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Peace *and* Democracy? – The Post-Cold War Debate on U.S. Middle East Policies

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1. Introduction

In the years since the end of the Cold War, the Middle East has become in many ways *the* test case for U.S. policy in a unipolar world. The policies pursued by the world's currently most eminent global power toward one of the world's most penetrated subsystems do not only serve as a vivid example of the prospects and limits of the exercise of hegemonic power. They also reflect the long-standing debate between those who argue in favour of the promotion of political reform and democratization as a central U.S. foreign policy goal and those who support a more cautious approach that centres on what they consider to be more limited "national interests". The following pages will therefore be devoted to the analysis of the debates accompanying these competing approaches toward a region whose strategic and cultural significance puts it at the heart and centre of many U.S. foreign policy interests.

2. The Middle East in U.S. Grand Strategy

The question about the relationship between democratization and other U.S. foreign policy interests forms a central part of the debate on U.S. post-Cold War Grand Strategy. According to Posen and Ross, the latter can best be understood as constituting four ideal-type "visions" (Posen/Ross 1996/97).

The Neo-Isolationist approach did not view regional conflicts such as the one between Israel and its Arab neighbours as requiring substantial U.S. involvement and deemed it advisable to leave the quest for its solution to the regional actors themselves (Posen/Ross 1996/97, 14). As will be shown below, many critics of U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East claim that the end of the close relationship with Israel would help defeat the kind of anti-American animosity Islamist terrorist recruiters try to exploit. Such a narrower definition of U.S. interests in the Middle East is also considered as having the additional benefit of withdrawing the United States from its role in the domestic conflicts between the Arab

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world's "pro-Western" authoritarian regimes and their Islamist opposition. In the end, the world's Islamist challenge could be as unimportant for the United States as "the nationalism of the Quebecois is for Thailand" (Karabell 1996/97, 86).

Washington's policymakers would thus be free to focus on what Mead termed the Jeffersonian call for the perfection of U.S. democracy (Mead 2001, 184). In isolationist thinking the question of whether a link between the Arab-Israeli conflict and democracy promotion in the Middle East exists and what this would mean for U.S. policy would therefore not arise. The conflict itself would not be relevant and democracy promotion would consist of leading by example. While neo-Isolationist Jeffersonian thinking has ceased to exist as a dominant political force in Washington, D.C., a long time ago, the outbreak of political crises in the Middle East continues to bring about repeated allusions to its language.

Critics of neo-Isolationist calls for U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East point out that the United States is not always attacked for what it does, but also for what hostile actors *believe* to have detected in its policies (Pillar 2001, 66-67). Also, the acceptance of a link between the status of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the level of anti-Americanism could lead to the conclusion that increased U.S. engagement toward a peaceful settlement might be a more efficient way of fighting regional hostility towards the United States. This line of reasoning finds its strongest support among the adherents of a Grand Strategy of *selective engagement* that focuses on stable relations amongst the most important actors of the international system. The United States would view regional conflicts only through the prism of possible negative implications for the stable relationship with other world powers and the security of the United States as well as the world economy's continued access to the oil resources of the Persian Gulf (Art 2003, 58-64).

This approach, which Mead termed the *Hamiltonian school* after the nation's first secretary of the treasury, puts particular emphasis on securing U.S. economic interests as exemplified historically by the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and George H. W. Bush

(Mead 2001, 87). Its major proponents with regard to the Middle East are, obviously, representatives of the oil industry and those members of the U.S. military industry who regard the region's Arab regimes as valuable consumers. Together with their regional partners they find their natural access points in the Department of Defence, which is interested in sustaining partnerships that facilitate the fulfilment of its strategic missions in areas such as the Persian Gulf and in offsetting the costs of the development of new weaponry, as well as in the career diplomats of the Department of State, whose professional socialization and regional expertise tend to make them more open to the concerns of Arab governments. The resulting reluctance to follow policies which these "Arabists" perceive as counterproductive has frequently earned them the ire of superiors who share the sometimes conflicting ideological outlook of the respective administration. None other than Francis Fukuyama, who once worked in the State Department's policy-planning staff, remarked that:

> „ [Arabists are] a sociological phenomenon, an elite within an elite, who have been more systematically wrong than any other area specialists in the diplomatic corps. This is because Arabists not only take on the cause of the Arabs, but also the Arab's tendency of self-delusion (Quoted in Kagan 1995, 7-8). "

These business- and military-oriented interests tend to collide with the interest in the secure existence of Israel. Critics such as Jerome Slater thus claim that the "support of Israel has never been in the national interest, *properly understood*" (Slater 2002, 165 emphasis added). By making this statement Slater adheres to a traditional Realist notion of national interest. However, in doing so, Slater and others put themselves in the position of deciding what the "national interest" of the United States is and, in fact, only put forward the interests of one powerful lobby while, for whatever reason, discarding other lobbies' interests. A contemporary and widely debated example of the irritation Realist thinkers feel over the societal input into foreign policy decisions is the book published by Mearsheimer and Walt on

what they broadly term the "Israel Lobby" (Mearsheimer/Walt 2007). As perceptive assessments have pointed out, their study suffered not only from a neglect of the input of the above-mentioned oil and defence lobbies, they also offered such a vague definition of who actually constitutes the "lobby" and what could be regarded as its successes that it left their work open to the charge of "incoherent" accounts and "uneven" evidence (Mead 2007, 161).

In contrast, liberal critics of this essentialization of the concept of the "national interest" have pointed out that the latter is better understood as the result of the interaction between a broad range of (competing) institutional and societal interests which all shape foreign-policy making in a democracy (Moravcsik 1997; Risse 1991). In fact, while a large number of organizations and think tanks attempt to channel popular sympathies for the state of Israel into the U.S. foreign policy decision-making process, they all tend to agree on barely more than the most general interest in Israel's secure existence. Especially the polarization of the Jewish communities in the 1990s over the Oslo peace process has resulted in a fragmentation of the "pro-Israeli" political discourse. The leadership of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Zionist Organization of America, Americans for a Safe Israel and think tanks such as the Middle East Forum tend to share the Likud's uncompromising stance toward the Palestinians. Israel's Labour Party and peace movement have their voices heard through Americans for Peace Now, the Israel Policy Forum and the New Israel Fund (Seliktar 2002).

What is remarkable about U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East during the second part of the 20th century is the fact that while the parallel pursuit of the two interests in the security of Israel and access to the region's oil resources has sometimes caused frictions with allies in the region (the Arab oil embargo of 1973), the U.S. has for the most part been able to achieve both (Quandt 2006, 56). Yet, it failed to initiate the kind of democratization drives other parts of the world witnessed during and in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War.

