



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

On June 18 the Institute held a workshop, co-sponsored by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), on Islam and democracy. The principal questions addressed were why the majority of Muslim countries are not democratic and whether there is an inherent contradiction or incompatibility between Islam and democratic principles. Some western analysts contend that Islam is the reason that so many Muslim countries are not democratic.

The workshop was co-chaired by David Smock, director of the Institute's Religion and Peacemaking Initiative, and Radwan Masmoudi, executive director of CSID. The four presenters were Laith Kubba of the National Endowment for Democracy, Muqtedar Khan of Adrian College, Mahmood Monshipouri of Quinnipiac University, and Neil Hicks of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, all of whom are experts on Islam and democracy.

This report was prepared by David Smock.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Institute of Peace or of CSID, which do not advocate specific policies.

## Islam and Democracy

### Briefly . . .

- Democracy building remains an uphill struggle in most Muslim countries.
- The explanation of why so many Muslim countries are not democratic has more to do with historical, political, cultural, and economic factors than with religious ones.
- Nevertheless, many Muslim activists, using broad and sometimes crude notions of secularism and sovereignty, consider democracy to be the rule of humans as opposed to Islam, which is rule of God.
- Scholars of Islam agree that the principle of *shura*, or consultative decision-making, is the source of democratic ethics in Islam. But a great deal more reflection is required to clarify the relationship of *shura* to democracy.
- In establishing the compact of Medina, Prophet Muhammad demonstrated a democratic spirit quite unlike the authoritarian tendencies of many of those who claim to imitate him today. He chose to draw up a historically specific constitution based on the eternal and transcendent principles revealed to him but also sought the consent of all who would be affected by its implementation.
- Conservative Muslims tend to view the western world's advocacy of human rights as a modern agenda by which the West hopes to establish its hegemony over the Muslim world, whereas reformist Muslims tend to be more receptive to new ideas, practices, and institutions. Reformists stress the need for continuity of basic Islamic traditions but believe that Islamic law (*sharia*) is historically conditioned and needs to be reinterpreted in light of the changing needs of modern society. Secular Muslims look to the experiences of the secular West as models in an effort to promote their countries' development.
- Despite the degree to which human rights are suppressed in Muslim countries, two grassroots movements are struggling to change this situation. Women are beginning to effectively assert their rights, and in some countries young people are agitating against government oppression.
- The United States has generally accepted the fiction that repression in the Muslim world is the best way to prevent Islamism from growing as a threat to the West and to U.S. interests.
- Those countries that have weak civil society structures and authoritarian regimes are fertile ground for terrorists. If western countries want to suppress terror then they must foster civil society and support movements that bolster democratic trends within these repressive political systems.

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- The United States should: (a) increase substantially the amount of U.S. foreign assistance that is spent on promoting democracy in the Muslim world; (b) provide governments and key interest groups in Muslim societies with incentives to engage in democratic reforms; (c) take seriously the existing framework of multilateral agreements and treaties that bear on democratization, such as those in the field of human rights; and (d) promote regional accountability mechanisms.

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## Introduction

Is it true, as some claim, that democracy is basically a western concept and ideology and therefore fundamentally at odds with the values and principles of Islam? If so, then the Muslim world, consisting of 55 countries populated by more than 1.4 billion people, is doomed to dictatorship and oppression. Moreover, Muslims would have to choose between their religion and democracy. In introducing the discussion, Radwan Masmoudi asserted that there is no inherent contradiction between Islam and democracy and that democratic ideals and principles are also Islam's ideals and principles. Thus, the explanation of why so many Muslim countries are not democratic lies in historical, political, cultural, and economic factors, not religious ones. "Not only must we understand these reasons, but we must also find out what needs to be done to correct this situation. What can we as Americans and especially as American Muslims do to promote democratization in Muslim countries?"

U.S. administrations have generally chosen to build strong ties with those regimes in Muslim countries that seem to support American interests, ignoring their records on human rights, accountability, and democracy. "We have been content to support dictators in the Muslim world, as long as they are allies and do what we want them to do. What are the implications of this policy for the Muslim world? Could this policy lead to the growth of political extremism, political violence, and anti-Americanism?" asked Masmoudi. If we want to change our policy and promote democratization in the Muslim world, can we do it without destabilizing the region and allowing extremist groups to come to power? Do we have to choose between democracy and stability? Or is there a way to promote democratization without causing havoc and anarchy?

