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# Democracy and the Middle East: Egypt, the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the United States attempted to reverse its longstanding policy towards the Middle East of working with undemocratic and often autocratic governments with 'deficits' in the areas of elections, freedom of speech and human rights. George W Bush reiterated the new approach in his 2006 State of the Union address, when he linked the security of the US to reform in the region.

*"Our offensive against terror involves more than military action. Ultimately, the only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by offering the hopeful alternative of political freedom and peaceful change. So the United States of America supports democratic reform across the broader Middle East. Elections are vital, but they are only the beginning. Raising up a democracy requires the rule of law, and protection of minorities, and strong, accountable institutions that last longer than a single vote... Liberty is the future of every nation in the Middle East, because liberty is the right and hope of all humanity."*

President Bush, 31 January 2006

There has been much criticism directed at this democratisation project, summed up by former British Ambassador and Middle East consultant Oliver Miles, who wrote in August 2006, *"The trouble with this childish vision is that reality doesn't match up to it. The real problems are more uncomfortable."*

This Paper examines the emergence of the project and looks at the three elections singled out by President Bush – in Egypt, the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia.

Ruth Winstone

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## Summary

In 2002 the United States government, which had been considering its foreign policy strategy in the Middle East for some time, embarked publicly on a drive to promote reform in the Arab world and Afghanistan. The series of terrorist attacks in the previous ten years, aimed principally at the United States, gave impetus to the policy.<sup>1</sup> The *Middle East Partnership Initiative* of December 2002 was augmented by the *Partnership for Progress and a Common Future in the Broader Middle East and North Africa*, in June 2004. The two initiatives built on the work of the highly influential UN-sponsored annual Arab Human Development Reports, first published in 2002, and aimed to advance economic, political and educational opportunities through business and 'civic society' leaders. Political freedom and peaceful change were seen as tools with which terrorism could be defeated, and the US has committed large sums of money to the project.

In January 2006 President Bush used his State of the Union address to reaffirm the policy and to pledge his administration's support for elections in the region. He singled out Egypt, the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia for attention. Egypt had then just completed electing the President and the People's Assembly; the Palestinians had just confounded some observers by electing the militant Hamas organisation to the Legislative Council by a large majority, having in earlier presidential elections chosen the Fatah leader, Mahmoud Abbas; and Saudi Arabia had in 2005 embarked upon an unprecedented course of elections, albeit only at municipal level.

The democratic election of Hamas proved the most controversial event, creating a dilemma for Israel, the US and the other partners in the "Quartet" (the UN, the EU and Russia). The Palestinians had democratically elected to power an unacceptable party. The USA's commitment to the Egyptian experiment was strained by the electoral success of candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the subsequent treatment of people protesting about the conduct of the elections and the imprisonment of President Mubarak's main rival. The Saudi elections, though modest, were welcomed but the subsequent arrest of Saudis who were campaigning for reform of the monarchy and the system of rule undermined the gains.

This Paper examines the three elections in the context of the overall 'democratisation' programme.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the failed attack on the World Trade Centre (1993); bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (1998), attack on the USS *Cole* while refuelling in Aden, Yemen (2000); attack on New York and Washington (2001); bomb attack on fuel tanker *Limburg* in Yemeni waters (2002)



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# I Chronology

<b>June 2002</b>	First UN Arab Human Development Report published, condemning the 'freedom deficit' of Arab countries
<b>Nov 2002</b>	Community of Democracies meeting in Seoul and Statement on Terrorism
<b>Dec 2002</b>	<i>US-Middle East Partnership Initiative</i> launched
<b>2002</b>	Construction begins on the Israeli security wall/barrier in the West Bank
<b>March 2003</b>	Invasion and occupation of Iraq
<b>April 2003</b>	Israel/Palestine Road Map agreed 'for a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005'
<b>May 2003</b>	Israeli 'disengagement' policy promoted by Prime Minister of Israel
<b>Oct 2003</b>	UN Secretary General addresses Islamic Summit
<b>Nov 2003</b>	Bush addresses National Endowment for Democracy on the 'freedom deficit'
<b>June 2004</b>	G8 Summit at Sea Island, Georgia – <i>Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa</i> launched
<b>Jan 2005</b>	Elections for President of Palestinian Authority: Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah elected
<b>Feb 2005</b>	Municipal elections in Saudi Arabia
<b>May 2005</b>	Saudi intellectuals arrested for political campaigning
<b>May-June 2005</b>	Lebanese Elections: Amal Party/Hezbollah coalition win quarter of seats
<b>June 2005</b>	US Secretary of State speech to the American University in Cairo
<b>Sept 2005</b>	Contested presidential elections in Egypt
<b>Nov 2005</b>	Parliamentary elections in Egypt: Muslim Brotherhood form largest opposition group
<b>Dec 2005</b>	Egyptian presidential candidate Ayman Nour jailed for 5 years
<b>Dec 2005</b>	Assembly elections in Iraq: no absolute majority
<b>Jan 2006</b>	Palestinian Authority Elections: Hamas win majority of seats

**Jan 2006** President Bush's State of the Union address referring to democracy and liberty in the Middle East

**Feb-June 2006** Sanctions against Palestinian Authority imposed by Israel and the Quartet



## II The Broader Middle East democracy programme

Power in most of the countries of the Middle East had by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century been largely unaffected by the concept and practice of parliamentary democracy and accountability. Those countries with huge oil and gas assets moreover had used the wealth that these assets brought them to maintain a paternalistic form of government in which the values of liberty and human rights were subordinated to different historical, tribal and other traditions. During the 1990s terrorist attacks directed at US interests in the Middle East increased, and the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism led policy-makers, particularly in the United States, to review the defence of their interests in the region and adopt an approach broadly described as “democratisation”. This policy was stepped up after the Al Qaeda attack of September 2001 in a reversal of several decades of support for many autocratic regimes in the region, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia were among those countries considered urgently in need of reform. This new policy has been to concentrate on the so-called democracy and freedom deficits in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, in the hope that the promotion of elections as part of a wider strategy of social reform and development would undermine the conditions that lead to Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism and terrorism.