This last topic has recently received more attention from adherents of the Grand Strategies of "*Primacy*" or "*Cooperative Security*" (Posen/Ross 1996/97, 24 and 32). Representatives of both approaches try to turn the thesis of "democratic peace", which stresses structural and cultural causes for the explanation of the empirically observed phenomenon that democracies are more peaceful in their interactions (Russett 1994), into a guideline for foreign policy. What sets their treatment of the "democratic peace thesis" apart is the fact that for supporters of "*Primacy*" democratization is part of a drive to realize a "benevolent global hegemony" that forestalls the rise of global and regional competitors (Kristol/Kagan 1996, 20-21). Those who call for a Grand Strategy of "cooperative security" treat democratization as a means of addressing the transnational problems of an interdependent world and perceive the use of U.S. "soft power" as not only a more important, but ultimately a more cost-efficient means of democratization than the unilateral use of "hard power", i.e. military means (Nye 2004).

3. **Peace precedes democracy – the Clinton administration and the consensus of the 1990s**

As a young governor from a relatively remote Southern state, William Jefferson Clinton chose the topic of democratic change as a rhetorical weapon in his 1992 campaign oratory against the sitting president, George H. W. Bush.

> "From the Baltics to Beijing, from Sarajevo to South Africa, time after time this
> President has sided with the status quo against democratic change, with familiar tyrants
> rather than those who would overthrow them, and with the old geography of repression
> rather than a new map of freedom. (. . .) My administration will stand up for democracy.
> We will offer international assistance to emerging fragile democracies in the former

Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe, and create a democracy core to help them develop free institutions."[1]

Interestingly enough, Clinton's willingness to distance himself from George H. W. Bush's traditional "Realism" earned him the support of neoconservatives like Joshua Muravchik who at that time were already emerging as spokesmen for the push to topple Saddam Hussein. In particular, Muravchik was incensed by what he considered President Bush's failure to follow through with his promise of a "new world order":

> "In his moment of glory, Operation Desert Storm, Bush spoke visionary words about a 'new world order'. (…) any such order rests on the continued advance of democracy, because democracies behave more responsibly and peacefully. But Bush kept democracy off Desert Storm's agenda."[2]

As Muravchik and others would soon realize, Bill Clinton was bound to disappoint them as well. The beginning of his presidency was marked by the confluence of two developments that would shape the course of Middle East politics over the following decade. The signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles in September 1993, which had been negotiated mostly without U.S. involvement, let hopes prosper for the emergence of a "new Middle East" that would witness the end of old conflicts and the beginning of peaceful coexistence as the first step toward an eventual development along the lines of European integration. Such rosy scenarios not only had to face the challenges of Israeli and Palestinian veto-players, but also the rise of Islamist groups whose political agendas and willingness to resort to terrorist violence posed a direct threat to the stability of the United States' regional partners.

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[1] The 1992 Campaign: Excerpts from Clinton's Speech on Foreign Policy Leadership. New York Times, 14 August 1992.
[2] Joshua Muravchik, Conservatives for Clinton. The New Republic, 2 November 1992.

Washington's policy-makers would therefore have to weigh the short-term interest in the cooperation of authoritarian Arab regimes, whose domestic deficiencies had facilitated the spread of Islamist groups, and the long-term interest in genuine political reform against each other.

The fact that the regional actors tend to draw a connection between the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours and the broader regional context led Laura Drake to caution that the two seemingly separate trends of the legitimacy crisis of most Arab regimes and the U.S.-led efforts in the Oslo process towards regional integration would eventually intersect. In particular, Drake warned that the widespread impression that the U.S. supported undemocratic regimes in its quest for regional peace would ultimately discredit all diplomatic efforts and lead to the waning of U.S. influence (Drake 1994, 42-43). This challenge was summed up pointedly in a report by the Senate committee on Foreign Affairs which was published at the beginning of Bill Clinton's presidency:

> „The new U.S. Administration, which came into office pledging to shore up international support for democracy and human rights, will find its policies inextricably linked to the question of political Islam. The United States must assess whether and how its programs will effect the political composition and basic security of traditional friends and allies in the region (Pickart 1993, V)."

Such calls obviously raised the question of whether or not Islamist movements should play a part in the political reform processes in the Arab world. However, this aspect did not receive high-level attention. In line with the Hamiltonian approach that neglects the domestic political setup of countries assisting the United States in its pragmatic and non-ideological pursuit of national interests, the Clinton administration opted in favour of attempts to solve the Arab-

Israeli conflict and against the initiation or facilitation of an Arab democratic wave modelled after the post-Cold War Eastern European revolutions.

This was highlighted by the National Security Strategy of 1996, published during the heydays of the Oslo process. Its central concept of "engagement and enlargement" was meant to provide the Clinton administration with a foreword-looking theme for a foreign policy which critics warned had been ignored and lacked focus. Also, its claim that the expansion of the number of democratically ruled countries with a market-economy helped to protect the national security of the United States nicely tied the pursuit of foreign policy interests into the President's domestic agenda (The White House 1996). However, the National Security Strategy did not talk about it in terms of U.S. Middle East policy and limited democratization to the successor states of the Soviet Union and its former East European satellites.

> „We must continue to help lead the effort to mobilize international resources, as we have with Russia, Ukraine and the other newly independent states. We must be willing to take immediate public positions to help staunch democratic reversals, as we have in Haiti and Guatemala. We must give democratic nations the fullest benefits of integration into foreign markets, which is part of why NAFTA and the GATT ranked so high on our agenda. And we must help these nations strengthen the pillars of civil society, improve their market institutions, and fight corruption and political discontent through practices of good governance (The White House 1996, 23)."

While the Clinton administration was very cautious about the notion of a democratizing Middle East, it soon began to focus on stressing its disagreement with the vision of a "clash of civilizations". There, it could follow the direction of a speech in which President George H. W. Bush's last Assistant Secretary of State for the Near and Middle East, Edward Djerejian had already set the tone for all official statements on this issue up until today. He had stressed

that for the U.S. government the "Cold War is not being replaced with a new competition between Islam and the West. It is evident that the Crusades have been over for a long time" (Djerejian 1992). Robert Satloff, the director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, dismissed the latter aspect as a „cultural cliché" and challenged the U.S. government to formulate a position on the question of whether the establishment of sharia-based regimes would constitute a threat to U.S. national interests (Satloff 2000, 7). While critics of U.S. reluctance to push for democracy in the Middle East agreed with Satloff's observation that Djerejian should have indicated whether the United States would accept an Islamist regime elected in free and fair elections, they still praised the speech as an attempt to "build bridges" to the world of Islam (Gerges 1999, 84-85). This position found the endorsement of Robert Gates, who at that time served as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and would later join George W. Bush's White House as Secretary of Defence. In a testimony before the Democratic-led House Foreign Affairs Committee, he warned that the negative experiences of the Iranian revolution should not let the U.S. perceive Islamism as an inherently anti-Western and anti-democratic phenomenon (Gates 1992).

