



FOR THE COMMON GOOD:
Revitalizing Multilateral Cooperation for
Political Reform in the Middle East

TUQA NUSAIRAT
JUNE 2010

**FRIEDRICH
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STIFTUNG



PROJECT
on Middle East
Democracy

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THE PROJECT ON MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRACY is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to examining the impact of American policy on political reform and democratization in the Middle East. Through dialogue, policy analysis, and advocacy, we aim to promote understanding of how genuine, authentic democracies can develop in the Middle East and how the U.S. can best support that process.

THE FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG is a non-profit German political foundation committed to the advancement of public policy issues in the spirit of the basic values of social democracy through education, research, and international cooperation. The foundation, headquartered in Bonn and Berlin, was founded in 1925 and is named after Friedrich Ebert, Germany's first democratically elected president.

The conclusions in this paper do not necessarily represent those of the Project on Middle East Democracy, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Georgetown University, the Woodrow Wilson Center or the participants in our two workshops. Although we tried as best we could to capture and convey the ideas discussed by participants, inevitably this is an imperfect record of those wide-ranging discussions. The participants deserve the credit for their creativity and critical analysis; the author takes full responsibility for any and all errors in conveying their perspectives in this report.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AHDR	UN Arab Human Development Report
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
G8 BMENA	Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative
GfD	Good Governance for Development Initiative
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EU	European Union
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PJD	Justice and Development Party (Morocco)

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Executive Summary

In May and September of 2009, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) gathered twenty American, European, and Middle Eastern leaders to discuss challenges and opportunities for multilateral efforts to support reform in the Middle East. The workshop participants also discussed specific platforms for such multilateral efforts and provided recommendations to policymakers for improving these mechanisms in order to effectively promote democratic reform in the region.

In their initial meeting, the participants discussed overlapping interests and values of the three parties when it comes to political reform and emerged with a set of overarching priorities for future multilateral reform efforts:

- **Adjusting Western policies**
- **Strengthening civil society**
- **Promoting political inclusion**
- **Advancing human rights and liberties**
- **Addressing issues of migration**

Discussions of these priorities included steps for moving forward in their implementation as well as potential obstacles facing the parties involved. With these in hand, the participants went on to discuss existing multilateral frameworks and emerged with a set of recommendations to address the loopholes and weaknesses in five prominent multilateral initiatives:

G8 Broader Middle East & North Africa Initiative (BMENA)

- Restructure as a state-to-state initiative that complements existing civil society initiatives rather than including civil society directly.
- Rebrand the initiative by dropping the “B” in order to focus on the Arab world.
- Strengthen incentives for Arab participation and support.
- Support sustainability of initiatives by rotating presidencies.

OECD Governance for Development Initiative (GfD)

- Increase transparency regarding initiative’s purpose, activities, and participants.
- Incentivize participation of additional actors and broaden agenda beyond modernizing governance to include political reform and human rights.

European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean

- Expand focus on migration to include addressing political reform issues.
- Emphasize civil society-to-civil society component.

- Expand opportunities for educational exchanges between the regions.
- Promote accountability of regional governments through civil society organizations.

UN Arab Human Development Report (AHDR)

- Address concerns about authors' credibility and external intervention in report's conclusions.
- Provide policy prescriptions for regional governments based on the diagnoses highlighted in the reports.
- Utilize the findings of the AHDR to shape the structure of donor programs in the region.

Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)

- Conduct an independent review to assess and study MEPI's regional impact.
- Address the issue of fluctuating funding to make programs more sustainable in the mid- to long-term.
- Explore the potential for more cooperation, communication and coordination with other national, international, and multilateral donors and initiatives.

In reviewing the aforementioned priorities, participants concluded that some could not be addressed by existing multilateral initiatives. Suggestions emerged for an "**Arab Social Forum**," a non-governmental, non-partisan, open platform for regional organizations and individuals to share experiences and success stories, and to organize around shared interests.

Introduction

Among the principle weaknesses of the U.S. approach to Middle East reform under the administration of President George W. Bush was its unilateralism, which both divided Western support for political reform and undermined its universal moral claims. The Bush administration failed to understand the degree to which its security policies and inconsistencies would undermine its efforts. Its apparent disdain for “Old Europe” led it to discount the continent’s interests and complementary strengths in supporting Middle East reform.

