

133rd Bergedorf Round Table

**Reforms in the Middle East
How Can Europe and the US Contribute?**

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SUMMARY

What contributions can Europe and the United States make to stabilize and modernize the Middle East?

The 133rd Bergedorf Round Table fundamentally analyzed the respective **strengths and weaknesses of the United States and the EU** (pp. 24–38). In the view of many, the robust, often short-term oriented US approach constitutes the direct opposite of the EU strategy, which takes a longer view but is criticized as lacking initiative and effectiveness. Does this view have a point? How can the two approaches best complement each other?

The discussion of contrasting **perceptions and prejudices** (pp. 51–56) was dominated by the allegation that, depending on its real political interests, the West applies a **double standard** in its attitude toward the region’s autocrats (pp. 47–51).

Regarding **historical and cultural obstacles to democratization** (pp. 60–66) in the Middle East, some of the region’s representatives called for patience and respect for regional peculiarities. Others said that cultural peculiarities were used as an excuse by the ruling autocrats, so as to delay reforms ad infinitum. These voices said many countries in the Islamic world have a democratic tradition and that potential support for democratic values there is just as strong as elsewhere. Can **democratization from outside** work (pp. 66–69)? While some of the region’s representatives said that open support for western actors undermines the credibility of the democratic opposition, others considered outside pressure to be the only way to accelerate reforms. On the issue of **instruments of democratization** the discussion centered on the role of the media (pp. 71–73) as well as the importance of elections on the one hand and building up functioning systems for the political process and the rule of law on the other hand (pp. 69–71).

Primarily, however, specific challenges and political approaches to resolving them were at the forefront of the discussion. Did the **Iraq war**, as a “controlled earthquake,” set a positive dynamic moving in the region, or are incalculable security threats its chief legacy (pp. 39–44)? How can the transatlantic partners prevent the situation from getting out of hand (pp. 96–101)? What role do **Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib** play for the perception of the West within the Arab world and what course should the United States take in this regard (pp. 44–46)? How do the region’s people regard the **Arab-Israeli conflict** (pp. 56–57) and how can the West help solve the conflict (pp. 76–80)? What strategies should the transatlantic partners adopt towards the **nuclear dispute with Iran**—what can the EU-3 achieve and what effects would direct talks between the USA and Iran have (pp. 81–86)?

How can the West effectively apply **instruments such as mass media, financial support, and conditionality** (pp. 88–91) and what **local traditions** can be utilized (pp. 91–94)? Can **Turkey** serve **as a model for secular democracies in the region** (pp. 103–107) or does the future lie in a **dialog with Islamists**, whose power appears to be growing steadily? Secular reformers said that only the mostly repressive conditions in the Muslim world are responsible for the success of Islamist politicians—and that the West must reply by redoubling pressure on regional regimes to adopt democratic structures (pp. 94–97).

PROTOCOL

Welcome



Let me welcome you to Dumbarton House, an outstanding example of Federal Period architecture and thus a legacy of the great formative years of US democracy. In these befitting surroundings we will speak about one of democracy's present-day frontiers: the democratization and modernization of the Middle East. Participants from the region, the United States, and the EU member states will analyze what Europe and America can contribute towards triggering reform. Controversies between the transatlantic partners about the most promising strategy have risen to new heights since the US invasion of Iraq, and the topic will remain a major foreign policy challenge in the years to come. Theo Sommer, Editor-at-Large of »DIE ZEIT«, will moderate the discussion.

von Weizsäcker

The Middle East, long known as one of the most dangerous cockpits of conflict in the world, has become even more unstable and insecure in recent years. The region is at boiling point, Iran's nuclear ambitions are frightening the world, Iraq is teetering between stabilization and civil war, the Arab-Israeli conflict remains unresolved, and Afghanistan is a far cry from being pacified. While we agree that a both protracted and painful transformation process lies ahead, it has not yet been resolved what Europe and the US can or should contribute to this process.

Sommer

The Protocol contains an edited and authorized version of the participants' oral contributions.

I. EU and US Approaches

1. Definitions of the Middle East

Sommer

Let us clarify the terminology before we turn to the specific problems at hand. I myself spoke about Afghanistan as part of the Middle East in my introduction. Afghanistan does not belong to the Middle East by traditional definition but is part of the so-called Greater Middle East, a term introduced by President George W. Bush at the G8 summit meeting in 2004 in his proposal for a new Western strategy for the region. When we speak of the Middle East, some of us will be using this new definition, whereas others will have other geographic boundaries in mind.

Moukheiber

Our definitions determine
our political approaches

Our definition of the region affects our analysis and determines our political approaches. Regardless of Western penchant for simplicity, you must precisely identify your point of reference. Is it Lebanon, Syria, Egypt or Iraq? Putting countries that do not belong with each other in the same bag affects our analysis: Lebanon has a free press, which did not stop the mob from torching the Danish embassy in Beirut. Even a free press does not always support liberal, Western points of view. Only a proper differentiation allows you to identify the West's real problem.

Klose

Proper analysis requires precision

The "Broader Middle East" is not a bad title, but a proper analysis requires precision. One should not equate Yemen with Jordan, Lebanon with Saudi Arabia, Syria with Oman, or Egypt with its neighbor Libya. Yemen is far away from democracy, while Lebanon might have a chance to be democratic in the near future, and Syria is more similar to the pre-1989 Eastern European "People's Democracies" than to any other regime in the Arab world.

Moukheiber

Equating the Islamic world with the Middle East would be misleading. Not all societies in the region are monolithically Islamic and follow a traditional interpretation of the Qu'ran.

Vague definitions also hamper policy choices. The inaugural "*Forum for the Future*" 2004 in Rabat brought together representatives from the civil society of the BMENA nations including Iran and Turkey (Turkey was then part of the BMENA region, now it is involved in BMENA as a partner). Right from the start, translators were needed because the Turks and the Iranians did not speak Arabic and the Arabs did not want to use English or any other third language. When Arab participants asked why Turks and Iranians were present, the answer was: because the Americans decided to include them in BMENA. How can the US hope to foster



The Islamic world is not the the Middle East.

Moukheiber

interaction between the actors of civil society of a region if it artificially includes countries whose citizens need translation in order to interact with those of the majority of countries involved?

I agree, each country in the Middle East needs a tailor-made individual approach.

Of course notions like “Middle East”, “Greater Middle East”, “Arab world”, “Islamic world” or “the region” are fuzzy around the edges. But for pragmatic reasons we have to hope that we share a conventional working meaning for all these categories. If what holds true for the Arab world does not hold true for the Islamic world, we need to make that clear specifically.

The G8’s decision to aim at the “Broader Middle East” rather than at the “Middle East” in a narrower sense was of course a political decision. But airtight boundaries are objectively inappropriate for the Middle East because, for example, the situations in Iran and Iraq are closely interrelated. The concept of the Middle East had to be somewhat broadened for practical purposes when conceptualizing policies.

The respective geographical definitions of the US and the EU initiatives are part of the competition for the region’s markets. Terminological issues have very practical implications in terms of agenda-setting and the distribution of funds.

2. EU and USA: Strengths, Weaknesses and Common Ground

Let us now speak about which approaches the transatlantic partners have used until now to foster reforms in the region. How do these approaches differ, where do they coincide, and in which way do they contradict or complement each other? Ernest May, Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, will assess the present administration’s agenda against the background of American foreign policy tradition. Ruprecht Polenz, Chairman of the German Parliament’s Foreign Relations Committee, will take a decidedly political approach.

Regarding the Bush Administration’s push for democracy in the Middle East, two questions occur to a historian. First: how new is the policy? Second: what is its likely staying power? Will “a democratic world” be an enduring US objective

Polenz

Al-Azm

The geographical definitions are fuzzy around the edges ...

Ottaway

... but airtight boundaries are inappropriate for the Middle East anyway

Moukheiber

Sommer

May

How new is the Bush Administration’s policy and what is its likely staying power?

Even former American politicians
termed democracy a “disease”.

May



Americans have always seen Muslims
of the Middle East as backward

Democratization is an old aim
of American foreign policy

comparable to the “open door” or “containment?” Or will it be more evanescent, like Woodrow Wilson’s “make the world safe for democracy” or Jimmy Carter’s emphasis on human rights?

As for the newness of the policy, the answer depends in part on how one interprets US priorities. Its objectives include: (1) regional peace and order; (2) assured flow of oil; (3) internal liberalization bringing open elections, rule of law, equality for women, and greater religious and ethnic tolerance; (4) improved economic and educational opportunity for youth; and (5) abatement in terrorism.

Some of these have been long standing objectives of Americans though not necessarily of the US government. Broadly speaking, Americans have always seen Muslims of the Middle East as backward. Islam’s heyday came and went, after all, several centuries before the United States was born. In much of the nineteenth century, American missionaries were busier in the Ottoman Empire than in China. The American University in Cairo is one of their legacies.

As oil became important in the world economy, American individuals and firms became counselors to Middle Eastern rulers. Over time, the US government took a larger hand. During the Cold War, ambitious programs of economic and military aid sought to prevent the Soviet Union from obtaining allies in the region. One need only recall the huge US contribution to the military build-up of Iran under the last Shah.

The seemingly novel ingredient in the Bush Administration’s approach is its emphasis on democratization as a primary means of achieving America’s multiple objectives. While this is new for the Middle East, it is hardly new in itself. Americans have consistently urged others to copy their political example. They did not at first recommend democracy. In 1804 Alexander Hamilton termed democracy a “disease” from which the United States could perish. Not until the 1830s did Americans become comfortable seeing a foreign analyst like Alexis de Tocqueville write of their country as a democracy.

Until the very end of the 19th century, the emphasis was simply on setting an example. In the formal empire acquired after the 1898 war with Spain, the United States introduced institutions like its own. Wilson went on to attempt to remake Mexico and parts of the Caribbean in the US image. His ambassador in London once explained to a British Foreign Secretary that Wilson’s aim in Mexico was, “Make ’em vote and live by their decisions.” To the question “But suppose they will not so live?,” the ambassador replied “We’ll go in and make ’em vote again.” Asked “And keep this up for 200 years?,” the ambassador answered, “Yes.

The United States will be here in two hundred years and it can continue to shoot men for that little space till they learn to vote and rule themselves.”

The Senate’s rejection of Wilson’s peace treaties in 1919 seemed repudiation of his whole program, applying to democratization as much as to collective security. Subsequent presidents backed away from efforts to make Latin Americans vote and abide by their decisions. Franklin D. Roosevelt, though a Wilson protégé, is supposed to have said of one Caribbean dictator that he was “a son-of-a-bitch, but *our* son-of-a-bitch.”

During the Second World War, Roosevelt was cautiously Wilsonian, insisting that all peoples should have “the right ... to choose the form of government under which they will live.” He did not rule out their choosing non-democratic forms of government such as that of America’s then-ally, the Communist USSR. During the Cold War, though American leaders praised democracy, they were generally content not to fuss too much about tyranny so long as the tyrants were our sons-of-bitches.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, American leaders groped to define the national mission. At one point, Bill Clinton’s National Security Adviser mystified the world by saying that the central objective of the United States was “enlargement.” But interventions in Haiti and the Balkans evidenced an impulse to promote democracy as well as simply stability and order. In brokering the Middle East process, US envoys steered Palestinians toward more open political processes.

Meanwhile, calling to mind Keynes’ maxim that the minds of political leaders are often captives of “some academic scribbler of a few years back,” it became fashionable for American political scientists to advance the neo-Kantian argument that democratic regimes had a propensity to be peaceful, at least in relations with one another. Meanwhile, economists who had previously seen democracy as a product of modernization began to argue that it might work the other way around.

The presidential election of 2000 brought to high positions individuals greatly influenced by these scribblers. Some also happened to be close to Likud and to champion a Middle East peace settlement that reconciled Muslim regimes to an Israel more or less coterminous with ancient Judea and Samaria. The neo-Kantian formula offered hope. The terrorist attacks of 9/11, combined with mistaken consensus concerning Saddam Hussein’s advanced weapons program, provided the catalyst for a military campaign to make Iraq the first in a chain of democracies bringing the Middle East peace, stability, and modernization.

The current government agrees with the theory ...

... that democratization leads to modernization

Bush has committed himself to bringing democracy to Iraq

Since the future of Iraq remains uncertain and problematic, it is an open question whether this particular experiment will be deemed a success or a failure. Rhetorically, however, President George W. Bush has committed himself to the proposition that democratization is the means by which the world, and the Middle East in particular, will move to what his father vaguely characterized as a “new world order.”

Question two concerns the staying power of this US commitment to democratization. In the past, the most important determinant of the vigor and life expectancy of an American foreign policy in the United States has been, ironically, the depth of its roots in the American democratic system. Most foreign observers—and many Americans—deceive themselves about the nature of this system. They ignore the truth that the American people express support for a policy not only through approval of a president but also equally through more fragmented communication to members of the Senate and House.

In many instances, presidents’ policies have turned out to be non-policies because Congress withheld endorsement. The famous Monroe Doctrine had no substance for three-quarters of a century. Only after the Spanish War and Theodore Roosevelt’s succession to the presidency did Congress make the doctrine a reality that actually deterred European powers from acting against nations in the Caribbean. The détente of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger was of even flimsier material. Congress made clear from the beginning that it would never endorse even-handed arms control arrangements along the lines of the original SALT agreement and would never accept Soviet control over Eastern Europe as a semi-permanent reality.

Thus far, neither Congress nor the public has really accepted his aggressive strategy

Thus far, neither Congress nor the public for which Congress speaks has endorsed aggressive promotion of democracy in the Middle East. If the Iraq War eventually turns out well, that could change. If Iraq never seems more tranquil or at peace internally than at present, it is not impossible that Congress will register disapproval tantamount to the disapproval of Wilsonianism registered after 1919.

For the moment, the best bet is that promotion of democracy will continue to be a feature of the US approach to the Middle East but not a dominant feature. George W. Bush’s initiative seems likely to have enduring effects resembling those of Jimmy Carter’s initiative on human rights.

Polenz

How do the US’ and the EU’s policies regarding reform in the Middle East differ? The United States’ current administration argues that terrorism is rooted in the

Local political elites have little desire for reform because they want to retain their power.

Polenz

lack of freedom, and that this can be overcome through democratic development. Security at home is best secured by promoting freedom and democracy throughout the world. From that perspective, the path from September 11 to the invasion in Iraq follows a compelling logic. But the loss of US credibility following the war in Iraq gravely damaged Western efforts to promote democratization in the Middle East. The war and the subsequent events—including the photographically documented brutal and inhuman treatment of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib—are not only a moral disaster for the United States but also have devastating effects for American foreign policy. Amr Hamzawy's study „Zeitgenössisches politisches Denken in der arabischen Welt. Kontinuität und Wandel“ concludes that the US intervention in Iraq reinforces the belief in the region that current US foreign policy aims at restoring the colonial status of the Islamic world. The impression that freedom, democracy and the declaration of human rights are only a pretext for enforcing American power makes more and more citizens in the Middle East loathe the US.

The Broader Middle East Initiative—meanwhile renamed to Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA)—created to support democratization, has not yet yielded any results. One reason for that is that neither the EU nor G8 could agree with the United States on a common strategy. So what is the EU's approach?

The European Union focuses not on regime change through pressure and military force but on individual approaches to different countries and on a dialog with the existing regimes. The EU's strategy is a long-term strategy approach on the assumption that democratization can only succeed if it arises alongside economic prosperity and political participation. The institutional foundations of democracy—transparency, pluralism and the rule of law—must be strengthened to trigger lasting changes; democracy consists of more than elections.

As the local political elites have little desire for reform because they want to retain their power, the EU has established a structure to give incentives for reform. In 1995, it launched the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (“Barcelona Process”), to foster political, social and economic modernization in neighboring countries in the Mediterranean through domestic reform and regional cooperation. To achieve the necessary consent of the ruling elites in its partner states, the EU provides financial support and offers to gradually establish a free-trade area.

The EU's second mechanism of cooperation, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) established in 2004, shares the objective of enhancing stability at



From the point of view of the American government, the path from September 11 to the invasion in Iraq follows a compelling logic

BMENA has not yet yielded any results

Unlike the US, Europe is indissolubly
linked to the Middle East.

Fischer



The Barcelona Process has so far failed ...

Europe's borders by creating stable and modern societies in neighboring countries. Directed at the EU's neighbors in the East and in the South alike, it uses the experience of the EU's enlargement process in selectively applying some of its instruments to help partner countries modernize their economy and political systems according to individual Country Reports and Action Plans, though without providing a membership perspective. The ENP is supposed to build upon the Barcelona Process.

Taking stock today shows that both projects must be viewed critically despite isolated successes. Reviews of the Barcelona Process, conducted in November 2005, ten years after its launch, showed that the process has failed to initiate a broad wave of political reform in the region. It has not yet become a motor for political reform and the development of vibrant civil societies. The failure was most noticeable in that the participants at the 10th anniversary conference in November 2005 could agree on a code of conduct on countering terrorism only in a watered-down statement, even though a remarkable institutional apparatus had been set in motion to prepare the conference.

... the EU focused mainly on security;
the partner states on economic interests

The process has failed firstly because, within the repressive general conditions, the partner countries inadequately implemented the agreements while the EU distinguished itself mainly through deficiency. Secondly, the EU's expectations focused primarily on security while the partner states concentrated above all on economic interests. Thirdly, the Barcelona Process suffers both from a lack of priority-setting and a lack of coordination with the European Neighborhood Policy.

Sommer

How do the European and American approaches to the Middle East differ, Mr. Fischer?

Fischer

Middle Eastern security is an
integral part of European security

Both the US and the EU have strategic interests in the region, but Europe as geopolitical neighbor is indissolubly linked to the Middle East. Europe can thus never completely withdraw, and close cultural and historical ties reinforce the relationship. Middle Eastern security is therefore an integral part of European security, whether we like it or not. Europe has strong interests not only in democratization but also, for example in improving minority rights and solving migration issues. Whether the Mediterranean becomes a sea of cooperation or confrontation in the 21st century is a decisive question for the EU and the Middle Eastern countries alike (the lack of adequate institutions to jointly address our common tasks issue is another question).

The US will never leave Israel on its own.

Smyser



The US has no such inescapable need to ensure security and prosperity in the Middle East. Although the region is of course tremendously important for American security as well, the Atlantic does make a difference.

The United States cannot easily withdraw from the Middle East just because of its geographical position: The US will never leave Israel on its own.

Of course the US is tied to the region because of Israel and numerous other strategic issues. But Europe, is directly affected for geographical reasons by immigration or the fate of Turkey, while the US is surrounded by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and has Canada and Central America as its only neighbors.

The different European and the American attitudes had an impact on the transatlantic partners' different reactions to the terrorist attacks on 9/11. In 2001 both, the US and Europe came to the conclusion that the status quo in the region was no longer acceptable. A new strategy was needed, and America's European allies without exception supported the NATO strike against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The subsequent invasion of Iraq, though, was something different. The US adopted the risky strategy of reshaping the whole region and thus creating an American Middle East based on democratization, market economies and modernization. They were not as pessimistic as the Europeans were regarding the risk of failure and of thus creating a vacuum that would pose a serious global threat.

The US administration believed at the time that the perceived threat from Iraq and Saddam's refusal to cooperate with the UN Security Council justified an invasion. We know more in retrospect than we knew back then and there may be good reasons for an intensified debate. But I suggest that we instead turn to the challenges ahead.

Europeans know from their own history what a painful and violent process modernization can be. That makes them act sometimes a bit more cautiously and modestly than the Americans when it comes to modernizing other countries.

Even though I believe that the US approach was way too optimistic in the case of Iraq, I want to make a more general statement to put that specific statement in the right context: The unique combination of values and interests in US foreign policy is a gift to the world. America must retain this core political concept, at all costs.

The US has less need to ensure security in the Middle East than the EU

Smyser

Fischer

The US adopted a risky strategy in Iraq

Volker

We should turn to the challenges ahead

Fischer

Modernization can be painful and violent

The unique combination of values and interests
in US foreign policy is a gift to the world.

Fischer



Rouleau

Other than the US, Europeans have no such term as “rogue states” in their diplomatic vocabulary. They are also quite skeptical concerning democratization achieved by foreign powers. They are aware that the West has supported autocratic governments in the Middle East for more than sixty years, be it because of the Cold War or the protection of Middle Eastern oil and trade markets.

Europe is prone to self-criticism
because of its colonial past ...

Europe is prone to self-criticism and restraint because it is aware of its colonial past. The colonial powers have always alleged that they were acting in the interest of the peoples they were ruling. In the 19th and early 20th century, France justified its expansionist policies by referring to its “civilising mission” (“mission civilisatrice”). Nowadays, the French are so aware of the negative aspects of colonialism that the French Constitutional Court struck down a law requiring history teachers to stress the “positive aspects” of French colonialization, although colonialization undoubtedly led to progress in certain areas.

