

Promoting Democracy as a Key Element of a Smart Long-Term Strategy
To Undermine, Isolate and Ultimately Defeat Radical Islamist Terrorism

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Six years after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, the United States, Europe, and most of the rest of the world still face serious threats of deadly terrorist violence from the current manifestations of Al Qaeda, and other radical Islamist networks loosely affiliated with it, inspired by it, or emanating from similar ideological origins and political and social grievances. My overarching argument here is that these groups pose a fundamentally political challenge, which can only be effectively contained and ultimately defeated with a political strategy that undermines their ideological cum religious challenge to the existing order, within their countries and globally.

Defining the Problem

The problem, then is not just a military or security one. We must look to the political, social, cultural, and economic grievances that are driving mobilization by and recruitment to Islamist terrorist networks, as well as the broader milieu of sympathy and support that enable terrorist cells and leaders to survive and operate. Certainly, we have to appreciate how broader geopolitical grievances and stresses in the Middle East feed the climate of anger, frustration, humiliation, and insecurity. I cannot address in any detail here the geopolitical dimensions of the problem, except to state (without having scope for explanation and justification) that we cannot

get dramatic traction on the radical Islamist terrorist challenge without breakthroughs on the geopolitical front, particularly in the Middle East. These must involve a viable peace between Israel and the Palestinians, based on a two-state solution; a broader peace between Israel and its neighbors; stabilization of Iraq in some way short of disintegration or the establishment of an Islamic state (or mini-states); and then the gradual withdrawal of American military forces from most or all of Iraq and much of the rest of the region. Eventually, it will need to—and I believe it can and will—involve a transition in Iran from the current decrepit Islamic state, which is gasping for legitimacy, to a pluralistic democracy that will substantially separate religion and politics. Neither am I going to address the need for European countries to find ways to more effectively integrate their Muslim populations, and give them dignity and voice.

These challenges must be addressed, but doing so will not be enough. To blunt and reverse the radical Islamist challenge, we also need change within the conservative, authoritarian Muslim states, particularly in the Arab world, that now breed the social and political frustrations that feed violent, extremist Islamist ideologies and movements. We have to address the failure of so many Muslim countries and societies, particularly in the Arab Middle East but also in countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, to provide development, social justice, political voice and human dignity. Both the geopolitical factors and the internal domestic ones feed into a broad sense of humiliation, subordination, and shame which seeks psychological release and political vindication. Unless we grasp this element of psychological affliction, the feelings of symbolic and moral as well as practical injury, we cannot understand why prosperous middle-class professionals, many of them resident in Europe (and even the U.S.) and some of them second-generation immigrants and therefore even citizens, are recruited to the terrorist cause. The cause is not just about immediate tangible grievances—the lack of dignified jobs, and decent

education and housing. It is also about intangible feelings of failure, inferiority, and powerlessness, and therefore the burning, angry determination to show the West, to show the world, “I am somebody, I can be powerful, and I will show you how in a way you won’t forget.”

It is important to underscore that the underlying problems of humiliation, hopelessness, disempowerment, and marginalization are likely to intensify in many of these countries over the next few decades unless governance radically improves and development sharply lowers birth rates. Countries like Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Pakistan have bulging youth populations (with the majority of the population under 25, and fully a third under the age of 15) that generate massive demands for education, jobs, and social services. Egypt must generate over a half million jobs a year, just to keep its economic nose above water for this rising population of young people. Moreover, its population of 80 million people will double in the next forty years if birth rates do not decline much further.

The challenge is not just one of rising frustration and alienation, but also of increasing capacity and resolve from below to do something about it. These young Arab (and other Muslim) populations are better informed—or at least more independently informed—about what is happening in the world than they used to be, and better able to organize outside government control, most of all in the deep social interstices of Islamic religious and social welfare networks, and the intimately related political underground. Regime opponents are using the Internet with great energy to challenge the old order politically and intellectually. And they are not going to sit back and take it any more: that is one message of September 11. To the extent that the regimes of the Arab world do not reform politically and economically—so that they become more open, dynamic, just, and democratic—they will erupt in one form or another over the coming years. What Tom Friedman calls the “global supply chain” of suicide bombers is one

