

DEMOCRACY IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST: INEVITABLE

The author argues that expanding democracy to the Greater Middle East is becoming the most daring and exciting political undertaking of the next decades. He examines the resistance towards and the controversy regarding the democratization initiative of the Greater Middle East. He argues that we are going through an exceptional period of history where the global interests of the U.S. overlap with the primary rights of the peoples of the region. He concludes that the people of the Middle East will inevitably achieve freedom and democracy.

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One of America's greatest strengths is its willingness to take on great challenges, often with boldness and daring. Tugging at the coattails of this strength, however, is a recurrent weakness - as America steps forward into vast new undertakings it sometimes does so without adequate preparation, assuming that its strength and vigor will allow it to find, or even to improvise, the needed answers along the way. Of all the tectonic shifts in U.S. foreign policy emerging from the aftermath of 9/11, none is more potentially transformative than the widespread conviction in the U.S. policy community that America must reverse its longtime support for friendly tyrants in the Middle East and push hard for a democratic transformation of that troubled region. Yet it is not at all clear that the vastness of this new ambition is matched by a commensurate understanding of how to proceed in a region that has never known democracy and in which anti-American sentiments are at a record high.¹□

This is the opening statement of Jessica T. Matthews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in the foreword of the book *Uncharted Journey - Promoting Democracy in the Middle East*, which is described as “the first ever published on the challenges of promoting democracy in the Middle East.” It reflects, in a nutshell, the ongoing passionate debate on the central issue of our time.

Expanding democracy to a crucial geopolitics of the globe is becoming the most daring and exciting political undertaking of the next decades, not less daunting than the Cold War years that set the course of history during the latter half of the twentieth century. Expanding and promoting democracy in the Middle East in a wider geographical sense, an area stretching from the shores of the Atlantic on the Moroccan coast to the frontiers of China and Russia, encompassing the Levant, the Gulf, the Asian sub-continent and the steppes of Central Asia, will undoubtedly, shape the political calculus of the first half of the twenty-first century, leaving a unique mark on history.

When speaking of the greater or the broader Middle East, it is generally the Islamic world that is being referred to rather than confining the initiative to Arab Middle East, which lies at the geopolitical heart of the Islamic world. In order to avoid invoking the passions that would legitimize the clash of civilizations and not to give a confrontational accentuation to such a daring initiative, any mention of the Islamic world is avoided and this is understandable. It is equally true that as and if the Arab core of the Islamic world is transformed in attaining democratic governance, the initiative will basically triumph. Thus, the transformation of the greater or broader Middle East and the achievement of democracy in this troubled region are more or less about the Arab world.

¹ Jessica T. Matthews, “Foreword” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway (eds.), *Uncharted Journey-Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2005).

Yet, this is exactly why this daring initiative is subject to unprecedented controversy. It is widely seen – not only in some parts of Arab and Islamic world but also to a certain extent in the liberal segments of the Western hemisphere - as an American imperialistic design serving American hegemonic interests, an attempt to establish a new world order in the post-Cold war era, coated in a seemingly benign package. The resistance towards and the controversy regarding the democratization initiative of the greater Middle East is multifold. Besides those who object to it on the grounds that it is an American hegemonic thrust into the oil-rich Arab and Islamic world, there are those that view it as unrealistic and those who claim the mission is impossible because “democracy cannot be imposed from outside.” This is based on the premise that historically and culturally the Arab and Muslim peoples are not inclined to democracy. For these people the “democratically deficit” Middle East is a problem insurmountable by mere external pressure, a conviction which rises in part from the widespread belief that Islam, as the overriding culture and the religion of the region, is inherently, incompatible with democracy, an invention of the Judeo-Christian world at a certain juncture of history. □

The renowned Indian thinker Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel laureate for economics, refutes this pseudo-Occidental interpretation of democracy deftly, arguing, in the following statement, that democracy has a diverse ancestry:

Perhaps the most important political change in the 20th century has been the widespread acceptance of democracy as the ‘normal’ form of government to which any nation is entitled. There remains, however, an undercurrent of skepticism about prospects for democracy in the non-western world. That skepticism has received much encouragement from the recent events in Iraq. Critiques of the Iraqi intervention often move from a justified censure of an ill thought-out and counterproductive military operation to a far less justified general skepticism of any notion of a democratic Iraq. Indeed, there is a widespread assumption that democracy is a peculiarly western norm, not in tune with foundational values elsewhere, such as those in Arab countries. Underlying both approaches, the militarist and cynical, there is a basic misunderstanding about the nature of democracy. Democracy is best seen as the opportunity of participatory reasoning and public decision making – as ‘government by discussion.’ Voting and balloting are, in this perspective, just part of a larger story... Tribute must, of course, be paid to the powerful role that modern western thinking, in connection with the European enlightenment, played in the development of liberal and democratic ideas. But the roots of these general ideas can be found in Asia and Africa as well as in Europe and America.²

Amartya Sen, then goes on to disassemble the argument that democracy is an exclusively Western property, pointing to the interactive process in the development

² Amartya Sen, “The diverse ancestry of democracy,” *The Financial Times*, 13 June 2005.

of human thinking and practice that provides clues regarding the universality of the idea of democracy. He writes:

The belief that democracy is a quintessentially 'western' idea is often linked to the practice of voting in ancient Greece, especially in Athens. There is certainly priority there, but any leap to the thesis of democracy being by nature quintessentially 'western' or 'European' is a leap into confusion. The most elementary problem here concerns the partitioning of the world into largely racial categories, in which ancient Greece is seen as an integral and exclusive part of an identifiable 'European' tradition. In this classificatory perspective; no great difficulty is perceived in considering the descendants of, say, Goths and Visigoths as proper inheritors of the Greek tradition, ('they are all Europeans'), while there is reluctance to take note of the Greek intellectual links with ancient Egyptians, Iranians and Indians. Another difficulty concerns the fact that while public reasoning flourished in ancient Greece, it also flourished in several other ancient civilizations. There is a long history of cultivating public discourse, and tolerance of heterodoxy, also in Muslim countries, including the Arab world. When Maimonides, the Jewish philosopher, was forced to emigrate from an intolerant Europe in the 12th century, he found refuge in the Arab world and was given an influential position in the court of Emperor Saladin in Cairo. What about Iraq then? It would be a mistake to try to translate the immediate problems of Iraq into a larger case for rejecting the general possibility of - and indeed the need for - democracy in Iraq or the Middle East, or anywhere else.³□

