

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE ARAB MIDDLE EAST:
POSSIBILITY OR PIPEDREAM?**

by

Colonel Jefferson S. Burton
United States Army National Guard

Doctor Richard Winslow
Project Adviser

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ABSTRACT

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The attacks of 9/11 have indelibly affected United States foreign policy. Assaults on our home soil caused an immediate re-evaluation of the idea that somehow democracy and internal security were synonymous. The climate that existed in the Middle East which allowed sub-state actors to plan and execute successful attacks against the West had to be challenged and eradicated. This Strategy Research Project will examine the question of the democratization of the Arab Middle East; and most particularly of the volatile Gulf States in the region. Is Democratization a "pipedream," or is it a real possibility that will provide future stability and enhance understanding in an increasingly global world? It will also analyze the complexities associated with the prospect of democratization and offer some possible courses of action and methods for implementation.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE ARAB MIDDLE EAST: POSSIBILITY OR PIPEDREAM?

United States Foreign Policy and Democratization

The attacks of 9/11 have indelibly affected United States foreign policy. Assaults on our home soil caused an immediate re-evaluation of the idea that somehow democracy and internal security were synonymous. The climate that existed in the Middle East which allowed non-state actors to plan and execute successful attacks against the West had to be challenged and eradicated. This Strategy Research Project will examine the question of the democratization of the Arab Middle East; and most particularly of the volatile Gulf States in the region. In light of its strategic importance to the national interests of the United States and world economies, the Gulf Region is defined as consisting of the following countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Some parallels to other Arab States will be drawn during this analysis.

Is Middle East democratization a “pipedream” or is it a real possibility that will provide future stability and enhance understanding in an increasingly global world? This paper will analyze the complexities associated with democratization and offer some possible courses of action and methods for implementation.



FIGURE 1. THE MIDDLE EAST¹

For some Americans, and for observers across the globe, the attacks of September 11th 2001 were inevitable. They came as a result of the clash of two diametrically opposed ideologies, militant Islam seeking the establishment of religious theocracy and the world's premier capitalistic democracy espousing individual liberty and participative government.

Following the attacks of 9/11, a new United States foreign policy emerged with regard to democratization. The democratization of the Middle East is based on the premise that every human being has the desire and the right to self-determination. Indeed, this was the message clearly stated by President George W. Bush in the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States when he said:

People everywhere want to be able to speak freely; choose who will govern them; worship as they please; educate their children-male and female; own property; and enjoy the benefits of their labor. These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society-and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of all freedom-loving peoples across the globe and across the ages. The events of September 11, 2001 have taught us. The United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.²

President Bush openly described a radical departure from past policy when he spoke at the Royal Banqueting House in London in November of 2003. He described years of failed policies in the Middle East, as the United States and other Western Nations willingly made trade-offs that maintained oppression in the region, in exchange for petroleum market stability. Past alliances and ties often caused us to gloss over the shortcomings of regional Middle Eastern leaders. These trade-offs however, did not bring us stability. In the long run they simply bought us time and allowed problems to grow along with the ideology of violence.³

That same month, President Bush proclaimed:

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.⁴

Based on these official statements and our actions since September 11, 2001, it is clear that the United States is committed to the democratization of the Arab Middle East as a means of establishing justice and peace throughout the region. From the American perspective, the establishment of lasting world peace seems to be tied to the principles of freedom, democracy and free enterprise. Governments that desire peace and prosperity must offer security and personal and civil liberties to their citizens. They must establish an environment that enhances the creativity and the talents of their people.⁵ In light of this fact, it is prudent for us to examine

the realities of the world around us by answering some key questions that will help us to determine the best courses of action available to achieve this national objective.

As we pursue a course of democratization, it is important to define the concept of democracy for reference purposes. In his 1989 work, *The Modest Means of Democracy*, Samuel Huntington provides the following definition:

Democracy is the form of government that meets the following criteria:

1. Free and periodic competition between at least two candidates occurs for all effective decision making positions. The end result is a peaceful transition of government.
2. A high degree of political participation in the elections of leaders exists. The entire adult population is allowed to participate in elections; suffrage is universal.
3. There are guarantees of human and civil rights and liberties, such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to join and form political parties, etc.
4. The leaders are held accountable to the public as long as they hold office. This requires the existence of a means of removing leaders from office if they violate the law.⁶

This definition is consistent with the thinking of our political leaders, and congruent with current foreign policy. It provides a basic framework from which to judge the progress of the democratization process in the Arab Middle East.