The Obama administration, by contrast, moved quickly to make multilateralism a central tenet of its foreign policy, working together with allies and the international community on a range of issues including nuclear nonproliferation, Middle East peace, combating terrorism, and climate change, among others. However, if the tool of multilateralism has been championed under Obama, the goal of political reform in the Middle East has received less emphasis than it should. The task for the Obama administration is to leverage its engagement in multilateral discussions in creative and constructive ways that, in the words of the President, “[steer] those currents in the direction of liberty and justice.”¹

The need for political reform in the Middle East is clear. The traditional posture of the U.S. and Europe, actively seeking close relations with regional autocrats while turning a blind eye to popular demands for human rights and democratic accountability, has had and will continue to have palpable consequences for Western interests. On this, successive administrations, Democratic and Republican, have agreed. Peaceful opportunities for effective political participation undermine the logic of violent radicals. Democratic accountability fuels good governance and anti-corruption initiatives. And countries that value individual rights and freedoms spur entrepreneurship and economic growth. The question is not whether but rather how the West can best advance human rights and democratic development.

This report argues that a crucial step for revitalizing American support for political reforms in the Middle East is to recognize Europe’s interest in and ability to constructively support Middle East reform and to engage European leaders in a dialogue on these issues. Due to its geographic proximity to the region, Europe confronts such challenges as economic migration and domestic Islamist extremism more directly than the United States. These issues have led the European Union to prioritize economic engagement in hopes of it leading to Middle East political reform. Europe also has a different self-conception of its foreign policy toolkit. Whereas the United States remains the world’s sole military superpower, Europe has arguably been far more effective than the United States in employing soft power and economic might in its international relations – particularly in the Middle East. A successful new American effort to promote Middle Eastern reforms must recognize these differences while seeking to leverage European strengths.

1 Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at United States Military Academy at West Point Commencement,” West Point, New York, May 22, 2010.

In May 2009, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) hosted a workshop bringing together twenty young leaders from across Europe, the Middle East and the United States for a dialogue on the shared values and interests inherent in the Middle East reform agendas of Europe and the United States. In September the group reconvened to translate the theoretical overlaps between European, Arab and American interests into a series of concrete recommendations on how to improve existing multilateral frameworks for political reform. This report outlines the main conclusions of these workshops.

Our discussions indicate that an effective multilateral approach to encourage reform will require adjusting Western regional *political-security policy*, employing political and economic leverage to support a *robust civil society*, supporting *political inclusion* in the region, grappling with the challenge of *migration*, and developing an increasingly *enforceable human rights* framework.

Priorities for Reform: Overlapping Interests and Values

Any successful multilateral effort to advance political reform in the Middle East requires an honest assessment of how European and American interests both intersect and diverge. Such an assessment would reveal ways in which the EU and U.S. could collaborate constructively and areas where their relative strengths could be maximized to complement one another.

In formulating its Middle East policy, the United States has historically focused on several concrete interests, but benefitted from its physical distance from the region. America's expansive regional military presence has provided a ripe target for retaliation. However, prior to the attacks of September 11, few Americans imagined that the frustrations of Middle Eastern societies might bubble over and impact the security of Americans living in the United States. Still, the United States continues to focus on safeguarding the supply of oil, protecting its military assets, and ensuring regional stability while sidelining issues of reform that Middle Eastern societies find so pressing.

The European Union, however, faces a different situation. European proximity to the region and the continent's large Arab and Muslim expatriate population mean that the consequences of its efforts are felt more immediately. Furthermore, since the end of World War II, European states have largely lacked the capacity to project hard power and safeguard their interests militarily. As a result of these circumstances, the continent has consistently focused on economic development in the Arab World – and particularly in North Africa – as a way to improve its own security. By building prosperity, Europe has aimed to minimize migration across the Mediterranean.

A joint European-American strategy for political reform in the Middle East must acknowledge these divergent interests and incorporate each side's relative strengths. Joint efforts derived from a superficial desire to appear multilateral will have little or no positive impact. As Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy persuasively argue, it may be "better for the United States and the European Union to develop distinct policies to facilitate reform, drawing on their respec-

tive assets in the region rather than to launch joint policies that do not maximize anyone's strengths."² However, we believe strongly that the optimal approach is substantive cooperation with the aim of advancing reform: The U.S. and Europe share a compelling interest in political reform in the Middle East; transatlantic cooperation is necessary for achieving that goal; and an agenda for such cooperation exists.