In contrast to the perception among many Islamists around the world, even the American President George W. Bush, has advocated in strong terms the compatibility of Islam with democracy. He said:

Our commitment to democracy is also tested in the Middle East which is my focus today, and must be a focus for decades to come. In many nations of the Middle East - countries of great strategic importance - democracy has not taken root and the questions arise: Are peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? Are millions of men and women and children condemned by history or culture to live in despotism? Are they alone never to know freedom, and never even to have a choice in the matter? I, for one, do not believe it. I believe every person has the ability and the right to be free.

Some skeptics of democracy assert that the traditions of Islam are inhospitable to the representative government. This "cultural condescension" as Ronald Reagan termed it, has a long history. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, a so-called Japan expert asserted that democracy in that former empire would "never work." Another observer declared the prospects for democracy in post-Hitler Germany were, and I quote, "most uncertain at best"- he made the claim in 1957... Time after time, observers have questioned whether this country, or

³ *Ibid.*

that people, or this group, are “ready” for democracy—as if freedom were a prize you win for meeting our standards of progress. In fact, the daily work of democracy itself is the path of progress... It should be clear to all that Islam - the faith of one-fifth of humanity - is consistent with democratic rule... More than half of all the Muslims in the world live in freedom under democratically constituted governments. They succeed in democratic societies, not in spite of their faith, but because of it... In many Middle Eastern countries, poverty is deep and it is spreading, women lack rights and are denied schooling. Whole societies remain stagnant, while the world moves ahead. These are not the failures of a culture or a religion. These are failures of political and economic doctrines.⁴

There are many around the world who criticize the new approach to the Middle East, i.e. the democratization of the region through political reform that necessitates a regime change, but they never offer any viable alternative and most of their criticism has a racist tinge that implies that non-western people, either do not want, or at least are not ready for the rights afforded to Westerners. British literature especially that of Rudyard Kipling during the colonial occupation of India, offered similar views. However, the people of India, as recent history demonstrates, have proved those assumptions baseless.

So much for the civilization argument about whether Middle Eastern societies are inherently and structurally suitable for democracy. Nonetheless, other than these formidable ideological considerations, there are practical but genuine difficulties for the advocates of democracy in the broader Middle East. “The region’s entrenched authoritarian regimes are experts in the art of permitting partial reforms that win accolades abroad but create no real democratization at home. Democratic forces are weak, and political Islamists, who are enjoying an oppositional upsurge, have at best an uncertain commitment to democratic values. The United States is constrained in its search for a pro-democratic role - not only by the fervent anti-Americanism roiling the region but by the stubborn fact that the United States still has significant economic and security interests that impel close cooperation with many of the incumbent democratic regimes.”⁵

These are true but do not necessarily render the ultimate triumph of democracy in the broader Middle East impossible. They only indicate how formidable the historical mission is, not its insurmountability. Furthermore, the seminal speech delivered by George W. Bush, at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy on November 2003 spelled out the emergence of a new grand strategy for American foreign policy, comparable in scale and ambition to the strategy of containment that guided American foreign policy for much of the

⁴ President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East, Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C., 6 November 2003.

⁵ Jessica T. Matthews (2005).

Cold War, a policy that not only ended in success but also heralded a new age for the whole world. He said, "Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe – because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. And with the spread of weapons that can bring catastrophic harm to our country and to our friends, it would be reckless to accept the status quo."

This vision is reiterated, nearly two years later in another seminal speech of American Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, delivered in Cairo on 20 June 2005, when she said, "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."

The revolutionary character of Bush's global and Middle East policy had been detected even before he made his mind explicit. Its rationale is conceded even by Bush's critics. For instance, Sherle R. Schwenniger in his concluding remarks of the *World Policy Journal* article, "Revamping American Grand Strategy" wrote: "[T]he foreign policy priorities... would constitute a grand strategy of great power entente aimed at enlarging the world of middle class prosperity and common security. Admittedly, such an approach would find few true believers in the American polity today, dominated as it is by the new creed of neo-conservatives and neo-liberal triumphalists. Yet it may still represent the best way to secure a world favorable to American interests and values."⁶□

In the above-mentioned article, Schwenniger also stated:

First, terrorism and rogue states, especially those seeking weapons of mass destruction, constitute the greatest threat to American well-being and world order. These unconventional threats require going beyond our traditional reliance on deterrence and containment and may in some cases warrant preventive military action, as in the case of Iraq. Second, the Middle East has replaced Europe and East Asia as the fulcrum of geopolitics, the zone wherein the shape of world order will be forged. Remaking the Middle East, above all by bringing democracy to the Arab and Islamic nations of the region, therefore, must be America's overriding mission. □

The implications of the war on Iraq were beyond the mere task of disarming and removing Saddam Hussein and eliminating the stockpile of weapons of mass destruction that it was widely believed he possessed. As American forces were marching towards Baghdad, Robert Dreyfuss, a harsh critic of Bush policies, wrote:

⁶ Sherle R. Schwenniger, "Revamping American Grand Strategy," *World Policy Journal*, Vol.20, No.3 (Fall 2003).