U.S National Interests and Public Opinion

As we embark on the process of democratization, we must define United States national interests in the region. Since early in the twentieth century U.S. interests in the Middle East have included three fundamental items. The first is access to oil resources at fair market prices. Though many opponents of U.S. foreign policy may argue this point, we have always paid fairly for the Middle Eastern oil we have consumed. During the invasion of Iraq opponents sneered that we were invading to “steal” Iraqi oil. On the contrary since the invasion, the price being paid for oil by American consumers has dramatically increased. The second is the security of our friends and allies in the region. The United States has always taken the defense of its allies and friends seriously. A secure Middle East is essential to regional and world peace. The third national interest is regional stability. This ties closely to regional security and is based on the premise that the vast petroleum resources of the Middle East must be accessible to all nations through a free market economy.⁷

The Historical Context and Current State of the Region

Osama Bin Laden and his supporters see the spread of democracy as an insult to Islam and they are committed to an all-out war against the philosophies of the West. In a video taped message to his followers shortly after 9/11 he spoke of the “humiliation and disgrace” that Islam has suffered for “more than eighty years at the hands of the infidel.” He was no doubt making reference to the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and the breaking apart of the fertile crescent of Arabia into three new “nations”: Iraq and Palestine under the British, and Syria under the French. The historical references used by Bin Laden, demonstrate Islam's deep remembrance of the past.⁸ As Bernard Lewis describes it:

In the current American usage, the term “that's history” is commonly used to dismiss something as unimportant, of no relevance to current concerns, and despite an immense investment in the teaching and writing of history, the general level of historical knowledge in American society is abysmally low. The Muslim peoples, like everyone else in the world, are shaped by history, but unlike some others, they are keenly aware of it.⁹

Since the inception of Israel in 1948, the involvement of the United States in the Middle East has brought consternation and outright anger from many Arabs in the region. U.S. foreign policy has been badly perceived and our actions in the Middle East have been viewed less as attempts to further democracy, and more as self-serving means of maintaining the status quo.¹⁰ During the Cold War, the United States was focused on ending oppression and fostering freedom among nations across the globe, but most particularly those inside the Soviet block. The Middle East was a much different story. Here, the United States seemed happy to exchange stability in petroleum markets for liberty. In the Gulf region in particular, from a world perspective, the United States has been viewed as giving only lip service to democracy when it suited our purposes. Many have felt that U.S. leaders were happy to sacrifice the idea of spreading democracy in return for stability that was provided by “strong men” who would keep the oil flowing and thwart the growth of nations unfriendly to the U.S., such as Iran under the Shah.¹¹

Many academics in the early 1980's spoke of “Middle Eastern exceptionalism,” which focused on the reasons why democracy would never work in Arab nations. The thesis was that democracy was incongruent with Islam. Arab culture was viewed as a major stumbling block to democracy with its disposition toward hard and fast rules of conduct and its apparent acceptance of authoritarian regimes. As the decade of the eighties progressed, academics began to see evidence of local groups in the Arab world that displayed “civil society” tendencies. Academics saw this as a positive influence, and viewed these groups as essential to the

foundations of the future establishment of democracy in the region. However, little changed regarding U.S. policy toward Middle Eastern democratization. We continued to make deals with regional leaders with bad human rights records, but who displayed the ability to maintain the status quo.¹² As Daniel Neep describes it, following 9/11:

Policy planners also came to believe that America's role in supporting illiberal regimes in the region [such as Saddam] was indirectly to blame...Democracy, so the argument went, would provide an escape valve for some of the mounting and explosive political pressures building up in the Middle East before they reached a critical mass. It might also serve to lessen anti-American sentiment by removing the grounds for criticism of U.S. foreign policy on the grounds of hypocrisy.¹³

To say that many in the Arab world distrust American overtures regarding Middle Eastern democratization would be an understatement. A survey of the Arab Middle East and surrounding countries reveals little positive news for the current state of democracy. According to Freedom House, a widely respected nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, there are only two Middle Eastern electoral democracies; Israel and Turkey. Neither of these countries is in the Gulf region, and neither is Arab. Utilizing a scale which calculates the levels of political rights and civil liberties, Freedom House has rated the Arab Gulf States as follows on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being most free, and 7 being least free):¹⁴

<u>Nation</u>	<u>Political Rights</u>	<u>Civil Liberties</u>	<u>Rating</u>
Bahrain	5	5	Partly Free
Iraq	7	5	Not Free
Iran	6	6	Not Free
Kuwait	4	5	Partly Free
Oman	6	5	Not Free
Qatar	6	5	Not Free
Saudi Arabia	7	7	Not Free
UAE	6	6	Not Free
Yemen	5	5	Partly Free

TABLE 1.

