The Saban Center
for Middle East Policy
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Europe, the United States, and Middle Eastern Democracy: Repairing the Breach

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Executive Summary

Tensions between the United States and the European Union since the 2003 war in Iraq affected many arenas of Middle East policy, but perhaps none has come to encapsulate those tensions as much as the quest to advance democracy in the region. This paper looks beyond the highly charged, Iraq-related deterioration in the transatlantic relationship in order to assess the real similarities and differences in the two actors' democracy promotion strategies in the Middle East.

The United States and European Union disagreed on some notable issues regarding Middle Eastern reform, and serious mistrust developed between them as they developed their post-9/11 diplomacy on this issue. Yet, the substantive divergence in policy is not as great as is now routinely presumed. Both actors made strong commitments to supporting Arab democracy in the wake of 9/11 and articulated an understanding that democratic development in the Arab world was important to the security of Western states. In light of mounting regional security challenges and certain electoral outcomes, such as the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, both actors shifted some way back toward realist alliance-building with autocratic Arab regimes. Additionally, both parties have been reluctant to engage with Islamist opposition groups, but have done so in various instances.

Fundamentally, European and American officials struggle with the same two challenges: whether and how to offer Arab governments significant incentives for democratic reform, and how to mesh the long-term objective of supporting democracy with shorter-term strategic objectives. In short, both actors share the same challenge of transcending the fundamental ambivalence about the "democracy project" that hampers their policy effectiveness.

Advancing sustainable and meaningful political reform in the Middle East will require the efforts of governments on both sides of the Atlantic. American and European policymakers should build upon their shared strategic framework to forge a new partnership on behalf of Arab reform. In this vein, the paper suggests several concrete steps that European and American governments should take:

- **Avoid concretizing divergent rhetoric in disparate European and American mechanisms or institutions.** Brussels and Washington should consider setting up a higher-level transatlantic forum for coordinating policies in the Middle East, along the lines of the U.S.-E.U. strategic dialogue on Asia established in 2005.

- **Continue issuing joint diplomatic statements on the need for and desired shape of Middle Eastern reform.** The Atlantic community should leave Arab leaders in no doubt of the West's continued interest in and attention to democratic growth and human rights improvements in the Middle East.

- **Coordinate rewards on offer for democratic reform.** The Atlantic allies should seek common criteria for determining such rewards and coordinate on the use of positive conditionality to induce greater reform and ease the costs of change.

- **Uphold the principle that local civil society can seek and accept foreign assistance.** The European Union and the United States should articulate clearly and forcefully that their links to and support of Arab civil society are non-negotiable.

- **Coordinate positions on engagement with Islamists.** Western defense of peaceful political activism should not be selective, and transatlantic pressure should be wielded when regimes crack down on nonviolent Islamist organizations or prevent them from meeting with Western donors.

- **Improve coordination in the provision of non-governmental aid.** American and European government funders should engage in more sustained and regular dialogue on funding strategies for democratic development in specific states, and how to use their funds most efficiently to achieve common goals.

- **Stress jointly that democratic development in the Middle East is a common interest of Europe, the United States, and the peoples of the region, not a means to other ends.** Democracy should be supported as a system that meets the aspirations of Middle Eastern citizens for greater say in their government, and not simply because it is judged as instrumental for Western interests.

Challenges to greater transatlantic policy coordination and effectiveness derive not only—or even primarily—from the invasion of Iraq. They also result from the more prosaic fact that the European Union and United States approach the issue of Middle Eastern political reform from different angles. The United States is still struggling to build a framework for its engagement of Middle Eastern society that would invest its views on democracy with greater legitimacy and credibility in the region. The European Union, for its part, needs to demonstrate that its already-existing forms of multifaceted engagement can translate into a more tangible contribution to democratization. If European and American policymakers wish to move beyond the ructions of recent years, they can and should focus on their points of relative similarity as a foundation from which transatlantic cooperation in the Middle East can, cautiously, be rebuilt.

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Introduction

As the Obama Administration assumes office, hopes are high that transatlantic cooperation can be revitalized. If debates over Iraq poisoned the U.S.-European relationship during the Bush Administration, and bitterly divided the European Union itself, they also affected broader policy deliberations. In the years since the invasion of Iraq, the issue of democracy promotion in the Middle East has often been a focus of discussions over the breach in transatlantic relations—sometimes presented as a major cause of discord, and sometimes presented as the stepping stone to renewed harmony of purpose. Within the United States, President-elect Barack Obama's transition team has begun to consider new options for Middle East policy. The European Union, meanwhile, has launched a new Union for the Mediterranean, while also revising its overarching security strategy. As these new plans take root, views differ on how far transatlantic cooperation can be rebuilt and on how desirable or meaningful such cooperation may be. It is within this period of shifting policies that this paper offers its analysis.

This paper looks beyond the highly charged, Iraq-related deterioration in the transatlantic relationship in order to assess the real similarities and differences in the two actors' democracy promotion strategies in the Middle East. It argues that while serious mistrust has developed and notable disagreements have emerged between the United States and European Union, the substantive divergence in policy is not as great as is now routinely presumed. If European and American policymakers wish to move beyond the ructions of recent years, they can and should focus on their points of relative similarity as a foundation from which transatlantic cooperation in the Middle East can, cautiously, be rebuilt.

As such, the paper seeks to provide a corrective to the tendency of many analysts to apply readings of the macro-level trends in transatlantic politics to the issue of democracy promotion, with no more than a cursory look at the actual substance of democracy assistance strategies. These analysts often make an erroneous set of assumptions: that only Europe favors sophisticated methods of encouraging sustainable political change in the Middle East, whereas the United States seeks coercive imposition of democracy; or, alternatively, that only the United States is serious about political reform in the Middle East, whereas Europeans are spinelessly wedded to their alliances with autocratic incumbents. Neither of these black-and-white perspectives is borne out by the facts.

An examination of the empirical record of diplomatic and financial efforts reveals that, beyond the well-known tensions of recent years, American and European policies exhibit many similarities. Both actors made strong commitments to supporting Arab democracy in the wake of 9/11 and articulated an understanding that democratic development in the Arab world was important to the security of Western states. In light

of mounting regional security challenges and certain electoral outcomes such as the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, both actors shifted, in 2006-2007, some way back toward realist alliance-building with autocratic Arab regimes. Additionally, both parties have been reluctant to engage with Islamist opposition groups, but have done so in various instances.

Compared to European governments, the Bush Administration tended to conceive democracy promotion in more instrumental and strategic terms; often criticized Middle Eastern regimes more harshly; and sometimes focused more on democracy as a means to justify isolation of unfriendly governments. Yet we find that, on all such issues, it is misleading to position the European Union at a polar opposite to the United States: offering carrots where Washington wields sticks, emphasizing process where Washington focuses on outcome, relying on multilateral mechanisms where Washington works unilaterally. Despite all the mutual recriminations, the similarities between Europe and the United States have been at least as significant as the differences.

Where real policy divergence does exist, it appears rooted in the contrasting foundations and motivations from which the two actors seek to construct their respective democracy promotion policies in the Middle East. Some improvement in transatlantic coordination in the Middle East has been forthcoming since the low-point of 2003-2005, helped by the arrival of new leaders in France and Germany as well as by a sobered attitude toward the challenge of Arab political reform. Fundamentally, European and American officials struggle with the same two challenges: whether and how to offer Arab governments meaningfully significant incentives for democratic reform; and how to mesh the long-term objective of supporting democracy with short-term strategic objectives. In short, both actors share the same challenge of transcending the ambivalence about the "democracy project" that hampers their policy effectiveness.