For months Americans have been told that the United States is going to war against Iraq in order to disarm Saddam Hussein, remove him from power, eliminate Iraq's alleged stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, and prevent Baghdad from blackmailing its neighbors or aiding terrorist groups. But the Bush administration's hawks, especially the neoconservatives who provide the driving force for war, see the conflict with Iraq as much more than that. It is a signal event, designated to create cataclysmic shock waves throughout the region and around the world, ushering in a new era of American imperial power. It is also likely to bring the United States into conflict with several states in the Middle East. Those who think that U.S. armed forces can complete a tidy war in Iraq, without a battle spreading beyond Iraq's borders, are likely to be mistaken.⁷

The apathy and disdain for Bush's contribution to dramatically changing the orientation of U.S. foreign policy in Middle East are not restricted to his administration's pseudo-leftist and liberal critics. Conservatives find it "revolutionary" and harbor ill-feelings just because of it. One of them, putting the blame on the neoconservatives, asserts that "neoconservatives have more in common with French revolutionaries than American traditionalists." He goes to assert:

During his recent visit to England, President Bush enunciated a 'forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East'... Though centered at present in the Middle East, this agenda is global. It existed in broad outline even before the end of the Cold War... Many liberals and conservatives felt that a national emergency was over and that America could now afford to reduce its military and other international commitments. But some of the most ardent Cold Warriors sharply disagreed. According to them, the new historical situation presented the United States, now the only superpower, with an opportunity: America should assert its power throughout the world on behalf of democracy and capitalism. It should remove questionable regimes and other obstacles to a better world... These Cold Warriors were mostly liberals of a special, ideologically zealous variety: many of them had come from the extreme Left. They had opposed communism because they had universalistic objectives of their own... This kind of thinking bears a strong resemblance to that of Jacobins, who inspired and led the French Revolution of 1789. Their ideology was summed up in the slogan 'liberty, equality, and fraternity.' Equally universalistic and monopolistic, they demanded that other countries change their ways...⁸

Ryn, the author of these words, finds the "revolutionary aspect" of new American policy "centering on the Middle East" in order to "remake the world" incompatible with the founding principles of America. "The ideology of a benevolent American

⁷ Robert Dreyfuss, "Just the Beginning – Is Iraq the opening salvo in a war to remake the world?" *The American Prospect*, 1 April 2003.

⁸ Claes G. Ryn, "Appetite for Destruction," *The American Conservative*, 19 January 2004.

empire and global democracy dresses up a voracious appetite for power. It signifies the ascent to power of a new kind of American, one profoundly at odds with that older type who aspired to modesty and self-restraint. That former personality was inseparable from, indeed, the creator of, the notion of self-limited, decentralized government. Traditional, constitutional America derived its moral and political assumptions from the classical, Christian and British traditions.”⁹□

Yet, in his analysis of Bush’s inaugural address in January 2005, a leading advocate of “American revolution in foreign policy,” one of contemporary America’s most brilliant minds, Robert Kagan, reaches a diametrically opposing conclusion, claiming that the new policy is fully compatible with the founding principles of the United States of America. Kagan wrote:

Bush still asserts that ‘America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.’ But in his inaugural address he has taken a step beyond that.. He has grounded American foreign policy in universal principles, in the Declaration of Independence and what Lincoln called its ‘abstract truth, applicable to all men at all times.’ The goal of American foreign policy is now to spread democracy, for its own sake, for reasons that transcend specific threats... This is where Bush may lose the support of most old-fashioned conservatives. His goals are antithesis of conservatism. They are revolutionary. But of course – and this is what American conservatives have generally loath to admit - Bush’s goals are also deeply American, for the United States is a revolutionary power. Bush has found his way back to the core, universalist principles that have usually shaped American foreign policy, regardless of the nature of the threat. ‘The great struggle of the epoch is between liberty and despotism,’ James Madison asserted in 1823, and Americans from the founders onward have viewed the world in terms of that struggle.¹⁰

The prolific and perceptive writer, Michael Ignatieff, professor of human rights at Harvard, elevates Kagan’s assessment to further philosophical magnitudes:

As Thomas Jefferson lay dying.. he wrote a letter telling the citizens of the city of Washington... Wanting his letter to inspire.. he wrote that one day the experiment he and the founders started would spread to the whole world... Until George W. Bush, no American president -- not even Franklin Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson – actually risked his presidency that Jefferson might be right. But this gambler from Texas has bet his place in history on the proposition, as he stated in a speech in March, that decades of American presidents’ ‘excusing and accommodating tyranny, in the pursuit of stability’ in the Middle East inflamed the hatred of the fanatics who piloted the planes into the twin towers on Sept. 11... The democratic turn in American foreign

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Robert Kagan, “A Higher Realism,” *The Washington Post*, 23 January 2005, p.B07.

policy has been recent. Latin Americans remember (that) the American presence meant backing death squads and military juntas. Now in the Middle East and elsewhere, when the crowds wave Lebanese flags in Beirut and clamor for the Syrians to go, when Iraqi housewives proudly hold up their purple fingers on exiting the polling stations, when Afghans quietly line up to vote in villages, when Egyptians chant ‘Enough!’ and demand that Mubarak leave power, few Islamic democrats believe they owe their free voice to America. But many know that they have not been silenced, at least not yet, because the United States actually seems, for the first time, to be betting on them and not on the autocrats.¹¹

There should be no qualms regarding the novelty of an American global policy centered on the Middle East and its “revolutionary,” thus anti-status quo quality. The characterization of the new American Middle East policy, which is determined to see the region transformed through regime change and political reform in order to achieve democratic rule, as “revolutionary” is interestingly enough due mainly to Democratic opposition rather than the ruling Republicans. Two National Security Council staffers during the Clinton administration, Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay in a book published in 2003 entitled *America Unbound - The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* state that “Bush had set American foreign policy in motion. It was not a revolution in America’s goals abroad, but rather in how to achieve them.”¹² Even more interestingly, for President Clinton’s former national security adviser, Anthony Lake, who is known for his extremely liberal views, in the current American foreign policy debate, Republicans are the radicals while the Democrats are the conservatives:

Bush explicitly rebuked a narrowly realist worldview... This is not his father’s foreign policy. Indeed, the first President Bush resisted overthrowing Saddam and reshaping Iraq out of that great conservative impulse known as prudence. His son’s democratic imperialism is genuinely radical. What Bush calls for is very different from the transformation of Germany and Japan after World War II. By thrusting war on the rest of the world, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan made unconditional surrender and their long postwar occupations inevitable. By contrast, the war in Iraq was an optional war for the United States. We now learn from Bush’s latest speech that it was less a war about immediate threats posed by Saddam Hussein than a bold experiment in support of a grand theory. ‘The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East,’ Bush said in his speech, ‘will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution.’ ... Democrats have been in a box ever since the Iraq debate began, because they have always identified with the emphasis on spreading democracy that is at the heart of Bush’s rhetoric but are deeply uneasy with the use of military force to impose new regimes, even democratic ones, on other nations. They also

¹¹ Michael Ignatieff, “Who Are Americans to Think That Freedom Is Theirs to Spread?” *The New York Times*, 26 June 2005.

