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GENERIC BRIEF: Promoting Democracy - bad

By Vance Trefethen

**This brief argues against cases that all U.S. efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East are unnecessary or bad.**

NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY / OVERVIEW

Every U.S. project in the Middle East fails

Dr. Stephen M. Walt 2014. (Ph.D. in Political Science; [professor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professor) of [international affairs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_relations) at [Harvard University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_University)'s [John F. Kennedy School of Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_F._Kennedy_School_of_Government) ) 7 Aug 2014 “Do No (More) Harm” FOREIGN POLICY, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/07/do-no-more-harm/>

A far more convincing perspective comes from former [Ambassador Chas Freeman](http://chasfreeman.net/obamas-foreign-policy-and-the-future-of-the-middle-east/) who surveys several decades of America’s meddling in the region and comes to a depressing conclusion: "It’s hard to think of any American project in the Middle East that is not now at or near a dead end."

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

“Overthrowing dictators” doesn’t justify US intervention

Doug Bandow 2011. (J.D. from Stanford Univ.; senior fellow at the Cato Institute, specializing in foreign policy and civil liberties; worked as special assistant to President Reagan ) 25 Feb 2011 Revolution in Middle East: Time for US to Step Back <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/revolution-middle-east-time-us-step-back>

Attempting to forcibly reform, or even overthrow, repressive regimes seems more satisfying morally. But the outcome is not necessarily more positive. It is far easier to blow up a society than put it back together. In Iraq at least 200,000 civilian likely have died after America’s ill-considered invasion. In 2006 the U.S. government pressed for elections in the Palestinian territories, which propelled Hamas to power in the Gaza Strip. Washington then refused to recognize the result, adding hypocrisy to stupidity. Abrupt changes of regime are more likely to result in violence and repression.

INHERENCY

Private organizations are more effective than governmental democracy promotion programs

Dr. Sarah Bush 2013. (PhD; Assistant Professor of Political Science at Temple University) March 2013 Confront or Conform? Rethinking U.S. Democracy Assistance <http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/POMED-Policy-Brief-Bush.pdf>

Quasi-private democracy donors such as the National Endowment for Democracy generally promote democracy in less tame ways than government agencies. Government programs rely on government-to-government partnerships and may be subject to other priorities more critical to stable bilateral ties. While these bilateral ties may be helpful in enhancing the capabilities of certain host government institutions, they can be an impediment to many of the important, less tame forms of assistance that are critical to genuine democratization. Donor institutions that are insulated from government bureaucracy and competing geopolitical objectives are often nimbler and more effective players in democracy assistance.

SOLVENCY

U.S. advocacy for democracy in the Mid-East won’t be credible until we resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Marina Ottaway & Thomas Carothers 2009. (Ottaway – senior scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Carothers - vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Diane de Gramont, nonresident research analyst at Carnegie, ) 26 Oct 2009 [Think Again: Middle East Democracy](http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/26/think-again-middle-east-democracy/) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/26/think-again-middle-east-democracy/>

Yet failure to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict prevents the United States from gaining credibility as an advocate of democracy in the Middle East. Liberal Arabs perceive claims by the United States that it wants democracy in the Middle East as hypocritical, pointing to what they see as American indifference to the rights of the Palestinians and unconditional support for Israel. For their part, many Arab governments do not take U.S. pressure to democratize their region seriously, believing that the need for oil and fear of upsetting regimes that recognize Israel will trump Washington’s desire for democratic change. U.S. credibility in the Middle East will not be restored — and the unprecedented level of anti-American resentment will not abate — until the United States makes a serious, balanced effort to tackle the conflict. Without such credibility, Washington’s effort to stimulate democratization in the region will be severely constrained.