While these issues have been asked for many years, they have taken on new significance since September 11. Particularly important is the question of whether the lack of democracy in Muslim states has provided fertile ground for the recruitment of supporters for al Qaeda and other extremist groups. Moreover, has the growth of Islamic extremism reduced the likelihood that democracy and Islam can co-exist?

## The Problem of Democracy in the Muslim World

Democracy building remains an uphill struggle in most Muslim countries, asserted Laith Kubba. Progress in liberalizing societies, modernizing institutions, and developing infrastructures is generally slow and limited. Worldwide democratic trends have in most cases failed to transform authoritarian and patriarchal political cultures in Muslim countries. Military officers, westernized elites, and tribal/traditional leaders usually keep a monopoly over state power. The weakness of democracy in many Muslim countries is also evident in the many indicators used by western institutions to measure the extent of openness of states and societies. This is most evident in political violence, violations of human rights, and abuse of public office.

Most Muslim countries are at an impasse. Dysfunctional, corrupt, repressive states are neither willing nor capable of reform. Apathy and despair breed radicalism. The failure of secular politics in Muslim countries provides fertile ground for the rise of political

Islam. Moderation of Islamic political movements is closely linked to inclusion in the political process, while radicalization is linked to repression and exclusion.

Most Muslim countries, like others in the developing world, are driven by deep needs and a passionate quest for modernity, development, and dignity, Kubba said. For the past several decades, their vision of a better future was anchored in a simple version of a strong central state with a top-down reform approach. That vision was thought to be more likely to succeed than democracy, which offered a complex, multi-institutional participatory system anchored in individualism and liberal values.

Failure of strong secular states to meet the increasing demands of newly educated societies led to soul searching for alternatives. Following the 1979 revolution in Iran, social and political groups became aware of the power of religion in mobilizing public support. Islam, whose ownership, interpretation, and use are open to all, continues to be dragged into the arena as a sharp instrument that may be used by the ruler and opposition alike, by the modernists and conservatives alike, and by groups on the left or right of the political spectrum. Various Islamic groups agree on favoring Islam over secularism but differ on their leanings toward democracy or authoritarianism.

Over the past two decades, as the communist development model failed and models of both secular and Islamic governance failed to deliver solutions to growing social and economic needs, Muslim intellectuals started to advocate democracy and human rights. They did so not only to achieve modernity, development, and dignity, but also to ensure a better practice of Islam.

In Kubba's view the key to understanding the root cause of the democracy predicament in Muslim countries does not lie in the text or in the tradition of Islam but in the context of modernity, politics, and culture. The rather arbitrary use of the term Islamic to describe states, regions, and even people adds to the confusion and blurs the real issues. Although a solution may require addressing Islam and its interpretations, the basic issue is not about Islam but about Muslims. It is not about religion but about modernity. Islam is only one element in the history and culture of the 55 Muslim nations in more than eight distinct regions. Their cultures are influenced to widely varying degrees by the traditions and values of Islam. They are as diverse as the cultures of predominantly Christian nations from Latin America to the Philippines.

Despite the rather bleak situation at present, Kubba noted that there are grounds for hope. Education is having a significant impact. In addition, there are strong pressures toward liberalization, both because the media continuously provide alternative models from other countries and because states in the Muslim world can no longer function without fundamental structural reforms and without more effective partnerships being developed between the government and the governed. "Looking ahead, I am an optimist. We need to watch the discourse taking place among Muslim intellectuals by which they are bringing about authentic Islamic interpretation of how they should govern themselves in modern societies. I have a lot of faith that this debate will lead to democracy and to full recognition of human rights, but it will come with local language and interpretation and it will be approached from a totally different perspective than we are accustomed to in the West."

## Compatibility of Islam and Democracy

In considering the compatibility of Islam and democracy, Muqtedar Khan noted, one must recognize that it is false to claim that there is no democracy in the Muslim world. At least 750 million Muslims live in democratic societies of one kind or another, including Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Europe, North America, Israel, and even Iran. Moreover, there is little historical precedent for mullahs controlling political power. One exception is Iran since the revolution in 1979 and the other is the Taliban in Afghanistan. For the preceding 1500 years since the advent of Islam, secular political elites have controlled political power.