Transatlantic Tension on Middle Eastern Reform

Tensions across the Atlantic on Middle Eastern reform emerged initially in Europeans' skeptical reactions to the new U.S. reform initiatives launched in the wake of 9/11. The president's "forward strategy of freedom" was the first attempt by the Bush Administration to enunciate a positive vision for American engagement in the post-Saddam Middle East. It was also, quite consciously, a strategy for winning the "war on terror" by transforming the dysfunctional politics of the region which, in President George W. Bush's view, made Arab citizens resentful and repressed and so more vulnerable to the appeals of extremist ideology. The Freedom Agenda, as the Bush Administration formally dubbed it, was billed as the political face of the United States' counterterrorism effort.[1] However, the context for the policy also included the invasion of Iraq and staunch resistance by the Bush Administration to more intensive conflict resolution efforts between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Greater Middle East Initiative—proposed by the Bush Administration in 2004 as the main product of its chairmanship of the Group of Eight—thus met with a cool, and in some cases openly hostile, response from European governments. A range of European objections surfaced against this Initiative's proposal for closer and more institutionalized transatlantic cooperation on Middle Eastern reform. The first concern was that Washington was trying to use the European Union's well-established presence in the region for its own ends and wrest control from European initiatives. A second concern rested on the fear that, in light of the United States' damaged reputation in the Middle East, a partnership with the United States would constrain European options—based on the lessons of "joint" efforts in the Palestinian Authority—while doing little to share the financial burden. A third, related European fear was that well-designed, under-stated E.U. reform efforts would suffer from being associated with more intensive (and aggressive) U.S. activity.[2]

The most specific European complaint was that the Greater Middle East Initiative was not drawn up in consultation with either governments or civil society in the Middle East. An early draft of the U.S. proposal was leaked in February to an Arabic newspaper, *al-Hayat,* raising an outcry among Arab leaders that the United States was attempting to impose external political models on the region.[3] In order to sign up to a common initiative at the G8's Sea Island summit of June 2004, Europeans, in conjunction with Arab governments, insisted on far-reaching revisions: a change of name to the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA); a narrower geographical focus, excluding

[1] For more on the origins of the "Freedom Agenda," see Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March: America's Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008): 4-5.
[2] See for example, Volker Perthes, "America's Greater Middle East and Europe: Key Issues for Dialogue," *Middle East Policy* 11 no. 3 (2004): 85-97.
[3] "G8 Greater Middle East Partnership Working Paper," *al-Hayat*, February 13, 2004.

Pakistan and Afghanistan; a strengthened link in the initiative's declaratory language between reform efforts and progress on the Arab-Israeli conflict; and ensuring the centrality of consultation with Arab governments. This last concern was reflected through the institution that became BMENA's centerpiece, the Forum for the Future, a ministerial forum designed to discuss reforms in partnership with government representatives from the Middle East. At U.S. insistence, the Forum was expanded to include Arab government, business, and civil society representatives as "partners" in the project of reform. Still, the early leak resulted in the United States losing the initiative on the issue, and the State Department was compelled to spend its time reassuring European and Arab governments instead of lobbying for its proposal. This turned the focus of the whole Initiative from engaging civil society forces toward ensuring Arab governments' participation—or at least forbearance.[4]

Beyond this dispute over process, Europe and the United States diverged at first on some basic principles surrounding the Initiative. European officials, such as Germany's then-foreign minister Joschka Fischer, expressed the same concerns as President Bush about Arab political stagnation fueling radicalism that threatens Western interests. But Fischer and others argued that the Arab-Israeli conflict was also a major source of radicalization and therefore deserved equal attention to reform. The final BMENA statement referred to the two issues as equivalent priorities. The United States was keen for political aid programs to be managed under a common fund to reduce duplication and attain greater impact, but Europeans agreed only to information sharing within a new Democracy Assistance Dialogue (co-sponsored by Turkey, Yemen, and Italy). Europeans argued against the creation of new organizational structures, agreeing to consultations but not formal cooperation on the concrete implementation of a democracy promotion strategy.

A second critique was that U.S. approaches failed to embrace the European recognition that proper reform policies require a long-term and holistic approach. The distinctive European approach in the Middle East is asserted to be one based on gradual and comprehensive processes of reform that link political change to broader issues of social justice, local participation, and the modernization of governance structures. In a widely quoted speech, Commissioner Chris Patten felt it important to warn U.S. policymakers that "developing democracy is not like making instant coffee."[5]

A third element of European criticism of American democracy promotion, which also served to highlight broader policy differences, was evident when European governments admonished the United States for being drawn to a reactive, symptoms-rather-than-causes approach to security. It was commonly suggested that geographical proximity imbues European strategies with a more sensitive, complete, and long-term take on security and reform in the Middle East. By contrast, Europeans argued that the United States' post 9/11 lashing-out led to Washington pursuing democracy in too heavy-handed and instrumental a fashion. Europeans distinguished their self-consciously regional approach from the perceived U.S. preference for approaching reform through preferential bilateral relations.

These disagreements over the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative in 2004 and 2005 were fiercely debated and publicly aired in large part because many European policymakers found the Middle Eastern reform agenda a useful means of staking out broader positions regarding U.S. pre-eminence. This can be seen in the frequent warnings that were issued by Europeans to Washington that democracy cannot be "imposed by force"—though the United States was not suggesting such a strategy. The "partnership" approach imposed on the Forum for the Future was explicitly justified by Europeans in contrast to the American tendency toward unilateralism.[6]

[4] International Crisis Group, "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth," Briefing No. 14 (June 2004).
[5] Chris Patten, "Islam and the West: At the Crossroads," (speech, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Oxford, May 24, 2004).
[6] Commission of the European Communities, "European Security Strategy – Options for an EU Strategy Towards the Middle East," March 2004: 1.

As important as this effort at reactionary self-definition was to European actors in 2004 and 2005, events since then have somewhat reduced the salience of such endeavors. Efforts to renew U.K.-French-German collaboration (e.g. toward Iran) suggest that the depth of transatlantic division over Iraq may have been salutary enough to jolt European states into more clearly defining their own distinctive approach to world affairs through more common endeavors on Middle Eastern reform. This strategy also served the United Kingdom's desire to counterbalance its involvement in Iraq with the recovery of a broader sense of European distinctiveness.

Thus, the BMENA soon become a fairly low-profile forum, with few concrete outputs (the Forum for the Future did not convene in 2007 at all). Significant tensions lingered between the European Union and the United States over democracy promotion. French officials continued to fret that the BMENA is too American in design and authorship, and U.S. officials lamented that their initial plans were watered down into something far too French in its caution and gradualism. The International Crisis Group recognized that the final agreement on the BMENA "may at least apply some balm on a transatlantic relationship rubbed raw by difference over Iraq," but concluded pessimistically that "friction is almost as likely as balm…over the next few years."[7] French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier's speech at the first Forum for the Future laid primary emphasis not on the importance of proactively supporting democratization, but on the factors that would qualify its fruitful promotion—in particular, the nature of international policies towards the Arab-Israel conflict and Iraq.[8] This kind of European "yes, but" line commonly acknowledges adherence to democracy promotion with the same kind of passive resignation with which an elderly man might rue the inevitability of technological progress.

