



Democracy & Society

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Interview with Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf

Imam Faisal is the founder and CEO of the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA Society) and Imam of Masjid Al-Farah, a mosque in New York City, twelve blocks from Ground Zero.

D&S: In June 2009 the President spoke of a “new beginning” with the Muslim world in his Cairo speech. What changes, if any, have you seen in Obama’s policy towards the Middle East in this regard? What would you like to see a “new beginning” in U.S.-Muslim country relations look like?

IF: A “new beginning” between the United States and the Muslim world requires that we break the cycle of fear, mistrust,

misunderstanding, and violence that threatens the peace and stability of the entire world. This is the reason I founded the Cordoba Movement—a multi-national, multi-faith movement dedicated to improving understanding and building trust among people of all cultures and faith traditions. Misunderstanding among cultures and faiths only fuels the fear of Islam we see in the United States and elsewhere in the West. And this, in turn, is fueling the extremism and radicalism we see in some Islamic countries.

The Islam that I have studied all my life, the Islam that I preach, is all about worshipping God and loving your neighbor. The same values that are common to all the world’s cultures and faith traditions. The same values of life, [*Continued, Page 19*]

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Sustainable Democracy Promotion: What Obama Could Learn from Bush

BY ERIC PATTERSON, PH.D.¹

Introduction

In a speech to Ghana’s parliament that was broadcast across Africa, President Obama asserted: “We must support strong and a sustainable democratic government...”²

Support for democracy is an ongoing theme of American presidents, particularly since Harry S. Truman. But what does Obama mean by “sustainable democracy,” a term he used both as candidate and as president? Furthermore, are there deeds to match the rhetoric? What should the Administration do to promote “sustainable democracy” in an uncertain world? To date the Administration’s focus has been on visionary rhetoric coupled with

modest redirection of democracy funding to institution building. This paper examines such approaches and concludes with a series of lessons and recommendations for the Obama Administration gleaned from the shortcomings of the Bush Administration. This is particularly urgent as the Obama Administration presently seems determined to make many of the same missteps.

The Obama Administration and Sustainable Democracy

The Rhetoric of “Sustainable Democracy”

At the Chicago Council on Global Affairs in April 2007, Senator Obama said,

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The Shifting Balance of Power in the Middle East: Implications for the Obama Administration's Foreign Policy

BY ISTVÁN BALOGH

An analysis of the regional environment in the Middle East shows a new structure of power dynamics that poses significant implications for the U.S.¹ This will force the U.S. to adapt to these new realities. Otherwise, the chances of fostering a stable and peaceful region will decrease dramatically.

The shift in the balance of power results from the change in the relative power and influence of two key players, namely, Turkey and Iran. No other country experienced such a growth of political influence and power recently in the region as these two countries did. Much has been said about the growth of Turkish and Iranian influence in the Middle East. Apart from a few examples, however, the literature seems to have neglected the combined impact of these two historical developments.² A more organic view of both Turkey's and Iran's trajectories offers a more complete picture of the situation in the Middle East as it pertains to U.S. policy. This does not contradict the fact that Egypt, Israel, Syria, and Saudi Arabia are still important bastions of the Middle Eastern regional order.³ In terms of relative capabilities vis-à-vis other regional powers, however, the most significant changes occurred in the influence of Turkey and Iran. This paper analyzes the nature of this change and explicates its possible implications for U.S. policy towards the Middle East.

The Geopolitical Context

Turkey and Iran both lie at two different "geopolitical crossroads" of the Middle East, where the interests of a number of different powers collide. Turkey lies on the border of Europe and Asia, it is a member of NATO, but it is a Middle Eastern country at the same time. It is an important transit country—especially in terms of energy, due to the Baku-Ceyhan-Tbilisi pipeline. It also sits adjacent to conflict-ridden Iraq. Iran is in another transit zone of equal importance: the Gulf area. Approximately 40 percent of the world's seaborne traded oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz every day.⁴ The region is important to the U.S. for access to its bases in the Gulf. Iran lies adjacent to Iraq and Afghanistan—two countries of obvious interest to the U.S. Iran also has access to the Caspian Sea where the energy interests of various powers are in collision.

Indicators of Power

In terms of territory Iran is the second and Turkey is the fourth largest country of the region.⁵ Additionally, Turkey is the second and Iran is the third most populated country in the Middle East.⁶ Turkey was hit hard by the world financial crisis⁷, and in fact, the real growth rate of GDP in Turkey for 2009 is actually the lowest in the region⁸. In Iran however, despite all the international sanctions, the real growth of GDP for 2009 was 1.5 percent, whereas the world average was estimated to be -0.7 percent the same year.⁹ Since Iran is relatively isolated from the world economy, it was able to avoid negative spillovers caused by the international financial crisis.¹⁰ Also, in absolute terms, these are the two largest economies in the Middle East. Calculations based on purchasing power parity (PPP) show that both countries are ahead of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the other significant players of the region.¹¹ Although in a relative sense the two countries have not become stronger economically, they have become more influential.

Growing "Latent Political Leverage"?¹²

Variables such as "latent political leverage" are hard to measure, but there are clear indicators to prove that both countries have become more powerful. Turkey's "Zero-Problems" foreign policy promoted by Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu¹³ indicates that Ankara tries to enhance its position as a regional player. This new approach focuses on maintaining "the best possible relationships with all of its neighbors and regional and international actors."¹⁴ Thus, it became a go-between in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations, it helped broker a deal with Iran together with Brazil concerning the Iranian nuclear program, it struck a deal with long time foe Armenia and it strives to establish better relations with the Iraqi Kurds. True, some of these initiatives were not successful and some critiques suggest that Turkey is actually pursuing contradictory foreign policy goals.¹⁵ Still, what matters from a U.S. perspective is that Turkey is willing to put aside historical conflicts and try to become more powerful by playing a constructive role in the region.¹⁶

Iran's "latent political influence" is demonstrated by its cultural and religious ties to Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a major player in the Gulf in a position capable of controlling the Strait of Hormuz. It is also an important player in Afghanistan. It also has ties to Hamas and Hezbollah, which make it an important political actor in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Due to its oil and gas reserves it seems quite hard to isolate Iran, even though a growing number of international actors choose to withdraw from the Iranian market.¹⁷

The similarity of differences

Apart from their strengthened power position it is equally important that those two countries have a lot in common, or to be more specific, they both differ from most countries of their region in very similar ways. Indeed, what is most striking is that Turkey and Iran differ from the rest of the Middle East in very similar ways. For example, in terms of the role of people's voice and opinion in government, Turkey is probably the most democratic country of the Middle East (after Israel). Quite similarly, although, in different ways and to a different degree, Iran does have experience with democratic practices and it does have certain democratic traditions. The voice of the people does feed into government to some extent—something that cannot be said of a number of other states in the Middle East.

Iran and Turkey are both non-Arab countries and the rise of the two entities increases the importance of the non-Arab identity of the Middle East. Although, this has important implications for U.S. policy in the region, it would be foolish to think that a strategy built upon the exclusion of approximately 300 million Arab people¹⁸ may work in a region where the connection between Arab and Muslim identity is so crucial.

Transnational vs. State Power

Contrary to popular belief suggested by King Abdullah of Jordan, the “rise of the Shia crescent” is not the most important driving force shaping power relations in the region.¹⁹ The Shia versus Sunni divide is a transnational category—however, the forces that seem to be shaping the region still originate primarily from states. Organizations such as Hamas or Hezbollah have considerable influence, but they too are embedded in a state or are closely connected to one or more. Of course, the sectarian divide in the Middle East has a significant impact on the identity and politics of Middle Eastern peoples, but the rise of Shia Iran is not followed by a formal cooperation or alliance of states with significant Shia population since the “Arab-Ajam distrust” remains.²⁰ What is unfolding is a state driven process, due to a change in the regional division of power²¹ because of U.S. interventions in Iraq²² and Afghanistan. Iran's Shia influence does not seem to be enough to create a larger umbrella for other Shia entities of the region.

Implications for the U.S.—Multilateral Diplomacy as a Way Forward

The process drawn up above implies that the U.S. strategy toward the Middle East should be based on the notion that Iran

and Turkey have become stronger and that Israel remains a close U.S. ally. The U.S. could use Turkey as a mediator in a number of conflicts in the region—including a final settlement to the conflict between Tehran and Washington. Washington should also focus on mending relations between Turkey and Israel in order to maximize Ankara's mediation skills and influence in the region to continue Arab-Israeli negotiations. At the same time, Iran should be included in a security framework that could settle regional conflicts. The difficult task seems to be to settle the U.S.-Iranian conflict, while keeping Israel's trust at the same time. That is why Turkish mediation and the mending of Turkish-Israeli relations are so important.

The conflicts in the broader region are intertwined²³ which implies that they should be handled together. Thus, a chief U.S. priority should be to promote a stable Middle Eastern international system based on a multilateral regional security framework that is comprehensive enough to include Iran, Israel, and Turkey along with the other regional powers.²⁴ The U.S., therefore, could promote a multilateral framework—e.g., a conference or series of conferences with key players of Middle Eastern sub-regions aimed at establishing such an arrangement. The sub-region conferences should be organized so that sub-regional powerhouses play a leading role (Turkey, Iran, Israel, and the other Arab countries).²⁵ This would also mean that the U.S. is willing to talk to various actors with whom its relations are strained—including Iran. Even such a process could take years to succeed. It might as well fail—as so many Middle Eastern peace initiatives have—but it could also be a beginning on the way to end the deepest divisions of the region. Turkey and Iran stand out from their neighbors for numerous reasons, making them central to U.S.-Middle Eastern relations now and in the future.

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An Unlikely Outcome: The Maliki-Sadr Alliance

BY SHARMEEN CONTRACTOR

The results of the March 7, 2010 Iraqi elections were not conclusive and the country has, since then, been living in political stalemate. Experts and analysts for the past several months have been evaluating what the results mean for the broader interests of the U.S. and what future implications they have for the interests of the Iranian regime. Most Iraqis do not want the country to degenerate back into sectarian violence, and hence voted for Ayad Allawi of the Iraqiya party, which gained 91 seats out of 325, and for Nuri-al-Maliki, whose party won 89 seats. In 2006, Shi'a leader Muqtada al-Sadr publicly disassociated his movement from Maliki, however, recent developments on October 1 reveal that the Maliki government secured the support of the Sadr faction gaining him another 70 seats, leaving his party just four seats short of a majority. After eight months of parliamentary deadlock, a power-sharing agreement has been reached with Jalal Talabani of the Kurdish Alliance as president and Maliki retaining his post as prime minister. Allawi walked out of the arrangement after being offered the position of head of the Security Council. Osama Nujaifi of the Iraqiya coalition will be the speaker of parliament. Although the results of the election integrate all different ethnic groups, they appear to have created a fractioned environment. Many within the country and outside are not comfortable with the idea of a dominant Shi'a influence and a government endorsed by Iran.

