new.⁵ In his inaugural address on January 20, President George W. Bush declared that "it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."⁶

As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. And with the spread of weapons that can bring catastrophic harm to our country and to our friends, it would be reckless to accept the status quo. Therefore the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East.⁷

There are obstacles remaining on the road to democracy in the Middle East., especially in Iraq where American efforts to help Iraqis build a free society have suffered numerous setbacks and have met considerable opposition.⁸

Those who believe that a democratic Middle East is possible are few in number. Within certain sectors of America, and nearly everywhere outside of America, the voices of skepticism are growing. Many have questioned whether the democratic world has a right to impose its values on a region that is said to reject them. Many have argued that military intervention in the Middle East is causing more harm than good.⁹

They also argue that there are certain cultures and civilizations that are not compatible with democracy and certain peoples who do not deserve it.¹⁰

There is not a single non-democratic regime in the Middle East, nor anywhere else for that matter, that wants Iraqis to be free. The regimes that deny freedoms to Iranians, Syrians, Saudi Arabians, Egyptians, and so many others know that

success in Iraq indicates that the sands in the hourglass that mark their repressive rule will start running out faster than ever.¹¹

This project will provide a valid argument that the United States must continue to pursue democracy in the Middle East as a key component of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America beyond January 20, 2009 when President Bush leaves office. Democracy is not an unalloyed good and the United States should not blindly attempt to spread democracy to the exclusion of all other goals, but the belief is that U.S. and global interests would be advanced if the world contained more democracies. If the Bush doctrine is successful in laying the foundation for democracy in the region and elsewhere around the world, the spread of democracy in the Middle East will have to remain American policy beyond January 20, 2009.¹² Patience is a must and if we have any hope of successfully promoting freedom as the alternative to tyranny and despair we must remain patient!

Defining Democracy

As the United States pursues democracy around the globe, it is important to understand the definition and concept of democracy. There are deep disagreements about the appropriate theoretical framework, about whether democracy is simply an institutional arrangement for choosing rulers or an end in itself, about how to measure and evaluate democracy, and about the importance of prerequisites for democracy.¹³ Democracy seems especially difficult to define because it is not a given or a thing in itself but rather a form of government and a process of governance that changes and adapts in response to circumstances.¹⁴

There is one widely recognized definition of democracy that is accepted not only in much of the Western World but also in much of the Third World.¹⁵ This pure definition of democracy as defined by the United States State Department is: "government by the people in whom the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them, or by their elected agents, under a free electoral system."¹⁶ The most common form of democracy today is a representative democracy that allows the people to elect their representatives to make decisions for the people, develop laws, and oversee the governmental programs developed for the population.¹⁷

We live in a time when the call for freedom and democracy echoes across the globe. Eastern Europe has cast off the totalitarian governments of almost half a century, and the republics of the former Soviet Union are struggling to replace the Communist regime of almost 75 years with a new democratic order, something they could never before experience. North and South America is now virtually a hemisphere of democracy; Africa is experiencing an

unprecedented era of democratic reform; and new, dynamic democracies have taken root in Asia.

While acknowledging that the basic elements of a democracy will be different based on the cultural, economic and social systems found in a given society leaves room for some imprecision in the application of the definition, a working definition of democracy that is largely accepted by political scientists who endorse what is known as the Democratic Peace Theory amounts to:

1. The nation must hold competitive elections. To be defined as competitive, there must be at least two formally independent political parties (or similar groups).
2. 50% or more of the adult population must be allowed to vote.
3. Those in legislative and executive power must have been put into place by said elections.
4. There must have been at least one peaceful, constitutional transfer of power between independent political parties.