Changing Western Behavior

Critically important for transatlantic cooperation is the adjustment of Western behavior in order to build credibility. The U.S. and Europe need to work to adopt regionally consistent principles and long-term approaches for supporting political reform. Likewise, they should transition from a focus on specific elections and actors to a focus on building institutions of democracy through validating the legitimacy of peaceful opposition actors, among other actions. Finally, both the U.S. and Europe must grapple with challenges to their moral credibility posed by their other policy decisions.

First, greater consistency is needed. Successful political reform in the Middle East requires that Europe, and the United States in particular, integrate to a greater extent the need for political reform into their diplomatic dialogue with existing security partners in the Arab world. To this point, the United States has selectively chosen to expend diplomatic capital to promote democracy only in certain Middle Eastern countries. This situation derives from the two-tiered manner in which the United States appears to classify countries in the region. The first group includes countries in which the United States has important physical or resource security interests. Within this group – which includes countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States – authoritarianism is tolerated so long as the regimes protect America's regional interests. The second group – which includes countries such as Morocco and Lebanon – consists of those nations in which the United States lacks any direct material or physical strategic interests. As a result, it is more willing to push for reform and accept the unpredictable byproducts of political liberalization. In Morocco, for example, the United States has supported the Islamist leaning Justice and Development Party's integration into the country's political scene. In the wake of the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks, the American ambassador to Morocco is thought to have interceded on behalf of the PJD to urge King Mohammed VI not to prevent the party from political participation. In contrast, the current administration is seen as being too soft on the Mubarak regime, especially in light of the recent renewal of a decade's old emergency law.³ The Obama administration's response was apparently limited to statements by the White House and Secretary Clinton, who called the renewal "regrettable."⁴

If political reform efforts are to succeed, the U.S. will need to bridge the gap between these two approaches. Continued American reliance on this false regional dichotomy undermines the credibility of its moral claims, rooted in human rights. It also ignores the very realistic possibility that

2 Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, "Political Reform in the Middle East: Can the United States and Europe Work Together?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2004.

3 Michael Slackman, "Egyptian Emergency Law is Extended for 2 Years," *New York Times*, May 11, 2010.

4 Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Egypt's Renewal of State of Emergency," U.S. Department of State, May 11, 2010.

mounting frustration with the perceived inefficacy of non-violent political participation might fuel political upheaval in those countries where U.S. behavior encourages regimes to dismiss popular demands for democratic reform. Particularly in the Middle East, the United States has the unfortunate legacy of prioritizing short-term goals at the expense of its long-term interests. While short-term tradeoffs are part of any foreign policy decision, it is imperative that the United States begin orienting its policies to a greater extent toward long-term calculations. Such an approach will involve a realistic assessment of short-term tradeoffs and concrete plans to mitigate them.

Second, the U.S. and European Union should focus greater attention on building the institutions and the fair playing field that characterize a democracy. The Bush model of political reform sometimes emphasized elections and the victory of particular parties, a formula that proved problematic. Where the state has difficulty containing political forces, elections may exacerbate rather than reduce sectarian violence. One-time elections are also imperfect benchmarks of long-term political progress. At the same time, when the West champions elections only to reject their outcomes, it only undermines its moral claims. Instead, the United States and European Union should focus on encouraging steady progress toward more open, democratic, and law-based political systems.

One institution of democratic systems that merits greater attention is the opposition. The U.S. and Europe must work to validate the legitimacy of a peaceful opposition by lending moral support to dissident activists. While the Bush administration did advocate on behalf of key individuals like Ayman Nour and Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the U.S. and European governments can do much more. Resident diplomats should meet with a wide array of opposition figures and civic activists, rather than singling out a select few. By coordinating such a step, the U.S. and Europe could minimize the risk that Arab states will react negatively. As has been the case in other regions, it will be important in the Middle East to elevate such meetings to the status of standard Western diplomatic practice.