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Two extremely different groups, one from the West and one from the Muslim world, have been arguing that Islam and democracy are incompatible. On the one hand, Khan pointed out, some western scholars and ideologues have tried to present Islam as anti-democratic and inherently authoritarian. By misrepresenting Islam in this way they seek to prove that Islam has a set of values inferior to western liberalism and is a barrier to the global progress of civilization. This misconception also promotes Israel's claim to be the sole democracy in the Middle East.

On the other hand, many Muslim activists, using broad and sometimes crude notions of secularism and sovereignty, consider democracy to be the rule of humans as opposed to Islam, which is rule of God. Those who reject democracy falsely assume that secularism and democracy are necessarily connected. But secularism is not a prerequisite for democracy; religion can play a significant role in democratic politics, as it does in the United States.

As Khan noted, Muslim scholars agree that the principle of *shura* is the source of democratic ethics in Islam. While there is considerable truth in this claim, one must also recognize the differences between *shura* and democracy before one can advance an Islamic conception of democracy based on *shura*. *Shura* is basically a consultative decision-making process that is considered either obligatory or desirable by different scholars. Those who choose to emphasize the Quranic verse "and consult with them on the matter" (3:159) consider *shura* as obligatory, but those who emphasize the verse praising "those who conduct their affairs by counsel" (43:38) consider *shura* as merely desirable. There is no doubt that *shura* is the Islamic way of making decisions, but is it obligatory? Does a government that does not implement a consultative process become illegitimate? We do not have decisive answers to those questions.

More and more Muslim intellectuals agree that consultative and consensual governance is best. Jurists, however, are more doubtful or ambivalent. Many jurists depend on non-consultative bodies for their livelihood and are in no hurry to deprive themselves of the privileges that non-consultative governments extend to them. But even if *shura* is considered supportive of democratic process, the two are not identical, Khan asserted. What is clear is that a great deal more reflection is required among leading Muslim thinkers about the nature of *shura* and its relationship to democracy, as well as other Islamic principles that relate to democratic practice.

As Khan pointed out, the rise of political Islam has made the concept of Islamic sovereignty central to Islamic political theory and that concept is often presented as a barrier to any form of democracy. The Quranic concept of sovereignty is universal (that is nonterritorial), transcendental (beyond human agency), indivisible, inalienable, and truly absolute. God the sovereign is the primary law-giver, while agents such as the Islamic state and the Khalifa (God's agents on earth) enjoy marginal autonomy necessary to implement and enforce the laws of their sovereign. At the theoretical level, the difference between the modern and Islamic conceptions of sovereignty is clear. But operational implications tend to blur the distinction.

Democracies are seen by some Muslim activists as systems in which human whim is the source of law, whereas Islamic principles are transcendental and cannot be undermined by popular whim. But what many of them fail to understand is that democratic institutions are not just about law. They are also about prevention of tyranny by the state. Regardless of where sovereignty is placed theoretically, in practice it is the state which exercises it and not God. Even though God was supposedly sovereign in Taliban's Afghanistan, it was in fact the Taliban that was sovereign there; Mullah Omar ruled, not God. Sovereignty in fact is always human, whether in a democracy or an Islamic state. The issue is not whether people are sovereign, but how to limit the de facto sovereignty of people, since they reign under both systems. Democracy with its principles of limited government, public accountability, checks and balances, separation of powers, and transparency does succeed in limiting human sovereignty. The Muslim world, plagued by despots, dictators, and self-regarding monarchs, badly needs the limitation of human

sovereignty, Khan argued. Many Muslim activists also fail to recognize that Islamic governance is interpreted differently by different Islamic scholars, and hence is not nearly as immutable as they contend.

While sovereignty belongs to God, it has been delegated in the form of human agency (2:30). The political task is to reflect on how this God-given agency can be best employed in creating a society that will bring welfare and goodness to the population both now and in the future. God is sovereign in all affairs, but God has exercised sovereignty by delegating some of it in the form of human agency. God cannot become an excuse for installing and legitimizing governments that are not accountable to their citizens and responsive to their needs.

