

# Did Bush Democratize the Middle East? The Effects of External–Internal Linkages

BRUCE GILLEY

THE WAVE OF PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS and openings that swept the greater Middle East region in 2010–2012 caught the world by surprise. While the future of these openings is uncertain, their occurrence, as well as democratic changes in the region since 2001, are in need of explanation. What motivated and empowered the incidence of pro-democracy protest movements and regime liberalizations during this time?

A large literature has highlighted the importance of external as well as internal factors in democratization processes. The role of the United States as the most important external actor in the Middle East must be given due attention. More narrowly, the possible effects of U.S. policies under president George W. Bush between 2001 and 2008 deserve special attention because of the striking ways in which his administration sought to bring about such changes and because those changes occurred during and shortly after the Bush policies were enacted.

This paper first reviews theories that link external factors to democratic change. It then examines both correlative as well as qualitative evidence about the effects of the Bush policies on democratic change in the region. The results show that the Bush “Freedom Agenda” generally contributed in positive ways to undermining authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and to strengthening their opponents, factors that interacted with domestic

---

BRUCE GILLEY is associate professor of political science and director of the doctoral program in public affairs and policy in the Mark O. Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University. He specializes in comparative and international politics and most recently published *The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy*.

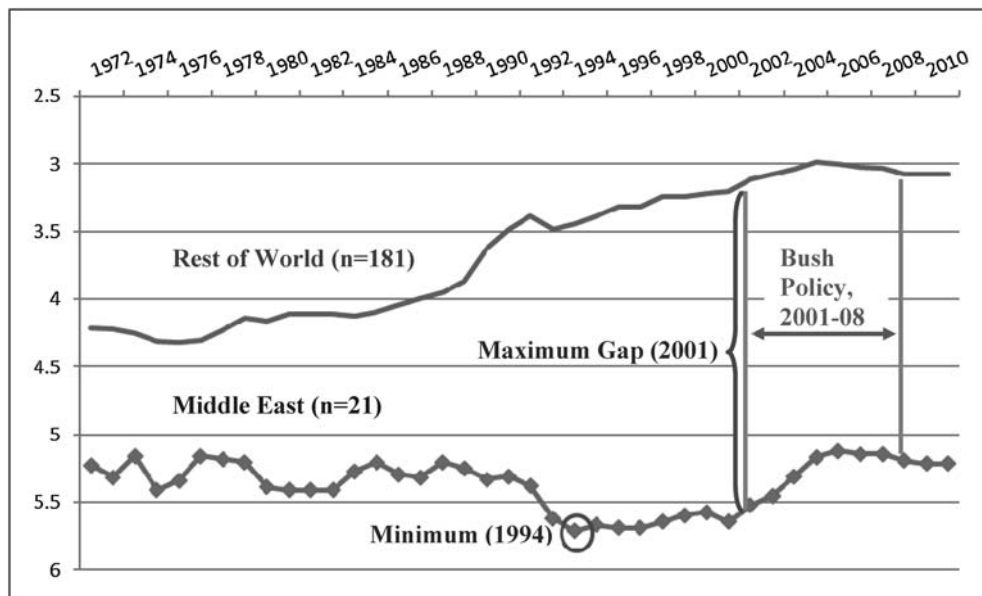
trends to contribute to rising democratic gains. However, the Freedom Agenda worked in complex and often unexpected ways, in particular by sparking nationalist sentiments against the United States. Studying this issue may help to recover the valuable lessons that the changes in the Middle East have to offer for democracy promotion practitioners as well as for analysts of democratization.

### DEMOCRATIC CHANGE OUT OF NOWHERE

Democracy was on a downward trend in the Middle East throughout the post-WWII period, reaching its lowest level in 1994 (see Figure 1). (I define the Middle East broadly here to include Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.) The democracy gap between the Middle East and the rest of the world was widest in 2001 as a result of the steady advance of democracy elsewhere.

The democratization process can be described in terms of a cumulative progression of rising democratic demands, sudden openings, decisive transitions, and eventual consolidation. Most countries in the Middle East have experienced only the first or second of these stages, although Tunisia, Egypt, and Iraq have proceeded to the third and Israel to the fourth. There have

FIGURE 1  
*Democracy Trends\* in the Middle East and Rest of World, 1972–2011*



Source: Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*, various years.

\*Freedom House Combined Average Rating (Political and Civil Liberties).

been three waves of democratic change in the Middle East since 2001. The first involved the creation of elected regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq following the American-led overthrow of authoritarian regimes. The second involved modest openings in authoritarian regimes—most notably in Turkey, Lebanon, and Pakistan, but also in Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. Overall, these led to small democratic gains for the region: between 2001 and 2010, the democracy gap between the Middle East and the rest of the world as measured by Freedom House shrank by 12 percent. The third phase involved large-scale demonstrations against authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Libya, Algeria, Oman, Syria, Jordan, and Bahrain beginning in 2010 that resulted in the fall of four of the region’s strongmen—Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (in power since 1981), Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (since 1987), Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi (since 1969), and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh (since 1978)—and threatened to claim another—Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (since 2000).

From the early 1990s, a vast literature arose to explain the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> The attacks of September 11 seemed to reinforce the dismal prospects for democracy.<sup>2</sup> A 2007 edited collection by Middle East experts concluded that “for the foreseeable future, democratization remains off the agenda in any Arab country.”<sup>3</sup> Saad Eddin Ibrahim was a rare voice who consistently, from the mid-1990s, argued that peaceful democratic change was in the offing.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Egypt, domestic factors such as fiscal crisis,<sup>5</sup> growing corruption,<sup>6</sup> and the rise of social media networks<sup>7</sup> were cited in the

---

<sup>1</sup>Moataz A. Fattah, *Democratic Values in the Muslim World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006); Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Nicola Christine Pratt, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007); Raymond Hinnebusch, “Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East,” *Democratization* 13 (July 2006): 373–395.

<sup>2</sup>Lisa Anderson, “Arab Democracy: Dismal Prospects,” *World Policy Journal* 18 (January 2001): 53–60.

<sup>3</sup>Oliver Schlumberger, “Arab Authoritarianism,” in Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>4</sup>Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “The Mideast’s New Spring of Freedom,” *Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 2009. See also Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, *Getting to Pluralism: Political Actors in the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Samir Sulayman and Peter Daniel, *The Autumn of Dictatorship: Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup>Rabab El-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet, *Egypt: The Moment of Change* (London: Zed Books, 2009).

<sup>7</sup>Fieke Jansen, “Digital Activism in the Middle East: Mapping Issue Networks in Egypt, Iran, Syria and Tunisia,” *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* 6 (January 2010): 37–52; Tina Rosenberg, “Revolution U,” 16 February 2011, accessed at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/16/revolution\\_u](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/16/revolution_u), 13 June 2012.

years preceding the overthrow as evidence of regime weakness. Still, *most* observers believed the Mubarak regime could withstand such pressures because of its well-institutionalized system of domination.<sup>8</sup> In a book published in 2010, Azza Karam argued that “regime continuity is assured, and its ability to pass the reins of power to the younger generation within the same ruling elite is almost guaranteed in the future.”<sup>9</sup> Lisa Blaydes, in a book that appeared days after Mubarak was ousted, wrote that controlled elections had *strengthened* regime stability.<sup>10</sup>

As for Tunisia, a noted expert on the country’s politics wrote in 2010 that the ruling party’s sweep of rigged elections in 2009 “and other cosmetic reforms have only served to consolidate Ben Ali’s domination of the regime and of the country’s political life.”<sup>11</sup> In 2010, another book argued that “authoritarianism enjoys at least the grudging support of a majority of the population” and thus “the deck was stacked heavily against democracy.”<sup>12</sup> In the words of two country experts: “To say that Ben Ali’s sudden fall caught specialists by surprise would be an understatement.”<sup>13</sup> In these cases, as well as in Libya,<sup>14</sup> observers believed that the only political change would probably involve revolutionary Islamic movements, not peaceful democratic ones.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Bruce K. Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup>Azza Karam, “Democracy and Faith: The Continuum of Political Islam,” in Nathan J. Brown and Emad Eldin Shahin, eds., *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East: Regional Politics and External Policies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 56–57.

<sup>10</sup>Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup>Ahmed Aghrout, “The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Tunisia, October 2009,” *Electoral Studies* 29 (September 2010): 749–753, at 753.

<sup>12</sup>Christopher Alexander, *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 116, 117, 123–124.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Schraeder and Hamadi Redissi, “Ben Ali’s Fall,” *Journal of Democracy* 22 (July 2011): 5–19, at 5.

<sup>14</sup>Ronald Bruce St John, *Libya: Continuity and Change* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Larbi Sadiki, “Wither Arab ‘Republicanism’? The Rise of Family Rule and the ‘End of Democratization’ in Egypt, Libya and Yemen,” *Mediterranean Politics* 15 (January 2010): 99–107; Yahia Zoubir, “Libya and Europe: Economic Realism at the Rescue of the Qaddafi Authoritarian Regime,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 17 (December 2009): 401–415.

<sup>15</sup>Walid Phares, *The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011). This includes advisers to President Obama. See Mark Landler, “Secret Report Ordered by Obama Identified Potential Uprisings,” *The New York Times*, 16 February 2011; Alejandro Sanchez, “Tunisia: Trading Freedom for Stability May Not Last—An International Security Perspective,” *Defence Studies* 9 (January 2009): 85–92; John R. Bradley, *Inside Egypt: The Land of the Pharaohs on the Brink of a Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

For the most part, the literature on authoritarian resilience in the Middle East was regime-focused<sup>16</sup>—that is, it centered on the (apparently successful) institutions and strategies of the incumbent regimes. This meant that there was a tendency to downplay the role of social and external factors. To the extent that social approaches were invoked, it was usually to decry the “missing constituency” for democracy in the region.<sup>17</sup> Scholars of the region underestimated the potential of democratic movements emerging in these societies.<sup>18</sup> To the extent that external factors were invoked, meanwhile, it was to show the *absence* of strong external democratizing factors,<sup>19</sup> especially because of the role of oil exports.<sup>20</sup>

Democratization is a complex process that involves both internal and external factors.<sup>21</sup> A wide consensus of the literature holds that criticality *generally* rests with internal rather than external factors, especially in regard to democratic consolidation.<sup>22</sup> However, initial democratic openings and transitions are more likely to be influenced by external factors. In Pete Moore’s<sup>23</sup> five-part typology, norm diffusion, foreign policy, foreign non-governmental organizations, regional security dynamics, and international political economy all affect political development in the Middle East. Ali Kassay, working from that

---

<sup>16</sup>El-Mahdi, Rabab, “Enough!: Egypt’s Quest for Democracy,” *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (August 2009): 1011–1039.