The Sadrist support for the Maliki government came as quite a shock to policymakers in Iraq, in the U.S. and in the region, as the two factions had a very public showdown. The rift widened further with U.S. and British troops fighting Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) forces in Sadr-dominated areas for control over predominantly Shi'a cities. Increasing U.S. influence over the Maliki government led to a curbing of militias supported by the Sadr faction in various areas of the country. When the Maliki government backed the U.S. in attacks on Sadr's militia during the surge and split from the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) in 2006, Muqtada al-Sadr withdrew five of his ministers from the cabinet the following year. The renewed alliance is very tactical and represents a domination of Shi'a stronghold in the Iraqi political framework.

Maliki ran his campaign on a pro-Sunni plank and was assumed capable of representing this sect. However, aligning with the Sadr faction, which is the most sectarian of all

Shi'a factions, cast doubts in the mind of many of Maliki's own allies in government about the likely course he is to take. He seems to want to maintain his hold over the prime minister's office and has adopted increasingly authoritarian methods. "The most recent incident, on January 14, was the Independent High Electoral Commission's decision to bar more than 500 candidates, representing 15 different parties, from running in the March 7 elections."¹ The alliance seems to have come at a price to Maliki as he wants to remain in the future political framework of Iraqi politics. According to *Al-Ahram Weekly*,² to secure Sadr's alliance, Maliki had to give various concessions to the Sadr faction including key government posts, a larger say in political and security decisions, and the release of those members of the Sadr faction who were jailed for violent acts. This is obviously a

For over 1,400 years, the Iraqis have been living under Sunni domination even though they comprise not more than 20% of the population.

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very disturbing development for the region. The U.S. is worried about the ramifications of such an alliance to stability in the country, as it would have preferred an alliance with Allawi for Sunni representation in government to balance the Shi'a domination.

The alliance with such a hard lined Shi'a faction with close ties to Iran is assumed to be one that was forwarded at the latter's behest. According to a recent article that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* on September 20,³ Iranian influence in Iraq was spelled out, but again dismissed as, at the time, such an alliance was not foreseeable given the animosity prevailing between the countries. But now, one has to wonder what a largely Shi'a dominated government that is backed by Iran will imply to both the nations' broader interests. Many in U.S. policy circles are worried about the reversal of efforts of the surge in quelling the violence that targeted Sadr-sponsored militia. They believe that this new political alliance can pave the way for a new host of militias from various Shi'a dominated strongholds in the country. Moreover, such an alliance would also lead to a more involved role for Iran within the future of a largely Shi'a dominated government and the fear of many that Iran will be a "spoiler power in Iraq" for the foreseeable future trying to influence regional politics.

It is no wonder that this alliance is a source of worry for the U.S. Even though the U.S. has been assured by the Maliki government that the Sadr faction would not have control over security, it is still disconcerting as the intentions of the faction are not known. How will the U.S. secure energy

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contracts for its firms in the south of the country? How will it negotiate with the government for troop assistance? These questions will largely remain unanswered until the time to approach the subject arrives. Moreover, this new alliance seems to be formed at the insistence of Iran, which needs regional allies to tilt the balance of power in its favor. Iran has long wanted the U.S. military presence reduced to zero in Iraq. Even before the U.S. invasion, it wanted Saddam Hussein removed from power and for a Shi'a dominated majority to take over to further its own interests. It seems to be receiving exactly that.

For over 1,400 years, the Iraqis have been living under Sunni domination even though they comprise not more than 20% of the population.⁴ Many Shi'as believe that their time has come as the majority to take over the political sphere and rule the government.⁵ Many are worried about the resumption of violence by Sunni insurgents given the history of the country with respect to sectarian tensions. Even though the U.S. forces wiped out a large portion of the Sunni insurgency, the possibility of future attacks is likely given the new dominant role of the Shi'a community in the political sphere. Their concerns of being alienated by the government, lack of employment, and religious extremism will not magically disappear overnight. Although Al-Qaeda activities have been controlled largely with the help of foreign forces, with the withdrawal of troops in December 2011, attacks are likely to be stepped up over time. There is little trust bestowed by Iraqi Sunnis on the Maliki government given that the community has witnessed the jailing of many of its political leaders and a disruption in plans for integration of the "sons of Iraq" into the security establishment. They remain even more skeptical of the support a government that is now aligned with a hard-line Shi'a faction.

The U.S. has been blamed for paving the way forward for identity politics in Iraq.⁶ The fear now is that after years of

living under Sunni domination, the country will be thrust under Shi'a control with interference from Iran. It now seems to be preparing itself for the next wave of domination. The U.S. cannot force a political decision on Iraq and neither can it support a coup that would contradict its own principles of installing a democratic system of governance in the country. The elections were flawed to begin with. After living under the tutelage of a dictator for so many years, the rush for democracy seems to have fed right into the hands of Iran. Many U.S. allies in the region such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait do not favor another Shi'a dominated government that is friendly to Iran. A sectarian, Shi'a dominated government can have devastating effects in the aftermath of war where peace building has been quite a challenge. Dialogue with Iran is therefore essential to curb the violence. To maintain regional balance of power and to restore its image in the region, the U.S. must insist on negotiations with Iran when it comes to Iraq's future for its own interests, for the region's interests, and for the interests of the Iraqi people.

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United States Policy on “Democratizing” Iran: Effects and Consequences

BY STEPHAN DE VRIES

Introduction

The 2009 Iranian elections were followed by massive upheaval and intense dissatisfaction within Iranian society. Change in the form of political openings and democratization seemed somewhat likely in the immediate aftermath of the elections; however, the regime currently holds the upper hand in the stalemate that characterizes Iranian politics today. This article will analyze U.S. policy towards Iran, both covert and overt, aimed at altering this balance of power in Iran. Speculations about U.S. influence on contemporary Iranian politics are abundant and well founded.¹ This contribution aims at moving beyond such speculation by addressing the actual content of U.S. policy on these issues and considering their potential ramifications.

U.S. Policy: Covert² & Overt Components

Under the Bush Administration, Congress allegedly agreed to a request by the president “to fund a major escalation of covert operations in Iran, according to current and former military intelligence, and congressional sources” (Hersh 2008: 1). The operations were to be paid for by a \$400 million fund and focused on “trying to undermine the government to regime change and undermining Iran’s nuclear ambitions” (ibid: 2). Activities, besides the alleged recurrent cross border commando raids into Iran from southern Iraq, mainly involve support for ethnic separatist groups like the *Ahwazi* Arab, Baluchi and other dissident organizations (ibid; Harrison 2007).³ Several armed attacks on Iranian security forces by *Jundallah*,⁴ bombings carried out in the oil-rich south-west regions by separatist Arab movements, and more recent bombings attributed to the radical monarchist group, are being linked to the \$400 million program, though such allegations are impossible to prove.⁵ Besides supporting separatists, a report in *Le Monde Diplomatique* revealed that millions of U.S. dollars are covertly administered to NGO human rights activists in Iran (Harrison 2007). These revelations are confirmed by former U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns (Fotopoulos 2009).

Although Obama has appeared to refrain from meddling in Iran’s internal affairs, the possibility that the program has continued under his administration, in some form, is real.

A May 2010, an article in *The New York Times* revealed that General Petraeus ordered “a broad expansion of clandestine military activity in an effort to disrupt militant groups or encounter threats in [among other states] Iran” (Mazzeti 2010). The order approves the establishment of ties with local forces and “reconnaissance that could pave the way for possible military strikes in Iran if tensions over its nuclear ambitions escalate” (ibid). Eric Margolis pointed out that Congress recently approved funding \$120 million for anti-regime broadcasting into Iran and \$60-75 million to support violent underground movements (Margolis 2009). All in all, it seems that behind Obama’s public rhetoric of principled diplomacy, the current administration is to some extent engaged in a covert attempt to destabilize the Iranian regime.

The term “overt” has to be taken with a grain of salt here, since, in contrast to the nuclear issue, no obvious overt and coherent policy seems to exist to support the “democratization” of Iran.⁶ However, by analyzing funding, regional diplomatic presence, and congressional bills and resolutions, it is possible to construct an image of U.S. policy regarding this issue. The basis of the policy consists of funds available for such initiatives.⁷ Between 2004 and 2008 funds for democracy promotion in Iran, with the exception of 2007, increased sharply, from \$1.5 to \$60 million.⁸ In contrast to previous years, the Appropriations Act 2009 contained no specific allocation under the Economic Support Fund (ESF) heading for Iran or an earmark for democracy funding (McInerney 2009: 27). However, unspecified ESF funds were partly available for the purpose. Under Obama, this policy in which any funding for Iran is not specifically allocated or earmarked seems to be the new standard. Besides the unspecified ESF funds, the Near East Regional Democracy (NERD) program was established, which received \$25 million for democracy promotion in the region, including Iran (ibid: Katzman 2010: 52). The \$25 million was divided into \$14.9 million for the support of Iranian civil society and the rest is being used for other democracy promotion programs (ibid; Katzman 2010: 52). Again, specific information on how the funds are being spent is not provided by any of the appropriations committee members, their staff, or the administration. All that is clear is that the program is seen as replacement of the funding designated for Iran as ESF under Bush (ibid). In other words, it is the recognition by the new administration of the need to support reform in Iran, and simultaneously reacts to criticism of the Bush approach. The program focuses strongly on support for media, technology, and internet freedom while funds, although primarily aimed at Iran, are not required to be spent in any specific country.⁹ The program seemingly gives the current administration more flexibility regarding the issue (McInerney 2010: 15).

In 2010 funding for Iranian democratization decreased compared to previous years. Obama requested and received \$40 million in 2010 for NERD initiatives, of which \$25 million is designated for civil society support, including

support for access to information. \$5 million is available for the remaining three “Governing Justly and Democratically” (GJD) program areas. Special attention for internet access translates into a specific earmark of \$10 million under NERD funds for “internet access and freedom” (ibid). The request for FY11 is equal to that of FY10: \$40 million in total, of which (again) \$25 million for civil society support. Obama’s request for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 2011 is \$105 million, of which a part is likely to be used for civil society building/training and providing opportunities for building networks among political activists in, among other countries, Iran (ibid).

Besides funding, several other initiatives are being considered. The first is the enhancement of Iran-focused regional diplomatic pressure. Under the presidency of George W. Bush, the presence of Farsi-speaking U.S. diplomats in diplomatic missions around Iran increased: “the Iran unit at the U.S. consulate in Dubai has been enlarged significantly into a ‘regional presence’ office, and ‘Iran-watcher’ positions have been added to U.S. diplomatic facilities in Azerbaijan, Turkey, Germany, Great Britain, and Turkmenistan, all of which have large expatriate Iranian populations and/or proximity to Iran” (Stockman 2006; Katzman 2010: 52). Some even go as far as to claim that the U.S. should place U.S. personnel at the Foreign Interests Section in Tehran.¹⁰ Although such staff members would mostly help facilitate U.S.-Iran people-to-people contacts and process Iranian visas, some observers argue that State Department officials see such a move as a chance to broaden U.S. contacts with the Green Movement and estimate its strength (ibid). No decision has been made on this issue by the Obama administration.