Finally, the U.S. and Europe must grapple with additional challenges to their moral credibility. For the U.S., these include its ongoing military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, perceived one-sidedness in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the continued use of detention facilities like Guantanamo prison. Each of these challenges requires attention if the U.S. is to strengthen its image as a supporter of the aspirations of Middle Eastern people for human dignity and progress.

Although traditionally more respected and perceived as more balanced in the Middle East, the European Union's reputation has also deteriorated in recent years. The lack of a unified stance against Israel's January 2009 offensive in Gaza shattered the perception of European even-handedness on Israeli-Palestinian matters. In addition, anti-immigrant sentiment and incitement in European countries against Arab immigrants have created a negative reaction within the region.⁵ While Europe remains the region's key trading partner and economic benefactor, the continent's

⁵ Recently, a Swiss referendum to ban the construction of mosque minarets faced criticism from the region: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/world/europe/30swiss.html?emc=rss&partner=rss>.

ability to project influence outside of this narrow sphere has been compromised. Indeed, both the EU's interests and its agenda in the Middle East have remained vague so far. The European Union needs to sketch out a new regional strategy for the Mediterranean and the Middle East that goes beyond what has been developed in the framework of its Neighborhood and Mediterranean policies since the mid-nineties and that takes into account the developments in the region since then. To maximize their capacity to encourage political reform, European states will need to address these credibility challenges as well.

Strengthening Civil Society

A strong civil society is an essential element of successful and meaningful democratic progress. In one-party authoritarian states, civil society, including professional syndicates, business groups, religious organizations, and other NGOs, are often co-opted through a combination of ruling party patronage and threats. The resulting lack of independence of this sector undermines its capacity to hold government officials accountable or advocate for substantive reform.

Western powers have had their fair share of ineffective support of civil society actors. Western ideas about civil society too often lead donors to support organizational models unsuited to local circumstances and to neglect groups more firmly rooted in local societies.⁶ In other cases, aid is allocated but is not supported by effective diplomacy, with the result that governments undermine recipient organizations and their work. A further challenge stems from U.S. and European credibility: endorsements from these governments, and particularly from the U.S., can in certain circumstances weaken the local standing of civic organizations. Understanding these challenges is essential if the U.S. and EU are to have a positive impact on political reform in the Middle East. As such, the United States and European Union should focus on providing the political pressure and economic support for such groups to develop and thrive independent of Western interference.

As a first step, donors need to examine more closely historic models of local civil society. The Middle East possesses its own traditions of extra-governmental authority. Jill Crystal observes, for example, that the Arab world "long ago developed its own indigenous legal system, one that historically did check the unbridled authority of the rulers to a degree."⁷ Although she notes that this tradition has been weakened over the course of many years of regional authoritarian power grabs, it is important to note that an independent tradition for providing services exists in the Middle East. As such, developing civil society would have concrete historical precedent that regional reforms could draw upon for authority. The United States and European Union can be most effective in providing local activists and leaders the tools they need to accomplish this task. Instead of diverting a majority of its aid to the Egyptian military, for example, the United States could provide more targeted aid packages aimed at supporting infrastructure development or grants for service projects outside of official government patronage.

6 Marina Ottaway, "Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Restoring Credibility," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2008.

7 Jill Crystal, "Political Reform and the Prospects for Democratic Transition in the Gulf," *Fride*, July 2005.

Most importantly, Western states should be active in pushing authoritarian states to open up space for independent organizations to operate. Although a difficult proposition, the United States and European Union can and should utilize economic and political leverage to encourage the kind of basic freedoms citizens need to press for government accountability and political reform in their own way. Targeted discussions with government officials should focus on existing laws that inhibit the work of civil society organizations. NGO laws in Egypt and Jordan, for example, make it difficult for organizations deemed controversial by the government to register with the state, thereby rendering their activities illegal.⁸ Other laws currently under debate by governments, including counterterrorism provisions, also deserve attention. And in some states, emergency laws that sharply constrain freedom of association and speech remain in force. Through private diplomacy and sustained public support for changes to these laws, the U.S. and EU can provide the added pressure needed to encourage important reforms.