The great lengths to which the Clinton administration went in order to dispel any lingering impression that the U.S. government might share the view of Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington became evident when National Security Adviser Anthony Lake felt compelled to directly address his thesis:

> „Some theorists have suggested that there is no common ground for understanding between the West and the rest – only the prospect of confrontation and conflict. They assert that the United States, as the sole remaining superpower, should lead a new crusade against Islam. In the quest for a new ideology to rally against, they believe, fundamentalism would replace communism as the West's designated threat. The Clinton administration strongly disagrees. There is indeed a fundamental divide in the Middle

East, as there is throughout the world, but the fault line does not run between civilizations or religions. Rather, it runs between oppression and responsive government, between isolation and openness, and between moderation and extremism, and it knows no distinction by race or by creed" (Lake 1994).

This speech's focus on the distinction between "moderation" and "extremism" was one of the hallmarks of the Clinton administration's rhetoric on the Middle East. It was designed to gather Arab and especially Muslim support for its policies and pre-empt the attempts of hostile actors such as Iraq and Iran to undermine Washington's Arab partners (Wirth 1993).

One year earlier, Martin Indyk, at that time member of the National Security Council and later Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and two-time U.S. ambassador to Israel, had also used the venue of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, which he had helped create after having worked for AIPAC, to spell out the Clinton administration's broader vision for the region. In his speech, Indyk did not only announce the policy of the dual containment of Iraq and Iran, but also called for the establishment of an "informal alliance" between Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Turkey whose purpose would be protecting U.S. interests from "extremism" and "radical regimes" (Indyk 1993). Adopting the optimistic scenario of the "new Middle East", Indyk described the president's vision of peace preceding democracy:

"[The president] understands that the Middle East is finely balanced between two alternative futures: one in which extremists, cloaked in religious or nationalist garb, would hold sway across the region, wielding weapons of mass destruction loaded onto ballistic missiles; and the other future in which Israel, its Arab neighbors and the Palestinians would achieve a historic reconciliation that would pave the way for peaceful coexistence,

regional economic development, arms control agreements and growing democratization throughout the Middle East (Ibid.)."

Interestingly, Paul Wolfowitz, one of the leading proponents of the Iraq War ten years later, lauded the policy of dual containment as "a much-needed break with old notions of depending on a balance between the two to protect security in the gulf (Wolfowitz 1994, 40)." In what would be a hallmark of neoconservative thinking about the relationship between the regional conflicts in the Gulf and the Levant, he also described any lifting of the sanctions against Iraq with Saddam Hussein still in power as "a terrible setback for stability in the Middle East, including the very promising peace process" since the "accord between Israel and the PLO would not have happened without the peace process launched by President Bush or, even more fundamentally, without the U.S. victory in the Gulf War" (Wolfowitz 1994, 40 and 30).

Given the emphasis on seizing Oslo's window of opportunity and the containment of Iraq and Iran, the topic of democracy and human rights protection in the Arab world was relegated to the reports of the State Department's human rights bureau. Under the leadership of Assistant Secretary of State John Shattuck it repeatedly provoked angry Egyptian reactions with its publicly expressed concerns about torture, extrajudicial killings, long-term detentions and restrictions on the freedom of expression (Human Rights Watch 1994).

Djerejian's successor, Robert Pelletreau, supported the notion that a distinction between those Islamists who "preach intolerance and espouse violence" and those who are merely interested in the application of religious beliefs to the challenges of domestic and foreign policy exists (Pelletreau 1996). While this statement might be interpreted as leaving open the option of a constructive engagement in the case of eventual Islamist revolution in the Arab Sunni world, U.S. policies were designed to ensure that such a scenario would not materialize. With Cairo at that time being perceived as offering valuable diplomatic support for the U.S. in

the Arab-Israeli arena, the domestic stability of the Egyptian regime trumped all other considerations.

This strategic focus found its expression in strong rhetorical support for friendly Arab governments in their struggle with "Islamic extremism" as well as the fact that between 1994 and 2001 one third of all U.S. foreign aid went to Israel and Egypt (USAID). Echoing Indyk's central statement on the Clinton administration's strategic outlook, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake described a comprehensive peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours as the precondition for the fight against the kind of political extremism that tries to exploit the religion of Islam for its own ends. Peace in the region would free the resources necessary to tackle the political, social and economic causes of political extremism.[3] Lake's statement thereby subordinated the domestic political problems of its Arab partners to the common quest for Middle East peace. This allowed the regime in Cairo to detach its diplomatic performance from its (lack of) domestic achievements.

As Laura Drake had predicted, the U.S.'s reluctance to push for political reform forced it to become increasingly involved in the domestic struggle between the authoritarian Arab governments and their Islamist challengers. In 1995, President Clinton used the powers granted by the *International Emergency Economic Powers Act* to declare a "national emergency" with respect to the increasing level of violence targeted at undermining the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This put him in a position to freeze the financial assets of all persons and entities linked to those organizations that engaged in terrorist attacks in the region. According to President Clinton, the "acts of violence perpetrated by foreign terrorists" in order to disrupt the peace process amounted to a "threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the United States" (The President 1995, 5079-5081). The fact that Clinton not only mentioned those Arab and Jewish terrorist groups that operated within the parameters of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also those Egyptian groups that only targeted the

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[3] Anthony Lake, The Middle East Moment. At the Heart of Our Policy, Extremism Is the Enemy. Washington Post, 24 July 1994.

Egyptian government demonstrated how the domestic stability of Egypt came to be perceived as an essential ingredient of any meaningful attempt at Middle East peace.