Arab advocates of democracy don’t know how to build support, leaving only government parties and Islamist parties

Marina Ottaway & Thomas Carothers 2009. (Ottaway – senior scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Carothers - vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Diane de Gramont, nonresident research analyst at Carnegie, ) 26 Oct 2009 [Think Again: Middle East Democracy](http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/26/think-again-middle-east-democracy/) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/26/think-again-middle-east-democracy/>

Arab democrats have so far shown little capacity — and less inclination — to translate abstract ideas into programs with mass appeal. Because they talk to Western organizations and each other more than to their fellow citizens, opposition political parties with a liberal agenda find themselves unable to build broad constituencies. This failure leaves the field open to government parties, which can build a following on the basis of patronage, and to Islamist parties, which build their following in the best tradition of mass parties, with a mixture of ideological fervor and grassroots social services.

Promoting elections and democracy in the Middle East won’t work

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2007. (PhD in diplomatic history; senior fellow for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.) 13 Aug 2007 “Democracy and Demagoguery in the Middle East” <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/democracy-demagoguery-middle-east>

Elections in such an environment will merely empower political demagogues and religious extremists. It is no accident that voters in Iraq spurned the more tolerant, secular parties who sought to reach across the Sunni-Shi’a-Kurdish divides and instead supported blatantly sectarian parties. The fallacy of assuming that democracy is a panacea for the Middle East was even more graphically confirmed by the elections in the Palestinian territories, when Hamas routed the more moderate (though hardly tolerant) Fatah. That is not to say that Middle Eastern societies will never be ready to implement Western-style liberal democracy. There is no anti-democracy gene in human DNA. Societies change over time, and the emergence of stable, liberal democratic systems in the Middle East might well occur at some point in the future. But it’s not likely to happen in the next generation or two, and for the president to base U.S. policy in the region on the expectation that it will is irresponsible.

Intervention for “Freedom” or “Democracy” won’t work: Their concepts of freedom and democracy are different from ours

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2007. (PhD in diplomatic history; senior fellow for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.) 13 Aug 2007 “Democracy and Demagoguery in the Middle East” <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/democracy-demagoguery-middle-east>

Bush’s view is not merely simplistic, it is profoundly dangerous. The president assumes that when people in the Middle East and people in the West speak of freedom, they have the same concept in mind. There is virtually no evidence to support that belief. For all too many people in the Middle East, freedom means the ability to live the way the local mullah tells them that they ought to. The foundation of an effective democracy is not some subjective desire of a person to live in freedom (however defined)—it is the willingness to allow fellow citizens, who may have different values and lifestyles, to live in freedom. That crucial spirit of tolerance is tragically underdeveloped in Middle Eastern societies. So is a pervasive attitude that political, economic and religious disputes must be settled solely by peaceful means.

Promoting democracy won’t solve for terrorism. Examples: India, Philippines, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia

Thomas Carothers 2008. (vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Diane de Gramont, nonresident research analyst at Carnegie) Fall 2008 Democracy and Discontent, DEMOCRACY <http://www.democracyjournal.org/10/6645.php?page=all>

But in his zeal, Traub slips a bit too easily past a central problem with the idea that more democracy abroad will ensure security at home. As Professor Gregory Gause and others have argued in recent years, the notion that democratization around the world will dry up the sources of radical Islamist terrorism rests on substantial doses of wishful thinking. Many autocracies have been more effective in preventing terrorism than many democracies–just compare China and India. The emergence of democracy in the Philippines has done little to weaken homegrown Muslim extremists, whereas various Arab autocracies, such as Tunisia, have held radical Islamic violence in check. And in some countries, like Saudi Arabia, it is at best unclear that a serious political opening would in fact undercut rather than fuel Islamic radicals.