The policy was outlined in some detail by Richard Haass, at that time US State Department Director of Policy Planning, in December 2002. The following extracts from his much longer speech reflect similar sentiments expressed subsequently by other members of the Bush administration:

A democratic world is a more peaceful world. The pattern of established democracies not going to war with one another is among the most demonstrable findings in the study of international relations. This does not mean we cannot have overlapping interests and fruitful cooperation with non-democracies, nor does it mean that we will not have strong disagreements with fellow democracies. But the more established democracies there are, the larger the area in the world where nations will be more likely to sort out their differences through diplomacy...

Muslims cannot blame the United States for their lack of democracy. Still, the United States does play a large role on the world stage, and our efforts to promote democracy throughout the Muslim world have sometimes been halting and incomplete. Indeed, in many parts of the Muslim world, and particularly in the Arab world, successive U.S. administrations, Republican and Democratic alike, have not made democratization a sufficient priority. At times, the United States has avoided scrutinizing the internal workings of countries in the interests of ensuring a steady flow of oil, containing Soviet, Iraqi and Iranian expansionism, addressing issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, resisting communism in East Asia, or securing basing rights for our military. Yet by failing to help foster gradual paths to democratization in many of our important relationships – by creating what might be called a “democratic exception” – we missed an opportunity to help these countries become more stable, more prosperous, more peaceful, and more adaptable to the stresses of a globalizing world.

It is not in our interest—or that of the people living in the Muslim world—for the United States to continue this exception. U.S. policy will be more actively engaged in supporting democratic trends in the Muslim world than ever before. This is the clear message of the President's National Security Strategy.<sup>2</sup>

In the UK the Foreign and Commonwealth Office launched its own 'Engaging with the Islamic World' initiative.<sup>3</sup> This aims:

- To increase understanding of and engagement with Muslim countries and communities and to work with them to promote peaceful, political, economic and social reform
- To counter the ideological and theological underpinnings of the terrorist narrative, in order to prevent radicalisation, particularly among the young, in the UK and overseas

Among the influences on the new US policy was the work of a group comprising mainly academics and members of the Arab political class, who produced in 2002 the first of a series of Arab Human Development Reports, under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme, which identified the low level of political freedom in the Middle East. It singled out participatory democracy, women's empowerment and a knowledge deficit in the region as problems to be challenged. 'Popular political participation in Arab countries remains weak, as shown by the lack of genuine representative democracy and restrictions on liberties. The relative absence of women in government both reflects and exacerbates the lack of gender of empowerment.'<sup>4</sup>

The 2002 report concluded that

...the Arab world is at a crossroads. The fundamental choice is whether its trajectory will remain marked by inertia, as reflected in much of the present institutional context, and by ineffective policies that have produced the substantial development challenges facing the region; or whether prospects for an Arab renaissance, anchored in human development, will be actively pursued.<sup>5</sup>

Between 2000 and 2004, key speeches were made by American officials and political leaders on the issue of democracy in the Middle East. The specific proposals of this campaign were contained in the *Middle East Partnership Initiative* and the *Partnership for Progress and a Common Future in the Broader Middle East and North Africa*, unveiled between December 2002 and June 2004.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard N. Haass, addressing the Council on Foreign Relations, 4 December, 2002

[http://www.cfr.org/publication/5283/towards\\_greater\\_democracy\\_in\\_the\\_muslim\\_world.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/5283/towards_greater_democracy_in_the_muslim_world.html)

<sup>3</sup> See

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1133774501517>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rbas.undp.org/ahdr2.cfm?menu=3&submenu=1&subsubmenu=1>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.rbas.undp.org/ahdr2.cfm?menu=3&submenu=1&subsubmenu=1>

## A. The Middle East Partnership Initiative

The Middle East Partnership Initiative of December 2002 proposed an ambitious programme of work. The US State Department describes it as follows:

- The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative will provide a framework and funding for the U.S. to work together with governments and people in the Arab world to expand economic, political and educational opportunities for all.
- The Initiative will encompass the more than \$1 billion in assistance that the U.S. government provides to Arab countries annually. The United States is also committing \$29 million in initial funding for pilot projects in support of reform in each area listed above. We will also be requesting significant additional funds next year.
- The Initiative is a partnership and we will work closely with governments in the Arab world, other donors, academic institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organizations.
- As part of the Initiative, we will review existing U.S. assistance programs in the region to ensure our aid is reaching as many people as possible across the region, with a particular emphasis on women and children. We also want to insure that we are providing the most effective and efficient assistance possible.
- Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage will serve as coordinator for the Initiative. The Initiative will be managed by the Near East Affairs Bureau of the Department of State.

Examples of programmes to be funded included:

### Education

- "Partnerships for Learning" program to share knowledge with all levels of society in the Middle East through programs such as a Georgia State University workshop for non-governmental (NGO) leaders from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates.
- Programs focused on improving the lives of girls and women through literacy training and scholarships to stay in school.
- Efforts that expand access to bodies of knowledge and promote active learning, for example through e-learning, English teaching and book publishing initiatives. We will focus in particular on connecting more schools and students to the Internet.
- Implementing teacher training programs at the primary and secondary school levels and expanding university linkages for higher education.
- Scholarships for undergraduate study in the United States and in American universities within the region, focusing on degrees in fields such as economics, education, business administration, information technology, and the sciences.

### Economic Reform and Private Sector Development

- Assistance to Arab members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to help them comply with their commitments and technical assistance on WTO criteria to aspiring WTO members in the region.

- Enterprise funds with private sector management to provide capital and technical assistance to promising entrepreneurs and their business ventures. We will also establish new micro-enterprise programs to help new micro-business.
- New Department of Commerce Special American Business Internship Training scholarships, which will provide internships in American companies, and also will focus on developing networks and training opportunities for women entrepreneurs from the Middle East.
- Assistance in financial sector reform for governments across the region.
- Programs to assist on-going efforts to increase transparency and fight corruption.

### **Strengthening Civil Society**

- Through mechanisms such as the Middle East Democracy Fund, assistance to non-governmental organizations and individuals from across the political spectrum working for political reform.
- Support for establishment of more NGOs, independent media outlets, polling organizations, think tanks, and business associations -- groups that create the foundation for a vibrant democracy.
- Programs that will increase the transparency of legal and regulatory systems and improve administration of the judicial process.
- Training for candidates for political office and for members of parliaments and other elected officials.
- Training and exchanges for electronic and print journalists.