If this data is to have any positive impact on the region, it must be viewed as legitimate and non-partisan. The editor of Newsweek International, Mr. Fareed Zakaria stated that:

While there are many sources of economic data, good political data is hard to find. Freedom House's survey is an exception. For anyone concerned with the state of freedom, or simply with the state of the world, Freedom in the World is an indispensable guide.¹⁵

As of October 2005, only three Gulf States received the rating of "partly free," these are Bahrain, Kuwait and Yemen. In Bahrain, freedom of expression is limited. In 2004 it received a

low ranking of 143 out of 167 countries in press freedom by the media watchdog group Reporters Sans Frontiers.¹⁶

In Kuwait, the National Assembly is elected by a limited popular vote which involves only about 15 percent of the country's population. The Government restricts freedom of assembly and any public gatherings must be approved by the government.¹⁷

In Yemen, 2004 brought some troubling signs regarding the government's commitment to a free press when a prominent journalist – Abdel Karim al-Khaimani was arrested, and several newspapers were closed. Additionally, concerns continue to exist over limitations placed on the rights of women.¹⁸

Six nations received ratings of “not free,” these included Iraq, Iran, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Iraq's movement from an authoritarian regime to a representative democracy has progressed significantly in 2004-2005. Free elections have been held to choose an interim government and to ratify a draft constitution. With well over 60 percent of registered voters participating, these are hopeful signs for the future. Escalating violence on the part of extremists and insurgents continue to negatively impact progress. Strong tribal affiliations continue to cause discord. Iraqis have few governmental restrictions placed on them, but the continued massacre of citizens by Islamic extremists could derail the democratic process.¹⁹

In Iran, 2004 brought a decrease in civil liberties as radical clerics gained more control over the parliament through illegitimate “elections.” Freedom of expression is controlled. Since 1997 over 100 literary publications have been closed and hundreds of journalists and civil society proponents have been jailed. Women's rights are far from equal with a woman's testimony in court only given half the weight of a man's. In August of 2004, a 16 year old girl was executed for “acts incompatible with chastity.” No mention was made of what happened to the man involved in the act.²⁰

In Oman, citizens do not have the right to participate in free democratic elections. The power to rule remains firmly in the hands of Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said. The appointment of three women as government ministers and new laws establishing guidelines for the opening of private radio and television stations provide hopeful signs.²¹

In Qatar, 2004 saw the implementation of the nation's first written constitution. The document was approved by the majority of Qatari voters in April of 2003. The election of a new national parliament is scheduled for later this year. Qataris do not presently have the power to democratically elect their nations leader. The head of the Qatari state is Emir Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani and he possesses complete control on national political power. Freedom of

expression is permitted by the new constitution, but both print and broadcast media is firmly controlled by prominent families. In 1996 AL-Jazeera Television was established in Qatar.²²

The Saudi Arabian government maintains firm control over the political rights and the civil liberties of its citizens. The royal family carefully manages any reforms which tend to move very slowly. The government has sponsored a few national dialogues on reform and is working on plans for local municipal elections later this year. Saudi media outlets are strictly controlled, and journalists who speak against policy are fired or banned from further participation. Religious freedom is non-existent in Saudi Arabia. The public practice of religions other than Islam is strictly prohibited by the government. Academic freedom is limited and government “informers” attend classes to ensure that Western concepts and philosophies are not taught to students. Citizens do not have the right to free assembly though recently, the government has allowed the establishment of a National Human Rights Association, and labor committees in local companies with more than 100 employees. By Western standards, women have few rights in Saudi society. They cannot legally drive automobiles and their access to public sites is restricted when men are present. Women cannot travel outside the country without a male relative to escort them. In 2004, women won the right to obtain commercial licenses, which might increase their access to involvement in commerce and economic matters. In 2005, more than half the country’s university students are women.²³

The United Arab Emirates consists of seven separate emirates. Through most of its history, it has been controlled by numerous competing tribal forces. UAE has achieved some success in diversifying its economy beyond oil, to include a prominent free trade zone in Dubai and an important manufacturing center in Sarjah. Positive economic reforms have not brought similar changes to the political landscape. Citizens of UAE cannot participate in the democratic process. The current president was elected by the Supreme Council of Rulers and he also serves as the crown prince. The ruling family maintains complete control over all political power. No political parties exist in the UAE, and government positions are appointed based on tribal loyalties and economic power. The UAE constitution does extend some limited rights of freedom of expression. These “rights” however, are strictly controlled by the government. The law prohibits criticism of the government and ruling families and provisions are made against any statements that may “threaten society.” Journalists self regulate and routinely publish government messages without presenting any differing opinions. Freedom of religion is limited. The government controls the content of messages emanating from mosques. Academic freedom is limited with government censorship being the norm. Freedom of assembly is strictly controlled by the government. Small political discussions in individual homes are allowed, but

any larger gatherings require government approval. The slave trade continues to be a problem in the UAE. Human rights groups continue to point out the routine enslavement and abuse of South Asian children for use as camel jockeys in lucrative races held throughout the Emirate.²⁴

Many argue that the lack of liberal institutions in the Middle East is an insurmountable stumbling block to democracy. In spite of some of the troubling human rights trends in these countries, some positive signs do exist. When comparing conditions over many decades, small steps have clearly been taken toward the increase of political rights and civil liberties.²⁵ Some scholars openly argue that the Middle Eastern States may be moving, though rather slowly, toward the establishment of democracy. As Robert Pastor stated:

