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ABDEL MAHDI ALSOUDI

The Impact of US Aid Policy on Democracy and Political Reform in the Arab World

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ABDEL MAHDI ALSOUDI

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Abstract

While the United States has long advocated the spread of democratic governance all over the World, democracy promotion in the Arab World did not emerge as a central pillar of American foreign policy until the end of the twentieth century. As for US aid to the Arab World, billions of Dollars were given to some Arab countries during the last few decades to encourage economic development and political reform. It was hoped that this aid would help transform the area into democracy and economic prosperity. This paper explores the impact of the U.S. aid policy on democracy and political reform in Jordan and other Arab countries. It advances three arguments: First that the impact of US aid has not yet made any significant difference in the nature of Arab political affairs. Second, that the Arab World underwent some modest structural changes that may lead to significant socio-political developments in the long run. Finally, although US aid has had some positive impact on democracy and political reform, the socio-political reality of the region is still dominated by dictatorships, anti-Americanism, poverty, unemployment, and corruption. Good governance and protection for human rights and democracy are still distant goals.

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The views contained inside remain solely those of the author who may be contacted at alsoudi@policy.hu. For a fuller account of this policy research project, please visit <http://www.policy.hu/alsoudi/>.

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International Policy Fellowship Program

Open Society Institute

Nador Utca 9

Budapest 1051

Hungary

www.policy.hu

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Executive Summary

While the United States has long advocated the spread of democratic governance all over the World, democracy promotion in the Arab World did not emerge as a central pillar of American foreign policy until the end of the twentieth century. As for US aid to the Arab World, billions of Dollars were given to some Arab countries during the last few decades to encourage economic development and political reform. It was hoped that this aid would help transform the area into democracy and economic prosperity. This paper explores the impact of the U.S. aid policy on democracy and political reform in Jordan and other Arab countries. It advances three arguments: First that the impact of US aid has not yet made any significant difference in the nature of Arab political affairs. Second, that the Arab World underwent some modest structural changes that may lead to significant socio-political developments in the long run. Finally, although US aid and policy has indeed some positive effects on democracy and political reform it can be argued that dictatorships, anti-Americanism, poverty, unemployment, and corruption are still the main features of the socio-political reality of this region until the present day; that this region is the least governance, human rights and democracy.

1 Introduction

For decades, the United States had ignored any concerns about freedom, human rights and political reform in the Arab World, valuing regimes stability for the sake of its economic and security interests. Over the course of the last decade, however, the US administration has begun changing its policy toward the entire region. This change came as a result of September 11 terrorists' attacks which made it clear that these policies were in fact breeders of anti-Americanism and extremism. First the American adopted a policy of regime change as the case in Afghanistan and Iraq and they face problems in both countries they adopted a new policy that calls for democracy and political reform in the entire region as a way to fight extremism and terrorism. Economic aid was used a practical tool to achieve the goals of this policy and indeed they started to provide Jordan and other Arab countries, with millions of Dollars to encourage development and political reform. It was hoped that such aid will help transform the area into democracy and economic prosperity. Unfortunately, all Arab states reacted

negatively to US and other internal and external calls for democracy and consequently, dictatorships, anti-Americanism, poverty, unemployment, corruption and terrorism are still the main features of the region until the present day.

1.1 Objectives

The main objectives of this study are to increase understanding of the United States aid policies to Jordan and other Arab countries and assess their impact on democracy and political reform during the last decade; to examine United States level of aid funding to Jordan and other Arab countries; to conduct interviews with relevant policy makers, regarding future policy that will be followed for the allocation of US aid for the MEPI goals and criteria for democracy, and finally to write a research paper and 20 page policy study with recommendations for relevant policy makers, parliament, political parties and other institutions in Jordan, USA and other Arab countries.

1.2 Study Questions

The Study tries to find answers to the following questions: What are US policies towards political reform in the Arab World before and after 9/11? What are the objectives of USAID in general and the Middle East Partnership Initiative in particular (MEPI)? Can the United States promote political reform at the expenses of instability and cooperation of Arab regimes on the war against terrorism? Can the United States risk the emergence of unfriendly Islamists regimes to replace the present ones? Can the United States afford the consequences of loosing its military bases and control over the oil production and supply in Gulf if it antagonizes Arab regimes by demanding them to change into democracy? Is it feasible for the United States to promote political reform effectively amid Arabs' widespread anti-Americanism and grievances against the occupation of Iraq and its support to Israel? What are the reactions of Jordanian and other Arab regimes to the US efforts to democratize the area? What are the specific steps if any that Jordanian government had has taken toward democracy and political reform?

1.3 Methodology

To achieve the above objectives and find answers to the previous questions the author conducted: extensive literature review about US policy and the size of the United States' aid to Jordan and other Arab countries; a survey study regarding the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) its goals, programs and funding allocated to Jordanian and other Arab countries; interviews with government officials, policy makers, leaders of political parties, academics, and experts to understand their positions and views regarding the US aid and political reform policy and the region reaction to it; interviews with policy makers, experts, academics from, Georgetown university, Carnegie foundation, Brookings Institute, George Washington university, Washington Institute for near East policy, OSI, International republican Institute, International Peace Institute and the State Department. This was done during my stay as a visiting scholar at Georgetown University in summer 2005.

The paper consists of six parts: Part one provides introduction to the subject, its objectives and methodology. In part two, it discusses US policy and relations with the Arab World before 9/11 and after 9/11. In part three, it discusses US aid to the Arab World in general and the Middle East Partnership initiative in particular. In part four, it discusses Arab reaction to US aid policy. In Part five: it discusses Arab reaction to US reform policy. Part six, conclusions and recommendations.

