



Old Problems, New Solution

The Role of Democratization in U.S. Policy in the Middle East

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***“No one exists even for an instant
without performing action;
however unwilling, every being is forced
to act by the qualities of nature.”***

-- The Bhagavad Gita

***“Though fixed usages may be best for undisturbed
communities, constant necessities of action must be
accompanied by the constant improvement of methods.”***

-- Thucydides

A Note on Transliteration of Arabic Words and Names

I have used a simplified system for transliterating Arabic in the text – in cases where a term or name is more commonly recognized by a spelling that is different from that system, I have used the more common spelling. For example, I have written “al-Qaeda” instead of “al-Qa’ida” even though the latter is a more accurate transliteration. I have also written *shamsi* letters and *qamri* letters in the same style for the sake of simplicity, with names like Al-Seif instead of As-Seif. The following simplified system uses certain English letters to represent several Arabic letters, but generally follows the traditional rules of more sophisticated transcription methods:

ء – ‘
ا – a
ب – b
ت – t
ث – th
ج – j
ح – h
خ – kh
د – d
ذ – dh
ر – r
ز – z
س – s
ش – sh
ص – s
ض – d
ط – t
ظ – dh
ع – ‘
غ – gh
ف – f
ق – q
ك – k
ل – l
م – m
ن – n
ه – h
و – w/u
ي – y/i

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Introduction: Reviving the Democratic Imperative

"For 60 years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East –and we achieved neither. Now, we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people."

-Condoleezza Rice

An increased emphasis on democracy promotion in the Middle East over the past decade has returned few positive results for the United States. Originally inspired to foster democratization by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the George W. Bush administration failed to transfer its rhetoric on democracy to effective policy. After setbacks to the so-called freedom agenda in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories, democracy promotion was essentially dismissed as a pipe dream. However, the Middle East is possibly in greater need of political reform now than ever before. Growing radicalism and years of conflict and instability have left the area in a turmoil that cannot be alleviated by the corrupt, autocratic leaders that govern with no popular support or legitimacy. In order to retain the favorable position the United States occupies in the Middle East, policymakers must now be concerned with the internal politics of Middle Eastern states. The entrenched autocratic regimes currently in place are entirely inadequate to meet the challenges of the region today. The most effective way to address these challenges is to promote political and economic liberalization in the region with the ultimate goal of democratization.

The course of American foreign policy in the Middle East changed on the morning of September 11, 2001. The newly elected president, George W. Bush, had articulated a cautious, non-interventionist foreign policy during his campaign and in the

months leading up to the September 11 attacks. However, after September 11 the tone and substance of American security policy in the Middle East changed significantly into a bold new strategy of regional transformation and deep U.S. involvement. The 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States, which articulates the broad goals and methods of American security policy, is indelibly shaped by the events of September 11 and contains the chief themes of the Bush Administration's response to the attacks:

Enemies in the past needed great armies... to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us (National Security Strategy 2002).

Essentially, the NSS identifies terrorism, specifically global Islamic terrorism, as the most alarming threat to American security both in the present and the future. The events of September 11, 2001 changed the perception of that threat to the state: it now necessitated a response. The Bush Administration sought to combat terrorism by attacking its root causes; in other words, while simultaneously fighting existing terrorists, it would eliminate terrorism in the future by eliminating the forces that cause it. The root cause of terrorism is implicitly described in the NSS as a lack of freedom. The NSS asserts that the United States will eliminate terrorism once and for all by, among other efforts, "supporting moderate and modern government especially in the Muslim world, to ensure that the conditions and ideologies that promote terrorism do not find fertile ground in any nation" (National Security Strategy 2002). There is no mistaking the nature of the contest as perceived by the Bush Administration on the war against terrorism in which "we will never forget that we are ultimately fighting for our democratic values and way of life" (National Security Strategy 2002). In short, "freedom

and fear are at war," and the only way to defeat terrorism is to uproot and reform the repressive and illiberal societies that create it in the first place.

The fervor and reverence for the term *democracy* was largely a feature of the first Bush Administration and the first half of his second term in office. The latter part of the second Bush Administration saw democracy turn into a dirty word. As the Iraqi elections showed little positive results, a democratic election in Palestine brought Hamas legitimate political power, and elections in Lebanon saw Hizballah win two cabinet seats along with a large bloc of parliament, democracy appeared to be backfiring on the United States. In many parts of the world the Bush Administration's rhetoric on democracy was mockingly turned on its head, and prominent apologists of the so-called Freedom Agenda such as Paul Wolfowitz and Condoleezza Rice suddenly ceased to discuss democracy at all. Today in the early days of the Obama presidency, the promotion of democracy seems to be a secondary concern at best. Generally regarded as misguided and overzealous, democracy promotion takes a back seat while the government turns its attention to withdrawing from Iraq, stabilizing Afghanistan, and seeking reconciliation with Iran, which showed its true authoritarian colors in the stolen elections of Summer 2009. In the bitter aftermath of the Iraqi occupation, the violence between Hamas and Fatah, and the Israeli war with Hizballah in 2006, democracy promotion has been dismissed as fanciful adventurism.

Yet, the fact remains that the Middle East is in dire need of political reform, and few would deny this. American strategists were not incorrect to point out the underdeveloped and stagnant conditions in the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East. The Middle East today is a region dominated by self-serving autocratic regimes

that ignore the desperation of their populations and viciously oppress any opposition to their continued power. As noted in the United Nations Arab Human Development Report of 2009 the authoritarian governments of many Middle Eastern nations, "buttressed by flawed constitutions and unjust laws, often [deny] citizens their rights" (Arab Human Development Report 2009). Indeed, the Middle East stands out embarrassingly as a region of monarchies and autocracies in a world of democracies. Even as other regions of the world move towards democratization, the Middle East appears to have regressed over the last twenty years. Measurements of political liberalization from the late 1980s to the early years of this decade indicate that the Arab world has liberalized far less than any other part of the world; in fact, according to Freedomhouse the degree of rights and liberties in the Arab world decreased from 1987 to 2003 while it increased in all other regions of the world (Schlumberger 2006 35). Al-Qaeda, the terrorist group that organized and carried out the September 11 attacks, consists primarily of Arabs from repressive authoritarian regimes, most of them with close ties to the United States. All of the attackers themselves were from either Egypt or Saudi Arabia, two key allies to the U.S. in the region (Cleveland 2004 542). Their ideology is vehemently anti-democratic and anti-Western. Furthermore, al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups enjoy a surprising level of public sympathy in the Middle East, where the United States is detested and reviled for its policies in the region –namely, for its partnerships with corrupt regimes, its support of Israel, and its military operations in Iraq (Garfinkle 2004 197-201).

Though it would be inaccurate to attribute the current state of the Middle East entirely to American policy, there is little doubt that the United States has profoundly

influenced the region. American support has built and sustained the governments of many Middle Eastern nations, including Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan. American involvement in Middle Eastern affairs has had an undeniably significant effect on Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf states. Today's Middle East is clearly shaped by the United States and its interests. American involvement, or compliance, with political events in the region has helped to create the current environment that is now characterized by conflict, oppression, and extremism.

And yet, American policy still has the potential to influence the political landscape of the Middle East for the better. In the face of several early setbacks and many apparent difficulties, policymakers have mostly abandoned the cause of democracy promotion. In this paper I will argue that this abandonment is a mistake, and that it is time to review democratization as a security policy. American interests in the Middle East – secure flow of oil and gas from the Persian Gulf, stable commercial traffic from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, and the protection of key allies – remain, with the addition in the past decade of preventing incidents of terrorism, the same as they have for a generation, but the old model of cooperation with regional autocratic leaders has been showing its shortcomings for years. It has lost most of its utility, and should now be abandoned in favor of democratization. The following analysis will present a historical context for American security policy in the Middle East, and the role of democratization in it. Arguments will be presented for the relevance of democratization in the Middle East to American security. A critique of current and past attempts at democratization will make clear what shape an effective effort should take.

This thesis will argue that American foreign policy in the Middle East must turn away from the older model of using client regimes, and must promote liberalization and ultimately democratization in the region to protect its vital interests there. In the first chapter I will argue that American interests in the Middle East remain largely the same as they have since World War Two, but that our method of protecting these interests is rapidly becoming outdated. Systemic changes in the Middle East have weakened autocratic regimes allied with the United States. I will argue that nearly the entire region is facing a crisis of legitimacy in its leadership and that the continued security of American interests will depend on the resolution of that crisis.

The second chapter reviews previous efforts at democracy promotion in the Middle East with a particular focus on the George W. Bush administration. I identify two major impediments that prevented these past efforts from succeeding: a lack of commitment to the promotion of democracy, and a misunderstanding of its utility and implementation. I also explain why the failure of these efforts cannot be considered a failure of democracy promotion per se, but one of unclear and ill-conceived strategy.

In the third chapter I argue that democratization in the Middle East will most likely have to integrate Islamist movements if it is to succeed. I will show that Islamism as a movement is the most recent regional iteration of a resistance ideology that has roots in pan-Arabism and other post-colonial ideological movements. I contend that most Islamists are willing and able to aid the progress of liberalization and democratization in the Middle East, and that promoters of democracy will need to cooperate with Islamists throughout the region.

In the fourth chapter I discuss policy alternatives to democracy promotion. In order to clarify what course any sound policy in the region should take, I also consider certain conflicts of interest that may arise in democracy promotion. I present my view that no policy alternative to democracy promotion is adequate to retain long-term stability and combat regional extremism. I conclude that democracy promotion is generally the best policy option for the United States.

The fifth chapter contains a number of basic guidelines for a successful democracy promotion policy. I recommend that democracy promotion be implemented judiciously on a country-by-country basis, with a general focus on the protection of civil and personal liberties and the expansion of the arena of political contestation.

Democracy promotion in its early stages should not focus on elections or regime change, but on protecting human rights and the rule of law, and creating a pluralistic and healthy political environment. A sensible campaign of public diplomacy and resolution of hypocrisies in American policy will serve to improve the United States' credibility as a regional democracy promoter. In particular, ending human rights abuses such as extraordinary rendition of prisoners and taking a more even-handed approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict will serve to improve America's image in the region.

Many supporters of widespread democratization posit a moral argument for democracy as policy. By and large the arguments presented in this paper are amoral. This is in part a result of my own conviction that what is morally right in politics is far from clear, and that making decisions based on ethics tends to complicate rather than simplify policy dilemmas. There may be many sophisticated and nuanced arguments for including morality in political considerations, but the fact remains that states are

fundamentally self-interested. A policy that is both morally and politically expedient is obviously desirable, but morality alone rarely defines American strategy, and the Middle East is no exception. I will make no argument here that democracy is a superior system, or that it is morally more desirable than any other political system; instead, I will argue that democracy in the Middle East is desirable at present for American interests. Though it would be laudable, any improvement of American moral character through democracy promotion is ultimately a question of efficacy and not altruism.

Theoretical definitions of democracy can be highly nuanced and there are many existent forms of government that are labeled democracies though they are in fact quite different from each other. In general, by the term democracy I mean a form of government in which the populace elects its leadership, or at least a significant portion of it. Similar but more specific is a liberal democracy, which is a state in which the citizens have the power to choose their leaders and remove them through free and fair elections, and in which certain personal and civil liberties such as freedoms of speech and religion are protected by law. Additional common features of democracies, such as independent judiciaries and a civilian-controlled military are important – but not critical – factors. Though there may be illiberal democracies, unless otherwise noted I will use *democracy* and *liberal democracy* interchangeably. With the understanding that within the framework of these parameters there are myriad variations that may all be considered democracies, within the Middle East only Turkey and Israel resemble the above definition, though neither can be considered a perfect model of liberal democracy through the course of their history.

Democracy promotion is complex and presents a number of risks. Influence in the Middle East is a crucial part of American hegemony, and the region must be kept stable. Paradoxically, the key to stability today is change. The security provided by autocrats and illegitimate regimes was never truly reliable, and its repercussions are today's challenge to American policymakers. It is important to address these problems proactively to ensure that the outcomes favor the United States and its continued standing in the world. The expansion of political freedom in the corrupt autocracies that prevail throughout the Middle East will help to restore political legitimacy to states in crisis and to reduce the growth of extremism that threatens the rest of the world. American policy in the Middle East must address these issues and pragmatically adapt to changing circumstances, and that means devoting greater attention to democracy promotion.

I. Permanence and Shift: The Changing Relationship Between American Interests and Middle Eastern Realities

Though American interests in the Middle East have remained relatively constant since the end of the Second World War, American policy in the region must adapt to changing conditions to continue to protect those interests. While partnership with corrupt, autocratic regimes was sufficient to secure American interests in the past, it has become problematic and counterproductive, and the United States must now seek a different path in the region.

The present political and developmental state of the Middle East is often blamed, at least in part, on American security policy which has for decades supported draconian and oppressive regimes in the region. Within the Muslim world, blame is often assigned to the United States for the plight of the Palestinians, economic stagnation, and political repression (Dunne 2004 49-52). Extremists such as Usama bin Laden have found large audiences to listen to them decry the “Zionist-Crusader” alliance and the humiliation of Muslims at the hand of the United States (Kepel 2000 317-318). In the West, too, many see the United States as a contributor to Middle Eastern violence (Khoury 2009). Writers such as the New York *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman have identified American policy as a problematic source of violent extremism. Friedman even referred to the American government as a “customer” of the Saudi royal family (Friedman 2001).

Whether or not this is a fair assessment, the United States has undeniably had an influence on prevailing political conditions in the region. American involvement in the Middle East has been remarkably consistent, and American foreign policy interests there have changed little over the course of the last sixty to seventy years. Even today the

same strategy to secure these interests continues in effect, although the concept of democracy promotion has challenged it. As the hegemonic power in the Middle East since World War II, the United States has preferred the status quo – drastic change is not desirable because of the risk it might entail, a threat to American influence. Change is only desirable when it can increase American power or serve American goals in some other way.

The fundamental interests of the United States in the Middle East from the end of World War II to the present have remained essentially constant: the free flow of commercial traffic from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal and Gulf of Aden; secure access to the region's oil; the continuing security of key regional allies including, but not limited to, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt; and American naval and military presence in the Persian Gulf and at other key strategic points in the region. These interests have formed as a result of the American desire to maintain global hegemony – dominance in the Middle East is a key to the United States' hegemonic power, and Middle Eastern policy is shaped by this ultimate goal. Within the past decade, another concern – curtailing the threat of global Islamic terrorism emanating from the region – has become a vital American interest. There is widespread agreement that these core interests have shaped American foreign policy for the past generation. The factors that have changed are in response to developing and diminishing threats – more specifically, the older Cold War objective of containing communism in the region is now irrelevant, and the threat of terrorism is now in the forefront.

Though descriptions of U.S. objectives in the Middle East differ in detail, there is widespread agreement on what America's vital interests are. Tamara Cofman Wittes

describes the core post-War goals as “energy stability, maritime access, and the containment of communism” and in fact, these objectives have been essential components of Middle Eastern strategy (Wittes 2008 30). John S. Badeau identified these very same issues as vital American interests in his 1968 essay. According to Badeau, American interests in the Middle East were not shaped by conditions in the region per se, but they developed as “part of the problem of global defense... in which its strategic location gave the Middle East a highly significant role” (Badeau 1968 4). Middle Eastern policy was colored by the competition for global influence between the United States and the Soviet Union, emphasizing the strategic role of the region in relation to the rest of the world at the expense of attention to internal conditions there. Another related general objective of American policy, according to Badeau, must be “the maintenance of general stability” against the threat of change that could undermine the American global position (Badeau 1968 17). Under the two broader categories of containing Soviet influence and maintaining global stability, Badeau identified several primary interests of the United States, more specific and limited in their definition. First among these primary interests is access to the main routes of Middle Eastern communication and transport: “the unimpeded passage of the Suez Canal, and rights of overflight form an American interest at the present time so basic that any continued and serious threat would engender a strong response” (Badeau 1968 21). Comparable in importance to the security of key routes is “the interest in access to the petroleum supplies of the area” (Badeau 1968 21). Finally, “Reasonable tranquility within the area also bears upon American interests” (Badeau 1968 24). Tranquility here is defined in simplistic terms, according to which any conflict that does not threaten access to

petroleum and critical air and sea routes is not a major concern. However, it is clear that at least in the short term regional stability and a political status quo of some kind are desirable and complementary to greater American interests.

The Cold War shaped American objectives in the Middle East that have remained constant for decades. As early as 1947 the Central Intelligence Agency had identified Middle East oil as “essential to the security of the U.S.” (Hahn 2005 7). The Arab states, which make up the geographical heart of the Middle East, were of particular value “because of their oil resources, military facilities, and close proximity to the Soviet Union” (Hahn 2005 7). Furthermore, the interregional air and sea routes, including the Suez Canal, and other lines of transport and communication made the Middle East an important strategic and commercial zone (Hahn 2005 8). Middle Eastern policy was based on these interests and the use of regional agents to protect them. This approach to policymaking lasted through the entire Cold War.

As a resource-rich region at the convergence of three continents, the strategic relevance of the Middle East has survived the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Reflecting its continued significance in global politics, American interests in the area have remained remarkably constant. The 1998 National Security Strategy lists “lasting and comprehensive Middle East peace, ensuring the security and well-being of Israel, helping our Arab friends provide for their security, and maintaining the free flow of oil at reasonable prices” as “enduring interests” (NSS 1998 51). In more veiled terms, the document describes American military presence in the Persian Gulf as another key interest: “The United States must remain vigilant to ensure unrestricted access to [oil]... we will continue to demonstrate U.S. commitment and resolve in the Persian

Gulf” (NSS 1998 54). These objectives are framed clearly with the overarching goal of stability in the region; in other words, the United States is seeking to preserve a status quo that favors its dominance in the Middle East.

American methods for securing these interests have also remained relatively constant up until the present. Since World War II the United States has pursued a nearsighted policy in the Middle East, making stability and American security in the short term a priority over pushing for accountable leadership and long-term political and economic health of the region (Cleveland 2004 276). In the post-War era, the top American priority was containment of the Soviet Union, which was viewed as an opposing and expansionist force in the Middle East. The American policy response was simply to retain the strategic upper hand in the Middle East, and consequently the welfare and development of the Middle Eastern countries themselves was at best a secondary concern (Cleveland 2004 277). Non-democratic, and often repressive and illegitimate, regimes were considered acceptable partners in the region, so long as they were not communist. The United States sought to forge partnerships with Middle Eastern regimes that were able to protect its core interests. The essence of American policy was to “defend friendly regimes and contest adversarial ones” (Hahn 2005 46).

Among others, the United States relied on leaders such as Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, King Hussein in Jordan, Morocco’s King Hassan II, and the succession of kings in Saudi Arabia. These leaders opposed the Soviet Union, cooperated with the United States, and tended to have overlapping interests with the United States “such as the need for stable oil production, the desirability of Arab-Israeli peace, and the need to contain ambitious regional actors who might undertake local

adventures” (Wittes 2008 30). In general, this strategy of employing client regimes to maintain stability and preserve American hegemony yielded good results. In an interview in *The New Yorker*, former national security advisor Brent Scowcroft described the result of American strategy as “fifty years of peace” in the Middle East (Goldberg 2005 60). Insofar as this strategy was able to serve the basic American interests listed above, it must be considered a success. The United States has successfully ensured its military and naval dominance in the Middle East, it has protected the free flow of oil to the rest of the world, and it has developed close relationships with several key ally states whose strategic and economic cooperation have been beneficial.

