



The Foreign Policy Centre



Reform Initiatives in the MENA Region

Proposals for Progress

Report by
Rouzbeh Pirouz
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and
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Introduction

In November 2005, the Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre and the Belgian Royal Institute for International Relations organised a two day conference in Brussels titled 'Assessing Reform Initiatives in the MENA region'. The conference brought together representatives of Arab civil society organisations with key policy makers from the US and the EU, and academics researching political development in the Arab world. Participants were asked to critically examine externally driven reform initiatives, in particular the Barcelona Process and the American Middle East Partnership Initiative.

While a general consensus exists, both inside and outside the Arab world, on the need to address the unsustainable political, economic and social structures in the region, debate persists on how best to bring about beneficial change. Advances have been made on specific social and political issues: gender equality, good governance and minority rights. Broader themes of partnership, coordination and political will, which define the framework of and approach to reform policies, require further examination. Questions of refining the relationship between external and indigenous actors as well as examining the potential and limitations of cooperation and partnership were integral to the conference proceedings.

This report provides a summary of the conference discussion. It is divided in accordance with the themes emphasised by participants. These are:

1. Developing Partnerships for Reform;
2. Supporting Arab civil society;
3. Improving US and European reform programmes: Political Will and Coordination;
4. Conditionality.

Building on the conference discussions, the Civility Programme arrived at a set of policy recommendations for improving and advancing the debate and policy on reform. The recommendations follow from considerations of how initiatives can better reflect and

reinforce the perspectives and agendas of local civil society actors and their expressed preference for a holistic approach to reform; one that redresses overwhelming external party focus on economic as opposed to political reform.

We hope that the following analysis reflects the nuance and depth with which the participants tackled the themes under discussion. Readers should note that the debate on reform continues to be characterised by many different and competing perspectives. This diversity of opinion was evident at the conference. It should be noted that the policy recommendations in this report therefore reflect the perspectives of the Civility Programme and not necessarily those of the participants.

Developing Partnerships for Reform

Civil Society and Political Parties

As the EU and the US begin refining their policies on reform and democracy promotion in the Arab world, considerable attention should be given to the development and consolidation of linkages and partnerships with Arab civil society organisations. Until now, it appears that engagement with non-governmental actors has not taken place to the extent desired.¹ According to one participant; the reason for this is that 'we do not know who to talk to and if we do, we are uncomfortable talking to them'.

Not knowing who the potential partners on the ground are is understandable. Egypt is a good example of the paradoxical nature of the public sphere in the Arab world where restrictive legal and political systems do not necessarily translate into an environment from which civil society is absent. There are a multitude of NGOs in the Arab world; many of whose independent status is suspect. As Daniel Brumberg notes, governments like that of Mubarak actively encourage the proliferation of as many as 5,000 NGOs in their

¹ While the donor community was criticised by Arab participants for its limited efforts in consulting with Arab civil society, a MEPI representative responded arguing 'I can assure that there is no absence of discussions, it may just be that some of the discussions are not as broad-based, not as inclusive, as might be desirable'.

countries.² While democracy promoters in the West may view such numbers positively – assuming these actors have the capacity and intention to advocate for political reform – GNGOs (government backed NGOs) have often been used as buffers against making headway on political rights and establishing more representative governmental bodies. The challenge of differentiating between co-opted NGOs and independent ones is therefore considerable; especially if the international community is committed to the notion of partnership and is trying to locate legitimate entry points for their activities on reform.

Confronted with an over-crowded public sphere, representatives from the various Arab countries advised the international community to implement a series of country specific civil society assessment projects. These assessment projects should aim at mapping out the landscape of civil society actors, both officially registered as well as unlicensed, in each individual country of the Arab world. These assessments could then serve as a basis for determining who the potential partners on reform may be. Furthermore, a civil society assessment project would allow for judgements and conclusions regarding the capacity of these potential partners, their credibility, legitimacy and degree of independence – and the extent to which they command grass root support. It is unfortunate that after several years of international activity on reform in the Arab world, no comprehensive assessment has yet been made. According to one participant, it was only in 2005, several years after the launch of MEPI programmes in Morocco, that a civil society assessment was underway.

1. The international community is encouraged to implement a survey of civil society organisations with a view to determining credible and legitimate NGOs with grass root support.

The need to arrive at an understanding of the state of Arab civil society is further important given Arab countries' different domestic conditions and circumstances. In Morocco, for example, and

² Daniel Brumberg, 'Liberalisation versus Democratization: Understanding Arab Political Reform', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Democracy, Working Paper Number 37, May 2003.

particularly since the accession to the throne of King Mohammed VI, civil society organisations comprising teachers and intellectuals, trade unions and political parties have been particularly active in public life. Elsewhere this has not been the case and the circumstances confronting civil society are fundamentally different. In Syria, the political space available for associational life is highly restricted, with civil society forums flourishing for a very brief period only to be quashed. Syria has further seen the proliferation of so-called GNGOs. In Saudi Arabia, there are limited freedoms allowing for non governmental organisations to flourish. However, in spite of this, participants noted that women in Saudi Arabia are a well-organised segment of society. Informal 'cultural' forums have existed for the past two years in Riyadh with meetings held in individual women's homes. Participants from Saudi Arabia further noted that while the King has a more open vision for society, ministries remain intrusive and intolerant in their attitude to non-official groups. Recognising the diversity of political dynamics in different Arab countries is particularly important following an eventful 2005. With mass demonstrations in Lebanon, protest rallies joining disparate opposition movements in Egypt and municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, the international community has been tempted to forecast a sweeping movement to democracy and to reduce 'the current regional diversity to one dimensional talks about an emerging Arab Spring'.³

The examples above demonstrate that the strength of associational life and the intensity of civil society activity are linked to the political environment and the legal framework determining the right to form political parties and associations. It might therefore be helpful to complement civil society surveys with a review of party and associational laws in different Arab countries. This will allow for an understanding of the framework determining civil society activity, the boundaries of state/society relations and the dynamics of governmental control of NGOs and their operations. Assessing the circumstances of civil society in individual countries and by extension the characteristics of the political systems in place is ultimately integral to the formulation of successful reform initiatives. Given the country specific nature of these assessments and analyses, external

³ Amr Hamzawy, 'Understanding Arab Political Reality', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook, March 2005.

actors can then adjust policies to suit the circumstances of the individual country, its political environment as well as the legal parameters determining the intensity of associational life. Ultimately, a review of the laws determining civil society activity, political party development and associational life can then serve as both an indication of the reform orientation of regimes and as a starting point for policy and political pressure.

2. The international community must undertake an assessment of the legal environment governing associational life in different Arab countries.

Some participants, however, questioned the assumption that civil society is necessarily the right agent for promoting and driving forward the reform agenda. Given that the reform process is essentially political, entailing a change in a country's balance of political power, an examination of the potential role that political parties can have in processes of transition is important. With few exceptions, however, the debate on reform in the Middle East and North Africa has so far neglected the role that political parties can play. Moreover, wherever donor programmes on reform include party aid, this is usually tied to short-term programmes of electoral assistance.