Western states are likely to confront a series of difficulties in encouraging the development of civil society in the Middle East. Most significantly, authoritarian regimes are likely to resist any attempts to open space for independent actors. These regimes worry that any liberalization, however tempered or limited, could begin a chain reaction that ultimately results in their loss of power. However, it is in the interests of the U.S. and Europe to impress upon Middle Eastern governments the comparable dangers of maintaining the status quo. The short-term “stability” enjoyed by these regimes is likely to wane in the face of continued repression coupled with the pressure of generational transition. The example of the 1979 Iranian Revolution is instructive: the potential for frustrations to explode into upheaval threatens not only governments themselves, but also their Western allies. In fact, by opening space for independent civil society, governments can allow for a more broadly-based, constructive debate about the direction and pace of change.

Promoting Political Inclusion

Just as the U.S. and Europe should support a strong and diverse civil society, they should also support a healthy political society. Western states should work diligently to encourage the inclusion of all non-violent parties in legitimate political debate and activity. As in most one-party authoritarian states, political actors beyond the ruling party or the institutions of the ruling monarchy face significant obstacles to participation in most Middle Eastern countries. While some are conditionally tolerated, others face repeated harassment and arrest by authorities, and physical violence and intimidation from loyalist forces. This is particularly true of Islamist parties, which also struggle internally with the question of whether or not to engage in formal politics. History demonstrates that non-violent political movements facing state repression sometimes choose to moderate themselves, but just as frequently they spin off radical groups that seek to advance their goals through violence. The U.S. and Europe have a strong interest in averting the latter.

⁸ See more on Jordanian NGO law: <http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/ngolawmonitor/jordan.htm> and Egyptian NGO law: <http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/ngolawmonitor/egypt.htm>

In an effort to improve this situation, American and European diplomacy should encourage Middle Eastern regimes to open the political process to all non-violent groups and parties. At a minimum, this includes liberalizing mechanisms for party registration and ending the policies of political imprisonment and legal harassment common in many Arab states. The criteria of non-violence should include all parties that forswear the use of violence to advance their domestic agendas. It is important to note that this definition includes – and in fact encourages – the participation of Islamists committed to non-violence, including those such as al-Adl wal-Ihsan in Morocco who do not recognize the legitimacy of their governing authorities. In fact, non-violent Islamists can play an important role in undermining support for violent radicals. Beyond employing moral suasion, the U.S. and Europe should work to legitimate the criteria of non-violence through their own behavior. They should explicitly seek dialogue with all non-violent groups. At the same time, they should take advantage of that dialogue to press each group for its political acceptance of all other non-violent political actors.

Middle Eastern governments could be encouraged to take further steps toward genuine political pluralism by offering state funds to all registered parties at levels commensurate with the ruling party. Doing so would ensure that opposition political parties have legitimate means with which to contest elections and participate in politics. As a corollary, registered political parties should have equal access to television airtime or be given the opportunity to purchase it at a reasonable price. In addition, the state should provide incentives for parties to offer diverse candidate slates that include women and minorities.

Finally, supporting pluralism requires free, fair and transparent electoral processes. Elections and democracy only have the ability to reduce violence and tensions if they are perceived to be legitimate. It is important, therefore, that elections be open to international observers and that electoral jurisdictions are not gerrymandered to prejudice the outcome in favor of the ruling elite. Additionally, Western states should consult with political parties and gauge their need for electoral and grassroots organization training as an effort to pass on best practices and skills for effective political participation.⁹ Finally, it is essential to the success of any effort to broaden political inclusion that emergency laws and other legal impediments to genuine political activity be lifted.

The challenges to broadening political inclusion in the Arab world must be fully understood. Ordinary citizens do not hold particularly positive views of existing political parties and movements and are overwhelmingly skeptical about their ability to influence entrenched power structures. In this context, even a concerted effort to broaden the limits of political inclusion in a country such as Egypt, for example, might be seen as merely a further attempt by the regime to consolidate power. It is important that any such effort be carefully branded and conveyed so as to mitigate this possibility to the utmost extent. The U.S. and Europe can play a positive role in this effort by praising sincere reform initiatives, but only if they take great care. In this regard, the U.S. in particular must learn from recent mistakes. The Bush administration, as noted above, celebrated cosmetic reforms with exaggerated praise. It will be important for the Obama administration to praise governments when appropriate, but to do so only after real progress is made.

⁹ German political party foundations, like their American counterparts the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, have been organizing such training seminars for years.