2 US Policy for Promoting Democracy in the Arab World

2.1 Background

America direct contact with the Arab World started during World War One; intensified after World War Two when America became the undisputed leader of the Western World. It gradually filled the vacuum created by the departure of the old colonial powers, Britain and France, from the Middle East and since then the Americans dominated politics and the oil business in the Middle East.

However, and until the end of World War II America was popular in the Arab World as it was seen a liberal and non colonial power especially after its opposition to the joint British, French and Israeli aggression against Egypt in 1956 Alsoudi, 2005. But

unfortunately there were several factors that complicated and poisoned the US–Arab relations and affected US policy towards the region among them the Arab Israeli conflict, The cold war, Iraq-Iran war, the first Gulf war, US bases on in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, Oil, terrorism and US occupation of Iraq

2.1.1 The Arab Israeli-Conflict

The first and most important factor that has affected US-Arab relation, in negative way and still until today, was Washington decision to support the creation of Israel in 1947, and later its policy of unlimited support for Israel in its conflict with its Arab neighbors. America provided Israel with massive economic, political and military assistant especially after 1967 war. The annual amount of US economic assistant to Israel is about three billion dollars and totaled to about 100 billion Dollars sense the creation of Israel in 1948 Alsoudi, 2005. It could argue that the Arab-Israeli conflict was and still the essence of the pan-Arab cause, and American “support for Israel was too massive to allow for healthy relationships with most Arab countries, let alone with Arab public opinion Hudson 2005: 287).

2.1.2 Oil

The other important factor that affected US policy toward the area is oil, which became extremely important to America and the rest of the developed World after World War Two. Given the strategic importance of securing the supply of cheap Arab oil, “US administrations determined that their main tasks were to exclude Soviet influence from the region and prevent any local forces from nationalizing Western oil companies, reducing or restriction production, raising prices and overrunning the friendly regimes” Hudson, 2005: 287-89). The importance of oil led the United States to increase its military presence in the GCC countries, including permanent navel and air bases, and to provide those countries with arms and trained their military forces. The Americans’ military presence was seen by the local population as a form of domination and a new type of colonialism not different from their predecessors the British and the French.

2.1.3 The Soviet danger

After World War Two, America considered the Soviets’ threat as a fundamental threat to its security and even to its survival. The Americans realized that “the entrenchment of Soviet power in that strategic region would bring a decisive shift in the

World balance and could disrupt the economy of the free world” Hudson 2005:284). They believed that “the triumph of communism in the heart of the Islamic World could be the prelude to its triumph through Asia, Africa and Europe” Campbell: 1958:4-5.

Arguably, from the end of World War II until the early 1990s, “the underlying rationale for providing foreign aid was the same as that for all U.S. foreign policy —the defeat of communism” Therefore the aim of U.S. aid programs, to Arab countries during this period, were designed “to create stability and reduce the attraction to communist ideology and to block Soviet diplomatic links and military advances” Tarnoff and Nowels, 2004. Ottaway, summarizes this US policy as follows: “The old concerns that guided U.S. policy in the Middle East is well known: security, oil and Israel” .. ,the perceived Soviet threat led the United States to be tolerant of autocratic but reliably Arab anti-Soviet governments” Ottaway 2005).

2.1.4 The Iraq-Iran War

During the Iraq-Iran war America followed a policy of “dual containment”, which practically meant keeping the two states fighting each others without any clear winner. The reason for the United States and Europe’s assistance to Iraq during its war with Iran was to prevent the Iranian revolution from extending its anti-American influence to the vulnerable pro-Western GCC countries. They also were pleased that the war practically led to the destruction and consequently weakening both unfriendly countries Hudson 2005:285).

2.1.5 The first Gulf War /occupation of Kuwait

When Iraq occupied Kuwait in 1991 the United States led a coalition of more than 25 countries including Egypt, Syria and many other Arab Gulf States to liberate Kuwait. And indeed America started its first direct war against a major Arab country, and succeeded in driving the Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in a humiliating fashion not only to the Iraqi but to entire Arab nations. Many Arabs analysts believe that the United States strategic aim was to destroy the Iraqi Army for the sake of Israel security and not just to liberate Kuwait Attwan, 2004).

So one could argue that until the end of the 1990s there were no American or European serious talks about democracy, political reform and freedom in the Arab World, and every thing was fine with America and the West as long as they have access to cheap Arab oil and no threat to Israel’s security.

2.1.6 US military Bases in the GCC countries

The other important factor that poisoned US Arab relation is its military bases in “Jazeera Alrab” (Arab Peninsula) which includes Saudi Arabia, the GCC states and Yemen. During the 1990s the US needed the cooperation of Arab regimes to establish military bases to secure oil supply. Such presence was provocative to Muslims feelings and beliefs, as believe that Aljazeera Alarabeyyah (Arab Peninsula) is holly area, and, non Muslims are not allowed stay in it. The permission of Arab regimes to American forces to use Arab land, to attack and occupy Iraq was seen by the majority of Arab people as “Kheyanh” (betrayal) to the Arab nation and understanding this situation may help explain the 9/11 attacks .