In the Arab world, political parties operate in highly restrictive legal and political environments which impede their ability to develop into strongly based organisations. Moreover, many Arab parties are plagued by a number of structural weaknesses intrinsic to their operation. Parties can be described as 'clubs of notables' that carry little grass root support and have a multiplicity of organisational shortcomings, including a lack of internal democracy and the absence of branch organisations. As a consequence of this, parties have failed to generate citizens' interest in the political process and to develop strong constituency bases around sectoral interests. Most crucially, they have failed to gain the public support and trust necessary to become viable institutions in the political process. Recent events in Egypt exemplify and reinforce the above. Following a poor showing in the November legislative elections, Al Jazeera reported on opposition parties that are now embroiled in 'coups,

divisions and scathing self-criticism'.⁴ Ahead of the elections, a number of Al Ghad founders have attempted to take over the party's leadership from Ayman Nour. This leadership dispute is now in court. More dramatic than events within Al Ghad is the power struggle within Al Wafd, Egypt's oldest political party. In reaction to these events, Hassan Nafaa, a political science professor at Cairo University argued that 'when Egypt's oldest and biggest opposition party begins to collapse, it is normal for the national political forces of this country ... to view this as a sign and evidence of how the entire multi-party experience is falling apart'.⁵

Given the weaknesses cited above and exemplified in the Egyptian case, it is no surprise that irrespective of what the ideal role for civil society in a reform process is, it increasingly represents the sole avenue for expressing political grievances and articulating demands for reform. Furthermore, as one participant argued, the Western policy-making community should be wary of funding political parties and restrict themselves to influencing the environment within which these parties operate. He argued that Western policy makers should exercise 'absolute restraint' in funding the capacity of political parties 'because by giving money and quickly building up constituencies in very artificial ways, we damage the natural process that needs to take place'.

Islamist movements

Discussion on partnerships and dialogue on reform would fail to be comprehensive without examining the case of Islamist movements in the Arab world – precisely those actors that the international community have hesitated to engage with. The overwhelming focus of EU and American reform initiatives on engaging with liberal groups is understandable given shared aspirations and ideals, but are unlikely to trigger change across the board in the region because of the marginalisation of these groups within their societies. While country specific dynamics do explain recent Islamist successes in Iraq, Egypt and Palestine, there appears to be a general trend pointing to the relative weakness of liberal groups vis-à-vis Islamists across Arab countries. When given the opportunity, Islamist political parties have demonstrated their ability to tap into the political, social

⁴ Amira Howeidy, 'Egyptian Opposition in Crisis', *Al Jazeera*, 25 January 2006.

⁵ Ibid.

and cultural debates in their respective countries and translate this into electoral success. In comparison, liberal groups whom the West hopes can spearhead democratic reform have little grass root support and therefore a limited mass membership base. While Kefaya, for example, attracted much attention in the Western media for its brave displays of protest, it was in fact incapable of mustering more than a couple of hundred participants in its demonstrations.⁶ However, individuals at the conference did note that Islamist strength is a consequence of the Arab world's political systems. In authoritarian environments that limit the freedom of association and speech, liberal groups, with no mosques and charities as grounds for recruitment, have found it very difficult to mobilise support.

3. The international community should broaden its dialogue and debate on reform so that it includes diverse segments of a country's society and polity.

Faced with the popularity and legitimacy of Islamist political parties, the Western policy-making community will need to widen the dialogue they are undertaking with the region on reform so as to include these actors. Iraq has, to a certain extent, broken the taboo of engagement with religious leaders – as conversations were extensively held between US representatives and religious leaders and heads of religious political parties. However, this has so far not translated to a policy of engagement in all countries. When asked whether the US was willing to conduct a dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice responded 'we have not engaged the Muslim Brotherhood and we don't – we won't'.⁷ Faced with the electoral victories of various Islamist movements, the UK is now reconsidering its position on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. A leaked Foreign Office memo reported in the Guardian recommends that as well as meetings with diplomats, Muslim Brotherhood MPs should be included 'when events for medium level British visitors take place in Egypt'.⁸ The

⁶ Marina Ottoway, 'The New Republic', Vol. 232, Issues 4/716, 4/717, 6/13 June 2005.

⁷ Condoleezza Rice, speech to the US Embassy, London, 20 June 2005.

⁸ Ewen MacAskill, 'UK to build ties with banned Islamist group', *The Guardian*, 17 February 2006.

memo further recommends that the US, as well as other members of the European Union, also make contact.

While recognising the sensitivity surrounding the decision to engage with Islamist movements and political parties, it was suggested by many that dialogue must be extended if external parties want their initiatives to be inclusive, broad based, informed and credible. The US and EU must begin to consider organisations like the Muslim Brotherhood as legitimate political actors that command significant support within their societies. Consideration must further be given to the spectrum of movements and organisations, views and perspectives that come under the umbrella of 'Islamist'. Individual movements and parties can then be judged on their own terms and the criteria of inclusion determined by country specific circumstances. It would additionally be important to note that dialogue does not necessarily translate to assistance and support. The Western policy-making community can therefore ultimately judge the level and depth of its engagement with any group, in accordance with its interests.

4. The international community needs to recognize the spectrum of groups, positions and opinions under the umbrella of 'Islamist' and to foster an understanding of the differences between moderate and extremist Islamist movements.

It is worth noting that Islamist movements have themselves given considerable attention to the question of reform. Reform initiatives and statements advanced by Islamist political parties appear to signify a growing commitment to democratic principles and a dilution of the more controversial elements of their programmes. The Moroccan Justice and Development party's programme, for example, does not call for the application of Islamic law.⁹ Holding Islamist movement's accountable to the statements they have made as well as arriving at a clear understanding of their definition of reform and democracy is a necessary step. The policy making community would further find it beneficial to examine Islamist perspectives on issues

⁹ Interview with Saad Eddin Al Othmani, leader of Morocco's Party of Justice and Development by Amr Hamzawy, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Arab Reform Bulletin, Issue 1, February 2006.

that include women's rights and non-Muslim rights, modernising educational curriculum as well as the application of Sharia principles to public life.

It is important to consider that inconsistency and selective rhetoric emanating from the West, and particularly the US, has been damaging for the case of reform and for reform oriented individuals within Arab societies. US attention to the plight of Ayman Nour and its lack of attention to Essam El Erian of the Muslim Brotherhood is a case in point. The Secretary of State's denouncement of the Egyptian government's treatment of Ayman Nour and not that of Essam El Erian was an act of double standards which only reinforces scepticism regarding the sincerity and the commitment of the US to reform in the region. The United States may have found it more helpful to criticise the action of the Egyptian government on its violations of human rights through arbitrary arrests of its citizens rather than to focus attention on the treatment of one particular individual.

5. The international community should be more consistent in its messages on political reform.

Supporting Arab Civil Society

The question of supporting and funding indigenous civil society actors was visited repeatedly during the two days. Arab delegates advanced the notion of reconfiguring the relationship between international actors and local civil society so that it would no longer be based on monetary considerations. Participants did not emphasise their need for direct project financing but rather for international commitment to building human resource capacity and delivering technical and structural expertise to local actors. Structural and institutional shortcomings have often been cited as reasons behind the inability of local NGOs to successfully apply for grants from international foundations and bodies. Building the capacity of local NGOs is therefore required if they are to handle their own large grants. Donor assistance could then include financial management, grant writing and the development of management skills.

6. The international community should consider shifting focus from project funding to supporting the development of local NGO's capacities and resources.

