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The Greater Middle East Initiative

A Critical Study

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Chapter I. Prelude to the Greater Middle East Initiative	5
A. U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East before 9/11	5
B. Promoting Democracy and Reform	10
Chapter II. The Greater Middle East Initiative	15
A. The U.S. Draft Proposal	15
B. The European Vision and Transatlantic Relations	21
1. The New Draft	28
2. Evaluation	33
Chapter III. Reactions and Obstacles to the Greater Middle East Initiative	41
A. Arab Reactions	41
B. Regional Obstacles	50
1. Israeli-Palestinian Conflict	51
2. Islamic Fundamentalism	54
Chapter IV. The “Arab Spring”	59
A. Reforms in the Greater Middle East	59
1. Egypt	64
2. Jordan	67
B. Relation between Reform and Democratization	70

Chapter V. Promoting Public Diplomacy	73
A. The GMEI as a Soft Power Tool	73
B. The GMEI vs the Helsinki Accords	78
Conclusion	84
List of Acronyms	90
Conclusion	91

ABSTRACT

For most of the last five decades, the United States has relied on the autocratic leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries to help protect its vital interests in the neighborhood. However, on the morning of September 11, 2001, U.S. priorities in the Middle East changed and the call for reform and democratization in the region became a central goal in U.S. foreign policy. Washington perceived the rise of liberal democratic political systems in the Arab world as a basic feature of U.S. national security policy.

As they were building their new strategy, U.S. leaders sought to revive their alliance with Europe in order to contain Islamic Fundamentalism in which they saw a new enemy. Therefore, in a joint venture, they launched the Greater Middle East Initiative which aimed at assisting and helping Arab civil societies to reform and develop their countries. Arabs from different factions were skeptical about President Bush's new plan due to the failure of his past commitments in the region.

To date, no serious reforms have occurred in the Middle East except for a few cosmetic changes in some countries like Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan and to a lesser extent Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. However, pressure by Arab societies calling for change has obviously increased, leading to some instability in the region.

After providing a background of the American foreign policy in the Middle East, this study tackled the Greater Middle East Initiative trying to assess the real motives behind it, the obstacles it could face, along with Arab and European reactions. Furthermore, it presented the different setbacks of the Initiative along with some analysis based on different opinions.

Introduction

The attacks of September 11 represented a wake-up call to all American policy makers who thought that military superiority alone could pave the way for U.S.'s unilateralism and hegemony. In fact, the United States has succeeded in building a strong superpower after the end of the Cold War but it obviously failed to immunize it against foreign hostility. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq provided clear answers to all those who believe that militant Islamism is the U.S.'s only new enemy. During the Cold War the U.S. was fighting its Soviet counterpart while today it is fighting all those who, in the eyes of President Bush, are against the United States. There are still many challenges to overcome before the U.S. can lead the world alone. Such challenges are present not only in the Middle East, the stronghold of radical Islamism, but also in Europe, China and America itself. Autocratic regimes that it has been backing, oppressed Arab societies, radical Islamists, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), the growing anti-Americanism in Europe, the potential power represented by the European Union, the rise of a new economic bloc in China, and finally the numerous Americans who are not willing to pay for wars anymore, represent the new perils threatening U.S.'s legitimacy and world leadership.

American policy makers have come to realize that the U.S. needs to shift its approach by better cooperating with other regional and international players in order to face such challenges. When the U.S. won the Cold War, it did not rely solely on its military troops, but it also mobilized its public diplomacy devices to achieve its victory.

Therefore, the U.S. administration today needs to revive this combination of hard and soft power to effectively fight its new war.

Consequently, the shift in the U.S.'s foreign policy highlighted some international and regional re-engagements. The Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) represents a new mechanism for the re-employment of a more effective American role in the region.

This study tries to answer several questions concerning the challenges and the opportunities of the GMEI. While many saw in it a genuine proposal to help the Middle Eastern countries overcome underdevelopment setbacks, others perceived it as a nicely packed declaration of war.

The first chapter presents an analytical background of the different circumstances that led to the GMEI. It shows how the attacks of September 11 aroused the U.S.'s unilateral attitude which resulted in a crisis of legitimacy and in the rise of international and regional antagonism towards American policies. Such negativity towards the U.S. was further enhanced by the difficulties presented in the war in Iraq and the government's inability to provide security in the region. These developments played a leading role in launching the initiative which was aimed by the U.S. policy makers to contain the roots of terrorism.

The second chapter addresses the original draft of the initiative that the U.S. submitted to the G-8 meeting at Sea Island, Georgia, for discussion. It also introduces the results of the Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) that have been prepared by Arab civil society members and on which the Initiative relied. Next, it brings in the three different parts of the Initiative which stressed on the urgent need for political, social and economic reforms in the Middle East. Although the European countries agreed on the

necessity of such reforms, they highly opposed the American approach. Such dissonance led to the initiation of a new draft that satisfied both visions. Therefore, the chapter dealt with the split between Europe and the United States' positions towards the Middle East and presents the new draft that has been modeled upon the G-8 meeting, along with the different modifications.

The third chapter focuses on the regional reactions towards the GMEI presented by both Arab governments and intellectuals. These reactions show the impact of anti-Americanism on different elements within the Arab world and highlight the two major pillars of the original American draft as viewed by most Arab governments: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Islamic Fundamentalism. The study also explains the roots of these two obstacles along with potential challenges they could pose to the process of democratization in the region.

The fourth chapter sheds the light on the different reforms that occurred in different Arab countries with a wider focus on Egypt and Jordan. Although these reforms were not a direct result of the GMEI, they presented the different forms of instability that the new American policy created in the region. Moreover, the chapter deals with the positions of the different governments in the region towards such reforms and the limitations that they posed in order to protect their rule. This argument aims at showing the dissatisfaction of the Arab societies with their governments and the prevailing need among them to achieve radical changes in their countries.

Finally, the conclusion recalls the Cold War and presents a comparison between the GMEI and the Helsinki Accords. It identifies the GMEI as a soft power tool aiming at bridging the gap between the U.S. and Arab societies in order to contain the roots of anti-

Americanism. By doing so, some believe that the U.S. policy makers are trying to use public diplomacy the way they did during the Cold War to topple East European regimes. Differences in the social structure between the Arab and East European countries were addressed to show the incompetence of the "domino theory" in the Arab world. At the end, the study suggests more effective techniques towards establishing a developed democratic Middle East.

I Prelude to the Greater Middle East Initiative

A. U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East before 9/11

Since 1991 the United States has emerged as the world's only superpower which, after defeating the Soviet Union, promised to launch a more evenhanded world order. In doing so, it adopted a new concept of universal humanitarian intervention that replaced the long called for principle of noninterference in the domestic affairs of other states. In the name of human rights, the U.S.'s intervention in different conflicts such as in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq, resulted in the spread of its troops in many regions of the world.

In the Middle East, the United States failed to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and increased its support to Israel as well as to Arab autocratic regimes. These have been considered as the main deficits of the American policy that led to a great wave of anti-Americanism in the region. When President Bush came to power, he promised to work on the advancement of the peace process through what was known as the Road Map¹. However, shortly after, he gave up his plan while boosting his partial support to Israel, which added to the regional resentment towards the U.S., a new trend of "anti-Bushism". A similar anger towards the Bush administration was also growing in other parts of the world, especially in Europe, due to the evolution of a unilateralist American foreign policy. Such attitude was clearly highlighted when President Bush pulled back from treaties of international concern on nuclear testing, environmental protection in addition

¹ The Road Map is the latest peace initiative put forward by the U.S., the European Union, Russia and the United Nations which calls for two states living side by side (Israel and Palestine) in peace.

to his intention to withdraw from the ABM Treaty². In fact, the U.S. mounting dominance started in the 1990s, as a result of the unparalleled strength that the U.S. attained after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Samuel Huntington “warned about the ‘arrogance’ and ‘unilateralism’ of U.S. policies when Bush was still governor of Texas”³. The attacks of September 11, 2001 resulted in the reinforcement of U.S. aggressive unilateralism and the reallocation of its main goals. The Middle East became on top of the American foreign policy agenda giving birth to a new strategy of containment similar to the Truman Doctrine at the beginning of the Cold War⁴. However, unlike the Soviet Union, the U.S.’s new enemy, militant Islamism, is not restricted to one country. Islamists belong to different societies, but mostly belong to the same geographical area that the United States defined as the Greater Middle East. The New York attacks deepened the Americans’ belief in their right to act unilaterally in defending their national security which has been endangered for the first time in decades. U.S. unilateralism turned into a more belligerent and military-oriented approach when the Bush administration decided to attack Afghanistan. Although the decision to go to war in Afghanistan was purely American, Europe’s support to the invasion and NATO’s invocation of the right collectively to defend the United States prevented it from

² Center for Strategic and International Studies Washington, DC, *Remarks by Joseph R. Biden. Jr. United States Senator: Delaware Hard Choices for America’s Future: Strategic Opportunities for a New Century*, February 4, 2002.

³ Kagan, Robert. “America’s Crisis of Legitimacy”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 2, March / April 2004, P: 70

⁴ The Truman Doctrine called for helping free peoples to maintain their institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes. Spanier, John, and Hook, Steven W. *American Foreign Policy since World War II*, CQ Press, 13th edition, Washington D.C., 1995, p. 44.

appearing as a one-sided reaction⁵. Washington however, met these offers of assistance with a lot of indifference increasing European anxiety about the U.S. attitude⁶.

In the name of fighting terrorism, defending U.S.'s vital interests and promoting freedom, American foreign policy grew to be more and more independent from the rest of the world. Following the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. decided to fight all regimes that could export terrorism to the Western World with Iraq as a priority. Saddam Hussein had many things that could be inviting for a new American venture. Not only Saddam had committed crimes against his own people and was surrounded by plenty of terrorist groups, but also President Bush was sure about the existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. Therefore, the United States climaxed its unilateralism by deciding to invade Iraq without the Security Council's approval. Such decision reflected a growing hegemony in American stand and failed to gain the support of many countries, above all that of France and Germany. By ignoring the international community, the U.S. lost a great deal of its legitimacy. The Secretary General of the EU Council Javier Solana, argued that the United States needs Europe because it is "a partner with the legitimacy that comes through the collective action of a union of twenty-five sovereign states"⁷.

Despite the worldwide objection to the war and the anti-Bush demonstrations the U.S. invaded Iraq assuming that Iraqis would joyously welcome international troops as liberators. But soon Iraq fell far short of what the Bush administration promised as a result of a long chain of miscalculations. With Iraqis, Americans and other foreigners being killed everyday, the coalition occupation has left Iraq in far worse shape than it

⁵ Kagan Robert, *opcit.*

⁶ *Ibid*; p. 71.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 72.

need have and has diminished the long-term prospects of democracy there⁸. Failure in Iraq along with continuing violence in Palestine discredited U.S.'s role in the Middle East and put its reputation at stake. The Bush administration needed to introduce new inspiring ideas in order to legitimize its policy and preserve its reliability as a world leader. Therefore the Greater Middle East Initiative came to mitigate President Bush's new doctrine of "preemption" that has earlier caused the greatest uproar⁹.

The results of the war in Iraq have been extremely unfavorable to U.S.'s image both in the Middle East and internationally. The U.S.'s dilemma stemmed from its role as guarantor of the Middle East order which serves several important interests of the United States, regional governments and elites, and the international community at large¹⁰. Micheal Doran, an Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University and an Adjust Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, defined those who seek to overturn the regional status quo, such as Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein as the U.S.'s "near enemies" who represent direct threats and must be countered firmly and effectively. According to him, "far enemies" are factors that contribute to the region's popular anger and resentment to the U.S. Danger posed by "near enemies" is more urgent and therefore the U.S. should meet them first. Doran believes that deterring them first could guarantee a successful containment of far enemies represented in occupation, tyranny and social malaise¹¹. However, it seems that fighting near enemies has driven U.S. policy makers

⁸ Diamond, Larry. "What Went Wrong in Iraq", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, September / October 2004, p. 34.

⁹ Kagan Robert, *opcit*, p. 81.

¹⁰ Doran, Michael Scott. "Palestine, Iraq, and U.S. Strategy", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1, January / February 2003, p. 31.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 32.

into deep water. The shortcomings and the failure of the occupation proved to the Western players that the expected results were not easy to reach especially in light of rising Arab antagonism.

Although the declared reason behind the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan is containing terrorism, the importance of economic and strategic U.S. interests in the Middle East could not be denied. As the world becomes increasingly dependant on Middle Eastern oil, the United States tends to be keener in maintaining good relations with Arab states. "The Persian Gulf oil remains central to the global oil market, and U.S. oil imports from outside the Middle East will not change this fact¹²." According to Shibley Telhami and Fiona Hill, events have shown the need for profound political and economic reform in Saudi Arabia which would reinforce global economy¹³. Therefore, regional instability could hinder the flow of oil at reasonable prices to the United States, which renders the U.S. administration more careful in dealing with already existing regimes in the Middle East.

Another important economic area of U.S. interest in the region is trade, which according to Ghassan Salameh, might enhance economic development in the Middle East while offering in parallel greater benefits to the developed countries. Salameh quoted Joseph Stiglitz who wrote about the emergence of a new philosophy that considers promoting a free trade area as an enhancement to the economies of the developing countries that would serve in opening new markets for U.S. exports¹⁴. C.Fred Bergsten

¹² Telhami, Shibley and Hill, Fiona. "America's Vital Stakes in Saudi Arabia", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 6, November / December 2002, p. 167.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Salameh, Ghassan. *Quand l'Amérique Refait le Monde*, Fayard, Paris, 2005, pp. 390-391.

noted that the United States is pursuing a unilateralist rather than a globally cooperative foreign economic policy by trying to manipulate globalization in such a way that serves American interests. Therefore the U.S. tends to engage more its political allies in economic agreements such as Morocco, Jordan and Israel in the Middle East. He also mentioned that the World Trade Organization (WTO) has lost its appeal in the eyes of the U.S. due to the absence of the veto power; something that compels American policy makers to rely more on bilateral agreements¹⁵. In order to achieve such economic goals, the U.S. needs not to threaten its relations with Arab states. The Doha Round¹⁶ presents one example of the American need to cooperate with other countries. In view of such economic interests, the American strategy and military posture in the Middle East in general and the Persian Gulf in particular aimed at securing its interests in the region. One of the U.S.'s main concerns is to prevent hostile forces from seizing power in the region which would threaten the flow of oil to the West and hold back vital economic agreements.

B. Promoting Democracy and Reform

The most outspoken dynamic behind U.S.'s interest in the Middle East is to promote democracy and reform in the region in order to contain Islamic fundamentalism. Many of President Bush's advisers seem to believe in the rhetoric that considers autocratic rule and the lack of freedom as direct reasons behind militant Islamism and the

¹⁵ Bergsten, C. Fred. "A Renaissance for U.S. Trade Policy?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 6, November / December 2002, p. 86.