Nations which do not meet all four conditions might be considered proto-democracies or emerging democracies or republics, but would not be considered democracies until they met all four conditions.¹⁸

This definition is fairly stringent, but quite workable. It fits most of the nations that are typically considered democracies--Canada, the United States, India, Japan, most European nations, Australia, Brazil, Chile, and so on.¹⁹ It would also exclude nations that most people would recognize as "debatable," including Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, and Palestine. These could be considered proto-democracies or emerging democracies, but they have not yet proven themselves truly to be democracies. It would also completely rule out places like Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Libya, Syria or Iran.²⁰

This definition will also allow us to easily tell the difference between democracy and liberal democracy, under a liberal democracy the vast majority of adults must be eligible to vote, and freedom of political speech and press must be enshrined in the system of law. Thus the United States, for example, would not have qualified for "liberal democracy" status until the 19th amendment was ratified to give women the right to vote and it didn't fully meet the promises of liberal democracy until it guaranteed the franchise to blacks some 40 years ago.²¹

While elections themselves are not sufficient, the ability to elect—and remove—one's leaders is a fundamental mechanism of democratic accountability. One of the most important achievements of the modern democracy movement is the expansion in the number of countries that regularly conduct fair and competitive elections.²²

The Links between Democracy and Security

In 1994 the Clinton administration endorsed and adopted the idea that there is a link between democracy and security.²³ In his 1994 State of the Union address President Clinton declared that "ultimately the best strategy to insure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere."²⁴ A year earlier, Anthony Lake, then President Clinton's assistant for national security affairs, had called for replacing the Cold War strategy of containment with a "strategy of enlargement—enlargement of the world's community of market democracies."²⁵

President Bush throughout his presidency has also consistently argued that there is an inextricable link between freedom and peace, and between democracy and security.

The Bush administration and its defenders contend that the push for Arab democracy in the Middle East will not only spread American values but also improve U.S. security. As democracy grows in the Middle East, the thinking goes, the region will stop generating anti-American terrorism. Promoting democracy in the Middle East is therefore not merely consistent with U.S. security goals; it is necessary to achieve them.²⁶

Many studies have found that there are virtually no historical cases of democracies going to war with one another. In an important two-part article published in 1983, Michael Doyle compares all international wars between 1816 and 1980 and a list of liberal states.²⁷ Doyle concludes that "constitutionally secure liberal states have yet to engage in war with one another."²⁸ Subsequent statistical studies have found that this absence of war between democracies is statistically significant and is not the result of random chance.²⁹ Other analyses have concluded that the influence of other variables, including geographical proximity and wealth, do not detract from the significance of the finding that democracies rarely, if ever, go to war with one another.³⁰

Most studies of the democratic-peace proposition have argued that democracies only enjoy a state of peace with other democracies; they are just as likely as other states to go to war with non-democracies.³¹ There are, however, several scholars who argue that democracies are inherently less likely to go to war than other types of states.³² The evidence for this claim remains in dispute, however, so it would be premature to claim that spreading democracy will do more than enlarge the democratic zone of peace.

The United States will have an interest in promoting democracy because further democratization enhances the lives of citizens of other countries and contributes to a more peaceful international system. To the extent that Americans care about citizens of other countries and international peace, they will see benefits from the continued spread of

democracy. Spreading democracy also will directly advance the national interests of the United States, because historically democracies have not launched wars or terrorist attacks against the United States, nor have they produced large numbers of refugees seeking asylum in the United States, and will normally tend to ally with the United States.

Democracies more than likely will not go to war against the United States. The logic of the democratic peace suggests that the United States will have fewer enemies in a world of more democracies. If democracies virtually never go to war with one another, no democracy will wage war against the United States. Promoting democracy may usher in a more peaceful world; it also will enhance the national security of the United States by eliminating potential military threats. The United States would be more secure if Russia, China, and at least some countries in the Arab and Islamic worlds became stable democracies.