Morocco presents an interesting case study on the need to develop local capacity building. In the last year, MEPI offices received around 25 proposals by local NGOs for grant funding, and only two were successful. The problem was not that Moroccan based organisations did not have enough experience or track record in managing projects. Rather, applicant organisations did not know the objectives of MEPI programmes; with the majority of proposals being for development rather than reform oriented projects.

7. The international community must commit greater efforts to raising local awareness of their programmes and the criteria for receiving grants.

Another problem faced by local NGOs is what was termed by one participant as the 'democracy industry'. Policy makers should be aware of the growth of a whole 'industry' of organisations that are shifting their research and work so that it is more Middle Eastern focused – essentially therefore rent seeking NGOs. Given the amount of money the US government is willing to commit to its democracy promotion campaign, a number of organisations with previous interests in Latin America and Eastern Europe are now transferring their focus to the Middle East, irrespective of their expertise and degree of knowledge, in order to attract large grants. Unfortunately, given the comparative advantage these large organisations have in grant writing, in their access to the policy making community in the West as well as their large structures, they have successfully diverted funds and focus away from local civil society actors and the projects they may have wished to implement in their own countries. This observation was confirmed by the experience of Arab participants at the conference who argued that limited funding is being contracted to local civil society organisation. Assuming local civil society's inability to manage large grants, projects are being drawn up and approved outside the Arab world with limited consultation and partnership with local actors. They

therefore run into the danger of rarely reflecting a country's circumstances and conditions.

Arab participants, and particularly those representing Islamist movements, argued that the international community should be aware that direct financing of their activities is not necessarily desirable. Association with external actors, especially the United States, is likely to cause considerable domestic damage to the perceived legitimacy of local actors. The case of US support to Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim was cited as an example. The support given to him by the US significantly undermined his credibility with the Egyptian populace and resulted in the loss of considerable political capital. The move away from project and activities based funding to capacity building is therefore important not only from the perspective of usefulness but in order to avoid the stigmatisation associated with receiving foreign funding.

Therefore, while it remains difficult for civil society actors to operate because of restrictive legal and political environments, the international community needs to re-focus priorities so it is no longer about project funding but rather about equipping civil society with the capacity to effectively function within stringent political and legal environments. Strengthening the structural capacities of these actors, their access to information and technology as well as developing skills and capacities for building support could be far more important than direct financing for projects.

In return, representatives of the international community encouraged local NGOs to examine means of pooling their efforts and resources to push forward the internal debate and policy on reform. External donor support can and should be complemented by local NGOs exploring how cooperation amongst them can be encouraged, strengthened and consolidated. Based on his experience of working with Arab civil society, a participant argued that one of the failings of Arab civil society is that groups choose to compete with each other rather than cooperate. He continued to argue that 'they are often driven by charismatic leaders who simply are unable to make common cause'. Moreover, the participant argued that there is a need within the Arab world for a forum for indigenous organisations to meet and have a profitable and meaningful discussion. This

absence of regional forums increasingly explains why Arab NGOs look to external actors like the United States or the European for discussion. Therefore when addressing the issue of developing local debate on reform, the question of exploring mechanisms by which local organisations can cooperate and determine local reform agendas needs to be examined.

Furthermore, as the Western policy making community was urged to extend communication to Islamist movements so, it was argued, must liberal non Islamist groups within the Arab world. In fact, this recommendation follows from a point iterated in the Doha Declaration for Democracy and Reform. The Declaration calls for the creation of 'national pacts' that could help consolidate and strengthen the ties between reform advocates. These pacts could further act as a means to alleviate local concerns and fears of Islamists exploiting political openings to seize power. 'Essentially, these charters or pacts could lay out the rules of the democratic game and establish an agreed upon set of values and guarantees endorsed across the political spectrum.'¹⁰

While arguing the need to alter the framework of EU and American assistance so that it is no longer project based, participants simultaneously criticised donor activity in more conventional project based assistance and noted a bias in donor activity towards working in countries' capitals and urban centres. Participants argued that rarely are projects implemented in rural and provincial settings and this goes a long way to explaining the dominance of religious oriented groups outside the capitals. Rural communities are therefore neglected as partners in the debate on reform in the Arab world as well as targets of reform initiatives and activities.

9. The international community should be aware of the bias in the direction of its activities and funding; with overwhelming focus directed to capitals and urban centres of the Arab world.

¹⁰ Mona Yacoubian, Promoting Middle East Democracy II: Arab Initiatives, USIP Special Report No. 136, May 2005.

Improving American and EU Reform Programmes

It was argued by some at the conference that figures so far committed to political reform have not been very significant. For example, under the terms of the Barcelona Process €3 billion, one billion in grants and 2 billion in loans, have been made available to the Mediterranean partners. While this figure is objectively considerable, when compared to the commitments made to Eastern European reform and divided between the countries assisted by the funds, arguably it seems limited. Similarly, analysts noted the limited funding available for MEPI. As Dr. Katarina Dalacoura argues, while MEPI had made headlines as an important American tool for promoting reform, initial funding was 'a paltry \$29 million'.¹¹ This has increased over the years although not by as much as the Bush administration may have hoped. Because of concerns over programme duplication and the fact that MEPI goals have been defined in general terms, the House of Representatives' Appropriation Committee continues to provide less funding than demanded. Moreover, the \$293 million dedicated to MEPI over four fiscal years is dwarfed by the bilateral economic assistance of over one billion dollars per year to the MENA countries.¹²

It was further argued that there appears to be little consistency in donor priorities. Under the rubric of the Barcelona Process, a broad range of projects from agricultural assistance, to the development of the telecommunication sector and governance projects are deemed to be 'reform' related. While there is certainly an urgent need to address local and regional concerns in addition to securing economic rights and social development, it is important to differentiate between programmes that are developmental and those that are reform oriented. There is a grave danger in collapsing a range of projects under the heading of reform which may then dilute the goal and objective of reform initiatives. The international community should therefore be clearer about what 'political reform' actually means.

¹¹ Katarina Dalacoura, 'US democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a critique', *International Affairs*, October 2005.

¹² *Ibid.*

8. The international community must distinguish reform priorities and activities from its developmental work and therefore only those programmes that directly relate to and impact the political environment in the Arab world are deemed reform.

Interestingly, it was argued by one participant that the EU's competence in the areas of trade, financial assistance and more legalistic aspects of human rights explains Brussels' tendency to concentrate on these issues. Historically, these have been key instruments of EU foreign policy. Furthermore, trade agreements that tangentially address political circumstances have been the pattern of EU engagement not only with the Mediterranean countries but also with Russia, China and Latin America.