4. <u>Peace follows democracy – the Bush administration's approach</u>

4.1. 9/11 and the Arab-Israeli conflict

In a statement on CNN television on 12 September 2001, the young Jordanian King Abdullah II declared that the attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., would have possibly not taken place had Israelis and Palestinians been capable of bridging their differences during the Camp David summit of summer 2000.[4] His view contrasted sharply with that of President Clinton's former Special Middle East Envoy, Dennis Ross, who denied any link between the status of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the events of 11 September 2001. According to him, Osama Bin Laden simply followed in the footsteps of other Middle Eastern actors who, like Saddam Hussein before, had tried to abuse this sensitive topic for their own propagandistic ends.[5] Michael Scott Doran, who would later join President Bush's National Security Council, pointed out that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians allowed the region's political actors to air their grievances which in themselves are not associated with the political aspirations of the Palestinians (Doran 2003, 20).

When Yasser Arafat, in contrast to his pro-Iraqi stance of 1990/91, decided to refrain from embracing a sworn enemy of the United States, Secretary of State Colin Powell praised the Palestinian leadership:

„whose leaders have rejected bin Laden's attempt to hijack their cause for his murderous ends. No, these criminals have no religion, and they have no human cause. Their goal,

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[4] CNN Live this morning. America under Attack: King Abdullah of Jordan Discusses Fight Against Terrorism. 12 September 2001. http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0109/12/ltm.03.html (accessed 17 March 2008).
[5] Dennis Ross, Bin Laden's Terrorism isn't About the Palestinians. New York Times, 12 October 2001.

and the goal of all like them, is to divide and embitter people. They are evil merchants of death and destruction (Powell 2001)."

The question of U.S. responsibility also coloured the ensuing academic debate. In a book published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Martin Kramer criticized the U.S.-based Middle East Studies profession for having failed to ring the alarm about the new threat of Islamist terrorism (Kramer 2001, Brynen 2002). Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum, which shares WINEP's pro-Israeli orientation, but distinguishes itself through a much narrower focus on the hard-line thinking represented by the Likud, declared his emphasis on supposedly unthinkable Islamist threat scenarios as vindicated[6] and warned the U.S. of the long battle ahead:

„ (...) every fundamentalist Muslim, no matter how peaceable in his own behaviour, is part of a murderous movement and is thus, in some fashion, a foot soldier in the war that bin Laden has launched against civilization (...) By recognizing the wide backing of bin Laden's evil for what it is, Americans must begin a process of confrontation with 10 to 15 percent of the vast populations of the Muslim world."[7]

Joel Beinin, former President of the Middle East Studies Association of America, defended his profession against Kramer's and Pipes' criticism. In his view, all those U.S. regional experts unwilling to share George W. Bush's "Manichean worldview" were subject to a campaign "against critical thinking on the Middle East" that found its expression in Daniel Pipes' website Campus Watch which was supposed to monitor "anti-Israeli" statements made at U.S. universities (Beinin 2004, 101-107). According to his colleague Alan Richards, the „neoconservative denial" of the social and U.S. policy-related causes of terrorism represented

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[6] Daniel Pipes, Getting It Wrong In the Middle East. New York Post, 5 November 2001.
[7] Daniel Pipes, Bin Laden is a Fundamentalist. National Review, 22 October 2001.

the "American version of the strategy of the 'iron wall'", which the leading revisionist Zeev Jabotinsky had deemed to be the most effective way of protecting the Jewish predecessor to the state of Israel (Richards 2003, 2).

Daniel Brumberg presented a possible compromise position with his call to differentiate between the hard core of "Islamist and nationalist ideologues" and the broader, not necessarily politically engaged public. While the former cannot possibly be influenced in their Anti-Americanism, the United States could help change the domestic and regional context in such a way as to decrease their influence (Brumberg 2002). This obviously raised the question of whether the United States would be prepared to honestly push for political reform in the Arab world.

The extent to which the Hamiltonian assumptions of the 1990s did not seem to be valid anymore was highlighted by an article former Clinton administration official Martin Indyk published in Foreign Affairs, the flagship of Washington's foreign policy consensus. There he admitted that because he had sensed a window of opportunity in the Arab-Israeli conflict, he had pushed back demands within Clinton's National Security Council and from the Department of State's John Shattuck to put the issue of democratization on the agenda of U.S. Middle East policy (Indyk 2002, 76). However, this "deal" had broken down with Egypt and Saudi Arabia's lack of will or capability to deliver during the Oslo peace process and the fact that on 11 September 2001 their domestic shortcomings turned into a direct national security threat for the United States. In contrast to his "dual containment" speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in 1993, he now declared political reforms in the Arab world to be a "national interest" of the United States.

This sentiment was shared by Richard Haass, the former director of the policy-planning staff at the U.S. Department of State and current chairman of the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations. He offered a similarly honest critique of past U.S. efforts at democracy promotion in the Middle East:

„Muslims cannot blame the United States for their lack of democracy. Still, the United States does play a large role on the world stage, and our efforts to promote democracy throughout the Muslim world have sometimes been halting and incomplete. Indeed, in many parts of the Muslim world, and particularly in the Arab world, successive U.S. administrations, Republican and Democratic alike, have not made democratization a sufficient priority. At times, the United States has avoided scrutinizing the internal workings of countries in the interests of ensuring the steady flow of oil, containing Soviet, Iraqi and Iranian expansionism, addressing issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, resisting communism in East Asia, or securing basing rights for our military. Yet by failing to help foster gradual paths to democratization in many of our important relationships – by creating what might be called a 'democratic exception' – we missed an opportunity to help these countries become more stable, more prosperous, more peaceful, and more adaptable to the stresses of a globalizing world" (Haass 2002).

This was even more important given the fact that the question arose whether Arab governments might have to acknowledge responsibility for the fact that Osama Bin Laden had such an easy time exploiting the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict for his own ends. Martin Indyk therefore urged the governments of Saudi Arabia and Egypt to reassess the dominance of anti-Israeli and anti-American voices in their respective countries and criticized what he perceived to be an

"anti-American consensus […] between Islamist fundamentalists on the right, who regarded Americans as infidels; pan-Arab nationalists on the left, who viewed Americans as imperialists; and the regime itself, which found it convenient for the Egyptian

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intellectual class to criticize the United States and Israel rather than its own government's shortcomings" (Indyk 2002, 82).

According to conservative commentators such as Barry Rubin, the authoritarian governments of the region did not want to see a peaceful conclusion of the Arab-Israeli conflict out of fear that this would increase domestic calls for democratic reform and the protection of civil and human rights. Since most of the Arab intellectual elite adhered to outdated ideologies that were as precarious as their "Soviet equivalents", no change in U.S. public diplomacy or even actual policy could bring about a reduction in the region's dominant anti-Americanism (Rubin 2002, 63).