... that’s why the Barcelona Process is
a process of dialogue, not democratization

There are similar reasons today to be equally skeptical of the real motivations of those big powers who preach democratization. Europeans doubt that democracy can be exported and believe that the system of government should be a domestic affair, the sole responsibility of the indigenous people. This is why the EU’s Barcelona Process is conceptualized as a process of dialogue and not of democratisation.

Klose

The EU’s Barcelona Process was an invitation to cooperate in the fields of politics, economics and security. Unfortunately, its success has hitherto been limited. The offer of financial aid was rejected because of conditionality. In fact, the Arab leaders did not even participate in the last meeting of the Barcelona process.

Singer

The US and Europe have
strengths that meld well

The US and Europe have strengths and weaknesses on the issue of modernization and democratisation that actually meld well. Europe is very good at institution-building and at harmonizing neighboring countries’ legislation, especially from the EU integration experience. But it lacks convening power in the Middle East: the absence of major Arab players at the last Barcelona meeting makes this process almost irrelevant. In turn the US has neither experience nor capacity to promote democracy and reform the way Europe does, but it does have immense military resources and political weight.

Fischer

The Americans enforce their own interests
while the Europeans rely on incentives

While the US is strong enough and willing to enforce its own interests, Europe out of necessity relies on incentives and cooperation. Lacking the necessary political will, institutions and resources to use force, the EU has devised efficient tools of



peaceful influence. The single most successful European foreign policy up to now has been enlargement; Greece, Ireland, Spain, and Portugal, just to mention a few, are great success stories of transforming and modernizing societies. America applied similar methods incidentally, e.g. when influencing Mexico through NAFTA, but that has not become the American way of carrying out foreign policy.

Europe can sustain long-term initiatives because the Brussels administration's personnel changes very slowly and the Commission can be sure that its successor will not change course abruptly. The Barcelona Process for example is a prime example of a long-term process—it was recently reviewed and re-launched after ten years.

The United States, by contrast, is institutionally incapable of sustaining such long-term initiatives. No doubt the next administration, whether Democratic or Republican, will still talk about democratizing the Middle East. But the next president will reshuffle, reorganize and redefine the priorities. Then, again, US policy will probably be out of step with the EU approach.

The US and Europe indeed have different time frames for political strategies. While the US is typically impatient, Europe is overly-institutionalized. For example, Europe is on the Barcelona track, which basically takes forever and might never get anywhere, while the US' BMENA initiative is scheduled to end around 2008. The challenge is to bring the two approaches together in a working mechanism that creates both stamina and dynamism.

The assumption that the US cannot pursue long-term foreign policy goals for structural reasons is entirely wrong. I hope that European politicians are not misled by its seeming plausibility. US foreign policy's stamina is unmatched if—and only if—the Congress registers sufficient public support over a longer period of time. No European political system, except maybe for Great Britain's, allows comparable staying power.

The US consistently pursued its Open Door policy since the late 19th century. Containment and deterrence were long time strategies during the Cold War, pursued until they succeeded. Warning Europe against the impossibility of US long-term foreign policy strategies is a prime example of how the search for sweeping theses leads over simplification to plain falseness and finally detrimental political impact.

Ottaway

Europe can sustain long-term initiatives ...

... whereas the US is incapable of such

Singer

May

Of course the US can and does pursue long-term strategies

Democratization is not as important to the US as security.

Kassem



Pflüger The new US security strategy relies much more on diplomacy, multilateral organizations like NATO and long-term strategies like nation-building than its predecessor.

Al-Khalil The US and Europe have one thing in common: so far, European and American presence in the region have both been predominantly motivated by securing energy resources and responding to military crises and threats. The interest of people in the region living a better life often seemed not to be at the top of the agenda.

Kassem We all know that democratization in itself is not nearly as important to the United States as security. What the US does to support Middle Eastern democracy is certainly not done for the love of people in the region. Every honest representative of the administration will admit that security is paramount. That does not mean, though, that we should not welcome external pressure for democratization.

US support of democracy in the Middle East is not done for the love of the people there

Smyser Indeed, the current administration wants to increase US security by spreading democracy. Only security reasons can make the US invest such an incredible amount of money.

Democratization became the policy of the United States only with President Bush's second inauguration in January 2004, not with the invasion in Iraq in 2003. It became the State Department's official policy on December, 11th 2005, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's article in the Washington Post "The promise of democratic peace." Secretary Rice stated that having democratic governments all over the world is part of American security requirements, because these "conduct themselves responsibly in the international system."

This notion was reinforced by Thomas Barnett's bestseller "The Pentagon's New Map", which is widely read and very influential among the senior staff of the Department of Defense. In his book, Mr. Barnett, Senior Managing Director of the strategic planning firm Enterra Solutions, defines what he calls "the functioning core" or "core countries" as those which are democratic, globalized and inter-linked. On the other hand, he identifies countries of the "non-integrating gap", which are in need of democratization and reform. Many of these countries are situated in Africa and Latin America. Every Muslim country in the world is part of the non-integrating gap, including Albania, Pakistan and, I am sorry to say, Mr. Al-Azm's preferred role model Turkey. In his follow-up to "The Pentagon's New Map",

We should not suppose that everybody in the region admires the Western way of life.

Klose



titled “Blueprint for Action”, Barnett actually prescribed a formula for solving the world’s problems through military engagement: invade, leave a stabilizing force and then slowly but surely convert these countries to democracy.

While the upper levels of the Pentagon love this book, the lower levels, the people who would actually have to fight the wars, hate it. If you ever read it it will make your hair stand on end. Why?

Mr. Barnett’s ideas imply two major problems. First, they would bring the Westphalian system to an end that has provided the basis for peaceful international relations for over three and a half centuries. Since the peace treaties of Münster and Osnabrück in 1648 which ended the Thirty Years War, this system governed international relations in the modern system of nation-states, based on the mutual acknowledgment of each country’s sovereign rights. Choosing a form of government is one of these rights.

Second, the costs for Mr. Barnett’s strategy are unsustainable. Nobel prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz, a former Chief Economist of the World Bank, calculated the cost of the Iraq War at \$600 billion (including follow-up costs caused, for example, by medical treatment and pensions for soldiers and the interest on the national debt). Stiglitz estimates that if the war continues for two more years, the cost will increase to a trillion dollars. The United States cannot afford more wars like this.

The US cannot afford more wars like this

US policy in the Middle East is not only guided by security aspects, but also by the assumption that everybody in the region admires the Western way of life. This assumption is very American—I strongly doubt its accuracy. We should be more self-critical when it comes to exporting our way of life.

Klose

American politicians promote democratization for security reasons as far as the US government’s foreign policy is concerned. But at the same time they support it for idealistic reasons through other channels: every year the US Congress allocates tens of millions of dollars for civil society development in other countries through powerful institutions led by some of our most influential politicians. The National Democratic Institute associated with the Democratic Party is currently chaired by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and the International Republican Institute’s current chairman is Senator John McCain. These and many other institutions promote democracy as a system that should be expanded throughout the world. They are supported and aided by non-governmental organizations which

Smyser

Americans believe in the
efficacious use of force.

Wells



often bring their own funding or other, supportive funds. They have even attracted President Putin's wrath with their work in support of Russia's civil society.

Kepel

The Neo-Cons believed in
superior military technology

As Francis Fukuyama demonstrates in his new book "America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neo-conservative Legacy", part and parcel of a neo-con legacy in Iraq—and also the Likud legacy in Palestine—is a belief in Western commitment and superior military technology. The relative ease of regime change in the Soviet Union led to the notion that every unwanted regime melts away in the face of American resolve and functioning civil societies will grow from the ruins. But neither the military victory in Iraq nor the unilateral Israeli pullout from Gaza translated into the expected positive consequences.

May

The end of the Soviet Union was not
caused by threats or military action...

The United States does have military power and uses it, but other elements of governmental power are less impressive. Civil programs are much too limited and lack sufficient consultation and agreement between their actors.

In 1987, only two and a half years before the Berlin Wall came down, President Reagan demanded that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev "tear down this wall". The prompt fulfillment of Reagan's wish left the false impression that the end of the Soviet Empire was caused mainly by a firm US foreign policy. In reality, it was a result of joint efforts of many actors in Western societies. For instance, West German TV broadcast into East Germany played a major role in delegitimizing the GDR's ruling party, the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany). The provision of Xerox machines helped Poland's Solidarity, the first independent Trade Union in the Soviet Bloc, to survive the years of martial law (1981–1983). You all know about the important role of the CSCE. Persuasive power and support for the opposition were vital for bringing down the Soviet Union, not threats—let alone the actual use of force.

Berman

I can hardly understand why influential members of the administration still consider the use of force an efficacious tool for achieving the huge variety of US foreign policy goals, including democratization. We are deeply bogged down in Iraq, public support for the war is waning, and getting out without huge damage will be difficult enough.

Wells

In contrast to Europeans, Americans are used to taking risks and they believe in the efficacious use of force. Regarding risks, the US economy cycles like a



rollercoaster, our politicians make vast attempts at social engineering, and consequently, America also takes risks in its foreign policy. Furthermore, many Americans believe that if a system is deadlocked—as much of the Middle East apparently was—we see an appropriate use of force as an efficient means of shaking things up to trigger a change for the better. The Reagan administration applied a lot of forceful rhetoric and heavy military expenditures on an already declining Soviet Union to accelerate its downfall. That undoubtedly inspired the administration's decision to invade Iraq to a certain extent.

American proponents of the use of force sometimes forget that the US also had some less promising experiences. My mentor Ernest May mentioned President Wilson's interventions in Mexico: when General Victoriano Huerta overthrew the Mexican government in 1913 and declared himself Mexico's military dictator, Wilson decided to intervene, first by financially supporting Mexico's legitimate government and then militarily. But he failed to initiate a self-supporting process of democratization. The US withdrew in 1917, and only much later, when Mexico was largely ignored by the United States, did democratic institutions gradually evolve. A real transformation into a more open society took place only when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect in 1994. It took almost a century to get the Mexicans on the verge of what American democracy promoters had in mind under Wilson.

Do the American robust approach and European patience and willingness to enter into dialog rather complement or neutralize each other?

American activism is always in danger of being self-righteous, European caution is prone to becoming inactivity—but together they have sometimes worked just fine. In January 1977, US President Carter unleashed a yearning for participation and human rights all over the Communist world with his supportive letter to Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov, Nobel Peace Prize laureate of 1975. The Western European governments reacted very cautiously at the time, urging the US administration not to risk good relations with the Soviet Union on a crusade motivated by self-righteousness and zealotry. They argued that despite the necessity of pressuring the USSR on human rights issues, the West also needed the SALT II (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) agreement and a détente. Also, the US should be careful not to trigger the emergence of anarchistic movements or other political developments leading to chaos and instability. When both transatlantic partners

...as some people in the current administration believe

The US has also had some less promising experiences with the use of force

Sommer

Pflüger

The US permanently has to steer
between Scylla und Charybdis.

Singer



contributed their specific policies , the furthering of human rights and the safeguarding of good relations were brought together in a mutually productive way.

Al-Khalil

Europe and the US have specific assets

Europe's and the United States' specific assets have both contributed to reform in the Middle East. Europe's major assets in its relations with the Middle East is its strong economic and trade relations, its geographic proximity, its cultural affinity, and its knowledge of Middle Eastern history and traditions. In addition, Europe's balanced attitude has resulted in a low level of animosity and controversy between the two regions. As for the US, its assets are numerous. The US has both political and military power, advanced technology and sizable economic capacity. Moreover, its history is free of colonialism, and many Middle Eastern countries have embraced American values such as Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points. America has institutionalized the accommodation of Middle Eastern and Muslim immigrants exemplarily. Like Europe, the US has been offering Middle Easterners the best opportunities for advanced education in its academic and military institutions. In the case of Saudi Arabia alone, 400,000 Saudi students have benefited from these opportunities in America over the past 50 years, and have certainly played a major role in the modernization of the Kingdom.

Singer

US foreign policy is criticized
more harshly than EU policy

We must admit that US foreign policy is put under a microscope and criticized much more harshly than anything that the EU does. Some of you applaud the Bush Administration for initiating a renewed interest in democracy, but you then criticize them for pushing democratization too rapidly. You disagree with their focus on security and forced regime change, yet then criticize them for giving financial aid to NGOs in the region. You demand that the US foreign policy consistently supports human rights, but then when it pushes for human rights accuse the US of imposing its own standards without respect for other country's individuality. It seems the United States permanently has to steer between Scylla and Charybdis, where it can do no right in European and regional eyes, even when it does what they ask. With the cartoon controversy Europeans are for the first time facing similar scrutiny.

Kassem

While the US is determinedly pushing for
reform, the EU is still acting reluctantly

Today, while the United States is determinedly pushing for reform, the EU is still acting reluctantly. Until the Europeans realize the scope of the threat and start acting in concert with the US, there will be no society based on égalité, fraternité, and liberté, but extremism, theocracy and state failure in the Middle East.

3. The Middle East After the Invasion of Iraq

Let us take a closer look at the region today—how has it developed during the past years? We all agreed that the invasion of Iraq has changed the Middle East, but regarding to the assessment of these changes there are quite differing views.

Sommer

Reform in the Middle East and the Islamic world has been a major concern since the emergence of modern states in the region. However, reform has not succeeded in meeting the needs and aspirations of the states and peoples of the region. At the beginning of the third millennium, Muslims and Arabs are great in number yet burdened by economic, social, and political disappointments. Their governments are ineffective in some cases, and in others such as the governments of Afghanistan, Somalia, and Lebanon are incapacitated. As a result, the existing states have not played a satisfactory role in independently determining their destiny. Reform in the Middle East requires clear vision, competent governments, freedom of thought and expression, civil society organizations, and political stability.

Al-Khalil

The third Arab Human Development Report (2004) concludes that “the Arab development crisis has widened, deepened and grown more complex to a degree that demands the full engagement of all Arab citizens in true reform.” It identifies political restrictions as the major impediment to development in the region. But these restrictions are not the only reasons for the lack of vibrant civil societies. The debate about the free press, sparked by the publication of cartoons showing the Prophet Mohammed in the Danish newspaper *Jyllandsposten*, made it clear that some fundamental contradictions between Western democracy and Islamic traditions have not yet been resolved.

Polenz

Reform demands the full engagement of all people in the region

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, both the United States and Europe focused even more on enhancing security and stability in the Middle East. Multiple initiatives to trigger reform were devised, as diverse as the EU’s Barcelona Process and the US-led invasion of Iraq. Why, then, is the state of affairs today in some aspects worse than ever according to leading experts from the region itself? Neither security nor stability have been achieved, and the image of the West has deteriorated.

One positive development must be mentioned, though. People in the Middle East are now discussing political and economic reform, increasing the pressure

There are positive developments in the Middle East ...



on Arab regimes to intensify reform programs, most notably in Morocco, Jordan and Bahrain.

Sommer

Mr. Polenz gave a rather bleak description of the state of affairs in the region, but with some glimmers of hope. Do the positive developments he mentioned offer a promising perspective for the future? And did the US invasion of Iraq contribute to these positive developments?

Pflüger

... which the Iraq invasion has triggered

The US-led invasion of Iraq and the subsequent policy of the administration has of course some debatable features, to say the least, but it has at the same time triggered immense progress in the region. A few years ago, stability in the Middle East meant oppression and autocracies. Kurds and Shiites were mass-murdered in Iraq, even if the media did not bring it to the world's attention. Terrorism in and from the region threatened our security: 9/11 happened before the American invasion.

Despite bloodshed and instability,
the invasion has helped
democracy make progress

The invasion in Iraq has caused bloodshed and instability. But on the other hand, democracy has made tremendous progress. I saw positive developments almost everywhere during my recent visit to the Gulf States. While nobody in the Middle East cared about human rights and democracy five years ago, today newspapers and people on the streets are discussing human rights throughout the region, even in the conservative Emirates. Bahrain saw a conference on women's rights, and Morocco has passed reforms on women's rights. It remains impossible to challenge the leading families openly, but Qatar held its first parliamentary election last year. Ms. Al-Kitbi has just been elected to the first human rights board in her country, and Lebanon has conducted free elections: this nearly amounts to a revolution. Revolutions are sometimes bloody, there were setbacks and mistakes, and there will be further setbacks and mistakes. Still, we should always remember that the region was not in a state of peace and harmony before the invasion and that important steps forward have been made.

In Iraq, we have seen a constitutional referendum and an election with an impressive turnout of about 75%. Given the security situation, this was a strong message that people are willing to embark on the path toward democracy.

Klose

I am more skeptical than you are. Most European citizens and governments were "not convinced" that Iraq had WMD and supported Al-Qaeda, to quote Mr. Fischer's reply to Donald Rumsfeld at the 2003 Munich Security Conference. And



at least to some extent they were right: Iraq was not a terrorist problem then, but today it is.

I hope that the United States has a lot of staying power in Iraq. After World War II, it took four years to conduct elections and introduce a constitution in Germany, and ten years before the country was granted at least limited sovereignty.

Iraq in 2006 is very different from Germany in 1945. In Germany, democracy had strong historical roots, the economy soon gave reasons for hope, and the citizens were united in their identification with the German nation.

Comparing their current situation with that during Saddam's regime, people conclude that freedom without security is of no use. Regime change in and of itself is no guarantee of better governance if it does not entail stabilizing the society and ensuring education and public safety. The US failures strengthen the impression that neither indigenous reforms nor foreign intervention will ever fundamentally change the situation.

Paradoxically, the US invasion of Iraq makes many autocratic governments in the region feel more self-confident and powerful, because the US is unlikely to risk another endeavor.

The US' behavior as the only 'super power' and the many mistakes in its attempt to recreate the Middle East have unnecessarily created many enemies of America.

The Iraqi quagmire is not very tempting as a role model for anybody interested in democratization. If you were living in the Middle East and longing for democracy, would you throw your lot in with the people who are responsible for the current situation in Iraq?

Stability in the Middle East is too important and too delicate to act upon wishful thinking, Mr. Pflüger. Take a good look at reality: instead of triggering a chain reaction of democratization in the region, the US invasion in Iraq has created a dangerous vacuum.

By toppling Saddam Hussein, the Bush Administration wanted to transform the old Anglo-French Middle East marked by its colonial past and traditional conflicts, by corruption, stagnation and desperation, into a flourishing region

Do the Americans have as much patience with Iraq as they did with post-war Germany?

von Weizsäcker

Iraq in 2006 is very different from Germany in 1945

Al-Kitbi

Many autocratic governments in the region feel more self-confident

Al-Khalil

Rouleau

Fischer

Stability in the Middle East is too important for wishful thinking

The invasion of Iraq has not destabilized the Middle East.

Reiter



Violence in Iraq, hegemonial aspirations, Iran's nuclear program—the region is highly explosive

of democracy, civil society and modernized Islam. They attempted to repeat the transformation of Eastern Europe after 1989, but unfortunately in a completely different and ill-suited environment. You need not be a clairvoyant to see that the administration's plan will fail.

What the US has achieved instead is the destabilization of the whole region. The fall of Saddam Hussein initiated a contest for regional hegemony with Iran as the most promising player. Today, the US is dependent on Iranian support not only in Afghanistan but also in Iraq; 130,000 American soldiers in the region are potential hostages, and an oil price above \$ 100 per barrel would be economically devastating for the West. Besides Iran, Turkey and Israel are also fighting to fill the growing vacuum left by Saddam, while Jihad terrorists are fanning out to open up their next battleground in Jordan. Iran's nuclear ambitions turn this already explosive mixture into the ultimate Molotov cocktail.

I can only hope that the region's way to modernity and democracy will not be as violent and bloody as Europe's during the 20th century, where hegemonial aspirations and misguided optimism, and later a nuclear arms race, led to two World Wars and the danger of mutual destruction.

Pflüger
Exaggerated catastrophic scenarios are just as useless as wishful thinking

Wishful thinking is not helpful, but neither are exaggerated catastrophic scenarios. I am very willing to leave doomsday prophecies to former foreign ministers and restrict myself to differentiated analyses.

Reiter

The invasion of Iraq has not destabilized the Middle East—because the region was not at all stable before. Stagnation and stalemates among autocrats are not stability. America attempted, in a bold and resolute strategy, to get things moving through a controlled earthquake. Now Europe and the US must join forces to prevent this earthquake from getting out of control.