How does a country today establish liberal democratic institutions? And should a people have to wait silently through repressive dictatorships until they reach a point of development where they are allowed to choose their own leaders? If so, then the 33 countries of Latin America would still be waiting under oppressive dictators because liberal institutions exist in very few of those countries...Dictatorship is shrinking, and the path toward democracy is rarely straightforward. So the "illiberal democracies"...are actually much more tolerant than the dictatorships they replaced. Some...might call that progress.²⁶

Any American-led attempts at Middle Eastern democratization will face an uphill struggle as we work to overcome unfavorable impressions of our intentions, establish good will and win the hearts and minds of the people. The author Salman Rushdie has said that "The only way to establish peace in the Arab Middle East is for the constituency [the people] to demand a change."²⁷ Though democracy may not be the "magic bullet" to cure all of the difficulties faced by the citizens of the Middle East, there are strong arguments that the implementation of governments accountable to the will of the people will improve the region and ultimately the world.²⁸

Liberal Democracy in the Region: Pitfalls

The Middle East provides some significant challenges to the introduction of democratic principles. Governments in the region have long leaned towards autocratic rule and firm military control as a means to keeping order and maintaining their hard won independence from European colonialism. The recent invasion of Iraq has rekindled and refueled some of the attitudes and concerns over colonialism.

A second factor that impedes democracy in the Middle East is the lack of governmental dependence on its citizens for support.²⁹ Aside from the limited examples of diversified commerce in the United Arab Emirates, the vast majority of Gulf States can best be described as "Rentier States." A prominent Marxist in the 1980's, Giacomo Luciani writing of the notion of

a “rentier state” implied that democratization in the Middle East was unviable. The “rentier state” analysis is based on the theory that income generated from oil revenue is in fact a form of rent.³⁰ As a result, the vast amounts of income raised by the state have nothing to do with traditional methods of taxation and economic development which has always been related to popular rule, reform and legitimacy.³¹ As long as States have sufficient income they may have little reason to reform. Based on Luciani’s argument, Heather Deegan, a comparative Politics professor at Middlesex University in England has said:

...Although many Middle Eastern states are vastly wealthy in terms of gross national product which might present a prima facie case for political development, the nature of the wealth is not the result of industrialization and social differentiation, factors once seen as necessary to political change, but simply the result of enormous oil revenues.³²

Luciani further postulates that :

The need to raise revenues is the basic reason why the state has an interest in the prosperity and economic well-being of its country. Without such an interest, it is inevitable that “rentier states” will display little tendency to evolve towards democratic institutions.³³

A third factor that impedes democracy is sectarian strife. The Gulf region is filled with a myriad of tribal loyalties and affiliations. Colonial powers like Britain and France blurred these established cultural boundaries by establishing states that included many competing factions. Iraq is perhaps the classic example of a “nation” cobbled together with ethnic Kurds in the North, minority Sunni’s in the Center and majority Shiites in the South. The resulting “sandwich” of very different and often hostile groups has created a volatile mix, and one that moves toward liberal institutions and democracy very slowly.³⁴

The fourth and final challenge to the establishment of democracy that I will mention is that of Islamic fundamentalism. Democracy will not flourish in the Gulf Region without the inclusion of Islamist organizations in the process. Islamist organizations are firmly established in the region, and many enjoy a significant amount of prestige and trust from the populace. Involvement of these groups is going to be a key aspect of democratization in the future. An example of the power of these groups was born out during the elections in Algeria, where significant numbers of Islamist parties enjoyed broad support at the polls. Had the elections been allowed to proceed to completion, these groups would have won the day. Whether we like it or not, Islamist parties must be included in the democratic process. As Marina F. Ottaway has stated:

The existence of these Islamist movements with their broad base of support could be a tremendous help to the democratization of these countries if they

joined the democratic trends. And, of course, it's going to be a very serious hindrance if they don't. The most likely development we can expect is that the Islamist movement will divide and that some will join the democratic trends and some will not. I don't think, at this point, we are in a position to say how they will divide.³⁵

Though some significant "speed bumps" exist in Gulf State democratization, the will of the people cannot be underestimated. If President Bush is right in his estimation that all people desire self-determination and freedom, then the train of democracy will continue to roll despite the best efforts of its opponents. What is ultimately established may have little resemblance to our Western systems, but its success will ultimately be determined by those who embrace it.