<sup>17</sup>Marina Ottaway, “The Missing Constituency for Democratic Reform,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 151–170; Walid Kazziha, “The Fantasy of Arab Democracy without a Constituency,” in Nathan J. Brown and Emad Eldin Shahin, eds., *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East: Regional Politics and External Policies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 42–59.

<sup>18</sup>Eva Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East,” *Comparative Politics* 44 (January 2012): 127–149.

<sup>19</sup>Mustafa Hamarneh, “Democratization in the Mashreq: The Role of External Factors,” *Mediterranean Politics* 5 (January 2000): 77–95; Francesco Cavatorta, *The International Dimension of the Failed Algerian Transition: Democracy Betrayed?* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009); Jeffrey Haynes, “Democratisation in the Middle East and North Africa: What Is the Effect of Globalisation?” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11 (June 2010): 133–149.

<sup>20</sup>Larry Diamond, “Why Are There No Arab Democracies?,” *Journal of Democracy* 21 (January 2010): 93–104.

<sup>21</sup>Richard Youngs, “External Dimensions of Democratization: The Case of the Middle East,” in Nuno Severiano Teixeira, ed., *The International Politics of Democratization: Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 151–166; Kunihiro Imai, “Internal Versus External Requisites of Democracy,” *International Journal on World Peace* 27 (September 2010): 49–87.

<sup>22</sup>Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2008), chaps. 5 and 6; Nuno Severiano Teixeira, *The International Politics of Democratization: Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>23</sup>Pete W. Moore, “The International Context of Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 16 (Fall 1994): 43–67.



typology, argued that where security and economic needs were greater, norm diffusion and foreign policy would be more significant.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, there is a consensus that the *interaction* of domestic and external factors creates the critical conditions for democratic openings and transitions.<sup>25</sup> In Moore's words, "external factors display their relevance in setting constraints, providing sufficient conditions for change, and acting cumulatively."<sup>26</sup> For Gerhard Kummel, prospects for openings "are best when favorable internal conditions meet with a favorable external environment." Globalization and technology, he noted, have caused those interactions to be *strengthened* and the time needed for them to work *shortened*. However, "the concrete form of these impacts emerges through the specific response of internal actors to these external influences."<sup>27</sup>

As Larry Diamond notes, external factors operate in a non-parsimonious, complex, and perhaps non-generalizable fashion.<sup>28</sup> Establishing a priori predictions about their effects is tricky, given time lags, interaction effects, and observability problems. The most-precise nomothetic hypotheses we can make, therefore, are that external factors will be more significant to democratic openings the greater the resources (in terms of both breadth and depth) of the external factors, the more globalized the authoritarian country, and the more that external factors are aligned with existing social movements within the country.

## THE FREEDOM AGENDA

U.S. President George W. Bush's "Freedom Agenda" for the Middle East was born within weeks of the 2001 terrorist attacks when both National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke about the need to press for human rights and democracy in the region.<sup>29</sup> Bush made the point in his January 2002 State of the Union Address, in which he said that the United States would support democratic

---

<sup>24</sup>Ali Kassay, "The Effects of External Forces on Jordan's Process of Democratization," in George Joffe, ed., *Jordan in Transition* (London: Hurst, 2002), 45–65.

<sup>25</sup>Hakan Yilmaz, "External-Internal Linkages in Democratization: Developing an Open Model of Democratic Change," *Democratization* 9 (March 2002): 67–85.

<sup>26</sup>Pete W. Moore, "The International Context of Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 16 (Fall 1994): 64.

<sup>27</sup>Gerhard Kummel, "Democratization in Eastern Europe. The Interaction of Internal and External Factors," *East European Quarterly* 32 (Spring 1998): 245, 260.

<sup>28</sup>Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2008), chap. 5.

<sup>29</sup>Lorne Craner, "Will U.S. Democratization Policy Work?" *Middle East Quarterly* 13 (Summer 2006): 3–10, at 4.

principles “around the world, including the Islamic world.”<sup>30</sup> Expanding on the theme at West Point in June 2002, he argued that “the peoples of the Islamic nations want and deserve the same freedoms and opportunities as people in every nation.”<sup>31</sup> Bush then announced a “forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East” in a speech to the National Endowment for Democracy in 2003, chastising previous administrations and other Western governments for “excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East.”<sup>32</sup> This was later named the “Freedom Agenda” by the administration.

The reasons for the Freedom Agenda are complex and have to do with the rethinking of post-Cold War security strategy in the wake of the attacks of September 11, an analysis that borrowed on a renewed and muscular Wilsonianism associated with the neoconservative and liberal interventionist thinkers of American foreign policy.<sup>33</sup> It also responded to a growing chorus of appeals from *within* Middle Eastern states (and by critics of U.S. Cold War strategy) for the United States to emphasize human rights and democratic reforms after decades of supporting authoritarian regimes in the region.<sup>34</sup> As R.K. Ramazani, a stern critic of Bush, put it: “Every leading president in American history has aspired to the spread of democracy in the world, but none before President Bush made it the overarching goal of American foreign policy.”<sup>35</sup>

From 2001 to 2008, the policies of the Bush administrations in support of democracy in the Middle East involved four dimensions: rhetorical, diplomatic, material, and structural.

Rhetorically, Bush made democracy promotion in the Middle East central to his pronouncements on the region from 2002 to 2008, rarely omitting a mention of the need for political liberalization. His father, President George

---

<sup>30</sup>“President Delivers State of the Union Address,” 29 January 2002, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>, 10 October 2013.

<sup>31</sup>“President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point,” 1 June 2002, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>, 10 October 2013.

<sup>32</sup>“Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy,” 6 November 2003, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>, 10 October 2013.

<sup>33</sup>See Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Marina Ottaway, “Evaluating Middle East Reform: Significant or Cosmetic?,” in Marina Ottaway and Julia Choucair-Vizoso, eds., *Beyond the Facade: Political Reform in the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 1–15.

<sup>34</sup>Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Freedom’s Unsteady March: America’s Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 26; Reuel Marc Gerech, “How Democracy Became Halal,” *The New York Times*, 6 February 2011.

<sup>35</sup>R. K. Ramazani, “President Bush Deviates from Core American Principles in Middle East Policies,” *Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 17 (Fall 2008): 209–221, at 212.

H.W. Bush, had expressed hopes for more democracy in the Middle East following the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1991,<sup>36</sup> but had quickly lost interest in the issue. President Bill Clinton and his senior administration officials, meanwhile, “never uttered a public word about Middle East democracy,”<sup>37</sup> which was “little more than an ‘afterthought’ relegated to the level of ‘low policy,’”<sup>38</sup> something that administration officials later regretted.<sup>39</sup> Prior to September 11, Bush articulated a “distinctly American internationalism” that involved being “a champion of freedom” by “promot[ing] our values.”<sup>40</sup> But there was no mention of the Middle East. After the attacks of September 11, however, Bush made the promotion of democracy *in the Middle East* a central and consistent message, especially in his Second Inaugural Address of 2005. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in “perhaps the boldest moment of the Freedom Agenda’s course,”<sup>41</sup> in a speech in Cairo that same year, said that after 60 years of supporting dictatorships in the region, “Now... [w]e are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people.”<sup>42</sup> As Brown and Hawthorne conclude: “The rhetorical shift [of Bush] was not total. But it was striking.”<sup>43</sup>

Diplomatically, the Bush administration put modest pressures on Middle Eastern regimes to begin democratic reforms through frequent diplomatic meetings, including chiding both Mubarak and Ben Ali publicly about the need for democratic reforms when each visited the United States in 2004. The Bush administration also nudged the European Union to adjust its “Barcelona Process,” in place since 1994, to re-prioritize democracy, which Hollis<sup>44</sup> believes had been trumped by security and regime stability. At the G8 summit in 2004, the European Union agreed to launch

---

<sup>36</sup>“We urge as much democratic process as possible in the area and in all areas,” Interview With Middle Eastern Journalists, 8 March 1991, accessed at [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=2778&year=1991&month=3](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2778&year=1991&month=3), 10 October 2013.

<sup>37</sup>Azza Karam, “Democracy and Faith: The Continuum of Political Islam,” in Nathan J. Brown and Emad Eldin Shahin, eds., *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East: Regional Politics and External Policies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 20.

<sup>38</sup>Sheila Carapico, “Foreign Aid for Promoting Democracy in the Arab World,” *Middle East Journal* 56 (Fall 2002): 379–395, at 380.

<sup>39</sup>Madeleine Albright, “Bridges, Bombs, or Bluster?,” *Foreign Affairs* 85 (March/April 2003): 2–19.

<sup>40</sup>George W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Administration Goals,” 27 February 2001, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/02/20010228.html>, 10 October 2013.

<sup>41</sup>Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Freedom’s Unsteady March: America’s Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 99.

<sup>42</sup>Remarks at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, 20 June 2005, accessed at <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm>, 12 June 2012.

<sup>43</sup>Nathan J. Brown and Amy Hawthorne, “New Wine in Old Bottles? American Efforts to Promote Democracy in the Arab World,” in Nathan J. Brown and Emad Eldin Shahin, eds., *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East: Regional Politics and External Policies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 22.

<sup>44</sup>Rosemary Hollis, “No Friend of Democratization: Europe’s Role in the Genesis of the ‘Arab Spring,’” *International Affairs* 88 (January 2012): 81–94.



the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, which increased funding and coordination for democracy promotion in the region. The Bush administration argued that “the United States and Europe have political legitimacy when they act together.”<sup>45</sup>

Materially, the Bush administration vastly increased spending on democracy promotion and assistance in the Middle East (excluding the spending on democracy-building in Iraq and Afghanistan). Prior to Bush, U.S. democracy spending in the Middle East was close to nil. President George H.W. Bush excluded the Middle East from his administration’s democracy spending.<sup>46</sup> A Department of State initiative launched under President Bill Clinton in 1997, the Middle East Democracy Fund, was capped at \$3 million per year. Under Bush, spending increased rapidly beginning in 2002. In the three fiscal years 2006 to 2008, democracy spending for the Middle East reached \$436 million, or 17 percent of total democracy assistance. (Democracy spending on Iraq and Afghanistan in this period was \$2.7 billion).<sup>47</sup> Virtually all of the spending went to seven of the region’s 21 countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, and Yemen). Morocco and Jordan were induced to sign compact agreements with the Millennium Challenge Corporation, committing themselves to political reforms in return for new aid. As Amir Taheri concluded: “Bush was abandoning a 60-year-old policy that had continued under 11 presidents from both parties.”<sup>48</sup>

One of the biggest new contributors was the Middle East Partnership Initiative, a new State Department unit created in 2002 that alone spent \$480 million on 450 projects between 2002 and 2009. By contrast, between 1990 and 2002, U.S. democracy assistance to the Middle East region totaled \$417 million, accounting for only 9 percent of U.S. democracy spending in that period.<sup>49</sup> In other words, Bush increased the dollar amount per year spent on democracy in the Middle East by a factor of *four* and *doubled* its proportion of overall U.S. democracy assistance spending.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup>“All Aboard the Freedom Train?” *Economist*, 23 July 2005.