¹⁶ Working closely with the European Union, the U.S. administration forged an agreement at Doha in November 2001 to launch a comprehensive new round in the WTO that could wind up tackling virtually all relevant trade issues, as well as completing the accession of China and Taiwan to the WTO. *Ibid*, p. 90.

rise of terrorism. They believe that by promoting democracy, many frustrated groups living under dictatorial regimes would become less prone to adopt violence and extremism. Some also consider that once given their political rights, already existing radicals tend to moderate their policies¹⁷. Hence, democratization and reform in the Middle East have become key aspects of American war on terrorism. Moreover, helping people in the Middle East to gain freedom will serve in appeasing anti-American sentiments, especially that part of such resentment was mainly caused by American support to oppressive Arab regimes. Barry Rubin, Director of the Global Research in International Affairs Center, assumed that “only when the systems that manufacture and encourage anti-Americanism fail will popular opinion also change”¹⁸. The U.S. needs therefore to stop backing autocratic rulers and offer more help to civil societies which constitute the real engine for internal change.

Finally, the United States needs to bridge the gap with Europe which has been earlier caused by the American unilateral attitude and widened then with the war in Iraq. Since the conflict between the two players revolved mostly around policies in the Middle East, only reaching a common perspective about this issue could bring the transatlantic partners together again. Both the United States and Europe have realized that by extending the split between them, they will tend to loose more than win. With difficulties emerging from the war on Iraq along with rising hostility to the West, U.S. policy makers realized that new threats require multilateral response. In fact, the U.S. still needs its

¹⁷ Rouleau, Eric. “French Foreign Policy and Reform in the Arab World”, Beirut, Bristol Hotel, May23, 2005.

¹⁸ Rubin, Barry. “The Real Roots of Arab Anti-Americanism”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 6, November / December 2002, p. 85.

European allies not primarily for their military contribution, but also for political support, cooperation in international organizations, peacekeepers and police, money, diplomatic help with others, and general good will¹⁹. Finding the middle ground concerning their policies in the Middle East would permit the U.S. regain some legitimacy while giving Europe the chance to have a say over American policies. Both the U.S. and Europe have interests in the Middle East that couldn't be achieved through competition especially in light of prevailing tensions in the region.

In an effort to combine all its regional aspirations, the U.S. prepared a draft proposal of the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) and submitted it to the G-8 countries for discussion. The chief purpose of the Initiative was to promote democracy and reform in the region. The American plan aimed at relocating its role in the Middle East and regaining structural legitimacy through the revival of its partnership with Europe. According to Robert Kagan, a Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the U.S.'s conduct today is extremely important since it will be judged by the care and commitment it takes to secure a democratic peace in Iraq and elsewhere, or whether it merely defends its own interests²⁰. Promoting democracy and reform in the Middle East could be of benefit to both the U.S. and Arab societies. However, it is highly doubtful that Arab regimes would profit from such a plan given their autocratic rule mostly based on oppression and curbing freedom. The dilemma that the U.S. policy makers are likely to face is in choosing their regional partners. During the Cold War, this task was much easier with the existence of influential civil society groups

¹⁹ Gordon, Philip. "Bridging the Atlantic Divide", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No.1, January / February 2003, p. 81.

²⁰ Kagan Robert, *opcit*, p. 85.

which in collaboration with the U.S. played a very important role in democratizing East European countries. Yet, American policy makers could still use the same mechanisms that served their country in converging with those societies. The most important tool that they seem to have evoked is public diplomacy. The GMEI is in itself part of such a policy that relies on different types of exchange in order to guarantee a rapprochement between the U.S. and civil societies.

Democratizing the countries of the Middle East could pave the way for Islamist movements to seize power in many countries of the region, which might hinder the future of any Western project. View their massive antagonism towards American policies, such groups, once in power, are unlikely to cooperate with the U.S. Likewise, supporting Arab rulers could also backfire on the U.S. due to popular bitterness towards the governments of the region. So far it is not very clear how U.S. policy makers are planning to maintain the balance, yet, democracy and reform are clearly irrevocable titles for the Middle East in the future Western agenda.

The GMEI is a plan that aims at countering threats and capturing opportunities in the region. Yet, the results of the initiative and of U.S. foreign policy in general are highly controversial. In defining the new American order, G. John Ikenberry, Professor of Geopolitics and Global Justice at Georgetown University, criticized the U.S. for its reluctance to pay the costs of rebuilding societies that it invades and its inability to couple its own economic gain with the economic advancement of other countries. He further recalled the U.S. failure in securing the support of countries such as Angola, Chile, Guinea, Mexico, and Pakistan in the Security Council before the war in Iraq, which has

proved Washington's inability to use trade and aid as political leverage²¹. Nevertheless, many other analysts including some Arabs tend to have a very optimistic vision about the future American role in the Middle East. Fouad Ajami, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the School for Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, believes that the new American role in the Middle East is "the spearheading of a reformist project that seeks to modernize and transform the Arab landscape". Ajami shows great understanding towards those who do not trust American intentions especially in light of in light of U.S.'s unilateralism; however, he believes that the region can use such unilateralism as a justification for going along with American goals²².

The attacks of September 11 have led to an obvious shift in U.S. foreign policy. Although Washington seems more decided than ever to focus on the Middle Eastern issues, it realized that military power is not enough to contain terrorism. Therefore U.S. policy makers decided to fight for preserving American values both at home and abroad. By doing so it could guarantee the reinvigoration of its influence in the region by promoting its own principles in the Middle East.

²¹ Ikenberry, G. John. "America's Imperial Ambition", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 5, September / October 2002, pp. 151-152.

²² Ajami, Fouad. "Iraq and the Arabs' Future", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1, January / February 2003, pp. 7-8.

II The Greater Middle East Initiative

A. The U.S. Draft Proposal

In April 2004, the United States presented to the G-8 countries a draft proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) to be discussed at their June summit in Sea Island, Georgia. The initiative was part of President Bush's "forward strategy of freedom" which called for the promotion of freedom and the expansion of political participation in the Muslim world. The new U.S. strategy aimed at combating the appeal of Islamist extremism which is believed to be a direct result of oppression. The Greater Middle East has been defined as the countries of the Arab world, plus Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and Israel. The United States saw that this region poses a threat to the international community through exporting terrorism. The GMEI relied mainly on the 2002 and 2003 United Nations Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) which have been prepared by a group of independent Arab intellectuals. The reports identified major problems in the Arab world which have contributed to the increase of extremism, terrorism, international crime, and illegal migration. It stated as well the lack of freedom, knowledge and women empowerment as being at the origin of the disastrous situation in the region which is threatening the national interests of all the G-8 members²³. The statistics that have appeared in the reports reflected a catastrophic status in the Greater Middle East:

- The combined GDP of the 22 Arab League countries is less than that of Spain alone.

²³ Ajami, Fouad. "Iraq and the Arabs' Future", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1, January / February 2004.

- Approximately 40 percent of adult Arabs - 65 million people – are illiterate, two third of whom are women.
- Over 50 million young people will enter the labor market by 2010, 100 million will enter by 2020 – a minimum of 6 million new jobs need to be created each year to absorb these new entrants. If current unemployment rates persist, regional unemployment will reach 25 million by 2010.
- One third of the region lives on less than two dollars a day. To improve standards of living, economic growth in the region must more than double from below 3 percent currently to at least 6 percent.
- Only 1.6 percent of the population has access to the internet, a figure lower than that of any other region of the world, including sub-Saharan Africa.
- Women occupy just 3.5 percent of parliamentary seats in Arab countries, compared with, for example, 8.4 percent in sub-Saharan Africa.
- 51 percent of older Arab youths expressed a desire to emigrate to other countries, according to the 2002 AHDR, with European countries the favorite destination.

The initiative saw in the shortcomings of the Arab world presented in the AHDR a direct threat to the stability of the region and to the common interests of the G-8 countries. Therefore it proposed a reform agenda based on three basic commitments:

I-Promoting Democracy and Good Governance

According to the AHDR, out of seven regions in the world, the Arab countries had the lowest freedom score in the late 1990s, with very little empowerment of women. Such results appeared to be very intimidating, especially in light of high regional discontent

with authoritarian rule. In the 2003 AHDR Arabs expressed their immense support to democracy as the best form of government. Hence, the initiative invited the G-8 countries to support the oppressed people in the Middle East through their engagement in a set of cooperative programs:

1. Free Elections Initiative

This initiative aims at providing help to the Greater Middle Eastern countries which are expected to hold elections between 2004 and 2006 such as Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen. To that end the G-8 countries could offer some pre-election technical assistance through exchanges or seminars, and monitoring elections.

2. Parliamentary Exchange and Training

The goal of this plan is the reinforcement of democracy through helping parliamentarians achieving their legislative jobs effectively.

3. Women's leadership Academies

Such academies aim at increasing women's political participation through special training programs on leadership and administrative operation.

4. Grassroots Legal Aid

In order to complement the efforts of the US, the EU, the UN, and the World Bank to promote legal and judicial reform, a special focus is highly needed at the

grassroots community level. Therefore, special centers could be funded to offer legal advice in affiliation with law schools in the region.

5. Independent Media Initiative

The AHDR reflected a major deficit in the Arab media where poor quality newspapers and state controlled news television programs poses great restrictions on providing the public with needed information. Providing the journalism professors and students along with the existing journalists with effective training programs could help in improving Arab media.

6. Transparency/ Anti-Corruption Efforts

According to the World Bank, the biggest regional obstacle for development in most Greater Middle Eastern countries is corruption. The G-8 countries could help the region to overcome this problem by promoting the adoption of the G-8 Transparency and Anti-Corruption Principles, supporting already existing initiatives that aim at fighting corruption, and launching one or more G-8 transparency pilots in the region.

7. Civil Society:

Since reform relies heavily on the effectiveness of civil society organizations, the G-8 countries should help in the development and the empowerment of NGOs in the region through offering funds and technical assistance.

II- Building a Knowledge Society

The initiative mentioned the region's growing knowledge gap and continuing brain drain as major obstacles to development. Accordingly, it proposed three initiatives through which the G-8 countries could help in building a better knowledge society.

1. Basic Education Initiative

The G-8 literacy initiative aims at complementing the UN program to enhance literacy among people of different ages in the Greatest Middle East, with a special Literacy Corps that focuses on girls and women. The G-8 countries could also fund a special program to translate books on philosophy, literature, sociology and natural sciences to Arabic. Moreover, they could support the expansion of a Discovery Schools Initiatives in the region, and which aims at introducing new technology and teaching methods. Finally, the Basic Education Initiative called for the G-8 countries to host a Middle East Education Reform Summit which had been sponsored by the US Middle East Partnership Initiative, and which aims at solving educational problems in the region through paving the ground for cooperation between specialists in the US and the EU and others in the region.

2. Digital Knowledge Initiative

In an attempt to bridge the gap between the Greater Middle East and the rest of the world, this initiative focuses on expanding computer access in schools throughout the region. For higher effectiveness, this could also be coupled with a special corps to train local teachers.

3. Business Education Initiative

It aims at the enhancement of business education in the Greater Middle East through establishing partnership programs between business schools in the G-8 countries and different educational institutions in the region.

III- Expanding Economic Opportunities

The GMEI proposed an economic transformation in the region similar to the one undertaken by Eastern European countries. Such a transformation would require the enhancement of privatizing small and medium enterprises as an important element for economic growth, job creation and democracy. To this end, the G-8 could follow several steps:

1. Finance for Growth Initiative

In order to increase the efficiency of the financial sector, the G-8 countries could engage in different actions:

- **Promoting microfinance** in order to fill the gap through loans that could contribute in helping entrepreneurs out of poverty.
- **GME Finance Corporation** which aims at greater regional business integration.
- **GME Development Bank (GMEDBank)** modeled on the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) that would help magnify development and reform in the region.

- **Partnership for Financing Excellence** aimed at the expansion and liberalization of financial services in the GME.

2. Trade Initiative

This initiative proposed three different means to promote intra-regional trade in the GME:

- **WTO Accession/Implementation and Trade Facilitation** through the establishment of a G-8-sponsored regional program aiming at offering technical assistance that would facilitate accession and encourage commitment of the countries in the region to the WTO.
- **Trade Hubs** that would mobilize and improve intra-regional trade.
- **Business Incubator Zones (BIZ)** which are specially-designed to encourage regional cooperation.

3. GME Economic Opportunities Forum

This forum offers a common ground for top officials from the G-8 and the GME to discuss regional economic reform issues, including trade and finance.

B. The European Vision and Transatlantic Relations

The US engagement in unilateral conduct after September 11, 2001 and President Bush's refusal to ratify several international treaties resulted in the deterioration of American-European relations. The invasion of Iraq later on, against the will of many European countries, increased the tension between the two continents leading to a split

within Europe. The consequent wave of anti-Americanism in Europe expanded the transatlantic gap and made it more visible. In the U.S., most people were convinced at the beginning that Saddam posed a serious threat and that war was the right way to deal with it²⁴. However, in the aftermath of the war in Iraq, the American people started to seem reluctant to encounter the diplomatic, financial and psychological costs of Bush's unilateral adventure²⁵. Therefore with the Europeans demonstrating against the war and the Americans showing unwillingness to support military action, the American administration realized that a unilateral approach is going to be very limited and that only strategic cooperation with Europe would allow the containment of terrorism. Accordingly, respect to Europe as a transatlantic partner is highly needed in order to restore US legitimacy. The Iraq war affected Europe's perception of both, its relations with the U.S. and its policies towards the Middle East. It urged the EU to reconsider its priorities and renew its agenda by establishing new competent strategies. With new challenges coming out, reshuffling Europe's list of goals became a necessity. The first vital issue was to protect the EU as one powerful and integrated entity ready to face international challenges and competition. In order to achieve this aim, Europe has to consolidate the unity of all its countries and set a common agenda for the future. Second, the EU was interested in healing the wounds that affected its transatlantic relations with the U.S. before and during the Iraq war. And finally, it needed to revive its prominence in the Middle East which will represent a vital sphere of influence in the future.

²⁴ Kagan Robert, *opcit*, p. 65.

²⁵ Hunter, Robert E. "A Forward-Looking Partnership: NATO and the Future of Alliances", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, September / October 2004, p. 14.

The division over the war between major countries in the EU posed a real threat to Europe's political integration. Therefore, in December 2003, in an effort to reunify its perception of international and European security, the EU's head of state and government adopted the European Security Strategy which aimed at dealing with the different emerging threats, such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and regional conflicts²⁶.

In reality, the U.S. and the EU are facing the same fears and challenges, but their perceptions and approaches are quite different. However, such differences could be balanced through the creation of a strategic partnership that would grant the US more legitimacy and Europe more control. The GMEI came as the first step towards a new alliance between the U.S. and the E.U. "Recognizing that external pressure for internal political change is always a difficult proposition, the more so in this case given America's negative image in the Muslim world, the Bush administration has sought the support of European and other Western countries for its project of region-wide democracy promotion"²⁷. In fact, Europe's approach to the Middle East has always differed from that of the American which gave it a much better reputation in the region. Europe has always shown more flexibility while dealing with the Arabs, and this was highlighted in its opposition to the war in Iraq. The disagreements before and during the war have seriously strained American-European relations. Still, the GMEI today is regarded as a much more cooperative approach than all what have the Europeans

²⁶ Perthes, Volker. "European Perceptions, America's 'greater Middle East'", 2004. Available at: <http://www.dailynews.com.lb>

²⁷ Wittes, Tamara Coffman. "The New U.S. Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative: An Evaluation", Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Middle East Memo # 2, May 10, 2004. Available: <http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/fellows/wittes20040510.htm>

previously seen from the Bush administration. In this sense, the initiative could probably serve in improving transatlantic relations, since it paves the way for more coordination and effective cooperation. Moreover, the initiative's lack of fresh ideas could constitute an opportunity for Europe to play a prominent role in shaping the debate about a comprehensive transatlantic strategy towards the region²⁸. Yet, the differences in principles and perceptions between the two players couldn't be denied and will undoubtedly open the way for high controversy.