Since 2006-2007, American and European democracy promotion efforts in the Middle East have been rolled somewhat back (this will be discussed in detail in the next section); simultaneously, diplomatic efforts have been made on both sides to mitigate some of the damage done to transatlantic relations by the tensions of 2003-2005. Gerhard Schröder's replacement by Angela Merkel and then Nicolas Sarkozy's arrival at the Elysée have improved the tone of German and French relations with Washington—although they have not, of course, removed all tensions. Diplomats insist that low-level coordination has improved partly due to information-sharing consultations on Middle Eastern democracy-promotion policies.

Thus, confrontation is less emphasized in the relationship, and policy coordination has improved somewhat, but differences remain. During his April 2005 visit to Brussels, President Bush suggested that for Europe, 9/11 had represented a "passing moment" and not a trigger for the kind of fundamental change visited upon U.S. foreign policy. European policymakers, for their part, still routinely profess concern at the United States' tendency to overplay the link between 9/11 and the imperative of democracy promotion in the Middle East. Some commentators still argue with breathtaking surety that Europeans are doing nothing to back up the United States in expanding freedom in the world, and that "never has America been more alone in spreading democracy's promise."[9]

Despite plentiful E.U. rhetoric asserting the need to move beyond the disagreements over Iraq, in practice most European governments continue to see and speak about the Middle Eastern democracy agenda through the lens of broader U.S. policy failures in the Middle East. If many European policymakers and commentators have come to question the normative legitimacy of democracy promotion, it is because they have

[7] International Crisis Group, "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth": 1, 12.
[8] Michel Barnier, (presentation, Forum on the Future, Rabat, Morocco, December 2004). Available at www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actu/bulletin.asp?liste=20041213.html.
[9] Michael Ignatieff, "Who are Americans to think that freedom is theirs to spread?" *New York Times Magazine,* June 26, 2005.

come to associate the latter with U.S. actions in Iraq. Compounding this "Iraq spill-over," the well-known European line persists that Washington's imbalanced position on the Arab-Israeli conflict complicates other areas of policy in the Middle East. The European conviction remains strong that support for democratic reform is unlikely to prove fruitful until the Arab-Israeli peace process makes significant progress, a development that in turn requires a more even-handed U.S. attitude. In short, transatlantic differences on broader issues continue to infect attitudes toward the formally-shared agenda of democracy promotion.

Shared Commitment and Convergent Agendas

Notwithstanding the oft-stated tensions and diplomatic differences, notable convergence between American and European approaches can be detected. Five aspects of transatlantic congruence on Middle East democracy promotion policy are evident.

A Gap between Rhetoric and Policy

The first similarity in the American and European approaches to Middle Eastern reform is the yawning gap between rhetoric and policy evident on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite their shared recognition of a relationship between democratic growth and Western security interests, neither American nor European policies toward Arab autocracies shifted radically to reflect a new commitment to democracy promotion in the wake of 9/11. A steady stream of European politicians and writers have railed against the emergence of a forceful U.S. crusade to impose democracy upon the Middle East, but in most parts of the region the United States shares with European governments a striking forbearance in the face of autocratic abuses by friendly Arab states.

Egypt is a case in point. The United States government initially laid down some important markers on political reform for its most important Arab ally. In 2002, the Bush Administration threatened to withhold an anticipated aid request to Congress unless the government of Egypt released a democracy activist and dual U.S.-Egyptian citizen, Saad Eddin Ibrahim. In 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice cancelled a planned visit to Egypt when the government there arrested a prominent opposition politician, Ayman Nour. When Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak announced in February 2005 that he would allow opposition parties to run candidates against him in the presidential elections later that year, President Bush called Mubarak to demand that international monitors be allowed to observe the balloting, and that opposition parties be given equal access to the national media. That summer, Secretary Rice gave a confrontational speech on political freedom to a Cairo audience. But the United States was slow to raise objections when Nour was rearrested and convicted in a sham trial, and when Egyptian security forces beat demonstrators and barred voters from polls during parliamentary elections later in 2005. Since then, Egypt's regime has rolled back political freedom in a host of ways, with only occasional protest from Washington. In March 2008, Condoleezza Rice quietly waived congressionally-imposed human rights restrictions placed on American military aid to Egypt. This action was in striking, but almost unnoted, contrast to her 2005 statement in Cairo that "for sixty years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region…and we achieved neither. Now, we are taking a different course."[10]

[10] Secretary Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks at the American University in Cairo," (speech, American University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt, June 20, 2005). Available at http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm.

The European Union similarly talked of the importance of building on the 2005 elections to press Egypt towards democratization. But as Egypt has slid back toward something resembling a police state since 2006, European criticism of President Mubarak has also been lacking (the sole exception is the Danish government, which decided to phase out assistance to Egypt due to a lack of momentum in the political reform process). In 2007, despite Egypt's political regression, the European Union concluded a new European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) action plan with Egypt—the action plan, a contractual framework governing bilateral relations between the European Union and Egypt, included additional aid allocations and trade access. In addition, the European Union offered the Mubarak regime a separate energy accord. Egypt still receives large aid allocations from Germany (110 million euros for 2005), France (80 million euros) and Spain (30 million euros). Similarly, Spain recently signed a bilateral cooperation treaty with Egypt offering 250 million euros in aid (tied to contracts with Spanish companies).[11] In Egypt, the European Union and the United States have funded projects to support the internal management and capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), without making an issue of laws restricting civil society's freedom to operate or even to accept foreign funds.[12]

U.S. and E.U. relations with other Arab countries reveal similar inconsistency. After the Algerian presidential elections of 2004, in which President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was reelected with an improbably high vote of over 80 percent, the U.S. and French governments offered explicit endorsements of Bouteflika[13]—this as he banned the U.S.-based human rights NGO, Freedom House, from operating in Algeria. Both the United States and France have provided Bouteflika and the Algerian armed forces with generous new security cooperation in recent years, in part to hedge against the emergence of a new terrorist threat from the former Algerian Islamic Group, now renamed al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb. Similarly, the European Union offered Algeria a new energy partnership without the democracy stipulations of an ENP (which an energy-rich and thus emboldened Algeria has refused to sign). American governance-related assistance to Algeria has largely focused on assisting the latter's efforts to join the World Trade Organization and has side-stepped questions of internal political freedom and diversity.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf present similar dynamics. American criticism of human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia increased after 9/11, and the State Department for the first time named Saudi Arabia as a "Country of Particular Concern" in its 2004 religious freedom report.[14] A new bilateral strategic dialogue was launched to deal with rising tensions, and it included a working group on human development at which human rights concerns were regularly raised. However, U.S. pressure diminished in the wake of several terrorist attacks within Saudi Arabia targeting foreigners, especially one in December 2004 against the U.S. consulate in Jeddah. In May 2005, three reformists were given long prison sentences, just one week after Crown Prince Abdullah's meeting with President Bush. In 2006 and 2007, the United States, Britain, and France signed similar, significant arms deals with various Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia. In Yemen, the United States and the European Union increased the scale of their security support, even as President Ali Abdullah Saleh strengthened his fifteen-year grip on power.

Morocco is cited regularly by Washington and Brussels as a model for Arab political reform, and has been rewarded for its limited reforms with significant increases in aid from Europe and the United States

[11] "España financiará proyectos en Egipto por valor de 250 millones," *El País*, February 5, 2008. Available at http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Espana/Egipto/firman/Tratado/Cooperacion/Amistad/elpepuesp/20080205elpepunac_25/Tes.

[12] Michele Dunne, "Are the United States and European Union Promoting Democracy in the Arab World?" (presentation, Finnish Institute for International Affairs, Helsinki, Finland, June 3, 2005). Available at http://www.upi-fiia.fi.

