USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

DEMOCRATIZATION AS A UNITED STATES STRATEGY FOR MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

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President George W. Bush, in a speech to the National Endowment for Democracy in November 2003, announced the United States' forward strategy of freedom for the Middle East. From Thomas Jefferson's "empire of democracy" to Woodrow Wilson's "the world must be made safe for democracy," American presidents have long recognized that security and world order are advanced by pluralistic government. Yet one region of the world, the Middle East – and specifically Arab states – has lagged behind the rest of the world in adopting democratic rule. Since September 11, 2001, the United States has increasingly promoted democratization in the Middle East as a strategy for regional security and to reduce the threat of global terrorism emerging from the region. Is democratic reform an achievable goal or a symbolic agenda doomed to failure in a part of the world that is impervious to such reform? The SRP will analyze the broader challenges of democratic reform in the Middle East and analyze the strategic ends, ways, and means to combat terrorism and achieve regional stability. It will also analyze programs such as the Broader Middle East Initiative as a tool to promote political and economic reform.

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DEMOCRATIZATION AS A UNITED STATES STRATEGY FOR MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

> Therefore, the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. This strategy requires the same persistence and energy and idealism we have shown before. And it will yield the same results. As in Europe, as in Asia, as in every region of the world, the advance of freedom leads to peace.
>
> - George W. Bush

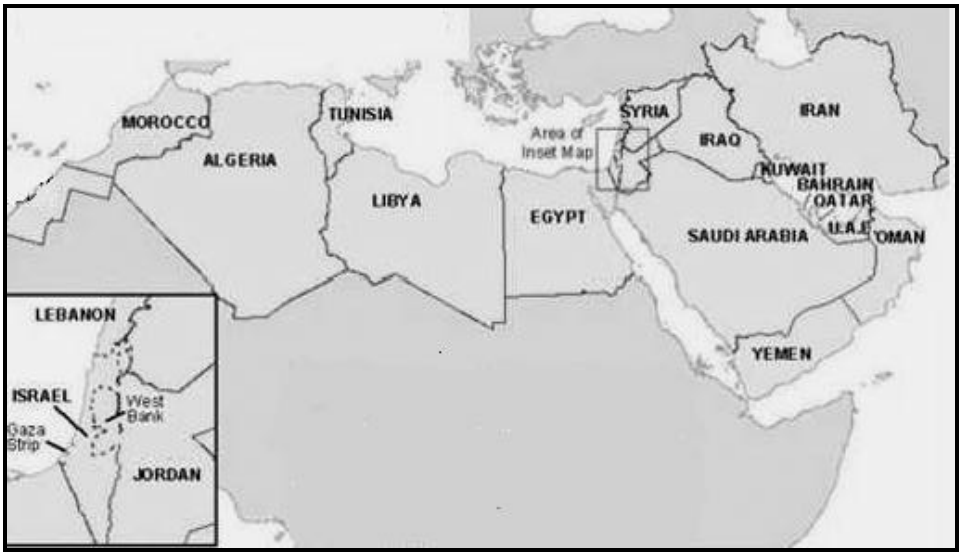
President George W. Bush's National Endowment for Democracy speech in November 2003 announced the United States' strategy for democracy in the Middle East. His idealistic vision is not new. Whether Thomas Jefferson's "empire of democracy", Woodrow Wilson's "world made safe for democracy," or Bill Clinton's strategy of "engagement and enlargement", American presidents have long recognized that security and world order are advanced by pluralistic governments. Yet one region of the world, the Middle East – and specifically Arab states – has lagged behind the rest of the world in adopting democratic rule. Except for Israel, no Middle Eastern country is considered democratic – most continue to exist under dictatorial, semi-authoritarian, or monarchical rule. Since September 11, 2001, the United States has increasingly promoted democratization in the Middle East as a strategy for regional security and to reduce the threat of global terrorism emerging from the region. Is the current approach an effective strategy or is it merely the latest symbolic agenda doomed to failure in a part of the world that is impervious to such reform? Can democracy take root in the region and, if so, will it be an effective counterbalance to global terrorism? This paper will analyze the strategy of democratization, outline the challenges of pursing such a plan in the Middle East, and recommend ways and means to improve the United States' strategy for the region.

THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

The goal of the United States' 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) is to make the world safer and better through political and economic reform. To achieve its objectives, the strategy advances the goals of open societies and the building of democratic infrastructure.[1] U.S. national objectives are: defending the nation against its enemies, creating of a balance of power that favors human freedom, and extending the hope of democracy and development to every corner of the world.[2] The objective in the Middle East is to defend the United States by promoting regional stability through an agenda of political, social/cultural, and economic reform. Ways to achieve national objectives in the region include expanding trade, investment in entrepreneurial businesses, promotion of democratic institutions, education and expansion of

the role of women in society, and development of global information technology. The strategy also exploits intangible means – in President Bush's words: "to unleash the potential of their people."[3]

The Middle East[4]



Since the publication of the 2002 National Security Strategy, the Bush administration has increasingly championed democratization as a strategy for Middle East security. In the administration's view, as long as the Middle East remains a place devoid of freedom, it will continue to breed instability, cultivate terrorism, and pose a direct threat to the security of the United States. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the approach toward reform was direct and unambiguous – regime change. In Afghanistan, the ruling Taliban party provided sanctuary for an international terrorist organization which perpetrated the September 11 attacks. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein's regime was judged to pose a threat to national security through continued violations of United Nations' Security Council resolutions, by suspected links to terrorist organizations, and by assumed (yet unproven) possession of weapons of mass destruction. Free elections followed in both countries and provide examples that the administration hopes will become beacons of democracy for others in the region to follow. As President Bush remarked at a speech to the Army War College in 2003:

> The rise of a free and self-governing Iraq will deny terrorists a base of operation, discredit their narrow ideology, and give momentum to reformers across the region. This will be a decisive blow to terrorism at the heart of its power, and a victory for the security of America and the civilized world.[5]

While their future is far from certain, it is difficult to argue that people were better off under the removed oppressive regimes of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Bush administration hopes that the sculpting of democracy in these two nations will encourage citizens of other repressed nations to rise up, decry tyranny and induct freely elected governments.