## **B. The Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Broader Middle East and North Africa**

The launching of the second initiative, the *Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Broader Middle East and North Africa*, was not without its problems, especially when the draft version was 'leaked' in the Arab world where the reception from some quarters was initially sceptical if not hostile. The United States chose to launch a revised version of the Partnership for Progress at the G8 Summit which it was hosting in the American state of Georgia in June 2004. The leaders of Algeria, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Jordan, Turkey and Yemen, and the new President of Iraq, were invited.

The final agreed document proposed:

A 'Forum for the Future,' which will bring together in one forum G-8 and regional foreign, economic, and other ministers for regular discussions on reform, with business and civil society leaders participating in parallel dialogues.

A 'Plan of Support' that will offer assistance through new initiatives:

*Democracy Assistance Dialogue*, which will bring together democracy foundations, civil society groups, and governments from the G-8, the region, and other countries, to promote and strengthen democratic institutions, coordinate and share information on democracy programs, initiate new democracy programs, and sponsor exchanges. Turkey, Yemen, and Italy to co-sponsor the Democracy Assistance Dialogue and co-host the first meeting in 2004.

*Microfinance Initiative* to help over two million entrepreneurs escape poverty through microfinance loans over the next 5 years. Jordan will host a Microfinance Best Practices Training Center and Yemen will host the first microfinance pilot project.

*Literacy Initiative* to assist the region's efforts to halve the illiteracy rate over the next decade, including by training a corps of 100,000 teachers by 2009. Afghanistan and Algeria will co-sponsor this initiative.

*Business and Entrepreneurship Training initiative* to help as many as 250,000 young entrepreneurs, especially women, expand their employment opportunities. Bahrain and Morocco will co-sponsor this initiative.

*Private Enterprise Development Facility* at the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to invest \$100 million to finance small and medium-sized enterprises.

*Network of Funds* to coordinate the work of development institutions and international financial institutions working in the region; and

*Task Force on Investment* to assist the region's efforts to improve the business climate.

In 2004 an assessment of the United States' reform programme was made by the United States Institute of Peace.

While the United States has engaged more directly over the past few years to promote reform...its efforts have been directed primarily toward a relatively narrow constituency of liberal, secular, pro-Western elites who do not represent the region's grassroots majority.

However, numerous Arab reform advocates—from Islamists to businessmen—have proposed a rich array of reform initiatives that merit U.S. policymakers' attention. Indeed, U.S. policymakers largely have ignored moderate Islamist voices for reform, even though Islamists retain a strong, populist following in various countries throughout the region.

Ultimately, successful Arab reform efforts must bridge secular and Islamist demands for change. In its quest to promote reform in the region, the United States will need to work with moderate Islamists and ruling regimes in the region. It must sell both on the notion that sustainable reform should be implemented via

a gradual process of change that creates transparent and accountable institutions and respects the rule of law.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time as these initiatives were being tried, the Roadmap towards a two-state solution for Israel/Palestine, supported by the US, the UN, the EU and Russia (the Quartet), was agreed in spring 2003 with the aim of an agreed settlement between the parties by 2005.

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<sup>6</sup> Mona Yacoubian and Vahn Zanoval, "Time for Making Historic Decisions in the Middle East" 27 Nov 2002 (United States Institute of Peace) [www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr136.pdf](http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr136.pdf)

### III 'Elections are vital'

As the programmes described above began to be implemented, greater emphasis was laid upon the need for the countries embraced by the Broader Middle East initiative to introduce 'democratic reform' and the prospect of 'future liberty'. In his State of the Union speech of January 2006 President Bush declared that "Elections are vital, but they are only the beginning" and he singled out Egypt, the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia as examples of areas where elections could transform the political landscape.

#### A. Egypt: Elections for the President and the People's Assembly

In 2005 President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt announced that for the first time in his 24-year presidency, the presidential election (of September that year) was to be contested. In June 2005, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice visited Cairo. She declared that:

We should all look to a future when every government respects the will of its citizens -- because the ideal of democracy is universal. For 60 years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East -- and we achieved neither. Now, we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people.<sup>7</sup>

Of a population of approximately 77.5 million, about 32 million were registered as voters. Of this electorate, one fifth voted. President Mubarak gained nearly 90 per cent of that vote. The President's nearest rival, Ayman Nour of the Tomorrow Party, won 7.3 per cent of the vote. Nour, who had previously been in prison awaiting trial from January to March 2005, was on bail during the presidential election. The results were as follows:

Candidate	Party	Valid votes	% of valid votes
Mohamed Hosni MUBARAK	National Democratic Party	6,316,784	88.6
Ayman Abdel Aziz NOUR	Tomorrow (Al Ghad) Party	540,405	7.6
Noman Khalil GOMAA	Al Wafd Party	208,891	2.9
Osama Abdel Shafi SHALTOUT	The Solidarity (Al Takaful) Party	29,857	0.4
Wahid Fakhry AL UKSORY	The Egyptian Socialist Arab (Misr Al Arabi Al Ishtraki) Party	11,881	0.2
Ibrahim Mohamed Abdel Monem TORK	The Democratic Union (Al Itihad Al Demoqrati) Party	5,831	0.1
Mamdouh Mohamed Ahmed QENAWY	The Social Constitutional (Al Dustour Al Igtima'i) Party	5,481	0.1
Ahmed Al Sabahi AWADALLAH	The Nation (Al Ummah) Party	4,393	0.06

<sup>7</sup> June 2005 American University of Cairo <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm>

Fawzi Khalil GHAZAL	Egypt 2000 (Misr 2000) Party	4,222	0.06
Al Said Refaat Mohamed AL AGROUDY	The National Conciliation (Al Wifaq Al Qawmy) Party	4,106	0.06

Turnout 22.9%

Source: IFES <http://www.electionguide.org/results.php?ID=80>

Two months later the parliamentary elections for the People's Assembly, comprising 444 directly elected members (plus 10 appointed) were held. 222 two-member constituencies were contested over the period of one month, in three stages. Muslim Brotherhood candidates stood as Independents because the Muslim Brotherhood, as an ostensibly religious party, is not allowed in the country (though it has a highly active and visible presence). Its reputation in Egypt for being non-corrupt contributed to its success in winning almost one fifth of the seats. This was the greatest electoral success for the Muslim Brotherhood in its 80 year history and made the Brotherhood the largest opposition block, the President's National Democratic Party having won nearly 70 percent of the seats.