¹² Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound-The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003) p.2.

want to preserve old alliances and the old institutions of international cooperation.

All this, says Lake, is why Democrats are today's conservatives. "The Democratic critique," he continued "is that every president since Franklin D. Roosevelt - Republican or Democrat -has conserved alliances and built multilateral approaches... They're trying to conserve the traditions of the last 50 years" Lake is right in saying that conservatism in foreign policy is not enough. He offers a useful metaphor: "If you had a house that was being knocked down, in whole or in part, you probably wouldn't just use the old plans to rebuild it. You'd want new plans for new conditions."¹³

This is exactly the point that provides a revolutionary and a legitimate rationale for the war on Iraq. That war removed the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein, the Baathist regime modeled on the German National Socialism that committed genocidal wars on the Kurdish people and persistent suppression of the rest of the Iraqi people in which hundreds of thousands of people perished. It also revealed its aggressive nature towards its neighbors by waging a brutal 8-year war against Iran and by invading Kuwait. It would take a war to uproot this regime from the region and that war could only be meaningful if it were launched for the purpose of bringing revolutionary change to a Middle East that had been suffering from a stagnancy that was corroding the international system. The war on Iraq terminated the Middle Eastern status quo, sending tremors through the entire region of autocratic and totalitarian regimes.

This heightened the expectations for the advent of democracy which the peoples inhabiting the lands stretching from the shores of the Atlantic to the remote corners of Eurasia so desperately need. The peoples of the broader Middle East could sense a better future, one that many countries of the Western hemisphere have been enjoying for a long time and that the former totalitarian areas of Eastern Europe, which crumbled at the end of the Cold War, have been enjoying for over a decade.

This new chapter in the history of the Middle East was opened thanks to a radical departure from the "stability-first" policies pursued by the sole superpower, the United States. This is an exceptional period of history where the global interests of an imperial power overlaps with the primary rights of the peoples of the region.

Yet, this new historical phenomenon looks quixotic because it has drawn an unparalleled negative international response. Aside from the region itself, US allies - administrations and public opinion alike- have been opposed to it. The charge is basically a moral one: the unacceptability of promoting democracy through war or, in other words - imperialism. "How can it be imperialist to help people throw off the shackles of tyranny?"¹⁴

¹³ E.J.Dionne Jr., "Countering the Radical GOP," *The Washington Post*, 11 November 2003, p. A25.

¹⁴ Michael Ignatieff (2005).

Michael Ignatieff reminds us of failed historical parallels:

From Napoleon onward, France sought to export French political virtues, though not freedom itself, to its colonies. The British Empire was sustained by the conceit that the British had a special talent for government that entitled them to spread rule of law to Kipling's 'lesser breeds.' In the 20th century, the Soviet Union advanced missionary claims about the superiority of Soviet rule, backed by Marxist pseudoscience. What is exceptional about the Jefferson dream is that it is the last imperial ideology left standing in the world, the sole survivor of national claims to universal significance. All the others – the Soviet, the French and the British – have been consigned to the trash heap of history... The problem here is that while no one wants imperialism to win, no one in his right mind can want liberty to fail either. If the American Project of encouraging freedom fails, there may be no one else available with the resourcefulness and energy, even the self-deception, necessary for the task. Very few countries can achieve and maintain freedom without outside help. Big imperial allies are often necessary for the establishment of liberty. As the Harvard ethicist Arthur Applbaum likes to put it, 'All foundings are forced.' Just remember how much America itself needed the assistance of France to free itself of the British. Who else is available to sponsor liberty in the Middle East but America? Certainly the Europeans themselves have not done a very distinguished job of defending freedom close home.¹⁵

Nonetheless, the so-called moralistic dissent is against America's promotion of democracy in the Middle East and continually points out the "immorality" of the Iraq war. A variety of people with impeccable intellectual record in the Western world go so far as to sympathize with the bloody insurgency in Iraq. Ian Buruma indicates the intellectual defects in the attitudes and rhetoric of American novelist Gore Vidal, British playwright Norman Mailer, the former leftist student activist of Pakistani origin turned-British-pundit Tarik Ali and Indian novelist and favorite 'post-colonial' agit-prop voice in the European liberal press, Arundathi Roy. Buruma wrote:

There are, to be sure, perfectly valid reasons to be critical of US foreign policy, especially the neo-conservative revolutionary mission. I was not persuaded that going to war in Iraq was right, because the official arguments were fuzzy, shifty, and changed from day to day... But this does not answer the question of what to do, as citizens of the richest and most powerful nations on the earth, about dictators who commit mass murder or happily starve millions to death. Why are our left-liberal intellectuals so hopeless at answering this vital question.¹⁶

Buruma thinks that the hopelessness of Western left-liberal intellectuals in taking a moral stand against third-world dictators who commit mass murder by mercilessly

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ian Buruma, "Wielding the moral club," *Financial Times Weekend Magazine*, 13 September 2003.