Now and then bills and/or resolutions regarding support for Iranian democratization are introduced in Congress. The “Iran Democratic Transition Act of 2010” (S. 3008, 111th Congress), for example, calls for the establishment of “a program to support a transition to a freely elected, open democracy in Iran”.¹¹ Other examples are H.Res. 33 (2009, 111th Congress), H.Res. 888 (2009, 111th Congress), and the “Stand with the Iranian People Act” of 2009 (H.R. 4303, 111th Congress). All are examples of proposed legislation currently being consideration that call for more pressing support for Iranian democratization.¹²

Effects of the Policy

Outlining the *possible* effects of U.S. policy on “democratizing” Iran is one thing; giving an overview of *the* effects of such policy is quite something else. Isolating concrete effects of policies is rather difficult and becomes impossible when the precise content of such policies is kept secret. This section will consider the *possible* effects and *possible* consequences of those effects. Although such a task is by nature inexact, by consulting different sources it becomes possible to provide a reasonable explanation.

Effects of the covert component, because of its classified character, are difficult to estimate. Nevertheless, when examining operations and attacks conducted by the earlier mentioned separatist movements, it appears that they have made little, if any, contribution to the democratization process. None of these causes have become popular, failing to attract broad public support within Iranian society at large. In fact, an anonymous Iranian researcher stated in an email conversation that “since the emergence of the non-violent Green Movement, the inability of the violent forms of opposition to contribute to the democratization process have become more evident. The democratization process in Iran is being driven by the urban-based middle class, which is typically highly-educated, academic, or business-oriented, culturally sophisticated and highly-diversified, and most significantly very reluctant to get involved in violence. The social groups that have dedicated themselves openly to a democratic agenda have consciously adopted non-violent forms of civil action as the only effective form of democratization in Iran. They have even adopted a strategy to expose the regime as the source of violence and hence a deterrent to peace and security.” All in all, the covert component may have even hindered democratization and had a destabilizing effect, since the regime has been able to use the threat of separatist movements to strengthen its control and play the “nationalist card.”

Possible effects of the “overt” component of U.S. policy became visible after the 2006 request by then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for \$75 million to support democratic aspirations of the Iranian people. The Iranian regime seized the opportunity to claim, as it has for the past three decades, that the main goal of the U.S. is regime change.¹³ Furthermore, the funding for democracy promotion sparked heavy critique from several experts and Iranian political activists. Shirin Ebadi and Muhammad Sahimi claimed that “no truly nationalist and democratic group will accept such funds” (Preble 2007). Many Iranian reformists believe that democracy cannot be imported; it must be indigenous and they believe that the best Washington can do for democracy in Iran is to leave them alone. One of the most important and common critiques of the funding is that it taints activists as being backed directly by the U.S. (O’Rourke 2007). As Trita Parsi, founder and president of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), stated: “The money has made all Iranian NGOs targets and put them at great risk. While the Iranian government has not needed a pretext to harass its own population, it would behoove Congress not to provide it with one” (ibid). Akbar Ganji agrees with Parsi, as he wrote in *The Washington Post* that U.S. aid to the pro-democracy movement in Iran should be stopped as it compromises recipients in the eyes of fellow Iranians; Iranians do not want to be dependent on outsiders when it comes to their democratic movement(s) (ibid). Another factor that increases the problematic character of the funding is its secret dimension. This aspect of the funding has enabled Iranian authorities to mark any activist, NGO, or

separatist movement as “backed by the U.S.” and therefore in support of a “velvet revolution”¹⁴ (Kalbasi 2009). In other words, effects of the funding have the same impact on directly-, indirectly- and non-involved actors; the Iranian regime does not differentiate between such actors, since existence of U.S. funding gives the regime an opportunity to treat them all alike.

Another critique that has been mentioned is that the decision to classify information, on the recipients of the funding for example, “precludes any external effort to evaluate the efficacy or even calculate how much of the funding has been spent in Iran” (Maloney 2007: 47). Suzanne Maloney raises other critical notes as well, the first being that most of the funding has not reached Iran but, instead, went to U.S.- or Europe-based organizations or groups. According to her, the U.S. lacks insight to influence Iran’s internal political dynamics (Dilanian 2009). At the same time, the funding, together with other “tools” used in order to pressure the regime, may spark nationalistic responses, which consolidate the regime rather than undermine it (Maloney 2007: 47).

In total, the effects of the policy seem rather negative. However, we should be very careful when drawing harsh conclusions, as some see the policy as something positive or even effective. As Iranian dissident Akbar Atri claims, Iranians have already considerably benefited from U.S. democracy funding. Especially the funds for Persian language broadcasting (Voice of America, Radio Farda, etc.) are effective according to him. As he wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*, “these broadcasts offer news and perspectives to the Iranian public that they would otherwise not have, including news regarding developments inside their own country. The broadcasts are popular with millions of diverse Iranians and have successfully broken the Islamic Republic’s attempts to isolate the country from external source information. The Iranian regime could not be happier to see its popular nemeses — VoA television and Radio Farda — exterminated by Iranian-Americans and others purporting to do good” (Atri in O’Rourke 2007). Atri considers the funding, since it supports civil society and moderate voices in Iran, an important pillar for averting military conflict with Iran over its nuclear program and he ridicules the idea that the regime’s repressive character is intensified by the U.S. policy (ibid). Besides such views, many see the current policy of President Obama as an improvement over those of President Bush and have applauded Obama’s decision to cut down on funding. The current funds, according to many Iranian, Iranian-Americans, and non-Iranians who support Iranian reformists, allow some space for the negative side effects of the Bush policy to fade (Zubairy 2009). The new focus on internet freedom in Iran is also seen as a positive development by some. Genevieve Abdo (fellow and Iran analyst at the Century Foundation), for example, thinks that “NERD is a very smart effort by the [Obama] administration to address very specific civil society issues without bringing on the ‘same

sort of baggage’ as democracy promotion policies” (POMED 2010). In other words, she believes that the NERD funding can be used in a very practical way (ibid).

Consequences of the Effects

The previous section provides us with a mixed impression of U.S. efforts to democratize Iran. What becomes clear is that a distinction should be made between the policies of Bush and Obama. The policy implemented by Bush was, to some extent, doomed to fail considering the context of the “war on terror”. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are perceived by most as attempts of regime change by coercive means, and the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay affairs severely damaged the image of the U.S. as protector of global democracy and human rights. Large increases in funding for democracy promotion during this period gave the Iranian regime an opportunity to label every attempt to support reforms, as backed by “the Great Satan” and therefore neo-colonial, imperialistic, and anti-Iranian. As a result, democracy promotion under Bush did not have the desired effects and instead was probably counterproductive. Consequently, Obama was burdened with a challenging legacy, since negative consequences do not vanish when new presidents take office. The question is whether Obama can turn the tide and change the policy to the extent that it will have an impact. Although it is too early to evaluate, the incoherence of Obama’s policy is unlikely to drive measurable change. Another consequence is the possibility that the U.S. is no longer seen, if it ever was, as a credible supporter of genuine democratization. The image of a superpower that does not seem to fully protect democratic values at home, that uses violence to topple regimes, and that prioritizes its geo-political interests over democratic ideology, has proved to damage the reputation of the U.S. as “the defender of the free world.”

Conclusion

The question is whether it is necessary for the U.S. to be perceived as a genuine supporter of democratization in order for its policy to be effective. In many situations it probably will not matter that much; since pragmatism is likely to dominate, policy is not necessarily less effective when the U.S. is not perceived as a credible democracy supporter. Considering the bigger geo-political picture, however, it might prove to make a difference. I believe that *long term* democratization and stability will only be reached when pursued by a non-arbitrary United States. That, however, does not mean that the U.S. should act in contradiction with its own interests, since, instead, acting as a *genuine* democracy promoter corresponds with U.S. long term interests.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 The role of the U.S. in Iranian history is well known: examples are the CIA involvement in the 1953 *coup d’état*, the Iran-contra scandal, and the 1979 hostage crisis after which hostility between both states has become something that is taken for granted.
- 2 The issue of U.S. covert operations regarding the destabilization/democratization of the Iranian regime is, for good reasons, considered to be a sensitive issue. Obviously, no public reports giving an outline of such programs exist. That, however, is no valid reason to ignore the issue completely. U.S. involvement in the 1953 coup, for example, proves that the U.S. is willing to use covert measures in order to influence the Iranian political landscape. This section is based on contributions of authors who base their work on well-informed sources but, although their writings are widely valued, have no hard evidence for what they claim.
- 3 *Jundallah* (or the Iranian People’s Resistance Movement) is a group that describes itself as fighting for the rights of Sunnis living in Iran. Other anti-Iranian regime groups that are allegedly supported by the U.S. are *Mujahideen-e-Khalq* (known in the West as M.E.K.), which has been on the U.S. Department of State list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations for over a decade, and Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), a Kurdish separatist movement which operates mainly from bases located in northern (Kurdish) parts of Iraq (Hersh 2008: 7).
- 4 An example is the deadly blast in *Sarbaz* (*Sistan-Baluchestan*) on October 18, 2009, killing at least 29 including Revolutionary Guards. *Jundallah*, allegedly backed by the U.S. and Great Britain, was blamed for the attack.
- 5 This point was brought up by an anonymous Iranian researcher in an email conversation.
- 6 Part of the more general policy toward Iran was one of engagement launched at the beginning of Obama’s first term in 2008. However, after the 2009 election, and because the U.S. perceives Iran as unwilling to deliver on the nuclear issue, the policy of engagement has subsided. Although Obama acknowledges that his administration has to negotiate on the nuclear issue with the regime that is currently in place, after the 2009 Iranian elections significant confusion arose within the U.S. government. By stating openly that ‘we [the U.S.] will continue to speak out in defense of basic human liberties and in support of those around the world who seek to exercise their universal rights’ (U.S. Department of State 2010), Obama’s administration has obviously taken a more active stance towards criticizing the regime.
- 7 Funds, however, do not tell the whole story and, in order to get a more comprehensive image of the situation, one should analyze how the funds are spent as well. But this is where ‘overt’ to some extent, becomes ‘covert’ because information regarding who receives funding and what it is used for should, according to the State Department, remain classified in order to protect recipients (Ong 2008).
- 8 For an overview on funding between 2004-2009, see Katzman (2010): ‘Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses’; Blout (2008): ‘Questions Remain about Iran Democracy Fund’; McInerney (2009, 2010): ‘The Federal Budget and Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2010 [and 2011]: Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights in the Middle East’; Stockman (2006): ‘“Long Struggle” with Iran Seen Ahead’, for exact figures.
- 9 There is movement in congress, however, to allocate the money specifically for Iran (Abdo 2010).