2.1.7 American occupation of Iraq 2003

The Americans’ War and occupation of Iraq and before it the severe economic sanctions that last about ten years caused the death of thousands of Iraqi innocent civilians, men, women and children. The suffering of the Iraqi people was broadcasted in all Arab television satellite channels, watched by million of powerless Arab masses from the Morocco to Oman. Moreover America cooperated with many of authoritarian Arab regimes in Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries during the first war against Iraq in 1991 the same regimes they trying to change now. These developments strengthened anti-Americanisms through out the Arab and Islamic Worlds in particular and among the majority of the world nations in general Alsoudi 2005.

2.2 US policy before 9/11

As regarding economic aid, the Arab World was not an important focus of American until the early 1970s. Before that America was interested primarily in access to oil, stabilizing its friendly Arab oil producing countries, and the security of Israel. In the 1980s, military and strategic cooperation became increasingly important between America, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and the GCC countries. The aim of the new cooperation was to protect access to cheap oil supplies, to establish US military bases in the region and to facilitate U.S. military operations in Asia and Africa. The US administration used economic aid to foster its relations with some of those Arab countries and later to encourage them for taken some steps for democracy and political reform. They typically direct such aid at one or more of the following institutions or

political processes: elections, political parties, constitutions, judiciaries, legislatures, local government, NGOs, civic education, trade unions and media organizations.

The enormous growth of aid in the 1970s and 1980s was directly linked to the increasing importance of the region in the Cold War. In the 1970s, the US administration succeeded to pull Egypt out of the Soviet camp by sponsoring a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. Since then US aid played an essential role to achieve and maintain the peace treaty and stability in the region. Israel and later Egypt have been the largest recipients of American foreign assistance with about 3 billion dollars annual assistance to Israel and 2 billion to Egypt Ruttan, 1996: 279.

In the 1980s, the United States aid policy focused increasingly on economic growth as a crucial component to maintain stability in the region. Among US initiatives were the U.S.–Egypt Partnership for Economic Growth in 1994, the U.S.–North Africa Economic Partnership (USNAEP) in 1998, and Free Trade Agreement with Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel to establish the joint Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) 1996 USAID, 2005).

Promoting democracy and political reform in the Arab World was not on the US foreign policy agenda until 2002, mainly because of the serious security problems that faced its forces in Iraq. Before that many U.S. experts and policy makers believed that political reform in the region should be gradual and controlled entirely by the ruling regimes and by moderate elements of their allies Carothers, 1999. However, by the end of the 1990s, the US administration realized that economic reform did not lead to political reform; that lack of political reform was impeding progress on economic reform and more importantly breeding terrorism Levin, 2003.

2.3 US Policy after 9/11

The traditional US policy of remote domination of many Arab countries and the noninterference in their internal affairs, especially regarding freedom, human rights and democracy has changed dramatically after the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

Arab world's democracy deficit suddenly became the focus of wide discussion among US policy circles and media. Many US commentators and experts blamed the spread of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and the rise of militant Islamic fundamentalist movements on political repression and economic stagnation in Arab World. Neoconservative analysts in particular criticized autocratic Arab governments, including close U.S. allies such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, for spawning radical groups

and stifling moderates and appealed to the Bush administration to make the democratic transformation of the Middle East a cornerstone of the war on terrorism Hawthorne, 2004.

The American administration accepted this analysis of the roots of terrorism. It responded to the question raised by President Bush "why do they hate us?" by putting the responsibility on Arab regimes rather than on the United States. They denies that animosity toward the United States stemmed at least in part from US policies in the Middle East, and refused the notion that the United States' policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict had contributed to the rise of terrorism and should reconsider its policies Alsoudi, 2005. "Democracy promotion in the Middle East thus became for the first time an important professed tenet of the United States' Middle East policy" Hawthorne, 2004.

New assistance programs include the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), launched in December 2002; the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, formally unveiled at the June 2004 Group of Eight industrialized nations (G-8) summit at Sea Island, Georgia.

Bush in a speech at the National Endowment for Democracy, on November /6/ 2003, said: "Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe - because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty." He added therefore, "the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East.

This new policy is in contradiction to America's longtime rationale for supporting Arab regimes as strategy to guarantee their stability and securing cheap oil supplies. The US administration realized after 9/11 that the stability of these regimes was deceptive and that the price for maintaining such policy was so high and unaffordable Wittes, 2004.

The new US foreign policy rested on the belief that America should aggressively go abroad and forcibly destroy or change hostile regime, especially those who may assist or harbor terrorists. That was the logic behind US decision to invade and occupy both Afghanistan and Iraq. "There's no question but what it is going to be cheaper and less costly to do it now than it will be to wait a year or two years or three years until they developed even more deadly weapons, perhaps nuclear weapons" Daalder and Lindsay 2003.

Although Washington's newfound interest in Middle East democracy may be real, "the United States continues to have strong economic and security interests that point to a need for close ties with many of the region's autocratic regimes" Carothers: 2005.

The US administration does not consider Arab regimes, except Syria, as hostile regimes deserve to be changed and has no policy goals to change them. Rather it considers them friendly regimes and adopts a policy of providing them with technical and economic assistance, to help them stay in power. It is a policy of friendship and close cooperation; a policy of economic assistance, political patronage, military protection against any internal or external threats.

It is a policy of mutual benefits between the US administration and Arab regimes based on the following: the US continues to support and protect Arab regimes in return for securing American interests. Arab public opinion understands this policy, hated it and this was and still one of the main reasons for Anti-Americanism, Islamic extremism and terrorism. Arab public opinion sees clear alliance between US administration, Israel and Arab regimes against them. They see on their screen daily oppression, humiliation, killing on the hands of Israeli on Palestinian territories, the Americans on Iraq and Arab regimes in every Arab country (Alsouudi, 2005)

US policy towards the Arab world is practically helping the oppressive regimes against their people, and this is exactly one of the causes of extremism and terrorism against America. This is the answer for President Bush why the hate us?