Democratic Successes in the Region

All people possess the innate desire to exercise some degree of personal liberty in the way that they conduct their own lives. This has been the basic premise of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East since the events of 9/11. Recent developments in Iraq seem to support this claim. In June of 2005, many Sunni groups boycotted voting on the new constitution. Over the past several months they have learned that their lack of participation has hindered their ability to have a voice. The October 2005 draft constitution elections demonstrated some positive results as well over 60 percent of registered voters participated along with a significant number of Sunni groups. Many of the Sunni leaders polled said that they would vote against many of the provisions, but the fact that they are involving themselves in the process is a very positive thing for the region. The first free elections in Afghanistan in over thirty years, and the free national elections in Iraq in January 2005 are also hopeful signs of a people taking part in democratic processes, many for the first time in their lives.³⁶ As Najib Ghadbian has stated:

Serious democratization measures have occurred in the Arab world since the mid 1980s, particularly in Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, and Yemen. The rise in Islamic movements ("fundamentalism" or political Islam") has coincided with this push toward democracy. Islamists have participated in and benefited from the democratization process, especially in countries that allowed free elections (e.g., Jordan and Algeria).³⁷

Getting competing groups involved in the democratization process is essential to maintaining momentum. It is a learned cultural behavior to solve issues at the ballot box and not with the barrel of a gun. As previously stated, we must be patient in the process of developing these new behaviors. In some cases it may take generations to supplant cycles of violence with democratic approaches. If we want to help emerging democracies in the Middle East such as Iraq and Afghanistan to reduce the problems of increasing violence from disenfranchised

militants, we must find a way to include them in the democratic process as well. As Joyce Davis has stated:

Government officials should allow Islamist forces to participate fully in the democratic process. Instead of realizing their worst fears, secular leaders may find that such participation might moderate Islamists' behavior and defuse the tensions that have given rise to religiously-inspired political agitation in the region.³⁸

This is obviously easier said than done, but it must be a substantive part of our strategy for the implementation of democracy in the gulf region. It has been said that "culture will eat strategy for lunch every time."³⁹ Every effort to implement democratic reforms must be done with a clear understanding of the Islamic culture. Themes for change must be presented in a way that is congruent with Islamic beliefs. Some areas of common ground must be established. Success will come only after we have demonstrated that democratic changes will provide mutual benefit for both Islamist groups and Arab society as a whole. To operate in a vacuum, without regard to cultural sensitivities is to doom our efforts to failure.

Expanding Democracy in the Arab Middle East

The democratization of the Gulf Region is dependent upon the establishment of four factors: first, democratic ideals must mesh with Islamic beliefs; second, regional and local security must be assured; third, economic development must accompany democracy; and fourth, effective Public Diplomacy and Information Operations must successfully carry the message. I will discuss each of these factors separately.

Introduction of Democratic Ideals that mesh with basic Islamic beliefs

The Ayatollah Khomeini stated that "Islam is politics or it is nothing."⁴⁰ Most Muslims would concur that God is interested in politics. The Muslim Holy Law or Shari'a clearly outlines the gaining and exercise of power, and the duties of leaders and how they obtain legitimacy and authority. Islamic doctrine clearly points out what we in the West would define as political philosophy and constitutional Law. The Christian notion of temporal or secular authority separate from religious authority is foreign to most Muslims. The heads of state of predominantly Christian or Buddhist nations would not gather in Christian or Buddhist blocks within the United Nations, but this is a common practice for Muslim States. To Western States the idea of such a grouping based on religion seems archaic and absurd. In Muslim nations, religion exists as a major political factor.⁴¹ "Islam is not only a matter of faith and practice; it is also an identity and a loyalty-for many an identity and a loyalty that transcends all others."⁴² These concepts must be understood and appreciated if democracy is to gain a foothold in the

Middle East. As democratic principles are introduced, care must be exercised to ensure it conforms to accepted Islamic thought and that it is supplanted as “their idea.” Anything that is viewed as “Western” runs the risk of being summarily rejected out of hand. Efforts need to be taken to educate and prepare respected Arab citizens to carry the message of the goodness of democracy to the masses. If it is attempted in any other way, it will end in failure. The rewards to the people and nations of the Gulf Region are great, but so are the risks. As Americans, we often expect quick solutions to some very complex challenges. We must be patient as we embark on the democratization process. Cultural awareness and sensitivity are keys here. A concept that seems so clear through Western eyes may seem alien through the eyes of a citizen of the Middle East. To be effective, we must provide the people with a vision of the advantages associated with personal and civil liberties. Some critics argue that the Arab culture is not consistent with democracy. In opposition to this notion, Alan Richards points out:

The fact that some prominent Islamic opposition movements (some salafis) oppose democracy as an alien importation is unsurprising and hardly decisive. After all, the Roman Catholic Church vociferously opposed democracy throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet Catholic Europe is today entirely democratic, as is most of Catholic Latin America... Islamist thinkers are now finding ways to ensure that democracy in Muslimmajority [sic] countries is culturally authentic. In short, despite the deplorably belligerent rhetoric now fashionable in some American circles, there is little reason to suppose that the “culture” of the Arab region constitutes a barrier to the transition toward democracy.⁴³