form of eruption. The wave of venomous anti-Americanism is another. The rising threat of radical Islamist terrorism inside Saudi Arabia is another. Sclerotic regimes that cannot generate jobs and hope at a faster rate than the population is growing cannot persist indefinitely. And the market-oriented economic reforms necessary to unleash economic growth are unlikely to occur adequately (or at least to cumulate to something serious and sustainable) without democratic change, because unless governments have much greater political legitimacy, they will not have the nerve, and the autonomy from the decades-long accumulation of vested interests, to take bold and difficult steps. There is a demographic time bomb ticking in the Middle East, and it is going to sweep away a lot of Western-leaning regimes sooner or later unless real reform gets going.

Of course, later could be a long time later. I concede that. Knowing that—knowing how efficient, cunning, and ruthless is the state security apparatus in many of these countries; knowing the opportunism and insecurity of middle-class opposition groups that do not want to rock the boat; understanding that change always carries short-term risks—American policy makers have tended to opt for the devil they know and leave the longer-term future to the next Administration.

Normatively and conceptually, we are at a historic juncture, where moral imperatives—to support human rights and promote peaceful democratic change—and security imperatives converge as never before. After September 11, the political transformation of Middle Eastern regimes, toward greater freedom, responsiveness, transparency, accountability, and participation—and therefore a real capacity to achieve broad-based human development—has become not just a moral imperative but a necessary foundation for the security of Western democracies as well. Creating a new climate in the region that is much less conducive to hatred and terrorism requires a sweeping improvement in the character and quality of governance

The question is, how do we do promote these changes in such a way that the search for an Arab Kerensky does not yield an Islamist Lenin instead? That is the core challenge, and there is no obvious and easy answer, because we cannot even be sure who among the Islamists is a Lenin—or bin Laden—and who is a potential Erdogan. We have to find out. We have to change our analytic and political paradigm. Just kicking the problem down the road while clinging to the immediate repressive stability that the Mubarak regime provides may be a short-term option, but it is not a long-term option. Either Egypt is going to find its way to much better governance, capable of generating real development, or at some point it is going to explode.

Key Assumptions

My basic premises are as follows:

- We are engaged—again—in what John F. Kennedy termed (speaking of the Cold War battle against communism) “a long twilight struggle” against the enemies of freedom. Truly prevailing in this struggle (not to mention essentially eliminating this threat) must be considered a project that will run across decades not years.
- As during the Cold War, this global challenge involves a great contest of ideas and values, and a struggle for hearts and minds.
- Therefore we cannot beat something—a clear, morally passionate, ideologically intense challenge, now based (which Communism was certainly not), in the more consummate legitimating cloth of religion—without something else that addresses and ultimately redresses the grievances that have given rise to this challenge.

- The “something else” that blunts, contains, and ultimately saps and defeats the radical Islamist challenge must meet that challenge in its multiple dimensions: political, social, economic, and religious. It must be seen to be morally more appealing and practically more achievable than the radical Islamist alternative. **Politically**, it must afford voice and dignity to people who have marginalized, repressed, and silenced; it must offer basic democratic freedoms of expression, organization, contestation, and self-determination. **Economically**, it must offer rewarding jobs and opportunities for people who have been left on the margins, have no dignity, and see no hope. More broadly, **socially**, it must implement reforms to achieve greater inclusion and justice—a fairer, more decent society, and therefore sharp reduction of corruption and economic inequality. And it must come to grips with and accommodate the renewed search in predominantly Muslim societies (as well as many others) for a **religious** frame of reference for the moral (and even to some extent political) order.
- No one strategy—political, economic, social, diplomatic, or military—is going to be sufficient to address the overall threat addressed in this project. As during the Cold War, every element of our national purpose and power must be effectively deployed. We need better intelligence, more nimble, careful, but effectively deployable military, comprehensive and vigilant policing, and other “hard power” elements. But we cannot prevent another terrible tragedy and ultimately prevail with hard power alone. Unless we prevail politically, with a better alternative, we will fail.