<sup>46</sup>Gerald F. Seib, “U.S. Push for Democracy Doesn’t Seem to Extend to Nations of the Middle East,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 November 1991.

<sup>47</sup>United States Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Agencies Take Steps to Coordinate International Programs but Lack Information on Some U.S.-Funded Activities* (Washington, DC: United States Government Accountability Office, 2009).

<sup>48</sup>Amir Taheri, “The United States and the Reshaping of the Greater Middle East,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 27 (July/August 2005): 295–301, at 296.

<sup>49</sup>Steven E. Finkel, Daniel H. Wallace, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán and Mitchell A. Seligson, *Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building: Results of a Cross-National Quantitative Study* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2006).

<sup>50</sup>Stephen McInerney, *The Federal Budget and Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2011: Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Project on Middle East Democracy, 2010).

Structurally, the Freedom Agenda included attempts to support local actors in building functioning democracies in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the U.S. occupations of those countries. Taheri called this “the most radical modification of the status quo since the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.”<sup>51</sup> The hope was that they would produce diffusion effects to the region. While perceived national security threats played the dominant role in the overthrow of these authoritarian regimes,<sup>52</sup> the subsequent occupations were driven by a pro-democracy logic.<sup>53</sup> Bush insisted in 2001 that the new Afghan government “must be broad-based, represent all Afghans, men and women, and be drawn from all ethnic groups.”<sup>54</sup> He also argued *prior to* the Iraq invasion that “a liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region” and that “a new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region.”<sup>55</sup> Bush administration planning as early as August 2002 defined war objectives in Iraq as being to “liberate the Iraqi people from tyranny and assist them in creating a society based on modernation, pluralism, and democracy.”<sup>56</sup> In 2003, Bush predicted that “Iraqi democracy . . . will send forth the news, from Damascus to Teheran—that freedom can be the future of every nation” and that “the establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution.”<sup>57</sup>

The diplomatic and rhetorical efforts may have waned over time, even as the material and structural efforts steadily increased. For instance, in his 2007 State of the Union Address, Bush called for political freedom in Cuba, Belarus, and Myanmar, ignoring the Middle East. Nonetheless, Bush’s ability to convince the U.S. Congress, Middle East governments, and the European Union to accept the Freedom Agenda was remarkable, given the initial hostility of all

---

<sup>51</sup>Amir Taheri, “The United States and the Reshaping of the Greater Middle East,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 27 (July/August 2005): 295–301, at 298.

<sup>52</sup>Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper, 2008).

<sup>53</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>54</sup>“Joint Statement on Afghanistan by President George W. Bush and President Vladimir V. Putin”, 13 November 2001, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011113-9.html>, 10 May 2013.

<sup>55</sup>“President Discusses the Future of Iraq, Remarks to American Enterprise Institute”, 26 February 2003, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html>, 23 February 2013.

<sup>56</sup>Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 154–155.

<sup>57</sup>“Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy,” 6 November 2003, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>, 23 February 2013.

three groups. Moreover, the Freedom Agenda was institutionalized in *National Security Presidential Directive 58* of 2008 (which retained language from the ADVANCE Democracy Act that died in committee in 2007) and, among other things, insisted that aid be tied to democratic reforms and required diplomats in authoritarian countries to maintain regular contact with democracy activists and dissidents. Despite frequent assertions by area specialists<sup>58</sup> that Bush abandoned the Freedom Agenda after Islamic parties surged in elections in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt, the President continued to publicly press for greater democracy in these countries right to the end.<sup>59</sup> If presidential time and focus is taken into account, the Bush administration consistently “poured ‘inputs’ into the Freedom Agenda.”<sup>60</sup>

We can think of the four dimensions of the Bush Doctrine in terms of the degree to which they employed hard/material or soft/normative power, and the degree to which they were targeted at specific countries or at many simultaneously (see Figure 2).

## CORRELATIONS AND QUESTIONS

To begin, we can look at the country-by-country status of the antecedent conditions—globalization, social movements, and Freedom Agenda narrowly targeted resources—and compare these to actual movements in a democratic direction between 2001 and 2012 (see Table 1). From this correlative analysis, the countries most vulnerable to Freedom Agenda effects did indeed experience greater democratic gains in this period. The main outliers from this pattern are Jordan (below predicted) and Libya (above predicted). At a minimum, then, this provides a reason to take seriously the possible effects of the Freedom Agenda.

The *causal* question, however, is whether the Freedom Agenda contributed to those gains. While a sophisticated large-*n* statistical analysis of Freedom Agenda spending on country-by-country democratic outcomes is tempting, the fact that spending was only one of four dimensions, and arguably not the most important, would severely limit the inferential value of such results to the Freedom Agenda as a whole. On the other hand, while in-depth country case studies could generate internally valid results, the large number of countries and contexts would severely limit the

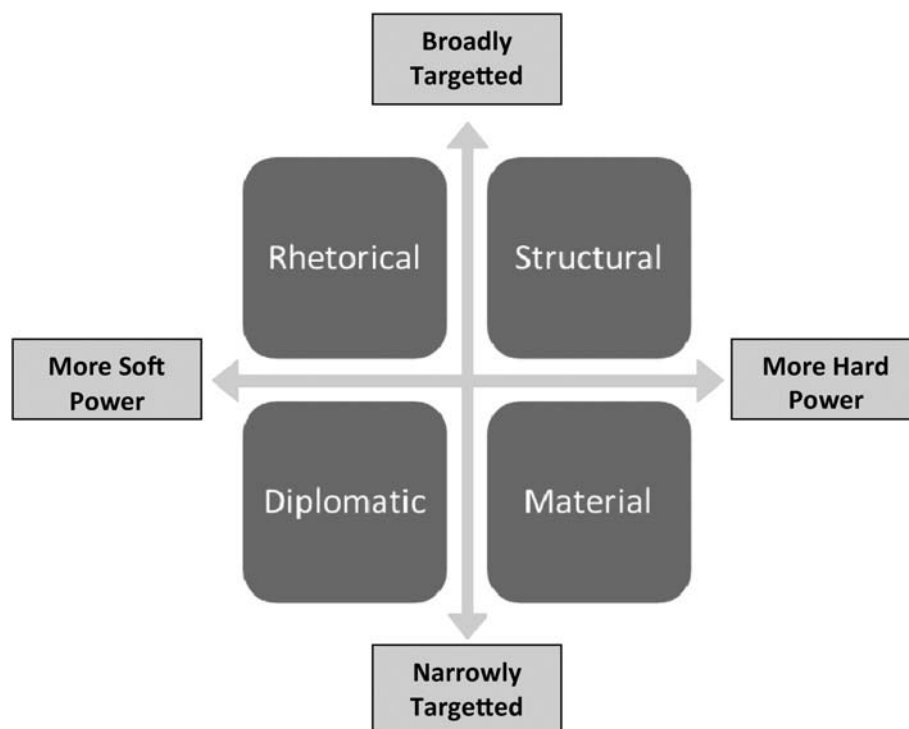
---

<sup>58</sup>Osman Hassan, “American Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Lessons for Europe?,” in Joel Peters, ed., *The European Union and the Arab Spring: Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in the Middle East* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 131.

<sup>59</sup>“Interview of the President by Mona Shazli, Dream TV, Egypt”, 12 May 2008, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/05/20080512-12.html>, 23 February 2013.

<sup>60</sup>Eric Patterson and Jonathan Amaral, “Presidential Leadership and Democracy Promotion,” *Public Integrity* 11 (Fall 2009): 327–345, at 339.

FIGURE 2  
Four Dimensions of the Bush “Freedom Agenda”



inferential value of such results to the region as a whole. Instead, I choose a broad strategy here, considering all four dimensions of the Freedom Agenda using summative evidence drawn from many countries.

The scholarly debate on the causal effects of the Freedom Agenda broadly falls into three main interpretations. Two of these form the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), namely, that the Freedom Agenda had *no effect* or a *negative effect* on democratic prospects in the region. However, there are two versions of this. One, which we might label  $H_{0-a}$ , is that the Freedom Agenda had no effect or a negative effect because it was of *insufficient magnitude*.<sup>61</sup> This could be because it was based on poor implementation, was constrained by European resistance, lacked sufficient resources, or

<sup>61</sup>Osman Hassan, “American Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Lessons for Europe?,” in Joel Peters, ed., *The European Union and the Arab Spring: Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in the Middle East* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 128; Shadi Hamid and Steven Brooke, “Promoting Democracy to Stop Terror, Revisited,” *Policy Review* 159 (February/March 2010): 45–57, at 48; Augustus Richard Norton, “The Puzzle of Political Reform in the Middle East,” in Louise L’Estrange Fawcett, ed., *International Relations of the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 146; Melvyn Leffler, “Bush’s Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy* 144 (September 2004): 22–28; Marina Ottaway, “The Problem of Credibility,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey*, 189.

TABLE 1  
*Antecedent Conditions of Freedom Agenda Effects (Ranked by Predicted Effects)*

Country	Globalization Ca. 2008 <sup>a</sup>	Social Movement Ca. 2001 <sup>b</sup>	Freedom Agenda Narrow Target? <sup>c</sup>	Predicted Effects By Rank <sup>d</sup>	Democratic Gains 2001 to 2012 <sup>e</sup>
Jordan	HIGH	HIGH	YES+	1	↓
Lebanon	HIGH	HIGH	YES+	1	↑↑
Turkey	HIGH	HIGH	YES	2	↑↑↑
Tunisia	HIGH	HIGH	YES	2	↑↑↑↑
Morocco	HIGH	MEDIUM	YES+	2	↑
Egypt	HIGH	MEDIUM	YES+	2	↑(↑↑)
Pakistan	MEDIUM	HIGH	YES+	2	↑↑
Iraq	N/A	LOW	YES+	3	↑↑↑
Afghanistan	N/A	LOW	YES+	3	↑↑
Algeria	MEDIUM	HIGH	YES	3	–
Bahrain	HIGH	MEDIUM	NO	4	↓
Yemen	LOW	MEDIUM	YES+	4	(↑)
UAE	HIGH	LOW	NO	5	↓
Qatar	HIGH	LOW	NO	5	↑
Kuwait	HIGH	LOW	NO	5	–
Oman	HIGH	LOW	NO	5	–
Saudi Arabia	HIGH	LOW	NO	5	–
Libya	MEDIUM	LOW	NO	5	↑(↑)
Syria	LOW	MEDIUM	YES	5	–
Iran	LOW	MEDIUM	YES	5	–

Source: Author's compilation and calculations based on sources below.