Kassem

Without the Iraq invasion, a Western intervention would have soon been necessary

The US military intervention in Iraq, for all its shortcomings, lack of legitimacy and planning and horrific consequences for many people, was still an effective push for reforms in the region. The alternative would have been stagnation, state failure and a subsequent Western intervention on a much larger scale. Let me explain:

Since 1989 democratization took hold everywhere except for the Middle East

At the beginning of the 21st century, the status quo in the Middle East was becoming increasingly intolerable. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, democratization took hold everywhere except for the Middle East. Here five regime

In 2005, the Middle East discovered the magic of the ballot.



Ibrahim

changes failed to initiate reform, inept Arab diplomacy failed to end the Arab-Israeli conflict and declining economies failed to provide welfare for our alarmingly fast growing population: 60 percent of Middle East's population is younger than 25, while the region's combined GDP, \$550 billion according to the UN's Arab Human Development Report, is less than Spain's \$592 billion. Economic failure is caused mainly by a lack of accountability and good governance in the club of authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes.

The combination of economic decline and demographic growth would over time inevitably have led to state failure. Then, the West would have intervened anyway. Europe and the US can tolerate failing states in Sub-Saharan Africa, but not in the Middle East where oil resources and Israel's existence are at stake.

Could the West not have forced the region's autocrats to change course by peaceful means? I strongly doubt it. Engagement and dialog would have lasted for decades without effecting any serious change, while an arms boycott as the only serious leverage would not have made the region's regimes embrace reform but turn to suppliers like North Korea, thus further radicalizing them. The US intervention has at least shaken things up, and to a lower price than intervention at a later point in time.

There have been encouraging developments in Iraq and in the region after the invasion. Since 2003 there has been a tremendous explosion of civic activity, modest democratic reforms and open discussion without political taboos. Certainly, the rhetoric about a democratic Iraq being a model for change in the region was somewhat overblown. But a unified and pacified country will provide a positive impetus.

In 2005, the Middle East discovered the magic of the ballot. In Palestine, Iraq, and under the worst conditions, in Afghanistan. Given the opportunity, the people, especially women, vote in large numbers. Today even traditionally anti-democratic forces, like the communists and Islamists, surprisingly agree with President Bush's advocacy of democracy. Less surprisingly, autocrats (and American allies) like Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt are not so eager to follow Bush's advice.

The examples of Palestine and Iraq have made many Arabs wonder if occupation is a condition for having have fair and free elections. Everyone saw that the Palestinian election was fair and free, and in Iraq nobody questions the elections' integrity, despite the horrific calamities and the bloodshed that cast a dark shadow on the country's future.

The region's autocrats will not change course without force

Volker

Ibrahim

Is occupation a condition for fair and free elections in the Middle East?



Al-Azm

Developments at the micro level
give much reason for hope

There are indeed developments at the micro level that give much reason for hope. After Hamas won the election for the Palestinian Legislative Council in January 2005, defeated Fatah decided not to participate in a Hamas government. Instead, Fatah announced it would reorganize itself to better meet its voters' needs in the next elections. What would be the normal course of action for a losing party in the West is a revolutionary development in the Arab world, never seen before in 40 years.

Also, in Syria or Egypt it would be unthinkable for the president to exchange letters with a democratically elected prime minister from the opposition party. But Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh exchanged letters as President and Prime Minister. The specific reasons for that may be debatable, but still it is a major step forward.

Esfandiari

The Qur'an remains a primary source
for national constitutions in the region

Maybe some Islamists are setting aside the idea that the Qur'an is "the solution," but in countries across the region the Qur'an remain a primary source for national constitutions. No Islamist party has yet run a country in a completely secular way, without leaning towards the Sharia law, at least on social issues, for example personal status law and familial relations. Regarding women's rights in some countries in the region, we are even worse off today than we used to be, for example in Iraq. The Iraqi city of Basra, once secular, has become a miniature version of an Islamic republic—politically, legally, even socially.

4. Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib

Sommer

American and European speakers as well as representatives from the region have pointed out positive aspects of the robust American approach. Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo are certainly not among these positive features.

Volker

Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo:
torture and degradation of
prisoners will not be tolerated...

Nobody was more appalled by the Abu Ghraib photos than President Bush. Of course the United States needs to be a model of the rule of law and human rights, for principal reasons and to be an effective actor in the region. With measures like the McCain Amendment signed we made it clear that torture and degradation of prisoners, both civilian and military, abroad or domestically, will not be tolerated. Also, I would like to remind you that at least the atrocities were discovered through an internal military investigation, which led to the conviction of those responsible. When a second wave of photos was published recently, every soldier pictured was already in jail.



We are aware that Guantanamo is negatively affecting the perception of the United States throughout the world. But traditional legal frameworks are insufficient for the fight against Islamist terrorists, and that is not just an American problem. According to international law, prisoners of war are detained until the end of the conflict. Can we treat the unlawful combatants captured in Afghanistan and the terrorists who have attacked American civilians accordingly? No, because they are not soldiers in a traditional war. Some of our European allies see a civilian code of justice as an adequate framework for the long-term struggle we are waging. But on the battlefields in Afghanistan forensic investigations cannot be properly conducted and the means for adequate civil trials are not readily available. Also, some captives released from Guantanamo subsequently conducted terrorist attacks in Russia or Afghanistan or threatened Danish cabinet ministers, which demonstrates that the cost of mistakes is higher for these people than for the average criminal. The US has improved the legal treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo and ensured that certain legal standards are fulfilled. We still need to work on a more sustainable answer to the legal issue, though. I encourage our European partners to contribute actively to that process because dealing with organized terrorism in a way which both protects citizens and respects the rule of law is our common challenge.

The argument to deny prisoners an adequate trial on account of their being especially dangerous and being neither ordinary criminals nor soldiers in a national army is well known in the Middle East. Arab autocrats justify their treatment of some members of the Muslim Brotherhood precisely in the same way. I am very sad to hear these arguments from a member of the United States' government.

To claim Senator McCain's amendment as a victory for the executive branch is a bit of a stretch, because the Bush administration fought to prevent this legislation tooth and nail. As I know from personal experience as someone involved in the investigations at Abu Ghraib, we in fact did not deal with it forthrightly in a timely manner. The abuses happened in October 2003, but the army investigation did not start until January 2004, and by the time the media reported on it in April 2004, it had still not yet been dealt with appropriately. Indeed, in terms of the responsibilities of the chain of command (as opposed to the individual soldiers), it still has not been dealt with. Until we create a sense of accountability up the entire military and civilian chains of command—including the attorney general and ci-

... but traditional legal frameworks are insufficient for the fight against Islamic terrorists

Al-Azm

Singer

The Bush administration fought to prevent the McCain amendment tooth and nail

vilian contractors—the world will not believe our commitment and our credibility will be severely damaged. Restoring our credibility is not only important from a moral point of view—anti-Americanism is a very real threat to our security. As an American patriot, I urge our European friends to keep up the pressure on the US government: We need your assistance in holding us up to our ideals.

Volker

Although the McCain amendment was strongly resisted ...

... the government did its best to improve the prisoners' treatment

The McCain Amendment was indeed strongly resisted by the administration at first. The administration would have preferred to demonstrate that they are determined to clean up this mess themselves without any outside pressure. But in the end the legislation was passed by Congress, the President signed it, and now it is the law of the United States.

Regarding the legal basis for the detainment and the treatment of individual prisoners in Guantanamo, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and the administration did their best to put this back on the right track. Many of you would prefer to hear me announce the dismissal of the Secretary of Defense, but I cannot do you this favor.

May

Great defense secretaries would have court-martialed the general officers in charge

Your explanation of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and the steps taken to deal with it make some sense, but they are insufficient and emotionally unconvincing. Donald Rumsfeld only held lower-rank personnel accountable, whereas former great defense secretaries, like George Marshal (1950–51) or Robert Lovett (1951–53) would have court martialed the general officers in charge immediately. And if similar scandals had occurred under the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–1961), the Secretary of Defense himself would probably have gone to the wall right away.

Pflüger

For the sake of its own credibility, the US should close down Guantanamo

I understand Mr. Al-Azm's and Mr. Singer's criticism, but at the same time I am convinced that the American administration is sincerely shocked about the abuses that happened and has done a lot to improve the situation. Still, for the sake of its own credibility, the only way to go is closing down Guantanamo.

II. Regional Perspectives

We will now focus on regional perspectives: What is the state of affairs? What are people in the region thinking about reform and about the role hitherto played by the West? Who are the regional reform agents? What do they want, and what do they expect from the United States and Europe?

Sommer

1. The West and the Region's Autocrats

Many people in the region and in the West claim that the West should not try to impose democracy on us because democracy cannot be imposed from outside. That argument is entirely wrong. Instead of imposing democracy, just stop imposing dictatorship! President Bush rightly said that the West has supported the region's dictators for 60 years to ensure stability, and to no avail. 60 years of foreign support for dictatorships have brought most states in the Middle East to the brink of failure.

Kassem

Support for the region's dictators has brought the Middle East states to the brink of failure

"Stop supporting autocrats, we can take care of the rest" sounds very convincing, but I doubt that Western support is the only reason there are autocrats in the region. If your societies have a huge democratic potential, some of them a long-standing democratic tradition, then why is it so hard to create a functioning democratic opposition? Being dependent on oil does not necessary lead to support for autocrats. The Western countries would no doubt prefer relations with oil-rich democracies to relations with oil-rich autocracies.

Polenz

The West has a responsibility for the ongoing autocratic rule in the region. Even though it was not the West that created these dictatorships, they would not have lasted this long without economic support, arms exports, and intelligence input (CIA etc.) for overcoming domestic opposition.

Rouleau

Without support, dictatorships would not have lasted this long

Autocratic regimes are not there only through Western support. The will of the leaders that some call "dictators" to survive and their regime's stability is quite strong. For instance, President Bashar al-Assad's demise is still far away despite considerable international pressure on Syria following the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon.

Al-Khalil

We should not play a blame game on whether internal or external actors are responsible for the stagnation in the Islamic world. But it is of utmost importance

Cohrs

The West does not have to export democracy.
Just stop imposing dictatorship!

Kassem



The West should avoid double standards
and respect international law

that the western powers avoid double standards. If the United States continues to place itself above international law, due process and other core principles, how can it expect the states of the Middle East to adopt these very principles? If Israel continuously violates international standards in the region without being put under serious pressure from Europe and the United States, how can the western powers be seen as a credible partner? I cannot help but feel a certain understanding for people in the region doubting that the US administration will continue its “democratization efforts” once they get the impression that such efforts might jeopardize American oil or security interests.

Kassem

The West makes its support of autocrats worse still by applying double standards. Let me give you two examples of how it supported dictators in spite of democratic rhetoric. In 1998, an EU official proudly pointed out to me that the impending Association Agreement with Egypt would include an article on democratic principles and human rights. Set backs in these areas would lead to the cancellation of the whole agreement. In May 2001, Mr. Ibrahim, sitting here with us at the table, was convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison by a government court for criticizing the government. Nevertheless, the EU signed the Association Agreement only a few weeks later and it entered into force in 2004 without any visible problems caused by the violation of its Article 2. Future historians will struggle hard to understand how this blatant discrepancy and hypocrisy, verbal support for democrats but aid and trade for dictators, could be the official policy of leading countries of the world.

Berlusconi and Chirac are prime examples
of Western double standards

Another prime example of Western double standards was the way Italy’s Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and French President Jacques Chirac dealt with Libya. Sanctions against former sponsor of terrorism and dictator Muammar Al-Qaddafi had only just been suspended when Western leaders began flocking to his tent to get oil concessions even though his rule is still one of the most disgusting regimes in the world—Qaddafi may even deserve the medal of the region’s worst dictator, given the fact that he has the advantage of seniority vis-à-vis his most important contender Al-Assad.

Al-Khalil

Abrupt shifts in Western policy often
left reformers standing in the rain

The people of the Middle East wonder if the West wants to help Muslim countries develop themselves or just pursues its own interests. Abrupt shifts in Western policy towards Muslim countries often left them standing in the rain: American-Libyan relations are an example of such a shift. These sudden changes of position



have undermined the credibility of Europe and the US. Certain Western countries rush to sell military weapons to some countries whenever funds are available at the expense of the basic needs of those nations.

Turning a blind eye to human rights violations by Western allies like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan, while harshly criticizing Iran, indeed shows double standards and destroys our credibility.

Western foreign policy sets its priorities in favor of non-Muslims. While the conflict in East Timor was resolved through the power of Europe, the Kashmir issue is still pending. To the Muslim nations, the only explanation for this situation is religious bias. It is true that ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina was resolved in Europe in favor of Muslims in that nation, which was greatly appreciated. However, the feeling of blackmailing Muslims in the political arena is still growing.

The West in some cases accepts the instrumentalization of radical groups by Middle Eastern powers. Hizb Allah ('Party of God') presently is an example of the danger of this political phenomenon. Syria and the Islamic Republic of Iran have been using Hizb Allah to serve their own political agendas at the expense of Lebanon's national security and unity.

The West obviously applies double standards. While the US invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan reminded people in the region of crusading Western armies, the West at the same time continues its unconditional support of Israel, thereby strengthening radical trends among Muslims, especially younger ones, and simultaneously deterring moderate and responsible groups.

The United States' major foreign policy tool in the Middle East, the proverbial big stick, is applied very selectively. Heavy pressure, sanctions and the use of force are reserved for the so-called rogue states accused of violating human rights, sponsoring terrorism and seeking to proliferate weapons of mass destruction (as of today, only North Korea and Iran remain on the list while Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan are off, after having adopted American standards of good behaviour).

Vis-à-vis its friends and allies, the US uses very slight or no pressure at all. Cosmetic changes are hailed as great progress. The US talks about progress in Iraq even though so-called free elections and courteous exchange of letters between the President and the Prime Minister do not make a democracy. On the other hand,

Polenz

Al-Khalil

Western foreign policy sets its priorities in favor of non-Muslims ...

...and accepts the instrumentalization of radical groups

Koolae

Rouleau

The US' proverbial "Big Stick" is applied very selectively



reactions to Hamas' recent victory in Palestine proves that democratic elections are recognized as such in the US only if their outcome pleases the White House.

Singer

It is plainly obvious that Europe and the US treat oil states very differently than non-oil states. This is as obvious in the EU's Barcelona process as it was during the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference held in Doha in 2001. Since then, energy policies have become an even more important issue. It is important to note that when in August 2005 Hurricane Katrina interrupted US fuel supply and fuel prices soared, energy security became an issue of national discourse in the United States, on which there was broad bipartisan consensus of its security importance for the very first time in over 3 decades. I am afraid the importance of oil will only increase in the next decades. Let us all be forthright and admit that among the reasons, the Middle East is of strategic importance for Western governments because of its oil resources.

Kamal

American support for democracy will always intermingle with realpolitik

American support for democracy will always intermingle with realpolitik. The US supported autocrats in Latin America, Asia, Africa and in the Middle East for 60 years not for their love of them, but because of their national interests. In the Middle East, these interests were and still are oil and Israel.

Al-Kitbi

The West's democratization and security agendas inherently contradict each other. For the sake of stability the West encourages autocratic regimes in the Arab world to further suppress their people's freedom and civil rights.

Hoyer

Western values are discredited not only in the Middle East, but also—for similar reasons—in Latin America and Russia. Credibly supporting democracy and freedom with credible engagement is as urgent there as it is in the Middle East. The United States' credibility regarding democratization is no less at stake than Germany's: consider the widespread denouncement of Germany for its close bilateral energy cooperation with Russia disregarding the interests of its European partners as well as problematic tendencies in Russia in the areas of human rights and a democratic political system.

Ibrahim

Patience with autocrats doomed most democratization efforts

The willingness to compromise with autocratic regimes doomed most Western efforts to democratize the region from the beginning. For decades autocrats and their mirror image, the theocrats, have dominated the political arena, while the

democrats were squeezed in the middle. For over half a century, the Western powers have stood firmly behind these regional autocrats for security reasons. How could people in the region now take their democratization agenda seriously?

Neither part of the world has ever been treated consistently by the West over several decades. The consistent Western support for democracy in Eastern Europe during the Cold War was possible only because of the strong indigenous desire for democracy.

Ottaway

The EU countries used to be even more patient with autocratic regimes than the US.

Koolae

I fear that insufficiently thought-out policies and their inadequate implementation have led to such disastrous results that the US administration will reverse course. We may see a paradigm shift away from the freedom and democracy agenda back towards support for the autocrats for pragmatic reasons before the end of 2006.

Hoyer

We may see a paradigm shift back towards support for the autocrats

2. Perceptions and Prejudices

For Western help to be accepted by the people in the region, people would need to perceive Europe and the US as their allies. Given the almost unanimous criticism of Western double standards I doubt that they do that. Or do they?

Sommer

Western countries are viewed by the majority of people in the Middle East as partly responsible for their political instability and poor socio-economic conditions.

Al-Khalil

The United States is accused by many in the region of enforcing a neo-colonialist regime for reasons of power politics under the fig leaf of bringing freedom and democracy to the region.

Pflüger

Mistrust of the US is much higher than mistrust of the EU. At a recent conference in Cairo devoted to reform, all participants, including the Islamists, assessed EU involvement in the region much more positively than US activities.

Moukheiber

Mistrust of the US is much higher than mistrust of the EU

President Ahmadinejad's remarks about the Holocaust stirred up very harsh Western reactions, yet the Danish cartoons depicting the prophet Mohamed were

Koolae

I have never observed such feelings of hate towards the West in this region as I do now.

Rouleau



published across Europe without protest. Personally, I believe in the freedom of the press, but among religious and secular Muslims alike, these cartoons were perceived as an attack against fundamental Islamic values.

Esfandiari

As for the condemnation of the violence of enraged Muslims against Scandinavian embassies as a response to the cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed, violence obviously was inappropriate. But Muslims should be able to protest and express their pain and displeasure in a suitable way, while accepting the principle of freedom of the press in communities in which they live and not isolating themselves from the rest of world.

Rouleau

We will achieve nothing in the region as long as we are seen as two-faced hypocrites

An atmosphere of deep mistrust towards the West prevails throughout the region. I have been a field worker in the Middle East for more than half a century, first as a journalist and then as a diplomat. In the last fifty years I have never observed such deep and lasting feelings of hate, frustration and mistrust towards the West. Our support for the regional dictators and our biased policy regarding the conflict between Israel and Palestine contribute to this state of affairs. We will achieve nothing in the region as long as we are seen as two-faced hypocrites following their own selfish agendas.

Western counter-terrorism is often perceived as an ongoing Western crusade against the Muslims. Taking into account the extent of Western Islamophobia, we should not be surprised that people in the Muslim world are skeptical of our good intentions. The Danish cartoons showed the Prophet with a bomb on his head, thus depicting him as a terrorist. Today, many in the Western World equates terrorism with Islam, as if a bunch of criminals called al-Qaeda with their own interpretation of Islam were authentic representatives of the Prophet's religion.

Brengelmann

Western self-flagellation does not efficiently contribute to improving the situation...

While such self-flagellation clearly inspires our discussion, I doubt that the West contributes most efficiently to improving the situation by constantly assuming responsibility for everything that goes wrong in the region.

Fischer

... it only gives people in the region an alibi for inactivity

Blaming the West for all of the shortcomings in the Arab world, for autocratic regimes, gender inequality and lack of civic activities, only gives people in the region an alibi for inactivity. We should not relieve them of their duty to find their own road towards modernization.



The US cannot be blamed for the situation in the region: democratization most of all depends on domestic actors.

Kamal

Democratization depends on domestic actors

Mr. Rouleau, I have the impression that your intense study of the Middle Eastern picture of the West brought you on the verge of adopting that picture. If I may, I would like to remind you that people focusing attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Western interventions instead of economic decline and bad governance in the Middle East is just what the region's dictators like to see. A former Egyptian ambassador once complained to me about the United States' exceedingly negative image in Egypt. In every café in Cairo he said, people are talking about the US killing Iraqi children because of its boycott of Iraq. Yet the ambassador knew very well that Iraq's misuse of the UN's Oil for Food program (implemented to assure that the Iraqi people get all the medicine and food they need) was truly responsible for this failure. Apparently, he did not attempt to actually tell the people in the cafés of Cairo who should be held responsible.

Berman

Many people in the region do indeed hold the West responsible for political and economical shortcomings in the Middle East. But it is the region's governments that are responsible for the state of democracy or the economy.

Volker

The region's governments are responsible for the state of democracy and the economy

The West is not responsible for all of the Middle Eastern conflicts. It was Iraq that attacked Iran in 1980, and even though some Western governments supported him, German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher harshly criticized Iraq's aggression. It was Iraq that attacked Kuwait in 1990 and it was the US that liberated Kuwait.