In response, an EU affiliated participant suggested that there have been developments in EU foreign policy; particularly since the institution of the Barcelona Process. There has been a continuous and developing political dialogue and annual meetings taking place both within the association councils and committees and later within the different sub-committees. The European Neighbourhood Policy is another forum through which this debate will develop and grow richer. While policy on reform and democratisation remains vague, there is an increasingly unified EU stance within the reform debate and this deserves recognition. One participant further argued that while the EU may have promoted reform as economic reform with the view that this will eventually lead to political reform and transformation, this viewpoint is now changing. As was suggested, 'it is my impression that in the last year we have all moved to consider reforms as... "politics", and the reform agenda is a political agenda'.¹³

The issue of refining concepts and definitions is additionally necessary when dealing with Arab populations' perspectives on

¹³ However as Thomas Carothers argues, the distinction between political and economic reforms are not necessarily so clear cut. In the Arab world, there are numerous examples of economic structures which feed into political levers of power. Economic reforms have therefore failed in a number of countries because of leaders' unwillingness to confront 'deeply entrenched, politically protected anti-reformist interests'. Thomas Carothers, 'Is Gradualism possible? Choosing a Strategy for Promoting Democracy in the Middle East', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Number 39, June 2003.

democracy promotion. According to a survey conducted by a conference participant, it was suggested that the term 'democracy', increasingly provokes perceptions of violent external intervention. Breaking the concept of democracy into its constitutive parts – rule of law, freedom of expression, equality – which many from the Arab world support may encourage more amenable reactions.

Political Will

The impact and likely success of reform initiatives and activities is related to the pressure the EU and the US are willing to exert on governments in the Arab world. To many of the Arab participants, the effectiveness of funding could be severely undermined if not accompanied by genuine commitment to, and rhetoric in favour of, reform. However, as was pointed out during Dr Wittes' presentation, the potential for conflict between reform priorities on the one hand and some of the more traditional strategic interests the US and the EU have in the region on the other is ever present. As the West, and particularly the United States, develop more substantive and country specific reform programmes, the question of consistency and balancing reform with more traditional strategic interests of oil, counter-terrorism and the Middle East peace process will need to undergo significant examination.

As one participant argued, there needs to be a realistic assessment of the US role in promoting the reform agenda. While the United States can and will put political pressure on governments in the region this can never be consistent – no matter who the president and which administration. There are economic and security interests which imply that there is 'never going to be a coherent, consistent political reform agenda or democracy agenda'. The nature of the US political scene further curtails the potential for a long term commitment on reform. An administration cannot take a long term view of foreign affairs when it is likely to change every four years, and even if it is the same administration re-elected, in the end there are 'always mid-stream changes in policies'. Furthermore, given that policies are subjected to the oversight of Congress, policies must have demonstrable short-term results that one can assess and present in order to maintain financing and support.

The United States however confronts particular complications relating to its own role and history in the Arab world. Firstly, the US has significant credibility problems vis-à-vis pro-democratic reformers given its history of relations with both Arab and Israeli governments. Secondly, current Arab governments serve significant American strategic and economic interests and it is not yet clear whether their democratic substitutes would do the same. The United States did place reform and the question of more open political systems into its agenda of bi-lateral relations with Egypt. It remains to be seen whether it will maintain this position as a long term policy vis-à-vis Egypt.

12. The international community is encouraged to ensure that its messages on reform are consistent and that they are maintained over a considerable period of time.

In response to the conflict of interests identified in Dr Wittes' presentation, participants argued that potential damage to bi-lateral relations made by pressures on reform could to a certain extent be avoided by resorting to international bodies as a means of expressing opposition to human rights transgressions. Arab states have signed and ratified most Human Rights conventions, and many without reservations. Saudi Arabia for example has ratified CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women)¹⁴ and while this does not allow for complaints advanced by individuals, states can trigger the enforcement mechanism on behalf of individuals within particular states. As Arab participants iterated, international conventions and treaties should and do present actors with tools and instruments for pressuring governments.

13. The international community should make use of international treaty obligations as a means of pressuring governments on their human right commitments.

¹⁴ <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/cedw.htm>.

Coordination

In 2003, US calls for international cooperation and coordination within the G8 framework were received with considerable scepticism by the EU. While the latter welcomed US initiatives, they initially found statements and recommendations prescriptive in both tone and style.¹⁵ The EU additionally noted the limited reference made by the US to the Euro-Med Partnership and long standing EU activities on reform in the region. Naturally cautious about compromising their political standing in the Middle East, there was eagerness within European policy making circles not to engage in anything that would result in the loss of independence for their policy instruments. As a result, Crisis Group reported that the Americans were forced to scale back some of their aspirations on programme merging and have now agreed to pledges of regular information exchange.¹⁶ There is no doubt however that US democratic rhetoric has prompted Europe to re-examine its own approach to reform and to address the excessive red tap surrounding the process.

The relationship between the US and the EU on reform is now at a different stage with cooperation on developing BMENA mechanisms significantly more advanced. The Second Forum for the Future demonstrated progress in transatlantic cooperation on the question of reform: a series of programmes and institutions were put in place and collaboration extended to both Arab governments and non-governmental bodies. In preparation for the Second Forum for the Future, the Democracy Assistance Dialogue, a forum for integrating the voices of Arab civil society into the inter-governmental dialogue on reform, was set up. Recommendations were formulated by civil society organisations and used as the basis for inter-governmental debate at the Forum for the Future in Bahrain.

The Forum in Bahrain did not conclude successfully. The Egyptian government tried to introduce language that would restrict external aid to civil society groups and with the Bahraini government insisting on consensus, the Forum ended with no final declaration decided upon.¹⁷ However, this failure should not distract analysts from

¹⁵ International Crisis Group, 'The Broader Middle East Initiative: Imperilled at Birth', Report No. 4, 7 June 2004.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 'Mid-East forum ends in confusion', Daily Star, 14 November 2005.

recognising the value of the institutional mechanisms set up in the run up to Bahrain as well as the visible cooperation between the US and the EU. Particularly, this recent Forum has ensured an official place for civil society organisations within the G8 framework for reform in the Arab world.

Participants at the conference suggested that cooperation between the US and the EU must continue and be further consolidated. While working together on programme design might not necessarily be desirable for either party, the EU and the US are advised to explore means of reinforcing each other's work and ensuring that they do not undercut efforts vis-à-vis a particular country or theme. Coordinating activities and messages can be instrumental in ensuring against exploitation of US and EU policy gaps by target governments. As one of the Arab participants suggested, coordinated support and rhetoric for change is likely to eliminate any opportunities that governing regimes might have for playing either party against the other. Participants highlighted Lebanon as an example of successful coordination by the EU and the US. In fact, Lebanon exemplified an effective division of labour between the EU and the US. Some participants therefore noted that in the future, the EU may find it useful to focus on civil society activity where it has a significant degree of credibility while the US, given its coercive power, could deal with governments.

Moreover, in their efforts to communicate the message on reform, the United States and Europe need to become 'increasingly sophisticated in distinguishing real from cosmetic reform'.¹⁸ In different countries, authoritarian regimes have proven themselves adept at taking steps that seemingly alter the shape of political life but ultimately do little to affect the balance of power and reinforce ruling party's hold on power. The constitutional amendment allowing for Egypt's first multi-party presidential elections is a case in point. Having first declared the amendment a bold move by the Egyptian regime, the United States found itself in an increasingly awkward position as Egyptian reformers criticised the amendment as ineffective. While the international community needs to encourage moves to political reform, public statements and remarks should be

¹⁸ Michele Dunne, 'Evaluating Egyptian Reform', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Working Paper No. 66, January 2006.

carefully considered and possibly reserved until assessments of initiatives are undertaken and when evidence of tangible impact is noted.¹⁹

14. The international community must strengthen and consolidate cooperation and coordination on reform.

The question of coordination should not only refer to dialogue between members of the international community, primarily the United States and the EU, but also between the international community and representatives of Arab governments. The emphasis on the need to continue dialogue with governmental bodies reflects participant recognition that governments in the Arab world are not monolithic entities and therefore include reform minded individuals.