- The political alternative is a constitutional democracy that will deliver much greater social justice, political responsiveness, and more vigorous and broadly distributed economic development than has been achieved to date in most of the predominantly Muslim states. To put it crudely or stereotypically, the objective should be to move most Muslim-majority countries, particularly in the Middle East, toward a democracy with some of the characteristics of Turkey today, where an Islamist-oriented party may rule, but with significant constraints on its power and respect for the rights of those with different religious (or even non-religious) orientations.

One other orienting assumption implicit in the above is to question the language of a “war on terror.” Does the concept of “war” do adequate service to the multi-dimensionality of the threat we face and to the crucial political, economic, and social elements of the response we must mobilize? And is it possible to achieve victory in any kind of military sense (or analogy), or might it be the case that we will have to face the threat for decades to come, while gradually shrinking it back to a more and more marginal, illegitimate, and defensive posture?

The Strategy: Promoting Democracy and Good Governance in the Muslim World

The Objective

If we want anything that would look like “victory” in the long twilight struggle against radical Islamist terror, we must achieve lasting change in the way Muslim-majority countries are governed, especially in the Arab world. The goal is not simply democracy but democracy with good governance, or a relatively liberal democracy that controls corruption, protects freedom,

and affirms the rule of law (in part through real independence of the judiciary and other institutions of horizontal accountability). My presumption is that such regimes could—as the AK Party has done in Turkey—secure greater political stability, draw marginalized and alienated people into the game of peaceful politics, create a more inviting climate for investment, therefore generate more vigorous economic growth, distribute that growth more fairly, and respond better to the agenda of unmet social needs. It is important to emphasize that such regimes in the Arab world, at least in their early stages, would likely be more illiberal in some respects: with less freedom for individuals to drink alcohol, watch pornography, express affection in public, express unconventional sexual roles and identities, and so on. These could result in some significant losses in dimensions of freedom, and there would also be broader threats to the freedom and dignity of women (though these rollbacks would be couched in the language of “protecting” women from threats to their dignity). I do not mean to minimize these dangers of illiberal cultural impositions by Islamist governments that might come to power democratically and observe democratic political rules while passing laws that diminish personal freedoms. Nor am I without considerable sympathy for middle-class, secular liberals in countries like Egypt and Morocco who prefer to stick with the authoritarian devil they know because at least they can live their personal lives the way they want. But if it is necessary to accept that part of the political compromise some of these countries are going to grope their way to politically is going to be that alcohol is banned from public sale and consumption, that would be a small price to pay for getting to a more legitimate, just, and responsive form of government. It is easier, down the road, to challenge the injustice of a government that denies its people ready access to alcohol or open sexual freedom than to challenge the greater injustice of a government that denies its

people freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to change their leaders at the next election.

The danger, of course, is that democratization would bring to power a much more fundamentally illiberal and undemocratic alternative, even one that would become an enemy rather than ally in the global struggle against terrorism. I will return to this legitimate concern later in the paper. For the moment, it is critical to be clear about the goal: not just electoral democracy, but a democracy that respects basic political and civil liberties, the rule of law, and the constitutional procedures and principles that would check its power and enable the people to remove it if it does not perform.

Ways and Means

Promoting democracy in the Arab world means taking some calculated risks. There is no way around this. My argument is that we can take calculated risks, by our own design, to get at the source of the problem in the coming years, or face bigger risks, feeding a much more formidable terrorist threat, with a much less friendly geopolitical situation, some years further down the road. It was political inertia and apathy—clinging to corrupt status quos—that helped to bring us 9/11. I think we need a new approach.

Part of the irony and tragedy of the impasse we have reached in American national security policy is that President George W. Bush was substantially right in framing the problem, but has been disastrously wrong in the unilateral, blunt and blundering means with which he has tried to bring it about. President Bush was right to identify the nature of politics in the Arab and Muslim worlds as a core source of the problem. I believe he was absolutely correct when,

addressing the National Endowment for Democracy on November 6, 2003, he declared a “forward strategy for freedom in the Middle East”: “Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe—because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export.”¹ The problem is that the Bush Administration set about to implement this vision in an arrogant, ignorant, and inept way, and then when the going got rough, it essentially bailed out of its rhetorical commitments, leaving democrats in the region abandoned and disillusioned. It is exactly the opposite of what we should be doing.