Egypt's Fragile Stability

BY DINA GUIRGUIS

Egypt, long a pillar of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, faces an imminent transition — not only politically but societally. In the fall of 2011, Egypt will hold its second ever multi-candidate presidential elections. This will follow recent parliamentary elections that served as a bellwether for next year's scheduled presidential elections and determined who can run against the 82-year-old President Mubarak for his sixth term should he choose to run. As the political transition nears, Egypt is becoming increasingly authoritarian, sectarian and politically exclusionary, even as Egyptian society becomes more restless. The interaction of these twin developments will have ripple effects throughout the entire region.

In Washington, the reality of the situation is slowly dawning but the Obama Administration remains unable or unwilling to find and/or use tools of leverage to substantively engage the Egyptian regime on critical issues of domestic reform. During his recent speech at the UN General Assembly last September, President Obama articulated a renewed commitment to democracy and human rights within a broader security paradigm that recognizes nations' domestic stability as integral to the role they play, for better or for worse, in the international community. Now—at the moment of Egypt's first potential political transition in 30 years—is the time for the U.S. to act on these stated values. Not only is it the right thing to do; ultimately it is in the United States' national security interest.

During its first two years in office, the Obama Administration has struggled to find its voice on promoting political reform in the Middle East. After the perceived failures of Bush's freedom agenda, this was only natural, but facts on the ground have been imposing themselves in a way that neither favors the U.S. or Middle Easterners. For decades, successive American administrations have relied on the now octogenarian President Mubarak as a stabilizing, moderating force in the region. It is unlikely he will serve as chief executive for much longer, and the Egypt he will be leaving behind is anything but moderate.

Notwithstanding a decade-long apparent plan to engineer hereditary succession to Mubarak's son Gamal, Egyptian government opacity during this transition has left both Egyptians and American officials wondering what comes next. Some are concerned about how this transition will take place, but mostly, there is anxiety about what the change will ultimately mean for Egypt and how it will impact its western allies, especially as the Egyptian domestic scene appears increasingly turbulent and an increasing number of Egyptians continue to take to the streets to agitate for change.

The Obama Administration's attempts to steer through these murky waters through appeals to "mutual respect" and reciprocity have been met with the Egyptian government's contempt, manifest for example in the renewal of Egypt's notorious emergency law this past May. The law, which has been in effect since Mubarak took office in 1981, suspends the basic constitutional protections granted to all Egyptians. The Egyptian regime marketed the renewal as necessary to fend off legitimate security threats generated by drug trafficking and terrorism, and pledged to restrict the law's application to those cases.

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Not surprisingly, few were convinced of this stated purpose. Only a month later, in a gruesome and brutal display of the Egyptian security apparatus's traditional impunity, a young man named Khaled Said was kicked to death by police officers. His crime?: Said refused to surrender his identification documents to the officers at an internet café. To many in Egypt, Said's case epitomizes all that is wrong with a regime increasingly out of step with Egyptian society and reliant on a brutal security apparatus that with more than one million men is at least twice the size of the nation's military. Said's case paints a picture of systematic and growing oppression in Egypt that betrays the regime's insecurity during this sensitive time of transition. Harassment (beating, torture, and detention) of young men and women peacefully advocating for basic political rights and reform, restrictions on speech, media, and the right of association, unrelenting attacks on the opposition's attempts to peacefully organize, and state complicity in growing sectarian strife have become routine.

This oppression also takes on the form of political exclusion and intimidation, seemingly designed to advance the succession prospects of the president's son, Gamal Mubarak, to the Egyptian presidency, to the exclusion of all other potential candidates and arguably against the will of the majority of the Egyptian people. The National Democratic Party's claim to a whopping victory in the recent parliamentary election falls squarely within the Egyptian regime's "overkill" during this phase, even eliciting criticism from some anonymous sources within the party.

In response to even tepid U.S. criticism related to these developments, the Egyptian government has reacted with resolute resistance. Egyptian officials, for example, rejected

President Obama's call for all nations to open themselves to international election observation. In a joint letter from the International Republican and National Democratic Institutes to President Mubarak, respective chairpersons John McCain and Madeleine Albright expressed U.S. support for international election observation of upcoming elections. That letter went ignored by the Egyptian government. Instead, the government proceeded with the elections in the absence of international monitors—making Egypt an exception to the current trend and majority of countries in the region that now accept the practice. (The latest country to join this majority group is Jordan, which opened its doors to international monitors during its parliamentary elections last November.)

In the face of tremendous obstacles, Egyptians are taking to the streets in acts of peaceful civil disobedience in unprecedented fashion, at great personal risk, to demand basic social, economic, and political reforms.

Similarly, a non-binding, strongly supported bipartisan congressional resolution supporting free and fair elections and an end to the emergency law—S. Res. 586—was vehemently fought by the Egyptian government and its extensive lobbying resources until it was killed off in the congressional lame duck session. Further illustrating the Egyptian government's contempt for Mr. Obama's policy of reciprocity, the Egyptian government's official media mouthpieces have become increasingly vocal in criticizing the U.S. One of the most vitriolic of these criticisms came in the form of an op-ed from the pro-government Al Ahram newspaper editor-in-chief Osama Saraya on November 22, entitled "The Devil Preaches," which lengthily refers to America's "failures" in the region.

Meanwhile, a faction of the Egyptian opposition boycotted the parliamentary election from the beginning. After the first round of voting, two important opposition players, the Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood, decided to join that boycott, citing widespread fraud by the NDP. Already facing an incredibly restrictive domestic environment—not the least of which is the extensive fraud documented during the course of the election—the opposition additionally perceives a changed international climate where neither the U.S. nor the European Union are gaining traction on key governance issues. Perhaps most restrictive have been the carefully tailored recent constitutional amendments which substantively exclude the opposition from legitimate political participation and from this year's presidential contest.

But times of challenge are also times of opportunity. In the face of tremendous obstacles, Egyptians are taking to the streets in acts of peaceful civil disobedience in unprecedented fashion, at great personal risk, to demand basic social, economic, and political reforms. For the past two years, Egypt's labor movement has become one of the most active in the world, and a growing poverty rate (currently 40% of Egyptians live on \$2 per day or less) will continue to fuel that activism.

Gradually, some sectors of the U.S. government, in particular the U.S. Congress, while maintaining Egypt's importance as a critical U.S. ally, are beginning to reject the Faustian bargain being offered by the regime, namely that Egyptian cooperation on U.S. regional interests comes in exchange for U.S. acquiescence to growing failures on liberalizing political reform and a systematic failure to respect basic human rights. In Washington, bureaucrats and political appointees alike in this Administration seem to understand that Egypt has its own national interests in pursuing Arab-Israeli peace and fending off regional military and ideological threats, and that Egypt has continued and will always pursue those interests independently of its bilateral relationship with the United States.

This basic understanding has yet to be translated into a policy that recognizes how broadly U.S. regional interests will be undermined should Washington continue to ignore Egypt's alarming socio-political trajectory. Ironically, the Egyptian regime's obsession with consolidating power domestically has led to a loss of Egyptian regional clout and diplomatic prowess, making it a weaker partner for the United States. Additionally, the regime's obsession with staying in power, coupled with increasing public frustration and anger, has led to a bloated internal security apparatus, skewing resource allocation that in turn have accentuated poor and corrupt governance across many fronts and resulted in substantial development failures. Making matters worse, the regime has pursued a divide-and-conquer approach that pits Egyptians against foreign countries, like the United States, or against each other in order to deflect blame for these failures. The fruit of this regime policy can be seen daily in anti-American official state newspapers and in the uptick in sectarian violence and extremism.

The lack of regime confidence and the inability to lead from a point of strength has exacerbated sectarian strife. Lately, Egypt has been shaken by a grisly terrorist attack on New Year's Eve targeting Christians as they were leaving a church service in Alexandria that left at least 25 people dead and dozens injured. Preceding the attack were sectarian protests that emerged in the aftermath of what appears to have been a domestic dispute between a Coptic priest and his wife, Kamilia Shehata, who was alleged to have sought to convert to Islam. Typically in Egypt, the church discourages conversions of Muslims to Christianity, because the

converted—as well as any Christians allegedly complicit in that conversion—face grave danger and serious state security harassment. Christians seeking to convert to Islam, however, typically face no such harassment. In the most recent case, some Muslims alleged that state religious authorities at Al-Azhar mosque refused to immediately recognize Shehata's alleged conversion to Islam and surrendered her to the church for “counsel.” It was alleged, with great outrage that state security authorities deferred to the church on the conversion and rendered her to church custody.

Will the U.S. stand on the right side of history in looking beyond short-term interests to help support the people of the region's legitimate aspirations to create stable and pluralistic democracies in the Middle East, as President Obama pledged?

The alleged surrender of the woman to the church led to charges by some Muslim protesters of church “kidnapping” and even of weapons stockpiling inside Egypt's Coptic churches. Some protesters went so far as to curse the Coptic patriarch and to call for violence against Copts and their return to dhimmi (inferior minority) status. These protests have been a mainstay after Muslim Friday prayers in mosques in Cairo and Alexandria since September. The usual heavy handedness wrought by state security on political protesters has been conspicuously absent, as protesters were left to engage in open threats of violence against the Copts. Instead, and absurdly, the Egyptian government “responded” to such tensions by placing restrictions on SMS messaging, which they claim played a part in “inflaming passions” in these circumstances. Rather than afford citizens equal treatment and protection before the law—such as the right of Christians to build or repair churches—an easily resolvable issue by Egypt's executive which alone would ease Egypt's sectarian tensions, the regime chooses instead, in typical fashion, to clamp down on all civil liberties. Conveniently for the regime, these restrictions came at a time when some civil society groups, with U.S. government backing, were planning on conducting election monitoring programs through the use of SMS messaging.

Weeks before the New Year's Eve massacre, the regime's unwillingness, for over a decade—despite numerous pleas by rights groups—to pass a law facilitating church repair and construction saw another tragic end. Coptic protesters, who came out to demonstrate against the refusal by Cairo's governor to let Copts build a church, were assaulted by security forces, which grossly outnumbered the protesters

and responded with disproportionate force. Tear gas, rubber bullets, then live ammunition were used against the protesters, leaving at least two, including one 19-year-old boy, dead, and dozens injured.” That the Copts were denied the ability to build a house of worship was nothing unusual; the strong Coptic public show of anger after years of discrimination was, as was the state's fatal use of force against them: all young, unarmed civilians. This incident marked a turning point in the Coptic population's relations with the state, signaling that Coptic acquiescence to the status quo may no longer be relied on as it once was. This turn was especially evident in the days following the New Year's Eve massacre, when thousands of angry Coptic protesters refused to heed even the call of the Coptic patriarch for calm.