#### Summary of the 9 November to 7 December 2005 People's Assembly of Egypt election results

Parties	Seats	Gains	Losses	Net Seats	
				Gain/Loss	%
National Democratic Party ( <i>Al-Hizb Al Watani Al Democrati</i> )	311	0	-93	-93	68.5
New Wafd Party ( <i>Hizb al-Wafd-al-Jadid</i> )	6	0	0	0	1.3
Progressive National Unionist Party ( <i>Hizb al Tagammu' al Watani al Taqadommi al Wahdwawi</i> )	2	0	-3	-3	0.4
Tomorrow Party ( <i>Hizb al-Ghad</i> )	1	0	-1	-1	0.2
Independents (Muslim Brotherhood - <i>al-ikhwan al-muslimun</i> )	88	71	0	71	19.4
Independents	24	0	-3	-3	4.6
Still in contest	12				
Non-Elected members	10	0	0	0	2.2
Arab Democratic Nasserist Party or Nasserist Party	0	0	-1	-1	0
Liberal Party ( <i>Hizb al-Ahrar</i> )	0	0	-1	-1	
	<b>454</b>				

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian\\_parliamentary\\_election%2C\\_2005](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_parliamentary_election%2C_2005)

Following the parliamentary elections, Nour, who had lost his own seat, was tried and convicted of forging signatures on documents in connection with his Tomorrow Party. In December 2005, he received five years' imprisonment. In May 2006 the conviction was upheld on appeal. At the same time, two Egyptian judges, Hesham Bastawisi and Mahmoud Mekky, representing a much larger legal constituency which had concerns about the lack of independence of the judiciary from the executive, publicly criticised the conduct of the elections. Since judges act as election supervisors this became a major issue in Egypt following the two electoral rounds. Protestors were physically attacked by the Egyptian police during demonstrations in support of the judges, and the Interior Ministry announced that all such demonstrations would be deemed illegal. The Egyptian authorities announced that 254 Muslim Brotherhood members, and activists from the Kifaya (also known as Egyptian Movement for Change, campaigning against Mubarak and the 'succession' of his son), were arrested.



Human Rights Watch commented that:

The Muslim Brotherhood put the number arrested in Cairo at around 400, and said that scores of additional arrests also took place in Alexandria. Kifaya coordinator George Ishak told reporters that demonstrators from his group were also beaten and arrested in Abbasiyya, another Cairo neighbourhood. Leading Brotherhood members were among those detained today, including member of parliament Muhsin Radi, Muhammad Mursi, a member of the group's executive bureau, and `Issam al-`Irian, a prominent spokesman for the group and leading member of the Doctors' Syndicate.<sup>8</sup>

Joe Stork, deputy director of the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch, added that it was 'another grim day for Egypt's supposed commitment to political reform. People are trying to gather peacefully to support critics of the government, which responds by putting them behind bars or beating them into silence.'

The treatment of Ayman Nour was criticised across Europe and in the US. Before the elections, in March 2005, Secretary of State Rice cancelled a visit to Cairo as an expression of US disapproval at his arrest. Following the elections, comment on the aftermath was severe.

'The charade is over,' said Samer Shehata, a professor of contemporary Arab studies at Georgetown University who is researching elections in Egypt. 'Egypt is going back to an earlier period of repression.'

In Washington, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the United States was 'deeply troubled' by Nour's case, calling it 'both a miscarriage of justice by international standards and a setback for the democratic aspirations of the Egyptian people.'

'Both Mr. Nour's ongoing detention and the Egyptian government's handling of dissent raise serious concerns about the path to political reform and democracy in Egypt and are incongruous with the Egyptian government's professed commitment to increased political openness and dialogue within Egyptian society,' McCormack said.<sup>9</sup>

The *New York Times* commented that

Recent decisions in Egypt, from arresting a popular blogger to postponing local elections, present a problem for the White House. Not only do they contradict President Bush's call for spreading democracy, but they complicate the administration's effort to maintain the nearly \$2 billion a year that Egypt receives in military and development aid in the face of some calls from Congress to re-evaluate the package.

...But despite the potential public relations value to the government if Mr. Nour is granted a new trial -- and presumably released -- such a decision would do little to make substantive changes in the political landscape of Egypt.

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<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch 19 May 2006 <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/05/18/egypt13407.htm>

<sup>9</sup> *Philadelphia Enquirer* June 2006

The judges' demands, on the other hand, have been widely seen as a direct challenge to the ability of the governing National Democratic Party's ability to maintain power and guarantee that its handpicked nominee will replace Mr. Mubarak, who turned 78 this month and has ruled Egypt for 25 years.

The call to have completely independent oversight of elections comes at a time when the governing party has appeared weak and divided, the president's popularity is low and the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood is strong and popular. Many supporters and opponents of Mr. Mubarak are discussing who will be the next president, even while the subject remains officially taboo.<sup>10</sup>

The 'officially taboo subject' is a reference to the speculation that President Mubarak's son, Gamal, would succeed his father.

Publicly US-Egyptian relations have been under strain as the democratic process in Egypt falters. Free Trade Agreement negotiations with Egypt which had almost reached a conclusion in January 2006 have stalled, the US Trade Representative reporting that "political and economic issues present obstacles to an FTA with Egypt, the largest Arab country. They are beginning to reform and liberalize their economy, but we're not quite there yet in terms of the economic or commercial side".<sup>11</sup> US civilian funding of Egyptian projects has also been under scrutiny since 2004, and has undergone a cut of 20 per cent.

Nevertheless, the US State Department reaffirmed the strong US-Egypt relationship in August 2006:

An important pillar of the bilateral relationship remains U.S. security and economic assistance to Egypt, which expanded significantly in the wake of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979. U.S. military aid to Egypt totals over \$1.3 billion annually. ...Since 2003, U.S. assistance is also focusing more on economic reform, education, civil society, and other programs supported by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

U.S. military cooperation has helped Egypt modernize its armed forces and strengthen regional security and stability. Under Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programs, the U.S. has provided F-4 jet aircraft, F-16 jet fighters, M-60A3 and M1A1 tanks, armored personnel carriers, Apache helicopters, antiaircraft missile batteries, aerial surveillance aircraft, and other equipment. The U.S. and Egypt also participate in combined military exercises, including deployments of U.S. troops to Egypt. Every other year, Egypt hosts Operation Bright Star, a multilateral military exercise with the U.S., and the largest military exercise in the region. Units of the U.S. 6th Fleet are regular visitors to Egyptian ports.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 'Democracy In Egypt Faces Two Tests Today', *New York Times*, 18 May 2006

<sup>11</sup> Rob Portman, US Trade Representative, quoted in Cairo, 12 February 2006

<sup>12</sup> US State Department Country Background Notes August 2006

## B. The Palestinian Territories: Election of Hamas

In January 2005, Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah was elected President of the Palestinian Authority with 62 per cent of the vote.<sup>13</sup> The Islamist movement Hamas had refused to participate in those elections.<sup>14</sup> The only other candidate with more than 5 per cent of the votes cast was the Independent, Mustafa Barghouti, with 19.5 per cent.