What is required here is a new US policy to support democracy, and political reform in the Arab World, a policy of alliance between America and the Arab people to get rid of oppression and stop its alliance and support to such corrupted failed regimes.

What the Arab World needs from the United States, in my view, is a clear policy declaring that authoritarianism is not acceptable in the World in general and in Arab World in particular, and to use all available means to replace it with democratic governments. What is required is a policy of alliance between the United States and the Arab people to replace the present US policy of protecting and supporting Israel and the same regimes that oppress them.

3 US Aid Policy to the Arab World

3.1 Background

For the past 25 years, the United States has provided Jordan Egypt and other Arab countries with billion of Dollars as economic assistance. Overall, assistance has evolved through four overlapping phases. The first phase (mid-1970s to early 1980s) focused on improving Arab countries' physical infrastructure. The second phase (1980s) shifted the primary focus to economic development, education, health, water and family planning. Phase three (1990s) focused on environment and economic reforms. Phase four began On 2002 and continues focused on economic growth, and political reform and development. The total USAID assistance to Egypt reached \$24.3 billion dollars and about 4.1 billion dollars to Jordan USAID. <http://www.usaid-eg.org/detail.asp?id=47>

3.2. *The Middle East Partnership Initiative MEPI*

On December 12, 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced the creation of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) (Powell, 2002). The (MEPI) is a program designed to promote political, economic, and educational development in the Middle. It has received an estimated \$284 million in funding since its creation in 2002. Sharp, 2005.

MEPI's objectives are divided into four overarching categories: political reform, economic reform, educational reform, and women's empowerment. In order to secure Arab cooperation with MEPI, U.S. officials have stressed that MEPI is a "partnership" with the Arab world and not an attempt to impose Western values on the region. MEPI came as an attempt to find a middle ground, where the United States can encourage reforms without challenging the legitimacy of the host Arab government.

Some analysts believe that the MEPI can have a positive impact on the region by promoting democracy and economic development. Others suggest that MEPI will have little effect in both encouraging political change and countering anti-Americanism in the region. Observers note that MEPI's underlining strategy of funding small-scale projects has proven ineffective in the past when faced with the challenge of reforming closed economies and entrenched state bureaucracies Wittes 2004. Other skeptics even

suggest that MEPI will only encourage opponents of U.S. policy in the region, who may perceive the program as an exercise in U.S. imperialism or an imposition of democracy from the west. Some critics of U.S. policy assert that there is an inherent contradiction in U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, in which the United States advocates liberalization in the region, while bolstering ties with autocratic regimes with similar strategic interests. Others suggest that no amount of public diplomacy can overcome the Arab perception that the United States is too closely aligned with Israel Sharp, 2005

3.2.1 MEPI funding and programs

MEPI has received about 282 million dollars since 2002. Since then the State Department has organized over 50 programs, some of which are already operating, under each of its four main pillars. MEPI programs can either operate in one or two countries or cover the entire Middle East region. Morocco is one of the biggest beneficiaries of MEPI, together with Jordan, and Yemen. Many of MEPI's host countries have taken some steps to create quasi-democratic institutions such as parliaments, or have allowed some political opposition parties to organize and run in elections. However, MEPI has a small presence in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other GCC countries where the authorities are more sensitive to reform-minded initiatives Sharp, 2005.

In the political arena, MEPI has funded voter registration programs in Yemen, judicial reform seminars in Jordan, Oman and Bahrain, and training sessions for female candidates for parliament in Morocco and Jordan. In the economic sphere, the program has funded commercial law initiatives, debt reform, and the development of information technology infrastructures in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

4 Arab responses to US aid Policy

4.1 Arab Perception of Democracy and Political Reform

Although a consensus is forming within the Arab World's political elite that democracy and political reform is necessary, there is no corresponding agreement on what democracy and political reform means. Instead, democracy and reform have become a widely used terms with different meaning and perspectives. There are

however, three main perspectives dominating the Arab thought today these are: Hawthorne, 2004).

The first perspective is the modernization approach which is advocated by many Arab regimes. It calls for gradual reform, but without changing the present power sharing structure.

It rejects the US administration and the Western call for real reform that would change the character of power distribution including the submission of the regimes to the will of their people. The Arab League's June 2003 reform initiative and its May 2004 declaration on reform, both capture the essence of the modernization perspective Arab business council, declaration, 2004).

The second perspective is the one held by Islamists. They call for political reform on the hope that democratic election would enable them to win the elections in most Arab countries. Their ultimate goal is to create an authentic Islamic political systems governed by Sharia' law, not Western-style democracies ruled by secular laws. Brotherhood manifesto 2003).

The Third perspective is the liberal democratic outlook, which defines democracy as the process needed to establish Western-style democratic institutions, presidency or constitutional monarchies. The Alexandria declaration issued in March 2004 by a group of Arab intellectuals, former diplomats, and businessmen reflects to a certain degree of the liberal perspective Alexandria declaration, 2004).