[13] "Félicitations de MM. Chirac et Bush ; En Algérie, l'ampleur de la victoire du président Abdelaziz Bouteflika surprend et inquiète," *Le Monde*, April 11, 2004.

[14] U.S. Department of State, *2004 Report on International Religious Freedom*, September 15, 2004: Near East and North Africa, Saudi Arabia. Available at http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35507.htm.

(including a 28 million euro reward in 2007 from the European Commission's Governance Facility). France, Spain, Italy, and Germany have all notably increased allocations to Morocco from 2006. American economic assistance increased by 50 percent over the past three years, and the U.S. government also bent the governance criteria set by its Millennium Challenge Corporation in order to grant Morocco eligibility for additional funds through that agency.[15] While Morocco passed important social legislation improving women's legal status and carried out reasonably fair and open parliamentary elections in September 2007, the regime remains a liberalized autocracy in which all major policy decisions emanate from the palace and basic political freedoms remain insecure. Clampdowns on press activity in advance of the 2007 elections were a particular concern, as was the abysmally low turnout rate in the elections themselves, suggesting that Moroccan citizens had abandoned the democratic process as a means to effect meaningful policy change. But the European Union and United States met the elections with congratulations. Perplexingly, the Spanish foreign minister even hailed the low turnout as a positive sign that the elections had been truly free.[16]

Indeed, while both the European Union and United States have promised to reward democracy by allocating aid and trade benefits to those states most willing to implement political reform, in practice the correlation between reform and financial rewards has remained limited. Beyond the Bush Administration's increased aid to Yemen and Morocco, and its refusal to implement congressionally-imposed conditionality on aid to Egypt, there is also Washington's Middle East Free Trade Area Initiative, which promoted bilateral trade agreements with little apparent regard for the Initiative's stated goal "to establish a Middle East Free Trade Area by 2013."[17] The Bush Administration added Bahrain, Oman, and Morocco as free trade agreement (FTA) partners, and negotiations are formally open (though stalled) with the United Arab Emirates. Yet, with the limited exception of Morocco, as noted, none of these states can claim major strides in political reform in recent years. Similarly, the European Union awarded aid increases to decidedly non-democratizing states, not to reformers. In 2004-2005, the European Commission's Governance Facility provided Syria with 100 million euros, Egypt with 360 million euros, and Tunisia with 185 million euros. Many individual E.U. governments have acted in a similar fashion. French aid to Syria has increased every year since 2002, reaching 26 million euros in 2005-2006. Italy has increased funds to Syria, Tunisia, and Egypt since 2005. Spain has increased aid to Tunisia, including direct provision of new security equipment. Not only has the European Union failed to tie reward to reform in many instances, it has failed to work incentive "carrots" into its policies. The European Neighborhood Policy—supposedly predicated upon the logic of incentives—excludes from the "carrots" it offers some of the rewards most sought after by Arab governments, including free access to the E.U. market for agricultural goods and free movement of workers. In addition, incentives-based democratic conditionality is not part of the E.U.'s new Union for the Mediterranean, launched in the summer of 2008.

Growing Caution with Democracy Promotion

Despite clear commitments to democracy promotion from Washington and Brussels and the joint and separate establishment of new mechanisms to provide incentives for democratizing countries, the European Union and the United States have exhibited a vast gap between rhetoric and policy. After 2006, however, this

[15] Elizabeth Spiro Clark, "The Millennium Challenge Account: Spur to Democracy?," *Foreign Service Journal* (April 2005): 31-35. Available at http://isd.georgetown.edu/associates_clark_mca.pdf.
[16] Kristina Kausch, "How Serious is the EU about Supporting Democracy and Human Rights in Morocco?" FRIDE-ECFR Working Paper, May 29, 2008. Available at http://www.fride.org/publication/431/how-serious-is-the-eu-about-supporting-democracy-and-human-rights-in-morocco.
[17] U.S. Department of State Fact Sheet, *Middle East Free Trade Area Initiative: Promoting Development and Economic Reform in the Middle East*, June 22, 2006. Available at http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/2006/68237.htm.

gap narrowed, because developments in the region led Washington and Brussels to backtrack on their commitments to democracy promotion in the Middle East. Indeed, a second similarity evident in European and U.S. policy is that they have, in practice, followed a very similar evolutionary trajectory: strong commitments to democracy promotion in the Middle East after the attacks of 9/11 gave way to far greater caution in the period since 2006.

The general American and European commitments to intensify support for democratic change in the Middle East after 9/11 were justified in strikingly similar terms. The U.S. National Security Strategy introduced in 2002 made an explicit link between democracy promotion and security interests; similarly, the European Security Strategy agreed upon in December 2003 was predicated on the assertion that "the best protection for our security is a world of well governed democratic states."[18] The American Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) was likewise matched by a new reform-oriented European Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and Middle East, adopted in June 2004, and the inception of the European Neighborhood Policy that, on paper, accorded democracy promotion a more prominent role in relations with Maghreb and Mashreq states.

After the tensions surrounding the BMENA initiative, joint transatlantic commitments to democracy promotion continued. The E.U.-U.S. summit held in Washington in June 2005 issued a declaration expressing joint support for democratic activists and aid programs designed "to sustain democracy in all [its] dimensions."[19] Choosing the United States as the destination of his first official trip after his appointment, then-French foreign minister Philippe Doust-Blazy pronounced in Washington that France was committed to working with the United States to encourage the spread of democracy: "Every time that human rights and the rule of law are in danger, we will be there."[20]

Neither the United States nor the European Union lived up to these commitments fully, as noted earlier. But even the *language* of support for freedom began to fade in 2006, following several political developments in the region that led American and European leaders to question whether democratization in the Middle East would bring desired changes to regional politics and whether the West could afford the costs of changes that were actually occurring. In the spring of 2005, the first Lebanese parliamentary elections after Syria's military withdrawal brought the militant group Hizballah more seats and stronger government representation. That fall, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood made a strong showing in parliamentary elections, winning 85 seats in the 454-seat lower house. Finally, in January 2006, Iraqis voted in their first post-Saddam parliamentary elections and handed victory to sectarian, militia-backed parties, and Palestinians handed a resounding victory to the militant, resolutely anti-Israel movement Hamas.

The Palestinian elections proved a turning point in U.S. efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East. The Bush Administration, having placed extraordinary emphasis on elections in Lebanon, Iraq, and elsewhere, was confronted with an election outcome detrimental to a major strategic interest—Israeli security—and a major foreign policy goal—a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The European Union, having invested over half a billion euros in the Palestinian Authority over the previous five years, was similarly flummoxed and dismayed by the results of the balloting. While the two parties coordinated closely to produce a unified policy toward the

[18] U.S. Department of State, *The National Security Strategy of the United States,* September 2002; Council of the European Union, *European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World*, December 2003.
[19] Council of the European Union, *EU-U.S. Declaration on Working Together to Promote Democracy and Support Freedom, The Rule of Law and Human Rights Worldwide*, Washington, June 20, 2005, 10307/05.
[20] Philippe Doust-Blazy, (statement, official trip to Washington, July 5-7, 2005). Available at http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actu/agorabb.asp?liste=20050707.html#Chapitre4.

new Hamas government, these results prompted fierce second-guessing in Brussels and Washington about the wisdom of seeking to advance Arab democracy.