slaughtering their own citizens goes as far back as Karl Marx. But he does not miss the point that the anti-Americanism at the root of the apathy for the fate of the millions in the Middle East has more to do with the right-leaning racism, rather than that of the left. He wrote, “Anti-Americanism, by which I don’t mean criticism of US policies, but a visceral loathing, has a rich history.. To prewar conservatives, America was vulgar, money-grubbing, rootless, brash, tasteless, in short a threat to high European civilization. Martin Heidegger had much to say about ‘Americanism’, as a soulless, greedy, inauthentic force that was fatally undermining the European spirit. To political conservatives, especially of the more radical right-wing kind, the combination of capitalism, democracy and a lack of ethnic homogeneity was anathema to everything they stood for: racial purity, military discipline and obedience to authority.”¹⁷

For those European right-wing critics, the war against the tyranny in Iraq and the promotion for democracy in the Middle East serves only as a backdrop against which to field their contempt for the United States. They do not care about the plight of the people of Iraq and the peoples of the broader Middle East. The racism they have nurtured for centuries against the colored and dark peoples - the Arabs and the Muslims in general fall into this category - is intertwined with their scorn against America, the revolutionary that has embarked on a mission to transform the broader Middle East.

Then, how does one describe the “moral racism” of the left? Ian Buruma provides the recipe:

The leap from right-wing Anglophobia and anti-Americanism to the left-wing variety really came only after the Second World War. Soviet propaganda no doubt had much to do with it, and especially the legacy of anti-fascism which the Russians exploited. Anglo-American capitalism was linked to fascism in Soviet propaganda, and seen as the great enemy of all the downtrodden peoples of the world. To be on the left was to be in favor of third world liberation movements. Not every supporter of Mao, Castro or Ho Chi Minh was pro-Soviet, but he or she certainly was anti-US, even though the US actually did much to end the European empires...When liberation finally came to many colonized countries, celebration quickly turned to massive bloodletting. Dictatorships, some supported by Moscow, some by Washington, were established. Millions in China, Africa, and south-east Asia were murdered, starved, or purged by their own ‘liberators’. America’s dictators (Suharto, Pinochet) were denounced by the left, while Soviet clients received special pleading.

Anti-Americanism may indeed have grown fiercer than it was during the cold war. It is a common phenomenon that when the angels fail to deliver, the demons become more fearsome. The socialist debacle, then, contributed to the resentment

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

of American triumphs. But something else happened at the same time. In a curious way left and right began to change places. The expansion of global capitalism, which is not without negative consequences, to be sure, turned leftists into champions of cultural and political nationalism. When Marxism was still a potent ideology, the left sought universal solutions for the ills of the world. Now globalization has become another word for what Heidegger meant by Americanism: an assault on native culture and identity. So the old left turned conservative. □

The moral paralysis of the left, when it comes to non-western tyrants, may also have a more sinister explanation. The Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit, calls it moral racism. When Indians kill Muslims, or Africans kill Africans, or Arabs kill Arabs, western pundits pretend not to notice, or find historical explanations, or blame the scars of colonialism. But if white men, whether they are Americans, Europeans, South Africans or Israelis harm people of color, hell is raised. One could claim this is only right, since we can only take responsibility for our own kind. But this would be rather racist view of world affairs.

Again, there appears to have been a reversal of roles between left and right. The conservative right was not, traditionally, internationalist and certainly not revolutionary. Business, stability, national interests, and political realism were the order of the day. Democracy, to conservative realists, was fine for us but not for strange people with exotic names. It was the left that wanted to change the world, no matter where. Left-wing internationalism did not wish to recognize cultural or national barriers. To them, liberation was a universal project. Yet now that the ‘Bush-Cheney junta’ talks about democratic revolution, regardless of culture, color or creed, Gore Vidal claims it is not our business, and others cry ‘racism.’¹⁸

This shifting in the traditional roles and positions of left and right is also reflected in the American political arena. Ignatieff asserted that

The fact that many foreigners do not happen to buy into the American version of promoting democracy may not be much of a surprise. What is significant is how many American liberals do not share the vision, either. On this issue, there has been a huge reversal of roles in American politics. Once upon a time, liberal Democrats were the custodians of the Jeffersonian message that American democracy should be exported to the world, and conservative Republicans were its realist opponent. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger remained in the realist mode. Since stability mattered more to them than freedom, they propped up the shah of Iran, despite his odious secret police and helped to depose Salvador Allende in Chile. Kissinger’s guiding star was not Jefferson but Bismarck. Kissinger contended that people who wanted freedom and democracy in Eastern Europe were lamentable sentimentalists, unable to look at the map and accommodate themselves to the eternal reality of Soviet power.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

It was Reagan who began the realignment of American politics, making the Republicans into internationalist Jeffersonians, which led to the emergence of democracy promotion as a central goal of United States foreign policy. At the time, many conservative realists argued for detente, risk avoidance and placation of the Soviet bear. Faced with the Republican embrace of Jeffersonian ambitions for America abroad, liberals chose retreat or scorn. Bill Clinton – who took reluctant risks to defend freedom in Bosnia and Kosovo, partly arrested this retreat, yet since his administration, the withdrawal of American liberalism from the defense and promotion of freedom overseas has been startling. The Michael Moore-style left, whose view was that America’s only guiding interest overseas was furthering the interests of Halliburton and Exxon, conquered the Democratic Party’s heart. The relentless emphasis on the hidden role of oil makes the promotion of democracy seem like a devious cover or lame excuse.¹⁹

As it turned out, the American electorate seemed to know only too well how high the price was in Iraq, and it still chose the gambler over the realist. In 2004, the Jefferson dream won decisively over American prudence.