At this point the general acceptance of the need to rethink the anti-democratic consensus of the 1990s on the Middle East converged with the Bush administration's decision to sharply break with Clinton's incremental, inclusive, micro-managing approach to the Oslo process and to adopt the Israeli government's position that the latter lacked a "partner in peace" on the Palestinian side. This perception was reinforced when the Israeli navy discovered the Gaza-bound vessel Karine A with 50 tons of Iranian weaponry on board. Arafat's perceived unwillingness to break with a policy of political violence undermined U.S. supporters, mostly to be found within Colin Powell's State Department, of continuing U.S. diplomatic efforts. In April 2001, the AIPAC had already been able to secure the signature of 87 Senators and 209 Representatives under a letter that not only demanded the closure of the PLO's Washington Bureau, but also supported Ariel Sharon's demand that President Bush should refuse to welcome Yasser Arafat at the White House as long as the Palestinian president did not declare an end to violence.[8]

At the end of this continuing disenchantment with Arafat's stance stood President Bush's by now famous Rose Garden speech of June 2002 in which he called for the political renewal

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[8] Alan Sipress, Lawmakers Criticize Palestinians. Washington Post, 6 April 2001.

of the Palestinian leadership (The White House 2002). While his open break with President Clinton's long-time negotiating partner underscored his dramatic turn away from the premises of the 1990s, President Bush added his support for the principle of "land for peace" that was enshrined in UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and thus even became the first sitting U.S. president to publicly support the idea of an independent Palestinian state. By elevating democratic structures to the status of a precondition for a comprehensive peace, President Bush was able to link the Wilsonian call for the region's democratic renewal with Jacksonian hegemonic projects and the Hamiltonian emphasis on the purported centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This led to the interesting twist that George W. Bush turned the 1990s policy of either democracy or peace to one of peace through democracy.

Here, President Bush's words and action began to resemble the recommendations of former Soviet dissident Nathan Sharansky whose book "The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror" would earn him an invitation to the White House to discuss its theses with President Bush in November 2004.[9] Since the 1990s Sharansky has held various posts in the Israeli government due to his leadership position within the nationalist Russian immigrant party Yisrael Beitanu, which he founded. Having described the establishment of democratic governance among the Palestinians as a precondition for peace with Israel, he told President Bush that he considered his Rose Garden speech to be the "greatest speech" of his lifetime since President Reagan had cast the Soviet Union as the "evil empire" (Sharansky 2005). U.S. observers might have detected a possible reason for such enthusiastic praise when they pointed out that in 2002 with the exception of the U.S. call for a freeze in settlement activity in the occupied territories Sharansky's public statements on the need for political reform among the Palestinians closely resembled central passages within President Bush's eventual Rose Garden speech.[10] Disparaging the neo-conservatives favourite bogeymen among the State Department's "Arabists", conservative

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[9] Dana Milbank, An Israeli Hawk Accepts the President's Invitation. Washington Post, 23 November 2004.
[10] Dana Milbank, A Sound Bite So Good, the President Wishes He Had Said It. Washington Post, 2 July 2002.

commentators such as Charles Krauthammer applauded the President's decision to adopt

Sharansky's line of reasoning as

> "a fundamental rejection of the Oslo conceit that you could impose upon Palestinian
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> society a PLO thugocracy led by the inventors of modern terrorism and then be
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> surprised that seven years later it exploded in violence."[11]

Independent observers such as U.S. Council on Foreign Relations' Henry Siegman pointed

out that for quite some time many Palestinians themselves had been issuing calls for the

political reform of the Palestinian authority, but had largely been ignored by the Israeli

government as well as by the Clinton and Bush administrations. He thus warned against

undermining Palestinian reformers by associating the call for reform with what was widely

perceived to be Ariel Sharon's rhetorical tool to delay the initiation of diplomatic negotiations

and justify the unilateral disengagement from Gaza.[12] In reality, Sharansky barely had any

impact beyond the formulation of official rhetoric that resonated with the Bush White House.

His opposition to the Gaza withdrawal as "encouraging more terror"[13] and the call for

political reform within the Arab world was met with more or less open scepticism within

Israel's foreign policy elite. He thus openly complained that "[t]hey see me as a lunatic from a

Soviet prison, disconnected from the harsh realities of the Middle East" and that Prime

Minister Sharon himself considered his ideas as having "no place in the Middle East" (quoted

in Benn 2005, 46).

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[11] Charles Krauthammer, Peace through Democracy. Washington Post, 28 June 2002.
[12] Henry Siegman, Yes, It's Broken. Now Fix It. Washington Post, 19 May 2002.
[13] Quoted in Milbank, An Israeli Hawk.

4.2. The Iraq War and the Greater Middle East Initiative

With democratization increasingly turning into the overarching public rationale for U.S. policy towards the Middle East's two central theatres of conflict, it was not surprising that President Bush continued to link the situation in the occupied territories with the fate of Saddam Hussein's regime. Only days before the start of the war with Iraq, President Bush used a speech at the American Enterprise Institute to stress his expectation that the demise of the old Iraqi regime will ultimately weaken the domestic opponents of Palestinian reformers (The White House 2003a). At his first appearance at the United Nations after the fall of Saddam Hussein, President Bush declared in September 2003 that "the progress of democratic institutions in Iraq is setting an example others, including the Palestinian people, would be wise to follow."[14]

These ideas fell in line with those voices within the Bush administration that had been propagating a Grand Strategy based on „primacy" since the end of the Cold War (Mann 2004). With regard to the Middle East they were supported by prominent academics like Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami who in their private conversations with Vice President Dick Cheney had stressed the positive regional effects they expected to originate from Saddam Hussein's fall (Daalder/Lindsay 2003, 130). In one of his public statements on the issue, Ajami considered a possible negative fall-out of the Iraq war to be „dwarfed" by the „disastrous consequences" of another U.S. failure to topple Saddam Hussein (Ajami 2003, 18). According to Bernhard Lewis, the United States only had the difficult choice between the neo-isolationist complete retreat from the region and the raw hegemonic pursuit of national interests („Get tough or get out.") (2004, 350). Former Director of Central Intelligence, James Woolsey, made it clear that the regimes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia had to understand that

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[14] In Bush's Words 'Advance of Democratic Institutions in Iraq Is Setting an Example'. New York Times, 24 September 2003.