DEMOCRACY

Before we analyze the strategy for democratization, it is useful to discuss the principles of democracy itself. Democracy is a system of government where the people hold sovereign power over the government. Certain principles and practices distinguish democratic government: power and civic responsibility exercised by all citizens; protection of human freedom; majority rule coupled with individual and minority rights; protection of basic human rights; free and fair elections; adherence to the rule of law; and a commitment to the values of tolerance, cooperation, and compromise.[6] While the Bush administration acknowledges that Western liberal democracy practiced in the United States is not a strict template for all nations, the above general principles are largely what it seeks in advancing its forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East and elsewhere. As President Bush proclaimed in his second term inauguration address:

> So 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.[7]

The United States endeavors to bring change to the Middle East buoyed by three decades of successful democratic reform in other regions of the globe. Beginning in 1974, the world witnessed what Samuel Huntington has termed a “third wave” of democratization with the downfall of authoritarian rule in Southern Europe and Latin America.[8] In 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, democracy spread throughout Central and Eastern Europe. The United States pursued an aggressive policy of democratic aid to bolster reform in these regions. By the end of the 1990s, the United States was spending over $700 million a year on democratic assistance around the world.[9] Democratic aid programs focused almost exclusively on

reforming the institutions of democracy – elections, legislature, and judiciary. It very much sought to impose the American template of democracy by remodeling state institutions in a top down approach. In most cases, the targeted nations were conducive to change. The political, social, and economic conditions closely approximated Western liberal standards and the "institutional modeling"[10] reform methodology met with success.

A SURVEY OF POLITICAL FREEDOM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A strategy of democratization faces many large challenges in the Middle East. The territory remains the only region of the world relatively untouched by the wave of democratic reform. Freedom House, a non-profit democracy advocate organization, produces an annual assessment of the state of freedom across the world. The survey measures freedom based on political rights and civil liberties. An evaluation of the institutions of freedom in the Middle Eastern states over the past five years is tabulated on the following page.

Of the 18 Middle Eastern states surveyed, Israel is the only "free" nation. Only 5 are categorized as "partially free" - Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Yemen. The analysis also indicates only limited expansion of democratic freedoms over the evaluated period with only Bahrain and Yemen moving from "not-free" to "partially free." Overall, the Freedom House assessment paints a bleak portrait of democracy in the region; there have been only minor advances of civil and political freedoms since the study began in 1972.

An assessment of the political landscape in the Middle East presents a wide variety of governments across the region. Republics exists in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen; monarchies rule in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; Iran is led by an Islamic theocracy; and Libya is best characterized as a military dictatorship. Israel is the sole democracy. Overall, most countries in the region have not bothered with even the trappings of democracy, while a number of those that did so have seen their democratic experiments relapse into increasingly authoritarian regimes.[11]

Freedom House Assessment of Freedom in the World[12]

Year	2000			2001			2002			2003			2004		
	PR	CL	Status	PR	CL	Status	PR	CL	Status	PR	CL	Status	PR	CL	Status
Algeria	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF
Bahrain	7	6	NF	6	5	NF	5	5	PF	5	5	PF	5	5	PF
Egypt	6	5	NF	6	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	5	NF
Iran	6	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	6	NF
Iraq	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	5	NF	7	5	NF
Israel	1	2	F	1	3	F	1	3	F	1	3	F	1	3	F
Jordan	4	4	PF	5	5	PF	6	5	PF	5	5	PF	5	4	PF
Kuwait	4	5	PF	4	5	PF	4	5	PF	4	5	PF	4	5	PF
Lebanon	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF
Libya	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF
Morocco	5	4	PF	5	5	PF	5	5	PF	5	5	PF	5	4	PF
Oman	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF
Qatar	6	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	5	NF
Saudi Arabia	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF
Syria	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF	7	7	NF
Tunisia	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF
UAE	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	5	NF	6	6	NF	6	6	NF
Yemen	5	6	NF	6	6	NF	6	5	NF	5	5	PF	5	5	PF

"F," "PF," and "NF," respectively, stand for "free," "partly free," and "not free."
"PR" stands for "political rights," "CL" stands for "civil liberties," and "Status" is the freedom status.
PR and CL are measured on a 1 to 7 scale, with 1 representing the highest degree of freedom and 7 the lowest

Of the nations categorized as "partially free" by the Freedom House study, significant shortcomings still exist in the realm of civil and political freedoms. None of the countries have the ability to choose their national leader. Bahrain, a hereditary monarchy, reformed its political system in 2002 to permit parliamentary elections. The king, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, remains the head of all three branches of government. He appoints all cabinet ministers as the lawmakers of the land. The National Assembly consists of 40 popularly elected members and 40 members of the Shura Council appointed by the king.[13] Jordan, a constitutional monarchy, has held free parliamentary and municipal elections for over a decade. King Abdullah directly appoints members to the upper house which restricts initiation of any undesirable legislation.[14] In Kuwait, the al-Sabah family rules a hereditary monarchy. Free elections seat the 50 member National Assembly, but the emir clearly sets the government's policy agenda. Morocco, also a constitutional monarchy, held parliamentary and municipal elections in 2002 and 2003 respectively. King Muhammed VI retains ultimate authority and since a series of suicide bombings in 2003, his government has engaged in a security crackdown that has prompted

criticism from media and human rights organizations.[15] In 1999, Yemen held its first ever presidential election followed by free parliamentary elections. However, the appearance of an open democratic process is misleading. Yemeni politics are fraught with corruption, dominated by the ruling party, and lack any checks and balances on executive authority. [16]