<sup>a</sup>Scores from the KOG Globalization Index, 2011 separated using mean-based partition cluster analysis.

<sup>b</sup>*Freedom in the World*, 2002 Edition. Coded by the author based on: number of anti-regime protests; evidence of negotiations or concessions by the regime; and existence of an organized pro-democracy network or party.

<sup>c</sup>Yes if U.S. bilateral diplomatic pressures for democratic change. Yes+ if in-country democracy spending present.

<sup>d</sup>Grouped according to sum of globalization, social movement, and narrow resources scores, each scored 3 (most present) to 1 (least present).

<sup>e</sup>One arrow for each 0.5 point movement on the Freedom House scale. 2012 estimates (in brackets) for Egypt, Yemen, and Libya based on Freedom House trend arrows.

was trumped by other U.S. policy priorities.<sup>62</sup> An Arab nationalist newspaper, *Al Quds al Arabi*, argued in 2002 that the Freedom Agenda was “too little” and “reflects the extent to which the ruling elite in Washington despises the Arabs.”<sup>63</sup> Many intellectuals argued after the U.S. criticism of a Hamas victory in Palestinian elections in 2006 that “the

<sup>62</sup>Vincent Durac and Francesco Cavatorta, “Strengthening Authoritarian Rule through Democracy Promotion? Examining the Paradox of the US and EU Security Strategies: The Case of Ben Ali’s Tunisia,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36 (April 2009): 3–19.; Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 238; Oliver Schlumberger, “Arab Authoritarianism,” in Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1–18.

<sup>63</sup>Ottaway, “The Problem of Credibility,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey*, 183.



United States has stopped trying to push autocratic governments toward democratic reforms.”<sup>64</sup> Sami Baroudi found that most negative criticism from Arab intellectuals was based on the belief that “the United States is insincere when it talks about promoting democracy . . . [and] is satisfied with mere cosmetic change that does not touch the regimes’ authoritarian core.”<sup>65</sup>

The second negative interpretation of the Freedom Agenda, which we might label  $H_{0-b}$ , is that it had no effect or a negative effect on democratic prospects because it was of *excessive magnitude*.<sup>66</sup> Some experts argued that it caused blowback against the democratic ideal because of its intrusive character. The Arab nationalist press, noted Ottaway, “inveigh[ed] against what it . . . interpreted as an aggressively prodemocracy stance by the Bush administration.”<sup>67</sup> Others concluded that it strengthened the clientelistic networks of regimes.<sup>68</sup> One Australian scholar concluded that U.S.-backed political reforms handed regimes “a new set of tools to supplant their declining legitimacy.”<sup>69</sup>

These two versions of the null hypothesis were often made simultaneously by critics of the Bush policy seemingly more intent on ideological criticism than internal logic or analytic rigor.<sup>70</sup> Thus, in considering evidence linking the Freedom Agenda to democratic gains, it is important to consider falsifying evidence both that the efforts were too little (failing because they were insufficient) and that they were too much (failing because they were excessive). Properly speaking, only the latter would count as evidence against the proposition of a positive relationship between the Freedom Agenda and democratic change.

---

<sup>64</sup>R. K. Ramazani, “President Bush Deviates from Core American Principles in Middle East Policies,” *Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 17 (October 2008): 209–221, at 213.

<sup>65</sup>Sami Baroudi, “Arab Intellectuals and the Bush Administration’s Campaign for Democracy: The Case of the Greater Middle East Initiative,” *Middle East Journal* 61 (June 2007): 390–418, at 408.

<sup>66</sup>Thomas F. Schaller, “Do Mideast Revolutions Vindicate Bush?” *Baltimore Sun*, 22 February 2011.

<sup>67</sup>Ottaway, “The Problem of Credibility,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey*, 182.

<sup>68</sup>Amaney A. Jamal, *Barriers to Democracy: The Other Side of Social Capital in Palestine and the Arab World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>69</sup>Benjamin MacQueen, “Democracy Promotion and Arab Autocracies,” *Global Change, Peace & Security* 21 (June 2009): 165–178, at 176.

<sup>70</sup>Mustapha Sayyid, “International Dimensions of Middle Eastern Authoritarianism,” in Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 215–230; Eberhard Kienle, “Democracy Promotion and the Renewal of Authoritarian Rule,” in Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 231–249; Robert Bowker, “Democracy Promotion and Egyptian Political Reform During the Bush Era,” in Shahram Akbarzadeh and Benjamin MacQueen, eds., *American Democracy Promotion in the Changing Middle East: From Bush to Obama* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 114–128.

As with the negative claims, the positive claims have often been made in partisan, confused, and often contradictory language.<sup>71</sup> For clarity, four versions of the test hypothesis can be put forward using the distinction between critical and contributory effects, and between expected and unexpected mechanisms. The Freedom Agenda might have been “critical” because it greatly increased the probability of change or because it was a critical part of a cluster of factors that was necessary and sufficient for change. Alternatively, it might have been “contributory” because it modestly increased the probability of change or because it formed part of one of several clusters of factors, any one of which would have been sufficient for change. Secondly, the Freedom Agenda might have operated in expected or unexpected ways, an important distinction given the interactive nature of external–internal effects (see Table 2).

#### ANALYSIS: MATERIAL

Prior to the Freedom Agenda, there was mixed evidence about the effects of U.S. democracy spending on the Middle East. Seligson and colleagues found that while U.S. democracy spending had a strong and significant positive effect globally between 1990 and 2003, that effect was missing in the Middle East.<sup>72</sup> However, this was a period of democratic stagnation and virtually no significant U.S. democracy spending on the region. Philippe Schmitter, by contrast, found “surprising and convincing” evidence that U.S. and EU democracy aid “does seem to produce a positive effect” in his study of Morocco, Algeria, Palestine, and Egypt between 1980 and 1999.<sup>73</sup> James Scott and Carrie Steele likewise find that U.S. democracy aid is highly

TABLE 2  
*Hypotheses Linking the Freedom Agenda to Democracy Gains*

	<i>Expected Mechanisms</i>	<i>Unexpected Mechanisms</i>
None/Negative	H <sub>0-a</sub> , H <sub>0-b</sub>	—
Critical	H <sub>1</sub>	H <sub>2</sub>
Contributory	H <sub>3</sub>	H <sub>4</sub>

<sup>71</sup>Charles Krauthammer, “Three Cheers for the Bush Doctrine,” *Time*, 7 March 2005; Jan Fleischhauer, “George W. Bush’s Liberal Legacy,” *Der Spiegel*, 7 February 2011; Elliott Abrams, “Egypt Protests Show George W. Bush Was Right About Freedom in the Arab World,” *The Washington Post*, 29 January 2011.

<sup>72</sup>Steven E. Finkel, Daniel H. Wallace, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán and Mitchell A. Seligson, *Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building: Results of a Cross-National Quantitative Study* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2006).

<sup>73</sup>Philippe Schmitter, “International Democracy Promotion and Protection: Theory and Impact,” in Nuno Severiano Teixeira, ed., *The International Politics of Democratization: Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 26–52, 48.

effective in general, even if it is often overwhelmed by other factors.<sup>74</sup> These scholars have generally found lagged effects of spending in all regions. Seligson et al. found that the impact after five years is more than double the impact after one year.<sup>75</sup>

U.S. material assistance was limited to only nine of the region's 20 authoritarian countries (including Iraq and Afghanistan). It was also hamstrung by the well-known problems of finding suitable "civil society" partners. As a result, as much as half of the Middle East Partnership Initiative funds went to government agencies or training programs, or to government-run non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the so-called "royal NGOs" in Jordan.<sup>76</sup> In 2004, for instance, the Bush administration closed an "NGO Service Center" opened in Egypt in 1999 because of the Egyptian government's ability to control and undermine it.

In a few instances, the spending may have backfired by discrediting democracy groups or strengthening authoritarian regimes.<sup>77</sup> However, for the most part, the spending seems to have had the expected small but positive effects. One example is the role of the National Democratic Institute's (NDI's) presence in Bahrain between 2002 and 2006. The NDI trained and organized election monitors for Bahrain's 2002 municipal elections, in which opposition and civil society groups participated actively for the first time. Bahrain hosted the 2005 meeting of the Forum for the Future with NDI assistance. In 2006, worried about the influence of NDI activities, Bahrain authorities closed the office and expelled its director, claiming the need to inculcate "Arab experiences" of democracy.<sup>78</sup> The closure was widely assumed to relate to the upcoming 2006 elections.<sup>79</sup> Shia and Islamic parties participated in those elections for the first time, and openly charged the regime with vote-rigging and gerrymandering. In the following four years, the regime's repression of the opposition raised public discontent to a new high, leading to the dramatic 2011 uprising that

---

<sup>74</sup>James Scott and Carrie Steele, "Sponsoring Democracy: The United States and Democracy Aid to the Developing World, 1988–2001," *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (March 2011): 47–69.

<sup>75</sup>Steven E. Finkel, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Mitchell A. Seligson and C. Neal Tate, *Deepening Our Understanding of the Effects of Us Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building: Final Report* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2008).

<sup>76</sup>Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March: America's Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 91; Julia Choucair-Vizoso, "Illusive Reform: Jordan's Stubborn Stability," in Marina Ottaway and Julia Choucair-Vizoso, eds., *Beyond the Facade: Political Reform in the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 45–70, 67.

<sup>77</sup>Mohammed El-Khawas, "North Africa and the War on Terror," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 14 (Fall 2003): 176–191.

<sup>78</sup>"Deputy Doubts NDI Intentions, Promotes Local Experience," *Bahrain Tribune*, 15 June 2005.

<sup>79</sup>Reem Khalifa, "Bahrain Starts Process to Expel U.S. Democracy Activist," *Associated Press*, 8 May 2006.

was repressed by a Saudi military intervention. In this case, U.S. material support interacted positively with long-running domestic democratization forces that had begun in 1994 and were then partly met in a 2002 constitution.