Clearly, we are trapped between two seemingly contradictory imperatives: the need to preserve the short-term stability of Arab regimes that have been friendly—or at least not explicitly and intractably hostile—to the United States, and the need to promote a deeper, more organic stability in the region through democratic reform, as President Bush has recognized and pledged repeatedly. Since September 11, 2001 and Bush’s identification of political stagnation and authoritarianism as a root cause of the terrorist threat we are facing, there have been a host of initiatives, some organizational—like the Middle East Partnership Initiative—some subtle, like quiet diplomacy, and one as unsubtle as a war and occupation to try to implement President Bush’s vision of promoting democracy in the Region. For a while, the Administration could claim that it was succeeding: elections in Iraq, with heavy turnouts that defied the threats of the terrorists; a Cedar revolution and then democratic elections in Lebanon; democratic elections—and electoral alternation—in Palestine; and a historic concession by Egypt’s authoritarian ruler, President Hosni Mubarak, allowing a contested presidential election and it seemed a more open and competitive race for parliament as well. Then came the results—the blowback. Radical

Islamists won or made deep inroads in all four elections. It seems that the Administration then woke up and said, “On no—where is this taking us?” Since then, one has not heard much triumphalist Administration rhetoric about the democratic credentials of the Hizbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or even the Shiite Islamists in Iraq. Since then, Mubarak has kept his presidential opponent, Ayman Nour, in prison and disgrace, thumbing his nose at the U.S., while we have chosen to focus on bigger strategic issues, like trying to stabilize the mess in Iraq and the Middle East.

In discussing ways and means, then, it is important to begin with the reality created by this sense of betrayal in the region, and the deep suspicion of U.S. motives and capacities among social and political forces in the region who want democratic reform (albeit with widely differing ideological agendas). The United States should not promise (and threaten) more than it can deliver. And it has to remain flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and learn from mistakes. But once the President of the United States commits to advancing the cause of freedom in the region and promises, we cannot walk away from these commitments and have any credibility left. President Bush was never more eloquent in his embrace of freedom and democracy than when he addressed a conference of democratic dissidents and activists from 17 countries in Prague on June 5, 2007. Freedom, he insisted once again, is “the most powerful weapon in the struggle against extremism.” Echoing the theme of his groundbreaking speech to the National Endowment for Democracy almost four years previously, Bush reiterated, “The policy of tolerating tyranny is a moral and strategic failure.”² Yet there was tyranny, creeping along with expanding American support in much of the Arab world (including extensive covert ties between intelligence agencies in the war on terror). There was Mubarak, entrenching himself in power and victimizing his opponents while the U.S. simply stood by and watched. After the

speech, one of the dissidents in the audience, the Egyptian civil society leader and former political prisoner Saad Eddin Ibrahim, told journalists, “I feel disappointed and betrayed by George Bush. He said that he is promoting democracy, but he has been manipulated by President Hosni Mubarak, who managed to frighten him with the threat of the Islamists.”³

If we are going to go down this road of trying to get at a crucial root of the problem that is threatening us—bad, corrupt, unjust governance in the Arab world—we need to have strong nerves, sophisticated analysis, and a long-term approach that is more consistent over time. On the one hand, since the agenda of promoting freedom and democracy in the region will inevitably run up against other geopolitical imperatives—including the need for security cooperation with these regimes to track and apprehend genuine terrorists—we have to lower our rhetoric a bit, be careful about what we promise, and craft a strategy for gradually encouraging and promoting democratic change that can be sustainable for the long haul. On the other hand, we need to recognize that not all Islamists are the same, that many of them are evolving in their thinking and practice politically, and that if we do not engage and encourage this evolution we will not be able to achieve anything else good and sustainable politically.