Egypt has witnessed a growing chorus of demands for political change. In 2003, the government initiated a series of limited reforms: abolishing state security courts and hard-labor prison sentences; initiating a wide-ranging dialogue with legal opposition parties; and tolerating more open discussion of previously taboo topics.[17] Syria's firm control continues to be the greatest impediment to freedom in Lebanon. The Lebanese president is formally selected every six years by the 128-member parliament. In practice, however, this choice is made after Syrian authorization. Freedom of religion is guaranteed and protected in the Lebanese constitution. The country's universities are the region's most open and vibrant.[18] These "partially-free" nations currently represent the best opportunity for a democratization strategy in the Middle East. In other countries, the prospects are much less promising.

In recent years, Libya has sought to climb out of international isolationism through two symbolic acts – the surrendering of Pan Am 103 bombing suspects and the regime's decision last year to end its weapons of mass destruction program. While this newfound accountability has resulted in the lifting of United Nations sanctions in September 2003, the Qadhafi regime remains a dictatorship by any measure. The government forbids opposition political parties, controls all broadcast and print media, and severely restricts freedoms of speech and assembly.[19] In Syria, President Bashar Assad wields absolute authority and continues to suppress civil and political liberties. The ruling Baath Party nominates the sole presidential candidate and applies a heavy hand over parliamentary elections. The most recent elections in 2003 were boycotted by five opposition groups.[20] Iran's leader is nominated by the assembly of Shi'a clerics and President Khatami is largely a puppet of the Islamic state. Candidates for parliament must pledge strict allegiance to the ruling theocracy and agree to govern by strict Islamic principles. Since 2000, Iran has shut down over 100 reformist newspapers and severely restricted external information sources.[21] Finally, in Saudi Arabia the al-Saud monarchy rules with absolute authority. Until recent municipal elections – in which women were forbidden to participate – it had never held elections at any level. In the wake of recent internal crises, Saudi Arabia has placed severe restrictions on political and civil freedoms

A MORE PATIENT STRATEGY

The extreme course of regime change is certainly not appropriate for all countries in the region and the Bush administration appears willing to adopt a more patient, grass roots program of change in other Middle East nations. In a speech to the Heritage Foundation in December 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell articulated a more systematic approach to reform in the Middle East:

> At the same time, it has become increasingly clear that we must broaden our approach to the region if we are to achieve success. In particular, we must give sustained and energetic attention to economic, political, and educational reform. The spread of democracy and free markets, fueled by the wonders of the technological revolution, has created a dynamo that can generate prosperity and human well-being on an unprecedented scale. But this revolution has left much of the Middle East behind.[22]

To achieve more enduring ways and means to economic, political and economic reform, the Bush administration has sponsored two initiatives aimed directly at advancing democratic expansion: the Millennium Challenge Account and the Broader Middle East Initiative.

In 2002, the United States established the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) to reward nations that "govern justly, invest in their people and encourage economic freedom".[23] The MCA focuses on reducing poverty by promoting sustainable economic growth. As a bilateral program, the MCA requires a high level commitment from recipient nations to develop shared objectives and guarantee civil society participation. In January 2004, President Bush signed the law creating the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), authorizing it to administer the MCA and providing $1 billion in initial funding for FY04. The administration has pledged to increase funding for the MCA to $5 billion a year starting in FY06, roughly a 50 percent increase over the current U.S. core development assistance.[24] While the MCA focuses primarily on economic aid to developing African nations, the program is clearly aimed at a larger agenda of political reform. At a May 2004 MCA selection ceremony, President Bush remarked:

> The powerful combination of trade and open markets and good government is history's proven method to defeat poverty on a large scale, to vastly improve health and education, to build a modern infrastructure while safeguarding the environment, and to spread the habits of liberty and enterprise.[25]

The program's prerequisites for "just governance" have excluded most Middle East nations from participation. To date, only Morocco has qualified. Yemen has been designated as a "threshold" country having demonstrated a significant commitment to improve their performance with respect to the MCA eligibility criteria.[26] For the Middle East, the MCA presents a "chicken or the egg" dilemma. While it aims to build the foundations of democracy – economic freedom, investment in society, and poverty reduction – it excludes unreformed nations. For the time being, the MCA appears beyond the reach of non-democratic Middle Eastern countries and the program is not likely to entice widespread reform in the region.

At the June 2004 G-8 Summit, President Bush announced the Broader Middle East Initiative (BMEI) as a pillar of the administration's strategy for economic, political, and educational development in the region.[27] The initiative commits "to a partnership for progress and a common future with the governments and peoples of the Broader Middle East and North Africa."[28] The policy focuses on three areas. First, in the political sphere, the agenda seeks to promote democracy, the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms, diversity and pluralism. Second, in the social and cultural sphere, it advances education, freedom of expression, equality between men and women, and access to global information technology as tools for modernization and prosperity. The final focus area, in the economic sphere, encourages entrepreneurship, expands trade and investment, and promotes transparency to combat corruption.[29]