4.2 Arab Reaction to MEPI

The Middle East Partnership Initiative has received mixed reactions, varying from country to country in the Arab world. At the governmental level, MEPI has been largely welcomed by the Arab monarchies of Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain, Qatar and Yemen. However, even among these enthusiastic Arab countries, there is still a high degree of sensitivity toward western programs designed to promote what is perceived as western-style democracy. The governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Oman have been more tepid in their response to MEPI, while the United Arab Emirates has shown less interest than some of the other small Gulf monarchies Sharp, 2005

At the unofficial level, the initial reaction in the Arab world to MEPI was largely negative, primarily in the Arab press. Jihad al-Khazin wrote that "there is an insult here, which I do not believe Powell intends. This sum [\$29 million] means that only 10 cents will be spent on every Arab man, woman, and child to teach them democracy" al-

Khazin, 2002. Joseph Samahah wrote the purpose of MEPI was to link “the ambitions of some people in the Arab world to the objectives of the United States, not the objectives of the United States to the ambitions of people in the Arab world.” Samahah 2003. Mustapha Al-sayyed argues that US aid is not only ineffective but that some part of the Arab public do not see that aid as a sign of US commitment to promote democracy: rather they look at it as instrument for furthering US foreign policy goals” Al-sayyed, 2000: 4). According to one recent evaluation by the Brookings Institution, “MEPI tends to fund programs carried out by American NGOs that do not cross the red lines of regime-sponsored reform, or that simply do not match the political realities Arabs face” Wittes 2004. In addition, MEPI’s economic and social programs are designed to foster modernization, reform, and development over the long term. Moreover, there is no agreement among the different branches of the US administration on the issue of democratizing the Arab World. The neoconservatives and the hawks in the Department of Defense for example are skeptical about the wisdom of democratizing the Arab World. Such tensions do not always help the promotion of democracy in the region Ottaway: 2005.

Add to this the administration's worry that assertive democracy-promotion in the Arab world will exacerbate tensions with Arab regimes whose cooperation on other issues is highly valued in the State Department and the Pentagon. There are many Arab regimes America has supported for years, and whose cooperation is necessary to US security, economic interests, and the war on terrorism. In the past, the U.S. government has subordinated its concerns about democracy and human rights to cooperation against the Soviet Union and the security of Israel Ottaway.2005).

Many US experts and academics argue that the US has no power or it is not in a position to press Arab regimes for political reform. Others including myself believe the America has political, economic and military power to push Arab regimes for democracy and political reform if it wants to. It is well known that the stability or even the survival of many of those Arab regimes depends on America’s political and military patronage or economic assistance Alsoudi 2005. In fact the US administration has no desire to push Arab regime for reform because such a thing is against its own interests. Indeed such policy has great consequences for US military bases, cheap oil supplies, Israel security, terrorism and other US geo-strategic interests (Alsoudi 2005)

Arab regimes are very fragile and manage to continue their rule with the use of naked military power and violence. They are hated regimes with no much legitimacy.

Therefore I believe that real pressure from America and Europe and clear position against oppression and authoritarianism will be more than enough for those regimes to start a real democratization process. A UN resolution prohibits oppression and dictatorship will be the ideal step in this direction. Uncovering the secret accounts of billion of dollars in Europe and the United states owned by Arab rulers, ruling classes and officials will help US image and credibility among Arab public opinion. Such policy does not serve the Arab people alone rather it serves the interests of America, the peace in the region and stability. It is the only policy to severe the cause of freedom and democracy in the region for securing a friendly relation between America and the Arab people.

Controlled liberalization that creates nominal-democratic institutions with no real power is not democratization. Elections are important, but they are not democracy, the existence of weak political parties is not pluralism, women controlled voting is not free participation, parliaments without proper authorities, constitutions without implantation are not institutions.

The Arab World today according to Ottaway (2000 p. 21) is the only region of the globe in which democracy deemed extremely weak and impossible to develop in the near future. She argues that the large amount of US money “are never spent in the recipient country but paid to expatriate consultants, administrative overhead and that the data is often imprecise or incomplete” (P33). The study concluded that “civil society assistance has not been decisive for democratization in Palestine or in Egypt, nor it is likely to become a force in the foreseeable future” (p. 44). The study showed civil society assistance to Egypt was about 1 percent of the total US 2.3 billion aids to Egypt (p.33).

5 US reform policy and Arab Reaction to it

Despite mistrust of the Americans, many government officials and other members of the elite have basically accepted the message that Arab countries need positive political, economic, and social change. Thus, as U.S. rhetoric on democracy became more prominent in 2003 and 2004, domestic opponents of Arab regimes coupled their criticisms of U.S. policy with calls for reform. Some Arabs who had privately supported democratic reform but had hesitated to voice their opinions publicly were also emboldened to weigh in. For their part, Arab rulers, suddenly no longer able to depend

on the protection offered by U.S. silence about their poor governance and human rights records, found it difficult to reject such criticism outright as they had long done Hawthorne, 2004.

Indeed since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; the question of Arab reform has become a dominant theme of discussion in the Arab World itself. Arab satellite television stations broadcast talk shows featuring vigorous discussions about the persistence of authoritarian rule in Arab countries and the incompetence of incumbent regimes. The opinion pages of Arab newspapers are full of articles championing democratic reform as the only way to strengthen the region against Western control. Civil society groups, political parties, and even business organizations are promulgating reform manifestos with increasing regularity. Even Jordan Egypt Qatar Algeria and other Arab governments have acknowledged the need for reform in principle and have announced their own reform initiatives. Some of them introduced new legislations; new election and press laws; hold regular parliamentary and presidential elections.