Sadly, the spiral of political uncertainty and sectarian unrest, fanned by government incompetence and complicity, reinforces for some the need to hold more tightly to the “moderating” Mubarak regime to avoid a complete collapse of the state. Already the regime succeeded for years in coercing acquiescence from sectors of its Coptic population as well as from some of its western allies, including the United States, by fueling fears of Islamist extremism—a phenomenon it has largely fueled. The problem, of course, is that the longer we wait, the more likely the worst case scenario becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. And the more Egypt's regime acts out in draconian fashion its growing insecurities during a time of transition, the less certain the prospects of a smooth transition.

Make no mistake, Egypt is changing, and these changes will substantially affect its Arab neighbors as they always have. They will also impact U.S. ability to rely on Egypt as a partner, both because a weak Egypt internally is weaker externally, but also due to growing anger toward the United States for its persistent support of the Mubarak regime. Will the U.S. stand on the right side of history in looking beyond short-term interests to help support the people of the region's legitimate aspirations to create stable and pluralistic democracies in the Middle East, as President Obama pledged? Or will we as a nation continue to compromise our values and ultimately threaten our interests in so doing? Like some of the Coptic protesters, will we awaken to the fact that the status quo does not serve but harms our long-term interests? Making the hard but necessary and strategic choice to do so will require the creative examination and use of all the tools of leverage—and the political will to use them.

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The Missing Democratic Piece in the Middle East

BY URIEL ABULOF

If the Obama administration's foreign policy were to end today, confusion would be its epitaph. Eloquence is not policy, even in diplomacy, where words, not swords, are often the key to success. The first two years of the Obama administration mark an American autumn. The fall of American power is particularly apparent in the Middle East, where rightly eschewing Bush's policies has thus far yielded little ideational or practical results. Un-Bushing U.S. foreign policy has particularly manifested itself in abandoning democratization. The initial pale reaction to the rigged presidential elections in Iran is the clearest, and most unfortunate, case in point. While for Bush, as noted by Condoleezza Rice in 2005, "promoting freedom is the only realistic path to security," Obama has effectively substituted stability for liberty as the best path to insure security. Bush's democratization drive, not unlike that of Bill Clinton, was considerably driven by a (much too) simplified reading of the "Democratic Peace Theory" (DPT), the assertion that democracies never fight each other. Obama, conversely, seems to favor the "anocratic war" theory, which argues that transitional regimes, often on their way to democracy, are in fact more prone to violence. Which is it then? Is fostering free and fair elections in the region more likely to induce violence or promote peace?

The quandary is far from theoretical alone. Granted, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been all but unaffected by the third wave of democratization. However, in the past generation the region has gone through seeming liberalization and electoralization. In the mid-1990s Saad Eddin Ibrahim held that "the Arab world is evolving along the same broad trends and processes that have been at work elsewhere in newly democratizing societies."¹ A decade ago, some depicted Arab states as "emergent democracies." And, in the past decade, electoralization has accelerated. Recent years, particularly 2009 and 2010, have witnessed an unprecedented number of (fairly) fair and free elections in the region, ostensibly giving voice through votes to the people. Iraq held governorate/provincial elections (31 January 2009), as well as presidential and parliamentary elections in Iraqi Kurdistan (25 July 2009) and, finally, a parliamentary election (7 March 2010); Israel held parliamentary elections (10 February 2009); Turkey held local elections (29 March 2009); Kuwait held an early parliamentary election (16 May 2009); Lebanon held parliamentary elections (7 June 2009) and local elections (May 2010); and Iran held presidential elections (12 June 2009). All but Iran (at least in the aftermath of the election)

ran relatively adequate electoral procedures. In 2010-11, elections are also due in Bahrain, Egypt, and Jordan.² Although the Middle East is hardly on the brink of a fourth wave of democratization, this electoral trend is remarkable. But has it advanced peace?

On the whole, no. MENA remains, and increasingly so, one of the most politically violent regions of the world. Among the world's 25 most war-prone countries since 1946, eight are Middle Eastern countries, led by Israel and Egypt. In terms of battle-death (rather than conflict numbers), since the 1980s MENA has been on par with the most deadly zones, Central and South Asia, and the sub-Saharan Africa, with the latter becoming the most conflicts-prone and deadly by the turn of the 21st century.³ Likewise, since the 1980s MENA has shared with South Asia the top place among regions plagued by political terror. Recently, it became even worse. The Global Peace Index, surveying 144 independent states along factors ranging from a nation's level of military expenditure in relation with neighboring countries, ranks most MENA countries in the bottom half. MENA now accounts for nearly one-fifth of "one-sided violence," the deliberate massacre of unarmed people, perpetrated either by non-state militias or by government forces. It also accounts for about a quarter of the total deaths due to non-state conflicts worldwide and has replaced Latin America as the most active terrorist region in the world.

MENA, it would seem, lives on the dark side of the democratic peace theory. Why? Partly because DPT is predominantly about inter-state relations. It says relatively little about intra-state strife (usually civil war), and virtually nothing about inter-communal conflicts that cut across state borders. In MENA, as elsewhere, however, interstate wars seem all but dead, while non-interstate conflicts abide. The "anocratic war" theory, which often refers to the latter type of strife, is ostensibly better suited to deal with this trend. Electoralization may indeed breed intra-state instability, which often enough provides motives and opportunities to engage in political violence. Eastern Europe's democratization during the 1990s, however, reveals that this is far from inevitable. Many societies have relinquished authoritarianism without succumbing to civil war, ethnic war, and terror. Why has MENA not followed this trend?

My research based on quantitative findings with comparative case studies suggests that the missing piece in MENA's puzzle of democracy and peace is "positive liberty." Isaiah Berlin famously distinguished negative from positive liberty. The first refers to human spheres of actions devoid of external constraints, poised and imposed by the ruler, answering "over what area am I master?" Conversely, positive liberty reflects a self-perceived moral agency, answering "who is the master?"—Who has the right to tell right from wrong? Most of DPT literature to date, to the extent that it deals with its normative underpinnings—the nexus between votes and values—focuses almost exclusively on negative

liberty. It assesses the extent to which government guarantees civil liberties, particularly freedom of association, assembly, religion, and speech. As it turns out, liberalization does not always accompany electoralization, which explains, as Fareed Zakaria rightly claims, the “rise of illiberal democracy.”⁴

Illiberal democracies are increasingly important socio-political phenomena. They are not, however, the main explanation for MENA’s inability to truly democratize, let alone create a democratic zone of peace. To a certain extent the opposite is true: many MENA states have managed to liberalize more than to democratize. Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, and Qatar are increasingly providing wider space for negative (i.e., civil) liberties, often more than political rights. While not quite amounting to liberal autocracies, these Arab regimes evince the limitations of the negative liberty approach to democracy and the democratic peace.

Contrary to current conventional wisdom, the ideational hallmark of real democracy is not negative liberty, but positive liberty, specifically—in the context of modern politics—popular sovereignty. Democracies may be liberal or non-liberal, allowing greater or fewer civil liberties, but what all true modern democracies share is a common adherence, among elite and public alike, that the people, and often a people, constitute an ethical-political collective agency, which legitimates the state structure. Popular sovereignty, rather than civil liberties, should thus be our main focus of research in investigating abiding authoritarianism in the Arab world. To what extent is there a sense of ethical-political agency, of “peoplehood,” in the region, and does it legitimate the state? In other words, we need to complement our study of authorities and policies with the analysis of identities and polities.

Modern positive liberty is sorely lacking in Arab MENA. I distinguish between three basic modes of *nomos* (normative Law) in global politics, each providing distinct answer to the positive liberty question—who has the right to tell right from wrong (in the public sphere)? *Heteronomy* (the *nomos* of the Other, either God or despot), *Autonomy* (reflectively aligning with the collective Self) and *Anomy* (the absence of *nomos*). I argue that Arab MENA has not crossed the normative threshold of modernity from pre-modern *heteronomy* to modern *autonomy*, and is consequently increasingly trapped in violence-prone *anomy*.

We may need to dig even deeper, and ask not only what—if at all—legitimate collective identities and polities exist in MENA—but also what the different models of modern legitimacy are there, and to which models, if any, do various MENA societies confer? Drawing on the four main “social contract” theoreticians—Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant—may inform such discussion. For Hobbes, the contract between fearful individuals justifies the elevation of one onto a Leviathan, accountable only (and most qualifiedly) for protecting the citizenry’s life. For Locke, individuals

already in possession of life, liberty, and property agree to form authority, which is accountable for everything. For Rousseau, free people decide to form a people, who, in turn, wills (*volonté générale*) an authority, subordinated to this popular sovereignty. For Kant, reasonable individuals must subscribe to their Reason in creating a government that will act upon this reason and enforce it on its citizenry. Which model fits MENA? The question is especially pertinent to the rise and fall (and possible resurgence) of civil societies. I argue that in Arab MENA, contemporary civil societies subscribe, at best, to the Hobbesian model, mainly expecting the regime to “live and let live.”

Reasons abound, but key ingredients are the reifying of the Arab state system (mainly by the West) and the erosion of both ethno-nationalism and civic patriotism, the two main normative sources for “popular sovereignty” worldwide. Practically, the result is that electoralization in MENA typically emanates not from popular will, but from incumbents’ need to both legitimate their authority in Western eyes, and sustain a veneer of a viable, legitimate polity. When the prime collective identity (in the Middle East, mostly Muslim or Arab) is not perceived to justify the collective’s polity (the states formed by colonial powers), there are slim prospects of the latter drawing on normative legitimacy to become fully democratic. If democracy and the democratic peace are to arrive at the Middle East, positive liberty, the missing piece for both, must be found.

There is no golden path between Bush’s pursuit of the democratic peace and Obama’s preclusion of the anocratic war. The latter’s policy can buy us time. For the short and middle term, insisting on regime stability may help contain MENA political violence. For the *longue durée*, however, it is ill-fated. Public resentment of incumbents is bound to explode. Still, Bush’s democratization agenda was likewise myopic. Force may topple dictators, but not instill a sense of collective self-determination. Peacefully fostering positive liberty in MENA requires comprehensive analysis of its socio-historical emergence. To start with, the administration could do worse than endorsing the translation of *Leviathan*, *Two Treatises of Government*, and *The Social Contract* to Arabic. Better late than never.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy: Critical Essays, with a New Postscript* (Cairo ; New York: American University in Cairo Press,

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We have heard much over the last six years about how America's larger purpose in the world is to promote the spread of freedom—that it is the yearning of all who live in the shadow of tyranny and despair.