In December 2004, foreign, finance, and economic ministers from the G-8 and Middle Eastern states met in Rabat, Morocco for the inaugural "Forum for the Future" to discuss BMEI political, economic, and social reform strategies. Forum participants endorsed the following actions: Democracy Assistance – providing electoral assistance, improving the role of women, and advancing relations between the region's governments and civil society through programs and projects supporting democratization and public participation. Literacy – advancing the region's efforts to halve the illiteracy rate over the next decade and improve education, especially for girls and women. International Finance – establishing the International Finance Corporation's Private Enterprise Partnership for the Middle East and North Africa facility to support small and medium-sized enterprises. Entrepreneurship – establishing two entrepreneurship centers in Morocco and Bahrain by 2005 to provide the region's young people with professional opportunities and job skills. Microfinance – establishing a consultative group and opening a technical hub and microfinance training center in Jordan by 2005. Investment – increasing investment in the region to spur economic growth and create jobs. A task force will

work with the region's governments and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to remove impediments to investment.[30]

Armed with concrete strategies resulting from the Rabat conference, the Broader Middle East Initiative program appears to have moved beyond the "bumper-sticker" phase and is now poised to undertake the crucial work of building the mechanisms of reform. Despite its good intentions and current traction however, the initiative still faces larger challenges toward producing the desired end state of a democratic Middle East.

CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRATIZATION

RELIGION

Many observers attribute the region's reluctance to democratize to its culture and traditions, particularly Islam. Some take the argument further – that the very principles of Islam prohibit the institution of a liberal democracy. Three cogent issues arise from any discussion of democracy and Islam – sovereignty, consultative decision making, and unbounded freedom. In the Quran, God is the sovereign and primary law giver. His earthly agents enjoy marginal autonomy necessary to implement and enforce His laws. His power is universal (non-territorial), transcendental (beyond human agency), and absolute.[31] Thus, jurists might argue, the very concept of free elections is foreign. Leaders are selected only through heredity, coup, or clerical arbitration. Reformers would argue that the Muslim world badly needs some human sovereignty – dictators and egocentric monarchs cannot continue to use a divine mandate to legitimize governments that are not accountable to their citizens.

The second issue rests in the conflict between democracy and shura – the Islamic decision making process. In a representative democracy, officials are elected by popular ballot. Representatives make decisions and pass laws, in theory, based on consultation with and consensus from their population. Under Islamic law, the Quran provides two conflicting interpretations concerning consultative decision making – it may be obligatory or merely desirable.[32] In the more authoritarian regimes of the Middle East, traditional Islamic scholars and leaders do not endorse consultation as a prerequisite to validate executive decision making. Many Muslim activists consider democracy to be the rule of humans as opposed to Islam, which is the rule of God.[33]

Lastly, the question of individual freedoms is sometimes at odds with familiar democratic precepts. Many Islamists strongly reject articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which deal with equality of marriage rights and freedom to change one's religion or belief. They also object to the provisions on women's rights, questioning the equality of gender roles and

obligations. Islam, they argue, prohibits the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man. Apostasy is forbidden and is punishable by death.[34]

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze Islam and its adaptability or inflexibility vis-à-vis democracy, it is important to account for the hand it plays in Middle Eastern politics. Islam, unlike any other world religion, permeates the very fabric of Middle Eastern culture and lifestyle. It is impossible to separate religion from Middle Eastern politics – and any attempt to democratize the region without consideration for the underlying foundation of Islam would be imprudent. However, experts generally agree that Islam and democracy are not mutually exclusive groups. At least 750 million Muslims live in democratic societies of one kind or another, including Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Europe, North America, and Israel.[35] As President Bush remarked in a November 2003 speech:

> Peoples in the Middle East share a high civilization, a religion of personal responsibility, and a need for freedom as deep as its own. It is not realism to suppose that one-fifth of humanity is unsuited to liberty; it is pessimism and condescension, and we should have none of it.[36]

One need only look to Indonesia where the world's largest Muslim population held democratic elections in 2004. Islam is not an insurmountable barrier to democracy. On the contrary, the fundamental beliefs of human dignity and freedom are well within the teachings of Islam. In establishing the compact of Medina, Muhammad demonstrated a democratic spirit in drawing up a constitution and seeking the consent of all who would be affected by its implementation.[37] Often the dilemma lies not in the traditions of Islam, but in the broader context of history, politics, modernity and culture.

A DEMOCRATIC ISLAMIST STATE

The unspoken danger of promoting democracy in the Middle East is the possible election of a fundamentalist Islamic government. Democracy may unleash radical forces currently under the control of monarchs and authoritarian regimes. Arab elites do not share the Western strategy of democratic change to combat extremism and are not convinced that opening up Arab political systems to popular choice would serve Western or their own security interests.[38] Some argue that the more popular Arab politics become, the more Islamic they will be – and it may spell the demise of democracy in the region. The Islamic revival reduces even further the likelihood of democratic development, particularly since democracy is often identified with the very Western influences the revival strongly opposes.[39] Therefore, United States' efforts to

democratize the Middle East may produce the unintended consequence of a democratically elected Islamist state with stronger anti-American policies.

Democracy cannot be modeled after a Western liberal paradigm. If the United States is truly interested in a democratic process to elect Middle Eastern leaders, it should prepare to weather the installation of a more authoritarian, unfriendly Islamic regime. If democracy is viewed not as an immediate end state, but as a journey toward eventual reform, the United States must be patient and accept the inevitable detours. Perhaps America must tolerate the election of an Islamist government as a natural progression toward democracy. Unless the U.S. is willing to commit all elements of national power – including military force – to overthrow democratically elected Islamic governments, it should anticipate this possibility. And while it may be viewed as an unfortunate outcome of the U.S. democratization policy, such a deviation may be necessary to expose authoritarian, extremist governments as flawed models which will ultimately fail and lead more secular democracies.