Spreading democracy is likely to enhance U.S. national security because democracies have a propensity not to support terrorist acts against the United States. The world's principal sponsors of international terrorism are harsh, authoritarian regimes, including Syria, Iran, North Korea, Libya, and Sudan.³³

Some skeptics of the democratic-peace proposition point out that democracies sometimes have sponsored covert action or "state terrorism" against other democracies. Examples include U.S. actions in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, and Chile in 1973.³⁴ This argument does not undermine the claim that democracies will not sponsor terrorism against the United States. In each case, the target state had dubious democratic credentials. U.S. actions amounted to interference in internal affairs, but not terrorism as it is commonly understood. And the perpetrator of the alleged acts in each case was the United States itself, which suggests that the United States has little to fear from other democracies.

The democratic world must export freedom throughout the Middle East not only for the sake of people who live under repressive regimes, but for the sake of their own security. For only when the world is free will the world be safe.³⁵

Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?

George W. Bush's first term in office was initially devoted to compassionate conservatism and to establishing his own ideas and dreams, unfortunately, his ideology only lasted less than eight months. On September 11, 2001, he was reborn as a war president. Since September 11, 2001, the Bush administration has argued that if the world can successfully instill democracy in the Middle East we will not have only spread American values but we will also improve U.S. security. The Bush Administration's ideology is that as democracy grows in the Arab world, the

region will stop generating anti-American terrorism. President Bush strongly believes that promoting democracy in the Middle East is not merely consistent with U.S. security goals, it is necessary to achieve them.³⁶

President Bush's belief in the link between terrorism and a lack of democracy is not limited to his administration. During the 2004 presidential campaign, Senator John Kerry emphasized the need for greater political reform in the Middle East as an integral part of the war on terrorism.³⁷ Morton Halperin, a key policy figure in the Clinton administration argues that the roots of al Qaeda lie in the poverty and educational deficiencies of countries such as; Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, and were caused by the authoritarian nature of those states and can be combated only through democratization.³⁸

Is the security rationale for promoting democracy in the Arab world based on a sound premise? The answer to this question appears to be no. Although what is known about terrorism is incomplete, the data available do not show a strong relationship between democracy and an absence of or a reduction in terrorism.³⁹ Al Qaeda and like minded groups are not fighting for or against democracy in the Muslim world; they are fighting to impose their vision of an Islamic state.⁴⁰

Even if democracy were achieved in the Middle East, we must also be concerned about what kind of governments would it produce? Would they cooperate with the United States on important policy objectives besides curbing terrorism, such as advancing the Arab-Israel peace process, maintaining security in the Persian Gulf, and ensuring steady supplies of oil? No one can predict the course that a new democracy will take but there is concern that they are likely to produce new Islamist governments much less willing to cooperate with the United States than are the current authoritarian rulers.⁴¹

According to the State Department's annual "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report, 269 major terrorist attacks occurred in countries classified as "free", by Freedom House, 119 occurred in "partly free" countries, and 138 occurred in "not free" countries.⁴² These numbers indicate that there is no relationship between the incidence of terrorism in a given country and the degree of freedom enjoyed by its citizens.⁴³ Comparing India, the world's most populous democracy, and China, the world's most populous authoritarian state, highlights the difficulty of assuming that democracy can solve the terrorism problem. For 2000-2003, 203 international terrorist attacks occurred in India and none in China.⁴⁴ If the relationship between authoritarianism and terrorism were as strong as many imply, the discrepancy between the number of terrorist incidents and China and the number in India would run the other way.⁴⁵

Democracy in the Middle East will not resolve the problem of terrorism, but a more open political environment combined with greater economic opportunity will likely weaken the pull of

extremist ideologies that fuel violence. If Arabs are allowed to participate freely and peacefully in the political process, they are less likely to turn to radical measures. If they understand that the United States supports their exercise of liberty, they are less likely to sustain hostile attitudes toward the United States. Efforts to maintain “stability” through the repression of political rights are unlikely to succeed in the long run. The overwhelming empirical evidence clearly indicates that the best kind of stability is democratic stability.⁴⁶