Reform in the Middle East is a common objective for both Europe and the United States. As a matter of fact, Europe has long been engaged in many programs aiming at building democracy, supporting civil society and human rights in the region. In 1995 after twenty years of increasingly intensive bilateral trade and development cooperation between the European Union, its fifteen member states, twelve Mediterranean partners, the Conference of the EU and Mediterranean foreign ministers in Barcelona began a new partnership phase in this relationship, which included bilateral and multilateral or regional cooperation (hence called Barcelona Process or, in general, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership)²⁹. This initiative has been important in maintaining dialogue between Europe and the Mediterranean countries. It dealt with economic, political and security issues and focused on filling the gap in term of development and growth between the two sides. The establishment of such partnership recognizes the need for joint efforts in order to deal with common interests such as trade, investment, protection of the environment and

²⁸ Wittes, Tamara Coffman. "The New U.S. Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative: An Evaluation", Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Middle East Memo # 2, May 10, 2004. Available: <http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/fellows/wittes20040510.htm>

²⁹ Marchetti, Andreas (Ed.), *The CSCE as a Model to Transform Western Relations with the Greater Middle East*, Center for European Integration Studies, Bonn, 2004, p. 33.

energy supply, to maintaining internal regional peace and stability. Nevertheless, September 11 and the Iraq war urged Europe to strengthen Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in order to reassure the countries of the region. Therefore in April 2002 the Valencia Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference was held to adjust national security policies into the new international situation³⁰. Moreover joint position on Iraq has become evident after the tenth Mediterranean Forum in October 2003 held (by foreign ministers and top officials of Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey) in Antalya, which confirmed a common Euro-Mediterranean vision. Once again the Sixth Meeting of Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Naples in 2003 came to emphasize the implementation of the Barcelona Process³¹.

Promoting stability, preventing the spread of Middle Eastern conflicts to Europe, ensuring the flow of oil and gas at reasonable prices, curbing migration from the Greater Middle East to Europe, containing terrorism and stopping the proliferation of WMD are common strategic interests shared by most European countries. Many of these goals are also on top of the American agenda and constitute the cornerstone of any possible transatlantic alliance in the region. The United States has equally worked on economic, political and educational programs that aimed at enhancing reform in the Middle East. At the Heritage Foundation on December 12, 2002, U.S. secretary of State Collin Powell announced the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) which included a set of programs and a framework for future cooperation aiming at "bridging the gaps between

³⁰ Ibid, p. 38.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 39-40.

the United States and the Middle East”³². It was founded to support economic, political and educational reform efforts in the region and to create better opportunities especially for women and youth. MEPI rested on four pillars:

1. The economic pillar aimed at supporting trade, investment and small businesses
2. The political pillar focused on strengthening democratic practices and civil society, promoting the rule of law and effective government institutions and encouraging the role of free and independent media in society.
3. The education pillar intended at expanding access to basic and post secondary education for all people, especially women.
4. The women’s empowerment pillar strives to reduce cultural, legal, regulatory, economic and political barriers to women’s full participation in society³³.

However, MEPI’s efforts have been very modest with limited achievements on all levels³⁴. The Arab-Israeli conflict, growing anti-Americanism, economic stagnation and developmental problems in the region required a much greater effort in order to achieve remarkable changes. The United States alone couldn’t provide all the costs of such development, therefore it sought to combine MEPI’s efforts with those of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership by proposing the GMEI on the G-8 countries. Coordination and cooperation between the United States and Europe on the reform program in the Arab world, or the Muslim world, is imperative to the advancement of any developmental agenda. In reality, both players have specific comparative advantages which enable them,

³² Colin L. Powell, “The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative: Building Hope for the Years Ahead”, The Heritage Foundation, Heritage Lecture # 772, December 17, 2002.

³³ <http://mepi.state.gov>

³⁴ Hudson, Michael. “Reform in the Arab World”, Beirut, Bristol Hotel, May 16, 2005.

with their respective instruments, to perform tasks better than others³⁵. While Washington has a better image in Israel, Europe enjoys more credibility among the Arabs. Europe is more experienced in integrating and cooperating with Middle Eastern societies, and tends to rely on softer approaches. On the other hand, the United States' role as a security-police actor in the region has made it more skilled in hard politics. Thus, it is important that transatlantic efforts should be based on complementarity rather than competition³⁶.

A cooperative plan, like the GMEI where each side could perform according to its experience and skills, seems much more practical. Accordingly, the initiative came as a step to combine the efforts and share the costs of reform in the region. Despite the transatlantic engagement on many issues, a wide gap between the two visions remains. American and European values and interests in the world remain similar, but their tactics differ. The US strategies tend to be more security-based and American policy makers believe that consultations with the objects of their policies are nothing but a waste of time. However, the European policies are more institutional and cooperative. Unlike the United States, they don't believe that military policies are enough to bring security, and they stress more on political, economic and cultural approaches. While the U.S. threatens with the use of punitive measures such as sanctions and military intervention, European policy makers work on dialogue and material support in order to achieve its goals³⁷. In general, Europe is less willing to use force and more keen to preserve bilateral than multilateral frameworks with its neighbors. However, the United States showed some willingness to establish some kind of rapprochement with the European approaches. A

³⁵ Perthes, Volker. "America's Greater Middle East and Europe: Key Issues for Dialogue", Washington, DC, Middle East Policy Council, 2002. Available at: <http://www.mepec.org>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid

European ambassador who has been involved in discussing the plan in Washington mentioned that the Bush administration, and for the first time in quite a while, has been willing to discuss a plan with its European allies without imposing it on them³⁸. The establishment of a parallel between the two views was highly projected in the European remodeling of the American draft that was presented for discussion to the G-8 countries in June 2004.

1. The New Draft

It is clear from the new draft of the initiative that considerable effort was made to respond to both, European and Arab criticism.

Europeans as well as Arabs criticized the American initiative for not mentioning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a key issue for solving regional problems. They believe that it has formed a primary obstacle to progress in the Middle East especially that it is widely perceived as a principal cause behind growing anti-Americanism. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, along with other European officials, noted that the Arab-Israeli conflict is a major source of radicalization that couldn't be ignored while dealing with the Middle East³⁹. They therefore stressed on the importance of mobilizing the Middle East peace process in parallel with efforts of promoting reform in the region. The Europeans were also concerned that the initiative shouldn't be perceived by the Arabs as an outside imposition, but rather as a step towards cooperation. Hence, the term

³⁸ Kessler, Glenn, and Wright, Robin. "Arabs and Europeans Question 'Greater Middle East Plan'", Washington Post Staff Writers, Page A18, February 22, 2004. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

³⁹ Wittes, Tamara Coffman. "The New U.S. Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative: An Evaluation", Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Middle East Memo # 2, May 10, 2004. Available: <http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/fellows/wittes20040510.htm>

“partnership” was reinforced in the new draft which sets up the “Forum for the Future” as a mechanism for dialogue on reform between the West and the Middle East⁴⁰. The Forum was based on three reform tracks: “Deepening Democracy and Broadening Participation in Political and Public Life”, “Building a Knowledge Society to Combat Illiteracy and Advance Educational and Technological Systems”, and “Accelerating Economic Development, Creating Jobs, Empowering the Private Sector, and Expanding Economic Opportunities”⁴¹.

European governments tend to believe that pressuring for reform and focusing attention to democracy deficits might provoke Arab resistance, while promoting structural changes based on cooperation in education, trade, and other areas is more effective. They therefore believe that no political changes can take place before achieving some progress in issues like poverty and unemployment. In this sense, they preferred to talk about “modernization” before pressuring for democratization⁴². This also was taken into consideration in the new draft through the Greater Middle East Literacy Corps and the G-8 Microfinance Pilot Project. The former aims at trying to eliminate major barriers to political participation, and the latter hopes to build “the middle-class foundation” on which democracies rely, through funding small businesses⁴³. The new proposal also included several programs inspired by Middle Eastern non-governmental calls for reform such as the Sana’a Declaration, the Alexandria Document, and the Arab Business Council. These elements include civic education programs, parliamentary exchanges,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Marchetti Andreas, *opcit*, pp. 59-60.

⁴² Wittes Tamara, *opcit*.

⁴³ Ibid.

women's leadership workshops, legal aid, media training, anti-corruption efforts, and labor union support⁴⁴.

The new draft also proposed two frames for democracy in the region: A "Greater Middle East Democracy Assistance Group" that aims at coordinating with both American and European foundations in order to effectively promote various democratic programs. This body is very important in activating and assisting non-governmental agendas that aim at building democracy in their own countries. It also serves in inducing new ideas on democracy, assisting new democratic movements, and following up on their performance. It is extremely important in institutionalizing democracy in the region. The other element is a "Greater Middle East Foundation for Democracy" similar to the foundations of the West and dealing with issues concerning democracy in the Middle East.

The new proposal became known as the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI) and modified many aspects of the GMEI.

First, changing the title to BMENAI showed deeper consideration to the structure and differences in the region.

Second, the new initiative acknowledged the importance of the Arab-Israeli conflict by stating that "G-8 support for reform in the region will go hand in hand with its support for a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict".

Third, in the new draft it was made clear that any change should come from within and not be imposed from outside through two different statements: "support for democratic, social and economic reform emanating from the region" and "successful reform depends

⁴⁴ Ibid.

on the countries in the region, and change should not and cannot be imposed from outside”.

Fourth, the new draft noted that it is up to the governments of the region to decide on and conduct the change. It stated that “each society will reach its own conclusions about the pace and scope of change”.

Fifth, unlike the GMEI the new draft took into account the diverse nature of the region by stating that “each country is unique and their diversity should be respected”.

Sixth, whereas the GMEI mentioned the right to establish direct relations with the various societies bypassing by that the regional governments, the BMENAI affirmed that relations with civil societies will be linked to relations with their existing authorities.

Seventh, the GMEI’s call for the creation of a non-governmental organization to monitor reform progress was replaced in the new draft with a “Forum for the Future” offering the ground for government-to-government dialogues between business and civil society leaders in the region.

Eighth, the two documents “Partnership” and “Plan of Support” were presented in the new initiative as continuation of earlier Arab efforts for reform. Such changes replace the GMEI’s calls for social transformation with calls for restoration, which could be easier to achieve and more accepted in the region.

Ninth, instead of relying simply on assistance and training to combat underdevelopment like in the GMEI, the new draft proposed “creating jobs and expanding economic opportunities”.

Tenth, whereas the GMEI was very vague about the tools to be used in implementing the different parts of the proposal, the BMENAI presented “clearer methodology on follow up”⁴⁵.

Finally, the new draft omitted “the disturbing references to the Arab Human Development Reports” which had been disgracefully perceived.

The new GMEI represents a combination of European and American means aiming at the same ends; reform and democracy in the Middle East. This joint venture shows that both partners have the will and the desire to overcome the rift that has portrayed their relations since September 11, 2001. Yet, differences in pursuing certain policies are still easy to detect. The United States has no patience to wait for changes to occur from within and tends to resort to radical policies such as threats, sanctions and sometimes direct interventions to change regimes. The war in Iraq is in itself a message of threat to all regional governments that do not wish to comply with American interests.

In fact, the term “democratization” when targeted towards a region mostly ruled by authoritarian governments, hints at regime change. In this sense, the Europeans were keener to talk about “modernization” instead. Europe is more concerned with preserving stability in the Middle East due to its geographical proximity and to its deeper understanding of the social and political structures in the region. Unlike the United States, Europe has always preferred building ties with institutions and not with rulers, a fact that gave it a better image and a closer stand among the people in the Middle East. This difference was mirrored in the Middle East where the American policy makers pressure the governments in order to achieve changes while the Europeans help and rely

⁴⁵ Marchetti Andreas, *opcit*, p. 59.

more on institutions towards the same end. According to Eric Rouleau⁴⁶, the European foreign policy will never embrace the approach of using sticks in order to impose democracy on the countries of the Middle East; it will rather continue in offering carrots to encourage reform and democratization from within. Such divergence in pursuing foreign policy stems from difference in principles adopted not only by the European governments but also by the people. Therefore, any future pro-American European government might be able to change in style but not in basics of foreign policy. The Europeans, in Rouleau's words, will go to war only when their security is at stake and not in order to counter terrorism. After his reelection, President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made great efforts towards reconciliation with Europe because they realized that European resentment to the United States has become detrimental especially in Iraq. After his tour in Europe President Bush was able to impress the Europeans, yet his mission in getting more support there has failed due to the difference in objectives. However, the Europeans felt that anti-American rhetoric has become politically harmful and that a change in attitude was highly needed. Therefore, confrontation between Europe and the United States has been replaced by peaceful coexistence but not alliance⁴⁷.

2. Evaluation

The GMEI presented a lucid will with a hazy way. The aim of promoting reform and democracy was obvious, but the process was very vague. It presented all the deficits of the Greater Middle East without indicating the appropriate techniques to deal with them. In fact, the GMEI and increased American call for democratization resulted in

⁴⁶ Rouleau Eric, *opcit.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

cosmetic reforms in some Arab countries that are hollow at the core. For instance extending the right to vote to Kuwaiti women sounds striking, but in reality is worthless when the parliament is controlled by the ruling family. Such political modifications are fruitless if not coupled with serious cultural and social changes. So long as women do not acquire their rights for equality and education, their votes will always echo those of their male custodians. Women's Leadership Academies proposed in the GMEI doesn't take this issue into consideration; it rather deals with it as if women in the Arab world were free and willing to participate in political life but simply are unqualified. Moreover, it ignored the very important fact that female empowerment, due to its association with secularism and Western values, has been resisted by women as well as by men⁴⁸. Therefore fostering women's awareness and education are requirements without which political participation is futile. Both domestic will and effective foreign assistance are needed in order for such changes to occur. The GMEI failed to offer the right strategies for internal mobilization and the clear techniques for offering assistance.

Besides all Arab countries, the Greater Middle East covers Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Israel. Such grouping lacks any clear geographical, cultural or economic justification. While Afghanistan is an ex-Soviet state, Turkey has always been closer to Western Europe, and along with Iran, Pakistan and Israel, they speak different non-Arabic languages. Although Islam is the only common factor determining identity throughout the area, attitude towards it is very diverse. Therefore, the only common denominator is that they all lie in the zone where hostility to the U.S. is strongest, and in

⁴⁸ Coleman, Isobel. "The Payoff From Women's Rights", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 3, May / June 2004, p. 88.

which Islamic radicalism is growing⁴⁹. Such a grouping could not be accepted by the different peoples in the region, and has been only perceived as an attempt to marginalize the Arab-Israeli conflict and lessen its significance in such a wide area⁵⁰.