Klose

I see one important structural reason for the estrangement between the West and the Islamic world: modern telecommunications infrastructure. Today we are living in an interlinked world. Potentially, that might increase the pressure on autocratic governments. But it has so far only led to a standardization of consumer preferences, not to commonly accepted standards for a civil society, and it has led to an increased spread of conspiracy theories throughout the Islamic world.

Polenz

In Arab countries, governments direct public opinion through the media, but electronic means of mass communication such as text messaging and e-mail flow freely. Rumors spread within seconds and cannot be checked against independent information sources, thus forming the breeding ground for all kinds

Electronic media form a breeding ground for conspiracy theories ...

The US promotes globalization everywhere
in the world—except at home.

Al-Kitbi



of public outcries and conspiracy theories. This further enhances the already prevalent opinion among people in the Middle East, in particular Islamists, that democratic Western societies are egoistical, decadent, hostile towards family life, and lacking values. They enhance the impression that Western policies are imperialistic, endangering national sovereignty, independence and control of economic resources.

Kassem
... and state controlled media
radicalize public opinion

State controlled media is contributing its share to radicalization. It shows American weapons being used by the Israeli military against Palestinians. This is a major source of the prevalent animosity against the US: the undeservedly high priority given to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Sommer

Even if the impression of an anti-Muslim Western policy is overstated and used as a tool by local autocrats, I encourage you nevertheless to take a critical look at Western attitudes towards the Muslim world.

Al-Kitbi

There is widespread mistrust against anything coming from the Muslim world throughout the West. Even though President Bush pronounced the United Arab Emirates a “valued and strategic partner” in the War on Terror, the US Congress prevented a deal which would have given the Dubai-based company Dubai Ports World control of six US ports. The only reason for this was the company’s Middle Eastern background. For the region, this was a clear signal that the US promotes globalization everywhere in the world, except at home.

Smyser

Most people in the West underestimate Arabs and Muslims. I have experienced this over decades. When I worked on Tunisia at the State Department, French diplomats used to say: “Oh, les Arabes, ils ne peuvent rien faire”. They showed no respect for the local culture, despite the fact that Carthage had been a great civilization long before France. But the French, as you may remember, lost the wars against the Arabs. Today, most cartoonists in the US depict Arabs and Muslims as either rich sheikhs carrying oil cans, or as terrorists carrying bombs. It was no accident that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld grossly underestimated the amount of troops needed to pacify Iraq. Prejudices against the Arab world also surfaced when Harvard and Georgetown University received \$20 million donations each to finance Islamic studies from Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, a Saudi businessman and member of the Saudi royal family. Instead of

Islam has obviously become a part of Western civilization.

Al-Khalil



being welcomed as an opportunity to build cultural bridges, the donations' moral acceptability was challenged because of the Prince's open intention to change America's attitude towards Islam.

Islamophobia has grown stronger in the West recently: just think of the public outcry following Dubai Ports World's attempt to take over American ports. This fear of Islam is on the one hand fed by extremists in the Arab world, on the other hand reinforced by intolerant forces in the West. Radicals on both sides are stealing the middle ground; they try to force people to adopt their own extremist siege mentality.

Since 9/11 and President Bush's ensuing distinction between good and evil, the Muslim world has become the target of the Western War on Terror—a crusade similar to President Reagan's condemnation of the Soviet Union as an evil empire in the 1980s. Suddenly the West is treating all Muslims like potential terrorists.

The concept of 'Islamophobia' is very alive in Western intellectual circles and public arenas. Some misleading notions have become popular lately, particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. One such notion is that people in the Middle East resent the western values and way of life. This notion is presented to the public by political leaders in a state of crisis. Its validity is questionable. Muslims do not 'hate' the West. In fact, a survey conducted in 2004 by the Center of Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan entitled "The Arab Street Revisited: Research from Within," revealed that what Muslims admire most about the West is technology, democracy, and freedom of expression. One look at the gates of Western embassies with Muslims lining up to obtain entry visas is evidence that Muslims hold Western values in high regard regardless of the loud alienating voices of Muslim extremists and terrorists.

Islam is considered a threat to the West. Muslims have been portrayed in the Western media, some school books, and movies as fundamentalists, extremists, and terrorists. There are indeed extreme, violent, and fundamental groups within the Muslim world. But the same holds true for the West. This false notion of an Islamic danger ultimately lends support to the theory of a clash of civilizations. Indeed, Islam has obviously become a part of Western civilization. Muslims are medical doctors, athletes, musicians, academics, politicians, businessmen, lawyers, and active citizens in the West. The modern world is not divided ac-

Volker

Radicals on both sides are stealing the middle ground

Koolae

Since 9/11 the West is treating all Muslims like potential terrorists

Al-Khalil

The people of the Middle East do not hate the West



ording to religion any more. There no longer is a Pope governing one part of the world and a Muslim Caliph governing the other. Muslims understand today that the concept of 'dar al-harb' (land of war) and 'dar al-islam' (land of Islam) is outdated.

Pflüger

For centuries the West has committed serious mistakes in dealing with the Islamic world, first through colonialism, and then by exporting doomed ideological concepts like nationalism, fascism and Marxism. Muslims have good reasons to be suspicious of Western concepts. But better governance, less corruption, and more social justice are in the interest of the Islamic world, even though they are advocated by the West.

Reiter

Let us advertise our core beliefs and then leave it to the people in the region to decide

The West must advocate its concepts within the region to give people a chance to make their own decisions about democracy. Eastern Europe's democratization was a success not so much of European or American political strategy but of Western ideas. Nothing is more powerful than ideas. Certainly, Central and Eastern Europe was a friendly environment. Now we should try to make our ideas work in the less friendly environment of the Middle East. Europeans tend to doubt their values out of historical experience, but let us advertise for our core beliefs and then leave it to the people in the Middle East to decide. Be ready to accept their decision, but do not prevent them from choosing.

3. The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Sommer

Before we turn to the future there is no way around addressing one major cause, maybe the major cause for mistrust against the West in the Arab world in detail: How do people here assess our role in the Arab-Israeli conflict up to now?

Moukheiber

The issue of Western credibility regarding democratization is indissolubly linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict, because the Western powers' biased position affects their overall credibility and constitutes one of the sources of motivation for terrorists. The US is no longer perceived as an honest broker; it is notorious for its double standards.

Polenz

The perception of the West and particularly of the United States in the Islamic world is indeed strongly influenced by our approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

To solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,
the Arab states have to change their policies.

Volker

In the experience of Middle Eastern and Islamic countries, each and every regional conflict was instigated by either the US or European countries or other powers from outside the region. Israel is the best example. It was an alien entity planted in the heart of the Middle East by Europe and later sustained and protected by the US. It is common knowledge that Israel could not have existed one decade without the tremendous amounts of money, advanced technology, military weapons, and political support it has received from Western countries since its creation.

Israel was not established by Europeans but by the UN. The General Assembly's approval of the partition plan in 1947 led to the foundation of the state of Israel. If the Palestinians and the neighboring Arab countries would have accepted that plan, it would have given a Palestinian state almost as much territory as Israel.

The perspective given by Mr. Al-Khalil is biased. How many Arab governments engage in open trade with Israel? How many have diplomatic relations with Israel or recognize it as a state? How many are actively pushing Hamas to recognize Israel? Before any solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians can be reached, the Arab states have to change their policies in a fundamental way.

The unconditional support of Israel is the worst example of Western double standards. How could Muslims trust the West's call for free elections, when in Palestine the Europeans and Americans are now punishing a majority of citizens for not voting the way they should have? When the Israeli Prime Minister's chief advisor Dov Weissglas cynically joked that Israel would not starve the Palestinians, but only put them on a diet for electing Hamas, his colleagues broke out in laughter, a fact which was published both by the Israeli and Arab press. No Israeli or Western politician criticised Weissglass or asked him to apologize for his inhumane joke.

The late Yasser Arafat wasted many years during the reign of five Israeli prime ministers. Nobody held him accountable for his neglect of his people's needs and his bungling in negotiations. When President Anwar Sadat stood up in the Egyptian parliament and announced his will to visit the Knesset, the Israelis delivered, and the Americans acted as a reliable broker and provided the main body of the forces observing the terms of the Camp David accord.

Al-Khalil

Israel is an alien entity in the Middle East planted by Europe

Klose

Israel was not established by Europeans but by the UN

Volker

Rouleau

Kassem



Moukheiber

The Arab-Israeli conflict is of course an obstacle to democratization in the region. Double standards towards Israel and its Muslim neighbors encourage terrorism in the region.

Also, foreign occupation blocks democracy's development—Lebanon was paralyzed by the long occupation of Syrian forces.

But we should neither accept that the Palestinians claim they cannot develop a democratic system before the Israelis leave nor that other governments use the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as an alibi for not embarking on the way towards democracy.

4. Causes of Radicalism

Sommer

What are the other challenges in the region? Where does the steadily increasing radicalization that provides the basis for terrorism stem from?

Radicalism in the region is a major Western security concern. Rooting out radicalism is probably the most important motive for Western democratization efforts.

Polenz

It was 9/11 that returned the Middle East to the political radar

It was 9/11 that returned the Middle East to our political radar. Before this terrible event, few people or conferences dealt for example, with domestic policy in the Middle East or Iran. Only after 9/11 did our fear of Islamist terrorists make Western politicians care about the Islamic world, try to understand Islam, its different branches and its political implications, and discuss the Middle East in parliament as well as in public. We are now forced to analyze the causes for the region's problems and do something about them, if only for security reasons.

Koolae

Terrorism stems from the unjust nature of our globalized world

Terrorism does not only stem from the shortcomings of Middle Eastern societies and political systems, but also within the unjust nature of our globalized world. Instead of only focusing on the War on Terror, the West must reduce the gap between underdeveloped and developed countries and strengthen the role of international institutions. Once a more just international system will come about, an important source of extremism and terrorist dangers will run dry.

Klose

Terrorism is brought to us by a minority of self-proclaimed holy warriors. The conflict is not a clash of civilizations because it is not a fight between Muslims and Christians or Westerners, but between extremists and democratic societies.

Demographics is by far the biggest challenge for the Middle East.

Singer



One of the factors contributing to radicalization is demographics, by far the biggest challenge for Middle East in the years to come. In the next generation, 100 million young people are going to search for jobs in slow, unsteadily growing or stagnating economies. One can only hope that their commitment to reform will not be undermined by the sheer hopelessness of their economic prospects. Moreover, this generation will grow up in the post-9/11 world, in a context of hate and anger: this is why some call them the “hateration.” Preventing them from radicalizing will be a difficult but immensely important task.

Singer

Is the victory of Hamas in Palestine an indication that radical Islamism is on the rise in the region?

Sommer

The elections for the Palestinian Authority were fair and free, and they reflected a deep commitment to democracy by the citizens who voted under the most serious conditions.

Fischer

The victory of Islamists of course throws into doubt the acceptance of people in the Middle East for democratic ideals as understood by the West. But I am convinced that the vote for Hamas was not a vote against democracy or for Islamism, but for a better everyday life, for security, for social services and for education, which Fatah failed to deliver.

The victory of Islamists throws into doubt the acceptance of democratic ideals

Talking about developments in the region, we must not forget Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia is a key country for democratization in the region, and a most problematic one. It is not only one of world’s largest exporters of oil, but also an ardent exporter of its austere and feudal 18th century brand of Islam, Wahhabism. The effects of Saudi Arabia’s financial aid, given generously to those willing to follow its rigid interpretation of Islam, are unpredictable.

Berman

Wahhabism supports the negative Western image in the region, and Saudi Arabia is supposedly an exporter of Wahhabism, funding it with large amounts of money, including both private and charitable contributions. While Saudi Arabia officially supports the War on Terror and condemns Islamist terrorism, is it not counterproductive to help spread anti-Western sentiments, Mr. Al-Khalil?

Brengelmann

Why does Saudi Arabia help spread anti-Western sentiments?

I have to admit that the much criticized export of Wahhabism, with its strong anti-Western sentiments, has become a domestic problem for Saudi Arabia, too.

Al-Khalil

Democracy is not new in the Middle East.

Ibrahim



The Saudi government is taking steps to monitor religious charities and foundations

The Saudi government has already taken large steps towards a solution, including the closing down of the influential Riyadh-based Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation—along with other Saudi charities and committees which were suspected by the US of funding terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda. A new entity—the Saudi National Commission for Relief and Charity Work Abroad—will work to keep charitable donations out of the wrong hands in the future.

Saudi Arabians are not hostile against the West, apart from a deep commitment to the rightful Palestinian cause. In fact, the Saudis' relationship with Europe and the US has been very fruitful in recent decades. Since 1950, countless Saudis have studied there—more than 400,000 in the United States alone, which makes Saudi Arabia an almost bilingual country. At the same time, Saudi Arabia never forgot its affiliation to the Islamic world. It is well-connected to its neighbors in the GCC, other Middle Eastern countries and the Islamic world. Saudi Arabia cares about regional problems, has often taken a leading role and is ready to help.

5. Can the Middle East be Democratic?

Sommer

Many people claim that democracy can never work in the region for cultural and religious reasons. I would like to ask those who live in the Middle East whether they feel characterized adequately by that analysis.

Kassem

Muslims are in no way genetically pre-determined to be undemocratic

I refuse to accept that we are all genetically determined to be undemocratic Muslims. That is just a pretext for those in power for keeping their people from determining their own way of life. Unfortunately, especially those in the West who try to be understanding regarding our local traditions often fall into this trap.

Ibrahim

Instead of social justice there has been 50 years of stagnation and decay ...

Democracy is not new in the Middle East. Many ignore that we had a liberal age, and that Egypt had an elected parliament back in 1866. Even before Germany and Italy were united, we had liberalism and democracy. It was not Westminster-style democracy, but participation in the political process. People over 60 like Mr. Al-Azm and I, still remember the tail end of this liberal age. In the 1960s, we traded defamed democracy for autocrats, dictators, and military regimes who promised the liberation of Palestine, social justice and Arab unity, an alternative social contract to the democratic liberal human rights-based legacy. Today, 50 to 60 years later, Palestine has not been liberated one inch, the Arab world has not been united and instead of social justice we are left with stagnation and decay.



The pretension that Western-style democracy cannot work in the Arab world for cultural and religious reasons is Europe's favorite excuse for inaction. It is as unfounded as it is popular. 60 to 70 years ago, many politicians and social scientists in America were convinced that Germans could never be democratic because of their authoritarian mentality and that the Japanese could not live in a democratic system because of certain Confucian traditions. Slavs, it was said, were bound to live under autocratic rule for historical reasons and until the 1970s important groups claimed that the South American and South European dictators were appropriate for the Catholic population of their countries. Nevertheless, since 1974 a hundred countries of all races, colors and religions have transformed themselves into democracies, beginning with Portugal. I am unwilling to accept the seemingly sympathetic argument that people from my part of the world will be doomed to spend their life under dictatorial or theocratical rule because they are for historical, mental or religious reasons unable to be democratic citizens. Look at me, does my DNA prevent me from being a citizen of a democratic state like you?

Opponents of supporting democratization in Eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s alleged exactly the same as those who argue today that Western-style democracy is not applicable to the Middle East. The communist regimes' claim that their people were not ripe for Western democracy and should be allowed to find their own specific way resonated well with certain political groups in Europe, much to our distress in Poland.

The desire for reform and modernity in the Middle East dates back to the 19th century and the quest in the region for human rights and democratization is not new.

Strengthening human rights should not be hindered by exaggerated respect for indigenous cultural traditions. Every UN member state is required to respect the human rights outlined in the Human Rights Convention and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The oldest reform movement in the region was driven from within: Turkey's role as the leading modernizer in the Islamic world started with the Ottoman Tanzimat. In 1839, the Ottoman Sultan decided to stop his empire's falling behind European powers. He modernized the army and the education system and started to fight corruption. Tanzimat, which can be translated as "reorganization" like the Soviet

... because some argue that the region cannot become democratic

Reiter

Esfandiari

Strengthening human rights should not be hindered by exaggerated respect for traditions

Al-Azm



Union's perestroika in the 1980s, peaked in 1876 with the implementation of a constitution that was meant to limit the Sultan's autocratic power. Despite some harsh backlashes, the modernization of the Ottoman empire and its successor Turkey continued until after World War II. The Young Turks and the later leaders of the Republic were educated in schools established during the Tanzimat.

Koolae

Many people in the Muslim world, especially in Iran, reject modernization, secularization, relativism and individualism as Western values contradicting their own traditions and identities shaped during many centuries. Democratic values have never taken root in large parts of the Muslim world, and the rise of political Islam has further limited their influence in the region.

Iran has a long tradition of democratization

Iran, though, has a long tradition of democratization. The ideas of democracy, human rights, gender equality, and the rule of law have been influencing Iran's society ever since the bourgeois democratic Russian Revolution in 1905, earlier than anywhere else in Western Asia. Political Islam is not the only viable alternative to despotic secular regimes in my country. Today, the Iranian theocracy no longer fulfills the people's expectations. Our population is divided into those who support the Mullah's rule, rejecting any kind of international influence, and those who want reform and see international influence as a potentially positive factor.

Al-Azm

Democratization is not about imposing a Western way of life on the Middle East—democracy is a way of organizing political representation and is in no way necessarily linked to consumerism, mass culture and other features of Western societies.

Kassem

Islamists are less vulnerable to suppression than secular parties are

Some claim that the only accepted alternative to authoritarian rule in the region is Islamism because at present, the secular parties are weak. But their weakness is due to their suppression, and the Islamist's rise is due to the fact that they are less vulnerable to suppression.

Let me explain what I mean with the example of Egypt. The regime, albeit formally democratic, has been under periodically renewed martial law ever since the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. For more than 20 years, the parties of the so-called "old opposition" have been suppressed: their activities have been restricted, their activists confined to their headquarters and their newspapers closed down. Today, these parties are only shadows of their former selves. They are chaired by discredited, corrupt leaders, and no longer seriously chal-



lenge Hosni Mubarak and his ruling National Democratic Party. In recent years, a “new opposition” serious about a democratic change of power and unwilling to take part in Mubarak’s charades, has arisen. These parties include Hizb al-Ghad, (Tomorrow Party) a centrist, liberal and secular political party which I am part of, and Hizb al-Wasat (Center-Party), a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot with moderate tendencies and Coptic members, on its way from Islamic fundamentalism to modern politics. Finally, there is the Nasserist-leaning Hizb al-Karama (Dignity Party). The Hizb al-Wasat and the Hizb al-Karama still lack a full license granted by the Political Parties Committee of the Shura Council, which is necessary to operate legally in Egypt. Hizb al-Ghad’s got its license only after an appeal to the Political Parties Court of the Higher Administrative Court.

So why did the Islamists score big in the last elections in Egypt? Only because secular parties were not allowed to operate while the Islamists are operating from the mosques which the regime could not close down. The only choice left to the Egyptian people was between the regime and the mosque. With the old opposition discredited, and the new opposition weak and vulnerable to regime harassment, the people voted for Islamists because there are no alternatives. The decline of secular parties in the region is almost a carbon copy of the developments in Egypt. The only place where dissenters are allowed to congregate is the mosque. Until that changes, secular parties will remain at a great disadvantage to the Islamists.

While we had irregularities in the last parliamentary elections, the ruling party won only 34% while the majority of seats went to independent and opposition candidates. The opposition should not blame the government for its internal problems.

Mr. Kassem, you claim that harassment from the Egyptian government is responsible for the decline of secular parties in Egypt. But secular parties are declining throughout the region. In Morocco, where secular parties are given more leeway than in Egypt, they nevertheless face the same problems. Is there not a broader crisis of secular parties in the Middle East because these parties have failed to make contact with potential constituencies recently?

If you have good advice on how the secular parties can better connect to their constituencies, I will gladly pass it on to America’s secular party which is in dire need of closer relations to its constituencies, too.

The people vote for the Islamists because there are no alternatives

Kamal

The opposition should not blame the government for its internal problems

Ottaway

Berman



Al-Khalil

Saudi Arabia does not need immediate democratization

Saudi Arabia does not yet need immediate democratization. Not because of Islam, but because our current political system is best suited to achieve prior goals like accountability, efficient use of national wealth or education. In 1950, the illiteracy rate was 95%; there were no modern schools and no universities. The great progress since then is the merit of our government. Our Western-educated intellectuals share this view. Personally, I support democracy and other Western ideas—after all, I spent 17 years of my life in the United States, my two daughters are American, and one of them is studying at Georgetown University right here in Washington D.C. But Saudi Arabia needs its current government and political system in the years to come to modernize our society.

Kassem

Do the Saudis want to postpone democratization until the state has already failed?

Postponing democratization because pressing challenges can supposedly be mastered best by an autocracy is exactly the wrong thing to do. Only functioning democratic institutions allow states to deal with challenges effectively.