Talking to Islamists. This then leads to one of the most important new initiatives needed by the United States. A number of Islamist political parties, movements, and leaders in the Arab world have been evolving toward greater pragmatism, moderation and acceptance of non-violence, pluralism, and constitutionalism. For the first time, it is possible to envision Arab Muslim democratic parties, on something of the model of the Christian Democratic parties of Europe, that are inspired by religious faith and values but do not seek to impose religious law or doctrine on the society. In the Middle East, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in

Turkey has been the harbinger of this transformation. The challenge now, politically and intellectually, is to test the more moderate Islamist political formations and to press them—as Carnegie Endowment scholars Amr Hamzawy, Nathan Brown, and Marina Ottaway have urged—to clarify where they stand on ambiguous issues such as the weight and imperative of the *sharia* (Islamic law), peace with Israel, tolerance for non-Islamist options, and the rights of women and religious minorities. This can only be done through serious and sustained dialogue: between Islamists and the state, Islamists and other non-state political groups, and—yes—Islamists and the United States.

The United States should set about a new policy of vigorously encouraging political dialogue with Islamist parties and movements that have rejected violence as a tactic and signaled a desire to commit to the game of peaceful, democratic politics. These dialogues should take place in a variety of forums, official, semi-official, and unofficial. Beyond the usual think tank and academic conversations, they should involve American diplomats on the ground in these countries, and once some degree of understanding and common ground has been established, high-level officials from Washington as well.

Expanding exchanges. If we are going to engage democratic or potentially democratic Islamists and others in these societies who will be crucial in shaping the country’s political future, we not only need more American diplomats and informed interlocutors in the region, we also need to bring more people from the region to the United States, to study and visit. We have to confront a serious constraint that is damaging our ability to engage the region while adding to the frustration and at times humiliation that people feel at the hands of the United States. This is the vastly increased difficulty, since September 11, of getting a visa to visit the U.S., and the rude, undignified, and sometimes shameful treatment foreigners sometimes confront upon entry

into the U.S., even if they have a visa. To be sure, we need to keep terrorists and their active sympathizers from entering the U.S. But we need to do a better, fairer, and more expeditious job of vetting people and making distinctions. This will probably require a significant increase in the number of consular personnel we have available to process visa applications and interview applicants. And it requires some reorientation of our gatekeepers. Immigration officials need to understand that keeping out terrorists and criminals is not the only way their work serves or affects our national security. There is also the more subtle effect of the opinions people form of the United States as a result of their first engagement with it, upon entry.

Waging the war of ideas and values. On the plane of ideas and information, the battle can be fought at multiple levels. Direct personal exchanges and contacts represent one kind of level. But we need a broader, public diplomacy front. If this is going to be effective, it has to be credible. The independence and integrity of the Voice of America must be restored. We need to refashion our international broadcasting and programming to appreciate that the more open, pluralistic, and even at times self-critical are our public diplomacy efforts, the more credible they are and the more we open doors to dialogue and begin to restore our shattered image in the region. We need not only to do much more on the public diplomacy front, but with a vastly different attitude than the political control and self-justification of the Bush Administration.

Standing up for human rights. One element of greater consistency that is sorely needed in the region is American defense of human rights, especially the right of people to speak, publish, organize, and mobilize in pursuit of peaceful and democratic political agendas—whether those people are secular liberals or Islamists who profess commitment to democracy. If we are going to have credibility in the region and impact in addressing the social and political breeding grounds for terrorism, we cannot have two drastically different standards of concern. It

is not only the Islamists who must clarify where they stand. The United States must also clarify where it stands, and whether it means it when it says—as George W. Bush did in his second inaugural address—“The United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for liberty, we will stand with you.”⁴ That means that the United States must stand with Islamists fighting for freedom, even if Islamists critical of our policies, so long as we determine they are fighting for real freedom and not just the freedom to win power and impose a new and more dangerous form of authoritarianism. It means that every American ambassador in the region has to keep pressing the case for an easing up of repressive laws and practices and the release of political prisoners. And it means that these issues have to be on the agenda—prominently—when top American officials from Washington meet with their counterparts in the region.