Successful democratic reform in the Arab Middle East will require complete commitment and the engagement of the local populace in the process. To effectively sell the message of democracy it must be presented by Arabs to Arabs. Democratic Institutions will initially bring some uncertainties and risk, but through their implementation, leaders can become more moderate, as in the case of the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. One of the most powerful features of democracy is the involvement of the people in the selection of their own leaders. Once this process is established and entrenched, democracy will “build steam” in the region.⁴⁴ The democracy established in the Arab Middle East will have to be compatible with Islamic thoughts and beliefs. It may include components not found in the West, such as the inclusion of some form of religious involvement in the governmental process. An understanding of the cultural setting is essential. The tribal system is a way of life in the gulf region. Families are interconnected in ways the average American does not understand. The beliefs, values and ethics of these groups must be understood if we are to successfully communicate the message of democracy. Writing about Iraq, Andrew Krepinevich suggests:

Accurate tribal mapping could guide the formation of alliances between the new Iraqi government and certain tribes and families, improve the vetting of military recruits and civil servants, and enhance intelligence sources on the insurgency's organization and infrastructure. Most important, it would facilitate achieving the grand bargain by identifying Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite tribes that would be most likely to support a unified, independent, and democratic Iraqi state.⁴⁵

The underpinnings of democracy are civil liberties and political rights. These concepts cannot be forced on a population. Instead they must be embraced and accepted if they are to ever take root. The people of the region have to desire these things for themselves and their children, or they will not be willing to take the risks associated with democracy. Recent free elections in both Afghanistan and Iraq provide clear examples of the great personal risk involved with choosing democracy. Insurgent rhetoric and violence at polling stations did not keep voters at home. In October 2005 ten million of the fifteen and a half million registered voters cast ballots in the Iraqi draft constitutional referendum.⁴⁶ This high level of involvement in spite of personal danger, clearly demonstrates the desire for self governance among citizens of the Middle East.

Al-Qaeda's message of wanton violence is not gaining a great deal of traction with the average Arab. As I worked in the streets of Baghdad rebuilding infrastructure in 2003 and 2004, I spoke to hundreds of Iraqi citizens. On many occasions the topic of democracy came up. The Iraqis would invariably say this; "we want a better life for ourselves and our families, If democracy can give us that, then we want it!" For the average citizen, it may be as simple as that. They want a better life. They want increased opportunities for their children. Al-Qaeda is completely out of touch with this reality. Colin Gray put it this way:

...Al Qaeda's militant ideology is so far from the mainstream of Islamic teaching, so unwelcome to the vast majority of Muslims, and essentially so hopelessly impractical, that it has little future, save as the inspiration for a movement that strategically cannot be more than a nuisance...

...Al Qaeda will be defeated by fellow Muslims devoted to moderate and modernizing policies...

...Obviously the rest of the world must do what it can to blunt al Qaeda's spear, if only for the urgent purpose of self-protection. Al Qaeda and associated organizations will be a perennial menace, but they will be beaten decisively as the Islamic world comes to terms, culturally in its own ways, with the modern, even postmodern, world. The process will take two or three decades at least.⁴⁷

Establishment of Regional/Local Security

Democracy cannot grow and flourish without the establishment of a relatively secure environment. Speaking of the most current test bed for democracy (Iraq), Andrew Krepinevich has stated:

The Iraqi people must believe that their government offers them a better life than the insurgents do, and they must think that the government will prevail. If they have doubts on either score, they will withhold their support.⁴⁸

Effective security operations are the key to providing the stability necessary for the introduction of democracy. It provides a stable platform from which to conduct infrastructure improvements and reconstruction efforts that are so critical to providing citizens with peace of mind and the hope for a better future. The maintenance of security also ensures that the benefits of reconstruction can continue without being destroyed by terrorists or insurgents. A secure environment also supports social changes such as ensuring the right to vote, and allowing women to attend school without any worry of repercussions from militant Islamists. One of the most important factors regarding the need for a stable and secure environment is the fact that it creates time for the appropriate training of indigenous security forces prior to 'throwing them into the breach.' In addition, a secure and stable environment helps to win the confidence of the people. They begin to view the government as a viable organization capable of protecting them from harm. The ultimate aim here is to win the support of the people. Without the support of the populace key intelligence is withheld from the government and those opposed to the spread of democracy can prevail in their attempts to sabotage the delicate process of introducing the often foreign concepts of personal liberty, and civil rights. As the people begin to see the benefits of security and infrastructure improvements, local free elections can be held.⁴⁹

Economic Development

Economic Development is a key element of our national power. This includes trade policies, promotions, sanctions and alliances. In democracy building, foreign aid and economic development are formidable tools that cannot be overlooked.⁵⁰ When correctly applied they can stimulate growth and create conditions conducive to democracy. Our national security strategy states that we will "ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade."⁵¹ While the establishment of free trade is important to economic growth, many of the nations in the Gulf Region also have underdeveloped infrastructure. Assisting nations to expand existing facilities and building new infrastructure can create a positive climate for the growth of democracy. It stimulates economic growth by involving local craftsmen and contractors in the building process. It fosters local pride and instills hope for a better future.