Moukheiber

Mr. Al-Khalil, your candid statement that Saudi Arabia is neither ready for nor desirous of democracy frightens me. I believe that the countries in the region need democratic systems based on the people's sovereignty, not on sovereignty arising from God-made rules and kings who are supposed to implement God's will on Earth. For me as a Lebanese, such a system is nightmarish. We need to secularize the management of our state, even if that is complex and tedious.

Kassem

I wonder how many Saudi Arabians are willing to wait until the state begins to fail before taking the first steps toward democratization.

Al-Kitbi

In Saudi Arabia, many petitioners in the last years have been asking for accountability, reform and a constitution.

Al-Khalil

Of course many Saudis seek reform—and so do I—but immediate Western-style democratization would hinder our progress toward enhancing accountability, the rule of law, equality and the use of our national wealth to better people's lives.

Sommer

So there is an indigenous basis for reform in the region?

Kamal

Today's Middle East is noticeably different from the one portrayed in the last Human Development Report. Today, there is a constituency for reform, not only

The political landscape in the Middle East is changing on the micro level. Small processes have an almost revolutionary dimension.

Al-Azm



among the opposition and civil rights activists, but also within government circles themselves. Politization is increasing and political mobility is taking place in many countries. One of the reasons is demographic change: today, over 70% of the population is less than 30 years old. The young generation, influenced by the modern world via satellite television and the internet, supports the reform process.

For a long time, the people in the Gulf region have traded their political rights for the benefits oil has brought them. But today people are asking for freedom of speech and the right to criticize the government.

The people want reforms ardently. But the regimes control their citizens so tightly that reformers are often unable to express their discontent.

Democratization in the Middle East is motivated by the failure of alternative policies to end political stagnation. After nationalist and populist reform agendas flatlined, many reformists in the 1980s switched to supporting civil society, democracy, the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Albeit aided by foreign support, this new consensus was driven by domestic needs and determined reformists.

At the micro-level, important progress has been made recently in the political landscape and towards the reinforcement of civil societies in the Middle East. Small as these processes may seem, they have an almost revolutionary dimension. This is what the United States and the European Union should support.

The same holds true for the emerging debate over civil society based on respect for human rights, freedom of expression and a religiously neutral state. Even if only a third of the population is currently in favor of what I would call the new liberal consensus, that is a great advance. Finally a significant part of the citizens have embraced the only option for breaking the vicious circle of stagnation, corruption and decay which all too often leads to turmoil and sometimes civil war.

Interestingly, this new consensus was first embraced and is most vociferously and competently defended by the left, even the traditional Marxists. When the failure of socialism's quest for a more advanced form of democracy became obvious with the end of the Soviet Union, the left retreated to its second line of defense, a civil society based on "bourgeois" values like human rights and secularism.

Many Islamists today also support this liberal consensus. The Muslim Brothers have fought from their moment of creation, as a political and social revolutionary movement in 1928, to defend a traditional interpretation of Islam and the Islamic

The internet generation supports the reform process

Al-Kitbi

The people are no longer willing to trade their political rights for material benefits

Moukheiber

Al-Azm

There is a new liberal consensus in the Middle East ...

... which many Islamists support

Unlike a machine, you cannot export
democracy to operate anywhere.

Kassem



countries against any kind of foreign or modernist influence. But after their attempts to violently seize power in Syria, Algeria and Egypt failed spectacularly, they recently changed course. They stopped demanding the immediate application of Sharia law and restoration of the Muslim Caliphate in favor of the liberal consensus. Understandably, they avoid the word “secularism” by all means, but they speak of “civil government” and mean a secular state. After they recognized that Sharia law will not be applied any time soon, a religiously neutral state is the second best solution from their point of view.

Brengelmann

How representative are your demands?

All participants from the region present at the table—mostly academics and civil society activists—have expressed their desire for reform. I am glad to hear that but cannot block out nagging doubts about how representative these views are. What about the Islamists who are not present among us? Nobody in the West foresaw the election of President Ahmadinejad in Iran or Hamas’ landslide victory in Palestine. They were hastily interpreted as protest votes against a corrupt establishment, not as a general rejection of democracy. As much as I would like to share that interpretation, I fear it might instead be that we simply do not know anymore and refuse to acknowledge what the majority in the Middle East is thinking nowadays. These people might be on a completely different path by now.

Moukheiber

They are representative because
the people want reform

Are the Muslims attending this Round Table representative for the region? Very much so. That might not apply to our secular beliefs: while the Islamists believe in legitimacy granted by God through the Qu’ran, we believe in legitimacy coming from the people. But that is not the main point. The main point is, people in the Middle East want reform, free and fair elections, and an end to corrupt governments. They want jobs, independent judges, civil rights, participation, more active civic organizations and more active political parties: in this respect, we are very representative.

Sommer

Can democracy be imposed or supported from outside?

Kassem

Democracy can never be imposed. Unlike a machine you cannot export it to operate anywhere. Like a seedling it needs decades, perhaps even centuries, to take roots and grow, and it constantly remains vulnerable. After 9/11 democracy was jeopardized in the United States by the Patriot Act—without tough opposition

The Middle East lacks both democratic traditions and devoted political leaders.

Klose

from American civil society and a well-functioning legal system the US might have descended into authoritarian rule.

Still outside actors can do and should do a lot to pressure the region's autocrats to reform. You should not wait until all our governments agree that their people are now ready to become democrats. Of course the Middle East is not ready for democracy. The region is plagued by sectarianism, nationalism, and Islamic fundamentalism! But beware of rulers reiterating that Westminster-style democracy is still far away. That is their favorite pretext for not even starting to move toward this goal. Recently, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak agreed that democratization in the region will take a generation. I agree too, but Mubarak is one of the people responsible for the fact that democracy is still so far away. If it were up to him, democracy would be postponed eternally on the grounds of the society not being ready to implement it successfully all at once.

Middle Eastern governments will embark on the path to change only if they are given serious incentives or put under great pressure. In Lebanon, international pressure by the US, Europe, and the UN following Hariri's assassination was instrumental for the so-called Cedar Revolution. It is time to push for democracy and stop worrying about its possible negative impact on regional stability, which is all too often used as an excuse to support dictatorships. But the West has to walk the fine line between assistance, which is truly welcome, and intervention, which is mostly rejected.

After the recent Color and Flower Revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, many people in Iran who are striving for reforms believe that external pressure might accelerate democratization in Iran.

Triggering reform from outside without an indigenous basis is impossible. The comparison between current American policy in the Middle East and the American efforts in Germany after 1945, as it is discussed in the United States, is inappropriate. Germany had a long-standing democratic tradition and had leaders like Konrad Adenauer, Kurt Schumacher and Theodor Heuss, who had been devoted to Western democratic standards for decades. The Middle East lacks both.

There has been a positive example recently, though. Lebanon has witnessed major changes following Rafik Hariri's assassination. During a visit after the tragedy, my colleagues from the German Federal Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and I met with many courageous civic activists in Lebanon who were protesting



You should not wait until our governments agree that they are ready for democracy

Moukheiber

It is time for the West to push for democracy and stop worrying about regional stability

Klose

We need a sense of ownership for reform.

Scharioth



against the Syrian occupation and calling for domestic reform. In the end, these protests, supported by international pressure, with the UN, the US and France playing a leading role and cooperating very closely, succeeded. The Syrian occupation forces were ousted and free elections were held, putting Lebanon on the path to democracy. This could be a model for positive Western interference in the region.

Scharioth We need a sense of ownership for reform in the region. First, regional elites must develop their own concepts of reform. After that, we might provide, if requested, advice, help and assistance to realize these concepts for reform.

Kamal Western policy for the Middle East should neither return to the tenets of security-induced realpolitik nor to an idealistic Wilsonian democratization policy. Between these two extremes there must be a middle course. It should be up to the governments in the region to come up with their own visions and their respective road maps for reform, to which they should then be held accountable. At best, Western governments should provide incentives to help these countries evolve both in the right direction and according to their own goals.

Koolae When supporting reform, the West must take the political, cultural, and social realities of each respective country into account instead of trying to duplicate other regions' experiences on a one-to-one basis.

Esfandiari Democracy also needs the civil society. But the civil society must grow from within, as the result of grass-roots movements. It should not be imposed by outside forces, i.e. the EU or the United States.
Civil society in the Middle East must grow from within

Berman The argument that democratization cannot be imposed from outside was also used against the United States' promoting democratization in the Far East during the 1980s and 1990s. It is as wrong now as it was then. Democratization in Taiwan, the Philippines and South Korea did get helpful boosts from outside, even though it would of course have been impossible without economic development and indigenous democratic forces.
Democratization in the Far East got helpful boosts from outside

Piscatori External assistance might be necessary for two reasons:
1. Authoritarianism is weakened by weakening its political basis. As authoritarian regimes are made up of coalitions, you need to encourage those parts of the



regime that are willing to be reformists. In this context, conditionality does play a meaningful role—though it has to be calibrated carefully.

2. External assistance can facilitate and encourage normative change. Assistance to civil society groups not only helps change individuals' lives, but also helps plant the seeds of the ideas of freedom, justice and democracy within the minds of the citizens, upon which we can build.

Western pressure has already helped many dissidents. Mr. Ibrahim, sitting here with us, was released from prison because of constant, year-long pressure by Western governments and NGOs. By the way, very few of his Arab colleagues worked for his release.

We need to soberly evaluate which projects of fostering indigenous attempts at democratization make sense. For example, the US government supports a training program for female election candidates. Women from the United Arab Emirates participate in the program, despite the fact that in their country nobody elects anybody.

To encourage reform in GCC states, you need carrots but also sticks. I do not see any sticks—how could the West put these regimes under pressure? They have enough money and do not need financial support.

How does democracy come about—is it there once fair and free elections have taken place or are elections the last step in a long process?

The United States seems to be obsessed by the idea that elections are the spark that ignites democratization. While it is true that democracy without elections is impossible, elections do not necessarily lead to a lasting democratic progress. Elections in an early stage of transition are not necessarily proof that democracy works. They may even pave the way for parties that want to reverse the whole process at the first opportunity. German history provides a good example. In 1932 a majority of non-democratic parties was democratically elected in the German parliament, with Hitler's NSDAP as the strongest force. You all know the outcome.

We should put more emphasis on the development of legal systems than on having elections as soon as possible.

Kassem

Western pressure has already helped many dissidents

Ottaway

Al-Kitbi

Where is the stick to put these regimes under pressure?

Sommer

Klose

Polenz

Without functioning courts and public registers,
neither democracy nor market economies work.

Hoyer



Ibrahim

How can one argue for delaying democratization until this or that political challenge has been mastered? An open society can best take care of the challenges ahead—establishing procedures and institutions is the key. Therefore, democratization should have priority over political goals like better education, an independent legal system or a reform of personal status law.

Hoyer

Democratization needs elections and
the rule of Law in equal measure

Democratization efforts cannot be put into a sequence: elections and the rule of law are required simultaneously. As an economist, I have seen developing market economies discredited around the world because they lacked the rule of law, functioning cartel offices or were unable to guarantee individual property rights.

To establish democracy and free markets in the Islamic world, we must give the highest priority to establishing a functioning legal system in dialog with the region.

Especially the US placed too much emphasis on establishing formal characteristics of market economy and democracy—like, for example, elections—, neglecting institution building and strengthening the rule of law. Without functioning courts and public registers, neither democracy nor market economies work. Both Russia and Latin America conduct elections and are formally market economies but lack independent, functioning legal systems.

Kepel

Free elections are of little use as
long as the institutions are missing

Fair and free elections created a juxtaposition of sectarian parties in Iraq that proved unable to build a democratic Iraq. In Palestine, they brought Hamas a landslide victory. Free elections are of little use as long as the necessary institutions are missing.

Moukheiber

Elections are one of
democracy's core elements

Free and democratic parliamentary elections do not guarantee democracy, as long as parliament does not have serious legislative and controlling competences. Therefore democracy is not only about free and fair elections.

But elections are of course one of democracy's core elements. Lebanon's unfair and unfree elections went largely unnoticed by the West for more than 15 years, but the latest elections were under great scrutiny as a result of the turmoil following former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's assassination. However, in its haste to rubber-stamp the elections, the EU failed to recognize a number of serious violations of this election's rules, including abuses relating to media and party funding. In Egypt, the government tampered with the election, yet the West criticized only cautiously this. This incoherence seems to indicate the West might ignore

For democratization you need democrats.

Al-Kitbi



cover-ups for the sake of having a clear conscience and thus encourages regimes to confine themselves to merely cosmetic improvements.

To trigger reform, the West must concentrate on helping people build institutions from within rather than on replacing politicians. Good governance means free and fair elections, effective parliaments, an independent judiciary, a free press (which has to include audio-visual media), and a vivid civil society. Currently, these tools have been crippled, and they have to be rebuilt from within.

Moukheiber

In Iraq and Palestine we neglected institution building. Instead we destroyed institutions which could have helped us. In Iraq, US Administrator Paul Bremer disenfranchised the Iraqi army and in Palestine, “tanks paid for with American dollars destroyed Palestinian institutions paid for with euros”—to quote Chris Patten, former EU Commissioner for External Relations. Without institutions, democratic societies cannot be built sustainably.

Kepel

For democratization, you need democrats. The West should do much more to strengthen democracy at grass-roots level to create a basis for its efforts.

Al-Kitbi

Which indigenous conditions are needed for Western support to be fruitful?

Sommer

Democracy needs a vibrant, effective and independent civil society. But most Arab countries, except Lebanon, and, to a lesser degree, Morocco, lack the legal and financial framework for such institutions. The Cedar Revolution in Lebanon was not organized by traditional political parties, but by the people, and the process of building democracy is driven by active, well-connected NGOs. Many movements for reform in the Arab world are connected to the human rights movement. While political participation is severely restricted in many Arab countries, human rights is the only area where demands for reform can be expressed. Unfortunately, the West often supports cronyism-plagued government offshoots which are civil society organizations in name only, instead of insisting on the creation of adequate conditions for the development of civil society.

Moukheiber

The West often supports cronyism-plagued government offshoots

Second, examples are vital for democratization in the Arab world, as the events in the aftermath of the Cedar Revolution showed. The pictures of the Lebanese taking to the streets, the media going beyond theorizing about reform to actually having people on TV or radio, discussing politics on air and thus being



part of the unfolding democratization process, brought enormous motivation to the region. The Lebanese people showed that democratization does not depend on ideas spread via foreign TV and radio—it was a positive example of democratization from within.

Kassem

Egypt is still waiting for Mubarak to give more freedom to the media

Independent media is an important condition for the development of a functioning democratic society. Unfortunately, most of the countries in the region still lack a free press and independent TV stations, among them my country Egypt.

Kamal

As publisher of a critical newspaper, you should know that the level of freedom of expression in Egypt today is unprecedented.

Kassem

Much to the contrary, Egypt is one of twelve countries in the world where journalists are imprisoned for criticizing the government. I do indeed run an independent newspaper. The government's attitude is: you say what you like, we do what we like—and I do not want to go into the details of this. Since President Mubarak made a promise to give more freedom to the media, the whole country is waiting for him to deliver. But he never has. TV and radio stations, which reach more of the population than newspapers, remain dominated by the state.

Moukheiber

In the Middle East, TV and radio are more important than newspapers ...

Freedom of information, a crucial prerequisite for a functioning democracy, is not so much about independent newspapers as it is about independent TV and radio stations. Only a minority reads; the majority has to be addressed through audiovisual media. Throughout the region, control of this media is still firmly under government control, except for Lebanon.

Polenz

Considering that many more people watch TV rather than read newspapers, are Western programs welcome voices of democracy, or are they simply perceived as Western propaganda? As a German parliamentarian, I am especially interested in how people receive Deutsche Welle and its Arab programs, because we spend a lot of money on them.

Al-Kitbi

... and regional media are more important than foreign channels

For most people in the Arab world, independent regional media like Al-Jazeera enjoy much more credibility than Western satellite TV channels broadcasted in Arabic, like Al-Hurra. The people are skeptical about this channel, not least because it is funded by the US Congress and directed by the US Broadcasting Board



of Governors. Moreover, its expressed purpose is to counter the—from a Western perspective—biased, anti-American reports and commentaries from Qatar-based Al-Jazeera and UAE-based Al-Arabiya. But these independent, regional media are much greater assets for democratization than foreign channels—especially those which are widely seen as government propaganda.

We should indeed not be too fearful of al-Jazeera and other Arab channels even if they sometimes may appear to contradict with Western press standards, for instance by broadcasting Osama bin Laden's videos. Al-Jazeera has brought about a sort of audio-visual Ummah where issues range from politics to Muslim's day-to-day lives. There is a new kind of pluralism in the Muslim world that was impossible when government-controlled media was the only means of information. Deutsche Welle and other Western programs could have a complementary role.

Pflüger

Foreign and regional media—including Al-Arabiya and even Al-Jazeera—cannot replace local media when it comes to pushing for reform. In Lebanon, audio-visual media had an immense influence on developing democracy. To a large extent, it replaced the inefficient parliament in discussing issues like corruption.

Moukheiber

Which local actors are pushing for reform or could be partners for the West?

Sommer

Even though the Arab League is practically absent as an actor, there are some positive developments. Trying to make reforms acceptable to every member, the Arab League searches for the smallest common denominator; thereby mostly achieving cosmetic changes. But even though its human rights declaration, its economic and social council and its concept for a unified Arab parliament fall short of most peoples' expectations, the attempt to create inbred institutions for democratization is still an encouraging sign.

Moukheiber

Every attempt by the Arab League to aid democratization is encouraging

Second, the judiciary in several states finally shows signs of embarking on its way to real independence. In Egypt, 1200 judges of the Alexandria Judges Club threatened in April 2005 to withdraw their supervision of the parliamentary and presidential elections unless they are guaranteed real independence. Unfortunately, this move has not really been heeded, but Egyptian judges continue to fight for their independence. In Lebanon, independence of the judiciary as a cornerstone of democratization has been the valiant cry of intellectuals and politicians ever since the Cedar Revolution ended the decay of our judicial system under

The judiciary is showing signs of independence



Syrian domination. The European Union has offered to provide advice, assistance and financial support within the framework of its Neighborhood program for a reform of the judicial system. In Lebanon, there have also been encouraging steps to ensure that the rule of law is civilian, immune to religious influence. Recently, Lebanese intellectuals set an unprecedented example of defending the independence of politics: when pro-Hizbullah scholar Sheikh Afif Naboulsi issued a fatwa prohibiting any Shia not belonging to the Amal party (party of God) from joining the Lebanese cabinet, eight intellectuals sued him for “identity theft, threatening and terrorizing in an attempt to obstruct the practice of civil rights, instigating sectarian differences and portraying political disputes as disputes between religions and sects.” They said Sheikh Afif Naboulsi was not entitled to “issue a fatwa and prevent Shiite citizens from practicing their constitutional rights.”

Third, reform-minded parliamentarians in and outside the ruling parties recognize constitutional reform and independent legal systems as prerequisites for lasting change. In Egypt and Lebanon, for example, some parliamentarians no longer accept a merely cosmetic role in their countries’ political processes.

Al-Azm

Egypt and Syria are similar to pre-1989
Eastern European countries ...

There are similarities between Middle Eastern states like Egypt and Syria and pre-1989 Eastern European countries regarding their institutions. The security apparatuses and the mass organizations for the youth and for students in Middle Eastern countries were essentially copied from East European models and created with the help of East German advisers.

... but lack the coherent reformist factions that
smoothed the transition in Eastern Europe

During the Soviet Bloc’s final crisis in the late 1980s, existing reform factions within the ruling parties stepped out into the open to smooth the transition of power. I can see no such, more or less coherent reformist factions either in Syria or other Middle Eastern countries with single-party systems. These countries are more similar to communist Romania than to pre-1989 Hungary or Poland. While Poles and Hungarians managed a peaceful transition, the Romanians overthrew their Communist regime by force and executed its leaders. A potential collapse of Middle Eastern political systems must be managed skillfully to avoid chaos and violence.

III. What Should Be Done?

In the third section of our Round Table discussion we will discuss what the EU and the US should do in the region. Khalil Al-Khalil, Member of Saudi Arabia's Committee of Security Affairs, the Al-Shura Council, will start us off.

Sommer

How can the relations between the Middle East and the West be improved? Europe and America should engage in honest and constructive dialog with the Middle East at all levels: states, civil organizations, business communities, intellectual leaders, and political and Islamic movements. It is crucially important to understand Islam and Muslims accurately through involvement with Muslims themselves instead of learning about them from special interest groups. The Western powers must clear the political and intellectual atmosphere of anti-Islamic myths and confusing notions. We should emphasize that extreme groups on both sides do not represent the majority and should not dictate the agenda. Western support for reforms will be appreciated if these reforms enhance people's lives directly and raise the standard of living.