In Egypt, election monitors from the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies and the Egyptian Association for Supporting Democracy were trained with U.S. funds under the MEPI, given for the first time without Egyptian government approval. The latter, for instance, received \$520,000 in MEPI funding, allowing it to increase its monitoring team from the 168 of the 2005 elections to more than 5,000 for the 2010 polls. These monitors participated in documenting the fraud of the 2010 elections and then in launching the Tahrir Square demonstrations, angered by what they had seen. “As a social scientist and an activist, I have to be honest,” Saad Eddin Ibrahim, founder of the Ibn Khaldun Center, told *The Boston Globe*, “the Bush administration did more for what is happening in Egypt now.”<sup>80</sup> The leaders of the 6 April Youth Movement that was prominent in the anti-Mubarak movement were also trained with U.S. funds, especially the U.S. and UK-backed Alliance for Youth Movements whose 2008 conference in New York on the potential of social networking technologies was attended by 6 April founder Ahmed Maher. “This certainly helped during the revolution,” he remarked afterwards.<sup>81</sup>

In Yemen, a \$300,000 NDI program was launched in 2005 to promote peace among 201 tribes among which 164 ongoing conflicts were identified.<sup>82</sup> These conflicts had long been managed by the Saleh regime through divide-and-rule tactics, and an NDI program on tribal reconciliation going back to 2001 had met with fierce resistance from the Yemeni government and equally fierce support from the tribal sheiks. Saleh forced NDI officials to end the program in 2006. As one sheik commented: “They live on divide and rule. When they see us having relations with internationals, it makes them very angry. NDI . . . gathered us as one.”<sup>83</sup> In 2007, the paramount sheik of the powerful Hashid tribe set up a National Solidarity Council of

---

<sup>80</sup>Farah Stockman, “Bush Program Helped Lay the Groundwork in Egypt: Vote Monitors Trained with Funds from US,” *Boston Globe*, 13 February 2011.

<sup>81</sup>Ron Nixon, “U.S. Groups Helped Nurture Arab Opposition,” *The New York Times*, 15 April 2011.

<sup>82</sup>National Democratic Institute, *Yemen: Tribal Conflict Management Program Research Report* (Washington: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2007).

<sup>83</sup>David Finkel, “In the End, a Painful Choice; Program Weighs Leader’s Edict, Tribes’ Needs,” *The Washington Post*, 20 December 2005. See also David Finkel, “U.S. Ideals Meet Reality in Yemen,” *The Washington Post*, 18 December 2005; David Finkel, “A Struggle for Peace in a Place Where Fighting Never Ends,” *The Washington Post*, 19 December 2005.

tribes for the first time.<sup>84</sup> The defection of tribal sheiks in 2011 from Saleh transformed the youth-led movement into a broader coalition and was a turning point in the movement that led to Saleh's negotiated departure.<sup>85</sup>

Elsewhere, spending was targeted at groups that would later play a key role in anti-regime movements. For instance, funding to promote opposition views in Iran began under an \$85 million grant from the inter-agency Iran-Syria Policy and Operations Group, headed by the daughter of Vice President Dick Cheney, which operated from 2006 to 2007.<sup>86</sup> Iranian activists also participated via Facebook in the Alliance for Youth Movements, which "included conceiving innovative means of using the Internet for purposes related to destabilizing the Iranian government," wrote a former Bush administration official.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, while material spending probably had a small overall effect, in some instances its effects may have been significant, even if they were overwhelmed or even reversed by domestic factors or (in the case of Bahrain) by other external ones. Indeed, this is why the programs were such a source of irritation to the authoritarian regimes.<sup>88</sup> Walid Kazzuha wrote that "the security of the Arab regimes was undermined as the US encouraged domestic political demands for reform."<sup>89</sup> In the case of material spending, at least, these results were precisely what was intended.

## ANALYSIS: DIPLOMACY

U.S. diplomatic soft power has always been an important factor in Middle Eastern politics.<sup>90</sup> Under Bush, it was used more actively, but still varied widely across time and place. When Congress sought to make military aid to Egypt conditional on judicial and police reforms in 2007, for instance, Bush obtained a waiver on national security grounds, even though five years earlier he had surprised Mubarak by delaying any increase in military aid until human rights were improved. In response to restrictions placed on

---

<sup>84</sup>Frederic Wehrey, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Jessica Watkins, Jeffrey Martini and Robert A. Guffey, *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East after the Iraq War* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 90.

<sup>85</sup>Laura Kasinof and Neil MacFarquhar, "Key Tribal Chief Wants Yemen Leader to Quit," *The New York Times*, 27 February 2011; Oliver Holmes, "Yemen's President Seeks Tribal Support," *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, 28 February 2011.

<sup>86</sup>Laura Rozen, "The Nonwar War Against Iran," *National Journal*, 20 January 2007; Farah Stockman, "US Unit Created to Pressure Iran, Syria Disbanded," *Boston Globe*, 26 May 2007.

<sup>87</sup>Scott Ritter, "Iranian Elections and Energy Security," *International Oil Daily*, 19 June 2009.

<sup>88</sup>Ron Nixon, "U.S. Groups Helped Nurture Arab Opposition," *The New York Times*, 15 April 2011.

<sup>89</sup>Walid Kazzuha, "The Fantasy of Arab Democracy without a Constituency," in Nathan J. Brown and Emad Eldin Shahin, eds., *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East: Regional Politics and External Policies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 54.

<sup>90</sup>William A. Rugh, *American Encounters with Arabs: The "Soft Power" Of U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006).



National Endowment for Democracy institutes in Egypt, Bahrain, and Algeria in 2006–2007, to cite another example, the administration lodged formal protests but did not exert stronger pressures.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, the diplomatic effort was also constrained by resistance from within the bureaucracy and diplomatic corps. One of the architects of the Freedom Agenda noted that “plenty of officials found [the Freedom Agenda] unrealistic and had to be prodded or overruled to follow the president’s lead.”<sup>92</sup> Finally, diplomatic pressures were notably modest or absent in dealing with the six Gulf Cooperation Council states where the Bush administration believed it had deep security and energy interests.

Nonetheless, in the early years of the Freedom Agenda, U.S. diplomatic pressures coincided with a series of limited political openings in Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Morocco. These usually involved some loosening of electoral rules or civic freedoms. In some cases, such as the elections for half the seats on 178 municipal councils held in Saudi Arabia in 2005 and then postponed when their term expired in 2009, the success was limited. There were, however, some important and enduring results of the diplomatic push. Joint French–U.S. fashioning of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 in 2004 and insistence on a UN investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005 led to a collapse of Syrian order in Lebanon through the Cedar Revolution of 2005, paving the way for the first free elections in Lebanon in 30 years<sup>93</sup> and “encourag[ing] Syrian opposition forces to intensify their demands for political reform and to work together to obtain it.”<sup>94</sup> In Morocco, where democracy promotion funding went up 10-fold, the U.S. embassy supported the visit to the United States in 2005 of the daughter of the head of the country’s main (illegal) Islamist movement, Justice and Charity, as well as arranging an official visit to Washington for the leader of the main legal Islamist party, the Party of Justice and Development. Under pressures from the U.S. embassy, the regime also established an independent human rights commission to investigate past abuses headed by a former political

---

<sup>91</sup>Dina Bishara, “American Party Aid Institutes Are in the Arab Line of Fire,” *Daily Star (Beirut)*, 28 August 2007.

<sup>92</sup>Elliott Abrams, “Egypt Protests Show George W. Bush Was Right About Freedom in the Arab World,” *Washington Post*, 29 January 2011. See also Marc Grossman, “Challenges to Diplomacy and the U.S. State Department,” in Matthew J. Morgan, ed., *The Impact of 9/11 on Politics and War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 24–46.

<sup>93</sup>Robert G. Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006).

<sup>94</sup>Ellen Lust-Okar, “Reform in Syria: Steering between the Chinese Model and Regime Change,” in Marina Ottaway and Julia Choucair-Vizoso, eds., *Beyond the Facade: Political Reform in the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 71.

prisoner in 2004 and allowed international election monitors for its 2007 parliamentary elections.<sup>95</sup>

Egypt, meanwhile, “witnessed its most transparent and competitive presidential and legislative elections in more than half a century”<sup>96</sup> in 2005 after direct and personal prodding by both Bush and Rice.<sup>97</sup> The elections, wrote Michele Dunne, were “partly due to the unequivocal support of the United States, which used public statements, private diplomacy, and assistance programs to encourage a gradual transition to a freer political system.”<sup>98</sup> Some experts worried that the elections strengthened Mubarak and the planned succession of his son, Gamal.<sup>99</sup> But by effectively opening political space for opposition parties and creating expectations for free and fair elections, Bush raised the costs for Mubarak in his plans to manage the 2009–2010 elections and install his son Gamal as President. Here, as in Jordan and Bahrain, elections held at American urging exposed the insincerity of the regimes, so that “the only option for those who truly wanted change was to ignore electoral politics altogether and take to the streets.”<sup>100</sup>

In Syria, the opposition alliance’s Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change, signed in 2005 after the regime responded to Bush pressures and promised democratic changes, was described by leaders of the Syrian National Council that led the 2011–2012 democratic movement there as one of its “main political forces.”<sup>101</sup> In Pakistan, where a momentous 1999 military coup had been largely ignored by the Clinton administration, the Bush administration played a key role in the return to civilian rule in 2008 because it “felt it was urgent to have a democratically elected civilian government in Islamabad.”<sup>102</sup> While 89 percent of Pakistanis

---

<sup>95</sup>Zoé Nautré, *U.S. Idealism Meets Reality: Democracy Promotion in the Middle East During the George W. Bush Administration* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), 156, 115.

<sup>96</sup>“Egypt” in *Freedom in the World* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2006).

<sup>97</sup>“Bush Urges Mubarak to Set Example With Egypt Election,” *Dow Jones International News*, 1 June 2005; “Secretary Rice: Remarks at the American University in Cairo,” 20 June 2005, accessed at <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm>, 13 October 2013.

<sup>98</sup>Michele Dunne, “The Baby, the Bathwater, and the Freedom Agenda in the Middle East,” *Washington Quarterly* 32 (January 2009): 129–141, at 132–133. Also Zoé Nautré, *U.S. Idealism Meets Reality: Democracy Promotion in the Middle East During the George W. Bush Administration* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), 90–91.

<sup>99</sup>Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 207.

<sup>100</sup>James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 142.

<sup>101</sup>Al-Arabiya Television, “Syrian National Council Member Says Al-Asad Government Has Lost Legitimacy,” *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 5 October 2011.

<sup>102</sup>Mohamed A. El-Khawas, “Musharraf and Pakistan: Democracy Postponed,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 20 (Winter 2009): 94–118, at 107.

denounced the regime's cooperation with the United States against terrorists, that same opposition demanded the return to democratic rule that the United States was facilitating by brokering transition talks.