Due to both internal dynamics and more consistent and concerted international attention to the question of reform, Arab governments have responded by announcing their own initiatives in areas such as women's political and social empowerment and reform of the educational systems. Arab governments' willingness to develop their own initiatives also reflects general conviction that some political change is needed. Even the most conservative among Arab leaders have conceded that their countries will need to change politically; although the terms and the timings for this change have not been elaborated or detailed. Furthermore, faith in government led reform processes may not be entirely groundless. Governments have tended to be the actors who are in the best position to change the rules of the political game. Some participants have therefore agitated against the alienation of Arab governments, and particularly those reform minded individuals within them. The engagement of Arab governments on reform is important in order to ensure that transition to more open political systems occurs in a stable manner.

15. The international community is called upon to recognise the potential role that Arab governments and reform minded individuals can play in the progress towards reform.

¹⁹ Ibid.

While keeping the above in mind, Arab participants cautioned against receiving some of these initiatives with enthusiasm. For as they argued, regimes have grown skilful at 'playing' the reform game with initiatives and liberalisation measures that are tenuous and reversible. Regimes will therefore only go as far as required and tackle only the 'easier issues'. As noted by some at the conference, appointing a woman minister is a non-threatening act: 'you will look as a reformer; you will have a four or five women in the cabinet and its OK. Revisiting your education, your curriculum, is not very threatening, particularly if you want to improve it, so they go ahead with it. When it comes to the politics, the democratisation, I think they are much more restrained. They will only go as much as is needed or required as a result of domestic pressure.'

The issue of coordination between local civil society actors and the Western policy making community was one that came under a significant degree of consideration during the conference. The discussion entailed severe criticisms of the international policy making community regarding the centralisation of programme design, implementation and evaluation. It appears that regular consultation with individuals representing countries and interests in the Arab world has not been sufficient. For example, MEPI programme design has so far taken place in donor countries. As one of the Arab participants noted, very little effort is expended in engaging with university research departments, think tanks and making use of local expertise in designing reform programmes. The engagement of Arab reformers in the different phases of project design and implementation will assist in the identification and prioritisation of local needs.

10. The international community must institutionalise avenues for ensuring regular contact and input by Arab reformers into the design and implementation of projects.

Unfortunately, this absence of consultation at the design level appears to have translated itself into limited access of local experts in project implementation. State Department programmes are being subcontracted to organisations in the United States, who then implement these projects in an Arab country. Arab countries, and local civil society actors, are positioned as passive recipients of

these programmes and projects and have a limited role beyond being subjects of training programmes. This is highly detrimental to the progress of reform. Furthermore project evaluation methodology appears to render donors dependent on the reports of Western organisations implementing projects. These do not always include independent assessments by local actors or participants.

11. The international community must ensure that its projects undergo independent assessments with benchmarks and criteria for project success determined by the specific circumstances and conditions of each Arab country.

Increasingly, however the MEPI administration is changing. With offices recently opened in Bahrain and Tunisia, there is potential for the development of more country specific strategies and for more regular contact with local experts. It was noted that the first of the country strategies were formulated in November 2004 and these have served to 'tighten (their) strategic framework and programmatic linkages substantially'.

While having MEPI offices in the region is a positive development, a participant suggested that MEPI's continued presence in the State Department may jeopardise its sustainability. State Department officials 'who are the primarily pool from which MEPI staff are drawn, usually have no training or experience in running aid programs. They are obliged to start at the bottom of the aid learning curve, in a region with obstacles to reform that daunt the most expert aid practitioner.'²⁰ The State Department's system of rotating staff has made it difficult to ensure continuity in institutional knowledge and expertise. As warned by one participant, no State Department office endures for very long. However in response to these criticisms, a MEPI representative argued that efforts committed to compiling country strategy papers will establish the groundwork for a long term process that has the potential for achieving parallel objectives to those of the Helsinki Process.

²⁰ Thomas Carothers, 'A Better Way to Support Middle East Reform', The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook, February 2005.

Conditionality

Participants at the conference consistently argued that traditional project based donor assistance is no longer sufficient for ensuring progress on reform. In fact, participants noted that the international community has been too lax in disbursing funds with no effective mechanisms in place to ensure tangible output and impact.

The role that a regime of positive conditionality might have in prompting reform was explored extensively; especially given that the EU is in the process of establishing a Good Governance Fund. This fund will make grants and loans to Arab governments conditional on the human rights and governance records. The Fund would essentially operate as a positive incentive encouraging and pushing forward advances on political reform. Questions were raised with regards to the content of the conditionality regime: what benchmarks of good governance ought to be prioritised and how assessments of progress and entitlements can be linked. The EU already has a pool of agreed treaties whose terms and contents can form the basis of this conditionality fund. The Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan for example includes agreed priorities that can form the basis of a conditionality framework.

It might be the case that those countries that most require reform are those who will not need access to this fund. For example, given their wealth of natural resources or what they acquire from bi-lateral aid, both Egypt and Saudi Arabia will not necessarily wish to compete for access to this fund. However, this should not necessarily translate to a dismissal of the potential for success that a conditionality strategy might have. As was noted at the conference the international community should move beyond economic incentives. Rather, creativity might be required of the international community to explore institutionalising a league of reform-minded states. This body would have a clear institutional identity and entry would be exclusive to those countries with firm records of good governance. Membership of this body or 'club' could then additionally confer particular advantages.

In determining a policy of positive conditions, two things must be kept in mind. Reintroducing political requirements into development

assistance programmes could be successful if donors are consistent in their demands and are able to sustain them over a considerable period of time. Furthermore, reform should not be evaluated by economic criteria only. Rather the international community is encouraged to be creative in its conditionality policy, exploring both institutional as well as economic incentives for encouraging advances on reform.

16. The international community should increasingly consider a regime of positive conditionality as a means for advancing reform.

Concluding Remarks

This conference took as its starting point the conviction that the case for reform – social, economic and political – is recognised both within and without the Arab world. Over the two-days, participants were called to evaluate the initiatives currently in place. Concerns regarding the advancement of role of civil society and political actors within Arab countries and the reliability of evaluation mechanisms all came under examination. Furthermore, given that external calls for reform are inherently limited in the absence of domestic forces in place, the potential for and the limitations of partnerships across regional boundaries was explored. It is imperative that further thought is given to exploring the development of organic agendas for reform and for examining the relationship between internal and external activities. With regards to the latter, it is particularly important to question how it is possible to ensure synergy between internal and external initiatives. In addressing these, one participant suggested that there would be great value in adopting a comparative approach and learning from the experiences of other countries in other regions of the world.

Prior to discussing and analysing the shortcomings of reform initiatives, language and semantics inspired much discussion. Polls cited at the conference highlighted the degree with which democracy is increasingly synonymous with forceful external intervention in the Arab world. When Arab opinions were polled on issues of freedom of the press, association and equality, reactions received by pollsters were markedly different. Together with language, the timeline for reform and change was given considerable attention. Recognising

the reform process as a gradual one should not preclude determining independent and clear benchmarks for measuring progress and ensuring accountability when these benchmarks are not met. As Dr Rima khalaf argued, 'we can't say it should be gradual, lets hold municipal elections and we do not what should follow and when.' Gradualism should be accompanied by a vision of what needs to be achieved.