Al-Khalil

The Western powers must clear the air of anti-Islamic myths

So which role should Europe and the US play in fostering reforms in the Middle East?

First, they must contribute to enhancing security. Europe and America are mainly responsible for world security and peace. They should emphasize the significance of mutual respect, peaceful negotiations, bilateral and regional treaties and international law, and should eliminate political polarization from world politics. Militarized groups, violent groups, and militias inside some recognized countries should not to be supported for any reason.

Second, the West must aim at tolerance of cultural diversity and the preservation of human rights when dealing with immigrants from the Muslim world.

Third, reform supported by the West has to be a comprehensive package of development encompassing basic needs such as human rights, education, freedom of expression, free press, minority and women's rights, and sanitation.

Fourth, the US should be more careful when acting like a global policeman in a global empire. Europe should be careful to avoid unconditionally joining the American camp because that might increase resentment against Europe. The cartoon controversy in Danish newspapers is a matter of concern to me in that regard.

Fifth, offering Turkey a fair chance to be a member of the European Union would be a practical step in the right direction. Turkey could serve as a crucial link between Europe in particular and the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia does not belong
to the “axis of evil”

Finally, the crucial element that Europe and the US could provide to foster reform is education. Problems such as poverty, unemployment, ignorance, extremism, social diseases, and political unrest are directly or indirectly related to the lack of efficient education. Western academic institutions such as the American University in Beirut and the American University in Cairo have greatly contributed to the modernization of the Middle East. The West should take up that tradition and offer education to Middle Easterners in their nations and abroad through encouragements, grants, and scholarships.

An alarming notion is the categorization of a country like Saudi Arabia, which is known to experts as a moderate nation and a reliable ally to the US, as belonging to the ‘axis of evil.’ Saudi Arabia was considered as such by political strategists like Richard Perle and David Frum in their book ‘An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror’ (2003). This raises big question marks about the intentions and expertise of some political strategists in Europe and the US.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been one of the closest allies to the US during both war and peace for seven decades. It has enjoyed solid partnership with some European countries as well. The role Saudi Arabia played in the second Gulf War to liberate Kuwait in 1990 is further testimony of these fruitful relationships. Another example is the outstanding collaboration of Saudi Arabia with Europe and the US to fight Al-Qaeda and terrorism after September 11th.

Sommer

Let us now try to develop policy recommendations for the most pressing issues. Clearly, the Arab-Israeli conflict is a major obstacle for the democratization of the Middle East. Is there anything promising the West can do to foster a peaceful solution?

1. The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Pflüger

Unfortunately, Israel’s unilateral retreat from Gaza did not provide a great impetus to the peace process. Within the last few months, we have seen a real stalemate arising with Hamas’ election. The European Union and the United States are now obliged to consistently stick to their principles : As long as Hamas refuses to recognize Israel’s right to exist, support the peace process, and renounce violence, the West will neither cooperate with Hamas, nor finance the Palestinian Authority.



Given the importance of what Palestine for the Islamic world, a visible dedication of the West to achieve justice for the Palestinian people would help placate the Sunnis in Iraq and Iraqi Muslims in general.

Al-Azm

Solving the Arab-Israeli conflict could trigger a positive domino effect. The West must press both sides to get on and implement the Road Map which is still the most promising base for a solution. That requires applying equal standards. We must demand that Hamas honors the Oslo Accords, renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist. But our demand will be more legitimate if we remind the Israeli government at the same time that it has not implemented the settlement freeze stipulated by the Road Map. Also, even though a wall might be necessary to prohibit terrorist attacks, we should insist that it be erected according to the cease fire line of 1967. Last, we should remind Israel that the Road Map is about a negotiated solution to the conflict, not the unilateral "solution" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has announced. Hopefully, American diplomacy will be tough on both sides.

Polenz

Solving the Arab-Israeli conflict could trigger a positive domino effect

Regarding the wall being built in Israel, as well as the settlements and the need to follow the Road Map, we are talking with Israel's government in very frank terms.

Volker

For the time being, the peace process is stalled because of the Hamas victory. The Israeli government will withdraw unilaterally and there will not be a negotiated solution. Hamas' victory is just another self-inflicted setback for the Palestinian cause.

Fischer

If the West supports democracy in the region, it must respect the outcome of free elections. It must recognize the Hamas government, initiate a dialogue, use the traditional instruments of diplomacy, incentives and pressure, to further the cause of peace.

Rouleau

The West must respect the outcome of free elections

The Western reaction to Hamas' victory is not an example of double standards but of consistency. The West welcomed free and fair elections in Palestine. But the outcome, namely a Hamas government, poses a problem because Hamas contradicts the very principles that have been guiding the peace process since its beginning. These principles—refraining and stopping terror and violence, recognizing

Freitag

We are criticizing Hamas, not the elections



the right of Israel's existence and accepting signed agreements—have not been invented or specifically tailored for the Hamas government, but reflect long-standing principles which have also been applied to the Fatah government. Ballots and bullets do not mix. It is a cynical approach by Hamas claiming the failure of the Oslo Accords when it was Hamas itself which initiated the derailment of the process by carrying out bombings once the Accords were signed in 1993. Now that the majority of Palestinians has supported Hamas, the West must still adhere to the standards it has been following for the past years. Accepting a government which refutes the fundamental principles of the peace process as a political partner would destroy our credibility.

Volker

Hamas' victory is a setback

Hamas' victory does not call into question the US government's long-term commitment to democratization. Hamas' victory is a setback insofar as it makes a negotiated settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis very improbable at this point of time. We do not agree with Hamas' policies and refuse to support this government as long as it does not recognize Israel's right to exist, honor previous accords and renounce violence. At the same time, we welcome the fact that the elections were free and fair. Also I am cautiously optimistic regarding the effect of democracy on Hamas itself. It was not elected for its support for terrorism, but because people had had enough of Fatah mismanagement. If the Palestinians now hold Hamas accountable for its performance, it may change its policies to meet the electorate's demand.

Rouleau

The Western conditions for dealing with Hamas are unacceptable

The West formulated three conditions for dealing with the Hamas government: recognizing Israel's right to exist, respecting existing agreements, and putting an end to violence.

Recognizing Israel's right to exist: within which borders, those of 1947, 1949 or 1967? Did the EU and the US ever ask Israel to recognize the legitimacy of a Palestinian state within the frontiers determined by the United Nations' General Assembly and the Security Council? Did Americans and Europeans ever exercise pressure on Israel to stop the creeping annexation of Palestine?

Respecting existing arrangements: the Oslo agreements and the Road Map are dead. Have we forgotten that the right-wing Israeli governments which followed the assassination of Itzhak Rabin have condemned the Oslo accords while systematically violating them? Likewise, the Road Map has never been implemented by Israel. The peace process has made no progress during the past ten years. Ariel



The peace process is not dead, but a reality.

Fischer

Sharon refused to speak to Yasser Arafat, he rarely spoke with his successor Mahmoud Abbas, and he never actually negotiated with him. The present Prime Minister Ehoud Olmert also abstains from opening any kind of dialogue. Israel keeps on saying that it “has no Palestinian partner”. But is it really seeking one? Is it not establishing the “final frontiers” of Israel unilaterally?

Putting an end to violence: did the West ever tell Israel to stop its daily operations in the occupied territories? In violation of all international laws, the Israeli government practises freely what it calls “target assassinations” of Palestinian activists. The US government has used its right of veto over and over again to prevent any condemnation of any Israeli act by the Security Council, in defiance of the international community. We are asking Hamas to stop all violence while knowing perfectly well that it has observed a unilateral ceasefire for the past year or so, while its leading members-political or military figures-are being systematically murdered.

So what should be done? Israel and the West should put an end to the boycott of the Hamas government and call for direct or indirect negotiations without any pre-conditions. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, in 1973, the P.L.O. was excluded from the Geneva Peace Conference since it had not yet recognized Israel. Nahum Goldmann, then President of the World Jewish Congress, described this attitude as being “plain stupid”. The fact that the P.L.O. was ready to negotiate, he said, indicated that it was recognising the Jewish State. This was plain common sense. Will it prevail 30 years later?

Demanding that Israel start unconditional negotiations with Hamas would be a grossly biased policy and would only accelerate the confrontation. If the West wants to support the peace process, taking a balanced position is the most important prerequisite.

The peace process is not dead, but a reality—as unpleasant as that reality might be for both sides. The Hamas government is the living proof: Hamas was elected as a result of the Oslo Agreement. Without the Oslo Agreement, no Palestinian Authority, without Palestinian Authority, no elections, without elections, no Hamas government. Now go ahead and show me that the peace process is dead. It is self-evident that Hamas must accept the principles on which it bases its power.

As to the recognition of Israel’s right to exist, of course the European position is that the Palestinians’ rights for self-determination within their own state is just

Israel is defying the international community

Fischer



as important. Territorial questions should be solved based on the borders of 1967, any changes must be negotiated.

The Hamas government must stop behaving like a revolutionary organization in exile and accept democratic principles and international law. If Hamas stops its terrorist activities, I am sure that Israel, America and the EU would enter into some kind of relationship with the Hamas government. At the moment, Hamas is a listed terrorist group in the US and partly responsible for the terrorist activities that made the peace process derail.

If Hamas is unwilling to accept the Oslo Agreement, how about accepting the conditions of the Arab Peace Initiative formulated during the Arab League summit in Beirut in 2002? If Israel withdrew its forces from the occupied territories and recognized an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, the Arab states would recognize Israel, reconsider the Arab-Israeli conflict and establish normal relations with Israel.

Klose The West is not punishing the Palestinian people for Hamas' victory. The EU has decided to continue financing the Palestinian Authority, as has the US. Former World Bank President James Wolfensohn, the Middle East Quartet's Special Envoy for the Gaza Disengagement, is currently calling on the international community to continue financing the Palestinian Authority. Western powers only decided that financial support should not go the Hamas.

Pflüger What has Saudi Arabia with its enormous financial power done to ease the burdens of the Palestinians? I understand that people from the region blame the West, but they should also demand that their own governments do their job.

Hoyer I still doubt that Saudi Arabia, as one of the most important players in the Middle East, is willing to accept Israel's right to exist. Remove that suspicion and we have a completely new perspective.

Al-Khalil The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be the last Muslim country to recognize Israel, if only because it is unwilling to immediately recognize anything. It took us 70 years to finally recognize the borders of our neighboring state of Yemen. Even the eight goals that Germany scored against Saudi Arabia in the 2002 Soccer World Cup were heavily debated, and many Saudis denied our defeat. Israel will be recognized only if the Palestinian issue is solved in a completely satisfactory way. King (then

The Hamas government must stop behaving like a revolutionary organization in exile

What has Saudi Arabia done to ease the burdens of the Palestinians?

Is Saudi Arabia willing to recognize Israel's right to exist?



Crown Prince) Abdullah's 2002 peace initiative made our conditions for Israel's recognition very clear.

Personally, I do not believe there will be a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict until we have governments which can be held accountable. The region's autocrats will keep on conveying a distorted picture of Israeli atrocities and American biased policy through state controlled media to rally support for their regimes.

2. Iran

One of the most immediate security challenges is the alleged Iranian attempt to develop nuclear weapons.

I believe that Iran wants nuclear weapons. The Iranians not only misled the international community and the IAEA for 18 years, they are also developing long-range ballistic missiles that make sense only for transporting nuclear, not conventional warheads.

Iranian nuclear weapons would threaten the whole region, trigger a nuclear arms race and thus increase the danger of nuclear proliferation to terrorists. No Arab I have spoken to is in favor of the Iranian nuclear program. The Europeans and Americans want a political solution, but Iran has to cooperate. Of course Iran is worried about its security with US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. But Iranian security would profit from a regional security system backed by the Arab countries, Europe, the United States and Iran much more than from nuclear weapons.

The United States must cooperate with the EU and use all the diplomatic tools available when dealing with Iran and its nuclear issues. But be assured that while ordinary Iranian people do not want their country to acquire a nuclear capability, they do thoroughly believe Iran is pursuing and has the right to pursue the peaceful use of nuclear energy, including enrichment.

Concerning Iran's nuclear program, we need to be very clear: An undemocratic regime whose president threatens Israel with extinction cannot be allowed to have nuclear weapons. It cannot be permitted to have a closed nuclear cycle either, because that could lead to a nuclear weapons program. Iran can have civilian nuclear power, possibly with enrichment taking place on Russian soil. To change Iran's course, the US administration is committed to using all diplomatic means avail-

Kassem

Sommer

Klose

Iran wants nuclear weapons...

...no Arab is in favor of the program

Koolae

The Iranians believe in their right to pursue the peaceful use of nuclear energy

Volker

An undemocratic regime cannot be permitted to have a closed nuclear cycle

The American nuclear accord
with India sends the wrong message.

Hoyer



able with the EU-3, the UN and the IAEA. In the longer run, we need to strengthen Iran's democratic processes and civil society. If Iran were truly democratic and respected Israel's right to exist, the West might still be reluctant to accept a closed fuel cycle, but the level of concern would definitely be lower.

We cannot force others to take certain decisions. The Iranian government decides about its nuclear program, its regional policy and its position on Israel and the Holocaust. All we can do is take the appropriate steps to influence these decisions. We should not, for example, take a credible military option off the table. While nobody in the US administration favors it, we should be aware that diplomacy may fail in the end.

May
Why is the US government rewarding
India's nuclear arms program?

The US administration needs to coherently explain why it seems to be rewarding the Indian nuclear arms program and winking at Israel's nuclear capacity while at the same time opposing Iran's nuclear program.

Hoyer

Considering India's tremendous importance as a future economic and strategic partner, the American move is sensible. But it was wrong to sign a nuclear accord because legitimizing the Indian nuclear program sends the wrong message to those benevolent people in Iran who are ready to limit nuclear efforts to the civilian sphere. You run the risk of triggering a new arms race when countries in the region (and far beyond) follow India's example: forget the NPT and all these nasty obstacles, do whatever you think will enhance your strategic position in the world, resist outside pressure to play by the rules and one day you will end up in the Security Council as a permanent member.

Volker

After extensive consultations with Security Council members, NPT members and the Indian government on how to support the development of the Indian civilian nuclear program, in March 2006 President Bush sealed a nuclear accord with India. The country will get access to US civilian nuclear technology and in return will open a part of its nuclear facilities for inspection. We send a clear message to Iran that a democratic, responsible and trustworthy government prepared to work with the international community paves the way to successful cooperation and international approval.

Pflüger
India has developed nuclear weapons
outside the NPT...

India has developed nuclear weapons outside of the NPT. You are sending a clear message, but your message is not that playing by NPT rules is best for your country, but secretly developing nuclear weapons is best.

A regional security system
has to include Israel as well.

Kamal

No, India has never been a nuclear proliferator and has never sponsored terrorism. In contrast to Iran, India is willing to engage in a process of guarantees on non-proliferation.

A regional security system has to include Israel as well. Not only for Israel's security, but because almost everyone in the region worries about Israel's nuclear warheads. It is high time to revive the multilateral track dealing with key issues (including the NPT) that emerged after the bilateral talks at the Madrid Conference in 1991.

The big difference between Israel's and Iran's nuclear ambitions is that nobody wants to wipe out Iran, whereas some governments and many people in the region want to wipe out Israel—including the President of Iran.

Iran's nuclear ambitions are a matter of great concern for the international community. I believe, though, that by taking Iranian interests into account and by acting in concert, Europe and the US have a good chance to resolve the conflict. Iran is the largest country in the region, but it is politically isolated, concerned about its security and desperately needs to create jobs for its very large, young and fairly well-trained population. We need, first, to offer economic cooperation—here, Europe can play a big role. Second, we need to address Iranian security concerns. In this regard, only direct US involvement in the negotiations with Iran can create a security structure attractive enough for Iran to give up its nuclear option.

Iran, strengthened by the US invasion of Iraq, is attempting to overthrow the strategic architecture of the region with its nuclear ambitions. But Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt will not accept Iranian nuclear predominance, they will start a nuclear arms race. That arms race will not resemble the Cold War scenario but rather the much less rational nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan. After the terrorist attack on the Indian Union Parliament in New Delhi in 2001, India positioned missiles at the border with Pakistan which it blamed for supporting the terrorists. Pakistan was also in possession of atomic weapons and the world was at the brink of a nuclear war on the subcontinent. A nuclearized Middle East will have an even lower level of rationality—a nightmare scenario.

Vis-à-vis Iran, a common Western position and a direct involvement of the US in the negotiations is paramount. Iran will try to split the West as they tried



Volker

... but guarantees non-proliferation

Kamal

Klose

von Weizsäcker

Europe and the US have a good chance
to resolve the conflict

Fischer

The region will not accept
Iranian nuclear predominance

Iran must decide between
cooperation and isolation

unsuccessfully with the EU-3. Therefore I encourage the United States to join the EU-3 and take the lead in the negotiations. Let us make it absolutely clear that we stand united and offer them a common proposal and a clear-cut decision: cooperation or isolation.

We are unwilling to play Tehran's games

We should state that we accept Iran's right to the civilian use of nuclear power and are prepared to cooperate on that, open our markets, allow for technology transfer and are willing to normalize our relations. This is the carrot. The stick would be if you refuse to behave responsibly in the region, to suspend nuclear enrichment and to conduct your nuclear activities in a completely transparent manner, we will isolate you. We are not horrified by soaring oil prices and you will not profit from it; Russia and Saudi Arabia will get rich, but not you. We are unwilling to play your games—agreements with Russia today, agreements revoked tomorrow, enrichment on Iranian soil to be suspended today, to be continued tomorrow, a new separate agreement with Russia etc. We are unwilling to let you play for time to get on with your nuclear activities. You have a choice: consider our offer, accept or reject it, and face the consequences. For the US, such a common offer would of course mean putting regime change aside and engaging in a transformation strategy reminiscent of the Cold War era. But if they are willing to do so, there is a real opportunity for a diplomatic breakthrough.

Without a common EU-US package, transatlantic unity will be increasingly at risk the more we move forward within the Security Council. Iran is very aware of this. When confronted with a joint offer, the Iranian government will understand that isolation is a real threat, and that isolation within the G77 framework and with regard to its relations to Russia and China is no longer impossible, either.

Brengelmann

Only the US can credibly negotiate over Iranian security concerns

The US indeed needs to enter into negotiations with Iran because only the Americans can credibly negotiate over Iranian security concerns. During the meeting between Chancellor Schröder and President Bush in Mainz in February 2005, the US agreed to support the negotiation process of the EU-3 as far as the WTO and spare parts for aircraft were concerned. Now you have to raise your stakes in that process.

Polenz

The United States should indeed enter into direct negotiations with Iran, an idea also supported by the US Senate's Foreign Relations Committee's Chairman Richard Lugar. The EU can provide technological and economic cooperation to ensure Iran's peaceful use of nuclear energy without a closed fuel cycle and foster economic

growth, but only America can answer Iran's legitimate security and regional interests. Iranian-American talks on Iraq could be a first step. Then, a summit similar to the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 might provide a framework for a comprehensive discussion between all countries concerned—including the US.

To put the necessary pressure on Iran, we must ensure unity among the countries that supported the IAEA Board of Governors' Resolution on February 4, 2006 to report Iran-related issues to the UN Security Council. If the West rushes these nations, we risk a split. The US must leave Russia more time to negotiate its offer to do enrichment on Russian soil, and China also needs time to conduct the negotiations it deems necessary. Representatives of China have assured me that they are firmly against expanding the number of nuclear armed states and to ensure compliance with the NPT.

Secretary of State Rice and Undersecretary of State Burns are in frequent contact with the Foreign Ministers of France and Germany, Philippe Douste-Blazy and Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The packages and ideas presented by the EU-3 in discussion with the Iranians have our full support and backing—we want to make sure that the Iranians know that we are all in the same boat on this issue.

The West must coordinate, but I doubt that the US government should seek direct negotiations with Iran. The US is not willing to play any more diplomatic games with the Iranian government. As long as the fundamental facts of Iran's nuclear program—enrichment, nuclear military research and the development of carrier missiles—remain unchanged, we are not going to get anywhere with direct negotiations.

It is crucial that the US and the EU coordinate their policies toward Iran. In February 2005, during President Bush's visit to Germany, the US fortunately expressed its support for the EU-3 diplomatic initiative. The Russian-Iranian preliminary agreement about enriching uranium on Russian soil might be a way out of the crisis. As the Iranians stick to their right to a closed nuclear cycle within the NPT, though, the negotiations with Russia could also be just another attempt to win time for nuclear research. The EU and the US should, apart from avoiding a split as occurred during the Iraq crisis, also bring the Russians and the Chinese on board in order to keep maximum diplomatic pressure on Iran.