Efforts should be made to ensure that local tribal leaders receive “credit” in the eyes of tribal members for their part in construction and infrastructure improvements. Recognizing tribal leadership can improve their involvement in the process and create a better long-term outcome. In addition, this type of partnership can have the reciprocal effect of increasing tribal involvement in providing much needed intelligence regarding potential acts of violence or sabotage. As security is established and the proper climate is created, private investment will provide the lifeblood required for sustained economic development.⁵²

Public Diplomacy / Information Operations

A recent Gallup poll determined that in 2002, “the citizens of Islamic nations are – at least outwardly – not as much envious or covetous of the success of the West as they are resentful – resentful that the powerful West does not help...[and] seemingly does not care.”⁵³ As a direct result of the telecommunications revolution, the people of the Middle East are very much aware of the vast differences between their standard of living and those of the West. The United States has done a poor job of convincing the world of its benevolence. “Other nations, particularly developing ones, have not bought what we are selling. It’s not the packaging that they dislike, it’s the product.”⁵⁴ It seems fairly self-evident that we must do a better job of defining the product we are selling. Freedom and democratic principles of self-governance are not concepts that can be easily transmitted to the Middle East. Patience is required along with improved training for Ambassadors, and local moderates and students. The expansion of cultural exchange programs will also enhance our image abroad.⁵⁵

Enlisting both the cooperation and the commitment of local Arabs is essential for democracy to take root, let alone to flourish. We must improve our information operations skills and refine our message if we are to win the hearts and minds of the people. Enlisting the considerable skills of “Hollywood” is a good start in this process. While this may sound overly simplistic, it is clear that we must use all of our considerable assets in the battle of ideas. We must craft and produce honest media products that truthfully describe the good that is associated with civil and political freedoms. Historically, we have not done a good job of managing our message. Much of the “good news” is never delivered to the masses, and the lack of this information can unjustly put a negative spin on public opinion both at home and abroad. Our nation possesses the world’s the most powerful media machine and we need to harness its power to further our national objectives. This will by no means require the “nationalization” of our media; but it will require better use of the tremendous production talents we possess. The delivery of the message should be executed by “insiders” or its legitimacy will

be challenged by the people. Use of ex-patriates who speak the appropriate languages without an accent, and who have first hand knowledge of the American way of life, will add impact to the message. The message must not be perceived as something that is being forced from the outside. This is a prescription for failure and the rejection of the message by the masses. Documentaries chronicling positive stories with a personal interest, to include re-construction efforts and improvements in the daily lives of citizens should be produced and distributed. We must improve our ability to take advantage of the tremendous benefits of mass media. The enemy is particularly adept in this arena, so we must meet this challenge by capitalizing on an effective message of our own. Millions of families in the Arab Middle East have a satellite dish or access to television; let us give them a real alternative to Al-Jazeera. If we want to promote democratic reforms, we had better get with the mass-media program.

The sad reality is that as we seek to democratize the Middle East, violence is likely to be present. Militant Islam will resist any attempts to liberalize and enlighten the masses. With the violence will come aggressive media coverage and "spin." Our ability to manage our message will be an essential part of mobilizing public will both at home and abroad. Recent events provide us with a clear picture of how the media will approach future engagements involving combat. Colin McInnes has said that "the global media thrive on warfare and treat it as entertainment and as a spectator sport."⁵⁶

Colin Gray expanded on this premise when he stated:

...[The media] is hypocritically leading the charge to condemn every deviation from the most pristine standard of what constitutes acceptable military behavior...With live video feeds via satellite to a global market, much of the ugliness of war is brought into homes almost everywhere...

...To regard war as uncivilized, unacceptable, and even all but unthinkable is a luxury permitted by the absence of dire strategic necessity. The taboo against war, if such it is becoming, will evaporate like the morning mist if, or more likely when, bad times of strategic insecurity return.⁵⁷

Again, patience is the key. Spreading democracy in the region will require local Islamic commitment, the establishment of a secure environment, the economic development of local infrastructure and a consistent, logical and measured voice using all forms of technology and media to counter the message of militant Islam.

New Approaches in the Region

In recent developments, the Bush administration has recognized that we must work to establish some good will with the peoples of the Middle East. His appointment of Karen Hughes as a good will ambassador and her recent five-day visit to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey is

positive news for America and the Middle East. According to Hassan Bin Yousef Yassin of the Arab News:

Despite cynical views of an American “PR effort” the recent visit to Saudi Arabia by Ambassador Karen Hughes was a success both for Americans and for Saudi Arabians. The dialogue which has been engaged, although only at its inception, has opened up significant new opportunities which the US and Saudi Arabian governments should be extremely serious about following up and taking advantage of.⁵⁸