Thus, as U.S. rhetoric on democracy became more prominent in 2003 and 2004, opposition groups, academics, parliamentarians through out the Arab World, held conferences, wrote articles, TV interviews, panel discussions, establishing associations for democracy, human rights, and even organized demonstration demanding democratizing the entire region.

Some Arab activists who had privately supported democratic reform but had afraid to voice their opinions publicly were also encouraged to express their views in public. Most Arab rulers declared that they want to advance democracy but in a gradual manner and in a way that fits with Arab culture and conditions. They were no longer able to depend on U.S. silence about their oppression of their people.

Arab civil society groups and opposition parties also started to put forward their own reform initiatives in 2003 and 2004 as mentioned earlier in Alexandria, Yemen, Beirut and Amman. They too sought to seize the reform agenda from the United States to counter neoconservative suggestions that the Middle East was a passive region needs to be reformed by US intervention.

Egyptian sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim, argues that the prospects for liberal democracy in the Arab World have never been so bright Ibrahim, 2004 Fareed Zakaria concluded after a visit to the region that “everywhere in the Arab world, people are talking about reform” Zakaria, 2004. President Bush acknowledged the demand for

reform in the Arab World as he declared in a June 2004 speech that: "voices in that region are increasingly demanding reform and democratic change. He added that "For decades, free nations tolerated oppression in the Middle East for the sake of stability. In practice, this approach brought little stability, and much oppression. So I have changed this policy".

However, such enthusiasm about the inevitability of democratic change in the Arab World is premature. So far, talk about reform exceeds actual reform implemented, and the reforms that Arab governments have actually carried out in the past decade are quite modest and do not affect their fundamentally authoritarian character. Furthermore, there is no popular movement for democratic change in the Arab world, only a growing willingness among some members of the elite to question existing systems and deliberate future options Hawthorne, 2004.

Nonetheless, the context for reform varies considerably from one Arab country to another. But the ferment is real and should not be dismissed as inconsequential. Calls for reform have surged and receded, however, without altering the core of authoritarian rule. Governments often have used promises of reform as a smokescreen for inaction. Hawthorne, 2004. Practically until today, the Arab world remained the least free and democratic region of the world, according to the annual surveys of the Freedom House and UNDP Arab development reports Freedom House, 2004.

The reform ferment of the post–September 11 period represents an evolution of this earlier liberalizing trend, rather than a wholly new stage in Arab politics. Three characteristics mark the present reform environment. First, political reform has become a topic of public concern through out the Arab World. Arab Advocates of democracy started to speak out for democracy at almost every meeting, conference and workshop inside and outside the region. Almost every Arab government has committed itself in theory to the concept of reform, and the issue has forced itself onto the agenda of last two Arab League summits. Second, Liberal democrats, Islamists and leftists are openly raising previously prohibited issues such as putting term limits for Arab rulers, transparency, fighting corruption and lifting emergency laws. Third, official voices challenging the very need for reform are becoming somewhat fainter Hawthorne, 2004. However, the current debate revolves more around what reforms are needed or necessary rather than how such reform could be implemented.

The US democracy initiative, in the beginning at least, enhanced many Arab regimes' desire to show themselves to their people and more importantly to the outside

world that they are reformers. They sought to demonstrate that they support US call for democracy in principle and that they are taking steps in this directions. Indeed some Arab regimes introduced new laws, constitutions, allowed the establishment of societies, political parties conducted elections, all this to avoid being targets of future U.S. interventions or occupations in the name of democracy and human rights Alsoudi, 2003.

However, Arab regimes strategy for reform which is based on the principle of gradual and top-down controlled liberalization has worked perfectly and kept them in power for the last four decades. This strategy practically prevented any political force to emerge, beyond the ruling elites and the Islamist opposition. They maintain total control, and the Islamists remain the main opposition. This situation was and still convenient to the regimes own survival and in their dealing with American quest for democracy Hawthorne, 2004.

Furthermore, reforms have been introduced from the top, by governments acting on their own initiative rather than in response to specific demands from their citizens. Some governments such as in Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, have organized national dialogues, conferences, workshops on reform, but participants and topics discussed at such gatherings are tightly controlled and supervised by these governments. They are primarily public relations exercises and opportunities for carefully selected members of the elite to show the outside World that they are reforming. Attempts by opposition groups to demand their governments for democracy have met with arrest of those involved in such activities. Indeed, most Arab governments have made general statements in support of reform but have not yet implemented any significant measures.

Arab governments understood US conflicting interests, and difficulties therefore they rejected US demand and argued that democracy cannot imported or imposed from outside; that they know about their conditions and circumstance more than Americans do Musa, 2004.

Some of them even, tightened their controls over their people; others reversed some of their previous liberal steps on the name of fighting terrorism. They are confident that the Americans wouldn't ask them to reform and at the same time request their cooperation in fighting terrorism.

Unfortunately, US occupation of Iraq has influenced the reform environment in a negative way. Widespread anger over the US occupation of Iraq and over some Arab

governments' direct or in direct support for that occupation exposed America to new charges of colonialism and Arab the governments of betrayal or incompetence. Numerous demonstrations spread through out the Arab World but most of them were by the sheer of military force. Further more, Many Arabs in fact questioned the United States' intentions and commitment to promoting democracy in the region, arguing that its policies are inconsistent and even hypocritical Alsoudi, 2005.