Islam and Democracy

The relationship between Islam and democracy in the contemporary world is complex.⁴⁷ Many prominent Islamic intellectuals and groups, however, argue that Islam and democracy are compatible.⁴⁸ The Muslim world presents a broad spectrum of perspectives ranging from the extremes of those who deny a connection between Islam and democracy to those who argue that Islam requires a democratic system.⁴⁹ In between the extremes, in a number of countries where Muslims are a majority, many Muslims believe that Islam is a support for democracy even though their particular political system is not explicitly defined as Islamic.⁵⁰

There are also those who are considered “progressive Muslims” who argue that democracy is considered a requirement of Islam. Many Muslim scholars bring historically important concepts from within the Islamic tradition together with the basic concepts of democracy as understood in the modern world. The Islamic tradition contains a number of key concepts that are presented by Muslims as the key to “Islamic democracy.”⁵¹ Most would agree that it is important for Muslims not simply to copy what non-Muslims have done in creating democratic systems, emphasizing that there are different forms that legitimate democracy can take.⁵²

There are several specific concepts Muslims cite when they explain the relationship between Islam and democracy. In the Qur’an, the righteous are described as those people who, among other things, manage their affairs through “mutual consultation” or shura (42:38 Qur’an). This is expanded through traditions of the Prophet and the sayings and actions of the early leaders of the Muslim community to mean that it is obligatory for Muslims in managing their political affairs to engage in mutual consultation. Contemporary Muslim thinkers ranging from relatively conservative Islamists to more liberal modernists to Shi’ite activists emphasize the importance of consultation.⁵³

By the late twentieth century, the concept of the caliphate involved responsibilities for all humans, in all dimensions of life, but especially the political: “Rightly, Muslims understand khilafah as directly political. . . . Islam requires that every Muslim be politicized (i.e., awakened, organized, and mobilized).”⁵⁴

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in theory and concept, Islamic democracy is well developed and persuasive but in actual practice the results are less encouraging.

Authoritarian rulers such as Ja'far Numayri in Sudan and Zia al-Haq in Pakistan initiated formal programs of Islamization of the law and political system in the 1980s with results that were not encouraging for democracy. A military coup brought a combination of military and civilian Islamists to rule in Sudan in 1989 and despite the proclaimed goal of creating an Islamic democracy, the regime's human rights record in terms of treatment of non-Muslim minorities and Muslim opposition groups is deplorable.⁵⁵

During its first decade, the Islamic Republic set narrow limitations on political participation. However, the end of the nineties saw the unprecedented presidential election victory of Mohammad Khatami, who had not been favored by the conservative religious establishment. He was reelected by an overwhelming majority again in 2001. Although there are continuing grounds for criticizing Iran in terms of its repression of opposition and minorities, increasing numbers of women and youth are voting in elections. Instead of "one man, one vote, one time," the "one man" is being joined by "one woman" as a voting force.⁵⁶

Beyond the formally proclaimed Islamic political systems, there has also been an increasing role for democracy with an Islamic tone.

Many Muslims, whether living in formally secular or formally Islamic states, see democracy as their main hope and vehicle of effective political participation. One important dimension of this participation is that despite conservative Muslim opposition to the idea of rule by a woman, the three largest Muslim states in the world -- Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan -- have had or now have elected women as their heads of government. None of these women was explicitly Islamist and one was directly opposed by an Islamist party.⁵⁷

In this complex context, it is clear that Islam is not inherently incompatible with democracy. "Political Islam" is sometimes a program for religious democracy and not primarily an agenda for holy war or terrorism.⁵⁸ In the Middle East, one should expect to find support for Islamism and democracy among similar categories of individuals.⁵⁹ Islamists see democracy as a viable route to greater political participation, whereas democrats will see Islamist discourse as a means of gaining wider constituency support. Democrats and Islamists are united on the same side of the political landscape.⁶⁰

The shape of Arab democracy and reform will be what the Arabs themselves make of it. To be sustainable, Arab democracy must have an Arab and an Islamic character, and be built from within their society. Democracy and reform will only succeed when Arab officials and religious and private sector leaders address self-defeating behavior such as demagoguery and religious fanaticism. Reform deserves support from the United States, as well as from Europe

and others, including India. For this effort to be successful, Arab leaders and reformers must work together.