Obviously this is simply a beginning, but it is precisely the type of personal engagement that is required. Much effort needs to be made in this arena to establish relationships and to improve the public's opinion of the United States in the Middle East. Based on past history we have a lot of “catching up to do.” Any attempts to advance a democratic agenda will continue to be viewed as self serving and suspect. Over time, however, I firmly believe that these perceptions can be changed. One thing that the Hughes visit did highlight is the fact that subtle changes are beginning to take hold in the Middle East, particularly with regard to women's rights. These changes must be implemented gradually if they are to take hold and be embraced. The women of Saudi Arabia were surprisingly candid in their discussions with Ambassador Hughes as they described their hope for the future and their confidence that progress would continue without other nations getting involved in their affairs.⁵⁹

Timetable for Implementation

We are in this for the long haul and must follow a methodical strategy if our efforts toward democratization are to be successful.⁶⁰ In a speech to the Heritage Foundation in December 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell laid out a systemic approach to reform in the Middle East:

At the same time, it has become increasingly clear that we must broaden our approach to the region if we are to achieve success. In particular, we must give sustained energetic attention to economic, political and educational reform. The spread of democracy and free markets, fueled by the wonders of the technological revolution, has created a dynamo that can generate prosperity and well-being on an unprecedented scale. But this revolution has left much of the Middle East behind.⁶¹

Americans are by nature an impatient lot. We focus on results and not on processes. We seem to be plagued by the notion that we can achieve a ten minute solution to a thousand year old problem. This approach will not contribute to the successful democratization of the Arab Gulf region. Patience is going to be required if there is any hope of successfully establishing representative forms of government into the region. For one thing, most of the citizens of the Middle East have never experienced the right to vote, free speech, or free press. These

institutions once established will take at least a generation to become accepted, trusted and fully integrated into society.

Conclusion

If democratization is to have any chance for success in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf Region, it will have to be planted in fertile soil. Democratic ideals must be presented in a way that is congruent with Islamic beliefs. For Muslims, Islam is much more than a religion or a set of beliefs; it is an identity that is central to their lives.⁶² The ideas of self governance and personal involvement in the political process must be presented in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner if they are to ever gain traction with the masses.

The safety and security of citizens must be assured during the process. Volatile and uncertain environments will create confusion and a lack of trust which will translate into limited support for democratic reforms. The people of the Middle East are accustomed to authoritative and often heavy-handed governments that provide predictable levels of security. It may well be that patiently supporting "liberalized autocracy's" that are moving slowly toward democratic reform, is preferable to the confusion and discord that follows regime change. As we have seen in Iraq, a rapid change from dictatorship to democracy can open the door to Islamist extremists and insurgency.⁶³ A focus on the "long view," combined with a patient and firm hand, may prove to be a superior and far more affordable approach to democratization in the Gulf Region.

In spite of vast wealth, the Gulf States possess seriously underdeveloped infrastructure. The bedrock of democratization is that it promises the people hope for a better future. For democratic ideals to flourish, visible improvements must be made to the quality of life of everyday citizens. Infrastructure improvement builds faith in democratic principles and representative government. It provides a marvelous opportunity to build the esteem and support for tribal leaders who are the key to democratization in the Gulf Region.

Is the Democratization of the Middle East, and particularly the Gulf States a possibility, or a pipedream? The answer lies in America's resolve and depends upon how the endeavor is approached. If as President Bush espouses, freedom is the innate desire of every human being, then democracy is an inevitable process in the region. Modern technology has opened the world to possibilities previously unimagined. People of all nations are absorbing new ideas and concepts at blazing speed through electronic media. The Globalization genie is out of the bottle and it has created a love-hate relationship between underdeveloped nations and the West.⁶⁴ Our actions as the chief purveyor of democratic institutions can hasten the progress of democracy in the Arab world, or cause it to come grinding to a halt. The promotion of

democracy has been a consistent message of American Presidents for decades. At times this has been viewed as self-serving, as all too often, we have acted in our perceived short-term national interests to support despots and dictators in the region.⁶⁵ Our new message of democratization must be linked with a foreign policy that “practices what it preaches,” through fairness and even handed treatment of all ethnic and tribal groups throughout the Gulf Region. We must demonstrate a selfless approach that is tied to long-term growth and not short-term personal gains. American hegemony is a double-edged sword. We are respected for our strength and scorned for not doing more to improve the plight of developing nations. Demonstrating firm leadership and taking a “Marshall Plan” approach to the region will bring positive results.⁶⁶ In the end, the liberal democracy established in the Middle East may have less resemblance to Western democracy than many would like, but it will be their democracy, and as such, they will take ownership of it and responsibility for it.

Endnotes

¹ For reference The Arab Middle East and Gulf States referred to in this SRP include nine nations; Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Map obtained from *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy* by Heather Deegan, (Boulder, CO: Rienner Publishing, 1994), pg viii.

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³ George W. Bush, Speech at the Royal Banqueting House in London, November 19, 2003, quoted in Daniel Neep, “Dilemmas of Democratization in the Middle East: The Forward Strategy of Freedom,” *Middle East Policy* 11 (Fall 2004): 74.

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