Addressing Migration

One of the areas where American and European interests diverge most is migration. The constant flow of Arab migrants across the Mediterranean is a recurring concern for European governments as they attempt to deal with illegal immigrants, increased competition for local jobs, and a growing demographic of alienated youth. Such negative consequences of migration are not immediately and directly experienced on the American home front. The European emphasis on economic development is naturally tied to this concern: aid projects aim to improve living conditions for Middle Easterners in their own countries in an effort to reduce migration. In order to effectively coordinate with their European partners, American policymakers need to recognize and understand this challenge.

Given the potential and need for economic development in the Middle East, more emphasis should be placed on job creation initiatives, improving educational opportunities and career counseling, and encouraging private companies to invest in Middle Eastern markets. Thus far, most European aid has been directed toward Arab governments and is often lost in a black hole of corruption that prevents it from reaching those who need it most. Still, there is room for American involvement in this venture to alleviate such difficulties. The United States should attempt to better coordinate its pre-existing aid programs in the region with relevant European governmental partners and private investors.

The ramifications of mass migration from the Middle East to Europe are not only felt in Europe. Countries in the region often bemoan the “brain drain” that occurs, as skilled professionals choose to leave their homelands in exchange for better economic opportunities elsewhere. Working with local governments to provide incentives for professionals to stay in their native countries would be beneficial for European and Middle Eastern governments.

Additional challenges are posed by the unskilled laborers who tend to take dangerous routes to European countries and, in hundreds of cases, drown en route. Steps should be taken to raise awareness of these dangers and address them through a cooperative strategy that includes consultation with Middle Eastern governments, the private sector, and civil society leaders.

Undoubtedly, there are numerous obstacles to remedying the aforementioned challenges. Convincing the United States to address European concerns over immigration in a serious way is one challenge. Another is overcoming the increasingly xenophobic attitudes prevalent in many European countries, which impact the degree to which Middle Easterners are accepted across the continent. The radicalization of some Muslim communities in Europe has created a sense of fear and strengthened opposition to loosening immigration regulations or integrating Middle Easterners into European society. The lack of a common European migration policy also presents another barrier to addressing these issues. While economic concerns are often the primary motivation for Arab immigration to the West, increasing human rights abuses and a desire for political change are also important factors to consider when crafting policies to address democratic deficiency in the Middle East.

Developing an Enforceable Human Rights Framework

Nearly all Middle Eastern regimes – including even the most egregious violators – trumpet the need to respect human rights. Serial violators of human rights in the region exploit the ambiguity of international human rights law to simultaneously flout their obligations while professing their fealty to them. It is therefore important to strengthen existing human rights regimes through a variety of means.

One step is to bolster human rights conditionality in international accords. Existing bi-lateral and multi-lateral relationships are largely based on economic goals that countries are encouraged to reach *after* their inclusion in a partnership such as the Euro-Mediterranean (more recently renamed the “Union for the Mediterranean”), not before. Additional forms of conditionality for receiving economic “perks” could encourage regimes that would not otherwise independently curb domestic human rights abuses.

In addition, civil society should be included in a dialogue about human rights, in order to develop standards that states can live up to and implement. Increasing citizen awareness of existing constitutional and civil rights is the first step to expanding their rights in the long-run. Funding civic education programs run by institutions independent of the government is one way to increase citizen awareness. While such programs may be welcomed by civil society leaders, they may face opposition from other quarters.

Finally, much work remains to strengthen and legitimize core international human rights institutions. One example is the International Criminal Court. Another is the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Because the U.S. is not a signatory to some major international human rights conventions, many players in the region perceive the U.S. as exercising a double-standard. The Obama administration has declared its intention to address human rights issues, most recently in the National Security Strategy:

The United States is committed to working to shape and strengthen existing institutions that are not delivering on their potential, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council. We are working within the broader UN system and through regional mechanisms to strengthen human rights monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, so that individuals and countries are held accountable for their violation of international human rights norms. And we will actively support the leadership of emerging democracies as they assume a more active role in advancing basic human rights and democratic values in their regions and on the global stage.¹⁰

As with the Cairo address, this strong statement is commendable. However, it will need to be followed by action in order to maintain American credibility in the eyes of the international community in general and the Middle East in particular.

¹⁰ National Security Strategy, May 2010, pg. 39.