DOUBLE STANDARDS

Another challenge is the perception that the United States is hypocritical. For years America has tolerated non-democratic, unreforming Middle Eastern allies, trading liberty for stability. It was often more convenient to befriend autocrats than condemn them for their oppressive policies. America's new-found enlightenment may be undermined by a record of defaulting to the higher politics of oil, military basing rights, and alliances of convenience. The application of double standards – supporting friendly Arab nations like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, while censuring others for similar infringements of political freedom, civil liberties and human rights – undermines U.S. standing as the champion of universal freedom.

The current war on terrorism has further fueled the argument as the United States indulges Pakistan (self-appointed military government) and Uzbekistan (repressive authoritarian government) as convenient neighbors in the Afghanistan war. Treatment of prisoners in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay – justified or not – has tarnished America's standing as a defender of human rights. Finally, the issue of favoritism toward Israel is central to the Arab states' claim of an uneven United States policy in the region.

PALESTINE

Perhaps the most significant barrier to democracy's future is the Israel-Palestine conflict. U.S. policy too often ignores the relevance of the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process as an impediment to broader reform and regional security issues. As Hesham Yussef, Director of the Arab League Secretary's office warns: "It is unacceptable to speak of any initiative or vision

which ignores or relegates the Palestinian cause…and to discuss security questions without speaking of Israeli weapons of mass destruction."[40] For many Arabs, the conflict transcends foreign policy and a failure to first address the issue erodes any peripheral approach to regional reform.

Every president since 1947 has felt a special commitment to Israel's security that has not been matched by a comparable commitment to any other state in the region. Many Arabs perceive the United States media and policy-makers as dominated by the Zionist lobby. United States policy in the region is viewed as biased through the sanctioning acts of Israeli aggression, unwavering support and funding for Israeli policy, and a general dehumanization and indifference toward the plight of the Palestinian people.[41] The Bush administration has largely adopted a laissez faire approach to the Middle East peace process and in the course allowed Israel's continued suppression of the Palestinian resistance. The United States' long standing refusal to allow consideration for the Palestinian Liberation Organization's agenda and, on balance, a biased sponsorship for the Israeli state, continues to send a destructive message to the neighboring Arab nations.

The June 2004 G-8 initiative recognized the dispute as an important element for progress in the region, but avoided defining it as an obstacle to reform. Conversely, Palestine is agenda item number one on the Arab League's 2004 Tunis Declaration. The recent passing of Yassar Arafat presents a window of opportunity to reengage the Middle East peace process and perhaps, an opening for the United States to moderate its policy toward Palestine and its neighboring Arab states. While the United States' relationship with Israel remains vital and enduring, it should recognize that any partiality creates a roadblock to open dialogue on broader regional security issues. If the United States desires to engage Middle Eastern countries in serious dialogue concerning political reform, it must gain some measure of standing among Arab states as an impartial arbiter of regional issues.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The Middle East lacks the basic socio-economic elements of civil society that many experts claim as a necessary precursor to democratic reform. Middle Eastern leaders retain sufficient political, economic and cultural sources of legitimacy to overpower any potential appeal that budding civil society organizations might have. The region's leaders are successful in keeping key social groups satisfied and discouraged from indirectly undermining their own interests.

The continued emphasis on rote learning ill-prepares youth for jobs in the modern economy. It is not accidental that many Middle Eastern regimes fail to promote modern education as a well-educated and knowledgeable population is demanding and critical – qualities that are counter to the longevity of authoritarian rule. Illiteracy rates are higher than the international average and even higher than the average in developing countries.[42] Problems in quality and relevance have led to a significant mismatch between the developing needs of the labor market and the output of Arab education systems.[43]

The Arab world has the highest unemployment rates in the world – ranging from 12% in the most developed countries to over 30% in Yemen and Syria.[44] The region lags behind the rest of the world in their acceptance and introduction of a global economy. As the gap widens, the resistance to reform seemingly grows as the inconsonance breeds resentment and a desire to return to Islamic authoritarianism.

At some point in the transition to democracy, an educated civil society must develop and play a role in influencing the political system. Many experts maintain that civil society frequently develops first, and is in fact the most important vehicle of reform. Civil society organizations tend to develop in response to an actual or perceived breakdown in the functions of the state and emerge chiefly to satisfy those needs and functions which the state has been unable or unwilling to deliver.[45] In the Middle East however, authoritarian leaders have effectively tied their identity to the region's most powerful social groups – namely religious organizations – thus restraining much of society's independence and autonomy.

The existence of autonomous civil society organizations is only a first step – their ability to detach themselves from authoritarian rule and act as agents of democratic reform is a much more difficult proposition. Despite the suffering of Middle Eastern states under a global economy, the region's leaders have failed to embark upon liberalization programs to transfer greater autonomy to civil society. They have been able to maintain power and remain largely unaffected by societal and international pressures to reform. The state continues to present itself as an extension and indeed a guardian of some of society's most important norms.[46]

ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT U.S. POLICY

Despite the many challenges that dim the prospects for a successful democratization policy, the Bush administration continues to advance the program as a centerpiece of its counter-terrorism strategy. The U.S. objective in the Middle East is to defend the United States by promoting regional stability through an agenda of political, social/cultural, and economic reform. Programs like the Broader Middle East Initiative provide the ways and means to

achieve national objectives by promoting democratic institutions, expanding trade, investing in entrepreneurial businesses, expanding the role of women in society, and spreading global information technology. The initiative advances the U.S. National Security Strategy's stated objectives: creating of a balance of power that favors human freedom, and extending the hope of democracy and development to every corner of the world. In the political sphere, the initiative specifically addresses the NSS aim of opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy. The program also seeks to achieve the U.S. intention of igniting economic growth through free markets and trade by encouraging entrepreneurship and enlarging regional trade and investment.