I agree. But this yearning is not satisfied by simply deposing a dictator and setting up a ballot box. The true desire of all mankind is not only to live free lives, but lives marked by dignity and opportunity; by security and simple justice... It also requires a society that is supported by the pillars of a *sustainable democracy* [italics added]: a strong legislature, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, a vibrant civil society, a free press, and an honest police force... As President, I will double our annual investments in meeting these challenges to \$50 billion ...³

The Chicago speech laid out a phrase Obama has repeated as president, “sustainable democracy,” and its central definition: “institutions.” Indeed, with two years on the job, evidence is beginning to mount about the Administration’s perspective and commitment to promoting democracy abroad. What is the Administration saying about democracy and related human freedoms? What is the Administration doing to promote democracy?

President Obama has said a great deal about democracy. Indeed, despite his criticisms of George W. Bush, much of Obama’s rhetoric sounds identical with that of his predecessor.⁴ The following examples are from three different speeches given in the same six-month period as the Ghana speech:

The United States of America stands for peace and security, justice and opportunity. That is who we are, and that is what history calls on us to do once more.⁵

I do have an unyielding belief in government that is transparent and doesn’t steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. Those are not just American ideas, they are human rights, and that is why we will support them everywhere.⁶

I pledge that America will always stand with those who stand up for their dignity and their rights—for the student who seeks to learn; the voter who demands to be heard, the innocent who longs to be free; the oppressed who yearns to be equal... These are basic principles that are universal; there are certain truths which are self evident—and the United States of America will never waver in our efforts to stand up for the right of people everywhere to determine their own destiny.⁷

The key themes of the president’s speeches can be most clearly found in his address to the Muslim world on a “new beginning” in Cairo on June 4, 2009 and his address to Ghana’s parliament a month later. Of the seven key issues

he discussed in the Cairo speech, four of them relate to policies of political and economic liberalization: democracy, religious freedom, women’s and minority rights, and economic development. President Obama avoided discussing U.S. history, democratic or institutional theory, or academic models of pluralism, but he did emphasize the importance of representative governance and religious freedom. President Obama concluded, “these are not just American ideas; these are human rights... we will support them everywhere.” President Obama noted that “elections alone do not make true democracy,” and he denounced movements that want to achieve power through elections and then throw off the restraints of democracy upon achieving power.

What of democracy promotion? President Obama asserted that “no system of government can or should be imposed on one nation by any other.”⁸ This and similar remarks distanced the new Administration from the Iraq war of 2003 and the policies of the Bush Administration. However, it is clear that many of the democracy-supporting policies of the Bush era will be maintained by the Obama Administration, such as maintaining support for Bush’s signature Millennium Challenge Corporation. Furthermore, President Obama recommitted the U.S. to supporting female and minority rights, including religious minorities, and providing economic assistance for long term political and economic development.

Many of these themes, particularly those focused on implementing democracy and development through government institutions, were addressed more fully a month later when President Obama spoke to Ghana’s parliament.

We must support strong and sustainable democratic governments... This is about more than just holding elections. It’s also about what happens between elections. In the twenty-first century, capable, reliable, and transparent institutions are the key to success—strong parliaments; honest police forces; independent judges; an independent press; a vibrant private sector; a civil society. Those are the things that give life to democracy, because that is what matters in people’s everyday lives.

This theme of promoting sustainable democracy via enhanced support to government institutions is apparent in the remarks of other Administration officials. One example, of many, is Secretary Clinton’s ambitious Council on Foreign Relations address in July 2009—wherein she laid out five policy approaches for the future and stated, “democracy is about more than just elections... it must also protect minority rights and press freedom, develop strong, competent and independent judiciaries, legislatures, and executive agencies, and commit for democracy to deliver results...”⁹ With this theme in mind, that of supporting sustainable democracy as a core foreign policy mission through financial support to foreign government institutions, what lessons can the Obama Administration learn from the experiences of its predecessor?

Lessons for the New Administration

First, democracy promotion policies were not, and are not, without their skeptics in government. The most important of those skeptics are those within the Administration or within the bureaucracy who do not support the effort, or in the latter case, do not support the president. It was telling, for instance, how rarely senior Bush Administration officials spoke about the president's Freedom Agenda, human liberty, and democracy in their speeches.¹⁰ Many of these individuals were self-proclaimed "realists" and they may have thought that President Bush's early speeches on liberty and democracy were little more than rhetoric. If this is the case, Bush ultimately surprised them with his dogged determination to press the Freedom Agenda. However, he did not necessarily convince them.

Ergo, a lesson for President Obama is—if he is committed to promoting sustainable democracy—his senior leadership team must be on board and must speak consistently about human rights, liberty, and democratic values, because the world community can easily spot the lacunae. At present, however, President Obama is in danger of following in Bush's footsteps on this issue. Although the president has consistently affirmed support for sustainable democracy activities, his Cabinet has been virtually silent on the topic. The same is true on most human rights issues, particularly the obvious signals to authoritarian governments like Moscow and Beijing that a "new realism" will be the basis of the relationship. Indeed, what has not been said—such as on Secretary Clinton's visit to China—as well as the sluggish pace of naming presidential nominees to key development and human rights positions in the federal government, sends a clarion message overseas that this Administration is not always committed to democracy abroad. President Obama's recent speech on human rights, two years after being elected, is more rhetoric without strategic policy planning—and it shows.

A related, second barrier to promoting sustainable democracy is institutional and bureaucratic resistance. Those who represent the U.S. abroad are busy people with a full range of prescribed activities. They feel they do not have time for more work. And promoting human liberty, in ways Congressionally mandated over the past decade in the Advance Democracy Act, the International Religious Freedom Act, and The Trafficking in Persons Act, is not just more work, it is uncomfortable and tiresome work because it demands that U.S. officials at foreign embassies report on barriers to democracy, including religious persecution, as well as meet with representatives from civil society who are challenging barriers to democracy. Such actions are not just more tasks; rather, they have every likelihood of disrupting the relationship between the ambassador's team and their local interlocutors. This adds up to a significant level of basic but influential institutional resistance to President Obama's proposed commitment to democracy promotion overseas.

Consequently, President Obama must have a disciplined message across his Administration on advancing freedom and enforce the implementation of such efforts. True, the president cannot control democracy on the ground in foreign contexts, but he should demand that his Administration focus on specifically what type of activities are most likely to actually promote human liberty and democracy around the world.

There is such evidence. A recent study in the journal *Foreign Policy Analysis* contrasts the efficacy of three types of economic statecraft to promote sustainable democracy: "top-down" (incentive to elites, such as Millennium Challenge Accounts), "bottom-up" (civil society and election support), and "inside" (technical and financial support to institutions, i.e., legislatures, judiciaries, law enforcement). The reports surveyed in the article suggest that *ex ante* conditional "top down" programs, like Millennium Challenge Accounts, and long-term "bottom-up" support to NGOs, journalists, activists, political parties, and elections (such as occurs through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)), as pursued by the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton Administrations, are most likely to ultimately nurture and reinforce democratic transitions. An October 2010 report released by the Brookings Institution also gives high marks to programs like the Millennium Challenge Corporation, while assigning weak marks to other U.S. development programs.¹¹

However, Obama's speeches (e.g., Ghana) largely focus on tangibly supporting government institutions in order to nourish sustainable democracy. The *Foreign Policy Analysis* article found that such "inside" activities have "largely failed to balance corruption and enhance professionalism."¹² Afghanistan is one case in point. In fact, the article cites a major academic study of USAID democracy assistance programming that found a negative correlation between human rights and financial aid to judiciaries. The study concludes, "Perhaps out of all areas, institutional aid has demonstrated to be the weakest democracy promotion instrument."¹³ In sum, the Obama Administration needs to weigh the evidence as to what forms of U.S. financial assistance are most likely to reap long-term democratic harvests.

Finally, the Bush Administration poorly connected democracy promotion to other strands of U.S. foreign policy. This is evidenced by the scattering of democracy programming across multiple bureaus and agencies with little interaction, an inability to connect the multiple strands of democracy, human rights, and development programming (e.g., religious freedom and minority rights), and a slow pace of appointments to key democracy and human rights positions, such as the Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom.¹⁴

Unfortunately, the Obama Administration seems to be facing a lack of strategic coherence similar to that of the Bush Administration. Although the president's Cairo speech suggests

the interconnectedness of issues such as women's political equality, human rights, religious freedom, governance and the rule of law, and economic liberty, there seems to be little strategic coordination on these issues. Indeed, the Department of State set up an "implement Cairo" task force after the speech—not in preparation of it. More generally, President Obama should re-tool U.S. democracy promotion policy by explicitly defining how its constituent policies (e.g., human rights, private property, free trade, and religious freedom) relate to and reinforce one another. Perhaps the State Department's new Quadrennial Democracy and Development Review—now nearly a year behind schedule—will provide some coherence on these issues.

In conclusion, a presidential commitment to "sustainable democracy" is nothing new—it is an expression of American values that harkens back to the founding of the republic. Although President Obama has reached the mid-point of his term in office, it is not too late to learn from the successes and failures of the past as well as engage and implement smart new thinking on these critical issues.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Jonathan Amaral and Joseph Shamalta for research assistance and to several colleagues for insightful discussions on parts of the document. Elements of this paper were presented at the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy's annual conference, April 28, 2010.
- 2 Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President to the Ghanaian Parliament, July 11, 2009." Available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-to-the-Ghanaian-Parliament/. Accessed September 1, 2009.
- 3 The transcript of this address is available at http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/dynamic_page.php?id=64.
- 4 For a detailed documentation of President Bush's philosophy and rhetoric on democracy promotion, see Eric Patterson and Jonathan Amaral, "Presidential Leadership and Democracy Promotion" in *Public Integrity* vol. 13, no. 1 (Summer 2009).
- 5 White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," March 27, 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/
- 6 "Remarks by the President on a New Beginning," [Cairo Speech], June 4, 2009. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04/us/politics/04obama.text.html>.
- 7 Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President to the President to the UN General Assembly," Sept 23, 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/remarks-by-the-president-to-the-united-nations-general-assembly.
- 8 Cairo Speech, June 4, 2009.

9 Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, Foreign Policy Address at the Council on Foreign Relations, July 15, 2009. Available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/july/126071.htm>. For other examples, see Karen Stewart, acting Assistant Secretary of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Comments on the 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," February 25, 2009. Available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/rm/2009/119811.htm>; and Jacob J. Lew, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, Statement Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, May 13, 2009. Available at <http://www.state.gov/s/dmr/remarks/2009/120324.htm>.

10 We have done a careful search of the speeches of these individuals and found that until about 2007, Administration officials rarely mentioned the Freedom Agenda. Since then, it is primarily Secretary of State Rice and National Security Advisor Hadley who utilize the president's language on the issue. Bizarrely, Secretary Rice talks about a "democracy agenda" about as much as the President's "freedom agenda," suggesting a political scientist's focus on institutions rather than the President's emphasis on values.

11 This report is available from the Brookings Institution's Center for Global Development at http://www.cgdev.org/section/topics/aid_effectiveness/quoda.