MEPI, the Barcelona Process and the BMENA were adopted as starting points for analysing and addressing the shortcomings of externally formulated initiatives for reform and political development in the Arab world. The conference examined the issue of how and by whom the reform agenda, its content and its terms can be advanced. Concerns regarding enhancing the role of civil society and other political actors within Arab countries as well as the reliability of evaluation mechanisms for informing the international community of tangible advances came under extensive examination by the participants during their breakout sessions. Recognising that both local and external initiatives for reform, on their own, have yielded little substantive success, the conference examined synergies between the priorities and objectives of various actors.

Attentiveness to the relationship between top-down and bottom-up efforts for reform was an imperative emphasised repeatedly by participants. Participants were unequivocal regarding the need for a long term, consistent and broad based Western policy on reform. Reform and political development in the Middle East and North Africa is likely to be a gradual process and the international community must harness its political will and commitment to maintain their messages for a considerable period of time. However, as noted earlier, difficulties remain. There are strategic interests that might come into conflict with the political pressure exerted against friendly governments in the Arab world. These difficulties only serve to reiterate the need to arrive at creative institutional frameworks for reform that is independent of bi-lateral country to country pressure. Furthermore, it should be noted that Europe and the United States have different strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the Arab world and coordinating a division of responsibility between the two parties could potentially add momentum to developments in the region.

Participants examined the circumstances of local civil society actors in the Arab world and their relationship to Western sources of support; financial or otherwise. Challenges remain especially as they relate to effectively integrating the voice and experience of local civil society into programme design, implementation as well as evaluation. Ultimately, it is through overcoming the gap between reform programmes drawn up in the West and perspectives and agendas within the region that progress towards political reform can be accelerated.

Appendix 1

The following is a transcript of the Keynote Address by Dr Rima Khalaf Hunaidi, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the United Nations Development Program's Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS).

INTRODUCTION

It is a privilege to be in Brussels on this occasion, and an honour to address this distinguished conference. I would like to extend my appreciation to the organizers, the Foreign Policy Centre and the Royal Institute for International Relations and its Director General, Ambassador Claude Misson, and to the Founder and Chairman of the Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre, Dr Rouzbeh Pirouz.

This examination of Western reform initiatives and their effectiveness comes at an opportune moment. Ten years on, Barcelona, the process that kindled our hopes for peace, prosperity and cross-cultural understanding and cooperation, has fallen short of expectations among Arabs and Europeans alike. Today, the Arab world enjoys neither peace nor stability. Our prosperity remains elusive, several Arab countries face large trade imbalances with Europe, and misconceptions and misunderstanding between cultures is at a historic high. Many Europeans now view their geographic periphery in the southern Mediterranean as an increasingly exposed flank, and new issues of migration and security have superimposed themselves on the original partnership. While the causes of these setbacks lie well beyond Barcelona itself, the lack of progress underlines the need for new impetus. But in what direction?

We also meet at a time when the Arab world is demonstrating the most contradictory of trends. Optimists, encouraged by the wide blossoming of reform initiatives, have called this moment the 'Arab spring'. Others, looking at the escalation of violence and the looming spectre of internal strife, see it as the opening stage of an impending inferno. So, where do we really stand, and where are we headed?

What can we Arabs and you, our partners, do to shape a more hopeful future for all?

I shall focus on these questions in the context of the current drive for internal and external reforms. I will attempt to address a number of related issues, among them:

- Why now? Why the sudden drive for reform by Arab reformers? And why the sudden interest in reform by Western governments?
- Do Western governments, Arab governments and Arab reformers share the same vision of reform? Are they seeking similar, or at least, compatible objectives?
- Do their different reform strategies reinforce one another? How do we ensure that internal and external initiatives generate synergy and do not work at cross-purposes or create greater turmoil?

My chief references are the writings, thoughts and hopes of Arabs themselves, as expressed in the *Arab Human Development Reports* sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme – a series that I have overseen for the past five years.

At the outset let me clarify the geopolitical landscape I will be referring to.

This clarification is necessary because our region enjoys a surplus of labels but suffers a deficit of recognized identity. We are sometimes called the 'Near East', at other times 'the Middle East and North Africa'. Some see the region as the 'southern Mediterranean', while others identify it as part of the 'Islamic world'. For the purposes of this presentation, I will adopt the definition and identity that the peoples of the region have chosen for themselves. I will speak about the 22 countries belonging to the League of Arab States and their more than 280 million people, which constitute the Arab world.

II. ESCALATING TRENDS TOWARDS REFORM

In the past couple of years, the Arab political and social landscape has witnessed dramatic changes. Seldom have we seen calls for reform so intense or widespread. Arabs from all walks of life have poured into the streets demanding their rights and freedoms.

Galvanized as never before, citizens have organized peaceful protests, held rallies, signed collective petitions and insisted on having a voice in their future. Dozens of reform-focussed conferences have brought Arab civil society, intellectuals and activists and sometimes government representatives together to issue courageous calls for democratization and representative government. Old taboos have been broken, with calls for good governance, gender equality and minority rights cutting forcefully across the region. Pressure for change from political and civil forces has escalated in countries like Lebanon, Egypt, Bahrain, and Tunisia, and emerged, probably for the first time, in countries like Saudi Arabia. On a scale not known before, the Arab Street has set about articulating a home-grown agenda for political, social, and economic reform.

Alongside such popular stirrings, or maybe because of them, Arab regimes have announced new initiatives to empower women, reform their educational systems, and to a lesser extent, to move towards more representational government.

These extraordinary concessions have included: legislative elections with women voters and candidates in a number of Gulf countries; competitive, multiparty presidential elections in Algeria and Palestine; the formation of Human Rights Commissions in Egypt and Qatar; the adoption of a new family law safeguarding women's rights in Morocco; new elected parliaments in Bahrain and Yemen; and finally, earlier this year, the granting of political rights to women in Kuwait, ending decades of peaceful protest.

At the same time, external initiatives to support reform in Arab countries, whether under bilateral or regional frameworks, have increased exponentially: the European Neighborhood Policy, the Greater, then Broader, Middle East and North Africa Initiative, and the Middle East Partnership Initiative, among others.

What accounts for this bumper crop of internal and external reform initiatives?

III. WHY NOW?

First, both Arabs and their partners increasingly understand that the status quo is unsustainable and that, in any case, workable or not, it no longer serves their interests. Most Arab governments have failed for decades to respond to their people's aspirations for development, security and freedom. On the other hand, the Israeli occupation continues to contribute to underlying grievances and anger by threatening not only the enjoyment of rights, but peace, stability and the prospect of leading meaningful and dignified lives for many. Caught between oppression at home and violation from abroad, Arabs are increasingly excluded from determining their own future. Many frustrated citizens, especially the young, now openly question their governments' competence and legitimacy, viewing them as authoritarian relics incapable of safeguarding popular interests and freedoms at home or abroad.

Second, is the realization that an unsustainable status quo is dangerous to all. Arab regimes, Arab reformers, and Western governments, have woken up to the fact that increasing political repression and rising unmet popular expectations are a combustible mix that could erupt into social upheaval and violence in several Arab states. Such anarchy would spill over to Europe and the Western world. This is what the third *Arab Human Development Report* described as the 'impending disaster scenario'.