But this is more than just a difference between risk taking and prudence. It is also a disagreement about whether American values properly deserve to be called universal at all. The contemporary liberal attitude toward the promotion of democratic freedom - we like what we have, but we have no right to promote it to others - sounds to many conservative Americans like complacent and timorous relativism, timorous because it won’t lift a finger to help those who want an escape from tyranny, relativist because it seems to have abandoned the idea that all people do want to be free.²⁰

All these debates surging all around the world, while left and right unite against the “global democratic revolution” or changing their traditional seats without changing their titles, bring us to the crucial question of the morality of armed intervention for humanitarian objectives. If the reluctant and delayed but efficient American intervention, with French assistance that salvaged the Muslim Bosnian people from extermination is right and justified, then the war against Iraqi tyranny that committed genocidal campaigns on its own citizens was also right and justified. If the NATO action, which lacked UN Security Council authorization but that salvaged the Muslim Albanian people from slaughter at the hands of that war criminal, then Serbian president of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, was right and justified, then, the war against Iraqi tyranny that committed genocidal campaigns on its own citizens was right and justified.

Had the massacres of Rwanda not occurred, the shameful apathy of the mighty powers of the West would not have been repeated. For the downtrodden of Darfur,

¹⁹ Ignatieff (2005).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

not to be annihilated by the famine imposed upon them and mass killings under a brutal Sudanese regime, a humanitarian armed intervention may be necessary and if and when it happens, it will be right and justified.

An overhaul of the Westphalian order, a product of conservative 19th century monarchs that wanted to preserve the status quo in a Europe threatened by revolutions and who sanctified the concept of “national sovereignty” may be long overdue. In the 21st century, if “non-interference in the domestic affairs” of a sovereign nation-state is practiced and interpreted to mean that this nation-state has a free hand to massacre and suppress its own people, then it must be discarded in the dustbin of history or lofty humanitarian objectives under democratic regimes will not prevail in this millennium. The Iraq war has become a revolutionary undertaking, in the sense that it also constituted an opening for de-legitimizing the anachronistic Westphalian order as the code of conduct for international relations.

If there is to be a new morality for terminating states that commit genocidal campaigns and massacre their citizens irrespective of their sovereign rights, then the war against the Iraqi tyranny could also be seen within the context of introducing to democracy to the broader Middle East. This may sound, at first, like a Machiavellian proposition that legitimizes waging wars, invasions or armed interventions for the achievement of democracy. That depends on how one views the war. It is a matter of dichotomy whether the Iraq war was a war of choice or a war of necessity. Viewing it as an optional war makes it a Machiavellian effort. It resonates of immorality. However, if the Iraq war is perceived as a war of necessity - despite the widespread contrary allegations - it would be natural that democracy be promoted in the aftermath of war and add an eventual morality to the effort.

The conflicting views about whether the Iraq war was a war of choice or necessity is merely a reflection of the differences of opinion which prevailed before, during and after the war and goes back to the two tendencies within the American administration seen in the aims of the Gulf War (1991). According to Richard Haass, currently the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, the administration “did not have to go war against Iraq, certainly not when we did. There were other options.” He was one of the closest advisers to former Secretary of State, Colin L. Powell, and the director of policy planning at the State Department. For him, the Iraq war was a war of choice after all. Nonetheless, for Paul Wolfowitz, who is generally regarded as “the main architect” of the war, currently the president of World Bank, the former Deputy Secretary of Defense, “One of the things changed was that it made it a war of necessity, not a war of choice.”²¹

This theoretical controversy can be extended both for World War I and World War II. Were they optional for America, who was separated by two vast oceans

²¹ Lawrence J.Korb, “A War of Choice or of Necessity?” *The Washington Post*, 8 December 2003, p.A25.

from the rest of the world and the primary battle zones, so its security was not ostensibly under immediate threat or were they a necessity given that the national interests of the United States can be best served by spreading freedom and democracy to all over the globe?

Whatever turn the conceptual debate may take, we know the consequences of the two world wars, especially the second one, where democracies proliferated thanks to the defeat of German Nazism and aggressive Japanese imperial fascism. □

History teaches us that in order to attain freedom and to open the road for democracy, the means employed is not always, unfortunately, gentle. The backbone of Nazism was broken under intense, and most of the time inhuman, air bombardment that turned cities like Berlin, Dresden, etc. into heaps of rubble. From the ashes of that rubble, German democracy flourished. And, it required the use of nuclear weapons to bring Japan to its knees, to surrender so to terminate the bloody imperialist war it had waged throughout Asia from 1932 to 1945. The result was the emergence of a prosperous and peaceful Japan, an economic giant within the family of free nations. The conclusion drawn from this should not be that for democracy to take root, it takes an inhuman, bloody warfare. But the historical parallel for democracy in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Iraq war is already there.

Those who emphasize the peculiarities of the Muslim and Arab world claim that the Germany-Japan analogy is not appropriate. Again, the hidden racism towards Muslim peoples, implying that they are unfit for democracy while the formerly Nazi Germans and the formerly fascist Japanese were, as if democracy is somehow genetically determined. Germans were Christian Europeans and contributed a lot to the European Enlightenment with their great thinkers; but they had no real sense of democracy until after World War II. Their national unity was exceptionally late, achieved in 1870 and by the iron fist of Bismarck and the merciless Prussian sword. True, in the wake of World War I, they had a remarkable democratic experience with Weimar Republic. However, it failed and it is precisely the Weimar Republic that gave birth to the Nazi Party, which was democratically elected. The Japanese, a non-Christian, non-European people, had no experience whatsoever with democracy. Since the end of World War II, they have firmly consolidated their democracy. The “democracy deficit” of the Muslims and the Arabs cannot be eternal, lest it be an excuse for autocracies and tyranny to prevail.

As a matter of fact, by removing Saddam’s tyrant Baath regime, the Iraq war has presented the Iraqi people with the benefits of representative government and constitutional process, something which many Iraqis are participating in even with the escalating spiral of violence. The watershed was the elections on 30 January 2005, with ramifications going beyond Iraq. 8 million Iraqis, from the Kurds in the northern mountains to Shiites in the flatlands where Basra lies at the

tip of the Gulf, voted for their candidates to determine their own future, freely for the first time ever. The impact of the Iraqi elections were much more stronger than any statement on democracy or strategy for the region could have been.

In the end, it will not matter how the world reports a president's or a prime minister's words. It will be the inescapable logic and reality of events that will eventually persuade even the most cynical critic.