However, it may be too glib to equate these successes with something as noteworthy as a generation of peace. While this interpretation may be accurate as far the United States and its narrow regional goals are concerned, Tamara Cofman Wittes rightly notes, “Residents of the Middle East might quarrel with that characterization” (Wittes 2008 30). Though the region was generally cooperative with the United States government on its main objectives, the second half of the 20th century can hardly be considered peaceful. In a comparison of the Middle East to East Asia, Etel Solingen calls the period after World War II to the beginning of the 21st century the *Bella Levantina* (Solinigen 2007 757). Since the end of the war, the Middle East has experienced “interstate wars, militarized interventions and mobilizations, invasions, shows of force, border clashes, and covert (violent) cross-border sub-version” (Solinigen 2007 757). Solingen lists 48 such conflicts involving every single country in the Middle East from 1962 to 2005 (Solinigen 2007 777). In spite of abysmal economic output, Middle Eastern governments had the highest military expenditures relative to GNP in the

world, 17.3% of GNP in 1985 and 7.7% in 2001, or nearly three times the world average (Solingen 2007 776). Though East Asia experienced high levels of conflict in the first two decades after World War II, “since 1965 the incidence of interstate wars and militarized conflicts was nearly five times higher in the Middle East” (Solingen 2007 758). Excluding wars in which the United States was a participant, there were four wars in the Middle East with over 10,000 casualties during this period, and only one in East Asia. These wars were not merely anomalous bloody rivalries. Every state in the Middle East has been involved in one or another militarized conflict since 1965 (Solingen 2007 758). The large number of cross-border incursions, state-sponsored assassination attempts, and the use of ballistic missiles and chemical weapons in combat add an even darker color to the picture of Middle Eastern conflict.

It is important to note that the Middle East and East Asia have taken such divergent paths, for the differences between the regions may help to illustrate the roots of Middle Eastern violence. In the years after World War II the political landscape throughout the Middle East and Asia was remarkably similar, characterized by:

colonialism as formative experiences, comparable state-building challenges, economic crises, low per-capita GNPs, heavy-handed authoritarianism, low intra- and extra-regional economic interdependence, and weak or nonexistent regional institutions capable of organizing cooperation (Solingen 2007 758).

And yet, in spite of these shared initial conditions, the two regions have since developed in significantly different ways. Solingen argues that this difference is not due to any cultural, geographical, or systemic factors, but that it is mostly a result of the differing styles of leadership that prevailed post-independence. While most East Asian states “pivoted their political control on economic performance and integration into the global economy,” Middle Eastern leaders built their power on “inward-looking self-sufficiency,

state and military entrepreneurship, and nationalism” (Solingen 2007 758). In short, the regimes that the United States supported generally pursued a political course that, though it may have benefited core American interests, contributed to overall regional conflict and instability. This instability, though it was tolerable for years, has contributed to the crises that today breed extremism and anti-Americanism, and weaken the legitimacy of American client regimes.

Middle Eastern leaders built their institutions with the goal of maintaining and legitimizing their hold on power. Perhaps enabled by American support, they employed “inward-looking” tactics of survival that emphasized statism and self-sufficiency (Arab Human Development Report 2002 4). Originally based on populism and state patronage, with economic decline these states came to rely on military power and nationalism to maintain political control (Solingen 2007 760). Stephen Heydemann refers to this phenomenon as the “democratic bargain,” an implicit agreement between rulers and ruled throughout the Arab Middle East (1993 74). The essence of the democratic bargain is the exchange of political freedom for social stability and prosperity: “post-independence Arab rulers have been paid political deference by their peoples in return for the provision of publicly subsidized services – education, health care, and a state commitment to secure employment” (Sadiki 2009 211). The democratic bargain, also often called the democracy of bread or in Arabic *dimuqratiyyat al-khubz*, is an important feature of Arab politics. Its implications for democratization or reform in the Arab world are critical, and the topic will be revisited in that context in a later chapter. The danger of regime reliance on popular quiescence in exchange for services to the people is the loss of state legitimacy in the face of economic failure. A government that justifies its

authority on its ability to provide bread for its people will lose its mandate once it can no longer provide for them. A combination of population growth and economic stagnation from the 1960s to the 1980s created just such a situation for many “democracies of bread.” It is in this context that “External conflict and nationalism became effective substitutes for maintaining political support and deflecting opposition” while offering certain token political reforms (Solingen 2007 771). As Toby Dodge writes, “fierce” Middle Eastern states could use violence at home and abroad to maintain order, but they still lacked the strength of institutional power and legitimacy (Dodge 2002 177). Ultimately, many Arab states, lacking in legitimacy and economically exhausted “in an effort to divert attention from failed domestic models,” would: “(1) emphasize nationalism and military prowess, (2) externalize conflict, (3) exacerbate arms races, (4) wield transnational allegiances and regional assertion, and (5) undermine the regional state-system” in order to ensure their own survival (Solingen 2007 774).

As the prevailing world superpower, the United States still seeks stability and maintenance of a favorable status quo in the region. However, the primary threat to stability is not now what it was in years past. According to Wittes, the major challenge to American hegemony is the weakening legitimacy and internal stability of key Arab allies (Wittes 2008 31). The old democratic bargain, long under threat, is closer to dissolution now than ever before as globalization and internal corruption and stagnation combine to create a fundamentally untenable situation. To assume that the old methods are still relevant is to ignore the changes that have clearly occurred in the Middle East and throughout the world. As long ago as 1968, Badeau noted, “the tinder of social discontent has long been smoldering” under an oppressive order (Badeau 1968 25).

Though relative stability in the short term has dictated policymaking decisions, “in the long run it seems probable that radical change in some form must take place” (Badeau 1968 26). There is, and there has been for some time, “an imbalance” between state abilities and popular needs which is producing “a generation of frustrated, urbanized young people with decent educations but few available... means of social advancement” (Wittes 2008 31). This imbalance is gradually eroding the “basic social contract” – the democratic bargain – “that has long sustained America’s Arab partners” (Wittes 2008 31).

All the same, these partner regimes have proven to be remarkably durable in the face of adversity over the years. In spite of at best questionable legitimacy, low popularity, and unsuccessful policies, states such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria have managed to retain control over their populations. Of course, this is not characteristic of American allies alone – other nations including Syria, Sudan, Yemen, and pre-2003 Iraq show the same ability to resist meaningful changes in power structure. Wittes identifies three factors, which she refers to as the “three Rs,” behind the longevity of autocratic Arab regimes: rent, rhetoric, and repression (Wittes 2008 37). Rents, or external income from oil exports and foreign aid, have provided revenue to sustain regimes. These rents have allowed regimes to provide the social services that sustain the democratic bargain, or as Lisa Anderson puts it “to buy acquiescence in their rule” with externally generated income (Anderson 1994 440). Rents have made it possible for autocrats to establish a paternalistic relationship between state and society – citizens cannot overthrow their government because they depend on it for food subsidies, jobs, housing, and other basic needs. In the Middle Eastern context, oil extraction has had a

particularly important role in securing external rents. Oil resources in many Middle Eastern states provide them a relatively reliable source of wealth that can help offset an otherwise difficult economic situation (Bellin 2004 152). Furthermore, when external sources make up the majority of state revenue, the need decreases for rulers to seek political legitimacy through the consent of their populations (Gurses 2009 508). In countries such as Saudi Arabia, external rents allow leadership to overlook domestic production and popular backing so long as they bring in enough money to secure stability.

The revenue from external rents coupled with regional conflicts enabled the construction of impressive military establishments and security agencies, which make up Wittes' second R, repression. With recent incomes over \$30 billion per year in oil revenue, Saudi Arabia is able to spend large amounts of money on its security apparatus even while other areas of its economy perform poorly (Bellin 2004 148). The military and security agencies help to increase citizens' dependence on governments throughout the region, as they have become significant employers (Wittes 2008 31). These organizations were also able to repress popular dissent whenever it arose. Indeed, many regimes have developed formidable mechanisms of repression that have successfully intimidated and marginalized opposition forces and prevented the development of any viable social or political alternative to state patronage.

Finally, rhetoric and ideology have made up an important component of many incumbent autocrats' survival strategies. Arab nationalism, the cause of the Palestinians, religion, and populism were all employed to divert attention from governmental failures and to shore up rulers' legitimacy. The use of ideology complemented state repression of

opposition – whoever agitated against the authorities was either silenced by the security agencies or delegitimized by government ideologies (Wittes 2008 40).

These tools of control have been effective in the past, but their potency is now diminishing. First, the population explosion in the Middle East in the second half of the 20th century has made external rents inadequate to meet domestic demands (Wittes 2008 41). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000 37.1 percent of the Arab population was age 15 or under (U.S. BC 2000). The infrastructure in place in the Arab world is simply not capable of absorbing this large new generation in any constructive manner (Fuller 2003 6). This burden is already beginning to manifest itself, as detailed in the United Nations Development Program's Arab Human Development Report of 2005, which predicts that Arab youth will need 80 million new jobs over the next two decades. The need for greater employment opportunities is complicated by the already high levels of unemployment throughout the Middle East, calculated at 20.1 percent of the labor force of Algeria, 11 percent in Egypt, 26.8 percent in Iraq, 11.9 percent in Morocco, and 26.8 percent in the Palestinian territories (Arab Human Development Report 2005). Tarik Yousef suggests that these levels of unemployment may be attributed largely to the new generation of young and educated workers, citing the fact that 50 percent of the unemployed are first-time job seekers (Yousef 2004 102). There is now considerable pressure on the labor market, which is exacerbated by "anemic economic performance and an outdated development model" (Yousef 2004 102). The population explosion may now force an economic transformation in order to incorporate the disenfranchised and desperate new youth into society. It puts ruling regimes in serious danger because the economic troubles of the past two decades have "called into question the status of the

region's postwar social contract" (Yousef 2004 108). Yousef himself identifies three important areas for reform and progress in order for any kind of economic transformation to succeed: education, gender equality, and governance (Yousef 2004 108). This is no task of subtle realignment in regional economic infrastructure; it requires changes capable of "creating as many jobs in the next 15 years as was done in the last five decades" (Wittes 2008 43).

Comprehensive reform in this case is primarily the responsibility of government (Richards 2001). This reform will extend beyond streamlining bureaucracies or reducing impediments to the private sector. Any policy with a chance of success depends on "the credibility of government and the capacity of state institutions to manage the difficult process of economic transition under conditions of economic volatility and social vulnerability" (Yousef 2004 109). The current ruling regimes throughout the Middle East, which have built their power on economic patronage and tight control of economic institutions, are not inclined to bring about such reform because it will undermine and diminish their power. The redistributive and interventionist policies that once contributed to the old regimes' legitimacy seriously limit their flexibility in economic reform today (Yousef 2004 109). In sum, the old method of using rents to perpetuate a controllable social order and purchase political quiescence is becoming obsolete. This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by ruling regimes. Economic development has become a major concern of autocratic regimes as it has "become evident to even the rent-rich countries that rents... could not deliver sufficient economic development and employment creation to sustain national well-being and social peace" (Bellin 2005 135). True reform of the development model and systems of patronage is now necessary to

strengthen Middle Eastern economies and move the citizens of the region out of widespread poverty.

Less capable of garnering loyalty with social services because of failing economies and burgeoning populations, Arab regimes are also losing their ability to repress dissent. The internet and satellite television networks have undermined government control of the press. When Egyptian security forces attacked protesters during the 2005 elections, al-Jazeera and other satellite news channels reported on the events while state television ignored them. There is now a battle of speech and media between states and their societies “because the historical monopoly of information by regimes is being broken due to the empowerment of non-state users of the new technologies” (Sadiki 2009 241). The effects of the globalization of information on repressive regimes cannot be overlooked. Governments are increasingly incapable of limiting their citizens’ access to information, and international attention to human rights abuses makes it even more difficult to ignore or suppress opposition. The international outcry at the arrests of Egyptian opposition leaders Sadd Eddin Ibrahim and Ayman Nour are illustrative of the effects this new scrutiny can have. Due to American pressure, Nour was released from prison weeks after his arrest and he was eventually acquitted of the charges against him (Wittes 2008 49). Though security agencies are as strong as they ever have been, violence and intimidation are less effective when they are broadcast around the world, and protesters are becoming confident that international scrutiny will help protect them. With the tendency of negative publicity to travel rapidly and widely, the illiberal practices of regimes are being exposed, having a “devastating” effect on the aura of state control (Sadiki 2009 248). The growth of independent media undermines

“the very essence of the authoritarian state – centralization, control, surveillance, censorship;” though repressive states manage to survive, the spread of information has left them “enfeebled and lacking in self-confidence” (Sadiki 2009 249).

To be sure, this does not mean that the coercive apparatus is near collapse in the Middle East. In fact, several scholars argue that Middle Eastern autocracies are still doing quite well at controlling their populations. Eva Bellin writes that conditions in the Middle East “foster robust authoritarianism and especially a robust and politically tenacious coercive apparatus” (Bellin 2004 152). This coercive apparatus is fed by numerous factors, some of which are unique to the Middle East, some of which are not. Bellin identifies “fiscal health” as a principal source of robust authoritarianism, which is maintained in part by access to rents (Bellin 2004 144). Steven Heydemann as well argues that Middle East autocracies have done quite well adapting to new challenges and maintaining control over their populations (Heydemann 2002 54). However, these analyses do acknowledge that it is becoming more and more difficult to retain such levels of control in a region with a burgeoning population, ever-greater access to information, and rising popular discontent. Bellin notes that economic hardship is making state coercion more difficult, though the likelihood of economic collapse in any Middle Eastern country is still quite low (Bellin 2004 147). Much of the resources that have sustained levels of repression come from external rents, which are in Western, and mainly American, control (Bellin 2004 149). Western powers can have considerable influence on the continued ability of coercive states to control their populations – it should not, then, be assumed that repressive regimes have total autonomy to exert repression as they please. Whether or not tactics of repression remain just as strong in

the Middle East as they have in the past is largely a question of the will of donor states to support such repression, or in the words of Steven Heydemann, “Dictatorship survives in no small measure because democracies tolerate it” (Heydemann 2004 318). Ultimately there is no denying that the instruments of repression have weakened in the region, and regimes’ ability to enforce coercion does not lie exclusively in their hands but depends also on their sources of external rent.

The presence of international media and non-state sources of information has also done away with rhetoric as a tool of state influence. The old ideological justifications of regime power have been almost entirely discredited. Arab nationalism, been tarnished by decades of failure to unite the Arab nation, oppose Israel, or resist foreign influence, has been largely abandoned by regimes. The appeal to religious legitimacy used by Saudis and occasionally by the kings of Morocco and Jordan has been similarly spoiled by the spread of Islamism and public images of royal indiscretions and irreverence. The internet has greatly aided transnational Islamism to the detriment of leaders claiming any religious legitimacy (Sadiki 2009 243). As a result, no state can now rely on winning popular allegiance through rhetoric or ideological fervor – they have ignored ideology in favor of survival for too long to retain any credibility in this regard.

The old tools of influence and control are eroding and making it more and more difficult for Arab autocrats to retain power. What are the implications of this phenomenon for American policy? Put simply, the United States must be able to anticipate change in the Middle East. The traditional method of protecting traditional American interests in the area is becoming obsolete as the ossified order of an older era continues to crumble. The democratic bargain has been failing for years, and the longer

it is artificially sustained the more likely it is to be swept away. The United States would do well to take steps to ensure that the old regimes come to an end in a way that does not undermine its vital interests in the region. In short, American policy must seek to align itself with reform and positive change in the Middle East – not necessarily regime change or social revolution, but something forming a bridge between the past and the future of the region.

It now seems that American objectives in the Middle East cannot be accomplished without some consideration for the peoples of the Middle East, their welfare and their feelings about American policies. Conversely, American interests are no longer so narrow as to be well served by regime cooperation alone. A new approach to the Middle East is now necessary; years of conflict, corruption, economic stagnation, and repression are taking their toll on Middle Eastern societies. Policymakers need only to look to Iran to see what can happen when a nation grows tired of its oppressive, illegitimate, American-supported ruler. What was believed to be a long period of stability in the Middle East under American auspices was in fact a violent, unstable era the consequences of which may now be seen writ large in regional attitudes to the United States, popular discontent, and growing radicalization. This may have been tolerable in the past, but American interests have grown more complex and as a nation we have learned that the internal politics of individual states may have broad security consequences for us. The United States must now seek the sort of change in the Middle East that can secure an outcome favorable to its regional and global objectives.

II. Feeble Response: MEPI, BMENA, and the Failure of Democracy Promotion in the Bush Administration

While the Bush administration's initial response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 was to expand democracy promotion efforts, these efforts failed to produce any significant results, and suffered from serious errors in conception and execution. Ultimately, democratization never seems to have been accepted as a priority, and it has been all but abandoned completely by the Obama administration. However, the Bush record on democracy promotion in the Middle East should not be considered a failure of democracy promotion per se. The effort to implement it was half-hearted and poorly conceived. Nor is democracy promotion antithetical to other American interests in the Middle East, even if policymakers have not yet reconciled the two.

American foreign policy in the Middle East as conducted in the second half of the 20th century has come under significant criticism in the past decade not for its effect on oil production or the free flow of maritime traffic, but for the rise of global Islamic terrorism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the cooperation of client regimes in the Middle East satisfied the narrowly defined goals of the time, in spite of high levels of conflict in the region lasting for decades. While this instability and violence may have been tolerable as far as American regional objectives were concerned, this may not be the case at present. Superpower rivalry is no longer the main threat to American hegemony. Given the new global situation, it follows that conditions, and consequently American interests, should change in the Middle East as well. The consensus as to what constitutes American interests has only just begun to reflect this change in conditions.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, combating global terrorism emerged as a key American interest in the Middle East. The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan was the beginning of a response to terror that has serious implications for Middle Eastern policy. The National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2002 identifies prevention of global terrorism as a national priority. The document also lays down how the United States aims to improve its safety and position in the world – namely, by defending "liberty and justice" (NSS 2002). The ideals of a liberal society are "a lifeline to lonely defenders of liberty" around the world, and the United States will encourage liberalizing change when the opportunity arises. The NSS asserts that "authoritarian systems can evolve, marrying local history and traditions with the principles we all cherish" to produce democracies in un-democratic regions such as the Middle East. Most strategists agreed in the early years of this decade that democratization in the Middle East is an issue of security, not altruism. Policymakers began to perceive a "democratic imperative" in American policy – democratization was widely believed to be the key to a successful approach to security policy in the Middle East (Carothers, Ottaway 2005 4). The 2002 NSS summed up the new attitude succinctly: "The national security... of the United States must start from these core beliefs [in democracy] and look outward for possibilities to expand liberty" (NSS 2002).

According to this argument, the undesirable results of the old methods of Middle East policy are Islamist political movements that detest the United States and its hegemony, and violent terrorist groups that constitute what is perceived as the single greatest threat to American security in the world today. The terrorist attacks of September 11 discredited the long-held assumption that "the political stability offered by

friendly Arab authoritarian regimes is a linchpin of Western security interests" (Carothers, Ottaway 2005 3). Lack of democracy is now held to be one of the main causes of the rise of violent anti-Western sentiment, and thus a fundamental security problem.