Although the GMEI relied heavily on reports (AHDR) that were prepared by Arab intellectuals, its first and main drawback was that it did not consult with the countries of the region. The presence of regional representatives in international meetings, and their participation in working through the details of the Initiative could have led to a more consistent draft. Therefore, the GMEI appeared to be like a marriage proposal by a stranger. The United States doesn't have close dialogue with neither the governments nor the civil society groups in the region which makes a blind acceptance of the Initiative very unlikely. With the possibility of having radical Islamists striking at any moment, Washington needs to provide the nations involved with some safety before it asks them to open up their systems⁵¹. Moreover, the initiative failed to puzzle out a major regional problem: underdevelopment. Instead of creating job opportunities in a region where unemployment is increasing dramatically, it simply focused on offering training and assistance without showing a will of injecting serious money⁵².

Another important drawback of the Initiative is that it did not offer any security guarantees while most countries in the region are suffering from instability. Regional security challenges have lately become very critical with the growing wave of radicalism,

⁴⁹ Achcar, Gilbert, "Fantasy of a Region that Doesn't Exist: Greater Middle East : The US Plan", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, translated by English language editorial director: Wendy Kristianasen, 2004.

⁵⁰ Al-Ahram, Cairo, October 20, 2004.

⁵¹ Baran, Zeyno. "Getting the Greater Middle East Initiative Right", In *The National Interest*, March 3, 2004. Available at: <http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/articles/Vol3Issue9/Vol3Issue9BaranPFV.html>

⁵² Ibid.

and violence is expected to rise if change is to occur. Here again, by not mentioning the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Initiative was born dead since it intensified Arab distrust in American intentions to conduct a real transformation in the region. The GMEI was ambiguous in many ways, so despite the heavy publicity surrounding it, it was unclear whether the Initiative will include new U.S. foreign aid. Published accounts indicated only modest spending on training programs for journalists, women and election monitors⁵³. The content of the Initiative was recycled from programs already incorporated in the MEPI. Like MEPI, the GMEI document tackled three main areas: promoting democracy and good governance, building a knowledge society, and expanding economic opportunities. MEPI's mediocre achievements and the lack of creativity and innovation in the new proposal presented the Initiative with little allure. Although it suggested new political reforms, under the headings of Democracy and Knowledge Society, the paper proposed initiatives of very limited scope, such as G-8 technical assistance to Arab countries that hold elections by 2006. This section included only pre-election assistance with registering voters and training staff, but it did not offer to monitor the elections⁵⁴, which represents a very important step towards real reform especially in light of widespread corruption in the region.

Besides, the initiative called for the creation of institutions that already exist in the region. For instance it proposed the establishment of a Greater Middle East Development Bank on the model of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In fact,

⁵³ Collier, Robert. "Arab Summit Blow-Up Appears Bad for Bush: U.S. Plan for Reform Resented as Meddling", San Francisco Chronicle, March 30, 2004. Available at: <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/headlines04/0330-04.htm>

⁵⁴ Achcar Gilbert, opcit.

Arab countries already have at least one such institution – the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development (Afsed). It also pressed for the creation of free zones while there are already several in Arab countries⁵⁵. Ignoring such existing institutions reflects an American will to replace them by Western controlled ones, at least in the eyes of the Arabs. The initiative also failed to show any shared basis for a genuine partnership with the West. It appeared to be as imposing reform from outside and not cooperating with the countries involved to achieve progress. By doing so, it presented an attempt for social transformation and not social restoration which will be an extremely complex undertaking in a region of enrooted Islamic traditions and religious convictions⁵⁶.

Finally, the initiative presented a plan to be applied on all the countries in the region and failed to respect peculiarities of each nation, and especially the variations in cultural and social structures.

Nevertheless, the GMEI presented few innovations that are worth mentioning. First, it focused on the empowerment of Arab citizens through offering funds to democracy, human rights, media and other NGOs instead of other government-controlled organizations that have been channeling foreign aids ineffectively⁵⁷. Second, it stressed on encouraging regional governments to lift all kinds of restrictions on public freedoms. Finally, it proposed to fund a new NGO that aims at monitoring progress in the region by

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. "The wrong Way to Sell Democracy to the Arab World", New York Times, March 8, 2004. Available at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/08/opinion/08BREZ.html?hp=&pagewanted=print&posit>

⁵⁷ Gambill, Gary C. "Democratization, the Peace Process, and Islamist Extremism", the Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 6-7, June / July 2004. Available at:
http://www.meib.org/articles/0407_mel.htm

drafting annual assessments of efforts achieved in the region (which has been replaced by the Forum for the Future in the new draft)⁵⁸.

On June 10, 2005, the Daily Star newspaper published the executive summary of a recent report sponsored by the Washington-based Council on Foreign Relations titled "In Support of Arab Democracy: Why and How." The report stressed on the U.S.-Middle East policy's focus on democracy and freedom for the next generation. The Council affirmed that conditions in the Arab world are a serious national security concern, and that promoting democracy there serves U.S. interests. The report was a reprocess of the GMEI but with a better vision of the region and some vital modifications. It acknowledged that democracy cannot be imposed from the outside, and that "America's goal in the Middle East should be to encourage democratic evolution, not revolution". It was clear in the new report that the United States has become much more aware of the risks of democratization in the region, and it has tackled many setbacks of the GMEI. American policy makers seem to have realized that the simple detail of holding free elections is not enough to enroot democratic changes and that there is much more to be done in order to reach sustainable democracies in the region. The report recommended a country-by-country strategy to promote social, economic, and political change, unlike the GMEI which did not take regional peculiarities into consideration. It also stated that Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would press the peace process forward, which would help ameliorate Arab mistrust of U.S. intentions. However, it still refused to correlate between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and democratic reform in the region. The Council answered many political analysts' question about which should precede democracy or development by noting that they should go hand in hand. It stressed on the

⁵⁸ Ibid.

importance of public diplomacy in order to change the Arab negative perception of US policies, and admitted the mistakes that have been done by Al-Hurra TV channel which gave the impression that it aimed simply at conveying American propaganda. Therefore it suggested that Al-Hurra should focus on broadcasting American and other democratic countries' news and political practices, as a model to the Arab public.

Another important issue dealt with the prevailing visa policy of the United States which has been contradicting the GMEI's intentions of cultural exchange with the Arab world. At this end, it proposed facilitating the process for Arab students to study in the United States. Incentive-based policies were given considerable attention with one important example of the Millennium Account Challenge (MCA), which, the council suggested, should distribute funds to Arab countries depending on their ability to use them for reform. The expansion of trade relations, military ties, and diplomatic support has also been proposed to encourage democratic reform. At the end, the Council expected many challenges and undesirable events to occur during the coming process of change, trying at the same time to give it a positive image by comparing it to the pre-independence era in the United States⁵⁹.

Many view the GMEI as a failed proposal that has faded away due to the Arab outrageous reaction when it was first initiated. The mere fact that the term "Greater Middle East Initiative" hasn't been used since then doesn't imply that the United States has abandoned its initiative. To the contrary, Washington's foreign policy towards the Middle East has been very consistent with the spirit of the GMEI but with a different approach. Moreover, all the destabilizing changes that have occurred in many Arab

⁵⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, "Democracy Deficit: America's foreign policy woes", The Daily Star, Beirut, June 10, 2005.

countries such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian territories resulted from the war in Iraq which was followed by the initiation of the GMEI. Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, along with US pressures on Syria and opposition pressures in Syria and Egypt, municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, and elections in Iraq couldn't be viewed separately from the new American foreign policy. Al-Hurra TV channel and radio Sawa are also American try outs of a new vision for the region. Although events that have occurred recently are the product of internal attempts for reform (excluding Iraq) with very poor American follow up, the release of the GMEI was the principal instigator for such changes.

III Reactions and Obstacles to the GMEI

A. Arab Reactions

The publication of the initiative in *Al-Hayat* Newspaper disturbed Arab officials. The League of Arab States was supposed to hold its Annual meeting late May, in Tunis, in which Arab leaders had to decide their stand towards this new American plan. However, the dissonance between the American policies in the region, especially in Iraq, and Bush's new rhetoric caused high skepticism among many Arab leaders. Syria, with some support from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, rejected the initiative and saw in it an arrogant interference in internal issues. Jordan, Qatar and Morocco gave more attention to the proposal, and suggested that the Arabs should take a pro-reform stance and work on their own plan in order to prevent Washington from imposing its own agenda⁶⁰. Such discrepancy in opinions led to the postponement of the Arab summit and provoked series of pre-emptive Arab initiatives. The impact of the initiative was highly projected through a list of non-governmental reform conferences in the Middle East, an unprecedented number of calls for reform, and an explicit focus on democracy and freedom. One notable example was the conference held by reformists at the Alexandria Library in Egypt demanding "the cancellation of emergency laws, the lifting of restrictions on speech and association, and the transfer of authority from Arab states' traditionally dominant executive branch to elected legislatures and an independent judiciary"⁶¹. This conference

⁶⁰ Wittes, Tamara Coffman. "The New U.S. Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative: An Evaluation", Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Middle East Memo # 2, May 10, 2004. Available: <http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/fellows/wittes20040510.htm>

⁶¹ Ibid.

received the official blessing of President Mubarak reflecting a new climate in the region where discussions on reform could no longer be avoided. However, many Arab intellectuals attacked the initiative for lacking in transparency, trying to impose reform from outside and neglecting the importance of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was mainly due to the events taking place in Iraq which symbolized the stick of punishment and overshadowed the carrot of partnership and reform. Therefore the critics of the initiative perceived it as a tool for American foreign policy and not that for internal reform. Some went further describing the initiative as being simply “an election-year distraction from the troubles in Iraq”⁶². In addition to the fact that “the United States had a very mediocre track record of following through on grandiose initiatives”⁶³ the Bush administration’s retreat from following up the President’s earlier Middle East Peace Plan instigated Arab skepticism towards American commitment to its agenda in the region.

Although the initiative was not released before February 2004, the echoes of Bush’s earlier speeches delivered in 2003 on different occasions reached some Arab intellectuals. On November 23 2003, in the Washington Post outlook, Saadeddine Ibrahim, an Egyptian reformist reacted positively to the Bush’s agenda for the Middle East. According to him, it was “a pleasant surprise”. He also praised President Bush for admitting his past mistakes of supporting dictatorial regimes in the region, and hoped that he would be able to translate his theories into policy. He enthusiastically welcomed the idea of promoting democracy in the Middle East, yet questioning American seriousness in supporting Arab democrats. The article presented an optimistic view, reflecting the

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Khoury Rami, The Daily Star.

chance that the plan would have to win some solid ground in the region⁶⁴. Ibrahim, along with other Arab intellectuals such as Amin Hewadi, a leading Islamist writer and Salam Neemat, an Arab journalist, expressed some doubts in US and Arab regimes' intentions, yet believed that the initiative should not be rejected without study⁶⁵. Other Arab officials and intellectuals saw in the initiative an attempt by the Bush administration to cover its failure to advance with the peace plan between Israel and the Palestinians. Nader Fergani, an Egyptian social scientist and a prominent civil society activist stated that the Israeli occupation presented the main obstacle to human development in the Arab countries, and he made clear that the American administration is simply using the AHDR to justify its plan, and not to solve the real problems. In *Al-Hayat* newspaper he declared that "the administration's initiative relied on the UN reports like a drunkard leaning on a lamppost, to save himself from falling and not for enlightenment"⁶⁶. Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League, reiterated that "nothing will change in the region if the Palestinian question is not resolved fairly and justly"⁶⁷.

After the initiative was published, Egyptian president Husni Mubarak was the first to renounce it. In an interview with an Italian newspaper he pointed out the drawbacks of the Initiative. First, he warned that the initiative might lead to more violence and anarchy and he recalled the Algerian elections in 1991 that brought radical Islamists to power. Second, he expressed his concern that promoting democracy should be gradual and that

⁶⁴ Ibrahim, Saad Eddin, "News from Democracy Egypt: A Dissident Asks: Can Bush Turn Words Into Action?", *Washington Post Outlook*, November 23, 2003.

⁶⁵ Marchetti Andreas, *opcit*, p. 59.

⁶⁶ Kessler Glenn and Wright Robin, *opcit*.

⁶⁷ Gambill, Gary C. "Democratization, the Peace Process, and Islamist Extremism", *the Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 6-7, June / July 2004. Available at: http://www.meib.org/articles/0407_me1.htm

“freedom and impromptu democracy could lead to shock”⁶⁸. Finally, he rejected the imposition of foreign plans especially if they are not in harmony with the nature of the countries in the region, and emphasized on the need to push further for internal reform efforts. Moreover President Mubarak mentioned an important deficiency of the GMEI which lies in giving the same solution for all countries of the region. In reality, the political, social and cultural diversities among the Greater Middle East countries make the application of the initiative on the whole region impossible. A plan that suits Lebanon doesn’t necessarily apply on Saudi Arabia, and a strategy that works in Morocco will definitely not have the same effect in Pakistan. Another Arab official objection was expressed by Bahrain’s Prime Minister who asserted that “the imposition of any foreign view is not in the interest of the countries in the region”⁶⁹. This reflects the great suspicions the Arabs hold towards Western initiatives which is due to the prevailing belief that Western leaders are not very conscious about the nature of the regional societies. Iraq’s Vice President Ibrahim Al-Jaafari noted that the United States “does not understand Arab cultures and customs”⁷⁰. One of the main criticisms of the GMEI pertained to the illogical grouping of the countries with which it dealt. Such a grouping could not be justified under any geographical, cultural or economic reason since “it extends either too far or not far enough, according to objective criteria”⁷¹. The only common factor between these countries is the existence of anti-western Islamic fundamentalism, though in different shapes and proportions. Another important criterion is the conspiracy theory that dominates the Arab minds when dealing with any Western

⁶⁸ Marchetti Andreas, *opcit*, p. 56.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 57.

⁷⁰ The Daily Star, Beirut, September 11, 2004.

⁷¹ Achcar Gilbert, *opcit*.

proposal. This was clearly uttered in the Syrian Vice President's words claiming that "the GMEI is reminiscent of the situation after World War I, when major powers sought to carve up the region"⁷². There is a predominant assumption that the West in general and the United States in particular will always seek to exploit the region for their own benefit and in order to preserve Israel's regional superiority. The Arabs look at France, England and the United States through the lens of Sykes-Picot Agreement which they perceive as the ground upon which the state of Israel was founded. Washington has always been thought of as Israel's strongest ally without which it could have never dominated the region and occupied Arab lands. Hence, it is very hard for the Arabs to believe that any American initiative would aim at serving their interests, especially in light of Israeli violations in the Palestinian territories and American occupation of Iraq.