The post-Arafat euphoria which greeted the election of President Abbas soon dissipated. Though able to negotiate a cessation of hostilities against Israel, Abbas was expected by Israel to prosecute and punish the “terror” organisations, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the effect of which, some believed, would be to encourage a civil war among his own people.

In December 2005 the Quartet members (the US, EU, UN and Russia) issued a statement warning the Palestinian Authority against giving Hamas leaders ministerial posts in any future cabinet. The statement did not mention Hamas by name, but ‘expressed [the Quartet’s] view that a future Palestinian Authority Cabinet should include no member who has not committed to the principles of Israel’s right to exist in peace and security and an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism.’<sup>15</sup>

In January 2006, parliamentary elections (ie elections to the Palestinian legislative council) were held, and Hamas, with a good record of non-corruption in comparison to Fatah, overwhelmingly won, with 74 seats compared to Fatah’s 45. The EU had helped finance the electoral process with €18.5 million funding. The election was organised under a new mixed PR system, in which half of the seats were elected from constituencies, the other half by party lists (the so-called Sainte-Lague method).

Result for the Electoral Lists:

No.	Electoral Lists	No of valid votes	Percentages	No of seats
1	Change and Reform	440,409	44.45	29
2	Fatah Movement	410,554	41.43	28
3	Martyr Bu Ail Mustafa	42,101	4.25	3
4	The Alternative	28,973	2.92	2
5	Independent Palestine (Mustafa Al-Barghouti and Independents)	26,909	2.72	2
6	The Third Way	23,862	2.41	0*
7	Freedom and Social Justice	7,127	0.72	0*
8	Freedom and Independence	4,398	0.44	0*
9	Martyr Abu al-Abbas	3,011	0.30	0*
10	The National Coalition for Justice and Democracy	1,806	0.18	0*

<sup>13</sup> See Library Research Paper RP 06/17 *The Palestinian Parliamentary Election and the rise of Hamas* for background to the political complexion of PLO, Fatah and Hamas

<sup>14</sup> See Library Research Papers 06/17 (*The Palestinian Parliamentary Election and the rise of Hamas*) and 05/29 (*The Middle East Peace Process: Prospects after the Palestinian Presidential Election*) for a fuller discussion and analysis

<sup>15</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 30 December 2005

11	Palestinian Justice	1,723	0.17	0*
	TOTAL (95.05%)	990,873	100	66
	Total no of electors	1,042,424		

\* Less than the threshold percentage

Final Distribution of seats:

	Political affiliation	No. of seats in the lists	No. of seats in the districts	Total No. of seats
1	Change and Reform	29	45	74
2	Fatah Movement	28	17	45
3	Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa	3	0	3
4	The Third Way	2	0	2
5	The Alternative	2	0	2
6	Independent Palestine	2	0	2
7	Independents	0	4	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>132</b>

Source: Central Elections Commission Palestine

The result ended the power monopoly of the PLO and the Fatah movement but the combination of the presidential and the parliamentary elections meant that

Hamis controlled the Palestinian Authority's parliament and, therefore, its government while Fatah retained the presidency as well as control of the PLO. Because of personal loyalty or party membership, Fatah also controls the security forces and much of the civil service. Dual power has thus been introduced into a system accustomed to domination by a single faction, with neither Hamas nor Fatah prepared for the change. Hamas is governing as an opposition party; Fatah is resisting it like a ruling one.<sup>16</sup>

Although the scale of the victory took many international observers by surprise, some had pointed to the strength of Hamas's power and the dilemma it would pose. Shibley Telhami, of the University of Maryland, wrote in January that 'Hamas will be the winner today, regardless of actual results. It will have a significant voice in the new parliament that cannot be ignored by Mr Abbas and the international community.' He predicted that 'the public wants results in foreign and domestic policies, and Hamas will not be able to deliver without moderating its positions. This will undoubtedly be both a U.S. and an international demand.'<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Robert Malley, *New York Review of Books*, 24 August 2006 (Robert Malley is International Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Programme Director)

<sup>17</sup> *Baltimore Sun* 25 January 2006

The victory for Hamas caught the Israeli Government off guard.<sup>18</sup> Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said on 29 January that Israel would not engage with a Palestinian Authority that included Hamas unless certain conditions were met:

We have made it clear that without giving up its ways of terror, recognizing Israel's right to exist in peace and security, and honouring all the Palestinian [National] Authority accords towards Israel - including, of course, annulling the Hamas charter calling for the destruction of the State of Israel - Israel will not hold any contact with the Palestinians.<sup>19</sup>

A number of Israeli measures followed swiftly, including the withholding of customs and VAT revenue which was normally collected by Israel and transferred to the Palestinian Authority, a request from the Israeli Cabinet to third countries to discontinue financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority, and the restriction of the movement of Hamas members, including new MPs, through areas under Israeli control.

The Quartet called on Hamas to renounce violence and recognise Israel or face sanctions in the form of a reduction in aid to the Authority. In late April 2006 the European Commission aid to the Palestinians (which in 2005 amounted to €290 million) was suspended, although the EU continued its aid programmes to the Palestinian people direct under a temporary international mechanism which enabled some funding of medical and other vital services.

The Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, told the European Parliament:

The Commission's action is a precautionary measure taken to ensure that no Community funds pass into the hands of Hamas. We have taken it pending the possible evolution of the Palestinian Authority position and a definitive decision by the Council on relations with the Palestinian Authority. It is not a definitive decision : we are currently reviewing all projects involving payments to or through the Palestinian Authority to see whether we can find alternative solutions. My services have already held a meeting with the office of Mahmoud Abbas to discuss implementing some of these projects through the Office of the President.<sup>20</sup>

Alastair Croke, a former EU negotiator in Palestine and the Director of Conflicts Forum, had warned a few days after the result that:

Hamas now has more legitimacy than any ruling government in the Middle East. If you radiate hostility and negativity towards the outcome of elections it will seem very perverse and it will colour and damage engagement in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Library Research Paper 06/17 *The Palestinian Parliamentary Election and the rise of Hamas* for detailed analysis of reactions to the result.