American security strategy was apparently transformed after September 11, 2001: henceforth the United States would take the welfare and the sympathies of the peoples of the Middle East into consideration when formulating its priorities. Democratization in the Middle East was envisioned on two distinct policy tracks: promotion and imposition. Though it was a complex and multifaceted operation with several unrelated goals, the military intervention in Iraq may be seen as an example of the imposition of democracy. The invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq resulted in American forces unseating the old government and replacing it with democratic institutions. On the other hand, programs such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the G-8 sponsored Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA) were not designed to impose democracy; they use diplomatic, economic, and social tools to promote democratic reform in the Middle East. Imposition and promotion of democracy were intended to be complementary strategies in the region. Imposition would be chosen for countries such as Iraq where it was perceived as the only means of creating a democracy; promotion would be implemented where immediate regime change was undesirable.

This apparent change in American policy would implicitly recognize the loss of utility of the client state model. It would seek to create a new social contract in the Middle East, one based not on a democratic bargain but on true democracy. But the new approach, though it may seem at first to represent progress in the collective

understanding of American relations with the Middle East, raises several troubling questions. First is the question whether or not democratization is in fact the optimal strategy to serve American interests going forward in the Middle East. Second, if it is, we need to ask what shape a democracy promotion policy should take.

These questions may not be as urgent as they seem. Indeed, in this chapter I will argue that, in spite of rhetoric to the contrary, the United States government has yet to accept democracy promotion as the new Middle Eastern paradigm. Efforts at democracy promotion have been definitively weak and ineffective, and they have been more or less given up in the past several years, in a return to the client state model, which, as we shall see, has never truly been abandoned.

Although democracy promotion efforts enjoy more attention now than they ever have, they are not new in the Middle East. In fact "hundreds of projects... [and] hundreds of millions of dollars had been spent on supporting and promoting democratic governance in that region" from the mid-1990s to the middle of this decade (Schlumberger 2006 37). Despite these efforts, the degree of political liberalization in the Middle East did not improve and actually may have declined over this period (Freedom House 2004). In light of this stagnation, or even depression, in the levels of freedom and liberalization in the Middle East, one might well conclude that previous democracy promotion efforts in the region have failed. To explain this failure, Oliver Schlumberger notes that democracy promotion has never been treated as a true priority. Though the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) may spend \$250 million a year in the Arab world on projects related to democracy promotion, the United States itself spends \$1 billion a year in Egypt alone on military aid. Rhetoric in this case

does not appear to have any effect on true policy –while American leadership preaches the democratic imperative, the older preference for autocratic partners still outweighs all other considerations. Given the large disparity in resources between those devoted to democratization and those devoted to maintaining friendly relations with authoritarian allies, Schlumberger argues that American policies as a whole continue to contribute to "the persistence of authoritarian rule rather than working in favor of democratization" (Schlumberger 2005 38-9).

The devotion of relatively few resources to democracy promotion indicates that American policymakers have not yet truly accepted it as a necessary step toward replacement of the client regime model. Of course, it is true that democracy promotion is simply less expensive than military equipment, development aid, and other programs of Middle Eastern policy. Still the difference is striking; excluding the even more expensive assistance to Iraq, the United States spends approximately \$5.5 billion in the Arab world on economic and military assistance every year (Albright et al 2005 8). The levels of funding the Bush administration devoted to Middle East democracy are indeed unprecedented, but “still very small when compared to the ambitious goal of bringing about significant change in... all Middle East countries” (Ottaway 2003 29).

Though it would be incorrect to call the new dedication to the promotion of democracy insincere, it certainly appears to be a secondary objective compared to maintaining established relationships with autocratic regimes. This assessment of democracy promotion is supported by the United States’ ambiguous and inconsistent stance on actual democracy and human rights issues in the Middle East. The Bush

administration may have been sincere in its emphasis on democratic reform, but it was unable to convince its regional allies that it was serious.

Efforts to escalate democracy promotion have failed for several reasons, among them the Bush administration's tendency to oppose democratic election results that it did not like. For instance, the United States government stood silent during the Egyptian elections of 2005, despite accounts of "systematic widespread rigging" reported by members of the Egyptian judiciary (Sadiki 2009 91). When it became apparent that Islamist Muslim Brotherhood parliamentary candidates were winning a surprising number of votes, the Mubarak government cracked down. The state-run *al-Ahram* newspaper described the final day of polling as "the most violent day" of the election (Kaye et al 2008 35). While election monitors from the judiciary sat inside polling stations, "Groups of thugs and state security personnel... arrested opposition candidates and blocked opposition supporters from reaching the polls, sometimes violently" (Kaye et al 2008 35). In spite of these efforts to intimidate and repress opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 seats in the Egyptian parliament. Though this is a small fraction of the total of 454 seats, the Mubarak government reacted by escalating state repression, postponing municipal elections for two years and freezing the Muslim Brotherhood's assets (Kaye et al 2008 36). Repressive measures have continued – Human Rights Watch estimates that over 1,000 Islamists were arrested from March to December 2006, 800 Muslim Brotherhood members were arrested before municipal elections in 2008, and thousands of Brotherhood candidates were disqualified (Kaye et al 2008 36-37). Furthermore, the suppression of political opponents has not been limited to Islamists. The leader of the opposition party al-Ghad, Ayman Nour, has been arbitrarily arrested

several times and stripped of his parliamentary seat, while numerous dissident bloggers, journalists, and judges have been arrested for publicly opposing regime practices (Kaye et al 2008 37).

Throughout this entire process, the United States government was silent. The State Department, which had funded some of the election monitors, refused for weeks to respond to claims of fraud. Official American visits to Egypt have continued, and very little has been said in criticism of the authoritarian and anti-democratic practices of the Mubarak regime. This tacit approval of Egyptian oppression is perhaps a result of the American need for help from Mubarak in dealing with the difficulties of the Iraqi occupation and “a cooled enthusiasm for Arab democracy in the light of gains by Islamist movements” (Wittes 2008 100). Regardless, it is a visible contradiction between what the United States says and what it does, and it indicates that democratic reform is not in fact an American priority.

A similar situation in the Palestinian territories is further evidence of the lack of commitment to the democratic process if it does not bring pro-American forces to power. After the death of Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat in 2004, the Bush administration advocated swift presidential and parliamentary elections in the Palestinian territories. After legislative elections saw the extremist anti-Israel Hamas party take a majority of seats in parliament, the United States cut off aid and diplomatic contact with the Palestinian Authority (Wittes 2008 84). Though the United States had pushed hard for elections, when the democratic process did not favor American interests it immediately cut off its support for Palestinian democracy, sending a message to the Middle East as a whole that the United States was pursuing democracy promotion for

ulterior motives and would not support freedom if it meant that anti-American forces would take power. This quick and striking turnaround prompted Khaled Misha'l, a Hamas leader living in exile in Damascus, to comment:

Hamas and the Palestinian people are collectively punished for voting... and for doing their part to build democracy for a future Palestinian state... It is not Hamas who has failed the democratic test. Rather, it is America who has failed to live up to its own agenda of democracy promotion (Sadiki 2009 181).

Perhaps the most damning evidence against a true commitment to democracy was the Bush administration's practice of extraordinary rendition of terrorism suspects to authoritarian governments. Concurrent with calls for improved human rights and democratic reforms, cooperation with authoritarian regimes and continued abuse of human rights and democratic principle sent a message that resonates deeper than any proclamation of universal ideals. The images of Abu Ghraib, and the stories of innocent people such as Khaled al-Masri who was kidnapped and held in a prison, where he was brutally interrogated before being left with no means of identification in Albania, remain just as important in the Middle East as any American efforts at promoting fair elections (HCFA 2007). The use of autocratic governments to torture and abuse terror suspects has had a twofold damaging effect on democratization efforts in the Middle East. It has significantly weakened American leverage with regimes that imprison, interrogate, and torture terror suspects, and it has tarnished American credibility throughout the world as an agent of democracy.

Democracy promotions that did materialize during the Bush administration were decidedly modest and ineffectual. The policy itself rarely attracted high-profile attention and the rhetoric supporting it seldom corresponded to a true and specific policy that moved beyond regional generalities. In a Council on Foreign Relations Task Force

report in 2005, near the height of democracy promotion efforts in the Bush presidency, the U.S. government is criticized for not yet speaking “in a consistent manner to various Arab countries on these important issues” of human rights, political representation, transparency, and rule of law (Albright et al 2005 4). The policies that were implemented “reflected a strong desire to avoid conflicts with autocratic allies,” which limited their effectiveness and guaranteed their marginalization (Wittes 2008 85). The Bush administration created the two related initiatives referred to above, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the G-8 sponsored Partnership for Progress and a Common Future for the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA). Neither of these programs has been given true priority in Middle Eastern policy, and their tools of reform are weak and incapable of producing real structural change in the region. Both are deeply flawed if they have been designed with the intent to democratize the Middle East.

MEPI has several key weaknesses that limit its effectiveness. First, the initiative’s focus is almost exclusively on building grassroots capacity to exert pressure for democratic reform. However, grassroots capacity is not the real problem in the democratization question – there is ample support and enthusiasm for democracy throughout the region. Rather, the “problem is actually with the supply side of the democracy equation... the authoritarian state and the profound reluctance of many Arab leaders to open their political systems” (Albright et al 2005 40). Instead of exerting pressure on Arab governments to reform, MEPI has taken a piecemeal approach, supporting small programs to develop civil society, reform education, or improve

women's rights. Though desirable, these measures "are not sufficient to cause democratic change" (Albright et al 2005 40).

MEPI has also failed to develop a coherent strategy for accommodating the risks of short-term upheaval in the Middle East while effecting true democratic transformation. Perhaps due to continued uncertainty about American interests in the area, MEPI has never sought a true change of the political status quo and never challenged any ruling regime to implement comprehensive reforms. According to Marina Ottaway, what was intended as a cohesive strategy for regional transformation turned out to be a "scattershot of initiatives" that were generally unrelated and "extremely unlikely to have a significant impact" (Ottaway 2003 29). Rather than attack the actual impediments to democratization MEPI devoted itself to traditional "project-based" programs, the kind which have been used in the Middle East since the late 1980s and have had no significant impact on political liberalization (Ottaway 2003 30).

In addition, MEPI's funds have gone mostly to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other groups that were pre-approved by their governments and thus unlikely to pose a serious threat to them (Brumberg 2005 22). Due to lack of specific regional knowledge, MEPI officials often turned to Arab governments for direction in distributing their funds, a practice that damaged efforts to build an independent and strong civil society (Wittes 2008 90). In fact, of the first \$103 million in MEPI grants, over 70 percent went to programs for Arab government agencies or to train Arab government officials (Wittes, Yerkes 2004). Though funding and training of government agencies is not necessarily anti-democratic, the massive imbalance of funding allocations suggests a wariness to support political opposition.

Over the course of its implementation, MEPI has gotten progressively weaker. In 2006, a total of 30 percent of MEPI funds were allocated to commitments outside its original objectives, such as the foundation of a region-wide free trade agreement (Wittes 2008 91). What remained of the initiative's budget was often not devoted to reform at all, but instead to public diplomacy programs intended to improve images rather than pursue reforms. Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon was the U.S.-Middle East Partnership for Breast Cancer Awareness and Research, begun in 2006. The program was intended to facilitate organization of women in Saudi Arabia, and later Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, to improve capacity for women's civic engagement. This strategy would indeed be an appropriate way to start organization of women for political activism, but in fact Saudi women are already too advanced in political participation to benefit from such an effort. Not only are they among the most well-educated women in the Middle East, they have been agitating for more rights for the past two decades. However, the program went forward because it had the potential to produce favorable media coverage (Wittes 2008 93).

MEPI has not, then, resolved the apparent conflict of interest in American policy between promoting democracy and maintaining relations with longtime autocratic allies. Instead, it has ignored these conflicts, preferring to enact numerous programs of little consequence to regional transformation. The G-8 sponsored BMENA program has not fared any better, failing just as badly to demonstrate American commitment to democratic reforms in the Middle East. Begun as a "working paper" known as the Greater Middle East Initiative, the Broader Middle East Initiative or BMENA came into existence at the 2004 G-8 summit at Sea Island, Georgia. The initiative contains a

statement of principles asserting that political, social and economic stagnation in the Middle East threaten global peace and stability (Wittes 2008 96). The statement enjoins the G-8 nations and Middle Eastern governments to commit to change in the region, and to work in partnership to bring about a new democratic era.

The emphasis in the statement on cooperation, with its implicit deference to incumbent regimes, would appear to severely limit the effectiveness of the initiative. Many programs now under the umbrella of the BMENA had already existed and had resulted in little or no gains for democratic reform (Ottaway, Carothers 2004 1). Like MEPI, the BMENA offers many programs designed to train civilians, bureaucratic administrators, and NGOs to provide the knowledge necessary to lead the way in liberalization. However, these programs ignore the central obstacle to democratization in the region, namely the recalcitrant leaders of so many countries that doggedly cling to power in spite of the aspirations and needs of their people. The core feature of the BMENA is the Forum for the Future, an annual meeting of governments, important entrepreneurs, and NGOs from the G-8 nations and the Middle East. Never truly effective, the forum has been ridiculed for the obvious gap between its stated goals and its actual behavior, most in evidence in 2005 when Bahrain, the host nation, forbade public marches and political protests during the forum (Wittes 2008 96). The sheer hypocrisy of allowing a country to suppress free speech during a forum on liberal reform is enough to put American commitment to meaningful change in the Middle East in doubt.

Perhaps the most laudable creation of the BMENA is the Foundation for the Future, a collection of international funds to support nongovernmental democratization

programs. To ensure its integrity, the foundation was to be managed independently of government intervention. Unfortunately, the United States agreed to allow Arab government donors influence in selection of the fund's directors. Furthermore, the foundation was registered formally as an NGO under Jordanian law, effectively making it dependent on the very forces it was intended to reform (Wittes 2008 97). As a result of these concessions, BMENA and its best programs foundered and produced no remarkable results. Though partnership is an admirable goal and likely necessary for successful reform in most cases, there should be room for criticism on both sides. Autocratic leaders will need to make sacrifices if the Middle East is to be eventually democratized, and they will not be willing to do so without significant, focused diplomatic pressure. BMENA, in sum, sought broad reform but provided inadequate tools to achieve it.

Ultimately these failures in policy reflect an inability to reconcile democracy promotion with the older, continuing core American interests in the Middle East. Due to ambivalence about the need for region-wide liberalization, MEPI and BMENA never developed into comprehensive, effective strategies to accomplish their stated goals. Yet this reluctance to risk the old relationships for the sake of democratization reveals more than simple uncertainty. To put it bluntly, it demonstrates that the American government has not yet recognized a true need for change in its Middle Eastern priorities. The split personality of the first Bush administration, which sincerely believed democratic reform was a necessity in the Middle East, has now reverted to the older model of supporting entrenched client regimes while ignoring how their citizens are treated. While the past decade has seen unprecedented attention to and political momentum for democracy

promotion the United States still exerts “pressure against democratic outcomes (Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt)” which undermine its pro-democracy efforts (Sadiki 2009 192). The current Obama administration appears nearly allergic to democratization as a security policy, and has remained muted on the subject. Though it is clear that President Barack Obama still values democratic reform in the Middle East, his public silence signals his administration’s priorities. During Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s visit to Washington, D.C. in 2009, President Obama did not mention democracy or human rights in Egypt at all, indicating “the limited interests of the U.S. administration in these issues” (Hamzawy 2009). Perhaps democracy promotion is part of the Obama administration’s agenda, but it is seen as far less important than questions of regional stability for which the United States still chooses to depend on its autocratic allies. Though it is still developing, the Obama administration’s strategy currently ignores the need for reform in the Middle East, and seems likely to produce the same poor results in this regard as the Bush administration had done. More attention is given to democracy promotion now than ever before, yet no effort has yet been adequate to the task. As Marina Ottaway wrote, the United States may be showing an unprecedented level of commitment to democratization, but Arab rulers are working far harder to preserve their autocracies:

Whether compatible with US goals or not, there is much nation-building taking place in the greater Middle East over which the United States has no control.

Indeed, the scope of the United States' cautious and piecemeal efforts to shape a new culture and politics in the greater Middle East pales in comparison to the attempts carried out by Arab governments and political organizations (Ottaway 2003 30).

Was the failure of Bush’s freedom agenda, then, a problem with democracy promotion per se? Or was it a result of inherent contradictions in American interests? Fortunately it seems to have been neither. Democracy promotion under the Bush

administration was never really given a fair shake. This is due to several key factors, among them the lack of institutional knowledge regarding democracy promotion, a misunderstanding of the utility of democracy promotion in the first place, and unwillingness or inability to reconcile democracy with other American regional security goals. Recognizing a need for reform, American policymakers shied away from the difficult question of how to bring it about, settling instead for small projects and modest efforts at the margin of Middle East priorities.

The ideological difficulties of the Bush administration's approach to democracy promotion merit discussion, because they throw light on its intellectual underpinnings. These need to be addressed if we are to form a better democratization policy, one that can be effective without being contrary to other American interests. In short, it will be easier to determine what works if we know what does not work, and why.

The first Bush administration's democratization initiatives suffered from deep misunderstanding of the history, culture, and politics of the Middle East that led to critical errors in structure and substance. The ideology behind such policy measures as BMENA implies a unidirectional interpretation of democratization in which wisdom and expertise were handed from West to East, betraying an under-appreciation of the unique circumstances that have impeded democratization to the present. Efforts also faltered because they were not aimed at achieving democracy in itself; rather, they were inspired by the misguided notion that democracy was a way to combat global Islamic terrorism. This fixation on terrorism would ultimately cause the backslide to a pre-September 11 style of policy as it made the Bush administration wary of Islamists and their prospects for political advancement in democratic elections. When elections showed Islamists

gaining influence in Egypt, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, and Iraq, democracy promotion was essentially shelved.

All of these factors contributed to the failure of the Bush presidency to effectively promote democracy in the Middle East. Essentially, democracy promotion became an American cause for the wrong reasons, attempted with the wrong tools, and terminated by the wrong interpretation of its faults. In view of all this, it would be difficult to dismiss democracy promotion in itself using the Bush record alone as justification.

The strategic approach to democratization characterized by BMENA, MEPI, and the rhetoric of President George W. Bush and his advisors is unilateral and simplistic in nature. The working paper of the Greater Middle East Initiative, a primitive draft of BMENA, describes “extremism, terrorism, international crime and illegal migration” as the result of political and economic troubles in the Middle East (Sadiki 2009 168). The document does not, however, recognize any responsibility of the G-8 nations or the United States alone for the current state of affairs. The solution offered is not cooperative repair of past errors; it is the United States and Western powers bequeathing their superior practices to the needy and dysfunctional Middle East. In the words of Larbi Sadiki, “The silence is glaring... on Western powers’ responsibilities” (Sadiki 2009 169). The Bush administration publicly acknowledged its role in aiding Middle Eastern autocracies, but this admission was not translated into policies. Just as the region’s problems have one source, so does the solution: “There is a one-way flow of information, knowledge, know-how, and values” (Sadiki 2009 170).

Sadiki’s critique of the Greater Middle East Initiative applies to other recent attempts at democracy promotion. The main advocates of democratization during the

Bush presidency subscribed to an idealistic perception of democracy and Western society as superior systems with unequivocal and universal appeal. Such a belief may have caused policymakers to underestimate the difficulty of foisting one society's political institutions upon another. The now infamous response of former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, when asked about the likelihood of Islamists taking power in democratic elections, is illustrative of this oversimplification:

Look, fifty percent of the Arab world are women. Most of these women do not want to live in a theocratic state. The other fifty percent are men. I know a lot of them. I don't think they want to live in a theocratic state (Hassan 2008 282).