Arab Support for Democracy

Since the onset of the “third wave” of democratization in the mid-1970s, the world has seen a significant increase in the number of countries governed by democratic regimes.⁶¹ Across the Middle East, support for democracy is remarkable. Data from the most recent round of the World Values Survey (WVS) reveal broad support for democracy among Arab men and women, both in absolute terms and relative to world regions.⁶² Institutional reforms, such as parliamentary elections and greater freedoms within civil society have allowed for greater civic and political participation.⁶³ Although support for democracy is extremely high, support for Islam is also quite high. In many parts of the Arab world, citizens express simultaneous support for democracy and Islam.⁶⁴

The discussion on the compatibility of Islam and democracy is a frequent topic of discussion throughout the Middle East. From Mosque sermons to newspapers columns, college campus speeches to coffee shop discussions, citizens of the Arab world view the tenets of Islam as inherently democratic.⁶⁵ However, in most western discourses, support for religious rule and democracy are often assumed to be diametrically opposed categories.⁶⁶ Secularism, implying the separation of church and state, is a discourse that the Muslim world appears to have rejected.⁶⁷ The most recent WVS, also indicates that the majority of citizens in the Arab Middle East do not see Islam and democracy as opposed to one another.⁶⁸ In fact, in many instances, respondents offered very perceptive analysis on ways in which Islam could further contribute to the democratization project.⁶⁹

During the 1980s and early 1990s there were gradual movements toward democratization in some Arab-majority countries, when a number of Arab governments were confronted with popular anger fueled by poor economic conditions, official corruption, and human rights abuses enacted programs of political liberalization.⁷⁰ The Arab world continues to stand out as a region for its limited progress toward democracy, but it also stands out on account of its high degree of popular support for democracy.⁷¹ The last few years have brought continued political reform in some Arab societies, among these are Bahrain, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, and, to a lesser extent, Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, and Palestine.⁷² Although progress for the most part has been tentative and partial, it is possible to have a meaningful debate about whether the glass of democracy is half full or half empty in the Arab Middle East.⁷³

Democratization as a United States Strategy for Security

Over the past five decades, U.S. policy in the Middle East has been largely predicated on the notion that the political status quo in the region best served Washington's interests in the Middle East.⁷⁴ The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC on September 11, 2001 challenged the underlying assumption of U.S.-Middle East policy.⁷⁵ It is the lack of freedom in the Middle East that is the greatest threat to peace and stability.⁷⁶ Prior to September 11, 2001, the question of a democratic Middle East was not a high priority for the Bush administration.⁷⁷ Policy makers across the world saw the Middle East as a huge swathe of despotism that could not, should not, and would not be changed anytime soon.⁷⁸ On November 6, 2003 in a speech at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), President Bush enunciated his Middle East Doctrine: democratization of the region as the first priority of U.S. strategy, irrespective of past policy considerations.⁷⁹ On numerous occasions since September 11, 2001, President Bush has expressed his belief in the power of democracy to transform the Middle East. President Bush used his second inaugural address to define an expansive new strategy for American foreign policy based on promoting freedom.⁸⁰

The idea that the advance of democracy beyond one's shores is vital to the security enjoyed within them is not new. It was the idea first championed by human rights dissident Andrei Sakharov, first practiced by Senator "Scoop" Jackson, and used with devastating effect by Ronald Regan to bring down the Soviet Empire, free hundreds of millions of people, and help secure what was then called the West.⁸¹