Utilizing leverage. We cannot have a single strategy and set of tactics for all countries in the region (and beyond). Some countries, like Morocco, are much further along the path of political opening, and thus more could be possible in the short term. Monarchies have the option of a soft landing to constitutional democracy while retaining, at least for a time, some significant control of some strategic arenas of power, like the courts and the military (see below). Mubarak and the Egyptian ruling elite do not have this option, at least not so neatly. And some countries the United States has significant leverage over through its relations of aid, trade, and investment, while others—most especially Saudi Arabia—are clearly holding the aces in our deck as a result of their vast oil resources. With the vast amounts of American (and it is important to stress, European) aid that flow to countries like Egypt and Jordan comes real leverage. Where there are high levels of security dependence (as with Kuwait) there are also potential levers of influence, but the most delicate aspect of this proposed strategy is that with every friendly government in

the region, the levers of influence work both ways. The result is that oil prices rise or terrorist chatter intensifies, we opt for the low-risk, short-term course of surrendering our leverage in order to win cooperation from the regime. We need a more forward-leaning strategy.

There are three key principles we must bear in mind. First, our economic relations of aid, trade, investment, and tourism, not to mention our annual military assistance, provide important foundations for the stability of some Arab regimes, like those in Egypt and Jordan (as well as the Pakistani regime of President Pervez Musharraf, which is now the third largest total recipient of U.S. aid). Second, the European Union is also a major provider of economic aid, and our leverage will be much greater if we seek to utilize in concert with the EU. This is not an easy path, since the EU is much warier of pushing democracy and more nervous about the near-term risks of political change than even the United States. But we need to engage our European partners in the quest for a common strategy of trying to move the region out of its longstanding, debilitating stagnation, and to work, any such strategy must have some teeth in it. This means communicating to Mubarak and others that there will be serious and painful consequences—reductions in economic and military aid, and possibly the incremental application of some targeted sanctions against regime elites as well—if they do not ease repression, release political prisoners like Ayman Nour, and begin a serious dialogue with their own civil societies and opposition forces on a path of real political reform.

Creative thinking about transition paths. Promoting genuine democratic reform in the Arab world requires creative thinking about the possible parameters and paths of political transition. Opening up power does not necessarily require giving up all power, and I am not advocating here that the United States press for immediate transitions to full democracy throughout the region. In Turkey, the military and the constitutional court have retained power to

restrain what the Islamists can do to reverse the country's historic secularism. In Thailand, the monarchy has had significant informal power as a check on elected governments. Both of these checks diminish democracy—and at times have been utilized to topple democracy—but this type of constraint can be a useful crutch, enabling politically crippled Arab establishments to hobble out of the current stalemate. In some Arab states (especially monarchies like Morocco), Islamist parties committed to the rules of the constitutional game could come to power and be checked by unelected centers of power. Initially, this would be less than full democracy, but it could build up the mutual trust and restraint that would enable democracy eventually to take hold in the Arab world.

Different countries in the region will be able to move at different paces, with different sequences of steps, toward the necessary elements of democracy and good governance: free and fair electoral competition for control of parliament and government; societal freedom of expression and organization; a genuine rule of law, enforced and defended by a politically neutral and independent judiciary; and effective (therefore truly independent and professional) mechanisms of horizontal accountability to constrain corruption and abuse of power, including a counter-corruption commission, a human rights commission, an ombudsman, and audit agencies.

Aid to democratic organizations and institutions. There is much we can do to strengthen democratic civil society organizations, independent mass media, and formal institutions of democracy and good governance through financial and technical assistance, as well as training. These forms of assistance through the National Endowment for Democracy, MEPI, USAID, and similar vehicles need to be generously funded and professionally staffed. We need to have a long-term strategy of building up the civic and institutional pillars of a free and democratic society. But this cannot be done effectively if we have to get permission from

the host government before we can make a grant to an organization. We also need to recognize that aid to official institutions of government is not going to amount to much unless there is the political will to use the financial and technical assistance (for example to electoral commissions or the court system) to generate serious, independent institutions that will advance democracy and good governance, not necessarily serve the ruling elite or party. So we need to be tough-minded, independent, and creative about what we are funding, and we need to use our leverage to lean on the government to give these programmatic recipients the space to function without fear or serious constraint.