Many Arab analysts used US failure to bring democracy or stability to Iraq as an indicator to its ignorance in Middle East Affairs. They started to question Americans' real aims in the area, and accused it of becoming yet another colonial power trying to secure its interests through full control over Arab oil Wittes: 2004)

U.S. discussions about the need for democracy in the Middle East have triggered a strong negative reaction by Arab commentators and journalists, including in discussions of democracy in the Arab press. Arab commentators have treated democracy as a foreign policy issue, asking why the United States is suddenly discussing democracy in the Arab world and what true intentions it is trying to hide behind the smoke screen of democracy talk Ottaway, 2003.

Arab governments and publics have reacted negatively to US reform policy. They have reacted with suspicion to Washington's attempt to recast itself as a champion of democracy and as the friend of all Arab reformers. Such hostility is hardly a surprise given the unfriendliness of the environment into which the Bush administration was attempting to project its democracy message. Long-standing Arab suspicion of U.S. motives in the region was only exacerbated by the administration's unconditional support for Israel and later the occupation of Iraq on false ground Hawthorne, 2004.

The many contentions that the United States lacks credibility as a promoter of democracy in the Middle East revolve around two major themes. First, is the contention that the U.S. administration has no credibility when it calls for respect for democracy and human rights because of its disregard for the rights of Palestinians, Iraqis, Syrians and other Arabs. "The United States cannot claim today to be the champion of freedoms while it is waging 'vicious' wars against the Arabs in most of their countries, from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, and from Iraq to Yemen. . . . This superpower, which protects and sponsors Sharon's mass killings and systematic destruction of Palestinian life, cannot emerge as an 'angel' in region, calling for democracy!" Salman, 2002. A Jordanian commentator asked rhetorically: "And what does Bush have to say about the so-called Israeli democracy, which has produced the worst kind of far-right, extremist

government, led by General Ariel Sharon, who is committed to continued occupation, the demolition of more Palestinian houses, the expropriation of Palestinian land, the assassination of Palestinian activists, ethnic cleansing and all-out state terrorism?" Fanek, 2002. The second factor Arab commentators cite as undermining U.S. credibility is the long-standing U.S. support for autocratic Arab regimes that are willing to accept U.S. policies in the area, maintain the status quo, and supply the United States with cheap oil. "The US is not the country that people of this region can rely upon to generate a foreign climate conducive to fostering and supporting a true process of democratization. The US has a long record of supporting dictatorships and of plotting to overthrow democratically elected governments. Whenever the defense of democratic values has come into conflict with the defense of US interests, the latter always win out." Nafaa, 2002).

Arab League Secretary-General Amr Musa said in an exclusive interview with Aljazeera, that the GMEI is lacking a lot of logic in its premises. "I do not think there is any logic in piling up Morocco and Bangladesh in a vision of that sort," he added "It is illogical to speak of an initiative which requires the cooperation of the Arab states without consulting those very states on the nature and details of such ideas. "It is unacceptable to attempt to dictate to peoples the developmental paths they should take. So, in short, I think this sort of initiative won't fly the way it was launched and promoted" Musa, 2004.

However, despite mistrust of US efforts toward reform, many Arab officials and other members of the liberal elite have basically accepted the message that Arab countries need positive political, economic, and social reform. Most Arab states admit their socio-economic failures, and seek to reform in ways that improve governments and economic performance but without changing the distribution of political power. And some of them, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Qatar, Bahrain, have placed some power in the hands of their peoples through constitutional and electoral reforms, but the majority tries to create false impression that they are moving forward on the road to democracy but practically strengthening their grip on political power.

It is save to say that the issue of political reform has so far generated far more debate than actual democratizing change in the Arab world. The main reason is that reform is still closely controlled by the authoritarian regimes. They took some cosmetic changes to show the outside World that they are taking certain steps toward democracy in a way that is suitable to the needs and circumstances of their people.

And sense they do not feel that they are under immediate domestic pressure to introduce far-reaching reforms; they will continue on the path of authoritarianism Ottaway, 2004.

Whether the reform process will remain largely in the sphere of discourse, or lead to real change, depends on numerous factors. One is the capacity of liberal reformers to attract the popular support they are now lacking, by developing an appealing socio-political agenda to accompany their abstract political demands.

Another is the ability of liberals and Islamists to forge strong alliances able to challenge the present regimes. A third factor is the future trajectory of the war on terrorism and the outcome of the situations in Iraq and Palestine. All are currently fueling anti-American sentiment that complicates the US reform agenda in the region Hawthorne, 2004.

Finally, the willingness of the United States and other Western countries to press for democratization, rather than to accept modernizing measures as a sign of democratic progress, will help determine the long-term significance of the current reform efforts Ottaway 2004.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

For decades, the United States has advocated the spread of democratic governance overseas but it had ignored any concerns about democracy in the Arab World, valuing stability for the sake of US economic and security interests. Indeed US democratization efforts in the Arab world have traditionally been modest, undertaken in consultation with Arab regimes, and aimed at liberalizing the economy rather than changing the distribution of political power. They practically supported many Arab regimes' own survival strategy of limited liberalization for more than three decades. The aim of such policy was to avoid the risk of destabilizing the region; the spread of Soviet influence and the establishment of hostile Islamists governments. For the most part, US policy towards the Arab World has been driven both by the strategic concerns of the Cold War and by domestic politics, the peace process and oil supply. As a result, US policy has been designed to provide some Arab regimes with economic aid, others

with military assistance and protection to maintain a sufficiently stable region and to guarantee flow of oil to US and world-wide.