Rediscovering Multilateralism: Tools and Mechanisms for Reform

For decades, Europe and the United States have sounded the need for greater human rights and political freedom in the Middle East, though their commitments have strengthened and weakened, diverged and converged, changing with time and circumstance. Nonetheless, there is a broad consensus that democratization is in the long-term strategic interests of Europe, the United States, and the countries of the Middle East. Though each country faces specific challenges, all Arab countries confront threats to long-term stability and sustainable development. The static and opaque nature of autocratic governance is ill-equipped to meet 21st century challenges that require the government's adaptable and timely response to crisis management on the one hand, and its ability to formulate and deliver results on national development strategies on the other. Autocratic regimes escape the public accountability necessary to push them toward optimal policies.

If Europe and the United States are to influence democratization in the region, they too will need to shift their current approach and adapt their reform initiatives to create policies that are logically coordinated and offer new incentives for their partners in the Middle East to seek successful political reform.

With two wars on its hands and significant damage to its credibility, the United States cannot afford to take an approach to Middle East political reform that excludes its allies and is deaf to voices from the region. President Obama clearly stated the need for a new era of partnership in his historic Cairo address to the Muslim world in June of 2009, citing the "responsibility to join together on behalf of the world that we seek." The Obama administration has since widely proclaimed multilateral cooperation as the only realistic means for meeting the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, including the opportunity for democratic reform in the Middle East, which "must be done in partnership."¹¹ More recently, in a speech at West Point, President Obama yet again emphasized the administration's commitment to multilateral efforts, "America has not succeeded by stepping out of the currents of cooperation - we have succeeded by steering those currents in the direction of liberty and justice."¹² Despite such strong statements, action on the part of the administration has been lacking. In fact, on the one-year anniversary of the president's Cairo address, commentators in the U.S. and in the region heaped criticism on the administration for its lack of follow-through on that speech.¹³

Multilateralism, however, is not an easy commitment, nor is it a panacea. Multilateral coopera-

11 Barack Obama, "On a New Beginning," Cairo, Egypt, June 4, 2009.

12 Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at United States Military Academy at West Point Commencement," West Point, New York, May 22, 2010.

13 See Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Obama is too friendly with tyrants," Washington Post, June 15, 2010; Michele Dunne and Robert Kagan, "Obama needs to support Egyptians as well as Mubarak," Washington Post, June 4, 2010; and J. Scott Carpenter and Dina Guirguis, "President Obama's Cairo Speech: A First-Year Scorecard," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2, 2010.

tion between the three main regional blocs with a stake in political reform in the Middle East poses its own set of challenges. Europe and the United States should cooperate on joint initiatives where interests are shared and goals can be made expressly clear. Multilateral programs for which all parties are not entirely on board or which attempt to patch over a stark divergence of interests tend to undermine the mission of these programs by muddling their coherence and diluting the seriousness of their expressed goals. However, where they do not choose to partake in multilateral decision-making, Europe and the United States should always engage in consultation and maximize coordination within the constraints imposed by frank discussion of divergent interests. Even minimal coordination can reduce the political maneuvering of autocratic regimes who seek partnerships and foreign assistance packages that require the least amount of democratic reform on their part by way of “donor shopping” between Europe, the United States, and international organizations.

There are myriad existing multilateral modalities for Middle East political reform, each with varying records of success. Participants in these workshops analyzed five such programs: the G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (G8-BMENA); the Good Governance for Development Initiative (GfD) conducted in partnership with the OECD; the EU’s European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and Union for the Mediterranean; and the United Nations Arab Human Development Report (AHDR). In the proceeding sections we outline the comparative strengths and weaknesses of these frameworks, demonstrating that in order to make progress on political reform, these initiatives first need to be reformed. We conclude with an analysis of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which is based on bilateral agreements but exhibits an important opportunity to be modestly “multilateralized.”