This tendency to over-generalize and to lionize democracy as a universal system with universal appeal indicates that the intellectual underpinnings of the decision to democratize the Middle East are ideological, not practical or empirical. The context in which democracy promotion emerged as a policy goal certainly ensured its ideological nature. There is no doubt that the Bush administration developed its vision of democratization as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The administration's response was colored by the idealism and absolutism best characterized by President Bush's own words:

In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America, because we are freedom's home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time (Bush 2001a).

The new duty to promote democracy was a continuation of America's role in history as a prophet, a defender of human dignity and freedom that could benefit the world by propagating its own political system. Thus anyone who opposes America is considered an enemy of American ideals. By this logic, the Islamic terrorists who threaten the United States "kill not merely to end lives, but to end a way of life... They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century" (Bush 2001b).

Democracy was cast in this picture of the world as an antidote to the evil forces that sought to destroy it. In short, the utility of democracy promotion was that it would end Islamic terrorism, and any other so-called ideology with the potential to oppose the American ideal.

The ideological conception of democracy promotion never appeared to develop a more specific rationale beyond the contention that it would defeat global Islamic terrorism. Unfortunately it was this very rationale that would cause the unraveling of democracy promotion. In consequence of identifying democracy promotion as a means to combat terrorism, the policy faltered when it became clear that a democratic Middle East would probably not be as amenable to American wishes as the entrenched autocracies had been. Furthermore, the events of September 11, 2001 may have inspired President Bush and his staff to spread democracy, but it also made security cooperation with Middle Eastern regimes more important in the short term. After Islamists with distinctly anti-American sentiments started to make political gains, policymakers became convinced it was time to draw back from the promotion of democratic change.

There are three problems with this reaction to the early results of democracy promotion: 1) policymakers assumed a link between lack of democracy and terrorism, 2) they assumed too great a link between Islamism as a political movement and Islamic terrorists, and 3) they overreacted to the initial electoral success of Islamists. The first of these problems will be discussed now, and the other two in a later chapter.

The most fundamental issue with the Bush administration's logic of democracy promotion was its analytical connection of tyranny and terrorism. There is little empirical evidence that democracies are in some way less prone to terrorism than

authoritarian states. In fact, most of the evidence is to the contrary. Though at first it seems logical, there is little empirical evidence to support the argument that political oppression produces extremism and terror. On the other hand, research on the relationship between terrorism and democracy, though limited, indicates that the two are in fact positively associated. In other words, democracies experience more terrorism than authoritarian states. In their article on the correlation between democracy and terror, William Eubank and Leonard Weinberg conclude that "it seems clear that terrorist organizations tend to appear in democratic settings" (Eubank, Weinberg 1994 433). Democracies of all types, including stable and established ones, were found to have a much higher incidence of terrorist groups than non-democracies, ranging from 3.19 to 3.85 times greater probability depending on degree of liberalization (Eubank, Weinberg 1994 426). Insofar as democracies –with their greater liberties and higher levels of political participation –allow extremists to organize and so enable them to resort to violence at a generally greater rate than authoritarian states, they are positively associated with terrorism.

In his article "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" F. Gregory Gause notes that the literature on the relationship between terrorism and democracy does not indicate that democracy has any role in decreasing violence but may in fact have the opposite effect (Gause 2005 65). Quan Li describes two opposed arguments about the effect of democracy on terrorism, specifically transnational terrorism: 1) Democracy reduces transnational terrorism because it ensures non-violent resolution of conflicts; 2) Democracy encourages terrorism because open societies permit organization, freedom of speech and movement, and other liberties that allow terrorists to plan and perpetrate

attacks (Quan 2005). Quan found in his own analysis of terrorist incidents from 1975 to 1997 that democracies tend to experience more terrorism than authoritarian states. While democratic participation was found to reduce terrorism, democratic restraints on executive power inhibited preventative measures, resulting in an increased incidence of violent attacks. In other words, democracies reduce the impetus for violence, but they also make violent attacks easier and more often than not this tends to increase, not reduce, violence (Quan 2005). These findings would seem to discredit democratization as a means to reduce terrorism.

In sum, it does not appear to be the case that democratization in the Middle East will reduce terrorism. The era of democratic expansion, from the 1960s to the present, has also seen the expansion of terrorism. The opening of societies around the world has ultimately coincided with an increase in both domestic and international terrorism (Eubank, Weinberg 2008 266-7). In the end, the sort of terrorists and terrorist organizations that threaten the United States, the likes of Usama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, do not seek democracy, and they will not be satisfied by a democratic Middle East. They make up a fringe of society that will continue to resort to violence against those who do not share their vision of Islam and the world, and democratization will not eradicate them. This is not to say that democratization cannot serve a positive role in the ongoing fight against global terrorism. The specific issue of how democracy promotion can contribute to the fight against terrorists will be discussed later; for now it is sufficient to note that democracy in itself will not end terrorism, and to promote democracy for the sake of fighting terror alone is an error, as the relationship between the two is complex and indirect.

If the premise that democracy does combat terror, an idea which inspired the most significant shift in United States policy in the Middle East in decades, is false, then what rationale is there for democracy promotion? The answer will emerge in what follows. For the moment, it is important to note that it was a mistake to couple democracy promotion with the effort to defeat terrorists. That mistake kept policymakers from perceiving the real utility of a democratic Middle East. Not only can democracy promotion serve the spectrum of American interests in the Middle East as well or better than any other strategy at present; it may even turn out to be necessary in the long term to achieve American regional goals.

III. Unused Potential: Islamism and its Capacity to Promote Democratic Change

While overemphasis on terrorism prevention as a virtue of democracy promotion is problematic on several levels, its implicit assumptions about Islamism demand further investigation. The Bush administration proved unwilling to accept the prospect of Islamists gaining a legitimate place in Middle Eastern politics, and articulated a monolithic understanding of the Islamist movement. However, Islamism is complex and has great potential to facilitate democratization and political opening in the region.

If democratization is to occur in the Middle East, its success or failure will depend in part on the role played by Islamists and Islamist political parties. As discussed above, some previous attempts at democracy promotion in the Middle East were hindered by a wariness of Islamists and their potential to change the status quo in the region. Yet however problematic their interaction with the United States may be, democratization cannot now happen without Islamists factoring into the equation. Islamism as a political movement has become crucially important throughout the Middle East, and it must be confronted by the United States and reconciled with American interests if there is to be hope for success. Islamism is not necessarily anti-democratic, nor is it necessarily violent or extremist. It is a broad and complex movement whose manifestations vary from country to country.

One additional comment should be made here on the criticism, often levied in the American media, that Islam is an authoritarian, or an inherently anti-democratic religion. This claim is, in short, preposterous. Whether or not Islam at its birth in the 7th century can be seen as in conformity with modern democratic ideals is immaterial. Religion

seeks to answer questions that transcend political theory; when they do address politics many religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, may appear anti-democratic. The original message of any religion is constantly reinterpreted, and it is these recent adaptations and revisions that are politically significant. The question about which policymakers should be concerned is not what Islam is, but what Muslims want. Devout Muslims who support democratization of their nations have found religious justification for their beliefs no matter what non-Muslim American pundits say about them. In sum, there is no compelling essentialist argument that Islam hinders democratization, or that Islamists cannot support democracy.

In fact, Muslims often demonstrate a greater faith in and support for democracy than people of other religions. This phenomenon may be explained in numerous ways, but in any case it contradicts the claim that Islam is anti-liberal. Whatever Islam teaches, Muslims tend to support democracy quite fervently. The Jordanian researcher Fares al-Braizat found that whether or not a state had a Muslim majority was one of the strongest predictors of its level of support for democracy in his analysis of World Values Survey data (Braizat 2002 288-9). Furthermore, World Values Survey results from 2003 to 2004 show that Middle Eastern Muslim majority populations overwhelmingly support democracy. Among four Arab countries surveyed – Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco – the lowest percentage of respondents who agreed that democracy was a “very good” or “fairly good” way to govern their country was 88%, in Algeria (Tessler, Gao 2005 88). Among the four countries in surveys from 1999 to 2002, the median percentage of respondents who agreed that democracy is the best form of government was 92.5% (Tessler Gao 2005 86-87). In the face of such overwhelming support for

democracy among Muslim populations in the Middle East, it is difficult to believe that Islam is the factor that holds democracy back.

All the same, in keeping with the complex nature of issues in the region, there is considerable evidence that democratization does not yet enjoy enough support to be successful. Though there are new groundswells of support for democracy, several scholars such as Marina Ottaway and Christopher Preble argue that there is not a sufficient domestic constituency in the Middle East to support democratic reform. Public opinion surveys indicate that there is strong support among Arabs for "more open political systems, increased protection of human rights, and broader personal liberties" (Ottaway 2005 151). However, the sentiment that democracy in the abstract is a good thing has not led to the development of an organized constituency for change capable of resisting the authoritarian ruling class. In short, the Middle East "lacks the conditions" which "stimulated democratic change in, for example, Central Europe and East Asia" (Besham, Preble 2003). While desire for democracy is present, "what is lacking is a supply of broad-based political organizations pushing for democracy" – political parties, labor unions, social movements, and so on (Ottaway 2005 151). Until such organizations can develop, it seems unlikely that the ruling regimes will see any reason to open up to true political reform.

Though intellectual support for democracy in the Arab world has grown in recent years, it remains but one of several ideas proposed to transform the region, among them nationalism and Islamism. Intellectual elites throughout the Arab world have come to see democracy as a necessity to revitalize and repair their societies after years of stagnation under authoritarian rule. Scholars such as Saad Eddin Ibrahim and

Muhammad al-Hasnawi, and politicians such as Ayman Nour and Riyadh al-Seif have vocally supported democratic ideals. Upon the succession of Bashar al-Asad in Syria, Riyadh al-Seif publicly hosted the National Dialogue Club, a group which organized lectures on democracy and civil society (Rubin 2006 69). The Egyptian professor Usama al-Ghazali Harb has even gone so far as to say that the best way for Arabs to help themselves is to establish democratic societies with legitimate governments (Harb 2003). The Arab Human Development Report of 2002, written by a team of Arab intellectuals, identifies “reform of the essence of governance: i.e. state institutions” and “activating the voice of the people” as the “twin pillars” of development in the Arab Middle East (Arab Human Development Report 2002 114).

However, this new faith in the potential of democracy has remained among the elite – it has not yet evolved into a popular movement for change. Pro-democracy groups have failed to attract public support because they are typically made up of wealthy, cosmopolitan elements that lack the skills and credibility to speak to a general audience (Ottaway 2005 153). Pro-democratic political parties remain weak and isolated, while Islamist leaders are well-connected with the "Arab street." The moderate elements of Middle Eastern society, especially in the Arab world, “are at present [politically] paralyzed, weak, and unable to influence events” (Rubin 2006 99). The failure of pro-democratic elements to reach out to the public is in part a result of the difficulties of political opposition in an authoritarian state – but it is also "a function of the gulf that still separates the educated elite from the rest of the population of the Arab world" (Ottaway 2005 153).

So how can the current situation be altered to build influential constituencies for democratic reform? One potential solution would be to forge a bond between democracy and some other more emotionally appealing popular movement. Successful movements for democracy have often been coupled with other more immediately appealing ideologies such as nationalism or socialism (Ottaway 2005 159). Democratic reform movements can take advantage of disillusionment with the status quo, popular ideologies, and even religion. A notable example occurred in the interwar period in Egypt, when the Wafd party successfully combined nationalism with democratic ideals (Cleveland 2004 194-203). However, mass ideologies in the Arab world over the past two generations have been antidemocratic, perhaps due to a broader suspicion of Western values in light of the imperialist legacy of the West, the continued manipulation of the region by the Western powers, and Western support for Israel (Ottaway 2005 162). All this would suggest that the combination of nationalism and democracy is unlikely to be effective at this moment; the coupling of democratic values and Islamism seems more promising.

Although Islamist organizations are not necessarily pro-democratic, "they occupy such an important part of the political space that it would seem very difficult to build large democratic constituencies without them" (Ottaway 2005 168). While many governments, such as that of Egypt, are adamantly opposed to including even moderate Islamists in the political process, enough support and encouragement can change the balance of political forces as it did in Eastern Europe and Latin America, where religious political parties played major roles in liberalization and ultimately democratization (Ottaway 2005 168).

Partnership with Islamism may be the best scenario for democratization to gain traction in the Middle East, but they will likely be uneasy partners. The difficulties of promoting such a scenario from outside are obvious; many Islamist groups are bitterly anti-American and they do not trust American motives in the Middle East. That Western powers also put too much emphasis on democratization is a possibility that must be considered. Democracy and Islamism, as we shall see, are compatible in principle, but current conditions make difficult any sort of cooperation between them.

The definition of political Islamism is somewhat vague and often polemical. For my purposes here, Islamism means any ideological movement or organization that believes Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and the Hadith should be included in some way, shape, or form in the ideal system of government. As with any ideology, there is a spectrum of belief – moderate Islamists may have a very different vision of Islamic government than extreme ones. This difference is crucial – often in Western media the extreme Islamists, including salafist groups like al-Qaeda, receive inordinate amounts of attention at the expense of moderate groups like the AK Party of Turkey. In reality the moderate Islamists "vastly outweigh" the more radical elements, they are far more likely to be receptive to democratic principles, and they are more likely to accept Western political overtures (Fuller 2005 38).

Failure to recognize this difference can lead to serious misunderstanding, as seen among some authors who still question Islamists' commitment to democracy. Daniel Pipes, for one, warns that the new democratic face of Islamists represented by Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Tariq Ramadan of Switzerland "pose a greater threat to Western civilization" than the likes of Usama bin Laden and Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran

(Pipes 2009). This “Islamism 2.0” as Pipes dubs it, is merely a new façade for old goals that seeks to insidiously achieve the worldwide application of shari’a, an end previously sought after by violence. By claiming allegiance to liberal democratic values, such Islamists win the adulation of the West, and the consent of their people, but “Once in power they can move the country toward the Shari’a” (Pipes 2009). So while bin Laden and other violent Islamists live in hiding, Erdogan is a respected and popular head of state.

This would be far more alarming if in fact Erdogan and other moderate Islamists were related to Usama bin Laden and ‘Umar ‘abd al-Rahman by anything but an English term of association. However, there is a distinct difference among these groups, though both are known loosely as Islamists. Pipes fails to see the obvious nuance and breadth in the word *Islamist* when he compares violent terrorists with elected democrats. The AK Party, which Pipes compares to al-Qaeda, has not in fact tried to impose Islamic law in Turkey. The AK Party and moderate Islamists in general support “freedom of conscience rather than aiming to make Islamic practices compulsory” (Yildiz 2008 47). Non-violent Islamists must be considered a distinct, albeit related, movement from violent Islamists, and a further distinction should be made between illiberal non-violent Islamists, and liberal non-violent Islamists. Instead, Pipes mistakenly groups all these dispositions together. In reality, mainstream Islamism is quite different from the violent and radical version exemplified by groups such as al-Qaeda and Hizb al-Tahrir; on the contrary, “Islamic groups... are [generally] rejecting the agenda advocated by al-Qaeda” (Telhami et al 2007).

For years now Islamists have been "steadily moving toward acceptance of the concept of democracy" (Fuller 2005 44). The Islamist embrace of democracy is assisted by the reality of authoritarian oppression and by political opportunity. Because they have built a broad base of public support, Islamist organizations would likely benefit more than any other groups from democratic elections, yet they are increasingly constrained and silenced by state oppression (Fuller 2005 45). In spite of some positive indications, whether Islamists will play a positive role in democratizing the Middle East is unclear, for coupling democracy with a second ideology has not consistently produced democratic institutions. One pertinent example is the failure of pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism to produce democracies during their period of political dominance from the 1950s-1970s. The pan-Arabism of that time and the Islamism of today share several important commonalities. According to Thomas Scheffler, both Arabism and Islamism draw their support from the same source: "a widespread and emotionally deeply rooted aversion to foreign domination" (Scheffler 2006 68). In the years after World War II, the secular manifestation of this emotion, namely Arabism, was dominant. The fervor of Nasserism and the spread of similar ideologies including Ba'athism eclipsed the Islamists. However, after the military defeat of 1967, Islamists began to gain ground. With the continued failure of secular nationalism to shake off foreign influence, Islamism became the dominant expression of the anti-foreign sentiment (Scheffler 2006 68). By the mid-1970s, both activists and observers "felt that Islamism carried within it the seeds of the future" for Muslims in the Middle East, and it became a significant mobilizing force in the region (Kepel 2000 23). Given its relation to nationalism, Islamism cannot be interpreted simply as a religious movement. Graham Fuller even goes so far as to say

in his 2003 book on Islamists that "the line between nationalism and the Islamic identity is now nearly obliterated: Even non-Muslim Arabs generally identify with the broader Islamist-nationalist trend" (Fuller 2003 14). Rather than remain purely Islamic, successful Islamist groups such as Hizballah and Hamas have "borrowed heavily from leftist and nationalist propaganda" and "transformed themselves into the vanguard of an ongoing national resistance struggle against foreign territorial occupation" (Scheffler 2006 69).

Even so, the relationship between Islamism and nationalism may be problematic. Stemming from the same emotional response to foreign domination, they are likely to produce similar attitudes. Pan-Arabism at its height, for example, had "a rather negative effect on both state building and democratization in the Middle East" (Scheffler 2006 65). The new belief in Arab unity created intra-Arab rivalries as each state vied for leadership of the greater nation. These rivalries were exacerbated as the newly wealthy Gulf states sought to increase their regional influence, which had previously been negligible (Mellon 2002 6-7). Arab nationalism also hindered cooperation, out of fear that any effort to unite was a veiled attempt to gain influence (Scheffler 2005 66). Unable to break down the artificial borders that were the legacy of colonialism, Arabism became mired in interstate rivalry and democratization never materialized. Individual Arab polities, wary of foreign or homegrown threats to their sovereignty, built up impressive security apparatuses that in turn hindered liberalization. Political Islamism may be having similar negative effects today. Like pan-Arabism in the past, its rise in popularity frightens some incumbent regimes, and motivates them to quash any movement towards democracy (Mellon 2002 3, Scheffler 2006 67). The transnational

nature of Islamism makes it a potential obstacle to democratization, as groups from each fragmented polity may ultimately hurt their cause in vying for regional leadership.

Despite these potential problems, there are indications that Islamism may differ from Arabism in its relation to democracy. Most importantly, the majority of Islamists do not seem to share the pan-Arabist interest in altering nation states. It seems unlikely that they would attempt to abolish any current boundaries as pan-Arabists did at the height of their power. Though Islamism is a transnational phenomenon, its primary focus is usually not "how to replace the existing Muslim states with a world Caliphate, but how to impose uniform standards of righteous behavior upon the Muslims living in them" (Scheffler 2006 71). Islamist parties retain a certain transnational character, but not at the expense of local identity. Most are not agitating for a caliphate –rather, they have adapted to the political environment of their home countries and, where allowed, have shown liberal tendencies and participated in local and national elections (Volpi 2009 31).