Another result of the diplomatic push was the acceptance of democracy as a regional norm. One example was the Forum for the Future of Middle East and Western governments as well as business and civil society groups that held eight meetings in the region between 2004 and 2011 to discuss political reform. More dramatic was the about-face by the Arab League, which had not amended its constitution since 1945 and whose "human rights" charter of 1994 spoke only of "racism, Zionism, occupation, and foreign domination." In 2004, under pressures from the Bush administration<sup>103</sup> and after previously being rejected by the Saudis,<sup>104</sup> an inter-governmental meeting of Arab League governments issued the Sana'a Declaration on Democracy, Human Rights and the Role of the International Criminal Court, which endorsed the importance of a free media, an active civil society, an independent judiciary, and "periodically elected legislatures, representing the citizens in a fair way and ensuring their full participation."<sup>105</sup> Within weeks, Arab intellectuals and democracy activists mobilized for several high-profile events—including the Alexandria conference of Arab writers, intellectuals, and political activists in March 2004, which called on Arab governments to accept alternations of power, competitive elections, and term limits.<sup>106</sup> The May 2004 Arab League summit referred to "political reform" in its Tunis Declaration, the first Arab League statement to do so. A revised Arab Charter of Human Rights, which took effect in 2008, complied with international human rights principles and established the first regional human rights mechanism.

Egyptian opposition leader Ibrahim argued that these acts were the functional equivalent of the Helsinki Accords because they gave international legitimacy to domestic democracy activists for the first time.<sup>107</sup> The Arab League would later play a contributory role in two of the 2010–2011

---

<sup>103</sup>Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March: America's Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 98.

<sup>104</sup>Richard Youngs, "External Dimensions of Democratization: The Case of the Middle East," in Nuno Severiano Teixeira, ed., *The International Politics of Democratization: Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 158.

<sup>105</sup>Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, accessed at [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/compilation\\_democracy/arab\\_region.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/compilation_democracy/arab_region.htm), 23 February 2012.

<sup>106</sup>Sami Baroudi, "Arab Intellectuals and the Bush Administration's Campaign for Democracy: The Case of the Greater Middle East Initiative," *Middle East Journal* 61 (June 2007): 390–418, at 397.

<sup>107</sup>Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "A Helsinki Accord for the Arab World," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 22 (June 2005): 63–64.; see also Natan Sharansky, "The Middle East Needs Its Helsinki," in *International Herald Tribune*, 30 March 2004.

uprisings—inviting the United Nations to impose a no-fly zone in Libya and imposing economic sanctions on the Assad regime in Syria.

There were many cases during the Bush years in which diplomatic pressures failed, notably in Iran, or were subverted by other policy aims. Nonetheless, the diplomatic successes in Egypt, Lebanon, and Pakistan, as well as at the regional level, show the ability of diplomatic pressures to magnify and strengthen domestic forces. The diplomatic pressures were insufficient in some cases but contributory in others, creating one of several possible causal clusters, working through expected mechanisms.

### ANALYSIS: RHETORIC

The Freedom Agenda rhetoric tended to elicit anger, resentment, and distrust across the Middle East. Despite Bush administration hopes that it would be welcomed by democracy activists, it tended instead to alienate and infuriate them. In both the 2006 and 2008 Arab public opinion polls, for instance, 65 percent of respondents in the six surveyed countries did not believe that the United States was sincere about promoting democracy in the region (versus about 25 percent who believed that it was). Bush's rhetorical tone tended to raise questions of hypocrisy and an in-bred skepticism about all politicians. As one leading Egyptian democrat put it: "We were fighting for years. And then they come and tell us, that's because Condoleezza Rice made a pressure on Mubarak or George Bush made a pressure on Mubarak. This is—I call this a new type of imperialist, because they do not take our resources, our oil, our materials, so they take also our efforts, our struggle for freedom."<sup>108</sup>

This backlash had two visibly separate effects. One was to undermine the legitimacy of domestic democracy activists, who were disparaged as agents of an imperialistic United States. Shibley Telhami noted that a "deep suspicion of U.S. intentions put the genuine democracy advocates in the region on the defensive."<sup>109</sup> However, a second and quite unexpected effect was to create new political space for socialist, Islamist, and government/military reform advocates who sought to counter the Bush rhetoric with a new democratic rhetoric of their own. In Egypt, for example, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, "in response to the debate initiated by U.S. policies and suggestions,"<sup>110</sup> unveiled its own reform initiative in March 2004, which demanded

---

<sup>108</sup>"Egyptian Feminist Nawal El Saadawi on Bush's Democratization of Middle East", *Democracy Now Radio*, 3 March 2005, accessed at [http://www.democracynow.org/2005/3/3/egyptian\\_feminist\\_nawal\\_el\\_saadawi\\_on](http://www.democracynow.org/2005/3/3/egyptian_feminist_nawal_el_saadawi_on), 10 March 2013.

<sup>109</sup>Shibley Telhami, "Upheaval in Egypt: Not About the U.S.," *Politico.com*, 31 January 2011.

<sup>110</sup>Katerina Dalacoura, "U.S. Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: A Critique," *International Affairs* 81 (October 2005): 963–979, at 967.

democratic freedoms and the suspension of emergency law. Michele Dunne, writing in 2005, noted that many reformers criticized the Freedom Agenda as a means of asserting their patriotism, which had the unexpected consequence of “open[ing] up political space so that reformers can articulate their own ideas.”<sup>111</sup> Marina Ottaway wrote, “Although objecting to U.S. policy, a large number of intellectuals, however, agreed that Arab countries needed to put their political houses in order and that democracy should not be rejected just because the United States was proposing it.”<sup>112</sup>

This mutual constitution of anti-Bush and pro-democracy rhetoric became widely evident among Arab intellectuals during the Bush presidency. Many argued both *against* the Freedom Agenda and *for* a grassroots democratic transformation of the Middle East.<sup>113</sup> One later result that vividly highlighted these twin effects (anti-Americanism *and* anti-authoritarianism) was the trial in 2012 of 43 democracy workers in Egypt, 16 of them Americans, on charges of violating sovereignty laws in working for the Freedom Agenda. “The demands for dignity that were part of the protest movement also implicated what many perceived to be Egypt’s undignified dependency on the U.S.,” commented one Egyptian scholar.<sup>114</sup>

The link between anti-U.S. (or anti-Western) nationalism and pro-democracy sentiments was notable on several occasions during the protest movements. Iraqi citizens, for instance, jeered Saudi rulers as “slaves of America and Israel” for sending Saudi troops into Bahrain to quell unrest there in 2011.<sup>115</sup> Both the Revolutionary Youth Union and the Muslim Brotherhood, meanwhile, made “national sovereignty” a key demand during the Tahrir Square movement, a term generally considered code for resistance to American influence (and Egypt’s transitional government moved quickly in 2011 to lift the blockade of Gaza and to normalize relations with Iran). A cartoon in Egypt’s *Al-Dustour* newspaper showed Ben Ali falling into a trash can clutching the American, French, and British flags as well as a bag of money.<sup>116</sup> Editorials in Iran and Syria pointed to Tunisia’s pro-Western policies as the main reason for Ben Ali’s

---

<sup>111</sup>Michele Dunne, “Integrating Democracy into the U.S. Policy Agenda,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey*, 219.

<sup>112</sup>Marina Ottaway, “Evaluating Middle East Reform: Significant or Cosmetic?” in Marina Ottaway and Julia Choucair-Vizoso, eds., *Beyond the Facade: Political Reform in the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 2.

<sup>113</sup>Osman Hassan, “America’s Imperial Right and Emancipatory Wrongs for the Middle East,” *International Studies Association Annual Conference*, Montréal, 17–19 March 2011.

<sup>114</sup>David Kirkpatrick and Mayy El Sheikh, “Trial of U.S. Non-Profit Workers in Egypt is Abruptly Put Off,” *The New York Times*, 27 February 2012.

<sup>115</sup>“Developments in the Region,” *The New York Times*, 20 March 2011.

<sup>116</sup>*Al-Dustour (Egypt)*, 16 January 2011.



downfall.<sup>117</sup> At an extraordinary summit of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union in Abu Dhabi in 2011, Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani urged the Arab leaders to internalize the lesson of the Tunisia revolution and “not to place their countries at the service of the West.” The Hezbollah leader in Lebanon commented: “The criteria used for measuring closeness or remoteness from the United States are not human rights, democracy, or public freedoms, but the service the regimes in our region render to Israel.”<sup>118</sup> (Nonetheless, after months of internal debate, the Hezbollah leadership opted in 2011 to side with the Syrian regime, its patron, rather than with the democracy movement there).

The rhetoric of the Freedom Agenda drew heavily on critiques of Middle East authoritarianism made in the watershed Arab Human Development Report of 2002. The assertion by one commentator that “the Bush Doctrine set the premise”<sup>119</sup> for the 2010–2011 uprisings overstates the rhetorical innovation of the Freedom Agenda. Rather, by *replaying* an indigenous critique through the loudspeakers of an imperial power, the rhetoric had the unexpected effect of galvanizing domestic forces to reclaim the reform agenda. Amy Hawthorne wrote, “As U.S. rhetoric on democracy became more prominent . . . , domestic opponents of Arab regimes coupled their criticisms of U.S. policy with calls for reform.”<sup>120</sup> Baroudi’s analysis of the negative response of Arab intellectuals to the Freedom Agenda makes clear that none of the critiques rejected democratization itself, only the motives of the Bush administration. Indeed, the nationalistic conclusion of most reformers who joined in the debate was that “democratization of the Arab world is far more likely to hinder the American agenda than to serve it.”<sup>121</sup>

The rhetoric of the Freedom Agenda thus had both negative and positive effects. The rhetoric was met with derision by intellectuals and democrats in the Middle East who saw it as lecturing, hypocritical, self-interested, and imperialistic. It alienated and undermined long-time democracy activists in the region. On the other hand, the breadth and depth of reform advocates widened. Youngs writes that the rhetoric “played a role in generating more

---

<sup>117</sup>“Arab and Iranian Reactions to the Tunisia Uprising”, Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch Series, no. 3521, 19 January 2011, accessed at <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/4926.htm>, 13 February 2011.

<sup>118</sup>“Lebanese Hezbollah Leader Hails Egypt Revolution, Comments on Tribunal,” *Al-Manar Television (Beirut)*, 16 February 2011, BBC Monitoring Middle East, 18 February 2011.

<sup>119</sup>Charles Krauthammer, “From Baghdad to Benghazi,” *Washington Post*, 4 March 2011.

<sup>120</sup>Amy Hawthorne, “The New Reform Ferment,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey*, 63.