If enacted to its full promise, the BMEI provides a solid roadmap to regional reform. It addresses the criticism that democracy cannot be imposed, it must arise from within. The initiative seeks to address the perceived inadequacies in the Middle East that have to date prevented the region from embracing the benefits of freedom and globalization. By attacking the root causes the initiative hopes to reverse the downward spiral of instability that breeds transnational threats.

The Middle East represents a region largely different from the West in principles of religion, culture, and governance. Any attempt to impose a United States style of model democracy in the region would certainly meet strong resistance and promulgate the perception of an imperialistic America seeking to deconstruct Islamic rule. The Broader Middle East Initiative compensates for this perception by acknowledging that, "successful reform depends on the countries in the region, and change should not and cannot be imposed from outside."[47] The proposal seeks to manufacture democracy from the ground up by invigorating underdeveloped social and economic systems. At the December 2004 Rabat conference, ministers from G-8 and Middle East nations agreed upon an aggressive agenda to reverse the trends that increasingly separate the Middle East from the rest of the world. The forum established programs for democracy assistance, literacy, international finance and investment, and entrepreneurship. It is hoped that a strong investment in the future of the Middle East will yield a stable, democratic region. The Middle East Initiative model may represent the only true hope for peaceful democratic reform in the region. It recognizes that the process is evolutionary, not revolutionary. It rejects the old model of imposing American institutions as inappropriate for a region of the world suspicious of U.S. intentions. Rather, it seeks to leverage the 2004 Tunis Declaration of the Arab League Summit, which declared:

> Endeavor, based on the Declaration on the process of reform and modernization in the Arab world, to pursue reform and modernization in our countries, and to

> keep pace with the rapid world changes, by consolidating the democratic process, by enlarging participation in political and public life …by widening women's participation (and) reinforcing their rights and status in society …

As the declaration states, the region seeks nearly the exact same objectives as the Bush administration's Middle East policy initiative. The BMEI facilitates and endorses Arab self-determination toward a more democratic rule. However, the ambitious proposal faces huge obstacles to effect measurable change. Chasms in culture, ideals and politics, along with U.S. military interventions in the region create conditions of mistrust, contempt and hatred. The same Tunis Declaration that championed reform and modernization denounced the U.S. as an occupation force in violation of Iraqi sovereignty. Thus, while America may be successful at imposing democracy through regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan, the region may not tolerate additional interventions and the U.S. should expect regional and international condemnation against further military. The BMEI offers the best, and arguably the only suitable strategy to bring about lasting reform in the region.

Even before it was officially unveiled, the draft version of the BMEI met with sharp criticism from the Arab League and European Union. The Arab League denounced the proposal as a unilateral attempt to impose Western values. It cautioned that any proposal must work hand-in-hand with Arab counties if it hopes to achieve a true partnership for change.[48] Consequently, the initiative includes clear language concerning resolution of the Israeli-Palestine conflict, restoration of a sovereign Iraqi state, and the desire to support reform through multilateral cooperation. European governments objected to any independent U.S. policy in the region. They charged the initiative ignored the European Union's years of extensive efforts toward the same ends in the Southern Mediterranean under the 1995 Barcelona Process, which fosters cooperation on political reform, economic liberalization, and social dialogue.[49] The Bush administration quickly recognized the alienation that imperiled the initiative and restructured it to implement reform efforts through multilateral cooperation with the European and Arab partners. It acknowledged the vital role of European partners and the absolute necessity of Arab self-determination toward the regional reform process. Despite the amendment, some Arab countries categorically rejected the proposal. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak declared that external attempts to impose reform were delusional and would lead to anarchy. [50]

Given the voluntary nature of the proposal, how will the United States reach unwilling participants? The Bush administration relies on a domino theory – if democracy can gain a foothold in the region, others will follow. As Bush expressed in his 2004 State of the Union address: "We will finish the historic work of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, so those nations

can light the way for others, and help transform a troubled part of the world."[51] The theory relies heavily on the information tool of national security policy. It is the administration's hope that the example of democracy will inspire other nations to rise up, decry tyranny, and embrace freedom.

Arguably, the ultimate success or failure of the BMEI will rest with real commitment in the form of robust funding. The initiative is likely to draw upon existing funds and programs established under the United States' 2002 Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). The Bush administration has committed $129 million over the past two years to fund MEPI's economic, political, education, and women's pillars.[52] It has largely been viewed as a cautious project. Although it has made inroads toward education and women's rights, it has had no measurable effect on promoting political reform. The BMEI, with almost the exact same agenda, will likely suffer similar malaise unless it is better funded with an aid package tightly conditioned to measurable benchmarks of political reform.

DEMOCRATIZATION AS A STRATEGY TO COMBAT TERRORISM

The 2002 National Security Strategy affirms the importance of democracy to U.S. objectives by stating:

> …the national security strategy of the United States must start from these core beliefs and look outward for possibilities to expand liberty. 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.[53]

In the wake of September 11, the Bush administration has promoted democratization as a counterterrorism strategy. 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 strategy is idealistic and laden with the myriad challenges previously discussed. Undeterred by the ominous prospects for democratization in a defiant Middle East, the Bush administration continues to advance its forward strategy of freedom.

U.S. counterterrorism strategy should leverage all elements of national power – military, economic, diplomatic and information. At the point of the spear, the military should continue to hunt down and capture known and suspected terrorists worldwide. This approach however, is reactive and fails to address the fundamental causes of global terrorism. It is necessary to

adopt a much broader strategy to attack the root causes of terrorism and anti-American extremism – a strategy of political reform. The Bush administration's democratization policy, while admittedly idealistic, is perhaps the only effective strategy to produce lasting change in the Middle East and to counterbalance the threat of global terrorism emanating from the region.