"[w]e want you nervous. We want you to realize that now, for the fourth time in a hundred years, this country and its allies are on the march, and that we are on the side of those whom you most fear. We are on the side of your own people."[15]

Against such thundering rhetoric stood the combined "Realist" scepticism of Washington's traditional foreign policy establishment. In a typical example of Beltway politics, an internal State Department document titled *Iraq, the Middle East and Change: No Dominos* was leaked to the press in the last week before the war. Its authors argued that a precipitous introduction of elections would lead to the establishment of Islamist regimes unless the region's social, political and economic problems were equally addressed.[16] This warning resembled a *Policy Brief* issued by the *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* in October 2002 which stressed the lack of necessary preconditions for sustainable democratic change in the region. While its authors deemed such a change to be possible, they made it clear that they expected such an undertaking to be a decades-long commitment which could easily lack the required support of the U.S. public (Ottaway/Carothers/Hawthorne/Brumberg 2002). Critics of the aggressive neo-conservative rhetoric about the Iraqi "role model" also remarked that other regional actors might feel compelled to sabotage the U.S.-led reconstruction of post-Saddam Iraq in order to prevent Washington from pushing for further change (Alterman 2003, 159).

The long-term vision of a democratic redrawing of the mostly authoritarian Middle Eastern political landscape increasingly dominated President Bush's efforts to press a reluctant Congress into appropriating the funds the executive demanded for the pursuit of its policies toward post-Saddam Iraq. In his November 2003 speech at the *National Endowment for Democracy*, the institution which President Reagan had founded twenty years earlier to support the global spread of democracy, President Bush announced that

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[15] James Woolsey, At War for Freedom, in: The Observer, 20 July 2003.
[16] Greg Miller, Democracy Domino Theory 'Not Credible', in: Los Angeles Times, 14 March 2003.

„[s]ixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe - because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty" (The White House 2003b).

While liberal Arab commentators like Shafeeq Ghabra, former president of the American University in Kuwait, picked up President Bush's Reaganesque rhetoric by announcing it to be about time to „tear down the Arab wall of authoritarianism"[17], U.S. commentators like Martin Indyk criticized the lack of new programmes or, in the case of the Council on Foreign Relations' Judith Kipper, even went so far as to claim that the questioning of long-standing U.S. positions on the Middle East inherent in the president's "campaign speech" did "not make us safer".[18]

Despite such criticism President Bush stuck to his message of democratization in a speech he gave during a visit to the United Kingdom in late 2003. There he not only thanked the government of Tony Blair for supporting the Iraq war, but also laid out a transatlantic vision for democratic change in the Middle East that featured many of the central arguments of his historic speech he had given only days earlier in Washington, D.C.:

"We must shake off decades of failed policy in the Middle East. Your nation and mine, in the past, have been willing to make a bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. Longstanding ties often led us to overlook the faults of local elites. Yet this bargain did not bring stability or make us safe. It merely bought time, while problems festered and ideologies of violence took hold. As recent history has shown, we cannot turn a blind eye to oppression just because the oppression is not in our own backyard. No longer should we think tyranny is benign because it is temporarily convenient.

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[17] Shafeeq Ghabra, It's Time to Tear Down the 'Arab Wall', in: Washington Post, 23 November 2003.
[18] Quoted in Terence Hunt, Bush: Mideast Must Move Toward Democracy, in: Washington Post, 7 November 2003.

Tyranny is never benign to its victims, and our great democracies should oppose tyranny wherever it is found (The White House 2003b)."

In order to demonstrate that his focus on democratization was not all about (retrospectively) justifying the war in Iraq, President Bush followed up on his historic November 2003 speech with what came to be known as the *Greater Middle East Initiative*. At its core was the exchange of the promise of Middle Eastern countries to engage in political and economic reforms for U.S. support in their efforts to join the World Trade Organization and establish closer security and military ties with the United States and Europe.[19]

Egypt's authoritarian ruler Hosni Mubarak quickly took the lead in attacking the proposal which had been prematurely leaked to the pan-Arab newspaper al-Hayat. He accused the Bush administration of behaving as if the "region, its countries, peoples and societies" would not exist and predicted "chaos" in the event of total political freedom.[20] Saudi Foreign Minister Sa´ud al-Faisal declared in a speech before the *European Policy Centre* that a democratization drive based on the model of the Helsinki process of the 1970s and 80s lacked attractiveness since this very process had led to the disintegration of a country and turned the Russians into the "most unfortunate" peoples of the past two decades.[21] At their meeting in February 2004 Mubarak and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah insisted that reforms could not be imposed "from outside" and had to be in line with "Arab identity".[22]

In the U.S., President Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, heavily criticized the circumstances of the eventual official announcement of the initiative:

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[19] Robin Wright/Glenn Kessler, Bush Aims for 'Greater Mideast' Plan, in: Washington Post, 9 February 2004.
[20] Neil MacFarquhar, Arab Leaders Seek to Counter U.S. Plan for Mideast Overhaul, in: New York Times, 4 March 2004; Steven R. Weisman/Neil MacFarquhar, U.S. Plan for Mideast Reform Draws Ire of Arab Leaders, in: New York Times, 27 February 2004.
[21] Kingdom Warns US Against Imposing Reforms. Arab News, 20 February 2004, http://www.arabnews.com/?artid=39792 (accessed on 26 February 2004).
[22] P.K. Abdul Ghafour, 'No Reforms under Foreign Pressure', in: Arab News, 2 March 2004, http://www.arabnews.com/?artid=40442.

„For starters, the democracy initiative was unveiled by the president in a patronizing way: before an enthusiastic audience at the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington policy institution enamored of the war in Iraq and not particularly sympathetic toward the Arab world. The notion that America, with Europe's support and Israel's endorsement, will teach the Arab world how to become modern and democratic elicits, at the very least, ambivalent reactions. (This, after all, is a region where memory of French and British control is still fresh.) Though the program is meant to be voluntary, some fear that compulsion is not far behind."[23]

In contrast to Brzezinski's assessment, the *Washington Post* editorialized against the critics of the initiative. It portrayed the demands for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict to precede any serious attempt at political reform in the Arab world as part of the "decade old rhetoric" that was as empty as the "nationalism and socialism which the regimes in Egypt and Syria are based on".[24] Even Bill Clinton himself advised the region's representatives assembled at the U.S.-Islamic Forum in Doha/Qatar to not let conflict divert attention from the need for political and economic reform (Clinton 2004).

5. Democracy versus peace – the Bush administration's failure (?)

The beginning of the year 2005 witnessed something of a "perfect storm" with regard to the chances of implementing a democratic reform agenda in the Middle East. In the United States, President Bush had just been re-elected with a historically small margin of victory that could still be construed as demonstrating U.S. popular support, thus providing him with some sort of "political capital" to spend. In the Arab world, the powerful symbolism of the first Iraqi elections in half a century and the election of Mahmoud Abbas as the successor to the late

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[23] Zbigniew Brzezinski, The Wrong Way to Sell Democracy to the Arab World, in: New York Times, 8 March 2004.
[24] The Arab Backlash. Washington Post, 10 March 2004.