<sup>121</sup>Sami Baroudi, “Arab Intellectuals and the Bush Administration’s Campaign for Democracy: The Case of the Greater Middle East Initiative,” *Middle East Journal* 61 (June 2007): 390–418, at 410.

intensive debates over reform in the region,<sup>122</sup> while Dunne argues that the result was to “inject momentum into the overall movement toward reform.”<sup>123</sup> Bassma Kodmani, another critic, wrote in 2010 that “the democracy promotion agenda has undeniably triggered a change of attitude in the Arab world by governments and societies alike... The reality is the key developments and major ideological debates in the Arab world were strongly influenced, if not determined, by the foreign factor, whether in opposition to it or in support of it.”<sup>124</sup> As the Iraq experience showed, the empowerment of pragmatic populists could take place *alongside* the discrediting of long-time liberal activists. Given that the success of democratic movements depended critically on the breadth of the coalitions demanding reform, these positive effects were not incidental, even if they were unexpected. While it is nice to imagine an ideologically agile Bush administration that used different rhetoric for different groups, as Mark Haas suggests,<sup>125</sup> this seems fanciful in light of the “whole of government” embrace that was required to make the Freedom Agenda operative. The rhetorical strategy may have been rigid. But it produced more positive than negative results nonetheless.

#### ANALYSIS: STRUCTURAL

The positive direct effects of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars through diffusion were, for the most part, limited to political elites. Walid Jumblatt, the patriarch of the Druze Muslim community in Lebanon, told *The Washington Post* shortly after the Cedar Revolution: “It’s strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq... [W]hen I saw the Iraqi people voting three weeks ago, eight million of them, it was the start of a new Arab world... The Syrian people, the Egyptian people, all say that something is changing.”<sup>126</sup> As violence in Iraq subsided, these elite diffusion effects strengthened. Bahraini opposition leader Sheik Ali Salman said in 2006 that “there are no democracies in the

---

<sup>122</sup>Richard Youngs, “External Dimensions of Democratization: The Case of the Middle East,” in Nuno Severiano Teixeira, ed., *The International Politics of Democratization: Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 157.

<sup>123</sup>Michele Dunne, “Integrating Democracy into the U.S. Policy Agenda,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey*, 219.

<sup>124</sup>Bassma Kodmani, “Democratization by Whom? Resistance to Democracy Promotion in the Middle East,” in Peter J. Burnell and Richard Youngs, eds., *New Challenges to Democratization* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 153, 155.

<sup>125</sup>Mark Haas, “Missed Ideological Opportunities and George W. Bush’s Middle Eastern Policies,” *Security Studies* 21 (July-September 2012), 416–454.

<sup>126</sup>David Ignatius, “Beirut’s Berlin Wall,” *Washington Post*, 23 February 2005. See also his similar comments to Taheri in Amir Taheri, “The United States and the Reshaping of the Greater Middle East,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 27 (July/August 2005): 295–301, at 295.

Arab world, apart from Iraq.”<sup>127</sup> At the withdrawal of U.S. troops, the president of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, would declare that “the liberation of our country was not only an important turning point in Iraq itself but it was an important beginning for the region.”<sup>128</sup>

However, it is probably fair to say that the diffusion effects of democracy building in Iraq and Afghanistan on the movements were *negative* overall. The manner of the Iraq invasion in particular and the missteps in the reconstruction effort, according to Gamal Selim’s careful analysis, “resulted in the discrediting of the Iraqi political experience among mainstream Arab political and civil society forces as a potential model to be emulated or diffused.”<sup>129</sup> In the 2006 and 2008 Arab public opinion polls, for instance, 81 percent of respondents considered Iraq to be worse off as a result of the war (versus 2 percent better off). The 2003 Arab Human Development Report argued that “the issue of freedom in Arab countries has become a casualty of the overspill from the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq.”<sup>130</sup>

As with the rhetoric of the Freedom Agenda, however, the wars may have had positive effects through unexpected mechanisms. While it is true that vocal liberals were discredited and that authoritarian regimes used Iraq to argue against democracy, vocal regime critics gained a new and unexpected voice. In particular, by sparking nationalist sentiments, the wars, like the rhetoric, discredited authoritarian regimes that had long claimed to defend the Arab world against U.S. imperialism, creating a new discourse of strength through democracy. Jason Brownlee, for instance, shows how the successful opposition movement in Egypt “explicitly opposed U.S. political and economic goals” and can be traced in part to “mass denunciations of the Iraq War.”<sup>131</sup> In Jordan, “professional associations, university students, voluntary neighborhood initiatives, and political party activists were mobilized against the Allied Forces in support of Iraq. It appeared then that the entire political atmosphere in the country was changing and the critical space was expanding.”<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup>Faiza Saleh Ambah, “In Bahrain, Democracy Activists Regret Easing of U.S. Pressure,” *The Washington Post*, 27 November 2006.

<sup>128</sup>Cheryl Pellerin, “Biden Trip Marks New Alliance with Iraq,” *American Forces Press Service*, 1 December 2011, accessed at <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=66316>, 1 January 2012.

<sup>129</sup>Gamal M. Selim, “The Impact of Post-Saddam Iraq on the Cause of Democratization in the Arab World,” *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 6 (January 2012): 53–87, at 58.

<sup>130</sup>United Nations Development Programme and Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, *Arab Human Development Report 2003* (New York: UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, 2003).

<sup>131</sup>Jason Brownlee, “The Transnational Challenge to Arab Freedom,” *Current History* 110 (November 2011): 317–323, at 321.

<sup>132</sup>Ali Kassay, “The Effects of External Forces on Jordan’s Process of Democratization,” in George Joffe, ed., *Jordan in Transition* (London: Hurst, 2002), 63.

The potentially positive relationship between nationalism and democracy is of course widely studied in the Middle East<sup>133</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>134</sup> In a parallel theory of social revolutions, Theda Skocpol posited that “wars and imperial intrusions were the midwives of the revolutionary crises.”<sup>135</sup> This was in direct contrast to the classic “second image reversed” theories, especially that of Otto Hintze, in which international security threats made authoritarian states *stronger* not weaker.<sup>136</sup> One might say that in this case, the “Skocpol effects” overwhelmed the “Hintze effects.” In Syria, 287 intellectuals petitioned the regime in 2003 to liberalize the political system, arguing that “We must undermine [U.S. imperialist] aspirations by correcting our situation and improving our nation . . . [T]he only force capable of accomplishing that is a free nation—which was excluded from political and public involvement, and that must be brought back so it can regain its importance to defend the motherland.”<sup>137</sup> The 2004 founding statement of Egypt’s Popular Campaign for Change (*Kifaya*)—which would be one part of the Tahrir Square movement—argued that “the country faces external challenges that threaten its national security represented in the continued aggressive policies of the Zionist State and the U.S. occupation of Iraq” and that U.S. aggression and Egyptian despotism “are two sides of the same coin, each nourishing the other, and neither curable alone.”<sup>138</sup> Rabab El-Mahdi concluded that the Iraq invasion “produced not only veteran activists who initiated the democracy protest movement but also a large part of the intelligentsia and middle-class professionals who have been classically tied to the state” and thus the United States “played a role through creating an environment that changed the political opportunity structure agitating many Egyptians against the regime.”<sup>139</sup>

Hawthorne noted in 2004 that “The opinion pages of Arab newspapers are replete with articles championing democratic reform as the only way to

---

<sup>133</sup>Gwenn Okruhlik, “Empowering Civility through Nationalism : Reformist Islam and Belonging in Saudi Arabia,” in Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 189–212.

<sup>134</sup>Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>135</sup>Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 286.

<sup>136</sup>Peter Gourevitch, “The Second Image Reversed: International Influences on Domestic Politics,” *International Organization* 32 (Autumn 1978): 881–911, at 896–898.

<sup>137</sup>“Syrian Citizens Urge President Assad to Implement Sweeping Reforms,” Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch Series, no. 523, 16 June 2003, accessed at <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/887.htm>, 10 October 2013.

<sup>138</sup>El-Mahdi, “Enough,” 1020.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, 1023, 1024.

strengthen the region against Western control.”<sup>140</sup> One critic of the Bush policies observed that “the discussion on democracy is routinely accompanied by condemnation of the US and its policies in the region.”<sup>141</sup> Perhaps the most extensive on-the-ground documentation came from a 2010 RAND field study that found that many of the region’s youths (including an entire Saudi soccer team) had gone to wage jihad in Iraq “as a surrogate battle against the rulers of their own countries.”<sup>142</sup>

One way to empirically see the correlation between the two is in public opinion data (see Figure 3). The proportion of respondents in the Arab public opinion poll of 2010 who believed the aim of U.S. foreign policy was to preserve regional and global dominance or weaken the Muslim world was 33 percent (versus 3 percent of respondents who said it was to promote democracy). The proportion holding a favorable view of the United States was a dismal 10–12 percent throughout 2003 to 2010. Yet at the same time, as Telhami noted, “Every year since the Iraq War began, polls of Arabs revealed their sense that the Middle East is even less democratic than before.”<sup>143</sup> In other words, the ill-will toward the United States was accompanied by a growing resentment toward their own regimes.

The response of the regimes tended to reinforce this trend. In the lead-up to the Iraq invasion, riot police suppressed anti-war demonstrations in several Middle East countries, killing five.<sup>144</sup> Then, as protests continued, “those governments that went against the will of the overwhelming majority [by failing to oppose the Iraq War] . . . reacted in the way they knew best: They became even more repressive.”<sup>145</sup> In Libya, the Qaddafi regime’s renunciation of its weapons programs in 2003 brought unprecedented charges of groveling to the West from Arab intellectuals, as did Egypt’s agreement to enforce an Israeli blockade of the Gaza strip beginning in 2007. Both were seen as evidence of weakness in the face of the U.S. show of force in Iraq. Unlike in the past, this fuelled discontent *against* the regimes rather than diverting it *away from* them. The explanation for why this external factor now acted in a new direction must lie in changing domestic

---

<sup>140</sup>Hawthorne, “The New Reform Ferment,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey*, 57.

<sup>141</sup>Katerina Dalacoura, “US Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: A Critique,” *International Affairs* 81 (October 2005): 963–979, at 967.

<sup>142</sup>Frederic Wehrey, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Jessica Watkins, Jeffrey Martini and Robert A. Guffey, *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East after the Iraq War* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 110.