The miscalculations of the war in Iraq enhanced the doubts in the American ability to understand or control regional ethnic diversities and led to the creation of new radical movements trying to resist American occupation in all means. The Tunisian human rights activist Moncef Marzouki, in *Al-Hayat*, stresses "the total lack of credibility of the US policy to promote democracy in the Arab world", and went further to say: "indeed one may say that US policy as a whole greatly facilitates the growth of extremist Islamic forces, as we are seeing in Iraq and will see elsewhere"⁷³. The turmoil in Iraq accompanied with a huge wave of American financial investments there, confirmed the idea of US hypocrisy and its intentions to exploit the countries in the region. Gilbert Achkar, a prominent teacher at the University of Paris-VIII, described the GMEI as "the latest US ambition to strengthen its grip on Middle Eastern oil wealth and markets and to

⁷² Marchetti Andreas, *opcit*, p. 57.

⁷³ Achcar Gilbert, *opcit*.

extend its network of military bases and facilities, all in the name of democratization”⁷⁴. Fergany also mentioned the US desire to impose its economic model on the Middle East criticizing the GMEI for not dealing with the sovereignty of Iraq but rather with its own economic benefits. He believes the initiative is only interested in “handing out contracts to companies from countries that have taken part in the destruction of Iraq”⁷⁵. Further, the unsuccessful attempt to find WMD in Iraq discredited the Bush administration even in the eyes of those who had not opposed the war. It enhanced regional insecurity that the United States could use false pretexts in order to justify further invasions. It was clear to the Middle Eastern peoples and officials that the war on terrorism, Saddam’s sponsoring of Bin Laden and the existence of WMD in Iraq were nothing but masked excuses to attack the country. Hence, promoting democracy in the Greater Middle East appeared as an attempt to shadow new expected American intrusions. Such concern has been emphasized by President Assad who had publicly condemned the GMEI as the most recent in a series of masks used by Washington to disguise its claims on Iraq”⁷⁶. Yet, some other Arab countries like Jordan, Morocco and Qatar have been somehow less critical calling for discussions with the United States and the European countries rather than dismissing the initiative out of hand⁷⁷. Such asymmetry in reactions reflects the various regional stands towards the United States. A country like Syria, for example, with US troops on one border and Israel on the other is less likely to trust American initiatives than Qatar or Morocco. Even among pro-American regimes such as Egypt and Jordan, reactions have varied. Jordan has always shown more inclination towards American

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Al-Hayat, Beirut, February 19, 2004.

⁷⁶ Al-Ahram Weekly, Cairo, March 6, 2003.

⁷⁷ Marchetti Andreas, *opcit*, p. 57.

policies than Egypt which has always been more critical. This is mainly due to the greater pressure exercised by Islamic extremists in Egypt than in Jordan. Nevertheless, there has been a general Arab official determination that any US plan to promote reform should be accompanied by efforts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The uniformity around this issue echoes the public Arab mood and sentiments.

The GMEI had everything not to be accepted by Arab and Moslem people. First of all it has been initiated by an administration which has earlier defined the problem in the Middle East as a clash of civilizations where "Great American Democracy is under attack by Evil Islamic Fundamentalism"⁷⁸. Therefore, the mere fact that the plan was proposed by a very deeply resented US administration instigates regional skepticism. Hostility towards the Bush administration in Arab countries, and suspicion of everything emanating from it has even prompted regional US allies to distance themselves from the initiative. Professor Michael Hudson considered the rapprochement in this climate between any Arab government and the US as a kiss of death to the former. This led President Mubarak and the Saudi regime to defend themselves from any possible reactions by issuing a common statement that rejects the Initiative⁷⁹. An unidentified Arab diplomat in Washington commented to administration officials, that the main reason behind Arab rejection of the GMEI is due to the initiator. In his words, "it's not the message, it's the messenger"⁸⁰.

⁷⁸ Geyer, Georgie Anne. "Initiative Sidesteps Crucial Issue of Israel/Palestine".
<http://www.uexpress.com/georgiannegeyer/?uc>

⁷⁹ Achcar Gilbert, *opcit.*

⁸⁰ Weisman, Steven R., and Mac Farquhar, Neil. "U.S. Plan for Mideast Reform Draws Ire of Arab Leaders", *New York Times*, February 27, 2004. Available at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/27/politics/27DIPL.html?pagewanted=print&position>

Even within the Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, opposition leaders did everything to avoid any link with the United States⁸¹. Eighteen leading intellectuals among the participants of the Alexandria Library Conference emphasized the national nature of the demand for reform rejecting the use of this noble demand to serve Arab totalitarian regimes or enhance American control in the region⁸². Second, a hypercritical remark that was mentioned by all Arab and European critics of the initiative was that it didn't consult with the countries of the region which highlighted the "arrogant mentality of the current US administration in respect of the rest of the world, which causes it to behave as if it can decide the fate of states and peoples"⁸³. Third, the initiative ignored the Arab-Israeli conflict which ranks first in the list of priorities of all Arabs, hence giving the impression that the US was either trying to cover its failure in dealing with the conflict or deflecting attention from it. In an interview with *Al Sharq el Awsat* newspaper (19 march 2004) Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League, questioned the logic behind the GMEI which he found very ambiguous. He noted a clear aim at marginalizing major problems in the Middle East such as the Arab-Israeli conflict by diverting away peoples' minds from them. He also compared the Initiative to Shimon Perez's idea of the "New Middle East" which came up in the nineties, arguing that they both presented imperatives to forget about already existing institutions such as the Arab League. He stressed the importance of reform in all Arab countries, yet he didn't believe this was the real aim of the initiative. Finally, American foreign policy's focus on reform on one hand, while occupying Iraq and supporting Israel

⁸¹ L'Orient Le Jour, Beirut, May 24, 2005.

⁸² Marchetti Andreas, opcit, p. 58.

⁸³ Al-Hayat, Beirut, February 19, 2004.

on the other, reflects a double-standard approach that leaves the Arabs with a great sense of threat and little trust in any American plan. However, some Arab officials such as Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan and Amr Moussa confirmed that the settlement of regional conflicts should not be considered as prerequisites to regional reform. Moussa believes there should rather be a certain kind of balance and parallelism between reform and conflict resolution in the region⁸⁴.

In reality, the initiation of the American plan had indirectly led the Arab states to consider reform either by issuing some self-reform plans or by accepting non-governmental calls for it. It also resulted in the Tunis Declaration in which Arab leaders committed to promoting human rights, freedom of expression, judicial independence and widening the role of women in society⁸⁵. Had the Arab regimes not been pressured by the Initiative and feared an outside imposed reform, they wouldn't have taken such progressive steps. In his latest article in *Foreign Affairs*, Professor Fouad Ajami noted some advantages of the new American plan of reform and democratization. In a study on Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, he signaled the approach of the "autumn of autocrats" by announcing that "the entrenched systems of control in the Arab world are beginning to give away. The Arabs, according to him, with the help of the United States are riding a new wave of freedom⁸⁶. Saadeddine Ibrahim, also in a recent study on democratic changes in the Arab world, emphasized the importance of the role of external actors in promoting democracy in the Middle East. No matter the stand on the US military

⁸⁴ Marchetti Andreas, *opcit*, p. 59.

⁸⁵ The Daily Star, Beirut, September 11, 2004.

⁸⁶ Ajami, Fouad. "The Autumn of the Autocrats", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 3, May / June 2005.

intervention, it modified the dynamics within the region and paved the way for inevitable changes⁸⁷.

Now that the United States has detected the real Arab reactions towards the GMEI and its new policy in the region, it will have to encounter the different suspicions that prevail among the Arabs. Any effort to promote freedom and reform will be perceived as hypocritical in light of the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, if the Bush administration undertakes serious steps in dealing with the Palestinian peace process it will be able to validate its commitment to promote regional democracy. Khalil Shekaki, the Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, considers the Palestinian elections an opportunity for the American administration to link peace making to democracy building. By supporting elections, Washington could convince the Arabs that it has a "sincere desire to initiate regionwide reform and good governance⁸⁸.

B. Regional Obstacles

Underdevelopment, corruption, poor human rights conditions, and lack of freedom have hindered the advance of democracy and reform in the Greater Middle East for decades. Authoritarian practices by the region's governments have contributed to the social, political, and economic deterioration. Governments in the region justified these practices by relying on two main issues which they considered as major predicaments to reform and development: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Islamic fundamentalism.

⁸⁷ L'Orient Le Jour, May 24, 2005.

⁸⁸ Shikaki, Khalil. "The Future of Palestine", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 6, November / December 2004.

1. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Henry Kissinger has noted that “a foreign policy to promote democracy needs to be adapted to local or regional realities, or it will fail. In the pursuit of democracy, policy is the art of the possible”⁸⁹. Relying on such logic, the GMEI seems to be a good start in an ambitious program for change in the region. Democracy will not only depend on freedom and human rights, but also on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As long as this problem persists it increases radicalism and violence through out the region and the world. Brzezinski compared the Palestinian issue to Germany during the Nazi era. He recalled that it was only after the Germans regained their political dignity that they were able to revive their democracy. Therefore, he concluded that the GMEI will be more successful, and find wider acceptance, if coupled with some efforts to grant sovereignty to the Palestinians. He also noted that reaching a peace settlement in the Middle East will give greater credibility to the constructive motives behind the Initiative⁹⁰.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a very critical issue in the Arab World. According to Shibley Telhami it represents a “prism of pain” for the Arabs and Muslims. It is the lens through which they view the world. The author compared it to September 11 today and the Holocaust after World War II, which served as prisms of pain for the Americans and the Jews respectively⁹¹. All the countries that supported the Jews against the Nazis became allies of Israel, and all states that are helping the United States in its war on terrorism today are perceived as partners. In the same token, the Arabs will not

⁸⁹ Hagel, Chuck. “A Republican Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 4, July / August 2004, p. 70.

⁹⁰ Brzezinski Zbigniew, *opcit.*

⁹¹ Telhami, Shibley. “The Ties That Bind: Americans, Arabs, and Israelis After September 11”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 2, March / April 2004, p. 11.

trust any country unless it backs the Palestinians or at least offers help to the peace process. According to the State Department, in the spring of 2000, when the prospects of Arab-Israeli peace seemed promising, more than 60 percent of people in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates expressed confidence in the United States. By the fall, after the collapse of negotiations, expressions of confidence had dropped sharply, and by the spring of 2001 they had fallen to around 35 percent. On the eve of the Iraq war, only 4 percent in Saudi Arabia and 9 percent in the United Arab Emirates expressed favorable views of the United States⁹².

The leaking of the original American draft of the GMEI to the Arab public, which ignored the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a major crisis in the region resulted in an extensive rejection of the initiative among the Arabs. Arab dictators have been exploiting the Palestinian question for years in order to control their national security states and restrict public freedom. They have been justifying their repressive policies in the name of preserving national security either from possible Israeli attacks or from internal subversion of Palestinian militants. They have caused enough harm to their peoples and societies in such a way that promoting democracy in the Arab world will certainly threaten their rule. The GMEI represented a shock to the leaders in the region who reacted with outrage to the proposal. They have, as usual, used the U.S. failure to resolve the Palestinian issue as a pretext to throw out every call for reform and democracy. It is true that the Palestinian issue resonates throughout the Arab world, yet it is illogical to hinder all efforts of liberalization until the conflict is resolved. Logically, giving women the right to vote in Kuwait and respecting human rights in Tunisia do not necessarily require the creation of a Palestinian state. However, the Arab states perceive any reform

⁹² Ibid.

agenda as part of a peace process that would put equal pressure on both sides rather than on Arabs alone⁹³. Moreover, the elimination of the Saddam regime in Iraq has changed the balance of power in the Middle East and created instability and uncertainty among other Arab countries. The Bush administration is refusing to offer security guarantees and it is still supporting Israel, hence its policies are viewed by most Arabs as threatening to the region. This has created distrust in any U.S. intentions towards the region. It is difficult for the GMEI to go far in light of such high distrust in the American agenda among the people in the region. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is part of the political logic in the Middle East and a serious engagement in reviving the peace process should escort any proposal related to the development of the region.

Another important issue that connects reform to the Palestinian question is Israel's nuclear superiority which creates a wide feeling of regional insecurity especially in light of the prevailing belief in the Arab world that Israel would do anything to prevent its neighbors from achieving progress. In Lebanon for instance, many people believe that late Prime Minister Rafic Harriri's governments would not have been able to accomplish the rebuilding of the country without the balance of terror provided by Hizbullah, which contributed in holding back Israeli military attacks. In this regard, Director of the Secretary's Office of the Arab League Hesham Yussef declared that "it is unacceptable to speak of any initiative or vision which ignores or relegates the Palestinian cause...and to discuss security questions without speaking of Israeli weapons of mass destruction"⁹⁴.

⁹³ Ottaway, Marina, and Carothers Thomas. "The Greatest Middle East: Off to a False Start", Policy Brief, March 29, 2004. Available at: http://www.ceip.org/files/publications/HTMLBriefs-WP\29_March_2004_Policy_Brief

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Therefore, it is clear that in light of regional insecurity, growing anti-American sentiments and hostility to Israel, the implementation of the GMEI will still be unattainable.

2. Islamic Fundamentalism

One of the major aims of the GMEI was to contain terrorism by promoting freedom and reform. This was based on the belief that the authoritarian political climate has fueled the growth of Islamists and enhanced the appeal of their ideologies.

Since September 11, 2001, Islamic Fundamentalist movements have become a major threat to democracy and freedom in the Greater Middle East countries. They come from very different backgrounds and have different ideologies and interests. The most prevailing in the world today are the Sunni Fundamentalists represented by *Al Qaeda* and other sub-groups linked to it. The first great triumph of the Sunni fundamentalists was the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Osama Bin Laden put it, they have destroyed the more dangerous of the two great infidel superpowers⁹⁵. Many Arabs in the region blame the rise and the empowerment of such groups on the United States' support to them during the fights against the Soviet Union. The aim of these Islamic radicals is to destroy the American power all over the world and to contain the spread of Western liberalization. For them "democracy is part of the greater evil emanating from the West" that should be demolished through what they call the holy war⁹⁶.

⁹⁵ Lewis, Bernard. "Freedom and Justice in the Modern Middle East", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 3, May / June 2003.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Whereas reformers believe that the problems in the region stem from lack of modernization, the Islamists believe there is excess of modernization⁹⁷. They have a network of suicide bombers whose aim is to attack Western interests. Bin Laden claimed his responsibility for the New York blast of September 11 and promised more to come. The profile of the people who executed these attacks and many others showed that they come from very poor backgrounds and have lived under authoritarian regimes⁹⁸. However, many of their leaders are extremely rich and educated, which shows that not only poverty generates radicalism. Many intellectuals correlate the rise of extremism to oppression. They believe that such movements flourish only in autocratic countries where young people are deprived from practicing their political rights. This link between authoritarian regimes and the growth of militant Islamic movements was named by President Bush the “cycle of dictatorship and extremism”⁹⁹.

Islamic Fundamentalists have proved to be very influential in societies where “cultural vacuum” prevails. In the absence of charismatic political leaders embracing people in public affairs, such religious figures seem to have substantial advantages. In a genuinely free election, fundamentalists would gain great support due to their efforts to alleviate the suffering of the common people and their ability to communicate effectively with them. Islamists have also been exploiting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to foster anti-Western feelings in the region and expand their influence. This hints to the fact that in light of freedom, economic development, respect for human rights and

⁹⁷ Lewis Bernard, *opcit.*

⁹⁸ Hoge, James F, Jr. and Rose, Gideon (Eds.), *How Did This Happen? Terrorism and the New War*, Public Affairs, New York, 2001, p. 10.