Yasser Arafat seemed to create a new opening for the administration's self-imposed Herculean task of democratizing the region *and* solving the Arab-Israeli conflict.

President Bush therefore declared the spread of freedom to be the central theme of his second term in office and promised to push for the establishment of a democratic Palestinian state by the end of his presidency (The White House 2005). The fact that Cairo decided to move against secular opposition leader Ayman Nour only days after Bush's speech was widely regarded as a direct affront by Washington's press corps.[25] It became obvious that the White House shared this assessment when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice did nothing to stop the spread of speculations that she considered cancelling a joint summit of the G8 and Arab countries in protest of Nour's arrest.[26] Only days later, Hosni Mubarak announced constitutional changes to allow the holding of multiparty elections, even though only weeks before he had predicted negative consequences for the "security and stability" of the country in such an event.[27]

In her forceful speech at the American University in Cairo in June 2005, Condoleezza Rice seemed to echo the sentiment of Egypt's liberal opposition by repeating President Bush's dictum that "sixty years of stability at the expense of democracy" had meant that neither had been achieved and demanded an end to the state of emergency in Egypt (Rice 2005a). Although her demand for independent local and international election observers was not met, one of her spokesmen would later portray the presidential elections as a „historic step" which would „enrich the political dialogue in Egypt for many years to come".[28] A more sceptical International Crisis Group report described the election as a "false start for reform" since "conditions for a genuinely contested presidential election simply did not exist" (2005, I).

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[25] Egypt's Brutal Answer. Washington Post, 24 February 2005.
[26] Glenn Kessler, Rice Drops Plans for Visit to Egypt, in: Washington Post, 26 February 2005.
[27] Maamoun Youssef, Egyptian President Orders Election Changes, in: Washington Post, 26 February 2005; Mubarak to nominate himself for Elections, rejects Constitutional Changes, in: Arabic News, 31 January 2005, http://www.arabicnews.com.
[28] Daniel Williams/Robin Wright, Controversy Swirls over Egypt Vote, in: Washington Post, 9 September 2005.

In many respects, Egypt's elections for national assembly would also prove to be disappointing for the United States. Not only did Mubarak's one time liberal challenger Ayman Nour loose his seat against a former member of Egypt's security services; low voter participation of around 25 percent and widespread violence against voters at polling stations in districts where Islamists did well also substantially undermined the election's credibility.[29] In late December 2005, the House of Representatives adopted a non-binding Concurrent Resolution which recognized the "promotion of freedom and democracy" as a national interest of the U.S. and asked the Bush administration to base future inquiries to Congress concerning foreign aid to Egypt on the extent to which Cairo addressed the necessity of lifting the state of emergency, the state monopoly over the printing press, the respect of peaceful demonstration and access for local and international observers to future elections.

The first public statements of the Muslim Brotherhood, who had been able to increase the number of its seats from 17 to 88 in the 454 seat assembly, raised concerns about the potential impact on U.S. Middle East policy. On the one hand, its leader, Mohammed Akef, declared that it would neither "recognize, nor fight" Israel and refrain from any involvement in the political decisions of Hamas, its organizational offspring in the Palestinian territories. On the other hand, however, he praised the "noble resistance" in Iraq with its "noble" methods, described Israel as a soon to disappear "cancer" and the holocaust as a myth.[30]

Despite the Egyptian experience the U.S. government decided to push aside the private warnings of Israeli foreign minister Zipi Livni in December 2005 and to support Mahmoud Abbas' call not to postpone the elections for the Palestinian legislative council. For Secretary of State Rice and her team of counsellors such a postponement would have only worsened

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[29] Abeer Allam, A Political Rival of Mubarak Loses His Seat in Parliament, in: New York Times, 11 November 2005.

[30] Michael Slackman, Egyptian Leader of Muslim Group Calls Holocaust a Zionist 'Myth', in: New York Times, 23 December 2005; Neil MacFarquhar, Will Politics Tame Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood?, in: New York Times, 8 December 2005.

Fatah's credibility problem.[31] How surprising Hamas' eventual election victory must have been might be gleaned from a statement Secretary Rice had made during her campaign for electoral reform in Egypt in the summer of 2005. There she had challenged the notion that free elections would necessarily bring radical Islamists to power:

> „I don't know who would win a completely free and fair election. (…) it's not at all evident to me that the most extreme factions win. In fact, I think you could make the opposite argument, which is that if people have to go out and campaign, they have to go out and get people's votes, and people can vote not just freely and fairly but secretly, it would be very interesting to see whether people would, in fact, vote for a platform that said our platform is to kill innocent people and take away your rights and send your children off to be suicide bombers or to fly airplanes into buildings. And the good thing about a campaign is that the media should and can ask questions that expose what the true platform and campaign would be. (…) Now, it's not a perfect safeguard and to a certain extent you have to trust the people, but we believe in the United States that what the absence of political openness and a press that has the opportunity to examine what political leaders are doing in an open way, that that has produced these dark shadows in which extremists can actually operate" (Rice 2005b).

On the other hand, the results of the Palestinian elections do not repudiate Rice in as stark a manner as some commentators have tried to make the general Western public believe. Hamas's overwhelming victory was, to a large extent, not more than a reflection of the complexities of Palestinian election law and incompetent campaigning on the part of Fatah. One half of the 132 available seats were determined through proportional representation while for the other half a simply first-past-the-post principle was applied. A well-thought out recruitment plan and internal divisions within Fatah that saw many candidates standing against each other thus splitting the secular vote allowed Hamas to gain 74 seats with only 45

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[31] Steven R. Weisman, Rice Admits U.S. Underestimated Hamas Strength. New York Times, 30 January 2006.

percent of the votes. The fact that even under extraordinarily favourable political circumstances Hamas could not manage to gain the majority of the votes against its secular opponents amongst the Palestinian political parties serves as another indicator that Islamist parties might constitute the strongest opposition, yet are unable to generate the support of the majority of the population.