The United States' strategy of democratization seeks to defeat the causes of terrorism through political and economic reform. The policy advances the creation of open societies and the building of democratic institutions. As stated in the 2002 National Security Strategy, the U.S. seeks to defend the nation against its enemies by creating the hope of democracy and development to every corner of the world.[54] Democracies give the people a voice and hold elected leaders accountable. They empower citizens to voice dissent and effect changes inside their country. It is the Bush administration's hope that by focusing on internal reform, Middle Eastern countries are less likely to direct blame and animosity against any perceived threat posed by the United States.

The institution of a democratic society supports adherence to the rule of law and a commitment to the values of tolerance. While the reform strategy will not completely eradicate Islamic fundamentalism and its terrorist byproduct, it is hoped that democracy will diminish the ideology as a conduit for extremism and anti-Americanism. Democratic states are generally stronger – they do not rely on fear and oppression to control their population. As we have seen in Afghanistan, weak and failing states are vulnerable to terrorist infiltration and pose a direct threat to national security. Democracies encourage the free flow of information and provide an alternative to the extremists' agenda of hate. Democracies are founded upon the ideals of human dignity and respect. The development of more open and representative political systems, broader economic opportunities, and empowerment of internal reformers provides an effective counterbalance to the agenda of Islamic extremists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States' promotion of democracy in the Middle East will have to rely on more than a bumper sticker slogan of a "forward strategy of freedom." It is naive to believe that waves of democracy are advancing in the world and will ultimately break upon the shores of the Middle East. The challenge is how to stimulate reform in a region where authoritarianism rules. Responding to this challenge will require a greater willingness to pressure authoritarian leaders who offer short-term economic and security benefits to the United States but spell long-term trouble.[55]

If the Bush administration hopes to achieve the strategic end of extending the hope of democracy and development to the Middle East, it must strengthen programs like the Broader Middle East Initiative by addressing several issues: First, the United States must challenge all nations, friends and foes alike, to reform in the areas of human rights and democratic rule. For democratization strategies to succeed, America cannot have more than one benchmark. It should expect the same standards of reform for human rights and democratic rule from Saudi Arabia and Egypt as it expects from "rogue states" like Iran and Syria. Second, the U.S. must forge ahead under the umbrella of multilateral cooperation and embrace the European Union and Arab nations as full partners on this venture of change. The United States, Europe, and the Arab League share key interests in the Middle East: better governance, defeating WMD proliferation and global terrorism, and improving economic and social conditions. As the United States designs its regional security strategy, it should not alienate or offend – the policy must promote cooperative reform with a keen respect for the trepidations of the reforming. There is no single prescription that will ensure a transition to democracy. In the vast and diverse Muslim world it will be necessary for the U.S. government to develop country-specific plans to promote democracy.[56] Third, reenergize the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. If the United States hopes to secure democratic reform in the Middle East, it must invigorate efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement and end the vicious cycle of violence. The dispute impedes Arab willingness to embrace broader foreign policy issues. Fourth, the U.S. must fund the initiative appropriately. If the U.S. is serious about instituting change in the region, rhetoric will not work. Robust economic aid, conditioned on measurable political and economic reform is critical to the program's success. Finally, America must be patient. As the G-8 Summit declares, reform will require a "generational commitment."[57] The United States and its allies must commit to a long-term venture while remaining content that the outcome is fundamentally unpredictable.

CONCLUSION

Can a strategy of democratization work in the Middle East? It partly depends on the definition of democracy. If it judges democracy strictly in Western liberal terms, the U.S. is likely to be disappointed. Perhaps what the United States seeks is not a model democracy but some measure of political reform. It may be wise to distill the concept of democracy into its constituent elements – free elections, strengthening civil society, judicial reform, accountable and transparent governance, and a respect for human dignity and the rule of law. It is overly optimistic to expect a sweeping and swift replacement of monarchs and dictators with freely elected democratic governments. Rather, the efforts should endorse and facilitate political

reform. The road ahead is uncertain and the U.S. should expect a protracted, generational period of transition. The strategy may not address the immediate crisis of Islamic extremism. Ultimately, the success of America's endeavors rests predominantly on the ability of individual societies to generate ideologies that can compete with Islamic fundamentalism within a democratic framework.[58]

Despite the many challenges, programs like the Broader Middle East Initiative provide the best ways and means to promote the National Security Strategy in the region. Information, financial, economic and diplomatic instruments of power are the most suitable, and arguably the only effective tools available to advance the durable prospects for freedom in the region. Democracy cannot be imposed overnight. It cannot be prescriptive or modeled upon a U.S. standard. As the Carnegie Institute's Thomas Carothers asserts: "Democratic change must be understood not as the reproduction of institutional endpoints, but as the achievement of a set of political processes that help engender a democratic process."[59] By providing aid to fragile economic institutions, financing private business enterprise, and empowering a knowledgeable, participative society, the United States may indeed foster democracy in the Middle East. Programs like the Broader Middle East Initiative offer a sensible agenda of ways and means to achieve the national security objective of extending democracy to a region of vital national interest. If pursued as part of a broader agenda of political and economic reform, democratization can reshape the environment in which terrorism prospers. By endorsing a "forward strategy of freedom" in the Middle East, the United States seeks to provide an alternative to the influence of extremism and counter the threat of global terrorism that threatens national security. The endeavor is both noble and necessary.