There is further encouraging evidence that Islamists can be supportive and inclusive of democracy. Where they have been integrated into national political systems, Islamist groups have typically moderated their platforms pragmatically to retain popular support (Scheffler 2006 73). In his book tracing the path of Islamism over the last 30 years, Gilles Kepel argues that like any political movement, Islamism adapts to its unique environment or fades away. According to Kepel, some Islamist groups have been on the decline in recent years, those whose movements turned violent or corrupt and lost credibility among their constituencies. Islamism as a whole has a new face now that is decidedly less anti-Western and more pro-democratic. The old Islamism that saw the

West as hostile to its very traditions has shifted to welcome the aspects of Western liberalism that it now needs to survive:

They [Islamists] have put aside the radical ideology of Qutb, Mawdudi, and Khomeini; they consider the jihadist-salafist doctrines developed in the camps of Afghanistan a source of horror, and they celebrate the "democratic essence" of Islam. Islamists defending the rights of the individual stand shoulder to shoulder with secular democrats in confronting repressive and authoritarian government. Choosing to wear the veil is no longer trumpeted as a sign of respect for an injunction of the sharia but is viewed as an exercise of the human right of individuals to freedom of expression (Kepel 2000 368).

Anti-democratic Islamists now represent a minority within the broader movement. The new majority emphasizes the compatibility of Islam with what were previously considered foreign values of democracy and liberalism. Islamists such as Abd al-Wahab al-Effendi decry the failure of non-democratic Islamist governments in Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan, and note that "Banna himself," the founder of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, "acknowledged that parliamentary democracy was the system most closely approximating to Islam" (Al-Effendi 1999). While many Islamists used to excoriate democracy and the appropriation of democratic ideals, they now see compatibility between it and Islam. Prominent Islamists such as the Tunisian Rashid al-Ghannoushi have publicly said democracy is an order inherent in and amenable to Islam: "The democratic values of political pluralism and tolerance are perfectly compatible with Islam" (Farran 1994). Ghannoushi even goes so far as to say, "The only legitimacy is the legitimacy of elections" (Wright 2003 230). Given this shift in Islamism away from extremism and violence, there is no reason to believe it cannot be fully incorporated into a healthy democratic system the same way Christian political parties have been in Latin America and Europe.

Clearly there is a potential in Islamism as a broad political movement to respect democratic practices and participate in the democratic process. In fact, and perhaps as a

result of their potential to gain from democratic reforms, Islamists appear far more committed to democracy than any of the “moderate” American allies such as the regimes in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. The fear that Islamists are anti-democratic appears to be unfounded.

The fear that Islamists are illiberal is perhaps more legitimate, but rests as well on shaky ground. No doubt there are Islamist factions that would be considered quite socially conservative even by Middle Eastern standards. However, social conservatism is only one part of the Islamist movement, and many Islamists are what Charles Kurzman refers to as Islamic Liberals (Al-Effendi 2003 255). Many of these Islamic Liberals have been disillusioned by their experiences in countries that have attempted Islamization such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, or Sudan, and they express liberal ideas in an Islamic vocabulary and with religious justifications (Al-Effendi 2003 255). Reform movements such as Nahdatul Ulama in Indonesia, the supporters of Mohammad Khatami in Iran, the Justice and Development Party in Morocco, the AK Party of Turkey, Al-Nahda in Tunisia, and certain factions of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria uphold democracy, rational interpretation of scripture, or *ijtihad*, and the protection of personal and civil liberties as fundamentally Islamic principles (Al-Effendi 2003 256). It is these reform movements that have fared well in elections throughout the Muslim world, not their more radical cousins such as Fazilet of Turkey or the Islamic Party of Malaysia. Though prominent extremists such as Mawlana Mawdudi of Pakistan and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt detested liberalism, many other modern intellectuals have upheld a strong relationship between Islam and so-called liberal values. Radwan Masmoudi refers to liberal Muslims as the “silenced majority,” a group who outnumber the two marginal

factions that dominate public debate in the Muslim world, secular and Islamic extremists (Masmoudi 2003 259). In any case, many Islamists are also liberal Muslims, and this strain of Islamism has fared well in political competition.

By no means is liberal Islam new, either. A 1957 edition of *al-Kifah al-Islami*, a weekly magazine published by the Muslim Brotherhood, expresses a liberal reformist perspective on the issue of women's rights: "We do not want to return to the past, to an old era and lifestyle... and it is inevitable that women associate closely with men... A man who prevents his wife from associating with another man must fear that she will love another man" (Schwedler 2006 156). Though the Brotherhood's position has changed over the past few decades, this current of liberalism can be found in numerous instances. A program statement from 1993 by the Islamic Action Front, the Jordanian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood and also a political party, stresses the need for women to take an active role in society: "legitimate women's rights have to be respected, as does the role of women in the development of society, within the framework of Islamic virtues. Women must be given access to participate in public life, and must have the chance to occupy leading posts" (Schwedler 2006 164-165). There is variation in perspective among Islamist groups and between each country, and many Islamist factions are backward by Western standards. However, the trend toward liberalism is often quite strong and has been growing in recent years. In the end, Islamists stand to gain from a greater respect for liberal values and personal freedom, because it will allow them greater access to the public sphere. Though some Islamists may still be illiberal, many prominent Islamist figures embrace liberalism rather than eschew it.

Equally unwarranted is the fear that Islamists would dominate free and fair elections to the detriment of secular liberals. Though Islamists do enjoy significant popular support throughout the Middle East, they are greatly aided by repression of all alternatives to their own opposition. This is so because non-Islamist political movements, not having the mosque as an organizational base, are generally more closely controlled by state mechanisms. As a result, political restrictions have hurt non-Islamist parties far more than Islamists (Langohr 2003 280). Secular parties denied freedom of association and means of communicating their platforms have no effective channel to draw supporters, whereas Islamists may use mosques and religious associations to spread their message. It is logical to assume that Islamists would fare worse in elections if non-Islamist parties were freer to organize and present themselves as another alternative to the ruling party (Langohr 2003 280). Islamists benefit as well from decentralization – since there is no definitive Islamic authority, the mosque can be a resource for many different groups, all of whom are part of the Islamist movement. This creates what Anna Seleny refers to as the *reverberation effect*, which makes the voices of Islamist groups “disproportionately resonant” in the public sphere (Seleny 2006 481). Because they do not need any real authority to label themselves Islamist, many groups – including militant factions that increasingly diverge from historical Islam – are able to draw on Islamism for their identity (Seleny 2006 488). The effect of this decentralization is that Islamism appears to be a larger and more homogeneous movement than it actually is (Seleny 2006 488).

Even with the advantage of being the most organized form of opposition, Islamists have scored no resounding victories in elections. Though they are generally

restrained less by state repression than the non-Islamist opposition, they have not managed to win clear majorities in any election, with the possible exception of the aborted elections in Algeria in 1992. Up to 2003, Islamists everywhere had never won more than 30 percent of contested seats in a legislative election in the Arab Middle East (Langohr 2003 279). Even the 2006 electoral victory of Hamas in the Palestinian territories appears weak upon closer examination. The governing Fatah party was in great disarray at the time of elections after the death of Yasser Arafat, and brought together candidate lists for local and national elections only days before the vote. In spite of the party's widely criticized corruption and ineffectiveness, Fatah won 41 percent of the parliamentary vote while Hamas won 44 percent (Wittes 2008 82-83). This hardly stood as a ringing endorsement of Hamas, but rather indicated a closely divided electorate in which the inept ruling party was favored over the Islamists by a considerable minority.

The situation is similar in Lebanon. Though the 2005 elections there saw Hizballah gain ground in the Lebanese parliament, elections in 2009 resulted in a victory for the pro-Western March 14 Coalition and a net loss of seats for Hizballah (Slackman 2009). Indeed there is a clear trend in the electoral record of Islamist parties. They tend to win significant representation at the outset, and then lose support in subsequent elections (Schwedler 2007 57). Such a pattern occurred in the 1990s in Jordan, Yemen, and Lebanon, for example, when the first election to include Islamists saw notable gains, and following elections a notable decline (Schwedler 2007, Langohr 2003, Kepel 2000). It must be acknowledged, of course, that regime meddling in elections affected these results; still, the decline of support for Islamists appears to be a result of failure to accomplish their agenda, or a decrease in that agenda's popularity. In any case, the

number of votes garnered by Islamist parties does not support the contention that they will win commanding majorities in free and fair elections; there is little evidence either that Islamists will seek to destroy the democratic process once they have been elected (Schwedler 2007 58).

Furthermore, polling data indicate that Islamists will face considerable opposition throughout the Middle East in a political contest. Even if they are able to win parliamentary majorities or some other political influence, their predominance probably will not be insurmountable. In their analysis of survey results from 2000 to 2004, Mark Tessler and Eleanor Gao find that significant numbers of Middle Eastern populations favor a strong relationship between religion and government, but that “in most instances an almost equal proportion does not favor such a relationship” (Tessler, Gao 2005 90). In several countries narrow majorities agreed that “men of religion” should not have a role in government – in no country did less than 44 percent of respondents agree with that statement (Tessler, Gao 2005 90). Similar numbers responded that Islamic *shari’a* should not be the sole basis of law in their country (Tessler, Gao 2005 89). This information is important because it demonstrates a near even division of opinion on the role religion should play in politics, a topic on which Islamists define themselves. It is plausible then, that in a free and pluralistic political arena, Islamists will not be able to dominate government or command unassailable levels of support.

Where Islamists have won parliamentary majorities or otherwise gained significant political influence, they have seldom shown any of the dangerous traits that American policymakers fear. The best example of this, indeed one of the only Middle Eastern examples, is in Turkey. The first Islamist party ever to take a majority of

parliamentary seats in a democratic election was the Refah party of Turkey in 1996, though prime minister and Refah leader Necmettin Erbakan was forced to resign his post barely a year later (Kepel 2000 343-344). The encounter between Islamists and secular forces was repeated with far different results in 2002 when the Justice and Development, or AK party, won 34.3 percent of the vote and earned 363 out of 550 seats in the Turkish parliament (Yildiz 2008 41). Since then the AK party has managed to carve a niche for itself and even to improve democratic practices in Turkey while resisting the military's attempts at direct intervention in politics (Somer 2007 1272). In recognition of the failures of the Refah party, and perhaps in a conscious effort to distance itself from it, the AK party has developed an agenda of democratic and economic development. Tension between the AK party and the secularist military has continued, but the party continues to enjoy popular support and has managed to succeed in a constitutionally mandated secular state. It has increased its support since its initial election in 2002, winning 46.6 percent of the vote in 2007 (Hwang 2009 30). The party's leadership is overtly religious but has not challenged the political or intellectual foundations of the Turkish state; the AK party approach is well described by the current prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan: "Islam is my personal reference. My political reference is democracy" (Yildiz 2008 57).

In Turkey, the state has permitted Islamist participation through normal political channels, and Islamists have proven to be willing and trustworthy partners in the democratic process (Hwang 2009 43). While in power, "the AKP has not changed a single law that directly challenged the secular constitution" (Somer 2007 1278). Though the example of Turkey – given its unique history, culture, and relatively advanced economic development – cannot be easily duplicated throughout the Middle East, it

remains a compelling instance of Islamism as a diverse movement with powerful moderate, pluralist, and democratic tendencies.

Most importantly for American policymakers, the Turkish Islamists have not tried to end the traditional relationship between their country and the United States.

American-Turkish affairs continue today much as they did when uncompromisingly secular parties dominated Turkey. The AK party has “maintained good relations with the United States” while maintaining its Islamist character (Gause 2009 52). In fact, Islamist Turkey has the potential to be a great asset to American goals in the Middle East.

Turkish Islamists even led the push to cooperate with American forces during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While AK Party leaders attempted to work out the terms of collaboration with the United States, the Turkish Armed Forces and Republican elite opposed involvement in Iraq without guaranteed protection of Turkish interests there (Mufti 2009 205). The opposition CHP voted en masse against a parliamentary resolution to cooperate with the United States and allow Turkey to serve as a staging area for the invasion of Iraq. Indeed, the strongest support for working with the United States in this instance came from the Islamist AK Party –three quarters of which voted for the resolution – and not the Turkish secularists (Mufti 2009 206).

More recently, the Obama administration has shown a serious commitment to several mutual Turkish-American interests, including engagement with Iran and Syria, and a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in which Turkey can play a positive role (Taspinar 2009 16). Continued collaboration between Turkey and the United States in Afghanistan, and Turkey’s excellent relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan, make it a valuable partner in American foreign policy (Taspinar 2009 18). These relations have

remained intact for the most part with Turkish Islamists in power, and in some respects they have even improved.

Inclusion of Islamists in elections is more likely to combat radicalism in the movement than to exacerbate it. Current repression of Islamist organizations serves extremists at the expense of moderates, whereas political participation could accomplish the reverse. As a repressed opposition, Islamist parties are often able to curry favor without articulating their political agendas. Very often they are supported simply in protest of the corrupt regimes that seek to repress them. Since they tend to make up the strongest opposition contingent, they naturally receive broad support in countries ruled by unpopular and corrupt regimes. Inclusion of Islamists has tended to follow Kepel's narrative – parties either moderate to better reflect the political mainstream, or they lose support and disappear or continue as minor forces. The reason for this is simple – unlike salafi groups such as al-Qaeda, Islamist parties have chosen to enter political participation and leave idealism and theology behind. By competing for popular favor, Islamists acknowledge that their goals are political, even while they may be inspired by religious sensibility. A party is not a religion, and an Islamist party that enters politics “implicitly recognizes that political priorities will often supersede the religious, that compromises in belief and ideology will inevitably have to be made, and that daily decision will require choices between Islam or the interests of the party” (Fuller 2003 134).

Islamist parties have often in fact cooperated with secular political elements on a political agenda. Even groups like Hamas and Hizballah have allied themselves with non-Islamic groups, many of which are their ideological rivals. Hamas frequently

worked with leftist and secular parties like the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine throughout the 1990s to fight the influence of the dominant Fatah party (Schwedler 2007 58). Furthermore, for several years now Hamas has been cautiously moderating its views on acceptance of Israel, expressing its backing for a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Issacharoff 2008). Hizballah has historically cooperated with many parties in Lebanon including rival Shi'a, Sunni, and even Christian parties. The best example of this cooperation is the recent 2009 elections in Lebanon which saw Hizballah running as part of the "March 8" coalition, which included the Shi'a Amal party and the Free Patriotic Movement of Michel Aoun, a Christian (Slackman 2009). This type of political maneuvering is more the rule than the exception, and it shows that Islamists can and do accept the democratic process, and – like any political party – they are willing to sacrifice some of their ideals in order to accomplish a more limited agenda.

Inclusion of Islamists in the broader democratic process also seems to have had the effect of moderating the movement as a whole. As Islamist groups have chosen to enter the political arena, they have left behind their belief that non-Islamic political alternatives are necessarily illegitimate and socially poisonous. In the end Islamist participation in the democratic process is a positive for democracy promoters and Islamists alike. An uncensored environment of debate fosters pluralism and provides alternative voices to the violent extremists who do in fact reject democracy. Inclusion of Islamists in an open political system, though it will not eliminate extremism altogether, may have the effect of moderating the political landscape (Schwedler 2007 59). Thus greater liberty and the freedom to compete with other groups for influence "places a

greater onus on Islamist organizations to accept some kind of ideological flexibility, moderation and pluralism – characteristics easier to reject when the system is closed” (Fuller 2003 125). Fears that Islamists will dominate elections, strip away democratic processes once they are in power, and impose extreme, harsh rule are thus misplaced. In fact, Islamism is a varied and complex movement with roots that go beyond religion and have affinities with modern resistance ideologies like nationalism that have gained traction in the post-colonial world. Perhaps as a result of vicious repression, Islamists now enjoy considerable popular support, but not overwhelmingly so. In many situations where they have been allowed to participate in elections, they have moderated their positions and proven to uphold democratic values as well as their counterparts in the secular opposition.

The true enemies of democratization in the Middle East are not Islamists, at least not at the moment – that appellation is better applied to the autocratic regimes that repress them. Too often fear of Islamists has been exploited by ruling regimes to discourage the United States from pushing for democratic reform, as “Arab leaders consistently cite the Islamist threat as a prime reason why they cannot risk pursuing political change” (Albright et al 2005 18). Images of events in Iran, Sudan, Algeria, and Afghanistan continue to dominate Washington’s impression of Islamists in politics. Though the fate of Islamism in these countries must not be repeated throughout the Middle East, it is a mistake to blame civil conflicts, coups, and revolutions on the democratic process. The violent expressions of Islamism in these situations was not the result of democracy, it was the result of repression. If anything, these examples should serve as a warning of what can happen when authoritarianism and political illegitimacy

continue as the status quo. In his study of revolutionary movements, Jeff Goodwin found that social upheaval, violence, and revolution are more likely to occur in repressive, exclusionary and weak states (Goodwin 2001 290). While inclusion seems to have a moderating effect, “Political exclusion and state repression unleash a dynamic of radicalization characterized by exclusive rebel [groups] that isolate Islamist [sic] from the broader society and foster anti-system ideologies” (Hafez 2004 15).

The continued rule of friendly autocrats is not assured, and the possible replacements for crumbling regimes are numerous and generally undesirable. The United States will best protect its interests by seeking peaceful transitions to democratic governments; the alternative may well be coups or revolutions led by anti-regime, anti-American extremists. In this context, Islamism can help American policymakers by serving as a catalyst for political change in the Middle East. While a political opening is unlikely to sweep Islamists to commanding majorities, Islamists do have a broader public audience than almost all other forms of opposition throughout the Middle East, and Islamist parties can stand for liberalization and protection of the rule of law and even for democratization. The less likely scenario, in which Islamists de-liberalize and establish theocracies, only becomes more likely when political repression continues and drives populations to more extreme means of protest. Iran is the supreme example.

An important distinction must be drawn when discussing Islamism. Many different beliefs and political dispositions fall under the somewhat vague term *Islamist*. It would be a mistake to label all of them extremist, or anti-democratic and no less a mistake to label all of them moderate. There is a stark and vital difference between salafists who reject modernity and seek a return to the purer times of the early Islamic

community and the modern political organizations that recognize rule of law and participate in elections. These separate classes of Islamists are different again from the quasi-Leninist terrorist groups using violence to bring about their vision of Islam and again from the Islamic societies that provide social services and education but are not involved in politics. Blanket statements about Islamism are inaccurate and seldom productive. However, it is safe to say that many Islamists have a demonstrated commitment to democracy and that in their various guises they comprise an influential segment of the Middle Eastern political landscape. To shun them or to attempt to undermine them in the interest of protecting democracy would be to misunderstand their movement. Islamism is not a threat like militant extremism – it is a political movement that has the potential to catalyze major and positive political change in the Middle East, or, if repressed, it also has the potential to derail reform and spur social regression. Given the role Islamism can play in the fate of the Middle East, its growth, development, and continuing moderation should be of utmost concern to American policymakers.

IV. The Best Remaining Option: Democracy Promotion and American Interests in the Middle East

It is time now to revisit the question whether or not democracy promotion can serve the totality of American interests as well or better than other policy choices. Does democracy promotion conflict with the United States' vital regional goals, or can it be a vehicle for accomplishing them?

Arguments have already been presented illustrating the changes that have weakened the traditional strategy of relying on autocratic leaders to maintain stability and further American interests. The regional population explosion, years of failed economic policy, social stagnation, political repression, and popular disillusionment with the status quo pose a daunting challenge to the already shaky legitimacy of the region's ruling regimes. The continued deterioration of the democratic bargain has created a need, and corresponding popular desire, for meaningful change. It has also had the dangerous effect of fostering radicalism and violent extremist movements that now pose a serious threat to American security and regional stability. Underdevelopment and popular discontent have combined to create a precarious situation that could result in a number of possible outcomes. The best possible outcome for American interests is the liberalization and eventual democratization of autocratic regimes.