For Western governments, particularly the US, September 11 brought home the multiple threats to their security as a result of the globalization of terror. It took this tragic thunderbolt to change the pre 9/11 'policy of exceptionalism' when it came to democracy in the region. For many years before, Western governments stopped short of supporting democracy in Arab countries. In certain cases, some actually worked actively against democratic forces perceived detrimental to their interests, principally oil and the security of Israel. In pursuing such interests, they propped up authoritarian regimes, turning a blind eye to their notorious violations of human rights. Post-9/11 wisdom recognizes that uncritical alliances with autocracies have actually fed anti-Western feelings and ironically, stirred up the very extremist militancy the West was seeking to contain. Hence, the avalanche of international initiatives to support reform in the region, however misguided some may be.

Arab reformers, for their part, suddenly found themselves caught between terror and an increasingly open-ended war on it. This war resulted in the further erosion of Arab freedoms and civil rights inside and outside the region. On the other hand, the vastly expanded American military presence on Arab soil, bent on re-shaping the region to fit an external vision, further alarmed Arab reformers. It was now apparent that, if they did not seize their own future, outsiders would.

Inside the region, the space for reformers began to shrink as they now faced not only repressive governments, but also radical groups that demanded full adherence to, and compliance with, their insular and exclusivist visions for change.

In other words, Arab reformers found themselves squeezed between a rock and hard place. On one side, a global power warned them: 'you are either with us or against us'. On the other, radicals told them bluntly that they could either support 'believers' or 'infidels'. Torn by two stark and uncompromising choices, Arab reformers could accept neither.

One path deprived them of their national liberty. The other would confiscate their rights and personal and social freedoms, and threaten their livelihoods and achievements. Both inhibited the reformers' articulation of a moderate path and threatened their own vision of a democratic region free of foreign occupation and free of terror. Hence the redoubled demands for reform from groups moving to reclaim their threatened political space.

The metastasis of terror has threatened not only reformers, but also Arab regimes. For many Arab governments, the comfortable choice in the past has always been between sharing some power and keeping it all. This new chapter has changed the formula to sharing *some* power or *losing* it all. Hence the official drive for reform from regimes on the defensive, limited as it may be.

In sum, these changes in realities and perceptions have prompted all actors to move simultaneously to pursue reform, though with each group spurred by its own vision. But do internal and external reform

initiatives seek the same or even compatible objectives? So far, not necessarily, it seems.

IV. GOALS OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REFORMS

The driving force behind internal reforms has always been the desire to rebuild Arab societies on the basis of the full respect for freedoms and human rights. For generations, Arabs have thirsted for democracy and freedom. They want the encroachment on their present and future to end. They want to be the masters of their own destiny, living in healthy cooperation and interaction with the rest of the world as equals.

Yet Arab reformers often suspect that apparently like-minded foreign partners do not share their goals. In many Western policies, democracy in the Arab world is not sought in and of itself. It is at best a secondary objective, inserted to serve the principal goal of fighting terror. Democracy in Arab countries is now assumed to marginalize extremists and hence slow and eventually end 'the flow of violent radicalism to the rest of the world'.

However, linking democratic reforms with the 'war on terror' has eroded the credibility of some Western initiatives in the eyes of Arab reformers. If in fact democratic change does not itself produce success in the fight against terror, as we are increasingly seeing in Iraq, then, reformers conclude, the West might well drop its support for Arab political reform and revert to supporting authoritarian regimes and undemocratic practices.

It is important to understand that mistrust among Arabs of Western-inspired reforms has a background. It has been heightened by the selective support of Western governments to nascent reform movements in Arab countries. Some, like those in Lebanon, were unconditionally supported, while others, were completely ignored. Friendly Arab regimes, particularly those housing foreign bases, have been hailed as star reformers, despite their flagrant abuses of human rights. When one such regime stripped some 6,000 of its people of their citizenship, not many official Western voices were heard in condemnation. The message from such selective support appears to be: apply a few cosmetic touches here and there; continue to welcome our military bases and presence, open dialogue

with Tel Aviv; and voilà! You are a member of the global democracy club.

Western credibility has also been tarnished as a result of Arab stereotyping in the West, coupled with ethnic profiling and tighter restrictions on the movement of Arabs. These sad by-products of the war on terror have negatively impacted liberal reforms and reformers at home and abroad. They have eroded the confidence of Arab reformers, who once held up the West as a model of freedom and democracy.

Finally, the failure of recent Western initiatives to acknowledge the role of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories in impeding freedom and development has created suspicion and distrust of many foreign policy initiatives in the region. Arabs do appreciate that the West, especially Europe, has exerted efforts to end the occupation, and that it has extended significant aid to the Palestinians. Even the US has called for a viable Palestinian state. But the continuation of occupation regardless leaves Arabs asking: 'are the giants actually helpless, or simply insincere?'

Let me be clear that this is not a 'blame game'. I am not in the least excusing the Arab governments' lack of progress, but rather pointing out that there is a task of liberation to be undertaken in the West itself. And the first step for the West is to liberate itself from its fear of Arab democracy.

That is not an easy task and some apprehensions about democratic outcomes are real. What if the Islamists win? Or the Baathists or Arab Nationalists? What if those elected dislike our military presence? What if they do not accommodate our policies regarding oil or Israel? Those are certainly legitimate questions. However, they presuppose a permanent, existential conflict of interest between the East and West. Yet such a conflict need not exist in the medium and long term.

In the short term, anger and frustration may well lead some voters to opt for leaders who are seen as 'clean', uncompromised, and willing to challenge their oppressors. They will vote for the Hizbullahs and the Hamas's of the Arab world. But the solution is not to block these

actors from participating in the political process. Democracy and reform in Arab countries may come at a cost to short-term Western interests, but the lack of it and the continuation of the status quo will certainly result in a much higher and less tolerable cost in the long-term.

The solution lies in a two-pronged approach, one that strives to end the injustices inflicted upon Arabs, by ending the occupation of their land on the one hand, and by supporting a gradual process towards good governance on the other. Although ending Israel's occupation of Palestine is not a prerequisite for Arab reform, it would certainly give reforms new impetus. It would right historic wrongs, restore stability and take away a strong element in the mass appeal of extremists, who consistently exploit the resonance of Palestine with the Arab Street. It would free Arab reformers to forge international partnerships for change, and liberate the US and Europe from their fear of democracy in the Arab world, because there would no longer be any special interests at risk. What an immense breakthrough that would be!

At the same time, reform and democratic transformation in Arab countries should be supported as a goal in itself rather than as a means to another end. It should not be contingent upon its usefulness in the war on terror.

The West can help to promote home-grown democracy and pluralism in the Arab world by engaging autocratic regimes candidly on their human rights records, by nudging them towards reform, and by working with Arab reformers regardless of their political affiliations.

So what does this all mean for the reform process? How can we bring together the various positions and processes?

V. RECONCILIATION: THE WAY FORWARD

We can begin by agreeing that reformation and renaissance in the Arab world is a monumental task, and that it is in the best interest of Arabs and their partners alike. The ultimate success of reforms will undoubtedly depend on Arabs themselves. But partnership with external forces can create additional incentives and momentum.