Khan described a precedent set by Prophet Muhammad that demonstrates how democratic practices and theories are compatible with an Islamic state. This is the compact of Medina, referred to by some scholars as *Dustur al-Madina* (the Constitution of Medina). After Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Yathrib in 622 CE, he established the first Islamic state. For 10 years he was not only the leader of the emerging Muslim *ummah* (community) in Arabia but also the political head of Medina. He ruled as political head as a result of the tripartite compact that was signed by the Muslim immigrants from Mecca, the indigenous Muslims of Medina, and, significantly, the Jews of Medina. Although the Medina compact cannot serve as a modern constitution, it can serve as a guiding principle.

The compact of Medina also illustrates, Khan pointed out, the proper relationship between divine revelation and a constitution. Muhammad, if he so wished, could have merely indicated that the truth revealed by God would serve as the constitution and forced this revelation upon both the Muslim and non-Muslim residents of Medina. Demonstrating instead a democratic spirit quite unlike the authoritarian tendencies of many of those who claim to imitate him today, Muhammad chose to draw up a historically specific constitution based on the eternal and transcendent principles revealed to him but also sought the consent of all who would be affected by its implementation. Thus, the first Islamic state was based on a social contract, was constitutional in character, and had a ruler who ruled with the explicit written consent of all the citizens of the state. Today, Khan argued, Muslims need to emulate Muhammad and draw up their own constitutions in a manner that is both appropriate for their specific circumstances as well as based on eternal principles.

The constitution of Medina established the importance of consent and cooperation for governance. According to this compact, Muslims and non-Muslims were equal citizens of the Islamic state, with identical rights and duties. Communities with different religious orientations enjoyed religious autonomy. The constitution of Medina established a pluralistic state—a community of communities. The principles of equality, consensual governance, and pluralism were central to the compact of Medina. Khan noted that it is amazing to see how Muhammad's interpretation of the Quran was so democratic, tolerant, and compassionate, while some contemporary interpretations, like that of the Taliban, are so harsh, authoritarian, and intolerant.

## Islam and Human Rights

Muslim views on human rights can be grouped into three broad categories, according to Mahmood Monshipouri. The first group is Muslim conservatives. They tend to look to both the classical and medieval periods for inspiration. Conservatives adopt a communitarian view that sees the individual as part of the community, to which he or she owes certain obligations. Conservatives' emphasis on drawing boundaries around the community is expressed not only in stipulations about dress for women (*hijab*) and the repression of women's sexuality, but also in the proclamation of a different way of life and of a transformation of mind by bringing the faithful back to the proper practice of the faith and tradition.

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These conservatives tend to view the western world's advocacy of human rights as a mechanism by which the West hopes to establish its hegemony over the Muslim world. They have vehemently objected to several articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), including Articles 16 and 18, which deal with equality of marriage rights and freedom to change one's religion or belief. They also object to the provisions on women's rights, questioning the equality of gender roles and obligations. Islam, they argue, prohibits the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man. Apostasy (*ridda*) is forbidden and is punishable by death.

Muslim conservatives challenge the idea of natural reason as an independent source of ethical knowledge. According to conservatives, following past traditions (*taqlid*) and returning to established norms in times of crisis are two cardinal rules of Islamic orthodoxy. Among the most prominent of the conservative leadership advocating these positions are such scholars as Sayyid Abu al-A'la al-Maududi (1903–79), Hassan al-Banna (1906–49), Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–89).

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Muslim reformists or neomodernists, in contrast, are more receptive to non-Islamic ideas, practices, and institutions, according to Monshipouri. They argue that material progress is necessary to bring about human and economic transformation within an Islamic framework. They stress the need for the continuity of basic Islamic principles but believe that Islamic law (*sharia*) is historically conditioned and needs to be reinterpreted in light of the changing needs of modern society.

A comparison between two reformist positions helps explain the contending perspectives within this camp. Some reformists have argued that what conservatives call divine law in reality only reflects the interpretation of a few specialists. Abdolkarim Soroush, an Iranian philosopher, has argued that "divine legislation in Islam is said to have been discovered by a few and those discoverers think that they have privileged access to the interpretation of this law" (Soroush and Charles Butterworth at the Middle East Institute, November 21, 2000, "Islamic Democracy and Islamic Governance," [www.mideasti.org/html/b-soroush.html](http://www.mideasti.org/html/b-soroush.html)). Having questioned the monopoly over interpretation by one group or class, Soroush argues the need for a dialogical pluralism between those inside and outside of religious intellectual fields. Human rights, according to Soroush, lie outside religion and are not solely intrareligious arguments based on jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Rather, they belong to the domain of philosophical theology (*kalam*) and philosophy in general (*Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahman Sadri, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 128–129). Some values, he argues, cannot be derived from religion. Human rights is the case in point. The language of religion and religious law is essentially the language of duties, not rights.