Despite its oil revenues, Iran has enormous economic and social problems, including one million more young people looking for jobs every year. Even Presi-

Volker

Europeans and Americans are all in the same boat

The US is not yet willing to have direct negotiations

Pflüger

Iran cannot afford to pursue a North Korean-style isolation policy

There is probably no chance to prevent the Iranians from getting nuclear weapons.

Wells

Ahmadinejad's anti-Israeli rhetoric is not acceptable

dent Ahmadinejad can probably not pursue a North Korean-style isolation policy. The need for technological cooperation with the West might win over the Iranian elite and prevent escalation.

The West should also be adamant in its position toward President Ahmadinejad's recent comments. It must make clear that it rejects to talk about wiping out Israel or denying the Shoa. It is important that not only the Western countries criticize this—there must also be strong criticism coming from the Arab world.

Wells

The US must open up a multitude of communication channels with Iran. I hope that Ambassador Khalilzad's talks about Iraq with representatives of the Iranian government will lead to more comprehensive negotiations, and I hope that America will also find ways to communicate with and support moderates like Ms. Koolae.

But even if the US engages in direct negotiations with Iran, I doubt that we will prevent a nuclearized Iran. In public, American officials dealing with nuclear issues insist that we must stop the Iranian attempt to get nuclear weapons. In private, the same people argue that they do not see any chance to do that. Therefore, our internal planning should focus on developing a plan B, a plan of how to deal with a future nuclearized Iran, on establishing a regional security system and an international structure capable of deterring Tehran even if it possesses nuclear weapons.

The US administration needs to soften its rhetoric on regime change, pre-emptive military strikes etc. These options can be discussed in internal circles but must not be repeatedly be brought out into the open.

Sommer

Iran is not only important in that it is perceived as a potentially dangerous potential nuclear power, but also as the largest country in the region facing immense domestic problems and with a political system that is problematic from the Western point of view. What should be done by the Iranians themselves and by the West?

Volker
Iran needs a regime change

We should not give up on regime change in Iran. We need democratic change and the development of a civil society. I agree, though, that an aggressive Western attempt to topple the regime is not desirable. We need regime change, but as a long-term development from within—and yes, it might be useful to think of what we did during the Cold War. We can only help by creating support and provid-



ing suitable conditions. In this context, our primary purpose of supporting civil society NGOs is not directly aimed at regime change, but at strengthening civil society.

To promote democracy in Iran and other Islamic societies, the West needs to take into account the fact that these societies are often guided more by emotions originating from historical experiences than by rationality. Rapidly imposing Western values, patterns of behavior or lifestyles on these people will only trigger a backlash. Change is inevitable but it must come gradually.

In Iran, nationalist sentiments are a reality and so are historical memories: large parts of the population equate the Western attempts to make Iran suspend nuclear enrichment with the coup against Iranian Prime Minister Mossadeq initiated by the British after Mossadeq's nationalization of the oil industry.

Iran is by no means a monolithic society. While some Iranians are modernistic, to some degree even westernized, traditionalism is also strong and the original values of the Islamic Republic of Iran have become increasingly popular in some strata of the population recently. Religious, ethnic, sectarian and social strife is a real danger in our country.

Iran has a better chance of democratization than most of the other countries of the Broader Middle East, in spite of the rhetoric of its political leaders. It has a highly educated, mostly reform-minded young population (more than 60% below 23) many of whom admire the United States. While we must take a tough stand as far as the nuclear question is concerned, we should not isolate Iran as part of the "axis of evil." The German parliament engages in dialog instead. Since the Mykonos affair—the 1992 assassination of four prominent Kurdish leaders in a Berlin restaurant, supposedly ordered by the Iranian chief of intelligence—which marked the low point in the relations between Germany and Iran, the Bundestag has built up a dialog with its colleagues in the Iranian Majlis. Honest relations and a mutual understanding among politicians can help improve the lives of Iranian citizens and bring Iran closer to democracy.

But Western policy lacks consistency and frequently leaves democratic forces in Iran out in the cold. Prince Charles visited Iran before the seventh parliamentary elections in 2004 even though many reformist candidates were disqualified. The history of Western influence in Iran is a fiasco of contradictory EU and US policy

Koolae

Gradual change is inevitable but it must come gradually

Iran is both modernistic and traditional

Klose

Koolae

Western policy frequently leaves democratic forces in Iran out in the cold

Oil and gas reserves are an
obstacle to reform and democracy.

Polenz



and wrong moves at the wrong time. Along with the unsatisfying track record of reformist President Khatami, this has created a deep frustration among reform-minded Iranians.

Polenz

Oil and gas reserves are an obstacle to reform and democracy in Iran and elsewhere, because they allow mullahs, kings and autocrats to satisfy the people's needs by simply distributing oil revenues. There is no need to create income through a functioning private sector producing goods for the world market. There is no need to invest in higher education and technological progress, no need to create adequate conditions for private enterprise to function. There is no accountability to the people because rulers can exist on oil revenues and do not need to raise taxes. The consequences are widespread corruption and economic decline.

Koolae

Reform-minded people have continued and will continue their efforts to democratize Iranian society and will be grateful for Western help. But the transformation of a society shaped by traditional ideals and autocratic rule over centuries needs time, as the West should know from its own history. Teaching the people about democratic values takes a generation at least. It is naïve and simplistic to attempt an overnight transformation. Only if the West acts consistently, prudently and patiently at the same time, can engagement of international actors be fruitful and help pave the way for democratization. Also, Iranian peculiarities must be taken into account.

Any Iranian individual or organization
that receives US support
loses its credibility instantly

Recent US policy changes in favor of dialog with the region are steps in the right direction. I hope that the US will also enter into a real dialog with Iran. But the decision of the US Senate to financially support democracy in Iran will have counterproductive effects, to say the least. The State Department request for an additional 75 million dollars to increase support for democratic forces, expand radio broadcasting, begin satellite television broadcasts, expand fellowships and scholarships for Iranian students and bolster the US' public diplomacy efforts, might seem convincing at first sight. But any Iranian individual or organization that receives support from the US loses its credibility instantly.

Esfandiari

Iran has a very vibrant civil society, but if Iranian NGOs reach out to the US and the EU for financial support they will be subject to a government clampdown. If Western support for NGO's is tied to a program of regime change, the credibility of these NGOs will be totally undermined.

Teaching people about democratic values takes a generation.

Koolae



Western funding has often discredited civil society groups in the region. To support democratization, the West needs to find other mechanisms.

Al-Khalil

The problem of how to influence developments from outside without creating counter-reactions is a general one. How should the West proceed and which instruments should it use or avoid?

Sommer

3. Instruments and Partners for Reform

The West must throw its weight behind the democratic forces by insisting on conditionality. You can support democratization effectively by supporting only those politicians who are following a road map for democracy and civil society. The EU's Barcelona process and the G8's BMENA may fail because conditionality was not applied when dealing with autocratic leaders like Egypt's President Mubarak and Tunisia's President Ben Ali. Helsinki-type conditionality should be a cornerstone of Western policy.

Ibrahim

Conditionality as a means to encourage reform should be applied but its effects should not be overestimated. Yes, conditionality is mentioned in all the Barcelona documents and the ENP's Action Plans and yes, it is important. But that does not exempt us from setting priorities and from balancing competing long-term democratic development and strategic interests of stability. In Egypt for example, we have—on one hand—seen fraudulent elections and martial law being applied. Progress toward democratization is indeed slow and allowed only to such an extent as to not jeopardize the current government. On the other hand, we have no interest in endangering Egypt's important stabilizing role in the region. Conditionality can help in supporting concrete and specific steps towards reform particular in the legal sector and in helping to promote the rule of law and in building a pluralistic society in which the choice is not only either the well-established ruling parties or a fundamental Islamic opposition.

Freitag

In Egypt, sanctions or conditionality, let alone military intervention by the West would not help to promote democracy. The West's image is so negative that nobody wants to be perceived as closely associated with the US or Europe. Dialog, based on mutually agreed benchmarks and incentives, is a much more promising strategy for the West.

Kamal

In Egypt neither sanctions nor conditionality would help promote democracy

European countries with aging populations
will soon need a qualified immigrant workforce.

Kepel

Berman
What is wrong with conditionality?

What is wrong with conditionality? Why let autocrats develop time tables and guidelines for reform without including our own benchmarks? We must of course create individual approaches in a dialog, but that does not mean simply abandoning conditionality.

Moukheiber

A push from the outside through conditionality, benchmarks and a time schedule for reform is greatly welcomed in the region.

The West must be adamant in rejecting cosmetic ploys. The European Union in particular must take Article Two of the 2002 Association Agreement with Lebanon stating that relations shall be based “on respect of democratic principles and fundamental human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” seriously and implement the conditionality clause allowing for appropriate measures if the opposing party fails to meet the obligations of the agreement.

Kepel

Education is of crucial importance in the long-term. With 70% of the population below 30, and 60% below 25, there is a whole generation looking for education qualifying them for adequate jobs. With public education institutions in a shambles, private schools and universities are competing for investment. Europe and the US should be present in this field. This is not only a means of stabilizing Middle Eastern societies, but also of educating a qualified immigrant workforce which some European countries with their aging populations will desperately need soon enough.

Polenz
Civil societies take centuries to develop

We need to change the negative perception of the West in the Middle East. Unfortunately, as these perceptions are based on emotions, it will take a long time to change them. While the people in the Middle East must be able to define their own path to democracy, we should try to communicate a realistic image of our model of democracy and bolster the indigenous debate on reform, in an open dialog with actors from the region. Promoting inter-cultural dialog via television might help to create a realistic and nuanced image of the West in the long-term, which in turn could provide a role-model to overcome political restrictions. As European history shows, the development of civil societies might take centuries and the commitment of many generations.

Kepel

We should indeed seek access to the media in the Middle East. Al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya and other so to speak “post-authoritarian” media are open to demagogues



like bin Laden, but they are also open to Westerners. For example, Mr. Rouleau and I quite often appear on al-Jazeera. This is a means to address a wider audience in the Middle East in their own language.

The West should use the internet extensively to give information to and communicate with the people interested in reform in the Middle East. If Al-Qaeda can put manuals of how to build a bomb on the web, it ought to be possible to also offer advice on how to improve the rule of law or provide adequate conditions for private enterprise—and also links to people in the West that would be willing to act as consultants. That might help to engender confidence and present a more positive picture of the West.

It is widely accepted that the West should build its reform efforts on local traditions. How can that be done in practice?

Instead of discussing democracy in a paternalistic, Eurocentrist way (“Westminster for everybody”), we support indigenous traditions. In Kuwait, for example, we have the Diwaniyas, private meeting places where men discuss politics openly. There is Shurah, the traditional method by which Arabs have selected leaders and make major decisions. To foster democracy, we should not impose our standards, but revive and enhance such regional democratic traditions.

Is a modernized Sharia law something that might make compatible local perceptions of justice with Western humanitarian values?

I know from my time as a member of the sixth Iranian parliament (2000–2004) that some modern interpretations of Islam and humanitarian interpretations of Sharia law are suitable for reform and for answering people’s demands for a just regulation of their lives.

We are just beginning to learn about the traditions of the Islamic world. We need to understand as much as we can as fast as we can about different interpretations of Sharia law and about how to make Islamic and Western legal traditions compatible. We still have a long way to go, but we better start walking because that is the only way to lasting progress, for us and for people in the Middle East. An understanding of where the Western legal system could be compatible with the

May

Al-Qaeda uses the internet more efficiently than Western democrats

Sommer

Pflüger

Indigenous traditions instead of “Westminster for everybody”

Sommer

Koolae

Hoyer

We need to understand Sharia law

No Western idea is rejected in Islamic countries just because of its origins.

Al-Khalil



different interpretations of Sharia law is decisive for Western support for rule of law in the Muslim world.

Al-Khalil

Even though Islam has strong religious norms, Islamic countries are open for modernization

Even though Islam has strong religious norms, the political system of Islamic countries are wide open for modernization and no Western idea is rejected just because of its origins.

Kassem

New laws do not have to be guided by Sharia law

Do not take it as a given fact that countries in the Muslim world must be guided by Sharia law. Sharia law is man-made law, written 1400 years ago, an interpretation of Qu'ran that can be changed by men. It all depends on the interpretation. I believe that we need new legislation in our countries, but it does not necessarily have to be Sharia law.

Polenz

Apparently, female members of the Iranian parliament are pointing more and more at the inconsistencies in Islamic traditions in order to justify their fight for more equality. For example, in personal status law, women are supposed to take care of the house and children, but if they are divorced from their husbands, custody is nevertheless awarded to the fathers.

Al-Kitbi

In the Arab world, strong social sentiment against women's participation in politics persists, as does economic and social discrimination; these conditions are often legitimized by fundamental interpretations of Qu'ran. At this point, several regimes in the region exploit women's empowerment—urged, among others, by Western initiatives like the MEPI—as a red herring to distract public attention from shortcomings in other key reform issues like incumbency term limits, freedom of the press and political party rights. I have witnessed this especially in the Gulf region, where some women recently became members of parliament or appointed to ministerial-level posts.

Koolaee

Women need greater economic autonomy

Improving women's rights regarding personal status law and child custody is only worth something if they also get greater economic autonomy.

May

Justice should be a key issue in every dialog between the Islamic world and the West. It has critical value on both sides, but our understanding of it is different. Religious scholars should be encouraged to translate its meaning to foster mutual understanding.

To foster mutual understanding, we need translation—for example concerning the notion of justice.

May



We should try to speak our partners' language. I want to plead for a certain amount of humility in the wording when promoting our ideals. The United States' new National Security Strategy mentions "freedom" and "democracy" countless times, while citing only once the rule of law. Let us stress elements of democratic societies like due process, rule of law and justice instead, because that is where we can connect to the Islamic world. Islam has a very strong set of religious, social and cultural norms and the respect for norms is widespread in the region. Germany could build a stable democracy after 1945 not because of its long standing democratic tradition—its experience with democracy had been rather brief and unpleasant—but because of its long standing tradition of rule of law and due process. Let us pave the way for democracy in the region by fostering these elements instead of making elections our only goal.

The rule of law is as a key element of the Barcelona Process. Most partner governments are very open to addressing justice and accountability as major elements of civil society. What we have yet to find are partners within civil society and at the same time a way to avoid their being stigmatized as agents of the West.

Participation is the key to real change. The CSCE experience proves that all elites, not only the ruling elites, must participate. CSCE's tremendous success resulted from its indirect influence on Eastern Europe's societies. Under Western protection, civil societies could develop. How exactly to support indigenous grass-roots movements without being accused of imposing something from outside remains, of course, a practical problem for us and our foundations.

The Forum for the Future created in 2004 as a centerpiece of the BMENA partnership brings together government officials, civil society activists and representatives from the private sector. As a joint initiative of the G8 nations and countries in the Broader Middle East and North Africa region, it lends support to indigenous calls for reform through its conferences in the region. The appendant Fund for the Future will offer equity investment to small businesses to support economic growth and job creation. Its funding comes from Western countries and countries in the region, its board consists of decision makers from the Broader Middle East and Europe. At the same time, an independent Foundation for the Future funded by countries from the region, the US, the EU and European countries will provide support to regional NGOs working for democracy and human rights.

Scharioth

Humility would help the West promote our ideals

Freitag

Scharioth

Volker

Participation is the key to real change.

Scharioth



Moukheiber

You have to work in real partnerships in order to support and coordinate grass roots democratic efforts.

Polenz

In order to win over partners,
we must be credible

In order to win partners, we must be credible. Democratization is always a fierce struggle for values and ideas. Indigenous elites and credible foreign support are equally indispensable. Outside support must build on soft power and credibility. Consequently, the West has to adopt a more coherent human rights policy and criticize human rights violations more coherently.

Pflüger

Neither Guantanamo nor Abu Ghraib lives
up to American claims of being a role model

More important than all military campaigns and democratization initiatives is the power of example regarding human and civil rights. The well-known phrase of America being a “city upon the hill” was meant to remind the first colonists that their community is watched by the world, and Ronald Reagan recalled the phrase to state the American claim of being a role model for the world—this is where human rights are a reality. But neither Guantanamo nor Abu Ghraib live up to this phrase. Even if we all acknowledge that the US feels at war after 9/11, we must also consider the Arab perception. For the sake of its own interests, the US should close down Guantanamo prison.

Sommer

Should the West engage Islamists as partners in the modernization process, as the region’s home-grown alternative to authoritarian rulers?

Kassem

The West should not engage Islamists ...

The idea of engaging Islamists in the political process is very fashionable at this time. It rests on the assumption that for the genetically Islamic people in the region, Islamism is the only alternative to autocracy. At the moment, there is no political process to engage Islamists or anybody else. That lack of political process is the real problem, and our goal should be to establish the necessary democratic institutions. This would in turn demonstrate that Islamism is not the only force that can be summoned to fight authoritarianism.

... but demand the creation
of democratic systems

Once we have a functioning democratic system, let the people decide whether they want to be ruled by an Islamic government. As long as our institutions guarantee that the people will also be able to vote them out in future elections, there is no need to be afraid of them. Remember, the Muslim Brotherhood failed to come to power in 78 years under four different regimes—the monarchy, Nasser, Saddat and Mubarak—which indicates that they may still be lacking in political savvy.

Starting to move towards democracy and accountability is of utmost importance. Otherwise, the next election might well turn Egypt into an Iran-style theocracy, if people see the Islamists as the only alternative and there are no mechanisms to ensure that they can be voted out of office again once they win power.

... then the people are able to vote for Islamists and vote them out again

Theocrats are the mirror image of the region's autocrats. Stop supporting autocrats, and Islamism will no longer be the only visible alternative to autocracy.

Ibrahim

For me, the main issue today is to stop the Islamists from re-extending Sharia law to all the other parts of the legal system, thus reversing the achievements of the last half-century of secularism—Abdel Nasser limited Sharia law to personal status law, not the Islamists. From an Islamist perspective, it does not suffice to apply Sharia law only to family law.

Al-Azm

What about the alleged relation between democratization and stabilization which Mr. Kassem hinted at? Would free elections in a country that suppresses the secular opposition lead to a rise of Islamism and would that in turn endanger stability?

Sommer

The West fears the Islamist's impact on terrorism and security while people in the region fear that religious rule may prevent them from running their life through adequate institutions.

Moukheiber

Still, fear of Islamists should not prevent external actors from seeking reform and change in the region. Islamists are perceived as a threat to regional stability, civil society, the rule of law and fundamental human rights. But autocrats readily use this fear to present themselves as the lesser evil and further tighten their control of their peoples. The main concern regarding Syria, for example, is not its horrible regime, but its potential replacement by Islamists.

Fear of Islamists should not prevent reform or change

The Islamists have a large impact on the people in the region; you should not hope to simply isolate them—least of all the moderate ones. You should remember the proverbial saying, “if you cannot beat them, join them”: you should not actually join them, but to get into some kind of dialog or engagement with them, might help to win the hearts and minds of this region's people.

Al-Kitbi

In Germany in 1933 democratically elected leaders did indeed put an end to democracy, but I cannot remember similar events in the Islamic world. The West should

Ibrahim

Regional autocrats are very clever
in instrumentalizing Western fears.

Ibrahim



The West should no longer be afraid
of the results of free elections

no longer be afraid of the results of free elections in the Muslim world. 1.4 billion Muslims worldwide are already living under democratically elected regimes.

Autocratic regimes are grateful for the Western fear of Islamist democratic victories and gladly confirm that free elections would put an end to their alleged attempts to modernize and democratize their countries. Since 1991, the Algerian military has had an important influence on the government. Regional autocrats are very clever in instrumentalizing Western fears.

Pflüger

We need to engage in dialog with at least parts of the Islamist groups. The notion of “Islamists” covers a broad spectrum. In Morocco and Egypt, I met Islamist politicians who are Islamists only because that is the only strong alternative to the autocratic governments. There is no alternative to dialog with Muslim Brothers and other Islamist groups.

Ottaway

The US should widen its narrow
target group for democratization ...

The United States should widen its far too narrow target group for democratization. Take, for example, Hamas: even if the organization and its members may not be admirable actors, they are part of the democratization process. Another example are the leftist Syrian parties which have now adopted the liberal consensus and support the Syrian movement for democratization and civil society. The US will not support these groups because its definition of democratic actors is too narrow.

Singer

... but American policy towards
Islamist groups is changing ...

American policy towards Islamist groups is changing. For example, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (also known as the 9/11 Commission Report) did put all Islamist groups in the same bag. Arguing for a dialog with Islamist groups would have made you suspect of sympathizing with Al-Qaeda. Today, even the administration is talking about engaging some of these groups. After all, the only successes of the US’ democratization efforts—the elections in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt, and the changes in Lebanon—each have brought Islamist forces to power. The debate is no longer about whether the US should engage Islamists, but under what conditions.