However, for partnership to be fruitful, adherence to the five following principles is essential:

1. The principles of democracy should be applied to all.

Human rights should be enjoyed by all, Palestinians as well as Iraqis, Saudis as well as Moroccans. Violations of human rights should not be tolerated regardless who the perpetrator is, Syrian or Israeli. None should be above international law or exempt from its application.

2. The outcome of the democratization process should be respected,

even if elected leaders are not to the liking of some. Democratization will bear fruit gradually in the Arab world, as it has everywhere else. In the short term, it may lead to the emergence of new and seemingly threatening untested political forces. Yet fear of short-term results should not hinder deepening the process, as long as its basic tenets are always protected.

3. Reform cannot be imposed from the outside;

neither can the democratic model itself be imported wholesale. Peoples of the region should be able to select from among the different variations as long as the selected model respects human rights in full, protects freedoms, safeguards popular participation and ensures both majority rule and minority rights.

4. Any democratization process should be inclusive.

All societal forces should be allowed to organize and compete in the public sphere as long as they do not resort to violence, do not abort the democratic process, and respect the right to differ.

5. Finally, the relationship between Arab reformers and their international supporters should always be one of partnership and not one of patronage.

Beyond these basic principles, Western initiatives can encourage true political, economic and social reforms, by using existing tools better. I began by observing that the Barcelona process has not

attained its potential. I would argue that one of the obstacles is the weighted focus on economic and trade partnerships instead of partnerships with people. Until equal emphasis is placed on human rights and freedoms, initiatives will fail to produce meaningful people-centered change. Of late, there has been a commendable shift towards supporting good governance. But most foreign initiatives so far have focused on economic, social and political liberalization – encouraging freer debates and competition, but still falling well short of helping to institutionalize the representative political power required of democratization.

VI. CONCLUSION

Ladies and Gentlemen: history has presented the Arab people with a crisis that is also a make-or-break opportunity to claim a better future consistent with human dignity. The transformation we seek is one encompassing a *political reform* that consolidates systems of good governance and unleashes the creative energies of our people; a *social reform* that builds their capabilities; and, an *economic reform* that opens up wider opportunities so that people can utilize their enhanced capabilities.

Our Western friends have much to offer, and ultimately much to gain, by approaching this transformation in the ways I have tried to explain, keeping in mind what the past has shown. On both sides, regressive public forces, vested interests and heightened insecurity could put sizable obstacles in the way of a dynamic partnership. Yet so long as we believe that our vision of change is just, and is indeed the only effective way to serve mutual long-term interests in our neighbourhood, we can not only prevail over these forces, we can succeed. Certainly, for the Arab peoples at this point, failure is not an option.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention. I now look forward to our dialogue.

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A new momentum is building behind development efforts in Africa. The work of the UK Commission for Africa, for example, appears to be symptomatic of a renewed global interest in the world's poorest continent. But while debate continues about how best to assist progress in Africa, one potential factor in the 'African renaissance' receives less attention than most: the media. Historically, the media has played a fundamental role in democratisation and economic growth across the world, yet its significance is routinely downplayed by development strategists. Taking his lead from the success of trans-national media like Al-Jazeera, the author examines how the media might contribute to much needed change across the African continent. What role could the media play as part of political and economic advances in Africa? Can and should Africa shrug off its perceived information dependence on the West? Should the creation of an indigenous pan-African broadcaster be a development priority?

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The prospect of Turkey's entry to the European Union has triggered a remarkable outburst of fear and anxiety in some European member states. Yet it is in our collective economic, geo-political and strategic interest to bring our key ally in the Muslim world into our midst. But hope will not win over fear unless we understand what makes Europeans frightened of Turkey's membership. We have to grasp why so many are so afraid, and the role that labour market crowding and supposedly 'insurmountable' cultural differences play in nurturing these anxieties. Turkish membership might encourage the emergence of a truly modern, European version of Islam: that is a form of Muslim living that also incorporates a basic set of European values, women's equality and human rights. This in turn adds urgency to the task of European self-definition and identity. To what,

exactly, are we inviting new entrants to the EU to integrate? The past fifty years of migration are a story of mixed success. In a world of hectic mobility and change, we will need to be more confident of our own values and the boundaries we set. The prospect of Turkish accession is a welcome opportunity to revisit these questions.

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There will be more attempts by the self-proclaimed jihadists to murder large numbers of Britons in coming years, either in the UK or abroad. Their campaign has been going on for over a decade and will almost certainly continue for another decade at least. Their tactics and targets will change in that time. The risks are high, with some prospect of the terrorists reaching for ever greater casualty numbers through the use of weapons of mass destruction. To defeat this threat, the British community as a whole must 'know' its enemies and it must 'know' its own capacities to disrupt, capture or kill them. So far, it does not know either adequately. This pamphlet provides an overview of the threat and looks at ways in which the UK can improve its defences through greater investment in intelligence, in recruitment and training of security services personnel and crown prosecutors, and in setting up stronger public accountability mechanisms for the government's counter-terrorism operations.

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Amitai Etzioni
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Leading communitarian author, Amitai Etzioni, argues for a shift in international counter-terrorism resources toward more focus on preventing attacks with nuclear weapons. The best way to do this, he argues, is to limit greatly the damage that terrorists will cause by curbing their access to nuclear arms and related materials. He argues for a robust and intrusive campaign of 'de-proliferation'-

making states surrender such materials. He pleads for more attention to failed and failing states (Russia, Pakistan) than to rogue states (Iran, North Korea), on the grounds that each failing state is like hundreds of actors with too wide a variety of motives and too low a visibility for them to be easily deterred. On the other hand, rogue states- which have singular and effective governments- might be deterred.

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Mark Leonard, Andrew Small with Martin Rose
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The war in Iraq has had a seismic impact on international perceptions of Britain and British foreign policy, yet there is a big contrast between the cacophony of debate in the United States on the political and diplomatic fall-out of Iraq for US grand strategy, and the relative lack of public and political debate about how UK public diplomacy needs to change to reflect these new realities. In this book, the authors argue that a major rethink is needed in the approach taken to public diplomacy to respond to these shifts. Neither a redeployment of old Cold War propaganda tools, nor the 1990s variant of Cool Britannia will do. Instead, there should be a new set of trust-building practices that address the gaps in worldview and significant public opinion challenges that exist in our relationships with key allies, major new powers and the rest of the developing world.

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The Civility Programme aims at informing Western policies on political reform in the Middle East. Our starting point is a conviction that the case – economic, political and social - for Middle East reform has been made, but the question of *how* to realise such an aim now requires far more systematic attention. The Civility Programme seeks to analyse the nature of civil society and develop realistic policy proposals through engagement with policymakers, journalists, academics, business leaders and representatives of civil society in the region. By doing so Civility aims to encourage the foreign policies of Western nations towards active and long-term support for the development of Middle Eastern civil society.

The Civility Programme has three core activities:

- Engage decision-makers in a deep and practical understanding of the state and potential development of Civil Society in the Middle East;
- Distribute research and recommendations to policymakers, journalists and academics in the West as the basis of greater discussion and understanding;
- Encourage the foreign policy of Western nations towards active and effective support for the development of Civil Society in the Middle East;
- To promote communications and cooperation between Western and Middle Eastern Civil Society.