An Evolution in Democracy Assistance Funding

A third similarity is evident in the way that American and European democracy assistance funding for the Middle East has evolved, and on what the money has been spent. New funding initiatives have been introduced by U.S. and European donors that allocate additional resources for democracy assistance. MEPI was given over $534 million for the period 2002-2008; other U.S. democracy assistance to the Middle East —through the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and through the U.S. Agency for International Development—added at least another $370 million, excluding Iraq. Beginning in 2006, however, funding for MEPI began to decline as the administration's enthusiasm began to wane and a Democratic Congress became more skeptical of the program's value. The only other significant alteration in U.S. democracy spending in the region was when Congress, beginning in Fiscal Year 2005, compelled USAID to spend $50 million of its development assistance funds for Egypt on "democracy and governance" projects to be decided without Egyptian government approval.

While several European governments have also increased reform and governance funding, overall, on both sides of the Atlantic, the level of such funding has remained modest. In terms of political aid, the Middle East remains conspicuously under-funded by European donors, as compared to other regions. For its part, American democracy assistance in the region in the first five years after 9/11 amounted to 80 cents per capita, as compared to the $14.60 spent per capita in the former Soviet Union during the first five years of the Freedom Support Act.[21] Democracy assistance—including amounts targeted to government reform as well as to civil society—is also miniscule relative to official government-to-government aid. The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) allocations to Morocco have hovered around only 1 million euros a year, while the share of overall European Commission funds going to governance projects remains under 5 percent of total foreign aid, even after an increase in 2007. France is Morocco's largest donor, but virtually none of its assistance to the country is allocated to democracy promotion, while Spain in 2006 gave only 2 percent of its aid to Morocco for a very broadly defined "democratic governance, citizen participation and institutional development" category.[22] On the American side, 29 percent of MEPI programs from 2002 to 2007 benefitted Arab government participants, including teachers, but only 15 percent were targeted to NGOs. U.S. funding for democracy and governance in the Middle East is, like European democracy aid, small compared to other types of official development aid and is dwarfed by U.S. military aid in countries like Egypt.

With the funds they do allocate to democracy assistance, U.S. and European donors support a similar range of projects, mirroring a relatively standard template of activity deployed across different recipient regions. One common assertion is that the United States supports bottom-up civil society-led change, in sharp contrast to the European Union's support for top-down reform.[23] But in practice, both actors have pursued a mix of these two approaches in recent years.

In the Middle East, both actors have funded a mixture of civil society projects and state-institutional reform. The balance between these may be slightly different in U.S. and European aid profiles, but such variation is

[21] Tamara Cofman Wittes and Sarah Yerkes, *What Price Freedom? Assessing the Bush Administration's Freedom Agenda* (Analysis Paper 10, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, August 2006): 11. Available at http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/papers/2006/09middleeast_wittes/wittes20060901.pdf.

[22] Kristina Kausch, "How Serious is the EU about Supporting Democracy and Human Rights in Morocco?"

[23] Jeffrey Kopstein, "The Transatlantic Divide over Democracy promotion," *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2006): 85-98; Daniela Huber, "Democracy Assistance in the Middle East and North Africa: A Comparison of U.S. and EU Policies," *Mediterranean Politics* 13, no. 1 (2008): 43-62.

less significant than the similarities. A review of U.S. democracy assistance activities in the Middle East reveals the same type of priorities as in the E.U. funding profile: training on human rights standards for coast guard and border security forces; encouraging links between local-level government institutions and citizen groups; training officials in public administration; and combating child labor.[24] USAID has funded an array of good governance, service delivery, women's rights and "civic education" projects that closely mirror European projects.[25] The explicitly political projects tend to focus on the same "standard menu" of party-building, campaign skills, and technical training for parliamentarians and political activists. Thus, not only do European and American programs not present competing "theories of change," but in many cases, they are actually duplicative. Indeed, the similarities have led some experts to criticize American democracy assistance programs in the region for progressing little beyond the cautious gradualism of the 1990s.[26]

In some places, the range of U.S. political aid work has been broader than that of European donors. For instance, in the Gulf, U.S. funding has encompassed projects on political participation, the rule of law, press freedom, judicial reform, civil society, labor rights, and political parties, whereas European projects have been slightly more narrowly focused on women's rights, economic governance and media capacities.[27] But both Europe and the United States hesitate to undertake or sponsor projects that do not meet with local government approval, and will only provide funding to local organizations as allowed by local laws—a constraint Arab governments are tightening with alacrity.[28]

Dealing with Islamist Groups

A fourth similarity is that neither the European Union nor the United States have provided funds directly to any Islamist organizations; however, of the quasi-autonomous party foundations, the American National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) engage moderate Islamist parties in states such as Morocco and Yemen in a slightly more structured way than their European counterparts. American officials occasionally meet with Egyptian parliamentarians who, while formally independents, are members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The United States was willing to talk only to those Islamists that renounced violence and were already represented in parliaments—of course excluding a large swath of movements and parties. And Washington's negative reaction to the election of Hamas (a reaction shared by the European Union) prompted Islamists in the region to dismiss the United States as inimically hostile to their free participation in politics. In this sense, the Hamas election hardened and reinforced assumptions in the Middle East regarding Western double-standards toward Arab democracy.

In dealings with some states, the European Union has been even more circumspect than the United States, leaving the impression amongst Islamist opposition groups that "there is no place for Islamists in initiatives such as the ENP and that the E.U. is more anti-Islam than pro-democracy."[29] Detailed interview material shows that over 2006 and 2007 the European Union increasingly lost credibility with Islamist organizations for failing to follow through on promises to support democratization.[30]

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[24] U.S. Department of State, *Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2004-2005*, March 28, 2005. Available at http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/shrd/2004/.

[25] For an overview of U.S. democracy assistance to the Middle East, see Tamara Cofman Wittes and Sarah Yerkes, *What Price Freedom? Assessing the Bush Administration's Freedom Agenda.*

[26] Tamara Cofman Wittes, "The Promise of Arab Liberalism," *Policy Review* 69 (June/July 2004); Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, "The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start," (Policy Brief 29, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2004). Available at http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Policybrief29.pdf.

[27] U.S. Department of State, *Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2004-2005.*

[28] National Endowment for Democracy, "The Backlash Against Democracy Assistance," June 8, 2006:41-50. Available at http://www.ned.org/publications/reports/backlash06.pdf.

[29] Michael Emerson and Richard Youngs, eds., *Political Islam and European Foreign Policy* (Brussels: CEPS, 2007).

[30] Ibid.

Country-Specific Cooperation

A fifth arena of congruence may be the most significant going forward. Transatlantic coordination in practical policy implementation has been significant in regard to a number of individual Middle Eastern states. It is noteworthy, however, that much of this coordination has occurred on issues *other than* democracy promotion.

One notable instance of such transatlantic cooperation and convergence that has attracted little attention is E.U. and U.S. policy toward Libya. Here, a united front between London and Washington led to a December 2003 agreement in which Libya pledged to abandon its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs and formally renounce terrorism. While Britain's main role was in mediating with Muammar el-Qaddafi over the prospect of normalizing relations with Washington, Anglo-American coordination lasted beyond the WMD agreement. A U.S.-U.K.-Libyan forum was established to advance trilateral cooperation on Libyan defense reform.[31] Although this caused some initial consternation among other E.U. states, U.S. and E.U. strategies have since converged. Since 2006, the United States and European Union have rushed to conclude new energy deals with Libya, overlooking human rights issues. The European Union, collectively, as well as states such as France on an individual basis, moved to offer Libya a new trade and cooperation agreement after the release in the summer of 2007 of the Bulgarian nurses detained in Libyan jails. However, neither Washington nor any European capital sought more systematic improvements in human or political rights. Thus, in the Libyan case, close coordination enabled both parties to enforce strong conditionality in relations, but not conditionality directed toward democracy promotion.