During the 1990s, US democracy promotion focused primarily on support for free elections, support for the rule of law, human rights, freedoms of expression and assembly. The United States has provided funding, training, and other services to a broad range of NGOs, including human rights organizations, business leaders, student groups, as well as political parties and media.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks led to a shift in US policy regarding democracy and political reform in the entire region. Since then the Bush administration started to talk about the need for political change and democracy promotion in the region became at the heart of US Middle East policy. In response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the hard-line neo-conservatives succeeded to implement some revolutionary changes in US-Middle East policy, focusing on the use of pre-emptive war against targets identified as threatening to US interests and security. It was this change in course that led the US into war and occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq, which elicited Arab anger and anti-American sentiment and extremism.

The most significant tool for promoting democracy is economic aid which was specifically designed to foster development in the Arab World in general and Jordan in particular. US direct such aid at one or more institutions or political processes such as: economic development, parliamentary elections, political parties, governments' budget, education systems, women and media organizations. In December 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced the establishment of the US-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), to promote economic, political and educational reform in the region. Since then the United States provided Jordan and other Arab countries with million of dollars through USAID programs and under the MEPI. Other Arab countries received economic aid to encourage development and political reform. However, the effectiveness of US Aid policy results are not promising if there are any results at all. In its first few years the Middle East Partnership Initiative allocated about (284) millions to be spent on four main programs, governance, education, economic development and women empowerment, with less than 5 percent on political reform, and to be spent within the approved ceiling set out by Arab regimes.

Moreover, there is a widespread perception in the Arab World that the Bush administration is embracing the cause of democracy promotion not out of sincere commitment, but because doing so provides a convenient justification for US

occupation of Iraq, its unconditional support of Arab regimes and Israel. Such perception feeds a widespread feeling that the U.S. government cannot be trusted thus undermining its credibility as an advocate of democracy and political reform in the region.

The issue of political reform has so far generated far more debate than actual democratizing change in the Arab world. The main reason is that the US administration is not serious or not willing to push for it, and more importantly, Arab regimes are still in total control of the political process refusing so far to share power with their people.

The United States lacks credibility as a pro-democratic actor because of its long-standing support for Israel and some Arab autocratic regimes, its military basis in some Arab countries and more importantly the occupation of Iraq. Second, there is the stubborn fact that the friendly Arab autocrats serve significant American economic and security interests, and it is not clear that more democratic successor regimes would be as helpful to the United States. Hamas victory in the last Palestinian election 2006 is a good example of democratization in the Arab World. The US administration announced that it will not deal with any Palestinian government led by Hamas and stopped its future aid to the Palestinian Authority.

Most Arab states reacted negatively to US call for democracy and consequently, dictatorships, anti-Americanism, poverty, unemployment, corruption and terrorism are still the main features of the region until the present day. A crosscutting theme among Arab public opinion is the rejection of or suspicious attitude toward the role of the US in promoting democracy in the Arab World. They see America as assisting their internal and external enemies.

Finally US policies regarding democratization in the Arab world have ranged from failure to take action in support of democratization; that the US economic aid is too little to make any difference in the reality of oppression in the Arab World.

6.2 Recommendation

The United States should try to press for democracy and political reform in the Arab World, using its economic, political and moral power and should not wait, under any pretext, the change to come from Arab regimes as such thing would not happen in the foreseeable future.

The US should concentrate in the policy dialogue and in programs on issues that Arabs reformers have identified as critical: lifting emergency laws, revising laws on

forming political parties and regulating NGOs, forming monitoring bodies, and amending constitutions to provide for direct election of presidents, term limits, and redistribution of power.

The U.S. Administration should become more alert to whether Arab regimes are supporting or undermining local efforts at political and economic reform and make this an important factor in their talks and assistance for those regimes. It should make reform and democratization a persistent issue in their bilateral talks with Arab leaders.

The U.S. administration should press for free elections, and devise policy options that exploit future opportunities for democracy and political reform when they occur. The United States should strongly urge Arab governments to ensure that elections are free and fair and to allow international observers monitor the process. They should urge Arab governments to allow liberal parties to develop and give them a chance to participate in the political process. It is not enough for the United States to call for democracy and political reform without taking into consideration that such process would bring to power extreme Islamist parties such as Hams, Hizb Allah and other Islamist groups. This is a dangerous outcome not only for America but for the Arab World too. It is well known that those organizations had built their popularities on slogans such as: Islam is the solution; America and the West are the true enemies of the Arabs; they are colonizers; crusaders; who created Israel and supported it to defeat and humiliate the Arabs and helped it to convert Palestine into a Zionist State. If such groups took power in key countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria I am sure that an era of open conflict between the Arab World and America will open for many years to come. The US administration should learn from the 2006 Palestinian elections where Hamas emerged as the winner and the party that will form the next Palestinian government. President Bush declared that his administration will not deal with such government refusing the democratic results of the elections opening yet another accusation that America is not interested in real democracy to take place in any Arab country.

What is required here is a new US policy to support a gradual transforming the Arab World into democracy, a policy of alliance between America and the Arab people to get rid of oppression and to support for real steps to be taken by Arab regimes for power sharing with the liberal forces.

What the Arab World needs from the United States is a clear policy declaring that authoritarianism is not acceptable in the World in general and in Arab World in

particular, and to use all available means to replace it with democratic governments. It should press for a Security council resolution declaring authoritarianism and dictatorships as unlawful form of government that should be band or prohibited.

What is required is a policy of alliance between the United States and the Arab people to replace the present US policy of protecting and supporting the same Arab regimes who oppress them.

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