The popular charge of "double standards" in U.S. foreign policy tends to neglect the fact that the U.S. has been rather consistent with its public statements on the possibility of working relationships with Islamist movements. At the beginning of the Bush administration's democratization drive in the Middle East, Richard Haass, then director of the policy-planning staff at the Department of State, had picked up where his Democratic and Republican predecessors had begun laying out the official U.S. stance during the 1990s. According to him U.S. relations with any „fairly elected" government would only depend on how the latter would "treat its own people" and how it would behave on the „international stage" with regard to the questions of „terrorism, trade, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and counter-narcotics" (Haass 2002).

The Bush administration's democratization drive suffered yet another setback when in the summer of 2006, Hezbollah's attack on a military patrol guarding Israel's border led to a military response by Israel's army. The White House was suddenly faced with the dilemma that the unilateral, military-based form of counter-terrorism chosen by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his Socialist Minister of Defence Amir Peretz undermined Lebanon's pro-western government. At this point the short-term interest in the defeat or at least significant weakening of those forces whose goals were "escalation and the widening of the battle field"[32] by threatening Israel and preventing any success in the peace process took precedence over the long-term interest in the democratization of the region. The Bush administration's Jacksonian conviction that regional change can be brought about by military means found

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[32] Assistant Secretary of State David Welch quoted in Robin Wright, Options for U.S. Limited As Mideast Crises Spread. Washington Post, 13 July 2006.

reflection in the statement of George W. Bush's long-time confidant and adviser Dan Bartlett, that the President "mourns the loss of every life", but believes that "out of this tragic development" a "moment of clarity" arises which helps to tackle the "roots" of the violence[33] as well as Condoleezza Rice's description of the events as the "birth pangs of a new Middle East".[34]

The Israel-Hezbollah war of summer 2006 therefore highlighted the problems the Bush administration faced when it tried to separate the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict from its other regional interests or even tried to subordinate it to the pursuit of the latter. Rice's counsellor Philip Zelikow acknowledged as much during remarks at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy which a State Department spokesman later hurried to describe as private opinion:

"For the Arab moderates and for the Europeans, some sense of progress and momentum on the Arab-Israeli dispute is just a sine qua non for their ability to cooperate actively with the United States on a lot of other things that we care about. We can rail against that belief; we can find it completely justifiable, but it's fact. That means an active policy on the Arab-Israeli dispute is an essential ingredient to forging a coalition that deals with the most dangerous problems. I would take that even further. I would say that it is essential for the state of Israel because, in some ways, I do not believe that the Palestinian threat, per se, is the most dangerous threat to the future of the state of Israel. If Israel, for example, is especially worried about Iran and sees it as an existential threat, then it's strongly in the interest of Israel to want the American-led coalition to work on an active policy that begins to normalize that situation. It's an essential glue that binds a lot of these problems together. And so ironically, even if your primary concern is not the

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[33] Quoted in Michael Abramowitz, In Mideast Strife, Bush Sees a Step to Peace. Washington Post, 21 July 2006.
[34] Quoted in Robin Wright, As Mideast Smoke Clears, Political Fates May Shift. Washington Post, 13 August 2006.

Palestinian danger, you have to give it primary attention while you're looking at other problems as well (Zelikow 2006)."

The choice of Robert Gates as the new secretary of defence further strengthened those who adhered to a more consensual approach to U.S. Middle East policy. Donald Rumsfeld's successor had been part of the Iraq Study Group which over strong Israeli objections had described a stronger focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict as a way of generating regional support for the U.S. position in Iraq (United States Institute of Peace 2006).[35]

This task was made easier from the point of view of the Bush administration when Hamas' violent power grab in Gaza effectively ended the power-sharing agreement with Fatah and relieved the United States from having to find an answer on how to deal with Hamas. The ensuing diplomatic frenzy culminated in the Annapolis conference of November 2007 and a new peace process of the same name that was intended to produce a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinian leadership around President Mahmoud Abbas by the end of President Bush's presidency.

The convening of the Annapolis conference was not only meant to create a new push for serious negotiations between Israel and the moderate Palestinians, but also to engage the Arab world in Iran's containment. It could therefore be interpreted as an implicit acknowledgement on the part of the Bush administration that the plan to subordinate the Arab-Israeli conflict to a wider regional democratization drive had failed. Ironically, this led to a situation where the Middle East policy of George W. Bush's administration began to resemble more and more the traditional approach of George H. W. Bush's White House of regional stability and diplomatic engagement which since the early 1990s had been the subject of much neoconservative ridicule.

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[35] Israel Rejects Iraq Study Group Proposals. CBS News.com, 7 December 2006, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/12/07/world/main2237127.shtml (accessed 17 March 2008).

6. __Conclusion__

While the question of a possibly mutually reinforcing relationship between democracy and peace has been receiving ever greater attention, so far U.S. policy-makers have not been able to develop a truly sustainable policy. Even though the end of the Cold War had in many regional contexts put an end to the notion that the U.S. had to choose between the pursuit of either democracy or other "national interests", the Middle East long stood as an example of a region where "exceptional" circumstances prevented a similar change in course.

Under the Clinton administration, peace was to come at the expense of democracy, or at the most, as a precondition for political reform. By framing the issue in this way, U.S. diplomats were able to justify devoting all the energy and resources into the exploitation of what was widely considered to be a diplomatic window of opportunity. At the end, the triple crises of Camp David's failure, the al-Aqsa-Intifada and 9/11 demonstrated the futility of this approach.

The wide-spread acceptance of that fact meant that the incoming Bush administration's attempt to couch its own strategic outlook in the terms of democratization and political reform would resonate positively within the U.S. foreign policy debate. In the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the call for the democratization of the Palestinian Authority fell in line with the Israeli and U.S. perception that Israel did not have a true partner for peace on the Palestinian side and should therefore rely on unilateral initiatives.

President Bush's approach to the Middle East differed not only through his stronger focus on democratization in the Arab world, but also the public link of the Arab-Israeli conflict with the situation in the Gulf. In the end, the Bush administration's democratization drive suffered from the fact that it was, in fact, as much subjugated to a more general strategic calculus as was the case during the 1990s. Instead of constituting a mutually re-inforcing relationship, democratization and peace suddenly appeared to hinder each other.

As critics of an over-zealous, ideological application of the "democratic peace thesis" to the Middle Eastern political context have pointed out, the observation of a stable peace between democracies should not lead to the conclusion that peace between non-democracies is not possible (Ish-Shalom 2006, 583). Still, given the historical pattern of Arab regimes blaming domestic failures on "Zionist scheming" or the state of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the question remains valid as to whether it can truly be in the interest of the Arab world's authoritarian regimes to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Whether democracy is a result or precondition of peace is more than an academic question, it cuts to the heart of U.S. attempts to forge a sustainable Middle East policy.

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