The Arab world's rulers have proven remarkably durable and have managed to resist change for far longer than anyone could have predicted. A cycle of controlled liberalization to relieve socio-political pressure and bolster legitimacy, followed by increased repression when agitation for more meaningful change grew, has managed to sustain regimes through years of social unrest. However, the tools that autocrats have

counted on to prolong their rule are losing their effectiveness, and are now serving to exacerbate radicalization among their populations. The old mechanism of external rents, repression, and propaganda will be insufficient to secure stability in the coming years.

Some kind of reform must occur to restore political legitimacy to the Middle East, but is it necessarily democratic reform? The argument in favor of democracy promotion in the region is twofold: first, smaller incremental reforms that leave the established order in power appear insufficient to the task of satisfying the democratic bargain, making necessary some change in political leadership; second, from the American point of view, the best option for change is democracy. The other feasible reform options – economic reform to be followed in the future by political liberalization, reform and development of the institutions of civil society, and marginal liberalization by the regimes in question – have the potential for only minor and generally ineffective change. None of these options is useless; indeed all are important tools of democracy promotion, but none of them alone or in concert with the others is capable of meaningful reform in Middle Eastern autocracies – not, that is, without direct attention to democratization.

One of the commonly proposed strategies of Middle Eastern reform is to focus on economic development. This is certainly the heart of many ruling regimes' reform programs, and it is often held that it is less confrontational, and therefore more likely to succeed than political reform (Hamzawy 2009, Wittes 2008 59). As the argument goes, economic development will build the necessary framework for political liberalization. A course of Washington consensus-style economic reforms could strengthen the private sector, expand the middle class, remove arbitrary regulation, and increase transparency, all of which could contribute to democratic liberalization. Proponents of the "economics

first” strategy reason that such reforms are easier to sell to Middle Eastern leaders who resist political change but acknowledge the need for an improved economy.

Unfortunately, economic development can encounter just as many obstacles as political liberalization, and it is just as problematic as political approaches to reform. There is no doubt a great need for economic development in the Middle East today. The labor force is rapidly expanding, and with unemployment region-wide at roughly 25 percent there is already a drastic need for growth (Albright et al 2005 24-25). Foreign direct investment in the Middle East is dismally low relative to other regions of the world, and capital flight has become a serious concern as Middle East residents hold billions of dollars in savings abroad (Bellin 2005 132). While incomes have remained stagnant, cost of living has risen considerably; in Egypt, for example, incomes have remained unchanged since 1985 while the cost of marriage has ballooned with inflation to four times the average annual income (Dhillon 2007 35). The majority of Middle Eastern states have struggled to keep gross national product, or GNP, at pace with population growth. Saudi Arabia and Iran have actually experienced an absolute decline in GNP over the past two decades (Bellin 2005 132).

The roots of this economic stagnation are also the obstacles to its reform. Eva Bellin refers to these as “too much state” and “too little state,” respectively (Bellin 2005 133). “Too much state” refers to the overbearing role of Middle Eastern governments in managing their affairs. Complex systems of patronage and years of a statist development model today cripple attempts to liberalize. In many countries, an enormous public sector has been managed with political aims – to absorb unemployment and maintain a system of patronage to regime allies (Bellin 2005 133). In order to consolidate control, Arab

rulers have carefully doled out business contracts and other economic incentives in exchange for the loyalty of businessmen and officials (Kamrava 1998 104). Patronage systems have not just targeted elites, however; Stephen J. King argues that state clientelism is used to secure the dependence of “entire social classes,” providing employment in inefficient and artificially sustained state enterprises (King 2009 30). Use of the economy as a political tool has its own decision-making logic that does not yield the best economic results, but only the most politically expedient ones. This strategy has imposed “significant irrationality” on the direction of the public sector, which affects all other areas of the economy on account of its central role; the result has been “chronic inefficiency and persistence as a loss-maker” (Bellin 2005 133).

Bellin’s second fundamental problem in Middle Eastern countries is “too little state,” or rather an inadequate state role in regulation. That is, most underperforming Middle Eastern states today lack the institutional and regulatory framework necessary to encourage technical innovation and attract private sector investment. High levels of corruption, arbitrariness, lack of property rights, and high transaction costs all combine to make the Middle East a very unattractive place for private investors to operate (Bellin 2005 134). Considering these obstacles, there is little question as to why the entire Middle East attracts only 3 percent of global foreign direct investment (Shafik 1998 3). In addition, inadequate state regulation, no less than heavy-handed patronage, is politically motivated. Arbitrary, labyrinthine regulations reinforce the power of the state better than a transparent system. They help to guarantee that allies of the state in the business elite will not have to compete on a level playing field with rivals, thus increasing business leaders’ loyalty to the ruling regime. That is, the current regulatory systems,

which are generally detrimental to free enterprise and development, are important tools used to bestow favor at the leadership's discretion, thereby tightening political control.

Middle Eastern autocrats have been slow to accept economic reform because it would mean weakening the strong systems of patronage on which they rely for political support. In short, because Middle Eastern leaders have used their economies as political tools, any economic reform necessarily affects their political security, and they have reacted accordingly. Several attempts at economic liberalization have been implemented in the Middle East since the 1980s. Reforms encouraged by the United States, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund have followed the guidelines of the Washington consensus, focusing on containing inflation, reducing government spending, eliminating price controls and subsidies, and privatizing state-run industries (Bellin 2005 135). The results have been mixed. By and large, most regimes accepted the need for lowering inflation and reducing government spending, but balked at the prospect of longer-term liberalization measures such as free trade, privatization, and reform or regulatory institutions. As a result of states' reluctance to lose key sources of patronage, the pace of reform in most countries has slowed to a crawl (Bellin 2005 136). Even genuine efforts at reform found little support among the middle class and business elite who have come to depend on government bureaucracies or patronage for their livelihood (King 2009 190). What reform efforts did materialize were not always genuine, and often were based on the same rent seeking and patronage, "which did not produce the economic growth or more beneficial class structure historically associated with capitalist development and democratization" (King 2009 190).

Such half-hearted economic reforms can even have the effect of reversing political liberalization. When reforms lead to popular discontent, they are often followed by a reduction in citizens' rights. Such a reduction did occur after bread riots in Egypt in the early 1990s, when "political deliberalization was the immediate corollary of reforms that were meant to enhance property rights, increase private sector growth, and otherwise liberalize the economy" (Kienle 1998 221). Ultimately, economic reform has faltered because it has been wielded, in Middle Eastern fashion, as a political tool – policies that are economically disastrous are politically expedient for most Middle East autocrats, and only severe crisis can spur genuine reform. Even then, it is likely to be minimal and calculated to retain government control, and does not necessarily signal a corresponding liberalization in the political process.

The second common track of foreign-sponsored reform in the Middle East is focused on development of civil society. Though the concept is somewhat vague, civil society is generally defined as the group of institutions that are unaffiliated with a government but still focus on improvement of social and political conditions. Unlike political parties, civil society organizations do not seek direct political power and they do not participate in elections. Examples of civil society organizations may include nonprofit organizations, labor unions, business associations, advocacy groups, and interest clubs (Hawthorne 2005 82). The logic for pursuing civil society reform is the same as that for giving priority to economic reform – it creates conditions amenable to democracy without directly challenging ruling regimes. Civil society can play a positive role in democratization, and a robust civil society often is a feature of healthy democracies. Because it is widely regarded as apolitical, it offers a way to gradually

build pressure for liberalization in authoritarian states that might try to squash change in any larger increments.

MEPI and USAID have devoted special attention to developing civil society in the Middle East in recent years (Hawthorne 2005 89). The specific failures of MEPI's efforts have already been discussed, and it seems that these disappointing results may be attributed to civil society reform in general as well. Civil society aid has been flowing to the Middle East for over two decades now, and has produced only marginal progress. Though it can be an important component of a more ambitious democracy promotion policy, civil society development in itself is frequently the subject of "unrealistic hopes... as a democratic and democratizing force" (Hawthorne 2005 97). Any democracy promotion policy will rely on cooperation and support from some elements of the society in which it is being implemented but, unfortunately, many of the groups in the Middle East that receive aid with the goal of democracy promotion are poorly placed to have any significant effect on their populations (Schlumberger 2006 44). Moreover, advocacy groups with the capability to apply for foreign funding tend to be made up of elite, institutionalized individuals who work with the support or consent of their governments. These groups often have little to no public influence, and they often serve as means to a comfortable living for the privileged classes rather than as vehicles for meaningful social or political change.

The ultimate problem with democracy promotion as such, according to Oliver Schlumberger, is that efforts to promote democracy in an authoritarian regime occur with the knowledge and approval of that regime, which will not tolerate them if they become a threat to their continued dominance (Schlumberger 2006 46). The civil society-based,

gradualist style of reform embodied in MEPI and similar programs cannot succeed because it is ultimately limited by the powers to which its success would be an existential threat. Indirect democratization may bring some of the trappings of democracy, but it is incapable of effecting true democratization.

Ultimately, the scenario of slow, incremental changes evolving into truly meaningful reform is "difficult and has been only rarely achieved around the world" (Carothers 2005 198). Instead of gradual and marginal changes, genuine, felt reforms must occur to prepare a climate in the Middle East that is favorable to American interests.

Gradual reforms that aim to foster peace and stability in the region will, for the reasons given above, not succeed under the current system of autocracies. The autocratic regimes on which the United States has relied to maintain stability and comply with American regional hegemony, unable to provide necessary social goods for their populations, will not continue to rule as in past decades without considerable and perhaps insurmountable difficulty. The current generation will therefore likely see significant regional change, and the best outcome for American interests is that these regimes move toward democracy. Other outcomes – an escalation of anti-regime violence, social revolution, coups d'état, and regime overthrow by radical elements that will be decidedly anti-American – are clearly unacceptable. Reinforcement of a failing status quo can only continue for so long, and the momentum toward change is palpable throughout the Middle East. It is my contention that democracy promotion is the best way to ensure that the emerging democratic bargain favors American interests and assuages the social unrest that threatens them at present. Democratization can address all at once the crisis of

political legitimacy, the worn out social contract, the rise of extremism and violence, and the demographic “time bomb” that threaten stability and American security interests.

Contrary to current thought on the subject, democracy promotion is not subject to intractable conflicts of interest – every policy choice will present a tradeoff between short-term interests and long-term consequences, or vice versa. However, the United States is fortunately able to tolerate these tradeoffs in democracy promotion – if they are handled carefully. Furthermore, proper democracy offers the best chance that American policy will reduce the political radicalization of the Middle East, a crucial priority of any policy.

The current threats to American interests in the Middle East may be summarized briefly – instability and popular discontent as a result of political repression and economic underdevelopment. There are obviously other concerns, among them the growth of influence of rival powers such as Iran, but the erosion of autocratic legitimacy and power poses an equal or greater threat to current American interests in the region. In fact, Iran’s recent gain in relative influence in the Middle East is partially the result of the failure of autocratic regimes to retain the support of their people, and of American policy leaving power gaps that Iran has opportunistically filled (Molavi et al 2007 7). Although the growth of Iran is not immediately germane to this paper, it is worth pointing out here that its conventional threat is minor and its increased soft power is largely a result of American decisions in Iraq and of Arab popular discontent with autocratic regimes. It certainly presents a challenge to American hegemony, but such a challenge will be more easily defeated if Iranian-backed extremists find their appeal effectively diminished in a democratic Middle East. The larger problem in the Middle East is that for decades it has

been “sinking in economic failure, political despotism, cultural turpitude, and social crisis” (Taheri 2004 13). There may be no discernible “breaking point,” after which there is an obvious and immediate need to reshape the political landscape of the region. However, cracks in the old system have been showing for years, and past methods of patching those cracks have in fact made the situation worse.

The relationship between democracy and terrorism has already been addressed in some detail. We have seen that the link between democratization and an immediate reduction in terrorism is dubious and lacks convincing empirical evidence. To pursue democracy with the goal of counterterrorism is therefore futile. The causes of terrorism are multifaceted and its prevention cannot be simply based on liberalization, especially when such liberalization puts radicals in a more advantageous position.

With these caveats in mind, an important distinction must be drawn – terrorists, especially the jihadist-salafist variety who pose the greatest articulated threat to the United States, will not be greatly affected by democratization. Still, democratization has considerable potential to reduce political extremism, by alleviating the conditions that give rise to such terrorist threats in the first place. Eubank and Weinberg, and Quan Li have provided indications that democracy may increase incidents of terror, but this empirical evidence is quite limited and generalized. Specific motivations for terrorism vary greatly by region and by country – data on eco-terrorism and Marxist terrorist groups in Europe, for example, probably cannot inform analysis of religiously motivated terrorism in the Middle East. At bottom terrorism is a tactic, not an ideology, and its use is varied and complex.

Furthermore, more recent data suggest that Eubank and Weinberg may have been incorrect in predicting trends of terrorism. Quan Li notes in his analysis, which supports most of Eubank and Weinberg's conclusions, that democratic participation may help curb terrorism because "It increases satisfaction and political efficacy of citizens, reduces their grievances, thwarts terrorist recruitment, and raises public tolerance of counterterrorist policies" (Quan 2005). According to the RAND Corporation Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism's Terrorism Incident Database, or RAND-MIPT, a plurality of 42 percent of all terrorist incidents from May 1, 2003 to December 31, 2006 were claimed by terrorists originating in the Middle East (Kaye et al 2008 20). In addition, 57 percent of all terrorist incidents in this time period occurred in the Middle East (Kaye et al 2008 19-21). Though democracy may not be a panacea for terrorism, much of the terrorism that occurs today is happening in the world's least democratic region.

There are additional reasons to be cautious when attributing terrorism to democratic liberalization. While critics of democracy promotion such as Gregory Gause argue that democratization will not appease al-Qaeda or any other violent jihadist-salafist groups, they may not be asking the appropriate question. Indeed, the United States has very little chance of persuading such groups to relinquish violence for political liberalization. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates have already abandoned the political process and seek to lead the vanguard of a quasi-Leninist revolution against modernity and all who oppose their narrow and radical interpretation of Islam (Esposito 2002 21). However, there are many groups in the Middle East that do not rise to this level of extremism but still practice violence and often forge links with al-Qaeda and more hard line elements. There is growing evidence that political repression radicalizes opposition

and may drive disaffected citizens to terrorism, which is often carried out against democracies. Where terrorists come from is as important as where they attack, if not more so, and evidence indicates that “countries that afford a low level of political rights are more likely to be springboards of terrorism and less likely to be the targets of terrorism” (Kruger and Laitin 2008). Illiberal political systems may not suffer from as great a number of terrorist attacks as democracies, but this is not because they actually create less terrorism – in fact the opposite appears to be true in the Middle East where “criminalization of legitimate political grievances has worsened the problem, heightened tensions, and intensified anti-American feeling” (Fuller 2004 22).

There is a very plausible logic to the argument that political repression is feeding the violent extremist movements that now pose such a threat to stability in the Middle East and around the globe. Exclusionary politics and oppression force regime opponents to turn to ever more radical means of resistance. With no meaningful political reform to appease them, and facing instead a mockery of democratic institutions that provides no greater opportunity for popular sovereignty, otherwise moderate citizens may lose faith in the political process and turn to violence as the only effective means of change. Beyond the local arena of politics, certain groups may target the hegemonic power that blesses the oppressive order and praises the small, superficial reforms that pass for democratic change yet achieve no power for the general populace.

This narrative is an oversimplification, but it serves to illustrate the general problem with leaving conditions in the Middle East as they are. Evidence does indicate a link between political repression, violence, extremism, and instability. A 2008 RAND Corporation study found a common thread in all six of its case studies of Middle Eastern

autocracies: political liberalization can often reduce violence and weaken extremists, but incomplete reform has the reverse effect, reinforcing radicals and inciting terrorism (Kaye et al 2008 164-171). Examples of this phenomenon abound throughout the Middle East, where autocratic regimes have made a habit of partial, half-hearted, or truncated reforms that are touted as true liberalization but fall far short of satisfying their people's aspirations for greater freedom. Most Middle Eastern governments today are what Daniel Brumberg refers to as "liberalized autocracies" –their authoritarian rulers allow a certain amount of liberalization so long as it does not weaken their grasp on true power (Brumberg 2005 16). These regimes are able to feign cooperation with reform efforts while actually conceding no meaningful changes: "They are liberal in the sense that their leaders not only tolerate but promote a measure of political openness... But they are autocratic in that their rulers always retain the upper hand" (Brumberg 2005 16). Rather than relinquishing power, rulers often use such partial liberalization to reinforce their control, keeping up appearances internationally and weakening opposition domestically. Partial reform of political and civil society allows governments to divide and weaken their opposition. The immediate result of increased freedom for opposition groups is competition for power, typically pitting Marxists, nationalists, secularists, Islamists, and others against each other (Brumberg 2005 27). This splitting of the opposition ensures that regime leadership remains the single greatest political force and inhibits nation-wide movements for reform.

Partial reforms tend to discredit any efforts at comprehensive reform as equally disingenuous and ineffective. They have the even more insidious effect of driving regime opponents to radicalism when conventional political channels are clearly shown to be

useless. Terrorism and other political violence in Egypt under the Mubarak regime has correlated in general with the rollback of reform processes, and with the consequent signal that the regime is not committed to forging any political legitimacy with its population (Kaye et al 2008 53). Terrorist campaigns throughout the 1990s and 2000s have escalated when peaceful opposition movements have failed to effect change (Kaye et al 2008 49). Even in Jordan, where partial liberalization has managed to keep the level of domestic terrorism relatively low, there is a growing fear that “frustrations surrounding its [political reform’s] absence... may only generate more radical alternatives... leading to pockets of instability and increased political violence” (Kaye et al 2008 80).

The United States’ autocratic allies thus face populations that desperately need reforms and development which they are incapable of providing. Limited reform programs designed to relieve political pressure often have the adverse effect of radicalizing opposition and spurring political violence and terrorism. The solution to the problem is meaningful change; creation of a new political order that is built on true legitimacy and popular consent has the potential to curtail radicalization and restore stability to the Middle East. Serious attention to political legitimacy and the rule of law will also serve long-term American interests in the region by helping to create a climate that is favorable to moderation and pluralism. A prudent, even-handed program sponsoring democratic reform in the Middle East is the best way for the United States to curb extremism and improve its low credibility in the region.

The recurring argument against democracy promotion is that it is in some way antithetical to the other American core interests in the area. It is impossible to deny that there are conflicts between promoting democracy and maintaining the old relationships

on which United States has relied to secure its strategic position in the Middle East. However, these conflicts are typically exaggerated, and democracy promotion does not necessarily take away from other American objectives. Essentially, American interests in the Middle East are, for the most part, in harmony, not conflict, with democratization. The imperatives for Middle East policy are clear – stability, security, and peace. Without these, American influence is sure to wane. Priorities have not changed, but methods must if the United States is to keep pace with the political dynamics of the region. In short, the United States “can and should seek peace, reform, and security for the region simultaneously, while continuing to buy Arab oil” (Dunne 2005 209).