Sometimes moments of truly historic significance are almost instantly recognizable for what they are. The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 proclaimed its universal importance right from the start. No one needed to be told that the fall of the Berlin Wall was going to change history. With others the consequences creep up on us slowly, even surreptitiously. Some wise heads see the significance; others resist it or are blind to it. It was not necessarily evident that Hitler's ascent to power in 1933 would lead to the unrelenting tragedy that unfolded for Europe and the world over the next decade. We all know better now.

Last Sunday (the date of the Iraqi election) I think will quickly fall into the first category. There is an unstoppable momentum for change in the Middle East now. In just two years tyrannies have been felled in Iraq and Afghanistan... But the crucial element is always going to be the voluntary and courageous act of self-assertion that democratic and free elections represent – a message heard around the region and the world.²²

Perhaps the most striking and also a surprising assessment of the magnitude of the significance of the Iraqi election came from within the region, from one of the traditionally fervent anti-American politicians, Lebanon's Walid Jumblatt. The leading neo-con thinker William Kristol triumphantly quoted him:

From the Middle East, listen to Walid Jumblatt, the Lebanese Druze Muslim leader and member of parliament, formerly an accommodator of the Syrian occupation and no friend of the Bush administration or its predecessors. On February 21, Jumblatt, in Beirut, told the Washington Post's David Ignatius that he is determined to work to get the current Syrian-stooge government out of Office and to get Syrian troops out of Lebanon. What accounts for his new sentiment – echoing and echoed by millions of others, in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East? Here's Jumblatt: *It is strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq. I was cynical about Iraq. But when I saw the Iraqi people voting three weeks ago, 8 million of them, it was the start of a new Arab world. . . . The Syrian people, the Egyptian people, all say that something is changing. The Berlin Wall has fallen. We can see it.*²³

²² Gerard Baker, "Like the fall of the Berlin Wall, Iraq's elections will change world history," *The Times*, 4 February 2005.

²³ William Kristol, "After 1/30/05," *The Weekly Standard*, Vol.10, No.23, 7 March 2005.

A most interesting perception about the historical significance of the Iraqi elections for remaking the Middle East and the world came from a European, from a German pen. Claus Christian Malzahn of the influential *Der Spiegel*, sarcastically criticizing the German and in general the European short-sightedness wrote:

“President Ronald Reagan’s visit to Berlin in 1987 was, in many respects, very similar to President George W. Bush’s visit to Mainz on Wednesday... The Germany Reagan was traveling in, much like today’s Germany, was very skeptical of the American president and his foreign policy. When Reagan stood before the Brandenburg Gate - and the Berlin Wall - and demanded that Gorbachev ‘tear down this wall,’ he was lampooned the next day on the editorial pages. He is a dreamer, wrote commentators. Realpolitik looks different.

But history has shown that it wasn’t Reagan who was the dreamer... rather it was German politicians who were lacking imagination -- a group who in 1987 couldn’t imagine that there might be an alternative for a divided Germany... When George W. Bush requests that Chancellor Schröder and Germany become more engaged in the Middle East, everybody on the German side will nod affably. But... Bush’s idea of a Middle Eastern democracy at the tip of a bayonet is, for Schröder’s Social Democratic Party... the hysterical offspring of the American neocons. Even German conservatives find the idea that Arab countries could transform themselves into enlightened democracies somewhat absurd. Europeans today -- just like the Europeans of 1987 -- cannot imagine that the world might change. Maybe we don’t want the world to change, because change can, of course, be dangerous. But in a country of immigrants like the United States, one actually pushes for change... We Europeans always want to have the world from yesterday, whereas the Americans strive for the world of tomorrow.

It was difficult not to cringe during Reagan’s speech in 1987... At the end of it, most experts agreed that his demand for the removal of the wall was inopportune, utopian and crazy.

Yet three years later, East Germany had disappeared from the map... When analysts are confronted by real people, amazing things can happen. And maybe history can repeat itself. Maybe the people of Syria, Iran or Jordan will get the idea in their heads to free themselves from their oppressive regimes just as the East Germans did. When the voter turnout in Iraq, exceeded that of many Western nations, the chorus of critique from Iraq alarmists was quieted. Just as quiet as the chorus of Germany experts on the night of November 9, 1989, when the wall fell.”²⁴

The Berlin Wall metaphor for the Iraqi elections is also used by a veteran Washington Post columnist Jackson Diehl:

²⁴ Claus Christian Malzahn, “Could George W. Bush Be Right?” *Der Spiegel Online*, 23 February 2005.

Virtually no one in Washington expected such a snowballing of events following Iraq's elections. Not many yet believe that they will lead to real democracy in Egypt, Lebanon or Syria anytime soon. But it is a fact of history that the collapse of a rotted political order usually happens quickly, and takes most of the experts by surprise. In early 1989 I surveyed a panoply of West German analysts about the chances that the then-incipient and barely noticed unrest in Eastern Europe could lead to the collapse of the Berlin Wall. None thought it possible; most laughed at me for asking the question.

If a Middle East transformation begins to gather momentum, it probably will be more messy, and the results more ambiguous, than those European revolutions. It also won't be entirely Bush's creation: The tinder for ignition has been gathering around the stagnant and corrupt autocracies of the Middle East for years. Still, less than two years after Saddam Hussein was deposed, the fact is that Arabs are marching for freedom and shouting slogans against tyrants in the streets of Beirut and Cairo and regimes that have endured for decades are visibly tottering. Those who claimed that U.S. intervention could never produce such events have reason to reconsider.²⁵

He defines the mood of those Arab leaders in the wake of the Iraqi elections that set the Arab masses in motion against them as, "These are autocrats whose regimes had remained unaltered, and unchallenged, for decades. There has been no political ferment in Damascus since the 1960's, or in Cairo since the 1950's. Now, within weeks of Iraq's elections, Mubarak and Assad are tacking with panicked haste between bold acts of repression, which invite an international backlash, and big promises of reform -- which also may backfire, if they prove to be empty. They could yet survive, but, quite clearly, the Arab autocrats don't regard the Bush dream of democratic dominoes as fanciful."²⁶

The potent force of democracy revealed and displayed by the Iraqi voters would have a contagious nature. We are living in a globalized world blessed by live coverage of a multitude of international news channels. Anybody in a remote corner of the Muslim world with an inexpensive dish has the luxury of having the world he or she lives in delivered to his or her fingertips. It would be impossible for the Iraqi elections -- or the mammoth demonstrations of the Lebanese that took the streets asking Syria to leave and footages of marching Egyptians shouting "*Kifaya*" (Enough) -- not to bring up the dormant but ever-present subconscious question: Why not here?