<sup>19</sup> <http://hcl1.hclibrary.parliament.uk/SECTIONS/lads/Rpapers.asp>

<sup>19</sup> *Haaretz* 29 Jan 2006, carried by BBC Monitoring Service

<sup>20</sup> Speech, EP plenary, "Suspension of aid to the Palestinian Authority government", 26 April 2006 at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/260&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

<sup>21</sup> *Financial Times*, 30 January 2006

The Israeli refusal to accept a Hamas-dominated government and to put pressure on the members of the Quartet was explained by Tanya Reinhart of Tel Aviv University in the context of the Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza. The unilateral 'disengagement' plan ensured that Israel retained its control of the Palestinian territories, monitoring border crossing points, insisting on military control of air space and sea borders, and retaining overwhelming influence over the economic and commercial life of Gaza and the West Bank.

...From the perspective of the Israeli army, Hamas's victory entails the complete loss of the network of control it has constructed in the territories since 1993. When it accepted the US demand to allow Hamas's participation in the Palestinian election, Israel - like the US - assumed that although Hamas would be in some way legitimised this would only entail a small change in the PA, which would essentially remain controlled by the same apparatus as before. ...With the realisation that its apparatuses in the occupied territories were on the verge of collapse, Israel managed within days to mobilize both the US administration and Europe. Overnight the West forgot its noble words about democracy and threatened to impose an economic stranglehold on the Palestinians for having made the wrong choice at the ballot box.<sup>22</sup>

She went on to quote the journalist Robert Fisk who wrote in the *Independent* on 28 January 2006:

And now, horror of horrors, the Palestinians have elected the wrong party to power. They were supposed to have given their support to the friendly, pro-Western, corrupt absolutely pro-American Fatah...rather than to Hamas which said they would represent them. And bingo, they have chosen the wrong party again...God damn that democracy. What are we to do with people who don't vote the way they should?<sup>23</sup>

'It is little wonder that ordinary people looked elsewhere - to Hamas, the voice of desperation - for electoral solace', wrote the MP, Tom Levitt, after visiting the West Bank shortly after the election. The Israeli government had continued to build its 'defensive wall', despite an International Court of Justice opinion that it had breached international law,<sup>24</sup> and had extended settlements in the West Bank while subjecting Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to continual surveillance.

...the outcome of the recent Palestinian election is of little surprise....East Jerusalem, a city holy to Christians, Jews and Muslims, is already in places a no-go area for Palestinians. Yet it is the source (until recently) of 40 per cent of Palestine's earned income. Surely no policy of using armed troops to maintain 680 road blocks daily in someone else's tiny country can be justified or tolerated? Over half of the 680 km so called "defensive" wall is now complete. 80 per cent of its planned length is inside Palestinian territory. Economic and social planning

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<sup>22</sup> Tanya Reinhart, 'The Road Map to Nowhere' 2006 p150

<sup>23</sup> Robert Fisk, *Independent*, 28 January 2006

<sup>24</sup> See the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion of 9 July 2004 [http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/ipresscom/ipress2004/ipresscom2004-2\\_summary\\_mwp\\_20040709.htm](http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/ipresscom/ipress2004/ipresscom2004-2_summary_mwp_20040709.htm) and see <http://www.ifjfp.org/factsheets/geneva4.htm> (Jews for Justice for Palestinians) for a discussion of the breaches and violations of Israel's international obligations.

become impossible for the fledgling Palestinian democracy...and general harassment make it impossible for the Palestinian Authority to govern and of the economy to bloom. It is little wonder that ordinary people looked elsewhere – to Hamas, the voice of desperation – for electoral solace.<sup>25</sup>

The prospect of a successful Palestinian government was thus considered, by some, blighted from the start. Fatah rejected a national unity government, and, according to Robert Malley publicly bemoaned the West's policy toward Hamas, while Fatah leaders 'privately supported that policy, encouraging the US and EU to maintain their three conditions for resuming donor aid. With US help, they hoped to establish a channel of communication between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert in order to circumvent and marginalize Hamas. And they discreetly promoted subtle forms of insubordination by civil servants who, deprived of salaries, hardly needed encouragement.'<sup>26</sup>

The *Washington Post* suggested that the withholding of funds (which would normally pay the salaries of the Palestinian Authority employees) would be used by Palestinian leaders with 'a long tradition of exploiting the suffering of their own people for political ends; Hamas has been content to foster a humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza strip.'

Despite its understandable rejection of Hamas, it is in Israel's larger interest to allow Palestinian money to be used for legitimate Palestinian needs and to ease its current chokehold on the movement of goods in and out of Gaza. But western governments should draw the line at providing for Hamas cadres now installed in ministries or the salaries of the 75,000 gunmen who are on the Palestinian payroll – unless these take decisive action against terrorism.<sup>27</sup>

The political situation was exacerbated by an attack on 25 June 2006 by members of Hamas on an Israeli military base, killing two soldiers and seizing a third. Israel retaliated by launching an air attack and ground invasion of Gaza, destroying a power station and placing an embargo on food and fuel entering the area. The UN Secretary General and UN agencies warned in early July of the potential for a humanitarian and public health disaster.<sup>28</sup>

As at October 2006 there is stalemate in the territories. The Israeli government has been condemned for its 'disproportionate' military response in Gaza, while efforts by President Abbas to form a government of national unity that would satisfy the criteria set by Israel and the Quartet have so far failed.

### C. Saudi Arabia: Local elections

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy with a political system rooted in Islamic Sharia law. The king is drawn from the Al-Saud family. The present King, Abdullah, is also the Prime Minister and nominates a Council of Ministers. His half-brother, Prince Sultan, is the Crown

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<sup>25</sup> Tom Levitt, *IPU Review* Spring 2006

<sup>26</sup> Robert Malley, above

<sup>27</sup> *Washington Post* 21 May 2006

<sup>28</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/5162062.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5162062.stm)

Prince. Other members of the King's close family hold important roles. The 13 provinces of the kingdom are governed by princes or close relatives of the royal family, appointed by the King.