Sheikh Rached al-Ghannouchi, leader of the Tunisian An-Nahda political party, articulates a different vision and rationale for reform. For Ghannouchi, the central question is how to free the Muslim community from backwardness and dependence on the "Other." Reconciling Islam and modernity, according to Ghannouchi, involves introduction of democracy and freedom, both of which are consistent with Islamic principles. The community not the individual remains the ultimate reality, and democracy and freedom of thought are tools that Muslims should use to achieve their community's goals and defend its interests (Abdou Filali-Ansary, "Islam and Liberal Democracy: The Challenge of Secularization," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1996, pp. 76–80).

The third group, according to Monshipouri, are the Muslim secularists. Secular Muslims look to the experiences of the secular West as guiding models in an effort to promote their country's development. Secularists often support policies and programs that are grounded in pragmatic considerations. Muslim secularists are reluctant to replace secular laws with *sharia*. To secularists, Islamic practices such as *shura* and *bay'a* (a binding agreement that holds rulers to certain standards and governs relations between rulers and the ruled) have failed to support individual political participation and to provide a basis for democratic accountability by governments. Secular rule is the prevailing

pattern in the Muslim world; with the exception of Iran since 1979, Sudan since 1989, and Afghanistan under the Taliban, the Muslim world is ruled by secular regimes.

The Muslim world is indeed in uncertain transition, with its youth facing cultural disorientation and its political scene dominated by internal power struggles. The greatest threats to human rights in the Muslim world are not religious or theological but political. In a globalizing world, concern has been expressed about whether Muslims will lose the ability to control their own economies, power, and cultural assets. Many in the Muslim world, however, see hope in such a globalizing world. The youth, women's organizations, the press, intellectuals, and Islamic reformers all see great opportunities, especially if they become part of the global civil society.

The biggest question is how to adopt new ideas and policies while maintaining religious and cultural integrity. Monshipouri argues that to maintain such a balance, the Muslim world's elites, scholars, and activists must interpret Islamic values and social norms in a manner consistent with modern and internationally recognized human rights. The western world must treat Muslim masses as partners in the struggle against human rights abuses, while helping to empower reformist voices and civil society.

Despite the degree to which human rights are suppressed in Muslim countries, two grassroots movements are struggling to change this situation. The first is the women's movement and the second is the youth movement. Over the long term they can have enormous impact on human rights in these countries. Women are beginning to effectively assert their rights, and in some countries young people are agitating against governmental oppression and corruption.

Monshipouri concluded his presentation by making three points. First, the greatest threat to human rights in the Muslim world comes not from Islam but from economic, political, and educational forces. Second, human rights struggles in the Muslim world will be lost or won on the national level, not on the international level; it is up to Muslims themselves to decide how much respect to accord human rights. Third, those countries that have weak civil society structures and authoritarian regimes are fertile ground for terrorism. If western countries want to suppress terror then they have to foster civil society and support those movements that express dissenting voices within these repressive political systems. Western countries can also apply economic and political pressure on these authoritarian regimes to encourage fundamental change.

## What Can the United States Do?

Neil Hicks noted that while the shortcomings in human rights and democratization of many U.S. allies in the region have been noted in official statements, particularly in the U.S. State Department's annual country reports on human rights practices, policy has tended toward the preservation of the status quo for fear of what might replace it. In the Arab world especially, authoritarian leaders have traded on their self-proclaimed status as bulwarks against Islamic extremism.

For the most part, the United States went along with the fiction that repression in the Muslim world was the best way to prevent Islamism from growing as a threat to the West and to U.S. vital interests. In the name of confronting radical Islam, Hicks said, basic rights and freedoms were virtually extinguished in Tunisia and severely curtailed in Egypt. In Turkey, Malaysia, and Algeria, authoritarian regimes employed anti-democratic measures to suppress Islamic movements that were gaining popular support.