For David Brooks, "This is the most powerful question in the world today: Why not here? People in Eastern Europe looked at the people in Western Europe and asked, Why not here? People in Ukraine looked at the people in Georgia and asked, Why not here? People around the Arab world look at voters and ask, Why

²⁵ Jackson Diehl, "A Mideast Makeover?," *The Washington Post*, 28 February 2005, p.A17.

²⁶ Diehl (2005).

not here?...This is clearly the question the United States is destined to provoke. Despite the suicide bombings in Israel and Iraq, the thought contagion is spreading: Why not here?"²⁷

As a matter of fact, Arabs have been asking “why not here?” since 2002 through Arab Human Development Reports published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and written by an independent group of Arab scholars, policymakers and practitioners. Those reports served as terms of reference for many people in the Muslim and Arab world and elsewhere, including American authorities. They have, as in the Foreword of the UNDP Administrator of the last Arab Human Development Report 2004, become landmarks in the broader debate and discussion over the future of the region. The key finding of the first one, which was published in 2002, and concluded that the Arab world is suffering from three fundamental deficits – in political rights, in women’s rights and in knowledge – which have, together, held back human development across the region, has now become widely accepted. They, moreover, have become the main pillars of the American-led drive in democracy promotion in the broader Middle East.

The last UNDP Arab Human Development report asserts that there is a rational and understandable thirst among Arabs to be rid of despots and to enjoy democratic governance. It speaks of the “black-hole” State described as follows:

The modern Arab state, in the political sense, runs close to this astronomical model, whereby the executive apparatus resembles a ‘black hole’ which converts its surrounding social environment into a setting in which nothing moves and from which nothing escapes... The key support buttressing the power of the executive is the intelligence apparatus, which is not responsible to the legislature or to public opinion, but is directly under the control of the president or king and possesses powers greater than those of any other organ. The security apparatus has substantial resources and intervenes in all the powers of the executive, particularly in regard to appointment decisions and the legal regulation of associations, to the point where the modern-day Arab state is frequently dubbed ‘the intelligence state.’²⁸

The most colossal of them, Baathist Iraq has been demolished. Just next door, its twin, Baathist Syria is trembling. A Damascus-based Syrian civil rights activist, social analyst and novelist Ammar Abdulhamid dares to write: □

If the last five years in Syria have shown anything, it is that the country’s Baath regime cannot accommodate serious reforms – economic, political or structural. As such the lackluster nature of the recent Baath congress and its recommendations were not surprising. If anything, the Baath simply lived up to its, by now, well-established reputation as the party of missed

²⁷ David Brooks, “Why Not Here?” *The New York Times*, 26 February 2005.

²⁸ UNDP Arab Human Development Report 2004-Towards Freedom in the Arab World, (New York: United Nations Publications, 2005) pp.11-15.

opportunities and disappointments... For this reason, those who still 'believe' in the Baath regime, other than its members and immediate beneficiaries that is, seem to do so more as an expression of despair rather than of true faith. In other words, continued support is premised on the inability to envision an alternative, or a fear that the alternative could be chaos or an Islamist government.

For those Syrians who desire to safeguard their country from imminent collapse, the alternative at this stage is to accept the necessity of politics and the imperative of activism. This is crucial at a time when our future is being decided for us, on our behalf and in our name, by a number of external and internal actors, without any real regard for Syrian interests. But this is what silence, reticence and apathy produce in the final analysis. If Syrians want to avoid the same future as Iraq (for that seems to be what's in the back of their minds these days whenever they attempt to think of what could happen if Syria were to see fundamental change), they have to do exactly what their fears tell them not to do: they have to become politically alive again and tell those in power 'enough is enough.' Failing that, the country will surely implode, and the result could be much worse than Iraq.²⁹

The same day that Ammar Abdelhamid's yearning for change in Syria was heard from Damascus, a Palestinian-Jordanian intellectual residing in Beirut, Rami G. Khouri was sending a salutation to the Arab world from Lebanon, which had just been freed of direct Syrian control:

How refreshing! An Arab parliamentary election whose results were not known three months ahead of time, and did not result in the ruling party winning a victory of over 90 per cent, as has been the norm in many Arab countries in the last half century. Despite the spate of assassinations in recent months, Lebanon remains the Arab country with the best chance to break away from half a century of governance by policemen or warlords in business suits. It can spark other changes throughout the region if it moves toward a more modern, democratic political system. We shall soon find out if this is to be, though, clearly, there are forces resisting this trend...³⁰

No one has the slightest doubt that the road to freedom and democracy in the greater Middle East will be extremely arduous and perhaps very painful. But the end is nearly guaranteed, for, the way is open now; as it has never been, for an end to the centuries-long servitude and alienation of the people of the Middle East. Long after the rhetoric has been ridiculed and scorned, the reality will stand as a magnificent monument to the possibilities of liberty. The peoples of the Middle East will triumph and achieve the liberty and democracy that all humans in the world deserve.

The world will be remade in the 21st century. The Middle East will make it!

²⁹ Ammar Abdulhamid, "For Syrian optimists, now is the time to reconsider," *The Daily Star*, 22 June 2005.

³⁰ Rami G. Khouri, "Despite the gloom, Lebanon is changing," *The Daily Star*, 22 June 2005.