The 2006 National Security Strategy affirms the importance of democracy to U.S. objectives by stating: "The goal of our statecraft is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system. This is the best way to provide enduring security for the American people."⁸² President Bush has stated that: "We will use our foreign aid to promote freedom and support those who struggle non-violently for it, ensuring that nations moving toward democracy are rewarded for the steps they take."⁸³ The policy presumes that democratic institutions and procedures offer peaceful avenues to reconcile grievances and can help address the underlying conditions that fuel the rise of Islamic extremism and associated terrorism. The goal is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system.⁸⁴ The United States and her Allies are in the early years of a long struggle, achieving this goal will take the work of many dedicated generations.

In 2000, the Middle East region had 1 Free country (Israel), 3 Partly Free countries (Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait), and 14 Not Free countries. By 2006,

the number of Partly Free countries and territories had risen to seven with the addition of Bahrain, Lebanon, Yemen, and the Palestinian Authority. In the latter, the hopes that competitive elections would lead to steps forward were dashed as a result of incursions by Israeli military forces, as well as the continued operation of militias engaged in violence against Israel and their own political rivals.⁸⁵

Building Democracy after Conflict

The United States as well as the rest of the democratic countries around the world has an important role to play in fostering democracy in the Middle East region, but the task will be slow and difficult given the lack of leverage over key governments in the region. Experience in other countries where the United States has forcibly removed dictators or helped launch major post-conflict democratic reconstruction indicates a strong need for caution.⁸⁶ In Haiti, for example, the 1994 U.S. invasion and the subsequent large-scale reconstruction effort have not led to democracy but instead political chaos, renewed repression, and dismal U.S.–Haiti relations.⁸⁷ Panama post–U.S. invasion might be construed as a more positive case, with post-Noriega politics having achieved some degree of pluralism. But Panama already had some genuine experience with pluralism before Noriega rose to power.⁸⁸ The common belief is that the more certain the prospect of international response, the stronger the deterrent for those who would plot and join coups or erode democracy and democratic institutions.⁸⁹

In the Middle East, specifically in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States would have to become engaged in nation building on a scale that would dwarf any other such effort since the reconstruction of Germany and Japan after World War II. And it would have to stay engaged not just years, but decades, given the depth of change required to make Iraq into a functioning democracy.

Thus far the Bush administration has given no indication that it is ready to commit to such a long-term, costly endeavor. All this does not mean that the Middle East and specifically Iraq can never become democratic. But the idea of a quick and easy democratic transformation is a fantasy.⁹⁰

Sustaining New Democracies

While the Middle East continues to lag behind other regions in the development of free institutions, the fact that progress has been made since the September 11, 2001 attacks gives some cause for optimism.⁹¹ The first steps on the path to democracy are neither quick nor easy, and maintaining democracy, even for countries with a long-standing democratic tradition, requires education, sustained vigilance, and active support.⁹² Either external or internal pressures can open the door to democracy, but only local actors can eventually fling it open

wide and walk through it, as occurred in the Philippines and Poland, in Chile and South Africa.⁹³ Like previous transitions, the changes in the Middle East will come from within by some combination of reform-driven leaders and citizens. The international community must support these democracies at every step of the way by walking behind or beside them, not in front of them.⁹⁴

Leadership in the Middle East is crucial to successful democratic transition and consolidation. One important role for international democracy supporters is to provide capacity building for new political leaders, including those in opposition to non-democratic regimes and those newly elected.⁹⁵ The transitional period is especially critical, as democracy either takes root or flounders. Strong, political leadership is essential to establishing and sustaining democratic governance as new institutions and politicians emerge.⁹⁶

Recommendations

The United States must continue to work with other democracies to promote democracy in the Middle East recognizing that quick change is a dream. The United States' democracy promotion policy must be implemented consistently over the long term, which will last well beyond the end of President Bush's second term on January 20, 2009. Our goals must be initially modest, and the commitment to change long term. The core elements of a democracy oriented policy are not hard to identify: sustained, high-level pressure on Arab states to respect political and civil rights and to create or widen genuine political space; clear, consistent pressure on Arab states to carry out pro-democratic institutional, legal, and constitutional changes; and increased democracy aid that bolsters democracy activists, engages seriously with the challenge of political party development, nurtures efforts to develop the rule of law, supports serious proponents of pro-democratic institutional reforms, and supports a growing range of civil society actors, including moderate Islamists.