Even more striking, perhaps, has been the cooperation between France and the United States in Lebanon, where democracy has been at least some part of the equation. Not only did Paris and Washington jointly lead the way on UNSC Resolution 1559 in the fall of 2004 (which called for the removal of foreign troops and the disarming of local militias), but coordination between France, Britain, and the United States was an important element in pressing not just for the withdrawal of Syrian troops but for removing Syria's "residual presence" in Lebanon.[32] Paris took the lead in pressing the caretaker Lebanese government to issue an invitation to E.U. election observers, and the decision to send a European team was coordinated with the U.S. administration, which as a consequence agreed to stand aside. After the elections, France and the United States were critical of the share of power accorded to pro-Syrian forces, and each state contributed funds and supported activities in an effort to strengthen Lebanese sovereignty, improve government performance, and deepen democratic reform. Differences have emerged over the years since—over the United States' interest in using the Lebanese situation to pressure Syria and over the Sarkozy Administration's interest in mediating between different Lebanese factions, including Hizballah. But the significance of the United States and France working so closely together on a pro-democracy agenda in the Middle East should not be understated. One concrete outcome is the improved vigor and effectiveness of the post-2006 UNIFIL deployment in southern Lebanon.

The above overview of similarities is not intended to deny the differences in policy on the two sides of the Atlantic, but rather to correct assumptions that the United States and European Union have been drawn to completely opposite poles in their approaches to democracy promotion. Where different approaches to

[31] Michele Dunne, "Libya: Security is not Enough," (Policy Brief 32, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2004): 4.

[32] Richard Youngs, "Europe and the United States in the Middle East." Chapter in *The European Union and the United States Facing the Middle Eastern Crisis*, Seminar Report coordinated by Dorothée Schmid, June 16, 2006: 33. Available at http://www.ifri.org/frontDispatcher/ifri/publications/publications_en_ligne_1044623469287/publi_P_publi_mmm_seminaire_euromesco_1150472707764?language=us.

democracy promotion do exist, they often do not cut across a simple Europe-United States division. A range of views and approaches towards democracy promotion in the Middle East can be detected on the European and North American continents, but it is not always the Atlantic that divides. Within the Bush Administration, proponents and opponents of the Freedom Agenda did battle within the halls of the State Department and White House, often yielding widely varying statements on democracy, depending on which officials were visiting the region. Within Europe, a variety of views is also evident, although some distinctively European logic has emerged. Many of the most significant divisions, as in Washington, are between different ministries. The approaches pursued by different European development ministries, for instance, has more in common with USAID than with other agencies of their respective national administrations. Some Europeans acknowledge that within the Middle East, on-the-ground discussions on funding and lobbying strategies often produce unity around a "like-minded" group incorporating select European states, the United States, Canada, and Norway, far more than at an E.U. level. Revealingly, most European donors continue to have a better knowledge of U.S. policies than of the initiatives of their European partners.

Intra-E.U. differences indicate that the paucity of overall coordination across the Atlantic is not always qualitatively different from the limited degree of coordination within Europe. The distinctions in attitude toward Arab democracy between northern and southern European states is perhaps most obvious. In early 2008, serious divisions appeared within the European Union over President Sarkozy's proposal for a new Mediterranean Union, which, to the consternation of many member states, would exclude both northern European countries and any mention of democracy promotion.

Nuances and Strategic Competition

While American and European policies on democracy promotion in the Middle East exhibit significant commonalities in practice, differences remain, especially in rhetoric. How significant are these divergences in language and expressed intent? Certainly American references to "spreading freedom" and "ending tyranny" contrast with the tendency of European Union policy statements that couch aims in terms of "governance" and "modernization." While E.U. diplomats express a desire for greater transatlantic cooperation, senior U.S. officials' advocacy of the Freedom Agenda grate on even some sympathetic European ears.[33] One of the most senior European diplomats in charge of the Barcelona Process insisted that "we don't talk in terms of democracy but societal adjustment."[34] Another high-ranking Brussels official opined that the European Union does not and should not "beat the drum of democracy" as much as the United States, and instead focus on "good governance."[35]

Over time, however, some European rhetoric has become more forward leaning. While it is true that the United States has often tended to see democracy in a more strategic light—as a means to contain violent extremism, or to bring to power more friendly regimes—European politicians have also come to make the link between political reform and security interests. British Prime Minister Tony Blair talked constantly in terms of the desire to spread "our values." In his centerpiece 2004 foreign policy speech, Blair asserted that "lasting security against fanatics and terrorists cannot be provided by conventional military force but requires a commitment to democracy, freedom and justice."[36] Blair's foreign secretary, Jack Straw, spoke of the "long term goal of wider freedom," calling for "a renewed and re-invigorated alliance for freedom between Europe and the United States" in the Middle East.[37] One of Foreign Secretary David Miliband's first major speeches in March 2008 as the current U.K. foreign secretary struck a similar tone in advocating greater focus on democracy promotion. European Commission statements and documents now talk more directly about supporting "democracy." The European Union does appear at least in some measure to have overcome its erstwhile aversion to the "d" word.

In some specific cases, the United States has been more outspoken than the Europeans in criticizing authoritarian regimes. The European Union's reaction to Ayman Nour's imprisonment in Egypt was more qualified than the American response, which included

[33] See "All Aboard the Freedom Train?; Charlemagne," *The Economist*, July 23 2005.
[34] Author's interview.
[35] Author's interview.
[36] Michael White, "Policy and politics: Blair builds Atlantic bridge with democratic rights: Speech sets out common goals for US, Europe and United Nations," The Guardian (London), November 16, 2004.
[37] Jack Straw, "A Partnership of Wider Freedom," (speech, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., May 16, 2005).

the cancellation of a planned visit by Condoleezza Rice to the country. In another case, Washington attempted to coordinate a tough transatlantic response to Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Bin Ali's engineered victory in October 2004 elections, but failed in the face of concerns among the southern E.U. states. The southern E.U. states, having spent many years cultivating Tunisia as a success story of economic reform, acquiesced only to a mild statement. The detention of a prominent Libyan human rights activist early in 2004 likewise occasioned some criticism from the United States, but little from the European Union; the campaigner was released (temporarily) in March after appeals from members of the U.S. Congress, but without visible European governmental pressure.

There is still a tendency on the part of European diplomats to argue that their greater caution derives from their better understanding of the regional landscape, whereas the United States' boldness derives from a degree of naïveté. In the words of one European diplomat, "we are inside the region," and thus have a greater appreciation of its potential and the obstacles to reform. While U.S. policy has in practice been consistent with this gradualist approach and similarly averse to punitive measures, its willingness to adopt a harsh tone in public statements on occasion is a striking distinction.

Another notable difference is between the European willingness to engage with, and the American preference to isolate, unpalatable regional actors. For example, the European Union negotiated a new association agreement with Syria whereas the United States has pushed for isolation. Even though the European Union's agreement has not been implemented—due to Syria's alleged involvement in the Rafik Hariri killing in Lebanon rather than to Syria's democratic shortfalls—the European Union still argues that reform in Syria can best be encouraged through critical engagement. A key element of the European approach toward Syrian reform is the backing of reformists *within* government through measures aimed at strengthening the presidential office and modernizing ministries. European governments have declined to back exiled opposition groups and failed to support a 2006 alliance-building efforts among various Syrian groups in London. By contrast, the United States has worked resolutely to isolate Syria, subjecting it to a range of sanctions. American democracy assistance in Syria has been entirely directed to nongovernmental activity, unlike the technical training and other "good governance" assistance it provides elsewhere in the region. President Bush has also met more than once with members of Syrian exile opposition groups, including an opposition coalition that includes the exiled head of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.