Promoting economic reform, opening, and dynamism. It will help a lot to lay the foundations simultaneously for a more pluralistic, competitive, and dynamic economy that provides sources of power and influence and significant opportunities for advancement outside of the state. Wherever possible, we should encourage and empower this process to move forward, with technical assistance, diplomatic encouragement, and specific inducements. There is a fundamental tension however that is difficult to resolve. To the extent we promote free trade agreements as a means to do this, we risk losing an important dimension of leverage for serious political reforms. Such trade agreements tend to be seen by authoritarian regimes as a gesture of political embrace and legitimation, and it is therefore better to hold back on these agreements until a significant threshold of political reform has been crossed, while pursuing specific projects to enhance economic competition, encourage new export-oriented sectors of production, and promote better corporate governance.

Implications and Assessment

This is not a strategy that is going to turn the corner within a few years. It is a ten to twenty year project of societal and political transformation. It will require some measure of bipartisan support in the United States and consensus across US Government departments and agencies that we must begin to promote positive long-term democratic change in the region if we are going to get to the root of what threatens us. The strategy will be much more effective if it is transatlantic, winning real cooperation and coordination from the EU, so that we can maximize our leverage on regimes that will otherwise be very difficult to move. It is going to require more diplomats (quite literally, a larger foreign service, which is needed generally in any case), more aid officials (with a significant ramping up of the career staff of USAID), more democracy and governance assistance funds, and more speakers of Arabic (and other languages of the states in question) in USG career tracks. In other words, it requires some of the kind of comprehensive approach we took during the Cold War, when we ramped up our entire international engagement in response to a diffuse global ideological and security threat, and we invested heavily in developing the foreign language and area expertise that could advise and administer the forms of engagement we envisioned. Six years after September 11, we still lack a coherent national strategy (and program of financial assistance and inducements to universities and students) to accelerate the development of the needed expertise.

Measures of success. If the strategy were to bear fruit, we would see improved Freedom House scores for Arab countries, and sustained over periods of time. We would see Arab countries making transitions to democracy, beginning with real and lasting opening of political space, easing of political repression, and entry of Islamist forces into the political game while those Islamists evolve to accept the democratic rules of the game. Failure could come in the

form of collapse of these political openings in one way or another: either into renewed status-quo dictatorship, the norm, or with an Islamist movement gaining power and then shutting down pluralism while it moved to establish an Islamic Republic, or the Algeria scenario, with the security apparatus panicking late in the day of political opening, and then the situation descending into bloody civil war. There is also the possibility that increased electoral competition could lead to polarization and violence between competing political and sectarian forces, as in Palestine. This is why an incremental approach is generally advisable, and careful attention must be paid to the design of the electoral system and other institutional rules and constraints that might limit polarization and induce power-sharing and confidence-building.

Conclusion

Every strategy has risks, as does the drift into a dangerous future with no real strategy at all. The military and security responses to radical Islamist terror can only take us so far. They must be paired with a long-term strategy that gets at the roots of grievance and alienation, and this can only be done by transforming governance in the region. It is very unlikely that ruling elites are going to opt for painful and difficult reforms that reduce their own power and privilege, out of a statesmanlike sense of vision for the country's future. Rulers are going to have to be pressed to negotiate democratization, and they will only do so when they judge that they have no choice; that the rising pressures inside their country and the decline of American and European support for the status quo really leave them no option. Once one or two Arab countries make transitions to democracy that achieve a "soft landing," with physical security and economic protection for existing elites, and with stability in the society, other regimes will have somewhat

less anxiety about following suit. But every country is different, and each one needs its own strategy of reform, and its own strategy of international actors engaging for reform.

The United States remains the most important international actor in the Middle East. If we do not press—intelligently, carefully, but seriously—for democratic reform, it will not happen, and eventually the opportunity to steer the region away from a deepening radicalization will be lost. That would be a disaster for U.S. national security well exceeding the more limited risks of the strategy proposed here.

¹ Remarks by The President At the 20th Anniversary of The National Endowment for Democracy United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C., November 6, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/print/20031106-3.html>

² “President Bush Visits Prague, Czech Republic, Discusses Freedom,” (at Czernin Palace, Prague, June 5, 2007), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/06/print/20070605-8.html>.

³ Robin Wright, “Bush is Losing Credibility on Democracy, Activists Say,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/09/AR2007060901469_pf.html.

⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/print/20050120-1.html>.