American-regional relations are based on shared strategic objectives. Alliance with the United States is not a personal favor conferred by one particular leader, but the result of a calculation of mutual interests, opportunity, and cost. Consequently the United States can press political reform, even if it annoys regional governments, so long as cooperation with the United States on military or counterterrorist efforts, economic or strategic aid, and peacemaking remain mutually beneficial (Dunne 2005 217). Middle Eastern autocrats need America as much as America needs them – and maybe more; nor is this likely to change merely because the United States increases pressure for political or institutional reform. Riyadh and Washington have an interest in “strategic defense of the Persian Gulf and stability in the price of oil,” and they will continue to do so even if the United States pushes harder for reform (Wittes 2008 112). The Egyptian government may be reluctant to open up its political system, but it also relies on American aid to keep public order and prevent bread riots.

Indeed, American policymakers have a strong case to make to Middle Eastern leaders that democratic reform is in their interest as well. The potential for a reduction in radicalism and curtailment of violent resistance movements would certainly be to their advantage. Daniel Brumberg argues that though the transition from liberalized autocracy to democracy is difficult, popular support for some form of change is high, and sitting regimes are eager to shore up legitimacy (Brumberg 2005 34). Amy Hawthorne notes that reform has entered public debate in the Arab world and even staunchly conservative circles such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Saudi royal family have begun to consider reform a possible necessity (Hawthorne 2005 57). In 2004, American journalist Fareed Zakaria wrote after traveling through the region that, "everywhere in the Arab world, people are talking about reform... the wind is behind those who advocate free-market, modern, Western-style reforms" (Zakaria 2004). Even the American invasion of Iraq, extremely unpopular in the Arab world, seems to have had a positive effect on reform discussion. While the invasion was widely condemned, the events in Iraq seem to have had a role in sparking debate about democracy, particularly among American allies such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia (Hawthorne 2005 63). In short, there are signs that democratic reform has entered the public consciousness as a desirable option in the Middle East. Autocratic leaders understand that public tolerance of their corruption, repression, and exclusionary practices has worn out. They know that policymakers now consider their internal politics to have "important security consequences" for the United States, and that American objectives have changed to include the sentiments of Middle Eastern peoples as well as those of their governments (Dunne 2004 54). They should expect that American commitments to Middle Eastern security and economic aid would

now be determined in accordance with their own commitment to restore their legitimacy and improve their people's welfare.

There is general consensus that democratization in the Middle East is possible, and that the United States can, and even must, have a role in it. Democratic transition will not, in fact, occur, without open American consent and assistance. Democratization itself is not a strictly domestic process, but is contingent on international influences. The traditional view among democratization researchers that "democratization is a domestic affair *par excellence* no longer holds true" (Sadiki 2009 147). Philippe Schmitter, who together with Guillermo O'Donnell wrote the three volume series *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, has acknowledged a shift in emphasis to this international dynamic:

One of the most confident assertions in the O'Donnell-Schmitter concluding volume to the *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* project was that domestic factors play a dominant role in the transition. Not only does this fly in the face of substantial (if hardly concordant) literature that stresses the dependence, interpenetration, and even interrogation increasingly embedded in the contemporary world system, but it also seems to clash with some obvious facts surrounding the more recent transitions that have occurred in Eastern Europe (Schmitter 1996 27).

The differences between the Middle East and Eastern Europe will doubtless make their transitions to democracy different too. However, given the role the United States has played in bringing the current autocratic regimes to power and sustaining them for decades, it seems obvious that it will need to play a role in reforming them as well. The question of how precisely to reform these autocracies, while at the same time protecting other American interests in the region, is the topic of the next chapter.

V. Getting Results: Toward an Effective Democracy Promotion Policy

Democracy promotion in the Middle East will not be easy. The United States' ability to affect events in other countries is limited, and after a certain point democratic reform will depend far more on the nations implementing it than on any outsider. Furthermore, it is perhaps inadvisable to increase the public American role in the internal politics of the Middle East at present. Public opinion of the United States and its regional role is abysmally low, and the United States lacks the credibility to be vocal in promoting democracy just now. However, the problem of credibility should not prevent the United States from implementing meaningful democracy promotion policies; in fact, the challenge of building credibility may help to shape policy choices and simplify policymaking priorities. While implementing a strong campaign of public diplomacy, the United States should approach democracy promotion on a country-by-country basis, focusing on expanding civil and political liberties, protecting human rights and the rule of law, and creating a free and pluralistic arena for political engagement.

Public opinion of the United States and its goals is very low in the Middle East today. In a study conducted by the University of Maryland from 2006 to 2008, only small fractions of poll respondents indicated a favorable view of the United States government (Kull et al 2009 15). The United States is also generally considered hypocritical regarding international law. Asked if the United States was a leader in promoting international law or a delinquent in adhering to it, majorities in every surveyed country in the Middle East viewed the United States as a hypocrite (Kull et al 2009 18).

Table 1: Polling Data on Middle Eastern Opinion of U.S. Regional Policy

Polling Question	Egypt	Jordan	Turkey	Morocco	Palestine Ter.	Iran
Favorable View of the U.S. Govt.	4%	N/A	N/A	16%	N/A	8%
The U.S. is Hypocritical r.e. Int'l Law	67%	64%	81%	N/A	72%	N/A
The U.S. is Disrespectful to Muslims	56%	N/A	43%	N/A	N/A	64%
U.S. Opposes Democracy in the Middle East	37%	41%	30%	N/A	35%	N/A

Source: Kull, Steven, et al. *Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, Al Qaeda, and US Policies*. Rep. Worldpublicopinion.org, 2009.

Regarding relations with the Muslim world, Middle Eastern publics agree that the United States is disrespectful to Muslims, and many – including a majority of Egyptians and Iranians and a plurality of Turks – believe the United States intentionally humiliates the Islamic world (Kull et al 2009 19).

When the Bush administration began increasing its attention to democracy promotion after September 11, 2001, the reaction in the Middle East was one of suspicion. Writers in the Arab press decried pro-democracy rhetoric as a new package for the old imperialism of previous generations, and identified democracy as a “code word for regime change” (Ottaway 2005 174). Deep suspicions of American intentions remain, and even the wealthy, pro-democratic Arab elite tends to regard American support of democracy as disingenuous (Ottaway 2005 177). In a 2008 poll, 37 percent of Egyptian respondents said they believe the United States opposes democracy in the Muslim world, compared with only 8 percent who said the U.S. favors democracy even if

a government is not cooperative with its goals (Kull et al 2009 13). Responses were similar in other countries with just 6 percent of Jordanians, 11 percent of Palestinians, and 7 percent of Turks saying the United States favors democracy in the Muslim world (Kull et al 2009 13). Polling evidence since the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations with Israel and the Palestinians in 2000 has shown a decline in public trust and confidence in the United States throughout the Middle East (Telhami et al 2007 3). Expression of an interest in democratizing the Middle East has been greeted with accusations against the American government of insincerity, disregard of the plight of the Palestinians, support of Arab autocrats, and duplicity on the issue of human rights (Ottaway 2005 180). In short, the United States' efforts at democracy promotion have not been welcomed as a result of negative perceptions of past policies in the Middle East and a general lack of trust in the United States as a friendly power.

While the goal of democracy promotion is not to eliminate anti-Americanism altogether, bitterness and resentment of the United States is a serious impediment to its progress. This is not entirely due to American policies, and American policies cannot be built to address grievances based on perception and not fact. However, public diplomacy can have a positive effect on perceptions of the United States, especially among segments of the Middle Eastern public that have limited knowledge regarding the United States' regional policies. How to go about public diplomacy in an area where people harbor such deep suspicions of the United States is no easy matter, but a few general guidelines are apparent. First and foremost is Martin Kramer's observation that "policy is not there to create leeway for public diplomacy; public diplomacy is there to create leeway for policy" (Kramer 2004 141). In other words, public diplomacy can help persuade foreign

populations to accept policies they would otherwise oppose or distrust. In this case if a public diplomacy campaign can reduce the level of anti-Americanism prevailing in the region today, it will likely help pro-American political factions, which will continue to benefit the United States as political systems become more democratic. Care must be taken, of course, to keep public diplomacy and policymaking distinct, and not to conflate the two. Any benefits of public diplomacy are ancillary to more central policies, and they should be considered secondary to more substantive programs.

There are several potential ways to address public diplomacy. It is clear, though, that democracy promotion unaccompanied by a public diplomacy campaign will not be sufficient to improve Middle Eastern views of the United States. In short, additional efforts must be made to convince Middle Eastern publics that the United States does not actively seek to humiliate them, divide Islam, or control their internal affairs. William Rugh, among others including the 2005 Council on Foreign Relations' Independent Task Force, suggests that efforts focus on what the United States government refers to as "Americana" information – that is, educating Middle Eastern publics about the American political system, the practical meaning of human rights, and the sharing of powers between branches of government (Rugh 2004 154). The assumption here is that perceptions of the United States will improve if Middle Eastern populations have more and more accurate information about its politics and its people.

Though well intentioned, such programs will probably not be effective without adequate and visible policy changes. The polling data indicate that Middle Eastern populations do not dislike the United States because of its domestic politics, its culture, or its people. Rather, it is American foreign policy that Arabs cite as a primary grievance

against the United States. In a 2004 poll conducted by Zogby International, Arab respondents frequently indicated that American policy in Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere in the region caused them to have an unfavorable opinion of the United States (Zogby 2004 1). The data show a dramatic decrease in American popularity in the region from 2002 to 2004, when only 11 percent of Moroccan respondents, 4 percent of Saudis, 2 percent of Egyptians, and 15 percent of Jordanians indicated a favorable opinion of the United States (Zogby 2004 3). It seems far more likely that this decline was a result of the Iraq war and not a sudden change in opinions on American culture or the American people. Opinions of American “‘science and technology,’ ‘freedom and democracy,’ ‘people,’ ‘movies and TV,’ ‘products,’ and ‘education’” were generally favorable, while approval of American policies toward Iraq, Palestine, terrorism, and Arabs in general were “‘extremely low” (Zogby 2004 3).

When asked what determines their opinion of the United States, respondents overwhelmingly replied that policies in Iraq, Palestine, and treatment of Arabs or Muslims in general were more important than “American values” (Zogby 2004 4). The main source of Arab resentment of the United States, then, is its policies, not its people, its democracy, or its culture. Though it is important to continue existing efforts to secure favorable views of the American people and culture, such efforts must be accompanied in appropriate proportion by serious attempts at altering perceptions of American foreign policy and the role of the United States as an actor on the international stage.

The main concern here is not to tailor American policy to the preference of Arab publics, but to present American objectives more favorably. One of the main reasons why Arabs dislike American policies in the Middle East is that they believe them to be

unfair, or intentionally crafted to serve the United States at the expense of the Arab people. Large majorities throughout the Arab world say they believe American goals in the region include spreading Christianity and expanding the borders of Israel (Kull et al 2008 12,14). Given the widespread discontent with American policies, one may surmise that these beliefs about American goals contribute to the negative perception of America's regional role. Yet changing these assumptions about American policies is not as simple as changing rhetoric or expanding access in the Middle East to alternative perspectives on American behavior.

The ability of the American government to directly affect public opinion in the Middle East is quite limited. Not only do high levels of mistrust and suspicion inhibit it, but also it simply does not have the capacity to disseminate information in the area as efficiently as regional media. Though Middle Eastern peoples get their information from diverse sources, Zogby International's study found that in Arab countries the main source of information about America was "seeing or hearing Arab commentaries in the Arab media" (Zogby 2004 13). Significantly, Arabs who indicated that they regularly watch or listen to such commentaries have "appreciably less favorable" attitudes toward the United States than Arabs who did not (Zogby 2004 17). In other words, regional media are critical in informing Arabs about the United States and in shaping their opinion on American policies. Little can be done to change the way Arab media portray the United States, except to engage in high-profile policy initiatives that will at least make the United States seem to have a fairer, more even-handed approach in the region.

There are few greater opportunities for such a shift than in the Israel-Palestine conflict. For several generations Arabs have pointed to American preferential treatment

of Israel as evidence of its injustice toward the Arab and Muslim world. In a survey of seven Arab countries, an average of 87 percent of respondents in each country indicated that Palestine was an important or very important political issue to them – 86 percent replied that the “rights of Palestinians” was important or very important (Furia, Lucas 2006 595). In a 2002 Zogby International poll, respondents ranked Palestine or Palestinian rights as the third most important international or domestic issue to them; significantly, the only issues that ranked higher were political/civil rights and healthcare in the respondents’ respective states (Zogby 2002 33-34). Arabs have been “supporting Arabs in Palestine and expecting their governments to do the same” since as early as the 1930s (Barnett 1998 72). The situation of Palestine continues to be of great importance to Arabs throughout the Middle East; Shibley Telhami even goes so far as to say “No other issue resonates with the public in the Arab world, and many other parts of the Muslim world, more deeply than Palestine” (Telhami 2002 96). There is evidence that a country’s policy toward Palestine is important enough to Middle Eastern Arabs “that it may serve as a “litmus test” for their evaluations of other countries as well” (Furia, Lucas 2006 596). In short, the condition of Palestine and the Israel-Palestine conflict is extremely important to Arabs, and most non-Arab Muslims, throughout the Middle East. It seems likely that an improvement in public perception of the American role in the conflict would lead to an improvement in public opinion as a whole regarding America and its policies. In the 2004 Zogby poll mentioned above, respondents were asked what the United States could do to improve its image. The two most frequent answers were “change your Middle East policy” and “stop supporting Israel” – paradoxically, the answer “help Palestinians” was given far less frequently (Zogby 2004 8). Nevertheless, it

seems clear that the United States can improve its image in the Middle East by taking a more apparently even-handed approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict, and by publicly distancing itself from Israel.

Whether or not the United States should actually abandon support of Israel, or change its underlying strategy regarding the peace process is a complicated question that cannot be adequately addressed at this time. At the very least, perception of American policy must change, and this will likely mean some change in its substance as well. The opportunity to build American credibility in this regard deserves serious consideration, and there is little chance that a public opinion campaign in the Middle East can be effective while avoiding the Palestinian question.

Beyond the specific issue of Israel-Palestine policy, trends in Middle Eastern public opinion should help to clarify how the United States can approach regional public diplomacy. The old rule of “less is more” may be useful in this application. With governmental attempts at outreach and communication with Arab publics arousing suspicions more often than quelling doubt in recent years, policy should focus on using less direct channels to implement public diplomacy. Arab resentment of the United States may be alleviated by “making sure [American] policies are wise and grounded in fairness and principle” (Laipson 2004 180). While policymakers should be concerned with American interests above all else, the United States is in the fortunate position of sharing an interest in what the Arab public views as a more fair and principled policy. Personal and civil rights were given the “overall highest priority rating” of any political issue by Arab respondents to the 2002 Zogby study (Zogby 2002 33). The United States stands to greatly improve its image among the Arab public if it can cast itself as a

protector of political freedom rather than its antagonist. There may be reason to doubt that the United States will ever be loved in the Middle East, but that is not the point of security policy anyway. Successful democracy promotion, while helping to serve long-term American interests in the region, will help improve public opinion, and these two phenomena are mutually supportive.

More minor public diplomacy initiatives, including “Americana” style programs, may still have a place in a public diplomacy campaign. Though their effects will depend in part on the ability of the United States to portray itself convincingly as a friend of the Arab people, such programs can help to address some deeply held doubts about the United States. An “Americana” initiative may include the use of Radio Sawa, the latest Middle Eastern incarnation of the Voice of America, whose programming is mostly music and popular culture targeted at Middle Eastern youth (Rugh 2004 159). With relatively little expense the United States could establish other radio channels to expand communication capacity in the region. Similarly, the American-sponsored satellite channel, al-Hurra, could devote more of its programming to a “CSPAN-style” format (Albright et al 2005 7). Al-Hurra is currently seen as a vehicle for American propaganda – broadcasting congressional hearings, political rallies or protests, and other features of American democracy will provide Arab audiences a chance to see open political systems in action (Albright et al 2005 7). The United States should also protect and expand non-governmental media in the region. Rather than boycott and criticize Arab media, the United States should attempt to engage important newspapers and satellite networks to devote more attention to policy areas where American and popular Arab interests overlap rather than conflict. However, it would be imprudent and counterproductive to pressure

Arab governments to suppress their media if the portrayal of the United States and its policies becomes problematic. In order to have any credibility as a force for democracy, the United States needs to make clear that it values free speech and encourages alternative media sources no matter what they say.

Other programs that are related to public diplomacy include cultural and educational exchanges between the United States and the region. Rugh identifies such exchanges as a “powerful support for American public diplomacy” which can help to educate visitors about all aspects of American society (Rugh 2004 158). Likewise, sending Americans abroad to study in the Middle East will help expose them to Middle Eastern culture, and will increase direct interaction between Americans and the people of the region. Educational and research exchanges such as the Fulbright program form an important part of American policy that can directly reach Middle Eastern communities (Early 2010). While not every participant in such a program will come away with a positive experience, the majority tends to view the United States more favorably than they did beforehand (Early 2010). In any case, an increase in cross-cultural communication likely favors the furtherance of American interests more than it hinders them. It will not alleviate the deep misgivings about American policy in the region, but it will help to combat some of the anti-Americanism that is rooted in ignorance or misperception rather than legitimate grievances.

Still, successful democracy promotion is likely the best way to improve public diplomacy, and not the other way around; fortunately it is also at the core of a successful regional policy. That is, the United States will improve its position as an agent of democracy in the region if it can effectively have a hand in political liberalization. It is

not always the case that pursuing foreign policy interests is a way to win the good will of other countries, but at this time in the Middle East there is a meaningful, albeit asymmetrical, overlap between popular aspirations and American interests. The elements of a successful strategy cannot be simply defined, however. Exactly what policy will bring about the right democratic transition at the right time, like anything in the future, is exceedingly difficult to predict. But despite the inherent challenges, a few guidelines have become apparent from the failures and modest successes of past democracy promotion programs.

First and foremost, democracy promotion must be pursued on a country-by-country basis. Region-wide initiatives such as MEPI and the G-8's BMENA cannot move beyond vague generalities. The United States has a unique relationship with every country in the Middle East, each of which has its own unique history and social milieu that will affect the conduct of democracy promotion. There are very few policy recommendations that are applicable to every country in the region, so a democratization campaign must focus on specific issues. The varying levels of autocracy and repression, along with the varying nature of American relations with each respective country, must be taken into account. For example, extremely authoritarian countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Tunisia require a different strategy than partially liberalized autocracies such as Egypt, Jordan, and Bahrain (Carothers 2005 194-195). Within these sub-categories, different approaches are again necessary depending on country-specific factors – American pressure for reform must take a different shape in Saudi Arabia, a regional ally, than in Syria, where the United States has considerably less leverage, diplomatic or otherwise.

Ultimately, it is not democracy per se that is necessary to secure American interests in the Middle East. For reasons discussed above, it seems that the United States can no longer ignore domestic politics in the region, and reform has become necessary to maintain regional stability in the long term. That does not mean that every Middle Eastern state has to immediately democratize. Instead, it means that Middle Eastern autocracies need to base their authority on greater legitimacy, and political liberalization is currently the best option for creating such legitimacy. Any kind of reform that will help to restore the old democratic bargain in the region is good for the United States. Democratization is not the only way to accomplish this, and it is accompanied by significant risks and tradeoffs. However, out of the available remaining options for reform and maintaining regional stability, democracy promotion shows the best potential for success.