Promoting democracy won’t solve for terrorism. Lack of democracy isn’t the cause of Mid-East terrorism

Marina Ottaway & Thomas Carothers 2009. (Ottaway – senior scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Carothers - vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Diane de Gramont, nonresident research analyst at Carnegie, ) 26 Oct 2009 [Think Again: Middle East Democracy](http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/26/think-again-middle-east-democracy/) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/26/think-again-middle-east-democracy/>

"Middle East Democracy Is the Cure for Islamist Terrorism" No. This view is rooted in a simplistic assumption: Stagnant, repressive Arab regimes create positive conditions for the growth of radical Islamist groups, which turn their sights on the United States because it embodies the liberal sociopolitical values that radical Islamists oppose. More democracy, therefore, equals less extremism. History tells a different story. Modern militant Islam developed with the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1920s, during the most democratic period in that country’s history. Radical political Islam gains followers not only among repressed Saudis but also among some Muslims in Western democracies, especially in Europe. The emergence of radical Islamist groups determined to wreak violence on the United States is thus not only the consequence of Arab autocracy. It is a complex phenomenon with diverse roots, which include U.S. sponsorship of the mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s (which only empowered Islamist militants); the Saudi government’s promotion of radical Islamic educational programs worldwide; and anger at various U.S. policies, such as the country’s stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the basing of military forces in the region.

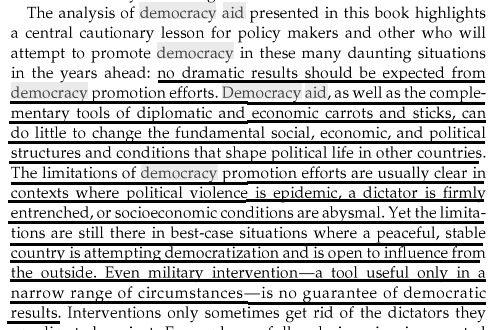
Poor incentives: Democracy promotion programs are contracts paid by the government to NGOs (non-governmental organizations) whose incentive is to do something quick, not necessarily effective

Dr. Sarah Bush 2013. (PhD; Assistant Professor of Political Science at Temple University) March 2013 Confront or Conform? Rethinking U.S. Democracy Assistance <http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/POMED-Policy-Brief-Bush.pdf>

Second, there is growing competition among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for U.S. government democracy funds, which in turn encourages them to develop projects that are likely to yield quick results and help them gain access to a wide range of countries. Unfortunately, the programs that are easiest to measure and for the U.S. to support are not clearly associated with democratization. WHO IMPLEMENTS DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE AND HOW? Dozens of NGOs receive grants and contracts from U.S. government institutions to implement democracy programs overseas. Those organizations together form an increasingly professional industry, which has been called the “democracy bureaucracy” or the “democracy establishment.” They share common ideas and values about how best to aid democracy abroad. There are about two-dozen core NGOs in the democracy establishment, such as Freedom House and the National Democratic Institute, which work in many countries and are agenda-setters in the field.

Don’t expect much results from democracy promotion: There’s little we can do to change underlying social conditions

Thomas Carothers 1999. (J.D. from Harvard Law School, M.Sc. from the London School of Economics ) AIDING DEMOCRACY ABROAD: THE LEARNING CURVE <https://books.google.fr/books?id=R7RGfnIL7LUC&pg=PA348&lpg=PA348&dq=U.S.+democracy+aid+fail&source=bl&ots=r81P68NxwG&sig=VVEaFjGeu4ENqbFtSQRjDeETMfY&hl=en&sa=X&ei=EoSdVI6wFdPoaNuJgrgK&ved=0CC8Q6AEwATgK#v=onepage&q=U.S.%20democracy%20aid%20fail&f=false>



DISADVANTAGES

1. We make things worse.

Trying to influence Mid-East events, even for promoting democracy, ends up making things worse

Doug Bandow 2011. (J.D. from Stanford Univ.; senior fellow at the Cato Institute, specializing in foreign policy and civil liberties; worked as special assistant to President Reagan ) 25 Feb 2011 Revolution in Middle East: Time for US to Step Back <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/revolution-middle-east-time-us-step-back>

Abrupt changes of regime are more likely to result in violence and repression. While Washington should not oppose democratic movements even if they seem less likely to promote its geopolitical interests, the U.S. government should not actively spur revolution. American policymakers simply don’t know how to get there or even where “there” is. The world in which Washington can simply tell everyone else what to do is illusory. Even in pushing for the liberal ideal American officials risk doing more harm than good. Better for the U.S. government to advocate respect for human rights and democracy and then shut up. The less said by Washington about what the U.S. government desires, the better.