The greatest casualties of this broad-brush repression were basic values of tolerance, political pluralism, and free speech that are essential to democracy. The institutions of democracy, like an independent judiciary, free political parties, civil society, and the separation of powers, were undermined. On realizing that the non-violent, democratic path to power or reform was blocked, some felt vindicated in embracing violence as the only way of bringing about change. Polarization, extremism, and political violence all flourished. It

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is worth mentioning that liberal, pluralistic forms of political Islam have been a particular casualty of this unpromising political climate. On the one hand, they have been subjected to repression by state authorities as undesirable expressions of political dissent. On the other, they have been marginalized by some within the political Islamic movement itself for being utopian and ineffectual.

At the same time as many U.S. allies in the region were stifling democracy (with only token criticism at best from the West), the United States strongly criticized its foes in the region as enemies of democracy and human rights. There is no doubt that the governments of Iran and Sudan and that of the Taliban in Afghanistan were richly deserving of such criticisms, but the violations of human rights perpetrated by these regimes in particular were added to the indictment against Islamism in general. The mostly unspoken accepted wisdom became that U.S. allies in Egypt, Jordan, or Tunisia may have their failings, but we have to choose between them and the Iranian mullahs, the Taliban, and Sudan's National Islamic Front, and that choice is easily made. Human rights also became a vehicle for criticizing other regional foes like Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

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Hicks asserted that many people in the Muslim world and elsewhere quickly recognized a double standard in U.S. advocacy of human rights and democracy in the region. If the United States is so critical of Iran for not better protecting women's rights, then why is it silent about the abject situation of women in Saudi Arabia? If the Iraqi people deserve to choose their own leaders, then what about the Egyptian people or the Tunisian people? In Afghanistan, the United States was willing to cooperate with the *mujahedin*, and to call them freedom fighters, during the conflict with the Soviet Union, even though their commitment to democracy was virtually non-existent, Hicks pointed out.

There has been a glaring contradiction between U.S. rhetoric supporting democracy and human rights, on the one hand, and a policy that held major violators of human rights like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to be key strategic allies while at the same time condoning repression by other allies, like Egypt, on the other hand. The perception of double standards was exacerbated by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where many Muslim observers thought that Israel was allowed to disregard international law with impunity, whereas Muslim states like Iraq or Libya could be subjected to international sanctions or even armed intervention for their departures from international norms.

U.S. policy, Hicks continued, recognized the importance to regional stability and political development of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first Bush administration and the Clinton administration expended considerable effort in promoting the Madrid process and then the Oslo process. However, even these well-intentioned initiatives, especially in the middle and later phases of the Oslo process, had negative repercussions for democratization in the region. Supporting the "peace process" became an article of faith and the main goal of U.S. policy in the Arab world. Dissent from this orthodoxy was regarded as unhelpful by the United States. U.S. allies claimed that they were taking great political risks for peace by going against the views of their people, and this assertion was generally accepted. U.S. policy did not seem to question what was creating this public mood that was supposedly hostile to peace with Israel and whether more repression was the way to deal with it. In fact, many U.S. allies were fanning the flames of anti-Israeli sentiment and exploiting such feelings as a distraction from domestic problems and as another reason to keep the lid on political dissent.

Out of this morass of contradictions and double standards it is not surprising that some hostility toward U.S. policy developed, and some skepticism about the values the United States claimed to espouse. Indeed, some in the Muslim world expressed open hostility toward democracy and human rights as alien western values, and found an enthusiastic audience in doing so. Hicks asserted that this hostility is largely a reaction to the use to which such values had been put by cynical authoritarian governments and by the West, rather than a lack of identification with common values of justice and human dignity. Unfortunately, a kind of self-fulfilling stereotyping of Muslim attitudes to human rights and democracy has developed, partly as a result of the disaffection



expressed by many in the Muslim world towards “democracy” and “human rights” as they have experienced them in practice.