⁹⁹ Gambill, Gary C. “Democratization, the Peace Process, and Islamist Extremism”, the Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 6-7, June / July 2004. Available at: http://www.meib.org/articles/0407_mel.htm

settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Islamists might lose their appeal. However, in the present circumstances, promoting democracy in many parts of the Greater Middle East would bring Islamic radicals to power. This is exactly what happened in Algeria when Islamists won the 1991 parliamentary elections¹⁰⁰. Once in power, such religious militants might even be worse than autocratic rulers and are not likely to allow democracy to flourish. In this sense, applying the GMEI is very critical. In the absence of a clear solution to the Palestinian issue and thorough cooperation with regional players, the Initiative could be perceived by the Muslims as a new imperial plan aiming at exploiting their nation. This could also serve as a juicy substance for the Islamists that would permit them to manipulate the people, fuel anti-American sentiments and widen their popular base. The GMEI will empower the reformers as well as the Islamists both of which have been suppressed by the existing autocratic regimes. Thus, it is important to respect the peculiarities of each and every Arab society; whereas democracy could promote reformers in one country, it could likewise promote Islamists in another. However, the experience in Turkey showed that elections and political participation could drive the Islamist groups to moderate their agenda. Since they came to power in November 2002, Islamists have introduced unprecedented political and economic reforms. Applying the GMEI in the Arab and Muslim world will not necessarily lead to the U.S. desired changes, therefore, economic and social reform should precede the promotion of democracy. Deprived and uneducated voters could be easily manipulated and tend to rely more on their feelings than on rational thinking. "Some hold that 'premature' democratization in low-income countries is responsible for enabling

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

opportunistic politicians to fan ethnic and regional resentments”¹⁰¹. If the Initiative is not conducted carefully, its outcomes could be counterproductive. Achieving a better knowledge society is a prerequisite for other types of reform. According to the U.S. State Department’s Web site, “economic development makes democracy possible” in the sense that poor countries must develop economically before they democratize¹⁰². The logic behind this theory stems from the belief that economic growth creates the necessary preconditions for democracy by expanding literacy and creating a secure middle class.

Once again, the GMEI presents nice rhetoric that needs central attention to be transformed into policy. Advancing democracy and promoting reform are long and difficult processes susceptible to many setbacks in the Greater Middle East such as regional and internal conflicts, ethnic and religious diversities, illiteracy and underdevelopment. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Islamic Fundamentalism are two major obstacles to democracy that are interrelated. Islamic radicals have been trying hard to harm the peace process through intimidating rulers to refrain from negotiating with Israel¹⁰³. Yet, they continue to use the conflict as a base for their action. The relevance of the Initiative depends on the ability of the G-8 countries to understand these obstacles and reach compromise. It is extremely important not to forget that “Islamist violence is a direct result of the unjust policy of the U.S. against Muslims and Arabs”¹⁰⁴. The inability

¹⁰¹ Siegle, Joseph T., Weinstein, Michael M., and Halperin, Morton H”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, September / October 2004, p. 62.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 57.

¹⁰³ Weitzman, Bruce Maddy, and Inbar, Efraim (Eds.), *Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle East*, Franc Cass, London, 1997, p. 209.

¹⁰⁴ The Daily Star, Beirut, September 11, 2004.

of the Arab regimes to provide new reformist agendas encourages foreign meddling in the region which in turn strengthens Islamic extremism.

The Iranian revolution attested that Islamists, once in power, are not very likely to promote democracy. However, Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice's declaration on March 23, 2005 that Washington will not oppose any democratic process that leads moderate Islamists to assume power¹⁰⁵, matches Dennis Ross's belief that only proponents of moderate Islam can and have the stake in discrediting the radical Islamists¹⁰⁶. Once in power, these progressives might either moderate their policies in order to achieve economic and strategic benefits, as is the case in Turkey, or they might turn into more radical players. In this second case, democracy might again become a self-defeating process leading to more oppression and fundamentalism. The U.S. has so far failed to define its policy towards such possible outcomes.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Hayat, Beirut, May 28, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Ross, Dennis. "The Middle East Predicament", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 1, January / February 2005, p. 72.

IV The Arab Spring

A. Reforms in the Greater Middle East

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) stated in its annual report of 2004-2005 that Washington's policies of promoting democracy in the Middle East have proven effective, especially in light of the slightly reduced threat from terrorism in 2004. The Strategic Survey 2004-2005 related such progress to a change in U.S. policy following the re-election of President Bush and to renewed hopes in the advance of the Middle East peace process¹⁰⁷. The report also praised the American decision to abandon its military threats against Iran for the moment and to follow the European pacific style in negotiating the proliferation of WMD there¹⁰⁸. Such change in U.S. policies reveals that the American administration had learned a lot from its war in Iraq, and that it is willing to deal with its past mistakes.

The U.S. efforts in reviving the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians denote that the American administration had finally realized the interrelation between democratic reform and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Then, the United States' inclination towards the more flexible European approach indicates some American conviction that democracy and reform should not be imposed but rather supported and assisted from outside. The report also admitted that the war in Iraq and Bush's aggressive policies have led to many positive developments in the region. First, it indirectly encouraged the Lebanese people to demonstrate against Syrian presence in Lebanon, hence leading to

¹⁰⁷ The Daily Star, Beirut, May 25, 2005.

¹⁰⁸ L'Orient Le jour, Beirut, May 25, 2005.

free the country from Syrian autocratic control. Second, President Bush's determination to bring about reform to the region served in putting some pressure on Israeli Prime Minister in order to open up with the Palestinians, which consequently led to a truce between the two sides. However, the changes that have been achieved in the region were very superficial and did very little to serve the aim of a real democratic transformation. The Arab leaders responded to the GMEI by simply promoting some minor changes that would allow them to preserve their legitimacy, relieve themselves from public pressure and hold on to power.

Such reforms in the Arab world were taking different shapes. The impact of the new American policy to promote democracy in the region differed from one country to another. Starting with Iraq, although violence was enhancing the recruitment of new groups of terrorists¹⁰⁹, holding elections for the first time in over thirty years has been perceived as a successful venture towards democracy. Fouad Ajami¹¹⁰, who has traveled to Iraq many times after the defeat of Saddam, was extremely excited about the new politics. According to him, he saw the "spectacle of democracy" where men and women, Shiites, Sunnites and Kurds alike were working together for a democratic future. He also gave few examples of women behaving freely and of leaders looking for secularism. The impact of change was greatly mirrored in the Iraqi media through a major increase in the number of newspapers, weeklies, private television channels and radio stations.

At the World Economic Forum (WEF) which was held in Jordan in May 2005, King Abdullah II urged all the leaders in the Arab world to respond to popular calls for reform. He highlighted the people's desire to see a tangible difference in their lives and

¹⁰⁹ The Daily Star, Beirut, May 25, 2005.

¹¹⁰ The Daily Star, Beirut, May 23, 2005.

confirmed that any change must come from within. At the same event, Mohammad Bin Aa-Zubair, economic adviser to the Sultan of Oman, asserted that people should understand and be able to see the positive sides of liberalization in order to support reform. He confirmed that for reform to succeed, it should be coupled with popular support¹¹¹.

King Abdullah has in fact started to translate his rhetoric into reality. Recently he appointed a new government aiming at pushing forward the reform process and brought in a new team of reformers to the palace. Such statements and achievements convey a radical change in approach among such autocratic regimes which have ignored public will for decades. Responding to people's demands which was never on the agenda of most Arab governments before, highlights a new climate in the region. It is of course undeniable that the American military presence in Iraq has empowered Arab reformists and opposition, even without them wanting it, and urged for a change in the government's attitude.

In Kuwait also, a relatively very important step towards reform was taken in May 2005. The parliament has finally passed a bill granting women the right to vote and to run for public office. Kuwaiti women have been struggling for their political rights for six years but their demands have been blocked several times before by conservative Islamic members in the parliament¹¹². Another indicator of democratic dynamism in Kuwait was the resignation of three ministers within eighteen months after they have been questioned in parliament¹¹³.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² "21st Century Suffragettes", Time, May 30, 2005.

¹¹³ Al-Hayat, Beirut, may 26, 2005.

In Saudi Arabia, the concepts of elections and voting have been introduced for the first time in the culture in April 2005 when partial elections were held for town councils. The results of those elections were in favor of the Islamic conservatives. Dr. Omar Bakosar, a professor at King Abdulaziz University noted in "Al Hadath", a TV program on Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation¹¹⁴, that the results were not a surprise since religious thoughts dominate the Saudi society. According to Bakosar, having the elections held in the country is in itself a positive step towards reform. However, despite the loss of the liberals and the results of recent polls which produced big wins for religious conservatives, a Saudi court condemned three prominent liberals to between six and nine years of jail¹¹⁵. The Economist weekly assured that this does not mean that reforms will stop, confirming that there are other forces for change in the Kingdom, such as business interests and media exposure to the rest of the world. In fact, on May 24, 2005 at the Conference for Saudi American Relations in Washington, the launching of Ashark Al-Awsat newspaper's new internet site in English: www.asharq-e.com has been announced. On this occasion, Philip Zilco, the special adviser to U.S. Secretary of State declared that the Saudi regime has been very cooperative in fighting terrorism and have achieved great reforms and therefore is on its way to join the World Trade Organization (WTO)¹¹⁶.

In Morocco, King Mohammed VI has been leading great cultural reforms. In October 2003, he proclaimed gender equality and a year later he lowered the voting age

¹¹⁴ Al-Hadath, Narr. Shaza Omar. LBC, Lebanon. April 26, 2005.

¹¹⁵ "The Suffocating Limits of Reform", The Economist, May 21, 2005.

¹¹⁶ Ashark Al-Awsat, May 25, 2005.

to 18 years. Most recently, on May 19, 2005 the King announced the “national initiative for human development”¹¹⁷. He was clearly aware of the direct relation between underdevelopment and the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and therefore he decided to fight poverty instead of quelling the Islamists. Reform in many areas like education, justice and political parties have been crippled by corruption, illiteracy and the domination of religion. Yet, according to Mireille Duteuil of *Le Point* magazine, Morocco is working hard in order to overcome such obstacles.

However, in Damascus reform has, until now, been very mediocre. Syrian authorities arrested the chief of the Arab Organization of Human Rights in Syria (AOHRS) Mohammad Raadoun on May 22, 2005. Two days later, eight members of the board of the Jamal al Atassi Forum, the only independent political forum in Syria were also arrested¹¹⁸. Human right activists said that some of the Syrians living abroad for political reasons were sentenced to jail after they came back¹¹⁹. A prominent Arab non-governmental organization denounced the arrest of Raadoun and noted that such acts contradict all the reforms that Syria has claimed to undertake¹²⁰.

Since changes are most visible in Egypt and Jordan, a comprehensive analysis of the recent events in these two countries could be very helpful in understanding how changes occurring in the Middle East were carried out by the people, their governments and the West.

¹¹⁷ “*Comment Mohammed VI veut changer le Maroc*”, *Le Point*, May 26, 2005.

¹¹⁸ *L’Orient Le Jour*, Beirut, May 25, 2005.

¹¹⁹ *The Daily Star*, Beirut, May 23, 2005.

¹²⁰ *L’Orient Le Jour*, Beirut, May 25, 2005.

1. Egypt

In Egypt, President Mubarak has called for reform several times before without showing any genuine efforts. However, in May 2005, he made a step forward by calling for a referendum on a constitutional amendment that would allow, for the first time, more than one candidate to run for presidency. For the Egyptian people who have not had the chance to have a say in selecting their president for a long time, this was a considerably pleasing change. However, the events that followed showed that the president's plan was nothing but a forged attempt to ease agitated moods on Cairo's streets. The Egyptian parliament controlled by the National Democratic Party (NDP) succeeded in modeling the results of the referendum which came in favor of President Mubarak. The voting process was characterized by corruption and patronage. Participation reached only 20 percent and most voters were government employees or poor people who were paid to vote in favor of the President. According to *Al-Wafd* newspaper, a journalist was able to cast his vote eight times¹²¹.

The three main legal opposition parties, along with the Muslim Brotherhood, a very influential but illegal movement, and another protest movement called *kifaya*, boycotted the referendum and asked Mubarak to resign. This resulted in the arrest of Islamic Brotherhood leader Mahmoud Ezzat and 24 other members on May 22¹²², and massive attacks on "*kifaya*" demonstrators by the NDP supporters on May 25^{th123}. The crackdown of opposition members violates the law and the Constitution and contradicts the government's decision earlier that emergency laws are used only against cases of violence and drugs. Opposition leaders accused the United States of giving the

¹²¹ The Daily Star, Beirut, June 3, 2005.

¹²² L'Orient Le Jour, Beirut, May 24, 2005.

¹²³ Al-Hayat, Beirut, June 3, 2005.

government the green light to suppress the demonstrators and declared that Washington's claims to support reforms in Egypt were bogus. One of the prominent founders of the "kifaya" movement declared that all the United States really wanted is to monitor the coming elections next fall, which he believed to be a very silly detail in the process of democratization¹²⁴. The United States' failure to promote the democratic changes it called for in the GMEI increased distrust in the administration's intentions. In fact the United States pretended to back all movements striving for democracy while in reality it did little or nothing to help them. However, the mild changes that occurred in Egypt were nothing but the result of rising internal pressure. The "Kifaya" movement announced the first conference on democracy to take place on June 23 which aims at setting special committees to monitor the coming elections¹²⁵. Moreover, institutions like Parliament and the state-controlled news media have also begun to show a slight degree of independence. Abdel Monem Said, Director of the Ahrum Center for Strategic Studies, a government-backed research and policy organization, confirmed that these institutions are working for change¹²⁶. "Government-backed newspapers have lately published articles deemed unfavorable to the government, said Hussein Amin, professor of journalism and mass communications at the American University in Cairo"¹²⁷.

In light of what is happening in Egypt today, the GMEI appears as an effort to camouflage Washington's intentions to increase its involvement in the region in order to protect its interests and not to promote democratic reforms. However, events reflect the urgent need for a genuine implementation of the GMEI in order to fight corruption,

¹²⁴ Al-Hayat, Beirut, May 27, 2005.

¹²⁵ Al-Hayat, Beirut, June 3, 2005.

¹²⁶ International Herald Tribune, May 23, 2005.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

enhance a knowledge society and promote economic development, which represent crucial steps on the road of democracy. Another experience in Egypt came to illustrate the relevance of the logic behind the GMEI which stated that reform could curb Islamic fundamentalism. After the Newsweek magazine published in its May 9th edition a brief about the desecration of the Koran at Guantanamo, demonstrations broke all around the world condemning such disturbing violations which provoked all Muslim societies. In Egypt however, the reaction was almost muted at the beginning even among Islamist radicals and demonstrations did not break out until two weeks later. When asked about the reason of such passivity, many Egyptians said they were busy with reform issues and the constitutional referendum. According to a Political Science senior Student at the American University of Cairo (AUT), internal political reform may be more of a priority to the people¹²⁸. This incident corroborated the reasoning that once people participate in political life they are less prone to focus on religious issues and to react violently. Based on this belief, the North Africa Program Manager at the "Group for International Conflicts" stressed in *Al-Hayat* newspaper in May 2005, the importance of giving Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt the chance to participate in the political life. He noted that oppressing such groups will reflect negatively on the reform process of the country. According to him, Western countries need to open a dialogue with moderate Islamists which, in the case of Islamic Brotherhood, is impossible as long as they are being cracked down¹²⁹.