May

The United States also supported leftist groups when it was needed. Despite their rhetoric, every US governments has ignored ideological differences for practical reasons. In Postwar Europe, during the early years of the Cold War, the United States energetically supported the non-Communist left. Because the public and

There is no alternative
to dialog with Islamist groups.

Pflüger

the Congress did not support it, this policy had of course to be conducted by the executive, and clandestinely.

4. Iraq

Iraq is perhaps the most important field of cooperation for the transatlantic partners. Even the opponents of the invasion know that we have more important things to do now than retrospectively discussing the pros and cons of toppling Saddam Hussein. Today, we are all sitting in the same boat. But does anybody know where this boat should be going? We probably agree that withdrawal is not an option. But what should be the Western strategy for Iraq?

The challenges ahead are more important than asking who was right in 2003. Iraq has been invaded, the US and its allies are there and withdrawal is not an option at this point of time because it would result in chaos and destruction. Fortunately, the European states that opposed the US decision are now willing to cooperate even though they may stick to their former assessment. Only together will we be able to allow the Iraqi people to elect their own government based on their own constitution and eventually build a free, united, secure and prosperous society. Mistakes during the invasion have been made, many of them have been corrected, others still need to be. To create a free and democratic Iraq that no longer depends upon foreign intervention, America needs Europe's help.

Close cooperation toward this common goal is inevitable in spite of past differences and can profit from distinct approaches. Paradoxically, the political enfeeblement of both the US and the EU during the past years has increased the willingness to cooperate, because both sides have been sobered by touching the limits of what they can achieve alone.

The Western powers must jointly support the democratization of Iraq. Whether we were in favor of the war or against it, we should leave the judgement to the historians. Now, everybody must contribute to stabilizing the country and building sustainable democratic institutions. Germany is contributing its share by training Iraqi security forces. A withdrawal of the United States in the near future is not an option to my mind, but I am very curious about Arab opinions about this.



von Weizsäcker

Volker

Fortunately, Europeans and Americans are now willing to cooperate in Iraq

Reiter

Pflüger

Al-Kitbi The war in Iraq cannot be won; this failed policy was perceived as an attempt to colonize the region right from the beginning.

Klose To expect a quick success in Iraq would be unrealistic, and a withdrawal would surely lead to a disaster.

Fischer The withdrawal of the US from Iraq and the ensuing civil war and potential breakup of the country would create a combination of Somalia, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, with all the regional actors drawn into the confrontation. I fear this scenario might soon become reality.

Will the US soon withdraw from Iraq?

On March 19th, Jim Hoagland described in the Washington Post an upcoming change in US policy in Iraq: US troops will be moving out of the cities as part of a coordinated reduction and concentration of all foreign forces to lower the level of visibility. If I were to play devil's advocate, I would say this is phase one of the withdrawal. Either the Iraqi security forces would join in and replace the Americans in a coordinated step-by-step withdrawal. Or, if the Iraqi forces are not up to that, a civil war would break out. The administration has announced that in case of a civil war, American troops will be withdrawn. The new American policy could be the first step to leaving Iraq regardless of the consequences.

Volker
There will not be an overall withdrawal

The US will concentrate its troops in less visible places, yes. Having Iraqi security forces manage security and decreasing the visibility of the coalition troops may diminish support for the insurgency. But there will not be an overall withdrawal. We will not get out of Iraq and say we lost a battle, let us get on with the war. We consider Iraq more than a battlefield and we would see an early withdrawal as a strategic error of colossal dimensions.

Fischer
The next president may decide
to bring the boys home

Unfortunately, the Iraqi insurgents are no fools and they know about the presidential elections in 2008. The first decision of the next president, whether Republican or Democrat, will be about Iraq. Every presidential candidate knows that a wrong strategy for Iraq will ruin her or his political standing. As things look today, it is not improbable that the next president may decide to bring the boys home as quickly as possible. Again, unfortunately the insurgents are no fools. Iraq's parties and sectarian groups in Iraq are now planning for the day after US Ambassador Khalilzad leaves Iraq together with the last troops.

Being aware that the consequences of a withdrawal would be catastrophic, the US administration is clearly committed to keeping American forces in the country. It is a broad consensus that a withdrawal would not only mean a battlefield defeat, but an unaffordable strategic error. Every candidate in the forthcoming 2008 presidential campaign will be tested regarding his or her commitment to Iraq. By the time a new president is elected, the American military presence in Iraq will be an established, bipartisan position.

Volker

We all agree that the United States should not withdraw too rapidly from Iraq. But resisting the military, economic and political pressure to pull out as soon as possible requires considerable political capital. Hopefully, Mr. Volker is right that all the presidential candidates in 2008 will take the high road and withstand those pressures. Some candidates might give in to public pressure and back Congressman Murtha's option for a redeployment of US troops in Iraq "at the earliest practicable date."

Wells

There is a great deal of pressure to pull out as soon as possible

If our European friends are really convinced we should stay in Iraq, they should find economic and political ways to support the American government. Germany for example provides training in the United Arab Emirates for the Iraqi police; other European countries are encouraged to think creatively along these lines.

If Europe wants us to stay, it has to help us

If the US wants to prevent Iraq from becoming a permanent base for Islamist terrorists, US troops have to stay in the country at this point in time. When approached reasonably, Iraq's neighbors Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan will be prepared to help the US create a democratic and stable Iraq. An Iraq breaking up or being dominated by fundamentalist Shiite clerics is not in their interest.

Al-Khalil

5. Transatlantic Cooperation

Iraq is only the most prominent example for the need for transatlantic cooperation. I would like to pose the question on a more general level: how should the US and Europe envision their partnership regarding the wider Middle East for the future?

Sommer

Both for the US and for Europe, a key challenge is the modernization of the Middle East. The question is not whether the region will modernize, but whether its mod-

Fischer

My advice to Europe:
Get out of the American boat.

Smyser

ernization will be violent or peaceful. We need to encourage the development of a modern Islam and of functioning civil societies in the Middle East by all means.

Today, the US with its immense military and financial resources can barely avoid the implosion of Iraq. Unfortunately, failure in Iraq with all its disastrous consequences cannot be ruled out. It may be that this battle is lost. That makes it all the more important to choose a suitable strategy for the way to a peaceful Middle East, and this strategy must be jointly developed by the transatlantic partners.

Smyser

I have been very discouraged by what I have heard this afternoon because it gives me the impression that the war in the Middle East will go on for a long time and may even expand. I fear that the Middle East may become for the United States what the Balkans were for Germany at the end of the 19th century.

America is heading for a
disaster in the Middle East

As some of you may know, the Balkans at that time were full of mutual resentments and of perceived and real injustices as well as of ethnic and religious strife. But Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of the German Empire—which was then the most powerful state on earth—refused to involve Germany in Balkan affairs on one side or another of various disputes. He acted as “honest broker.” For him the entire Balkan question was, as he said, “not worth the bones of a Pomeranian Grenadier.” At the Congress of Berlin, he caused a lot of anger because of his neutrality, but he kept Germany out of Balkan wars. Unfortunately, his successors did not inherit his wisdom. Germany began to engage in the Balkans. When it was all over, Germany was no longer the most powerful state on earth. Today, Americans are making a similar mistake in the Middle East, getting deeply involved. They may have noble goals, but they will end the same way as Germany did although they do not know it yet. As an American, I am sorry to say this, but it is the truth and we must recognize it.

One of the purposes of these meetings is to exchange ideas and make mutual suggestions. I have such a suggestion for the Europeans, and I hope those that are here will take it seriously. I urgently advise the Europeans to keep their distance from American policy. Do not get into the same boat with the Americans. If you are already in the same boat, get out and find another boat. That is the only way to remain out of what will become a sequence of terrible tragedies. Please follow your own course, whether it is the Barcelona process, your own dialogue, and your own aid programs. You may from time to time follow a parallel path with the Americans for a brief period, but keep your own agenda and make it clear



that you do. Not only for Europe's own sake, but for the sake of the Middle East that will need honest brokers. Even for the sake of the United States. There will be times when the Americans will need the Europeans to save a situation and there will be times when the Americans will need the legitimacy of the Europeans to preserve the interest of the West as a whole. It will then be good not to have been too closely associated with the United States.

I have not heard more dangerous advice for quite a while than the idea that Europe should get out of the transatlantic boat as far as the Middle East is concerned.

The Europeans shall not, I repeat not get out of the American vessel and build their own boat. We need the United States to negotiate with Iran, to press Israel on peace in the Middle East, and to provide stability in Iraq. Europe needs to stay in the American boat and influence its course. Besides, two boats could end up colliding.

Instead, as during the Cold War, American activism and European caution can today fruitfully complement each other. Today, the American campaign for democratization of the Middle East is beneficial but in need of European "checks and balances." Europe should tone down the self-righteousness and foster democracy and human rights in an approach closer to the Qu'ran and Islamic traditions. If the Western democratization campaign becomes a real dialog, not a series of naïve demands, it can change the political minds of many Arabs. Especially young people in the region are yearning for more participation. Today they often only have two choices: joining autocratic governments or Islamist movements. Europeans and Americans must join forces to strengthen outspoken reformists like Mr. Ibrahim, but without the crusading fervor all too often demonstrated by the Americans.

We have to find common ground between Europe, the United States and the Middle East based on dialog, understanding and shared fundamental values: freedom, democracy, human rights, market economy, and the rule of law. As the Danish cartoon controversy made clear, these values may conflict. You need to walk the fine line between respect for religious beliefs and freedom of expression, for example. The delicate task of finding the right balance can be fulfilled best by a democratic system—Churchill's dictum holds true in that regard, too: democracy is the worst possible form of government, except for all the others.

Volker

Pflüger

The Europeans shall not get out of the American boat

American activism and European caution complement each other

Volker



The Middle East presents us with a whole complex of interrelated challenges. While some of them are immediate crises and require short-term efforts, others are long-term issues—like the problem of Islamophobia in the West and the corresponding resentment against Western powers in the Islamic world. We need to find a transatlantic approach that allows both partners to contribute their respective strengths to effectively addressing this complex set of issues on its different levels at the same time.

Al-Kitbi Why do the EU and the US not deliberately divide and coordinate their policies? The US puts pressure on the regimes, the EU provides incentives for promoting civil society—a “good cop, bad cop” game on the level of international politics.

Moukheiber The West should use the individual assets of its different nations deliberately. If Europe has a better image in large parts of the region, make use of that fact!

Singer Europe should not focus solely on its own agenda but also on the coordination with the US. We need to combine our respective assets: Europe’s strength in building institutions and harmonizing legislation must be combined with America’s unequaled political weight and resources.

The US and the EU must move from the level of concepts and conferences to concrete programs. So far, the meetings we have had were mostly about having more meetings. For example, at the Forum for the Future, we had a whole session where we brought all the governments together and the big debate was about the next meeting date.

For serious programs, the US and EU
need more financial resources

To be able to implement serious programs, the US and the EU need to invest far more financial resources. The European investment in the Barcelona process and in the Forum for the Future is very limited. And the US concentrates its resources on military and police work while neglecting the challenge of reform and hearts and minds: the very strategy document of the U.S. government to winning the battle against radicalism, outlines 3 equal pillars. But spending on the first of the three pillars in the war on radicalism, offense, i.e. the military effort, costs about \$500 billion. The second pillar, defense—homeland security—receives about \$120 billion. But the third pillar, reshaping the strategic environment (supporting reform efforts, public diplomacy etc.) receives little over \$500 million a year. This is hardly adequate given the fact that this pillar is about sustainably fighting the disease while the other two are about fighting the symptoms.



Of course we need to operationalize our concepts and implement concrete programs. But I would not completely discredit the role of conferences. The CSCE was a roving conference that only met every three years—and it had a huge impact.

Volker

6. Turkey and Lebanon—Models for the Region?

Are there any positive models for the region?

Sommer

For a long time, Israeli and Syrian forces occupied Lebanon, and the country almost vanished in a civil war. Now that its democracy, a rare example in the Islamic world, has been revived, Lebanon can be a role model for the region, showing what can be achieved through the combination of internal and external efforts. Lebanon will soon start seeking foreign aid at a conference in Beirut, with a reform agenda attached. The electoral systems, parliamentary reform, independence of the judiciary, developing a supportive environment for civil society organizations as well as audio-visual media and anti-corruption policies were all ways in which institution-building helped democratization from within. Not only the EU and the US, but also the UN and the World Bank should take this opportunity to act responsibly and supportively.

Moukheiber

Lebanon and Morocco could be models of democratization which may trigger a domino effect. Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC) is unprecedented in the Arab world. Established in January 2004, its purpose is to examine human rights abuses committed by the government.

The Islamic world is in dire need of a democratic, liberal, secular role model—and Turkey is the only available candidate at the moment, despite recent progress in Palestine, Lebanon or Morocco. It is a very interesting paradox that secular Turkey is the only country in the Islamic world where an Islamist party came to power through elections. Prime Minister Erdogan's Justice and Development Party did not try to establish an Islamist state even though it shows no commitment to the Kemalist ideology.

Al-Azm

The Islamic world is in dire need of a secular role model

Syria is a good example of the impact and influence of the recent political development in Turkey. Loathing Turkey is deeply rooted in Syria, for reasons dating back to the days of the Ottoman rule, but also for reasons relating to present-day water supply and territorial lines. But recently the Syrian left, searching for examples of a

Only democratic countries can conduct a self-confident foreign policy vis-à-vis the West.

Al-Azm

functioning civil society and a convincing implementation of the liberal consensus in the region, discovered its fondness for Turkey.

Some Muslim Brothers in Syria also favorably compare the evolution of political Islam in Turkey with the assification and the suppression of political Islam in their own country. They argue that the Brotherhood has not produced a new political idea in four decades—with leaders in their eighties, this does not come as a surprise. In contrast, Turkey became an example for vivid, political Islam, that assumes power in a democratic way.

Even many Syrians are looking to Turkey as a political model

Both the nationalists and Islamists in Syria who have traditionally hated Turkey for its Kemalist ideology, abolition of the caliphate, Western orientation and its good relations with Israel, are now looking to it as a political model. After blaming Turkey and the Ottoman rule (nationalists speak of the “retrograde Turkish occupation”) for everything backward in the Arab world, they are now saying that Turkey’s achievements might have served Arab Muslim interests more than any other regime in the Middle East.

Democratic countries like Turkey can conduct a self-confident and independent foreign policy vis-à-vis the West. When the US administration prepared the invasion of Iraq in 2003, they wanted to open a Northern front in Iraq from Turkey. But Turkey’s parliament narrowly failed to approve the deployment of US troops on its soil and Prime Minister Erdogan consistently refused the United States’ request. President Bush could only acknowledge this outcome, because it was the decision of a democratically elected parliament. Which Arab president, prince or king could refuse President Bush on the basis of a decision from his undemocratic, submissive parliament without being laughed at?

Ibrahim

The Turkish model is a promise ...

The Turkish model is now frequently cited by everybody on the right, the left, and in the center of the political spectrum in the Middle East. The AKP’s story is not—as Mr. Al-Azm called it—a paradox, but a promise. Therefore, Turkey must be successful in its quest to join the EU. If Europe fulfils the Turkish promise and if the West consistently applies conditionality, there is a real chance that every country in the region will one day find its own way to democracy.

Esfandiari

... but only as long as the army acts as a watchdog and defends secularism

Unfortunately, I am unable to share Mr. Al-Azm’s optimism regarding the rise of secularism in the region. Mr. Ibrahim called Turkey a promise, but I wonder how Erdogan’s Islamist party would have governed Turkey, had the army not acted as the watchdog over the constitution and in defence of secularism.



Turkey is considered a reform model for the Arab world, even among our Arab colleagues here at the table. Why is that? Because Turkey has relatively stable democratic institutions and is currently reforming its institutions from the inside to meet European standards. What the Turkish model can teach us is the importance of democratic institutions. The main motive for Turkish institution-building is the wish to enter the European Union, though, which is in turn motivated by the European self-perception of the Turkish elites. The same cannot be supposed for Turkey's Arab neighbors. For them, Turkey could in turn be a model.

I doubt that many Turks see themselves as part of the Middle East and am even more skeptical that the Arab world will look upon them as such a role model. Turkish regional identity, Arab self respect and the Ottoman colonial legacy make this all but impossible.

But Turkey has successfully achieved the crucial task of regulating the relationship between Islam and politics through clear criteria. In Turkey, every political party has to abide by the rules of the secular republic. The AKP does not want to change the system and create a religious state based on Sharia law—they do not even claim a monopoly over Islam. In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups in the Arab world still claim that they represent Islam and still believe in a religious state based on Sharia law. At the same time, almost every political group, party, and most governments in the Arab world still exploit religious issues to achieve political goals. We need to integrate Islamists into the political system so that they can evolve into conservative parties, just as in Turkey.

The success of Turkey as a role model for the integration of Islamists is determined by four factors: 1. a structural authority, 2. broadened constituencies, 3. the feedback loop and 4. normative change.

1. Structural authority in Turkey's case means the strong position of the army. Its political supervision is vital for the political integration of the Islamist movement.

2. Once the Islamist parties are actively participating in the system, they are forced to broaden their constituencies and appeal to more voters. They are forced to abandon some of their radical policies.

3. The feedback loop: the longer an Islamist party plays by the rules set by the structural authority, the more willing it will become to abide by those rules. That is why "electoralization", the increasing use of elections to decide policy

Kepel

Kamal

The Arab world will not look upon Turkey as a role model

Piscatori

Turkey is the European Union's great responsibility and great opportunity.

Polenz



matters on all levels of society, is an important factor once democratization is unfolding.

4. As to normative change, Muslim societies need not only participate in elections but also accept them internally. Therefore it is necessary to establish a discourse taking into account historical and theoretical developments and need to discuss questions of democracy extensively.

Strikingly, the combination of these four factors occurred in Turkey without outside assistance, which led to the fact that the integration of the Islamist AKP began once democratic participation was allowed.

Polenz

Turkey is the European Union's great responsibility and great opportunity. It will not serve as a model for democratization for all Middle Eastern countries on a one-to-one basis, but it can prove that our democratic values—the rule of law, checks and balances, and human rights—are compatible with Muslim societies.

Al-Azm

Astonishingly, Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party are very anxious to lead Turkey into the European Union, which former French President Giscard d'Estaing once called a Christian Club. The Turkish army, guardian of secularism and modernity, is more skeptical about EU accession.

That is why the EU must leave the door open for Turkey. A membership perspective will prevent the Turkish army from once again interfering in civilian decisions and prevent that a fundamentalist Spirit gains the upper hand in the Islamic Justice and Development Party. Turkey can then be the living proof that democracy can function in the Islamic world. At present, the only well-known contemporary model of Islamic society is the Taliban regime in Afghanistan for which, by the way, the US carries a certain responsibility. Horrible as it is, it should no longer be the only one. Help Turkey to become an antidote to Taliban-style Islamism!

Singer

The EU must not be misleading about Turkey's admission chances

Some EU policy makers have claimed that Turkey's negotiation process is valuable in and of itself and the final destination does not matter. The final destination does matter in one important way: the Turkish people and moreover, the wider public in the Muslim world will judge the success of Prime Minister Erdogan's policy based on a simple factor, whether or not Turkey is admitted to the EU. Any intentional misleading of the Turks about their chances of full EU membership is very risky if not irresponsible.

Europe and the US are needed
in the Middle East.

von Weizsäcker

Reform in the Middle East needs a strong Turkey supported by the West. The question is not whether Turkey becomes a member of the EU. The crucial point is that Turkey can serve as a model of how other Islamist parties can be integrated into the political system.

If we reject Turkey, the EU will have produced another estranged and disappointed European neighbor. Plus, no Muslim country has ever been as close to the EU as Turkey is now. Disappointing the Turks and making them loathe the European Union will have disastrous repercussions for the entire Muslim world.

I want to thank our chairman, Theo Sommer, for his peculiar combination of severe discipline and tolerance. And I would like to express my gratitude to all of the participants, especially to those coming from the region. It is of the utmost importance that those from both sides of the Atlantic, the Americans and the Europeans, listen to who lives and works in the Middle East. We have again learned during these past days about the immensely rich and complex culture and history of this region that today presents us with an equally complex set of challenges. Europe and the US are needed here, I think. Their own history provides them with a responsibility for helping the region to overcome its difficult legacy and their own security interests do not even leave them the choice of distancing themselves. But if they want to contribute something useful, they must be willing to really learn. I have the impression that all of us have learned a lot here in Washington.



Pflüger

Reiter

Disappointing the Turks would have
disastrous repercussions

von Weizsäcker