Policy toward Iran appears to be one of the most emblematic cases of the transatlantic divide between engagement and isolation. The overarching European philosophy has been to support reformers linked to former president Mohammed Khatami over hardliners like the current Iranian president. However, the Bush Administration doubted that this cleavage within the clerical establishment was a determinant factor in the future of Iranian politics. The European Union appeared willing to sacrifice a focus on internal reform, as Khatami's position weakened, in order to keep alive talks on the issue of Iran's nuclear program; Bush Administration officials argued that it was precisely because even reformists supported Iran's nuclear program that systemic regime change should be pushed. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice labeled Iran an "outpost of tyranny," along with a select number of the world's most resolutely autocratic states; Europeans insisted that Iran was one of those Middle Eastern states where a degree of genuine democratic space did exist and could be harnessed to support an internally generated momentum of reform. While small-scale European aid projects had been undertaken since the late 1990s, particularly in the area of judicial reform, at the end of 2004 the United States released its first batch of funding for Iran-related democracy and human rights projects. While most of the projects were not publicly disclosed, the funding was clearly designed to support activists who wanted fundamental regime change.[38]

[38] U.S. Department of State, *Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2004-2005.*

While significant differences between the United States and European Union remain regarding Iran, the tenure of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad as Iranian president has brought about some degree of transatlantic convergence. By early 2005, the European Union finally succeeded in convincing the United States to support an incentives-based approach, acquiring Washington's endorsement for European talks with Iran and Washington's acquiescence to Iran's WTO accession as a reward for its cooperation with the E.U.-3. But this move came too late to affect Iran's internal politics, and a conservative-led government returned to power after the heavily manipulated June 2005 elections—of which both European and U.S. officials were strongly critical. After the elections, even France and Italy were openly despairing of reformist prospects.

Against this background, the campaign led by a group of U.S. Congressmen to legalize the controversial Iranian opposition group, the People's Mujahideen (MKO), found echoes in the European Parliament's decision to offer a platform in 2007 to the MKO leader, Mariam Rajavi. Overall, however, much transatlantic debate on Iran has become moot, as Iranian intransigence on both the nuclear program and regional security issues has engendered increasing concerns on both sides of the Atlantic.

A competitive impulse may explain some of the transatlantic policy divergence. Those cases where European policies have become more assertive in promoting reform are a result of benign competition with the United States, rather than of any desire to harmonize policies. For instance, the European Union's Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and Middle East was based on a Franco-German proposal that was forwarded primarily as a response to the original American Greater Middle East Initiative proposal.[39] Having staked out their claims to more intimate local knowledge and a more longstanding, committed local presence, Europeans could not afford to sit on the sidelines as the United States plunged into the fray. Diplomats acknowledged that new French-funded civil society initiatives, for example, were part of Paris's strategy to retain influence in response to a U.S.-led focus on civil society within the BMENA; Paris also sought greater engagement so as to underscore the role of states versus civil society in the reform processes.[40]

To some extent, this preemptive impulse on the part of France and other European states was conditioned by their experience of the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe. There, the United States had been at the forefront of the push for democratization, with Europe providing more of a demonstration effect than any direct assistance. The European Union's (tremendously powerful) positive conditionality and structured engagement kicked in relatively slowly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This dynamic left many local democracy activists feeling that, in the crucial moment of political change, only the United States was backing them effectively. Today, European governments reason, if politics is beginning to change in the Middle East, they need to position themselves to avoid a repeat occurrence. Thus, when asked what he considered to be the main difference between American and European approaches to political reform in the Middle East, one senior Commission official opined: "The whole U.S. strategy is based on the day after [a change in regime]; we focus on the process and still have no policy for the day after."[41]

Another noteworthy divergence is in how the Middle East region is conceived by American and European policymakers and how these different conceptions reflect different interests in promoting democracy. The European Union's approach is structured most substantively as a "Mediterranean policy," and is less

[39] Christian Koch, "GCC-EU Relations," *Gulf Yearbook 2004* (2005): 226.
[40] Dorothée Schmid, "France and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: The Dilemmas of a Power in Transition," in Haizam Amirah Fernández and Richard Youngs (eds) *The Barcelona Process, Assessing the First Decade,* (Madrid: Instituto Elcano, 2005).
[41] Author's interview.

concerned with connections between political development in the Mediterranean Rim and developments in the broader Middle East. This reflects the southern E.U. states' core concern with immigration and the stability of neighboring states; their concerns are what drove the Barcelona Process from its beginnings. Thus Europe's original commitment to reform in the Middle East derives from self-interest as much as the United States' does. The Europeans' Mediterranean framework has no organizational counterpart in American diplomacy, a fact which militates in a very practical way against coordination.[42] The United States, with its war-on-terrorism lens for the region, conceives of reform as necessary across a "broader Middle East" that stretches from Morocco to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Any country where political and economic stagnation reign and radical Islamist ideas are present is a necessary target of American pro-reform policy.

But, somewhat hidden from view by Iraq-related tensions, internal European differences over a possible remolding of its Mediterranean-focused structure have emerged. While some member states have pressed the idea of bringing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) countries, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Iraq, Iran, and Yemen together into a single strategic framework, others perceive this to be too indulgent of American visions. Some have argued that the United States' insistence on developing the Broader Middle East Initiative reinforced E.U. reluctance to debate productively new strategy in the Gulf on its own terms.[43] Spain has insisted on the European Union retaining a primarily Mediterranean policy. Somewhat in contrast, France has had a compromise approach: Paris backed the notion of a new E.U. Strategic Partnership with states "east of Jordan," while also sympathizing with concerns over this morphing into an unduly "American approach." As in the immediate aftermath of the Iraq war, positioning on the transatlantic divide is a powerful motivator for politicians in intra-European debates. Still, the European debate over how to conceptualize the region it is engaged with is occurring mostly with reference to American preferences rather than with the merits of the policy options.

The balance between bilateral and regional approaches represents another transatlantic difference. Many E.U. member states have been openly critical of the way American diplomacy has prioritized relations with individual states, arguing that the American approach undermines the European Union's efforts to encourage political change through "region-building." American officials, frustrated with creeping attempts at regional integration, prefer to provoke a competitive dynamic among Arab states for preferential relations with the United States and use that dynamic as leverage for new commitments to reform. This divergence has been a particularly divisive issue in the Gulf, where U.S. trade policy has emerged as an obstacle to further regional integration. After the signing of a U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement in September 2004, Saudi Arabia threatened to impose new tariffs against Bahrain in response. This episode undermined GCC unity, upon which the whole essence of the European Union's strategic approach in the Gulf had been predicated for over a decade. In North Africa, the dynamics have been more complex: European officials complain that the United States' preferential trade and aid cooperation with Morocco disrupts the Barcelona Process; but the European Union has itself moved towards a more bilateral focus through new Neighborhood Action Plans.