The United States policy framework will require additional high-level attention and wider support within the administration if it is not to be a futile fix. A serious program of long-term support for Middle East democracy will need to follow these guidelines:

1. The United States must not attempt to marginalize Islamist groups. Instead, the United States must differentiate between the truly extremist organizations that must be isolated because they are committed to violence and those amenable to working legally to achieve their goals.
2. The United States must develop strategies to encourage a political processes in which moderate Islamists, along with other emerging forces, can compete fairly and over time gain

incentives to moderate their illiberal ideologies. To do this, the United States needs to acquire a much better understanding of the relevant organizations in each country.

3. The United States must not overemphasize support for westernized nongovernmental organizations and individuals with impeccable liberal credentials but little influence in their societies. Democracy promoters need to engage as much as possible in a dialogue with a wide cross section of influential elites: mainstream academics, journalists, moderate Islamists, and members of the professional associations who play a political role in some Arab countries, rather than only the narrow world of westernized democracy and human rights advocates.

4. The United States must not support unresponsive institutional reform programs—such as with stagnant parliaments and judiciaries—in lieu of real political reform. We must push the liberalized autocracies of the region, such as in Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Jordan, and Lebanon, beyond the superficial political reforms they use to sustain themselves. This will require pressuring such states to undertake true political restructuring, allow the development of political parties, and open up more space for political contestation.

5. The United States must be clear about the goal in each country: regime change, slow liberalization, and democratization are not the same thing. Policies to achieve one goal are not necessarily appropriate for the others. A sudden regime change would probably make democratization a more remote prospect for many countries because it would too quickly tip the balance in favor of the groups that are best organized and enjoy grassroots support, Islamist organizations in most cases.

6. The United States must carefully review everything we have done so far in the region in the name of democracy promotion. The United States has spent more than \$250 million on democracy programs in the Middle East in the past decade with little impact. Understanding the weaknesses of these prior efforts is particularly important.

The fact that the Bush administration has changed its mind about the importance of democracy in the Middle East has not changed the domestic political equation in any country of the region. The United States has limited leverage in most Arab countries. In other regions, the United States, together with Europe and international organizations, often used the lever of economic assistance to force political reform on reluctant governments. But oil-rich countries do not receive aid. Poor countries in the region do, the United States can hardly afford to use this aid as a weapon for political reform without jeopardizing other interests.

The United States already wants a lot from Arab states. It wants help in the war on terrorism. It wants their oil. It wants cooperation in finding a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The United States cannot afford to antagonize the very regimes whose cooperation it

seeks. The United States must work with existing regimes toward gradual reform—and this is a good thing.

In conclusion, the lessons from the U.S. experience in postwar Iraq are being derived while the postwar history of the country is still being forged. Even with all the mistakes made by the United States—in failing to plan and prepare adequately for the postwar reconstruction of Iraq and in imposing a political occupation upon a proud and nationalistic people, suspicious of the West—it is still possible that democracy will take hold and continue to spread throughout the Middle East.

The odds may be long that the Middle East and particularly Iraq will ever turn into a mature democracy of the sort envisaged by the Bush administration. To his credit, President Bush recognizes the difficulty of the task in the Middle East. He has affirmed on numerous occasions that "The democratic progress we've seen in the Middle East was not imposed from abroad, and neither will the greater progress we hope to see. He has also warned that democratic development will not come swiftly, or smoothly, to the Middle East, any more than it did to America and Europe.

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