12 Stephen D. Collins, "Can the U.S. Finance Freedom? Assessing U.S. Democracy Promotion Via Economic Statecraft" in *Foreign Policy Analysis* vol. 5, no. 4 (October 2009), 384.

13 Ibid, 380.

14 On June 15, 2010 President Obama nominated Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook to this position, an appointment that has yet to be confirmed.

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10 The Foreign Interests Section is part of the Embassy of Switzerland and 'acts as protecting power for the interest of the USA in the Islamic Republic of Iran' (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs). For more information see <http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/rep/asia/virn/fosteh.html>

11 For the exact content and the status of all these bills and resolutions, see www.govtrack.us/

12 Note that such proposals become laws only when signed by the president and that proposals may never become actual laws.

13 This is a notion supported by many others, including scholars. See, for example, a recent article written by Takis Fotopoulos (2009), 'Iran, The Campaign for Regime Change in its Last Phase' and the booklet 'The Pink Revolution in Iran and the 'Left'' (2009). This contribution points in that direction as well.

14 After the 2009 elections Iran reacted in a similar way, accusing Obama of plotting against Iran and even of planning a civil war within Iran. After arresting a leader of *Jundullah* in February 2010, Iranian authorities accused him of having links with the United States. Indeed, labeling opponents as backed by foreign adversaries has a long history in Iranian politics.

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liberty, and the pursuit of happiness on which the United States was founded.

D&S: From your standpoint, what is the sentiment in the U.S. towards Muslims living here and how do Muslims in the U.S. feel? Do you see a change in the treatment of Muslims in the U.S. since President Bush left office and how do you account for any changes?

IF: Muslims in the U.S. and around the world are understandably concerned about an irrational fear of Islam. But this is not a sentiment that is shared by a majority of Americans. Now, more than ever, America needs to remember the ideals on which it was founded, and I look forward to continuing to be a part of that effort. We all have much more in common than many people realize. I simply want to see my children and grandchildren — and yours — grow up to live in a safer and more peaceful world.

“A ‘new beginning’ between the United States and the Muslim World requires that we break the cycle of fear, mistrust, misunderstanding, and violence that threatens the peace and stability of the entire world.”

D&S: Recent experiences with democratization in the Middle East have led some critics to say that democracy is incompatible with Islam. How do you react to this statement and what recommendations would you make to support Muslim proponents of democracy?

IF: Authentic Islam embraces the same basic values found in the Constitution and laws of the United States. We have much more in common than many people realize.

During my recent travels to the Middle East, the Muslims I met were galvanized and fascinated by observing the free and open debate taking place in the United States about religious freedom and religious tolerance. I enjoyed being able to explain to them that this debate exhibited the best attributes of both Islam and America — freedom of expression and the right to believe and worship as you wish.

To be a true Muslim means upholding the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the same values on which the United States was founded.

D&S: With the recent setbacks faced in negotiations between Israel and Palestine and trust between the two sides running very low, do you have any recommendations for building understanding and trust between the two groups?

IF: Progress in the Middle East will require marginalizing the voices of the extremists on all sides in order to allow more moderate voices to recapture the dialogue. Building understanding and trust between the two groups requires that we break the cycle of fear, mistrust, misunderstanding, and violence that threatens the peace and stability of the entire world. This downward spiral of hatred and ignorance must be stopped and reversed if our children and grandchildren are to live in a safer and more peaceful world.

D&S: Why did Park51 become such a controversial issue? The dialogue that emerged from the controversy revealed deep divides within American society. Did this come as surprise to you and how do you propose overcoming these divides?

IF: While Cordoba House at Park51 was portrayed as a controversial issue in the media, support for the project among New Yorkers of all faiths has been strong. Cordoba House at Park51 enjoys overwhelming support from our community, as well as local civic, faith, and political leaders throughout the city. We have been part of the New York City community for many years and now just want to continue to serve our neighbors.

The Cordoba House at Park51 strives to encourage harmony, dialogue and respect among all people regardless of race, faith, gender, or cultural background by cultivating good neighborly relations among all New Yorkers including the diverse American Muslim community in the City.

The Cordoba House at Park51 is just one part of the Cordoba Movement, which is willing to tackle tough issues in a practical way in order to build bridges between Muslims, Jews, Christians, and people of goodwill from all cultures and faith traditions.

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2002), p. 245 [a 1994 essay]. Ibrahim’s subsequent 2001 “Note from Prison” is more somber.”

2 This piece was completed in September 2010 and does not reflect the elections that were held later that year.

3 Human Security Centre. 2005. *Human Security Report: War and Peace in the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

4 Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. The Rise of Illiberal Democracy. *Foreign Affairs* 76 (6): 22-43.

Michael Young and the Illiberal Politics of Liberalism in the Middle East

BY NICHOLAS NOE

To those familiar with Lebanese-American pundit Michael Young's periodic columns on the opinion page of *The Daily Star* for which he is editor, his first book-length treatment of Lebanon's relatively recent, but now badly faded, "Cedar Revolution," which ousted Syrian troops from Lebanon, will likely be disappointing.

Although Young could have used *The Ghosts of Martyrs Square* to liberally reflect on and possibly complicate some of his well-worn criticisms of those forces self-defined as the "Resistance Axis" (mainly Syria, Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas) or, conversely, to create some much needed space to elaborate on potential solutions to the many ills which he says plague Lebanon, both efforts are largely absent.

Also absent, perhaps most disturbingly, is any sense of a meaningful political context outside that which seems to auto-genetically determine the form and content of the Lebanese actors themselves.

As such, Young reproduces the classic (shared) Neo-Conservative and Orientalist error—although Liberalism and Libertarianism are the tags he prefers—which has played such a key role in undermining Western policy-making and interests in the Middle East, not to mention the interests of the peoples of the region themselves.

As the Lebanese-American academic Ussama Makdisi succinctly observed about one of Young's ideological fellow-travelers, Fouad Ajami, "What was new" about his approach to the problems of the region, "was the degree to which his furious, often harsh, criticisms of Arab failures went hand in hand with a refusal to acknowledge what was plainly evident in Lebanon itself: the United States and Israel had not only played but were still playing an enormous, consequential, damaging role in shaping an illiberal Middle East."

True to form, Young's 254 page "eyewitness account of Lebanon's life struggle" gives inordinate credence in the presence of those forces he says he "hates" domestically; mainly Syria for its crimes committed in Lebanon, and Hezbollah, an odious, "totalistic" force whose true totalitarian nature is *only* held back by the liberal "impulses" of some Shiites. In contrast, the U.S. and Israel are given only a few passing references—either laudatory, in the case of the former, and almost incidental in the case of the latter.

Indeed, the Bush Administration's main representative in Lebanon, Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, is described by Young as having outlined a "more sensible model for democratization in the Arab world than one achieved through a unilateral resort to force or, conversely, a sole reliance

on domestic pressures in Arab societies. But there was no polemical intent on his part...."

Young then hones his point further, arguing that a healthy mixture of externally led violence and indigenous emancipatory energy are best served together, especially in Lebanon, in order to free subjected peoples, explaining, "What Feltman was hinting at, and what the Lebanese at Martyrs Square [in the March 14, 2005 demonstrations] made more explicit, as did the Iraqis at the ballot box, was that to have a fighting chance of succeeding, efforts at emancipation in the Middle East sometimes had to combine a domestic popular impetus with outside coercion."

Ignoring the awful loss of life entailed by this "balance" for the native populations—and refusing to consider that there *may* be other, less violent and more effective approaches to the problems of the region—Young then proceeds to ignore the U.S.'s active promotion of Israel's brutal 33 day war in Lebanon in July 2006—blaming the escalation of a border incident wholly on Hezbollah—and therefore refusing to raise that instigation as a *reasonable* sore point for many Lebanese.

Instead, Condoleezza Rice's grotesque pronouncement that the war represented the "birth pangs of a new Middle East," is termed merely as "unfortunate" by Young, a rhetorical mistake in service of a greater, Liberal goal of forcing freedom and emancipation not through addressing underlying grievances, such as occupation, but through the totalizing prowess of an F-16.

Conversely, when Hezbollah's leader, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, claims victory after having withstood the assault of one of the most powerful armies in the world, Young essentially says that the Arab and Islamic Mind has been duped into a false consciousness—that they fell victim to mere perception, emotions, populism and not dignity, freedom, reason or anything else *only* associated with Heroic Liberalism in his account.

Elsewhere, alluding to his own support for the Iraq war as a positive regenerative force—something openly stated in his columns but curiously under-emphasized in the book—Young takes matters a step further by arguing totalistically (and therefore most illiberally) that, "As far as *the* Lebanese were concerned, Iraq had usefully placed American forces on Syria's eastern border... *The* Lebanese instinctively grasped the advantages to be gained. That's why, unlike most Arabs, *they* were prepared to employ American power against Syria [emphasis added]."

The July War then quickly re-emerges, with a similar totality of thought—Young explains that "What Lebanon faced after the summer of 2006 would expose the dangers [of the Hezbollah path]—*everything* flowing from Hezbollah's conceit of having won a 'divine victory' against Israel, *when all we could see around us was senseless destruction* [emphasis added]"

Young's "we," of course, sadly cuts out the majority of Lebanese—a tactic he repeatedly reinforces by refusing to provide any credible space to the voices of Hezbollah or

opposition supporters themselves — relying instead almost solely on well-known confessional critics for his polemics about a community's discourse as a whole.

Of course, in reality, for better or worse, depending on your position, the Hezbollah-led opposition won the popular vote in the 2009 elections, after years of war, unrest and economic dislocation. And, contrary to Young's assertion, via his friend *New York Times* pundit Thomas Friedman, that Hezbollah's Christian ally the Free Patriotic Movement lost the majority of the Christians, the bloc led by General Michel Aoun actually managed to win a razor thin majority of Christian votes *and* expanded its parliamentary representation by almost 50%.

Still, the deeper problem with Young's account is not one of facts. Instead, it is the form of his approach whereby he claims the Liberal mantle as all that is good and just, with anything supposedly opposite as a total evil — and stresses, on top of this, that he has striven for “intimate contact with this disconcerting country of ours” to gain his account.

In other words, he knows the Other deeply... but it's just bad to the bone.

That this form of criticism does not perturb Young is simply remarkable, given the regularity — almost exclusivity — by which he focuses his critique on the pitfalls of illiberal thought.

Instead, we get a “Paradoxical Liberalism” unambiguously valorized as having opened up a wonderful space for *some* by virtue of Lebanon's illiberal differences cancelling each other out: “This reality, in turn, creates spaces in society for individuals to pursue these freedoms with relative ease.”

But *who* gets to enjoy these narrow freedoms? For whom is this bargain attractive?

No attempt at an answer is forthcoming, however; the advantages are assumed for all.