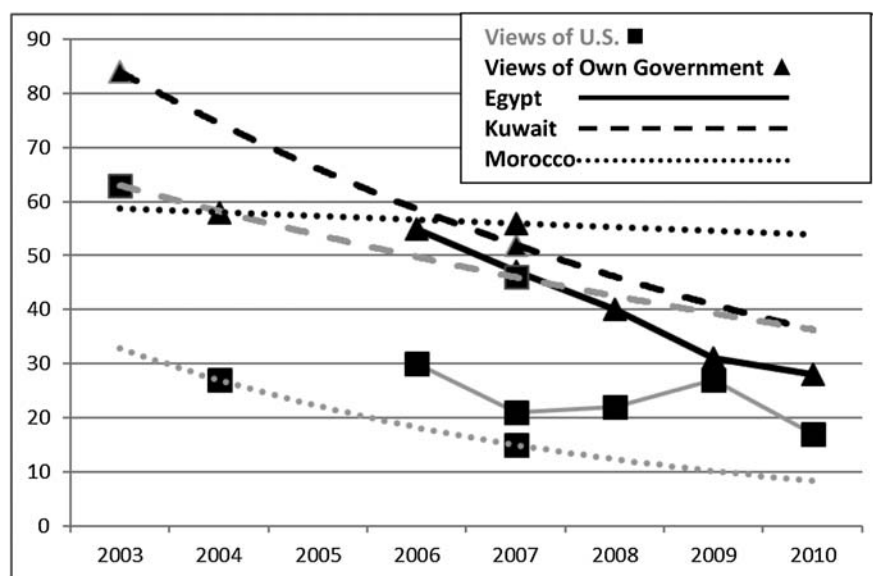
<sup>143</sup>Telhami, “Upheaval in Egypt.”

<sup>144</sup>United Nations Development Programme and Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, *Arab Human Development Report 2003* (New York: UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, 2003).

<sup>145</sup>Telhami, “Upheaval in Egypt.”



FIGURE 3  
 Citizen Views of United States and Views of Own Government



Source: Arab Public Opinion Polls, 2003–2010.

conditions, and reinforces the importance of external factors as interaction variables rather than independent variables.

In other words, the delegitimation of Middle East authoritarian regimes was parasitic on the anti-Americanism engendered by the Iraq War. “Widespread anger over the [Iraq] war and over Arab governments’ inability to prevent it exposed Arab governments to fresh charges of incompetence from their citizenry and to new expressions of discontent with the status quo,” wrote Hawthorne.<sup>146</sup> Or as Kazzuha wrote: “Arab leaders were humiliated when American troops marched into Baghdad and served notice to other Arab capitals who dared to incur the displeasure of the Bush administration.”<sup>147</sup> Since Arab regimes, unlike, say, East Asian ones, had built a political survival strategy on their anti-Western credentials,<sup>148</sup> this exacted a heavy price.

The realignment of nationalism with democracy in the Middle East represented something of a return to historical form. The outrage cause by the Allied occupation of Arab lands after World War I had led to the

<sup>146</sup>Hawthorne, “The New Reform Ferment,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey*, 63.

<sup>147</sup>Walid Kazzuha, “The Fantasy of Arab Democracy without a Constituency,” in Nathan J. Brown and Emad Eldin Shahin, eds., *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East: Regional Politics and External Policies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 54.

<sup>148</sup>Etel Solingen, “Pax Asiatica Versus Bella Levantina: The Foundations of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East,” *American Political Science Review* 101(November 2007): 757–780.

proclamation of a Syrian Arab Kingdom in 1920 with a constitution that was “the most democratic yet seen in the Middle East.”<sup>149</sup> Elizabeth Thompson’s argument that “reform in Arab politics must begin with respect for national sovereignty”<sup>150</sup> may be normatively attractive, but it is empirically false. Instead, democratic reform in the Middle East has more often been associated with threats to national sovereignty.

The social sciences (and natural sciences) dwell extensively on the sometimes unexpectedly positive consequences—from the American welfare state<sup>151</sup> to China’s reforms<sup>152</sup>—of preceding disasters. In economics, George Horwich introduced the idea that disasters can lead to an “accelerated depreciation”<sup>153</sup> of outmoded capital stock. In the case of the Freedom Agenda, the means of change was the weakening of Middle Eastern authoritarian legitimacy.

Ironically, it was the administration of President George H.W. Bush that had hoped for such a delegitimation effect after the first Gulf War, only to see anti-Saddam uprisings repressed. Instead, it was the *unexpected* effects of his son’s policies that provided external support for internal movements. Ibrahim put it thus in 2005: “The most honest and generous answer to whether the United States’ invasion of Iraq instigated this new democratic trend is that George Bush was the ‘midwife’ of the changes taking place today. But he is not responsible for the pregnancy. The seeds were laid over many years by people fighting for democracy.”<sup>154</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing the analysis above, the four dimensions of the Bush Freedom Agenda can be rated according to their causal effects and the mechanisms through which those effects operated as shown in Table 3.

In answer to the question posed by the title of this paper, “Did Bush Democratize the Middle East?” the answer is “Of course not.” The effects of the Bush Freedom Agenda would have been nil in the absence of domestic

---

<sup>149</sup>Elizabeth F. Thompson, *Justice Interrupted: Historical Perspectives on Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2009).

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Jeff Singleton, *The American Dole: Unemployment Relief and the Welfare State in the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

<sup>152</sup>Dali L. Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>153</sup>George Horwich, “Economic Lessons of the Kobe Earthquake,” *Economic Development & Cultural Change* 48 (July 2000): 521–543, at 523.

<sup>154</sup>Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “A Helsinki Accord for the Arab World,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 22 (June 2005): 63–64, at 65.

trends that had been moving in this direction since the 1990 s. In any case, individual agency belonged to domestic actors who brought the changes about amidst contingent circumstances. Nonetheless, in some cases, the Freedom Agenda had a significant positive effect *in creating the conditions to catalyze domestic forces*, often, however, in unexpected and clumsy ways. The Bush Freedom Agenda weakened authoritarian regimes and strengthened their opponents, helping to create conditions for democratic openings. Whether widespread democracy will result remains to be seen.

We cannot know if similar or greater democratic openings would have occurred in the absence of the Freedom Agenda. It was not the only external factor, and it could not have operated without existing domestic movements. But based on these findings, the Freedom Agenda was important in many causal processes that actually occurred. There were complex interactions taking place between the Bush policy (and other foreign policies) and domestic and regional dynamics, and in partly unexpected ways, the Bush policies helped to lay the groundwork for the resulting democratic changes.

Thus, to say that the changes were “driven by domestic demands”<sup>155</sup> is imprecise. While domestic demands exerted causal influences in a variety of contexts across the region, the Freedom Agenda helped create conditions in which those factors were strengthened. Popular claims such as that by *The Economist* that “a decade of American hard power has been less effective than a few months of peaceful protest in setting countries on the road toward representative government”<sup>156</sup> ignore the contributory role of “American hard power” as well as soft power in the encouragement

TABLE 3  
Summary of Findings

	CAUSALITY Critical, Contributory, or None/Negative	MECHANISMS Expected or Unexpected	HYPOTHESIS
Rhetorical	None/Negative	—	H <sub>0-b</sub>
	Contributory	Unexpected (Delegitimation)	H <sub>4</sub>
Diplomatic	None/Negative	—	H <sub>0-a</sub>
	Contributory	Expected (Pressure)	H <sub>3</sub>
Material	Contributory	Expected (Actor Mobilization)	H <sub>3</sub>
Structural	None/Negative	—	H <sub>0-b</sub>
	Contributory	Expected (Elite Attitudes)	H <sub>3</sub>
	Critical/Contributory	Unexpected (Delegitimation)	H <sub>2</sub> /H <sub>4</sub>

<sup>155</sup>Michael Scott Doran, “The Heirs of Nasser,” *Foreign Affairs* 90 (May/June 2011): 17–25, at 18.

<sup>156</sup>“Crescent Moon, Waning West,” *The Economist*, 29 October 2011.

and success of that peaceful protest. Eyal Zisser reluctantly concludes that the Freedom Agenda “was an important factor in creating significant cracks in the Middle East’s dictatorial walls and in encouraging the calls for justice and freedom that began to be heard there” and in this way “was an important preparatory factor, even an accelerator, for the developments.”<sup>157</sup>

As for functional forms, these varied across countries. In Egypt, for instance, the Freedom Agenda seems to have been part of a unique cluster of factors that was necessary and sufficient for change. In Yemen, by contrast, where the United States had less influence, the Freedom Agenda modestly increased the probability of change, whereas in Pakistan, it formed part of one possible cluster of factors, any of which would probably have been sufficient for change, given the strength of the domestic democracy movement. In such cases, the Freedom Agenda conformed to Sayyid’s argument that “external support to [domestic prodemocracy] groups might help to provide the last push in a long journey.”<sup>158</sup>

In the end, no theory is always right and the Bush policies operated in a variety of ways in different contexts, sometimes for the worse, but often for the better. A quotation from Esam Sultan of the Egyptian Wasat party in 2004 provides a concise summary: “U.S. efforts to impose democratic reform are not good, but they can have positive effects.”<sup>159</sup> One might say that the Freedom Agenda was an epistemological failure but an ontological success.

For democratization theory, these results raise new questions about the nature and workings of external factors. In particular, the standard tools of democracy promotion—democracy aid, public diplomacy, and norm diffusion—are usually assumed to operate through some form of emulation. Yet the findings here suggest that the mechanisms, in some instances, may be less about emulation than about mobilization. Democracy, in such cases, emerges as a “fortuitous byproduct”<sup>160</sup> because it meets a need to reassert popular sovereignty in the face of external

---

<sup>157</sup>Eyal Zisser, “The Failure of U.S. Policy toward Damascus,” *Middle East Quarterly* 20 (Fall 2013), 59–65, at 59.

<sup>158</sup>Mustapha Sayyid, “International Dimensions of Middle Eastern Authoritarianism,” in Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 216.

<sup>159</sup>Louis J. Cantori and Augustus Richard Norton, “Evaluating the Bush Menu for Change in the Middle East,” *Middle East Policy* 12 (March 2005): 97–121, at 107.

<sup>160</sup>John Waterbury, “Fortuitous Byproducts,” in Lisa Anderson, ed., *Transitions to Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 261–289.

pressures. For policymakers, this means that democracy promotion poses the same tragic choices as many other sorts of foreign policy, where the most-palatable and moral approach may be the least effective, and vice versa. Diplomatic initiatives and well-conceived spending programs are more palatable than war and rhetoric, one reason they are part of the Bush legacy that has continued.<sup>161</sup> But they do not exhaust the causal pathways to change, pathways that are fraught with heavy costs, moral and otherwise.

---

<sup>161</sup>James Traub, *The Freedom Agenda: Why America Must Spread Democracy (Just Not the Way George Bush Did)* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008); Shadi Hamid and Steven Brooke, "Promoting Democracy to Stop Terror, Revisited," *Policy Review* (Feb/March 2010): 45-57; Fawaz A. Gerges, *Obama and the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).