WORD COUNT= 7,226

ENDNOTES

[1] George W Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002), 2.

[2] Ibid., v.

[3] Ibid., iii.

[4] For purposes of this paper, the Middle East is defined as the region from Morocco eastward to Iran. It encompasses the 17 nations included under the United States' Middle East Partnership Initiative. Map available from <http://mepi.state.gov/c10128.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[5] George W. Bush, "Speech to the Army War College," 24 May 2004; available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040524-10.html>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[6] United States Department of State, "What is Democracy?," available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/principles/what.htm>; Internet; accessed 21 September 2004.

[7] George W. Bush, "Inauguration Address," 20 January 2005; available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[8] Peter J. Schraeder, ed. *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric vs. Reality* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 2.

[9] Thomas Carothers, "Democracy Promotion: A Key Focus in a New World Order," *Issues of Democracy* (May 2002); available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itdhr/0500/ijde/carothers.htm>; Internet; accessed 21 September 2004.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Lisa Anderson, "Arab Democracy: Dismal Prospects," *World Policy Journal* (Fall 2001); 54.

[12] Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Country Ratings," available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/allscore04.xls>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[13] Freedom House, "Freedom in the World: Bahrain," available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/bahrain.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[14] Freedom House, "Freedom in the World: Jordan," available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/jordan.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[15] Freedom House, “Freedom in the World: Morocco,” available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/morocco.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[16] Freedom House, “Freedom in the World: Yemen,” available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/yemen.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[17] Freedom House, “Freedom in the World: Egypt,” available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/egypt.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

[18] Freedom House, “Freedom in the World: Lebanon,” available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/lebanon.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

[19] Freedom House, “Freedom in the World: Libya,” available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/libya.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[20] Freedom House, “Freedom in the World: Syria,” available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/syria.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[21] Freedom House, “Freedom in the World: Iran,” available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/iran.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[22] Colin L. Powell, “The U.S. – Middle East Partnership Initiative: Building Hope for the Years Ahead,” December 22, 2002; available from <http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/hl772.cfm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[23] The White House, “The Millennium Challenge Account,” available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/developingnations/print/millennium.html>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[24] Millennium Challenge Corporation, “The Millennium Challenge Account,” available from <http://www.mca.gov/about_us/overview/index.shtml>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[25] George W. Bush, “Remarks at Ceremony Celebrating Countries Selected for the Millennium Challenge Account,” 10 May 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/rm/32399.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[26] Millennium Challenge Corporation, “Threshold Countries,” available from <http://www.mca.gov/countries/threshold/index.shtml>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[27] The program’s full title is “Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative.” Prior to the 2004 G-8 announcement, the program was widely known as the “Greater Middle East Initiative”.

[28] Sea Island Summit 2004, “Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa,” 9 June 2004; available from <http://www.g8usa.gov/d_060904c.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Department of State, “Accomplishments of the First Forum For Future,” 11 December 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/39676.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

[31] United States Institute of Peace, “Islam and Democracy, Special Report 93,” available from <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr93.html>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[32] M.A. Muqtedar Khan, “Shura and Democracy,” available from <http://www.ijtihad.org/shura.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005. Shura is a consultative decision making process that is considered either obligatory or desirable by Islamic scholars. Those scholars who choose to emphasize the Quranic verse: "..and consult with them on the matter" (3:159) consider shura as obligatory, but those scholars who emphasize the verse wherein "those who conduct their affairs by counsel" (43:38) are praised, consider shura as desirable.

[33] United States Institute of Peace, “Islam and Democracy, Special Report 93.”

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] George W. Bush, “Speech on Iraq Policy at Whitehall Palace in London,” available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031119-1.html>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[37] United States Institute of Peace, “Islam and Democracy, Special Report 93.”

[38] Thomas Carothers, “Democracy’s Sobering State,” available from <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/pdf/CurHistTC.pdf>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[39] Anderson, 53-54.

[40] Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, “The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief 29* (March 2004): 2.

[41] Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “Islamist Perceptions of U.S. Policy in the Middle East,” in *The Middle East and the United States*, ed. David W. Lesch (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003), 478.

[42] United Nations Development Program, *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (Amman: National Press), 51.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Alan Richards, *Socio-Economic Roots of Radicalism? Towards Explaining the Appeal of Islamic Radicals* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, July 2003), 14.

[45] Mehran Kamrava and Frank O. Mora, "Civil Society and Democratisation in Comparative Perspective: Latin America and Middle East," *Third World Quarterly* (December 1998); 893 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 19 January 2005.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Sea Island Summit 2004.

[48] Ottaway and Carothers, 2.

[49] International Crisis Group, "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperiled at Birth," *Middle East and North Africa Briefing* (7 June 2004): 5.

[50] Marina Ottaway, "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: A Hollow Victory for the United States," available from <http://www.ceip.org/files/publications/ 2004-06-15ottawayARB.asp>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[51] George W. Bush, "State of the Union Address," 20 January 2004; available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040120-7.html>; Internet; accessed 16 September 2004.

[52] Department of State, "Middle East Partnership Initiative," available from <http://mepi.state.gov>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

[53] Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 3-4.

[54] Ibid., v.

[55] Carothers, "Democracy's Sobering State."

[56] United States Institute of Peace, "Islam and Democracy, Special Report 93."

[57] Sea Island Summit 2004.

[58] Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Prospects of Democratization in the Arab World: Global Diffusion, Regional Demonstration, and Domestic Imperatives," in *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Volume 1, Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Rex Brynen et al. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 326.

[59] Thomas Carothers, "Democracy Promotion: A Key Focus in a New World Order," Issues of Democracy (May 2000); available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itdhr/0500/ijde/ carothers.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 February 2005.

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