Due to the vast influence that they have within the Egyptian society, the Islamic Brotherhood are able to gain huge power if given a political role. This might explain why

¹²⁸ The Daily Star, Beirut, May 10, 2005.

¹²⁹ Al-Hayat, Beirut, May 26, 2005.

the government hasn't been showing any kind of tolerance towards them and still seems unwilling to do so in the future. Consequently, if such tensions persist, it will be very difficult to advance reform in the country, and President Mubarak will end up losing what remains of his popularity.

2. Jordan

King Abdullah of Jordan was the first Arab leader to support and promote reform, even before the release of the GMEI has caused a great wave of pre-emptive reforms in the Middle East. Abdullah has been engaged in democratic reform for six years, but his efforts were restricted by domestic opposition. However, the young King seems devoted today more than any time before to persistent progress.

On May 5, King Abdullah removed his chief of intelligence, General Saad Kheir, whom he believed, had become an obstacle to his reform plans. In April, he formed a new government crowned by prominent reformists, hired a new chief to his palace, and replaced the director of public security. He also decided to replace chiefs of intelligence and public security, and to tackle issues of public interest such as corruption. Jordanian Finance Minister, Bassem Awadallah, has been working on economic reforms which will entail a plan to reduce oil subsidies and cut the budget deficit, in addition to privatization projects of \$500 million. Former Foreign Minister Marwan Moashar is working on political reforms which aim at providing national health care and fighting unemployment. King Abdullah seems to be taking democracy to the end by calling for a national

referendum to support his plans¹³⁰. Moreover, on June 6, Amman decided to stop censorship of books and publications¹³¹.

By starting his mission with new personnel, the King aimed at matching his rhetoric of democracy and reform with the conduct of the government and its agencies. In fact, since 1989, Jordan has been perceived as a leader in democratic changes within the Arab world. Since then, the kingdom has conducted five parliamentary elections, and succeeded in integrating Islamists into the power structure and opening up the media and civil society. However, the process of reform and democratization has been extremely slow due to public skepticism and parliamentary objections¹³². King Abdullah, affirmed at the University of Chicago in the United States, his deep belief that in order for reform to succeed, it should come from within. However, he admitted that U.S. pressure helped a lot in pushing for changes in the Middle East. He also said that reform in the region could not be completed without solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, yet he believed reform should not be delayed¹³³.

Jordan has, in fact, achieved great reforms when compared to other Arab states. The King's desire to advance reform and democracy reminds of Morocco's King Mohammad VI's efforts to the same end. The guts and the openness of the two kings could be due to their "good" relations with Israel which make them trust, more than any other Arab state, the American intensions. This shows the importance of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to mobilize democratic reforms in the region.

¹³⁰ The Daily Star, Beirut, June 9, 2005.

¹³¹ The Daily Star, Beirut, June 8, 2005.

¹³² The Daily Star, Beirut, May 25, 2005.

¹³³ The Daily Star, Beirut, June 11, 2005.

The GMEI instigated Arab's motivation for change and presented important titles of the region's requirements to achieve progress and development. Egypt and Jordan served as the best examples of Arab societies' intention and ability to build civil societies and promote reform though in different circumstances. Had the initiative been more detailed and succeeded to offer practical instruments of change, Arab reactions wouldn't have been so negative towards it. Yet, Arab societies' efforts on the road of reform show that the Arabs did not really reject the Initiative, but mainly the U.S. intentions behind it.

The nature of reform varies from one country to another in the Middle East, but one common aspect is that everywhere and at different levels, reform reaches a dead end. Such limitations are either due to structural deficits like in Morocco, or to the dominance of religion as is the case in Saudi Arabia or even to the leaders' unwillingness to give up their control like in Syria and Egypt. In some places, despite some progress, monarchies and family rule present the limit of reform and democracy like in Kuwait. This underlines the need for the GMEI to be seriously pursued and supported. The different amendments of the initiative aim at a restructuring of Arab societies on all levels.

After witnessing the latest developments in the Arab world, the origin of the major deficits seems to be more within the societies than the regimes. A successful implementation of the initiative will result in internal changes which lead to well structured civil societies capable of achieving more effective progress. Outside pressure might drive Arab autocrats to talk like modern democrats but still act like primitive kings. Another view by Charles Snow, a regional expert with Cyprus-based Middle East

Economic Survey, estimates that even Arab rulers who might be willing to experiment with change do not want to be seen as doing so as a result of foreign pressure¹³⁴.

No matter what reactions the GMEI had caused among Arab leaders, it surely pressed on democratization and reform in the region, something that wouldn't have happened without outside pressure. Yet, change can only be stimulated by outside but real and successful development entails internal efforts and mobilization. After the Arab governments opened the gates of their prisons, though slightly, it's up to the people to push as strong as they can to prevent them from being shut again. Only domestic pressure by a well developed public could inspire a warm "Arab Spring".

B. Relation between Reform and Democratization

Economic development and democratization may in fact often go hand in hand, but this does not mean that the former causes the latter¹³⁵. In fact, when some Arab leaders have reformed their economies such as Egypt in the late 1970s and Algeria in the 1980s, it did not lead to any form of democracy¹³⁶. In fact, the relation between reform and democratization could not be defined in abstract, it rather be related to the sociopolitical structure of each country. The U.S. State Department's Web site asserts that poor countries must develop economically before they democratize, yet different records have proved that poor autocracies and poor democracies have grown at the same pace¹³⁷. The data, compiled from the World Bank's World Development Indicators from

¹³⁴ Recknagel, Charles. "Washington's 'Greater Middle East Initiative' Stumbles Amid Charges it Imposes Change", Payvands Iran News, March 24, 2004. Available at: <http://www.payvand.com/news/04/mar/1159.html>

¹³⁵ Cook, Steven. A. "The Right Way to Promote Arab Reform", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 2, March / April 2005, p. 95.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Siegle, Joseph T., *opcit*, p. 57.

1960 to the present, reveal a simple truth: low-income democracies have, on average, grown just as rapidly as low-income autocracies over the past 40 years¹³⁸. However, this does not deny the developmental advantages that democracies have over authoritarian regimes. Democracies enjoy more openness and better systems for communicating information which might speed up the process of development¹³⁹.

Underdevelopment of many autocratic regimes is not a direct outcome of the political system itself, it is rather caused by socio-cultural setbacks that usually accompany such closed systems. Societies living under autocracies, especially the long existing ones, hold within them traditional social and religious views that prevent them from opening up to the rest of the world. Thus, this hinders them from being part of the global developmental cycle. Some analysts went further to claim that "countries frequently remain poor because they retain autocratic political structures"¹⁴⁰. Such vision implies that reform process could not thrive unless coupled with democratic liberalization.

On the other hand, it is not very accurate to assume that democracies always lead to development; they rather have better chances to seek development. This is mainly due to their freedom of changing and choosing politicians along with the democratic leaders' need to respond to the needs of their citizens. This explains the interdependence between the three different components of the GMEI. The Initiative stressed on the importance of social, economic and political reform in a similar way.

In the case of the Middle East, promoting reform alone is not likely to prove fruitful due to the prevalence of corruption and the monopoly of the governmental

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 59.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 64.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 71.

institutions. Leaders of autocratic regimes have the full power to curb any process of development responsible since they are not accountable before their people. It is extremely doubtful that Arab societies, once given their full political rights, would keep their rulers in power. This explains why autocratic governments have always been avoiding and resisting all calls for reform. They present different alibis to justify their reluctance, yet some of their excuses are valuable and true. For instance when President Mubarak said that a sudden democratization in the Middle East could lead to chaos, he sounded very logical. In fact, the different constituents of societies living under autocratic rule lack the educational background and the experience that allows them to make their own decisions. Moreover, the existence of radical religious groups poses a great threat on promoting democracy.

Finally, the promotion of both reform and democracy should be careful and gradual in the Arab world. There should be a pre-democratization phase that allows Islamic fundamentalists to engage in political life gradually, while giving time for the formation of other civil society groups that will serve as the real engines of democracy later on. Such gradual transformation prevents the emergence of extremist movements and lead to more effective future democracies.

V Promoting Public Diplomacy

A. The GMEI as a Soft Power Tool

The international struggle against terrorism is a large projection of local strives within Islamic civilization between moderates and extremists. Therefore, the mere existence of moderates in the Middle East makes the use of soft power much more effective. According to recent surveys in the region by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, significant majorities of people from Morocco to Jordan to Pakistan are democrats: they say they want to live in societies where leaders are freely elected, where free speech is protected, and where the rule of law is respected. However, large majorities in the very same countries do not like American ideas about democracy¹⁴¹. Such negativity towards American values is mainly due to the manner in which the Bush administration has pursued its goals. Even democratic activists and intellectuals in the Middle East who have been very cooperative regarding reform and democratization met President Bush's initiative with disdain. This shows that despite the great power the United States enjoys today, its influence has dramatically weakened. Whatever the link between American coercive means and this lack of influence is, it is clear that there has been certain incompetence in U.S. foreign policy. With some changes in approach the Bush administration could embrace all those with whom it shares progressive and liberal ideas in the region.

¹⁴¹ Berger, Samuel R. "Foreign Policy for a Democratic President", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 3, May / June 2004, p. 47.

Through its war on terrorism, it is not enough for the United States to destroy terrorists; it must also support those who want to live in freedom and peace and help in fighting poverty and corruption. President Bush made a bad start after September 11 attacks by applying his "with us or against us" philosophy to the whole world. At a time of high resentment to American policies, the results of such a doctrine could not be to the benefit of the United States. Even within nations that owe their existence to the sacrifice of American blood like Germany and South Korea, elections were won by appealing to anti-Americanism¹⁴². According to Gallup International polls, pluralities in 29 countries say that Washington's policies have had a negative effect on their view of the United States¹⁴³. Moreover, this antagonism was enhanced by the unilateral attitude the Bush administration was pursuing by refusing to ratify or support international agreements aiming at fighting poverty, protecting the environment and maintaining peace. The United States has become so unpopular that Arab leaders avoided looming as pro-American. Wise changes in American foreign policy were needed to reduce such antagonism and revive its legitimacy especially in the Middle East. In order to win the Cold War and contain communism, the United States relied on a system of alliances and building institutions that served effectively in communicating with the East European states. The distortion of American foreign policy during the last decade was mainly due to the decline in its use of soft power.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 50.

¹⁴³ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. "The decline of America's Soft Power: Why Washington Should Worry", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 3, May / June 2004, p.16.

Previous U.S. administrations owe their victory in the Cold War to a strategy of containment that used soft power along with hard power¹⁴⁴. With an enduring set of alliances and shared interests not only among governments, but also through building ties with civil societies, the United States succeeded in containing communism. A brief comparison between the Cold War and the war on terrorism would show that both aimed at containing ideologies that had regional prevalence. In both cases, American foreign policy was based on spreading democracy and replacing autocratic regimes with liberal ones. Freedom, reform, human rights, the rule of law and preserving international security that were the main slogans during the Cold War era are being adopted once again by U.S. policy makers in the Arab World in order to transform the region. However, there was no anti-Americanism behind the Iron Curtain that communist governments could stoke to deflect U.S. pressure for change or that the extremists could exploit to win support¹⁴⁵.

While Poles, Hungarians and ordinary Russians saw in the United States a credible champion of their democratic aspirations, the Arabs today see in the "Americans" an evil power aiming at nothing but occupying their lands, exploiting their resources, protecting their Israeli enemy and interfering in their internal affairs. The Arabs fear U.S. plans and perceive any initiative as a change that serves American and Israeli interests. During the Cold War, the tools of soft power played a major role in bonding between the U.S. goals of spreading democracy and the East European people's dream of acquiring it. Unfortunately, the pillars of the American soft power collapsed along with the Berlin Wall and Lenin's statues. Between 1989 and 1999 the budget of the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Berger Samuel, *opcit*, p.62.

United States Information Agency (USIA) decreased ten percent, resources for its mission in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation, were cut into half and the annual number of academic and cultural exchanges dropped from 45000 in 1995 to 29000 in 2001. During the Cold War, radio broadcasts funded by Washington reached half the Soviet population and 70 to 80 percent of the population in Eastern Europe while in the Middle East very few people listened to the Voice of America (VOA) in 2000¹⁴⁶.

The decline in soft power led to the decrease of American influence and marked down its appeal within its vital spheres. This resulted in the growing of anti-Americanism which American policy makers failed to understand, and perceived as a normal envious reaction to the world's only superpower. But after the attacks of September 11 2001, they realized that being economically and militarily strong was not enough to protect their country. Therefore many useful steps have been taken to revive U.S. attractiveness in the eyes of others, especially in the Middle East. Radio Sawa was funded by the American government to broadcast in Arabic, Radio Farda in Farsi, and the Arabic-language TV station Al Hurra. Moreover, the White House has created its own Office of Global Communications¹⁴⁷. Such tools of soft power aimed at exposing people in the Middle East to an American culture that is different from what they have been told at home. The belief that public diplomacy will help decrease anti-U.S. feelings resulted in seeking new networks to appeal to the people of the Middle East.

Therefore, in 2003, a bipartisan advisory group of public diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim world recommended appointing a new White House director of public diplomacy, building libraries and information centers, translating more Western books

¹⁴⁶ Nye Joseph, *opcit*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 18.

into Arabic, increasing the number of scholarships and visiting fellowships and training more Arabic speakers and public relations specialists¹⁴⁸. The mission of this exchange is to promote a better image of American policies and intentions and to change conspiracy theories that have prevailed in the Muslim world for a long time and deepened resentment towards the United States. The use of hard power has failed to achieve the intended results in the Middle East. Military, economic, and diplomatic sanctions tended to be counterproductive. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was capable of making use of American sanctions in order to fan the flame of nationalist resentment. So far, applying the Cold War model of diplomacy to the Middle East has not proved very successful, and this is mainly due to the absence of effective civil societies in the Arab World. During the Cold War, U.S. officials used to meet with influential opposition leaders who represented large factions of the societies. Nowadays, however, representatives of the civil societies in many Middle Eastern states are contained by the governments themselves. Former Secretary of State Collin Powell's meetings in Cairo were restricted to members of the National Party that represents the government and enjoys little influence among people¹⁴⁹. In Eastern Europe, where the governments and not the people were anti-American, the U.S. administrations used to rely on public support to topple Communist regimes. In the Arab World the mission is much more difficult due to the prevalent public despise of both American policies and local autocratic regimes. However, in both cases the United States has adopted a policy of containment which used hard power along with soft power. In the Arab world, like in Eastern Europe before, the aim was to strengthen democratic practices and civil society. At the end of the Cold War, civil society groups

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁴⁹ Salameh Ghassan, Annahar, Beirut, April 28, 2005.

played a major role in toppling communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe¹⁵⁰. However today, it isn't very likely that such groups will be able to reach the same ends in the Arab World where civil society groups do not have the same influence because their jobs are restricted to providing social services with no political role.