Again, democracy promotion will not look the same in every Middle Eastern state. Careful judgments must be made regarding which approach is appropriate for which states, and whether or not democratic reform is more important than some other priority, such as cooperation on intelligence gathering. In general, it seems wise to direct reform efforts toward stable countries with relatively well-developed relations with the United States. One of the mistakes of the Bush administration's democracy promotion efforts was an inappropriate focus on weak states and even non-states, in the case of the Palestinian Territories. Emphasis on elections in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq produced adverse results. By pushing weak governments the hardest, the Bush administration contributed to instability and unfavorable outcomes in all three cases. Elections, and democracy in general, can often have a destabilizing effect among states in crisis

(Enterline, Greig 2005 1077-1081). It was counterintuitive, then, to focus efforts for reform on states that have little central authority and face opposition from powerful militias. Conversely, states with a strong central authority are in little danger of popular uprising. The United States tends to have greater leverage over such states anyway, especially those with which it has well-developed relationships.

Another consideration to be taken into account when prioritizing where to push hardest for reform is geopolitical significance. Populous states such as Egypt, Iraq, and Algeria will have a greater effect on regional dynamics than the smaller Gulf States, for instance. States with key strategic or economic resources, such as Saudi Arabia, also have a significant effect outside their own borders. States such as Morocco and Yemen, with sizeable populations and a potential to affect regional prospects, form a second rung of the geopolitical ladder; the United States also has sufficient connections in these countries to have an important hand in their internal politics (Wittes 2008 110). Jordan, Qatar, and Kuwait also have a modest regional influence, and their ties to the United States provide greater leverage for reform efforts (Wittes 2008 110). Among each of these countries, the United States has a unique relationship that must be assessed to determine where reform is most needed, how it is best applied, and how American diplomacy can encourage it (Dunne 2005 221). Democracy promoters must understand the kind of influence they possess in Middle Eastern states and how democratic reform fits into the broader context of American interests in each state.

What has been lacking in past democracy promotion efforts is direct, sustained pressure on Middle Eastern governments for reform and liberalization. While smaller programs designed to build civil society, improve women's rights, and educate citizens

on political participation are laudable, they do not add up to a full program of democracy promotion without direct attention to the real limit on democratization – the Middle Eastern governments themselves. In order to engineer a transition from the limited reforms under way in many autocracies, the United States will need to push governments to a number of crucial steps: consistent respect for political and civil rights; a truly inclusive arena for political engagement that allows all groups who abide by the rule of law; adhering to the guidelines necessary to insure free and fair competition in elections; and expanding the arena of contestation to include the central positions of power in the government (Carothers 2005 203, Albright et al 2005 21). Without outside pressure, progress on these reforms will likely be slow if it happens at all. American policymakers should encourage reform of political institutions to create a free and pluralistic political arena. Rather than introducing new reforms, policy should be directed to making sure existing reforms are respected and implemented in good faith by Middle Eastern governments.

Economic reform, though in itself a poor way of promoting democracy, can serve an ancillary role in democratization policy. Though the relationship between the two is non-deterministic, economic liberalization may have several beneficial effects, chief among them the deconstruction of complex state patronage systems that keep the middle class and entrepreneurs beholden to their governments (Bellin 2005 132). Economic reform should be pursued as a goal in itself, not as a vehicle for political reform. However, the relationship between economic and political liberalization should be monitored carefully, as progress in one field can lead to regression in the other. In Egypt the *infitah*, or “opening” policy under Anwar al-Sadat, led directly to one of the largest

upheavals of Egyptian society since the Free Officers Coup, the Food Riots of 1977 (Ansari 1986 185-187). Though initially the result of the riots was greater political openness, the Mubarak regime has progressively removed those token reforms initially implemented to quell social uprising (Brownlee 2003 48). A similar story can be told in Jordan, where unrest due to economic hardship and the Palestinian *intifadah* in the late 1980s forced King Hussein to undertake a series of dramatic political reforms (Lucas 2003 99). However, reform was never intended to cause real political change, but rather to quell the instability that had arisen as a result of economic liberalization. After political pressure was relieved by one round of relatively fair elections in 1989, the Jordanian monarchy has sought to roll back reform and silence its critics (Lucas 2003 102-103). Dismantling the intricate patronage systems of many Middle Eastern autocracies will require a certain amount of economic hardship, and regimes often will de-liberalize politically to maintain their control. Economic reform must be integrated carefully into political liberalization to guarantee that this does not happen.

The primary focus in democracy promotion in many cases may need to be on the most basic features of a democracy, namely civil and personal freedoms. With well-established freedom of expression, free media, and freedom of assembly and association more complex components of a democracy, including elections, will have a better chance of success. In other words, the expansion of political freedom is more important than procedural improvements to undemocratic systems (Wittes 2008 104). Greater freedom of speech and association is critical to the construction of a political climate of moderation, pluralism, and legitimacy. In several past cases such as Morocco, Jordan, and Bahrain, allowing opposition movements to participate legally in the political process

has led to greater moderation and cooperation with governments rather than confrontation (Kaye et al 2008 164-165). Care must be taken here to reverse the trend in the Middle East of political exclusion and abuse of minority rights. Minority groups such as the Copts in Egypt often oppose democratic expansion out of fear that they will lose what little rights they currently have (Kaye et al 2008 166). While political inclusion is expanded, policymakers should promote arrangements to protect political or sectarian minorities from the “tyranny of the majority” (Albright et al 2005 5).

Improvements in freedom of association and organization will also help the construction of a strong domestic constituency for democratic reform. A democracy cannot survive without popular support, and currently grassroots democratic movements are stifled in the Middle East. Popular constituencies have been instrumental in previous American interventions in South Korea, the Philippines, and Chile (Wittes 2008 105). While direct American support, given the unpopularity of the United States in the region, will probably not help any democracy advocates, American diplomatic pressure can help create the necessary freedom for such groups to mobilize and reach their broader public. External pressure in this regard will have a twofold effect – it will make it harder for regimes to resist reform in the international context, while at the same time building internal pressure for reform. In other words, the utility of improving basic political freedoms “is that they make other forms of democratic progress possible” by building constituencies for reform and the capacity to protest and shame governments if they are reluctant to abide by their people’s demands (Wittes 2008 106). Ultimately, democratic political processes are impossible without an adequately democratic political arena –

expansion of this arena should be a priority in countries without a basic forum for political organization and expression.

Policymakers can have an even greater impact addressing the regional lack of human rights and the rule of law. Political reforms are often rendered ineffective in the Middle East by “a lack of progress on rule of law and judicial reform” (Kaye et al 2008 174). The continued use of repressive tactics such as political imprisonment, torture, and arbitrary arrests undermines regime legitimacy and democratic progress. Abusive security services also hurt images of the United States in cases where such repression is conducted by an American ally (Kaye et al 2008 175). Greater public attention to and admonishment of human rights abuses is necessary to convince reluctant authoritarians that it is in their interest to check their security agencies and respect an independent judiciary. Direct diplomatic persuasion will also likely be necessary to get Middle Eastern autocrats to withdraw from their positions of control (Wittes 2008 108).

The United States cannot accept marginal adaptations that appear to be improvements while actually conceding no significant authority. One poignant example of this phenomenon is the use –or perhaps, abuse – of elections by Middle Eastern autocracies. Contrary to the logic of democracy scholars such as Samuel Huntington, the institution of elections in the Middle East has seldom signified true democratization. There are regular elections throughout the Arab Middle East, and little democracy results from them. Emphasis on elections as signifiers of democracy has failed to actually improve democratic practice in the Middle East. In short, “Elections are ubiquitous. But democracy is still awaited” (Sadiki 2009 61). One of the most striking examples of how elections have been adopted in an authoritarian context is the United Arab Emirates or

UAE. Independent since 1971, the UAE held its first parliamentary elections in 2006, on its own a seemingly significant accomplishment. However, considering the facts and specific context of these elections, they are actually a mockery of true democratic practice, a mere gesture with no substance whatsoever. Only 6689 citizens, 18 percent of whom were women, were allowed to vote in the elections, a total of less than 1 percent of the UAE's population (Sadiki 2009 75). The rulers of the seven Emirates selected these voters, and their votes only elected half of the Federal National Council, an advisory assembly with no legislative powers (Sadiki 2009 77). Holding elections has become a fashionable practice, a symbol of enlightened rule whether or not they actually affect the holders of political power. Rather than pushing for elections, the United States should seek to increase momentum for democratic change by encouraging Middle Eastern states to refine and liberalize existing political institutions. In other words, inclusive, fair, influential elections are more important than regular elections that only serve to reinforce entrenched autocrats. Moreover, elections must include all groups who agree to abide by the rule of law and accept the results when polling does not favor them.

It is critical that militias and other armed factions be excluded from participation until they disarm and adhere to the constraints that are necessary to protect democratic practices. A democratic state cannot be built unless there is a state to begin with – that is, unless there is a central authority holding a monopoly on use of force within its borders (Diamond 2006 38). Armed political groups can spoil the practice of democracy through use of violence and coercion to achieve their goals. The presence of any such group contributes to instability and undermines the authority of elected government. It is necessary to disarm militias in unstable countries where central authority is weak and

contested, as in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories. Democracy in Lebanon, for example, is currently hindered by the unwillingness to disarm of groups such as Hizballah and the Lebanese Armed Forces (Knio 2008 445). The 2005 elections in Iraq are also demonstrative of the difficulties that result from pressing for elections at the expense of order and proper democratic practice. According to Iraq Presidential envoy L. Paul Bremer III, Bush administration officials, including Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, and Condoleezza Rice, had deep misgivings about holding elections too soon in Iraq (Bremer, McConnell 2006 217-226). However, the Shi'i cleric Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani had issued a fatwa recommending the adoption of elections to legitimize the drafting of the constitution and transfer power to Iraqis as soon as possible (Sadiki 2009 190). Unable, or perhaps unwilling, to resist pressure from the Iraqis, the Bush administration conceded to demands for early elections, which were held in an environment of sectarian violence and led voters "to favor strong sectarian militias" who had little need for or interest in political cooperation or reconciliation (Wittes 2008 84).

The dangers of being overhasty in holding elections are not limited to weak states either. In countries such as Egypt and Jordan, where central authority is quite strong but elections are routinely limited by rigging, disenfranchisement, and state intervention, a transition to fully free and fair elections should not be rushed. In such countries the political arena is artificially controlled, and many groups are seriously constrained to the benefit of the state and also of Islamist organizations that are more difficult to control than traditional political parties (Diamond 2006 35). Moreover, in countries without established political parties and a strong civil society, the "authoritarian tendency will have a tremendous head start" (Diamond 2006 35). In other words, illiberal groups tend

to be stronger than democratic parties in a country with little or no political infrastructure. In the case of Iraq, early elections guaranteed that voters would adhere strictly to sectarian allegiances, resulting in “an Iraqi parliament and government dominated by rival leaders with armed cadres at their disposal” and no incentive to cooperate if the democratic process did not favor them (Wittes 2008 84).

In focusing on the health of political institutions, the United States should encourage Middle Eastern governments to ease constraints on political organization and avenues of contestation. This might include a number of initiatives, which will vary in their utility from country to country – in countries where political parties are allowed, programs to strengthen organizational skills and inter-party cooperation may be helpful, while diplomatic pressure to allow opposition parties will be necessary in countries where they are not currently allowed (Carothers 2005 203). It may be easier and more effective in the long term to start this process at the local or municipal level. Shifts in local government do not pose the same existential threat to regimes that openly contested national elections would, and holding local elections can help develop proper institutions for protecting free and fair competition. Local elections also force victorious parties and officials to confront practical issues and challenges, giving them the opportunity to “generate the pragmatism in governance and the construction of mutual political trust and tolerance that could enable democratization to proceed more fully to higher levels of authority” (Diamond 2006 36). Assistance could also be given to election authorities to improve practices and ensure freedom and fairness of elections. Pressure is necessary in many Middle Eastern countries to prevent government intervention in elections and to secure greater independence for electoral administration entities (Carothers 2005 204).

To ensure the best democratic practice, additional aid will likely be necessary to both domestic and international election monitors, and civic groups that work to improve the electoral process by promoting voter turnout or organizing candidate forums, for example (Carothers 2005 204). Such measures may have significant positive effects if they are carried out in addition to the more fundamental reforms of civil and political rights, and if there is a growth in the strength of democratic institutions.

What policies will work and how to persuade governments to adopt them will vary significantly from country to country. However, the general guidelines discussed above provide a starting point for efforts of reform. A successful democracy promotion policy for the entire Middle East will likely contain the following components:

- A specific, tailored strategy for each country in which reforms are necessary
- Sustained, direct diplomatic pressure on regimes to respect existing reforms and implement new ones
- A focus on the development of civil and political freedoms, protection of human rights, and the rule of law
- Reform of political institutions with the goal of building a free and pluralistic arena for political contestation
- Economic liberalization in support of political reforms where deemed appropriate and useful
- A public diplomacy campaign that stresses cross-cultural exchange and the more popular aspects of American regional policy

Implementation of these components will ensure that democracy promotion policy is more effective now than it has been in previous years. It will also serve to build American credibility in the region and to strengthen popular constituencies for democratization, facilitating future reform efforts. While there will still be tradeoffs and risks to democratic reform, democratic reform, along the lines indicated, offers the best path to transformation of American relations with the Middle East – a transformation whose time has come.

Conclusion: Necessary Action

Accurately predicting the future is seldom possible and never easy. The attempt to do so is generally not considered scientific or even rational – it conjures up, instead, fortune telling, magic, premonition; research and argument have, apparently, nothing to do with it. Yet a successful foreign policy choice often involves a certain degree of anticipation, if not prediction, of the future. The course of human events is subject to constant change, and the ability to understand and adapt to change is critical to form a sound political strategy.

While it is difficult to predict the future, certain general trends can and must be accurately foreseen. Regarding American security policy in the Middle East, one thing is certainly clear – if the United States wishes to retain global hegemony, the Middle East will remain a critical concern in the coming decades. It is likely, however, that the United States will have to alter its former strategy if it is to maintain its influence in the region. A number of serious challenges threaten the old autocratic order on which the United States has built its regional policy, including a population explosion that weakens state infrastructures and exasperates conditions in poorly performing economies and stagnant social orders, fostering radicalism, instability, and violence. American strategists must now adapt their methods to meet these challenges and ensure that the future remains favorable to American regional interests.

The Middle East is dominated by autocracies, many of which enjoy significant American economic and military support but whose only interest is in retaining power over their populations. Corrupt and self-serving, these regimes are incapable of providing their people with the leadership and opportunities they demand. Furthermore,

the instruments of coercion and appeasement with which they have until now controlled opposition are losing their effectiveness. External rents remain an important source of revenue, but in the coming years they will likely be insufficient to meet the needs of burgeoning populations and it will be increasingly difficult to secure political quietism through state patronage. Authoritarian governments continue to use repression to control their populations, but satellite television networks, the Internet, and increased international observation are helping to weaken the coercive apparatus and embolden elements of the opposition. Rhetoric and ideology have lost any potential they once had to lend an air of legitimacy to Middle Eastern rulers, and Islamism now has a far greater hold on the popular consciousness than any state-sponsored doctrine. In sum, the Middle East today is afflicted with conflict, underdevelopment, and despotism, and it seems likely that the region's political landscape will change in the coming years, perhaps dramatically.

There are many directions such change could take, and few of them favor American interests in the Middle East. The United States today has essentially the same objectives in the region as it has had since the Cold War. These are the free flow of sea traffic between Europe and Asia, secure access to the region's oil, the continuing security of key regional allies, maintaining the American naval and military presence in the Persian Gulf and at other key strategic points in the region, and reining in global Islamic terrorism. For the past generation American policy has managed to maintain a generally favorable status quo in the Middle East, and though change by definition threatens any status quo, the current instability and growing challenges in the region make some form of change a necessity if American dominance is to continue. The situation is such that

reforms aimed at restoring legitimacy to Middle Eastern governments offer the best, and perhaps the only, way to preserve the hegemony of the United States.

The idea that promoting democracy abroad can help the United States achieve its international objectives and retain its preeminence among states is not new. As early as the Truman administration policy strategists have argued that a democratic world order favors American objectives. One of the first statements of American national security policy, known as NSC-68, found that the threat of Soviet expansion required “the free world to develop a successfully functioning political and economic system” (NSC-68 1950 VIII). In other words, to emerge victorious in its struggle with the Soviet Union, the United States had to champion an order capable of outlasting the Soviet system.

Unfortunately, in the Middle East the cause of democracy has too often been abandoned in favor of cooperation with autocratic rulers. During the Cold War this cooperation was sufficient to accomplish American objectives, but the persistence of authoritarian states in the Middle East has contributed to the conflict, instability, and underdevelopment that threaten American interests there today. International observers have long recognized the need for political and economic reforms in the Middle East, and numerous programs aimed at promoting democracy and liberalization have attempted to bring about positive change for decades with little real effect. It took the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 to bring the dire need for change to the fore. It was then that democracy promotion in the Middle East became a central goal of the Bush administration.

However, after spending a few years on poorly conceived and poorly implemented policies, the Bush administration made the mistake of stepping back from

its previous fervent support for democratization. Calls for reform ceased and in the shadow of the Iraq invasion, the human rights abuse scandals of Abu Ghraib and other hypocrisies the democracy promotion agenda seemed dead. Today, in the first year of the Obama administration, it appears to have been abandoned altogether.

It is important to realize the magnitude of this mistake. There is no doubt that conditions in the Middle East at present are untenable. Furthermore, the domestic problems of the Middle Eastern autocracies have more relevance on the international stage than ever before. The United States can no longer confuse the longevity of entrenched autocrats with true stability while their populations grow ever more desperate for competent and accountable leadership. Nor is there any reason to fear Middle Eastern democratization – in most cases it will work to the United States' advantage, but only if it is properly guided. In this paper I have offered several basic suggestions for a region-wide democracy promotion strategy, emphasizing country-specific initiatives that focus on improving human rights and expanding basic civil and political freedoms. Without direct attention to these issues and serious diplomatic engagement, democracy promotion will have little chance of success. Economic and civil reforms alone are insufficient to address the crisis of legitimacy that afflicts so much of the Middle East. The fundamental impediment to liberalization, and ultimately to democratization, is the recalcitrant and repressive order that currently governs the region. Few, or perhaps none, of the current regimes can be counted on to carry out meaningful reforms without direct and sustained pressure from the United States.

Continued American hegemony in the Middle East depends on our relationships with the states and peoples of the region. Fruitful strategic cooperation will be

impossible with governments that, lacking popular legitimacy, repress their populations, depend on foreign military and economic aid, and lend credibility to the grievances of radicals and extremists. Democratization provides the best path to restoring legitimacy to Middle Eastern governments. It is undoubtedly a difficult task, but there are no other sustainable options for the long term. In order to succeed the United States government will have to remake its image in the Middle East and set aside its misgivings about more open political space in the region and the possibility of Islamists gaining a greater share of power.

None of these risks should discourage democratization, which is now not an option but a necessity. The Bush administration's efforts at promoting reform in the Middle East were far too small and sporadic to have any positive effect. It is time now not to withdraw from but to strengthen the commitment to democratization programs and to apply credible and persistent diplomatic pressure to foster a healthy democratic environment in Middle Eastern states. This is the best way not only to improve the lives of Middle Eastern peoples but also to assure the continuance of American preeminence in the region and the world.

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