One advantage Europeans cite for the benefits of their approach is that the European Union has built a far broader and deeper range of economic and social engagement in the Middle East. This, they argue, enables European democracy promotion policy to draw on embedded networks of cooperation and development. The Bush Administration showed signs of having been

[42] Ian Lesser, "The United States and Euro-Mediterranean Relations: Evolving Attitudes and Strategies," Euromesco Brief No. 10, (July 2004).
[43] Roberto Aliboni, "The Geopolitical Implications," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10 (2005).

influenced by European policies in this regard when it introduced plans to create a U.S.-Middle East Free Trade Area by 2013, explicitly linking economic and political conditionality to the opening of free trade talks. The United States has signed bilateral free trade agreements with—in addition to Bahrain—Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. U.S. assistance, catalyzed by MEPI, is now allocated to a far wider variety of economic, social, and political reform projects than in prior eras. While the basic difference persists in the range of structured cooperation offered respectively by the European Union and United States across the Maghreb and Mashreq, U.S. policy has thus undergone a degree of "Barcelonification."

Recommendations

Significant transatlantic differences on democracy-promotion policies remain, and in some cases have widened. Yet similarities in European and American approaches are too important to ignore. Most fundamentally, both Europe and the United States have failed to match their actual policies toward autocratic Arab governments with their declared aims and intentions. This paper has demonstrated that many differences are more subtle than is evident from the sweeping generalizations commonly issued—from both sides of the Atlantic—over the respective nature of American and European political reform strategies in the Middle East. Europeans may have been conditioned by the Iraq experience to try to distance themselves from U.S. efforts to "impose" democracy on the broader Middle East, when (beyond Iraq) evidence is thin that American policy is in fact bent toward this goal. Many in the United States still see the European Union as chronically divided and drawn to uncritical engagement with authoritarian regimes, whereas many Europeans view the embeddedness of European influence in the region as increasingly pertinent to the United States' own declared aim to remold fundamentally the politics of the Middle East.

Each party has reacted to the other with a complex mix of strategic competition and calculations of convergent interest. Ironically, the very desire to preserve its own strategic relevance has pushed Europe toward U.S. policy—partly in the apparent European judgment that the United States might just be moving with the "tide of history." As a result, European policy has been more reactive to the evolution of U.S. initiatives than vice versa, arguably a paradox when in many parts of the Middle East the European Union enjoys a stronger political, social, and economic presence. However, on occasion the European Union and United States—whether willfully or as a result of poor coordination—have undercut each other's efforts. But complementarity has not been completely absent: if a more outspoken U.S. commitment to democracy has helped provoke new debate in the Middle East, Europe has gotten regimes engaged in regularized governance initiatives and presented its own experience as a useful model for reformers.

Challenges to greater policy coordination and effectiveness derive not only, or even primarily, from the invasion of Iraq. They also result from the more prosaic fact that the European Union and United States approach the issue of Middle Eastern political reform from different angles. The United States is still struggling to build a framework for its engagement of Middle Eastern society that would support its views on democracy with perceived legitimacy and credibility. The European Union, for its part, needs to demonstrate that its already-existing forms of multifaceted engagement can translate into a more tangible contribution to democratization.

Both sides of the Atlantic should take the time to assess their achievements and determine next steps regarding democracy-promotion policies. We suggest several issues to consider:

- **Avoid concretizing divergent rhetoric in disparate European and American mechanisms or institutions.** The Middle East does not lack for mechanisms or forums through which Western governments can engage on issues related to governance reform. The question is whether existing institutions and mechanisms, like the BMENA Forum for the Future or the ENP Action Plans, serve the purposes for which they were designed by their European and American architects, or whether, for purposes of democracy promotion, they have become empty forms. Brussels and Washington should consider setting up a higher level transatlantic forum for coordinating policies in the Middle East, along the lines of the U.S.-E.U. strategic dialogue on Asia established in 2005.

- **Continue to produce joint diplomatic statements on the need for and desired shape of Middle Eastern reform.** Arab states will continue to exploit any evident daylight between the Atlantic allies to avoid confronting the issue directly. Even if the United States and the European Union cannot agree on priorities for reform, they do agree that reform is a priority. They should leave Arab leaders in no doubt of the West's continued interest in and attention to democratic growth and human rights improvements in the Middle East.

- **Coordinate offers of rewards for democratic reform.** Both the United States and European Union have introduced new initiatives aimed at incentivizing political reform—especially the Millennium Challenge Account and the ENP Governance Facility, respectively. To reduce the risk of such funds employing different criteria and undercutting each other by rewarding different states for different types of reform, the Atlantic allies should seek common criteria and coordinate on the use of positive conditionality.

- **Uphold the principle that local civil society can seek and accept foreign assistance.** Regional governments have followed the Russian lead in seeking to criminalize and constrain local civic groups from accepting foreign financial assistance. Western democracy assistance to civil society is a crucial tool in democracy promotion and should not be yielded to accommodate "local sensitivities." More fundamentally, local groups' ability to request and accept outside aid is a basic element of their freedom of association and a basic element of the international community's "duty to protect" vulnerable populations. The European Union and the United States should articulate clearly and forcefully that their links to and support of Arab civil society are non-negotiable goods.

- **Coordinate positions on engagement with Islamists.** This is another issue on which Arab regimes are expert at driving wedges between Europe and the United States. Both Washington and Brussels have misgivings about the likely influence of these movements in a more democratic and pluralistic Arab political sphere, but these concerns can only be addressed through closer observation and engagement. In the meantime, Western defense of peaceful political activism should not be selective. Transatlantic pressure should be common and wielded when regimes crackdown on non-violent Islamist organizations or even prevent them from meeting with Western donors.

- **Improve coordination in the provision of non-governmental aid.** European and American party-affiliated institutions are the main providers of technical and financial assistance to Middle Eastern civic groups. Many have a long presence in the region and a solid reputation among locals. While the party institutions conduct ad-hoc dialogue at moments of crisis and opportunity, their government funders could encourage more sustained and regular dialogue on democratic development in specific states' funding strategies and how to use their funds most efficiently to achieve common goals.

- **Articulate that democracy promotion is not a plan for Western dominance in the region.** More generally, the end of the Bush era presents an opportunity for the European Union and United States to develop

a common discourse which stresses that military force is not part of the democracy promotion equation, but that democratic norms are essential and universal values. Such a discourse would stress that democracy is to be supported as a system that meets the aspirations of Middle Eastern citizens for greater say in their government, and not simply because it is judged as instrumental for Western interests.

It has commonly been suggested that the European Union and United States need each other—that the United States lacks the reach and credibility of European diplomacy, whereas the European Union lacks the "punch" of American capacity. The analysis provided in this paper suggests that, while a unified transatlantic policy in the Middle East might remain unattainable and probably even undesirable, the foundations do exist for improved coordination and improved impact. Overcoming the mistrust and differences that have taken root in recent years is a challenge not likely to be surmounted immediately. But if policymakers recognize that there are significant aspects of strategy that unite rather than divide the European Union and United States, a new beginning on joint support for democratic reform in the Middle East is both possible and well worth pursuing.

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The creation of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center provides Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable scholars who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. The Saban Center's central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The center's foundation was made possible by a generous grant from Haim and Cheryl Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies, is the Director of the Saban Center. Kenneth M. Pollack is the center's Director of Research. Joining them is a core group of Middle East experts who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers in the Middle East. They include Tamara Cofman Wittes, a specialist on political reform in the Arab world who directs the Project on Middle East Democracy and Development; Bruce Riedel, who served as a senior advisor to three Presidents on the Middle East and South Asia at the National Security Council during a twenty-nine year career in the CIA, a specialist on counterterrorism; Suzanne Maloney, a former senior State Department official who focuses on Iran and economic development; Stephen R. Grand, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Hady Amr, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland; and Daniel L. Byman, a Middle East terrorism expert from Georgetown University. The center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings, led by Brookings Vice President Carlos Pascual.

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