Young then ends his account by taking matters even farther, laying bare the elite advantage of his Paradoxical Liberalism: “Even during the [Civil War] years,” he says, “I don't recall ever having been surrounded by such an intensity of death, of attending so many funerals.”

Although the Lebanese Civil War entailed the deaths and disappearances of tens, if not hundreds of thousands over 15 years, and forcefully displaced hundreds of thousands more, the handful of assassinations between 2005-2008 was somehow more “intense.”

But perhaps this makes sense. Between Weakness and Freedom — a false binary if ever there was one — Young says *he* is comfortable with weakness and an enjoyment of the liberal freedoms which have been afforded him in Lebanon's placement at the edge of colonialism and several occupations as well as the frontline of a series of international wars.

This reader, at least, is left with one nagging question: how much longer can this situation last?

NICHOLAS NOE is the Co-Founder of *Mideastwire.com* and the Editor of *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah* (Verso 2007).

REVIEW

Not Quite Breaking The Rules: Andrew Bacevich's *Washington Rules*

BY MATTHEW LEATHERMAN

Andrew Bacevich, professor of international relations and history at Boston University and retired Army Colonel, writes in *Washington Rules* with the white-hot indignation of someone deeply wronged. Indeed, that is how he feels. The central thesis of his book is that American statecraft is bound by a straightjacket of orthodoxy that privileges a narrow class of insiders over the society they are sworn to protect. Adding insult to injury, he perpetuated this orthodoxy for the better part of a career before he began to see through its façade.

Everything about *Washington Rules* is personal, bookended by Bacevich's story of how he came to see the American national security apparatus for ‘what it is.’ That story is a compelling one — a decades-long Army officer having the glimmer of epiphany at Brandenburg Gate shortly after the Berlin Wall fell, and following that light through nearly every channel of self-reflection and critique possible before arriving at the conclusion that our very democracy is sinking under the weight of perpetual and pointless war. A missive like that will not lack for controversy, and *Washington Rules* finds it around every corner.

Bacevich is provocative in many of the right places. America's — and Americans' — privilege, sense of being exceptional, and focus on the future over the past and on action over reservation are elemental to our society — and Bacevich is driven to show the dark side of these predispositions. The belief that our political system and the values behind it are universal has inspired the past decade's adventurism, and the conviction that we can do anything we put our minds to turned that inspiration into action. The exceptional nature of our mission allowed the ends to justify the means, of course, so we fixated almost exclusively on the most direct and immediate means at our disposal — the military. Even when the early results came back negatively, our persuasion that today's world is new and special, and that money is no object, inspired us that pressing forward was better than stepping back.

The story is familiar, even to those that dispute it. Bacevich tells it with no punches pulled, and it is powerful.

The trouble is that this is not what Bacevich set out to do, nor should it have been. We've all heard this story before. The objective he chose is much more important, even rising to the level of public service. Two parts of it are especially noteworthy.

Unpacking his objective and looking at it technically, Bacevich states an intent to define America's national security orthodoxy, to inspect it, to determine how it is perpetuated,

and to disprove it. The question of how it persists often is the least explored of these issues, and hence most interesting and significant. The U.S. national security community is not small, after all, nor is limited to just one generation or locale. How and why does such a large body arrive at such consistent conclusions?

Determining how orthodoxy is perpetuated is impossible, though, when the core of your book—indeed, the title—essentializes the force behind it. “Washington” is nothing but a physical place. It doesn’t rule, have rules, or do anything at all. Anthropomorphizing Washington as Bacevich does dodges the foremost questions still facing us. Who’s in charge? Why do they favor these outcomes? How do they institutionalize these preferences across time and space? Answers to these questions are fundamental to understanding the system and, for those so inclined, for changing it. None of them are in this book.

Bacevich’s objective is not limited to technical analysis, though. The theme that ties it all together is “to invite readers to share in the process of education on which I embarked two decades ago in Berlin.” That’s a trip I want to take. Bacevich’s story is such a unique one, surely rich with insight. In short, I wanted to hear Bacevich channel his three voices—soldier, scholar, and skeptic.

Instead, what I got was a denunciation. Like a preacher facing the choir to rail against sin, Bacevich uses loaded language sure to rouse the converted, offend the disbeliever, and confound everyone in between. Rather than reaching out to inform and persuade the American public, the effect of this language is to retrace the battle line and unload the arsenal.

Only disappointment can follow such a missed opportunity. As Bacevich himself emphasizes at the book’s conclusion, “if change is to come, it must come from the people... the need for education—summoning Americans to take on the responsibilities of an active and engaged citizenship—has become especially acute.” Regrettably, *Washington Rules* is another book that acknowledges this imperative but fails to deliver. Americans are not going to be summoned by stock arguments against their exceptionalist ideal, nor are they going to be swayed by the sensational, exclamatory rhetoric that already makes politics distasteful. It’s going to take facts that speak for themselves and circumstances that are relevant to lives lived outside the D.C. beltway or the halls of academia.

Those facts, relevant and accessible, are out there. Why is the U.S. spending far more on defense today than at any point during the Cold War? Who truly, deeply believes that the U.S. would wage any sort of war with China? What does our defense strategy do to tangibly make individual Americans’ lives more secure? And how is it that the gateway to respectability as a national security professional has narrowed to pass through roughly a dozen graduate schools, nearly all of which are located somewhere between Washington and Boston?

Bacevich clearly is on to something. The national security problems we face are systematic, institutionally entrenched, and essential to our democracy. *Washington Rules* tells this like it is. The flaw lies in whom it tells this to. Bacevich wove his personal story throughout this book, and it overtook it. More than anyone else, *Washington Rules* seems to be addressed to the author, an opportunity for him to revisit his steps and affirm his conclusion more than a hand reached out to those that need help along the way.

MATTHEW LEATHERMAN is a Research Associate with the Budgeting for Foreign Affairs and Defense project at the Stimson Center, where he contributes regularly to the blog *The Will and the Wallet*. He earned his MA in International Affairs from Columbia University.

REVIEW

Bernard Lewis on “Faith and Power” A Difficult Question—A Complex Answer

BY DAVID KENNER

I remember once asking a deliberately broad question to an intelligent yet didactic professor who was tasked with teaching me Middle Eastern history: What do you think of Bernard Lewis? The Princeton University professor of Islamic history, after all, had penned far and away the most informed and most readable essay assigned to us that year—his account of the *hashashin*, a cult of Shiite Ismaili assassins that terrorized Syria and Persia in the 11th and 12th centuries. But Lewis was also the polemicist who, from his perch on the *Wall Street Journal* editorial pages, gave no small measure of intellectual legitimacy to President George W. Bush’s efforts to revolutionize the Middle East at the point of a gun.

This was 2005, and Lewis’s conservative politics were starkly at odds with the academic consensus regarding the Bush administration—though arguably in line with the American public’s mood, which could still imagine something approaching “victory” in Iraq and even, if that enterprise had proven successful, appeared willing to entertain the extension of the war into Syria or Iran. Accordingly, my professor chose the cautious answer. There were two Bernard Lewises, he explained: He had great respect for Lewis’s work as a historian, but reviled the conservative pundit as an irresponsible warmonger.

Faith and Power, a collection of Lewis’s essays over the past two decades, covers the birth of Islam in the Seventh century and extends all the way to Osama bin Laden’s 1998 declaration of *jihad* against the West. It therefore represents an opportunity to determine whether it is indeed possible to bifurcate the professor so easily.

Lewis believes that the most important facet of Islam’s political instincts lie in the origins of the religion, with

Muhammad's dual role as a religious prophet and politician, the founder of an empire. As a result, Lewis argues, the predominantly Muslim Middle East faces a greater difficulty in separating the spiritual and temporal aspects of power than Christian Europe, which could rely on Christ's edict to "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

This premise leads Lewis to see the relationship between the West and the Islamic world primarily through the prism of endless war. "What confronts us is not a quarrel between governments but a clash of civilizations," he writes. "And in this clash, in this generalized mood of resentment, every difference is exaggerated, every quarrel exacerbated, and every problem—one may hope for the time being—is insoluble."

The result of this worldview is a particularly zero-sum version of international politics. Lewis focuses on the swings of power between the two combatants—the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1529, Napoleon Bonaparte's 1798 invasion of Egypt, and the European mandate period that followed World War I are all important dates—but largely dismisses the possibility that a mutually beneficial relationship, based on the trade of goods and ideas, could exist between the two worlds.

Lewis would be quick to argue that this is merely historical fact, not his opinion of how relationships between Islam and the West will develop in the future. "We shall be dangerously deluding ourselves if we pretend that [this history of conflict] never happened and pretend that even if it did happen, it doesn't matter," he told a joint assembly of the European Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, in a speech included in *Faith and Power*. "It does matter."

So it does. But this sweeping account of the history of Muslim and Christian interaction requires a simplification of the Muslims' actions, political or otherwise, that obscures any example of mutual coexistence. To Lewis, the primacy of Islam as a motivating factor is of overriding importance: He leaves little room for national or ethnic loyalties, or any interpretation of Islam that is willing to justify the political regimes created by the Prophet and the Rashidun Caliphs as a particularity of the Seventh century, and thereby relegate them to history. The book repeatedly states what "Muslims believe" or what "Muslims did" without any conception that numbers in the hundreds of millions will inevitably contain significant diversity.

Nevertheless, Lewis is not unremittingly pessimistic on the question of whether Islam can make peace with liberalism and democracy in the modern day. He places much hope on the Islamic concepts of consensual governance and the concept of *Bay'a*, a form of contract between the ruler and the ruled that establishes obligations for both, as potentially holding the seeds of authentic Islamic democracy. Moreover, he attacks those who suggest that modern-day Arab dictatorships, such as the regime of Saddam Hussein, are a natural expression of Islamic democracy. Such an argument,

he writes, "shows ignorance of the Arab past, contempt for the Arab present, and unconcern for the Arab future."

Given that Lewis sees the history of Islamic and Western civilizations' interaction as based on perpetual conflict, it is somewhat bewildering to watch him stumble on the questions of modern day politics by being overly optimistic. In one essay, he holds out great hope for a revival of consensual rule in Afghanistan, where citizens are "resurrect[ing] the better traditions of the past." He theorizes that the creation of a Shiite-dominated democracy in Iraq "would pose a challenge, indeed a mortal threat" to the Iranian regime—not exactly how the relationship between the two allies looks today. And he suggests that the January 2005 elections in Iraq, held shortly before the country descended into chaos, "may prove a turning point in Middle Eastern history no less important than the arrival of General Bonaparte and the French Revolution in Egypt more than two centuries ago."

I am forced to agree with my old professor: Lewis's analysis of history and his opinions of today's political battles appear as if they belong to two different men. And Lewis the pundit should spend some time reading the work of Lewis the historian.

DAVID KENNER is an assistant editor at *Foreign Policy* magazine.

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