What can be done? Hicks noted that promoting democracy abroad is not something new for the U.S. government, even if there has been less of it in the Muslim world than elsewhere. There are lessons to be drawn from Eastern Europe and Latin America, regions where democratic advances since the end of the Cold War are discernible, and from the former Soviet Union and parts of Africa, where signs of progress are often less apparent. Perhaps the most important lesson is that there is no single prescription that will ensure a transition to democracy. Local conditions vary enormously. In the vast and diverse Muslim world it will be necessary for the U.S. government to develop country-specific plans to promote democracy.

Hicks then offered four recommendations:

- ***Increase substantially both the proportion and the amount of U.S. foreign assistance that is spent on promoting democracy in the Muslim world.*** It is important to note that simply spending more is not a solution by itself. We can learn from the example of U.S. foreign assistance to Egypt, which has remained at high levels even while foreign aid budgets elsewhere were evaporating. In Egypt the United States has funded democratization projects and supplied hundreds of millions of dollars of other civilian assistance while, by any measure, democratic freedoms have contracted. To succeed the United States must demand accountability from the recipient governments. The question then becomes, is the United States willing to have a more adversarial relationship with regional leaders, and perhaps to see some of them overthrown, as part of the messy process of promoting democracy? These leaders, after all, are valued because they are seen as assisting in the protection of vital U.S. national interests.
- ***Provide governments and other key interest groups in Muslim societies with incentives to encourage democratic reforms.*** A major commitment to foreign assistance to the Muslim world by the U.S. government would provide an attractive incentive to recipient governments to embark on the path to reform. Foreign assistance should be linked to clear progress in strengthening institutions of accountability. Here domestic interest groups independent of existing power elites take on a particular importance, because existing leaders typically have little interest in diluting their own privileges. When providing foreign assistance, the U.S. government must insist that there be a free press, that the judiciary be independent, and that civil society organizations operate free from governmental interference.

Incentives should come not in the form of aid alone, which inevitably has some patronizing connotations. Real partnerships, especially in the field of trade, but also in a host of other areas, including cultural and educational ones, are also important. The positive impact on democratic reforms of Turkey's accession process to the European Union is a good case in point. Because many sectors of Turkish society anticipate benefits from EU membership, there has been a considerable groundswell of support for the stringent reforms required by the European Commission. The process of change has been and is painful to many entrenched interests. Nevertheless, the business community has put pressure on the government to press forward with political as well as economic reforms. Business elites in other Muslim states, who recognize the benefits of participating in the global marketplace, and who also recognize that the price of entry is compliance with international standards, are a largely untapped resource for democratic change.

- ***Take seriously the existing framework of multilateral agreements and treaties that bear on democratization, such as those in the field of human rights.*** Since there is skepticism over the U.S. government's motives in promoting democracy in the Muslim world, it is wise to disarm doubters by embracing multilateral approaches with like-minded governments wherever possible. Treaty bodies within UN human rights mechanisms—like the Human Rights Committee and the Committee Against Torture,

***Recommendation: Increase substantially both the proportion and the amount of U.S. foreign assistance that is spent on promoting democracy in the Muslim world.***

***Recommendation: Provide governments and other key interest groups in Muslim societies with incentives to encourage democratic reforms.***

which oversee state compliance with treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention Against Torture and other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment—are highly regarded for the integrity of the work of their members, who sit as independent experts. Their work is often favorably compared to the politicized machinations of the UN Human Rights Commission, for example. Yet these effective bodies are chronically underfunded. Members operate with little or no research support and their findings are virtually unknown beyond the world of human rights specialists. It would surely be a sound investment for the U.S. government to lend its financial and political support to the work of these under-appreciated institutions.

- **Promote regional accountability mechanisms.** The Muslim world is lacking in regional accountability mechanisms. The great virtue of such mechanisms is that they cannot be accused of being alien or inauthentic because they are of the region over which they exercise jurisdiction. Again, Turkey provides an example of the merits of such mechanisms. One of the reasons for Turkey's advantage over other Muslim states in its progress towards democratization is its longstanding participation in the human rights mechanisms of the Council of Europe, especially its acceptance of the right of individual citizens to petition the European Court of Human Rights and its agreement to be bound by the rulings of the court. The benefits go beyond the individual cases that have been heard before the court. Turkey's legal community and human rights organizations increasingly know and make use of the fact that there is a functioning mechanism for them to resort to in the face of state violations. The United States should make great efforts to promote effective regional mechanisms of accountability within existing regional institutions like the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States.

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