“Promoting democracy” is viewed as code-word for “U.S. domination”. It fuels Islamist extremism

Marina Ottaway & Thomas Carothers 2009. (Ottaway – senior scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Carothers - vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Diane de Gramont, nonresident research analyst at Carnegie, ) 26 Oct 2009 Think Again: Middle East Democracy <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/26/think-again-middle-east-democracy/>

Regrettably, President George W. Bush’s repeated justification of the war as a democratizing mission has discredited some Western-oriented Arab democrats in the eyes of their fellow citizens. Many Arabs have come to view democracy itself as a code word for U.S. regional domination. The unpopularity of the war and the abuses against Iraqis at Abu Ghraib prison have further tarnished the reputation of the United States and fueled Islamist extremism.

2. Anti-American backlash. If the plan succeeds and we get democracy, we may not like the results

Free & open elections could result in unfriendly regimes getting elected

Marina Ottaway & Thomas Carothers 2009. (Ottaway – senior scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Carothers - vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Diane de Gramont, nonresident research analyst at Carnegie, ) 26 Oct 2009 Think Again: Middle East Democracy <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/26/think-again-middle-east-democracy/>

Moreover, despite the president’s conviction that democratic change in the Middle East is necessary, a great deal of ambivalence remains within the U.S. policy bureaucracy about the prospect of any rapid political openings in the region. This sentiment is particularly true of the State Department and the intelligence community. Some experts worry that, given the political mood of most Arab citizens — who are angry at the United States and sympathetic to political Islam — free and open elections could result in some distinctly unfriendly regimes.

Promoting democracy in the Middle East doesn’t justify US intervention: Arab movements that respect the people’s aspirations will oppose U.S. interests

Dr. Leon Hadar 2011. (Ph.D. from the School of International Service at [American University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_University)) Obama on the Middle East: No Game Changer 19 May 2011 <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/obama-middle-east-no-game-changer>

And while most Americans would probably applaud Obama’s call for protecting individual rights, freedom of religion, the emancipation of women, and the promotion of free markets in Egypt and other Arab countries, there are no indications that the majority of the people who are driving the change that supports these principles. If anything, considering the findings of several opinion polls conducted in the Middle East, Arab governments who will be more responsive to their people’s aspirations are probably going to be less inclined to move in the direction set by Obama and to embrace policies that will be less favorable to the interests of the U.S. and Israel.

3. Phony progress. Democracy aid can provide political cover that actually enables dictators

Democracy aid creates incentives for dictators to play along and gain a veneer of democracy, while consolidating power

Dr. Sarah Bush 2013. (PhD; Assistant Professor of Political Science at Temple University) March 2013 Confront or Conform? Rethinking U.S. Democracy Assistance <http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/POMED-Policy-Brief-Bush.pdf>

Organizations in the democracy establishment want to foster democratization, but, like all institutions, they also want to survive and thrive as organizations. To do so, they must obtain government funding and maintain access to target states. Given the constraints set by the U.S. government, looming budget cuts, and rising competition, organizations survive using two strategies. First, they appeal to donor officials that cannot monitor them closely but demand results using measurable programs that have quantifiable outputs, such as the number of women in parliament. Second, they gain access to target states suspicious of American or foreign interference by implementing programs that do not directly confront autocrats, such as programs geared towards improving local governance. Those tamer programs may make sense in many contexts, because democracy promoters need to gain a foothold in the authoritarian environments within which they work so that they can push for incremental changes. But tamer programs can also play into the hands of autocrats seeking a veneer of democracy while consolidating power. Successful democracy assistance requires U.S. policymakers to discern which programs and organizations are likely to play into autocrats’ hands and avoid funding them.