B. GMEI versus the Helsinki Accords

Some U.S. policy makers thought that the GMEI could play the role the Helsinki Process did during the Cold War, but the GMEI seems to be quite different due to many regional factors that did not exist in Eastern Europe. First, the Arab-Israeli conflict and U.S. support for Israel prevented the American government from offering any security guarantees to Arab states while the Helsinki process had security issues at its core. Therefore Helsinki has been rejected by the Bush administration as a model to be applied on the Middle East in order not to restrict the United States with security measures¹⁵¹.

Second, the nature of the regimes in the Middle East where political participation is extremely limited puts a Helsinki model far from reach.

Third, radical Islamic movements in the region do not believe in the establishment of pluralistic civil societies and aim at Islamic rules where freedom is not very important.

Fourth, the negative U.S. image throughout the region makes it hard on the American administration to find partners within the countries of the Middle East where neither governments nor reformers are willing to endorse U.S. policies. If Arab rulers back the GMEI or any other reform initiative they will certainly be committing suicide given public resentment to their autocratic rule.

¹⁵⁰ Cook Steven, *opcit*, p. 94.

¹⁵¹ Ottaway, Marina, *opcit*.

Reformers on the other side do not like to be labeled as pro-Western. Denis Ross, Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said that the Group of Eight industrialized nations should “create a shield for the reformists in the region”, but some others in Washington like Phyllis Bennis, an analyst at the Institute for Policy Studies, believed that “any overt support from the United States would be the kiss of death for reformers in the Arab world”¹⁵². Besides, real reformers in the Middle East are critical of the U.S. policies and according to Ross, many of them believe in Washington’s double standard, and that reform is “only intended for America’s enemies, not its allies”¹⁵³. Finally, the United States has to deal with different players in the Greater Middle East whereas in the Helsinki process it was challenging one single authority, the USSR. Each country in the Middle East has its own history, culture and experience which result in various visions and reactions to the GMEI. Yet, mostly all Arab states agreed on rejecting the U.S. initiative even if modeled after the Helsinki accords. As quoted by Associated Press, February 19, 2004, Prince Saud al Faisal of Saudi Arabia commented on the GMEI “the results on the Soviet Union we all know. It was broken up, it suffered economic deprivations its people were the unhappiest people for at least two decades. So if this is presented as a lure to the Arab countries, we really don’t see much lure in the Helsinki accords”¹⁵⁴.

The Helsinki Process was an important tool that led to improving human rights and achieving political reform in the Warsaw Pact countries. It consisted of three baskets that dealt with issues of major concern to all parties, such as, security, economic and social issues. The United States was successful in attaining a good deal while bargaining

¹⁵² Collier Robert, *opcit.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Ottaway, Marina, *opcit.*

with the Soviet Union; in return for U.S. arms control, the Soviet Union was asked to make efforts on freedom and human rights issues¹⁵⁵. Although the GMEI resembles the Helsinki Process with its approach, many differences between the two models show that they cannot be comparable. Foremost, in the Greater Middle East there is no Arab equivalent to the Soviet Union or an Arab Moscow¹⁵⁶. No single power enjoys superiority in the region, which compels the West to find many middle grounds while dealing with the different Middle Eastern players. Moreover the relationship between the whole of the Greater Middle East and the West is very complex and different from the one between the U.S. and the USSR during the Cold War. U.S. relations alter from one country to another in the Greater Middle East which makes it difficult to set a unified policy towards the whole region.

Another significant difference is that the Helsinki Accords were achieved through clear negotiation structures represented by leaders within each group capable of delegating for the rest of the group. In the Greater Middle East, this is impossible due to the absence of a strong regional organization that can take the lead in negotiating for others¹⁵⁷. Amr Moussa, the Secretary General of the Arab League, cannot represent the various stands of the Arab countries – putting other non-Arab states aside. This is also true in the case of the West where there is a clear divergence when it comes to interests in the GMEI. Also at Helsinki, there was a common interest between the Western and the Eastern blocs which was to preserve a stable situation in Europe¹⁵⁸. In the GMEI, it is very difficult to find a common interest in light of the existing conflicts, whether in the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Marchetti Andreas, *opcit*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 66.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Greater Middle East, between Europe and the United States, or even among European countries themselves.

During the Cold War, the bargaining deal in the Helsinki Accords was clear: western economic support in return for human rights in the East European countries. Such a deal is very hard to reach between the West and the Greater Middle Eastern countries due to ambiguity surrounding the intentions of both sides. The West talks about democracy and reform while publicly supporting autocratic rulers and the governments in the region show their will to reform and liberalize their countries while still harassing opposition leaders and holding political prisoners. Moreover, Western policy makers affirm their interest in regional stability while invading Iraq and supporting Israel militarily, and Arab leaders speak of democracy while truly trying to resist it knowing it will threaten their own power. Furthermore, the disastrous results of the Helsinki Process, which led to the rise of anti-totalitarian opposition and the toppling of the Soviet Union itself, would leave Arab autocratic governments very cautious and resistant to such model. Furthermore the shaky conditions in the GME draw further challenges to any initiative in the region. Whereas the Helsinki Accords took off in light of a stable situation in Europe¹⁵⁹, the Greater Middle East region suffers from grave instability. Besides the Israeli-Palestinian issue, there is great inter-Arab competition for dominance and hegemony that might, at any point in the future, lead to serious conflicts.

Looking at the situation in the Greater Middle East, it is impossible to have a security basket similar to the one in the Helsinki Accords. This is mainly due to the differences in security issues among the different parts of the region. They cannot be put in one basket

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 68.

since they have different security interests. Security problems in the Middle East are not the same as those in the Persian Gulf and others in North Africa¹⁶⁰.

The situation in the Greater Middle East today varies from that in Europe during the Cold War. At the time of the Helsinki Accords, the countries of the Soviet Union were eager to involve the United States. However, the countries in the Greater Middle East which have been witnessing Western interventions in many parts of the world do not seem enthusiastic about new intrusions today. This is especially true because of Western clear disrespect of major principles such as sovereign equality, respect to inherent sovereignty and peaceful settlement of disputes. During the Cold War era, the Warsaw Pact ensured a certain kind of balance in face of the NATO alliance, which provided the Eastern bloc with some sort of confidence in negotiating with the United States and its West European allies. The absence of a similar alliance in the Greater Middle East leaves the region very weak while facing Western coalitions, thus leading to a regional resistance to any intervention.

Many factors thus fall short in reaching parallels between the Helsinki Accords and the Greater Middle East initiative. The establishment of consensus vis-à-vis security issues and the recognition of borders in the region appear to be impossible in light of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other Arab disagreements. Also the Eastern European Order that gave way to the domino theory to work does not exist in the Greater Middle East. Pressures that might lead to reform and freedom in one country do not necessarily have the same effect in others. The maturity of civil societies in Eastern European states renders democratic transformations much easier than in the Greater Middle East. Finally,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

perceiving the United States as an enemy and not a savior as in Eastern Europe, led to a Middle Eastern resistance to all American proposals.

Conclusion

The attacks of September 11 led to a great shift in U.S. foreign policy towards the GME and had a significant impact on the policies of the governments in the region as well. Promoting democracy and reform to the Arab world is not a Western innovation, in fact civil society activists have long been striving to achieve some progress to that end in the different countries of the region. However, such efforts have been constantly kept down by local regimes in different ways. Autocratic leaders have always been conscious that any changes in their countries would lead to weakening their control if not expelling them. In order to preserve their control, they have been using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the fear of Islamic fundamentalist takeover as excuses to maintaining their security rule. If reform is on the regional agenda today, it is simply because it intersects with Western interests.

Progressive reformers are more assertive than any time before because all Arab regimes feel the need to pay at least lip service to them and because the threat from militant Islamism is urgent. However skepticism about Western intentions is still prevailing among Arab societies. While some perceive the GMEI as “the latest U.S. ambition to strengthen its grip on the Middle Eastern oil wealth and markets and extend its network of military bases and facilities, all in the name of democracy”¹⁶¹, others are still questioning some Western practices in the region. The U.S. administration seems to be pressuring only its enemies in the region for reform while ignoring many non-democratic practices among its friendlier allies. This has lately reflected the

¹⁶¹ Achcar Gilbert, *opcit.*

predominance of security issues over reform and democratization on the American agenda. While the U.S. appears to be pressuring for changes in Syria, it is obvious that its main concern entails securing the Iraqi borders and controlling Hezbollah in Lebanon. In Egypt, the U.S. response to the arrest of civil society activists has been very minor. Mrs. Laura Bush was praising the Egyptian government for the changes it was conducting in the country while security officers were arresting hundreds of activists. The Bush administration's pass over of repressive practices in many Arab countries such as Yemen, Tunis and Morocco contradicts its continuous pressure on Syria, Iran and Palestine. In Saudi Arabia, U.S. pressure has dwindled along with the Kingdom's accomplishment in smashing terrorist groups. In Lebanon, the U.S.'s main concern lies in the disarmament of Hezbollah and not in achieving reform and democratization. The speeches delivered by the different American officials concerning the resolution 1559 stress mainly on converting Hezbollah into a political party and curbing its military role. Very little, if nothing, has been done to help Lebanon overcome its economic and political crisis. U.S. priorities in the region entail impeding the proliferation of WMD in Iran and halting the emergence of militant Islamist groups which could threaten U.S. security.

Another U.S. key interest in the GME stems from securing wider Arab markets to absorb American products. The emergence of the European Union and China as two giant economic blocs that could highly compete with the U.S. recommends broadening American economic strategies. Such needs have been clearly expressed in the GMEI. In order for the U.S. to preserve its leadership in the global economy, it must expand free and fair trade agreements and encourage intraregional trade and investment in developing regions. Even the political changes called for in the GMEI serve American economic

interests. Good governance, the rule of law, investment in people private property rights and economic freedom present vital goals in U.S. foreign policy that could promote the enhancement of global development. At time of uncertainty and change, countries in the Middle East may close their markets and protect their domestic industries. This could threaten the leading economic status of the U.S. in the world. Therefore the GMEI stressed on the importance of trade which is the driving force in market economy.

In order to achieve its economic and security goals in the GME, Washington should allow its allies in Europe to take the lead in exploring new policy initiatives since they enjoy greater influence and historical connections. Therefore, the GMEI offered a new alliance between the U.S. and other European countries. Europe is known in the region for its penchant for offering diplomatic incentives which makes it more credible in the eyes of the Arabs. Combining Europe's influence with American threats could lead to a better control of the region and to the enhancement of U.S.'s legitimacy that has been hindered by the Bush administration's unilateralism.

For an effective democracy-promotion strategy, the U.S. administration must develop a serious, well-funded effort to help in the advancement of reform. Such policy should deal with the difficult political realities in the region without accepting simple cosmetic changes. This will certainly entail exerting sustained pressure on autocratic Arab governments to take concrete steps in promoting freedom and undertaking real institutional reforms. The U.S. needs to use incentive-based policies in order to encourage Arab leaders while putting more effort on ending violence in Iraq and Palestine.

During the Cold War, the U.S.'s cooperation with civil societies of East European countries proved highly effective in bringing about democracy to the region. However, Washington's efforts in trying to apply this same strategy in the Middle East did not achieve any success so far. Some analysts believe that this approach could not be valid in the case of the Middle East due to the long existing autocratic governments. J. Siegle, M. Weinstein and M. Halperin presented five steps that would allow democracies to flourish in the Greater Middle East. The first policy which they called "democratic selectivity" calls for giving preference, when allocating development assistance, to countries which develop democratic institutions. Second, they suggested that charters of regional lending institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank should include amendments that clearly give priority for democratic regimes. States should meet certain democratic qualifications in order to benefit from the different flexibilities provided by such institutions. Third, they insisted that only democratic states would be supported with international development assistance. Fourth, they focused on the importance of separating aids granted for security purposes from those provided for development. This implies that aids should not be influenced by political judgment. Finally, they suggested the creation of a "cohesive development strategy" that aims at alleviate fighting poverty and promoting development in different parts of the world¹⁶².

Four out of the five tips presented in the above study present incentive-based policies that aim at a positive encouragement of autocratic regimes to democratize. Such policies contradict the actual American strategy that relies heavily on threats and sanctions and which proved to have failed recently in many parts of the Arab world.

¹⁶² Siegle Joseph T., *opcit*, pp. 67-70.

According to Steven A. Cook, the best way to promote democracy and reform is by moving away from negative pressures toward encouraging promises. To this end, the United States, Cook said, could reward countries who achieve economic reforms and political liberalization through sponsoring their participation in different world clubs and organizations such as the World Trade Organization.

Democracy promotion has become imperative of the war on terrorism. However, this new strategy has led to contradictory policies within the Bush administration which have been selective in choosing its candidate countries. In fact, there are some countries where Washington is trying to balance new security ties with pro-reform pressures¹⁶³. By doing so, the Bush administration is again discrediting itself and instigating skepticism about its ability to stick to its commitments in the region.

Autocratic leaders and corrupt regimes in the Middle East represent the major obstacle to democracy and reform. However, the war on terrorism has impelled the Bush administration to seek friendlier relations with authoritarian regimes in many parts of the world for the sake of their cooperation and security measures. Moreover, the administration has not objected to different antidemocratic practices. For instance the U.S. built its strongest ties with Pakistan at a time when President Musharraf was including some amendments to the constitution of his country in order to preserve its rule. Talking about the U.S. as a country devoted to democracy in light of such contradictions will weaken rather than strengthen the country's credibility.

Such practices raise the doubts in the real intentions of the GMEI, and explain the unwillingness of Arab civil societies to embrace American initiatives even when they

¹⁶³ Carothers, Thomas. "Promoting Democracy & fighting Terror", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1, January / February 2003, p. 95.

intersect with their aspirations. To date, there is no clear vision about the fate of the GMEI. Yet, it is clear enough that Washington is seeking for self-protection regardless of its rhetoric overkill of promoting democracy and reform in the region.

American policy makers have become so obsessed by security issues to the point that limits their own freedom. While Arab autocratic regimes need to have their security officers in every corner of their countries in order to preserve their rule, the U.S. has spread its troops in different regions of the world in order to maintain its world leadership.

The U.S.'s conduct in the Greater Middle East today is extremely crucial since it not only put the future of the region at stake, but also its own reputation and credibility. The whole world will be judging whether Washington is really seeking to advance the cause of liberalism or it is simply defending its own interests.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

1. *Greater Middle East Initiative*: **GMEI**
2. *Greater Middle East*: **GME**
3. *Weapons of Mass Destruction*: **WMD**
4. *Arab Human Development Report*: **AHDR**
5. *Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative*: **BMENAI**
6. *Millennium Account Challenge*: **MCA**
7. *Middle East Partnership Initiative*: **MEPI**

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