Pressures for change were already emerging in the kingdom in the 1990s, and the then king, Fahd, introduced a number of political reforms, including the establishment in 1993 of a Consultative Council, the Majlis Al-Shura with 120 appointed members. The Council has no function as a legislature. However, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace argues that it was the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 that 'exposed Saudi society to the catastrophic outcomes of its authoritarian Wahhabi lethargy. The most immediate impact of the 9/11 attacks was to subject the royal family to increasing international pressure to introduce significant reforms to combat terrorism and extremism. However, the attacks also served as a catalyst for wide-ranging debates among the political and intellectual elites about "what went wrong" and "what should be done." Domestic calls for reform were suddenly given a better hearing.'<sup>29</sup>

In October 2003, the then Prince Abdullah announced plans to create municipal councils for which elections would be held in the provinces of the kingdom. Petitioners to the Prince had called for, among other changes, election of members to the Shura council and regional assemblies; an independent judiciary; freedom of speech and association; a greater public role for women; and a national forum for open discussion.

The municipal elections were the first elections to a government body in Saudi Arabia. Polling took place between February and April 2005 in three phases – first in the capital Riyadh then in the south and east regions, followed by the north and west. 1,818 candidates contested 592 seats. (Half the seats were up for election and half appointed.) Nationwide, more than three million Saudis were eligible to vote out of a population of approximately 24 million. Women were not registered to vote, but the way was left open for female voting in future elections. Turnout was between 25 and 35 per cent depending on the region. Participation in the election was more enthusiastic among the candidates, than it was in the electorate as a whole. In the absence of political parties, it was up to individual candidates to make themselves and their policies known; there was no limit on campaign spending so long as candidates used their own resources.

There have been no full results tables issued to date. But reports suggested that eighty per cent of the seats were won by candidates from emerging middle class 'Islamists'.

According to lawyer Abdul Aziz al Kasseem, "The winners can be considered moderates. They are more open than the official religious establishment and the Wahhabi currents, they are technocrats and business men with religious leanings, who are against any liberal reforms of the theocratic state." According to the pro-government daily Arab news based in Jeddah, "The election results are unexpected for both government and militant groups. The winners are western educated radicals, opposed to militancy and liberalism and want to keep Saudi Arabia as an Islamic country, but want more share in the running of government

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<sup>29</sup> 'The Saudi Labyrinth: Evaluating the Current Political Opening' by Amr Hamzawy, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2006



through elections. They are not a party because it is illegal to form a party, but still they are very closely connected with each other nationally and will become a sizeable force in future. There are different currents among them, but the leading colour is Islamic. This is the emergence of the middle class on the political scene.”<sup>30</sup>

In Saudi the middle class is largely Western-educated, comprising academics, doctors, lawyers, managers, civil servants and businessmen.

They have shown their strength in the elections, by winning 80 per cent of the seats. This is an important development in a tribal-dominated society like Saudi Arabia. Society has partially emerged from the constraints and confines of traditional tribal politics. Those who make up the middle classes now have been transformed from poverty-stricken desert dwellers to wealthy citizens of modern metropolises within two generations. The middle class intelligentsia has increased their influence in the last few years. But it would be a mistake to exaggerate their influence in this conservative society, compared to the religious leaders and mullahs.<sup>31</sup>

The British Government welcomed the elections, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw saying in February 2005, ‘they [are] an important step in the growing involvement of the people in political decision-making. I look forward to the development of this process; and I particularly welcome the Government of Saudi Arabia’s commitment to extend it to women.’<sup>32</sup> But their limited scope, the exclusion of women and the lack of political parties meant that the Saudi initiative was widely ignored; however Amr Hamzawy of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace argues that this illustrates a misunderstanding of Saudi politics.

The tribal loyalties and confessional affiliations clearly manifested in the municipal elections did not represent incurable elements of backwardness. Rather, they entailed an important moment of pluralism. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Saudi government suppressed diversity in society. The surfacing of tribal and confessional affiliations in today’s politics represents a reassertion of pluralism and ultimately serves to push the reform process forward. After all, only a consensus-oriented participatory political system is capable of accommodating diversity peacefully.

The municipal elections have served three important purposes with regard to the reform process.

First, as Saudi Arabia’s first elections since the 1960s, they reinvigorated the forgotten memory of popular participation. Second, they set a precedent for opening existing consultative bodies for pluralist contestation. And, third, the elections garnered great attention among the Saudi population and helped strengthen the debates on reform.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> [www.socialistworld.net/eng/2005/05/16saudi.html](http://www.socialistworld.net/eng/2005/05/16saudi.html)

<sup>31</sup> [www.socialistworld.net/eng/2005/05/16saudi.html](http://www.socialistworld.net/eng/2005/05/16saudi.html)

<sup>32</sup>

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391647&a=KArticle&aid=1107298676561>

<sup>33</sup> Amr Hamzawy, above

The councils have yet to meet.

The then Crown Prince Abdullah in an interview in Paris in April 2005 confirmed that Saudi 'was working towards consolidating the democracy we wish for' hinting that in future the Shura Council might be subject to some form of election.

He held back from setting out detailed plans, indicating the extent to which the heir apparent is modernising Saudi Arabia through a process of cautious evolution, which has to be based on securing the consensus of the other leading royals.<sup>34</sup>

In the same article the *Gulf States Newsletter* pointed out the paradoxical nature of the Saudi approach to democratic reform. Three Saudi intellectuals were sentenced in May 2005 to lengthy prison sentences, after a trial which had begun over a year earlier. . The three had campaigned for a constitutional monarchy for the kingdom, and an elected parliament, and their lengthy trial ended with convictions for threatening national unity, doubting the independence of the judiciary, organising political meetings and justifying violence. The US Secretary of State made reference to the affair while visiting Cairo (see above, page 13) in June 2005. Agence France Press reported that: .

The crackdown on pro-democracy activists has cast a shadow over the Saudi government's moves to introduce limited reforms, including male-only general and municipal elections.

In a speech in Cairo ahead of her visit to Saudi Arabia, Rice criticized Riyadh's record on democratic reform and the jailing of the three activists. "Many people still pay an unfair price for exercising their basic rights. Three individuals in particular are currently imprisoned for peacefully petitioning their government -- and this should not be a crime in any country."

The State Department had already registered concern over the fate of the activists and Rice said she raised the matter in her talks with the Saudi leadership.

But Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal said he told Rice the prisoners had broken a law. "They are in the hands of the court. The government cannot interfere until the court action is taken in this regard."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Gulf States Newsletter, Issue 759 10 June 2005

<sup>35</sup> Agence France Press, 21 June 2005

## IV Commentary

While the US continues publicly to promote democratisation,<sup>36</sup> criticism and analysis of the policy reached a peak in 2006. The invasion of Afghanistan in response to Al-Qaeda's activities, the occupation of Iraq, and subsequent events in the Palestinian territories, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt underlined the problems inherent in the democratisation policy. 'Is there any way out of this mess?' asked Oliver Miles in the *Independent*. Mr Miles, formerly a diplomat and head of the Near East and North African Department, wrote on 1 August 2006, during the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon:

The Middle East is in a worse mess than at any time I can remember. Iraq, Gaza and Lebanon are at war or on the edge of war. Israel and the West Bank are bleeding. Is there a way out?

A month ago, attention was on Gaza. Having argued that negotiation with Arafat was impossible, Israel and its supporters tried to starve the newly elected Palestinian government into submission. Britain and Europe followed America in refusing to talk, giving the coup de grâce to the policy of promoting democratic reform in the "new Middle East". When Hamas countered by abducting an Israeli soldier, Israel's reaction was to kill at least 150 Palestinians and destroy the Gaza power station, a war crime which has condemned some of the most miserable people on earth to even greater misery without water or sewage.

Reviewing the situation in Lebanon, he continued,

Why is the region in a mess? George Bush and Tony Blair explained their shared understanding of the big picture in Washington on Friday. Against the reactionary and terrorist groups trying to stop progress towards democracy, liberty and human rights, stands a more hopeful ideology called freedom, which, in Bush's words, "scares the ideologues, the totalitarians, those who want to impose their vision. It just frightens them, and so they respond. They've always been violent."

So it's black hats and white hats. The trouble with this childish vision is that reality doesn't match up to it. The real problems are more uncomfortable. For years, Britain and the rest of the world have put the Middle East in the "too difficult" tray and left it to America. America is incapable of dealing with the problem because of its ingrained bias towards Israel. The Arabs, hopelessly outgunned, have responded over the years with an unpredictable crescendo of new horrors. And Israel has pursued a policy of colonial expansion and the "iron wall".<sup>37</sup>

The rise of Islamism is another complicating factor in an already faltering search for stability through democracy in the Middle East. As is evident in Egypt and Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries, there is a struggle taking place between the traditional elites whose rule has gone largely unchallenged and radical new forces, particularly radical Islamists, who present an ideological challenge to the old order.

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<sup>36</sup> For example President Bush praised reforms in Kuwait as a 'notable example' for the Middle East in October 2006. See [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060905-3.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060905-3.html)

<sup>37</sup> Oliver Miles, 'Is there anyway out of this mess?' *Independent* 1 August 2006

The order that emerged after World War II – accustomed to encouraging domestic anger against Israel – has seen its influence and grip on power challenged in the wave of instability washing across the Middle East. That has roughly coincided with the rise of insurgency in Iraq...

The empowerment of Islamists has been propelled by events large and small – the occupation of Iraq, Israel's war with Hezbollah, the United States support of Israel in that war, Danish cartoons lampooning the Prophet Mohammed...<sup>38</sup>

In their attempt to regain the initiative and strip the Islamic opposition groups of credibility Middle Eastern governments have "long tried to take the lead in defending what they perceived as Islamic values while simultaneously trying to crush organisations that defined themselves as Islamic, like the Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>39</sup> Western calls on such governments to reform, may therefore be missing the point

Other voices argue that Middle East democratisation programme should not be abandoned. Discussing the paradox presented by the popular election of violent organisations, Timothy Garton Ash writing in the *Guardian* during the Israeli-Hezbollah war, argues that abandoning the experiment in favour of 'realism' was the wrong conclusion to draw.

...transitions from the politics of violence to democratic compromise are always messy. They involve negotiating with terrorists, letting some past wrongs go unpunished and accepting that a movement's militant rhetoric may lag behind the more pragmatic reality of its position. Everything, in fact, that the US practised in its relations with the Kosovo Liberation Army, which it initially characterised - with reason - as "without any questions, a terrorist group".

Two diametrically opposite conclusions may be drawn from these first strange fruits of democratisation in the Middle East.

One is to say that the whole Bush agenda of supporting democratisation in the Arab and Islamic world was misguided from the start - the product of a naive, missionary-cowboy approach to international politics. It destabilises. It brings terrorists and extremists to power. The cure is worse than the disease. So let's get back to seasoned old "realism".

Let's not try to transform these countries or expect them to be more like us, but take them as they are. Let's pursue our national interests - security, trade, energy - with whatever allies we can find. Stability comes first. Your friendly local despot may be a son-of-a-bitch, but at least he'll be our son-of-a-bitch. Or so we fondly imagine.

This is the default position of much European diplomacy. ...following the American debate closely over the past weeks, I find that opposition to the democratisation agenda is also growing inside the US.

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Slackman, 'The rise of Islamists imperils Mideast Order' *New York Times International Weekly* 24 September 2006

<sup>39</sup> Michael Slackman, above

There has always been a Republican "realist" position, associated with figures such as Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser to Bush Sr. After Iraq and this latest imbroglio, it could regain the upper hand in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election. It could win out on the other side of American politics too. If one looks at the foreign policy debate among Democrats, one finds a strong strain of such "realism" - although tagged with the label "progressive". The argument that the US should pull back from this poisonous world, look to its own economic interests and find allies wherever it can appeals to a significant part of the Democratic electorate.

For many Democrats, the fact that the current president has identified himself so strongly with the promotion of democracy is another reason for being sceptical about the promotion of democracy. If democratising the Middle East means Iraq, Hizbullah and Hamas, better not try it.

I believe that this is precisely the wrong conclusion to draw. In the long run the growth of liberal democracies is the best hope for the wider Middle East. It's the best hope of modernisation, which the Arab world desperately needs; of addressing the root causes of Islamist terrorism, inasmuch as they lie in those countries rather than among Muslims living in the West; and of enabling Arabs, Israelis, Iranians, Kurds and Turks to live side by side without war. But it will be a long march.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, 'A little democracy is a dangerous thing – so let's have more of it', *Guardian*, 3 August 2006