In broad terms, there are three main approaches multilateral programs can use to support democratization. One is a top-down approach focused on the modernization of the state by offering incentives for governments to democratize. Another is engaging in high-level dialogues that encourage democratization as a reform consistent with international norms and human rights standards. A third tactic is a bottom-up approach of working with local civil society actors to endow them with the capital and capacity to enact change from within. Given the inherent clash between the interests of pro-democratic civil society organizations and the autocratic regimes of their countries, it is exceedingly difficult to create individual democratization programs that work with both sets of actors, without creating empty dialogue, or worse, empty partnerships between donors and “government-operated” NGOs. In the realm of most political reform, governments want to modernize and civil society organizations want to democratize. To enact concrete change, however, each party must be engaged in policies that will advance their respective interests. Therefore, rather than championing one strategy over another, we argue that multiple mechanisms can play an important role in collectively encouraging reform.

G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA)

G8-BMENA was launched in 2004 at the behest of the United States during its rotation of the G8 presidency. The initiative was intended to strengthen cooperation between Europe and the U.S. on Middle East reform, and culminated in annual Forum for the Future conferences, which bring together civil society actors and Foreign Ministers from the Middle East to partake in dialogue on

democratization. Unfortunately, BMENA was undermined from its inception, as leaks of the idea — originally conceived as the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) — reached Arab media and provoked outrage at perceived U.S. intentions to change the Arab world. Considering that the agenda was driven by U.S. interests, coincided with the second Iraq War, and neglected to recognize years of Europe-Middle East partnership, it was both unpalatable to European countries and resisted by Arab governments. U.S. focus on the initiative waned until the cancellation of the 2007 Forum for the Future and its uneventful reprisal in 2008 in Abu Dhabi. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently attended the 2009 Forum in Marrakech, Morocco which included new projects such as “Civil Society 2.0,”¹⁴ but the Forum’s longer-term purpose remains to be seen.

Though born amidst controversy, BMENA has its merits. For one, the G8 provides a venue for high-level, high-publicity European-American multilateral cooperation. It helps to overcome the divergent interests of Europe and the United States by providing a neutral platform for Europe to support democratic reform. Traditionally, Europe has been theoretically supportive yet far less pro-active than the United States on democratic reform issues. The G8 provides a forum for Europe to support reform without “incriminating” their Neighborhood Program in the eyes of Arab governments that are far more supportive of the ENP’s technical and economic focus in the Middle East than they are of fundamental political reform. By bringing together these stakeholders in the Middle East reform process, BMENA creates a single market, which helps to curb donor shopping between the EU and U.S.

As a result of the controversy at its inception, however, BMENA has not been able to shake the impression that it was a unilaterally-imposed framework forced on Europe and the Middle East by the United States. Created at a sensitive time in the history of U.S. engagement in the Middle East, BMENA engendered suspicion that it was a ruse to spread the blame for U.S. failures in the Middle East. The initiative was perceived as a political maneuver designed squarely within U.S. national interest, obscuring the value in its mission.

BMENA’s structure also proved a challenge to its efficacy. The inclusion of Afghanistan and Pakistan in its mandate hopelessly widened the scope of the program, and the artificial framework for the Forums for the Future undermined its objectives. Because Foreign Ministers and Finance Ministers were tasked with inviting local civil society organizations to the Forum, primarily government-friendly, co-opted NGOs were brought to the conferences – not the NGOs that were in opposition to the governments and tended to be the true proponents of democratization. Additionally, as a product of the rotating G8 Presidency, BMENA further risked being given more or less attention by new president-countries as they rotated through office.

In summary, the G8 offers a valuable venue to unite European and American voices in the call for democratic reform in the Middle East. However, BMENA has many structural issues that will need to be addressed if it is to have a chance at implementing change.

14 U.S. Department of State, “Secretary Clinton Announces Civil Society 2.0 Initiative to Build Capacity of Grassroots Organizations,” November 7, 2009.

First, the Forums for the Future should include only state officials, not civil society representatives. Otherwise, regimes will either bring only their approved NGOs, or worse, the G8 could risk alienating Arab governments entirely by dictating whom their non-governmental invitees should comprise. A focused state-to-state approach would at least put international reform on the agenda by providing a vehicle for program coordination and funding to support political reform in the Middle East. This is not to discount the pivotal role civil society plays in democratization – in almost all cases, real change must be driven from below. However, it is preferable to nurture legitimate, non-co-opted civil society organizations from the bottom up, via programs such as ENP and MEPI. A high-level state-to-state structure would complement such programs by targeting authoritarianism from the top-down, without delegitimizing and diluting the conversation by including exclusively government-friendly NGOs in what would become an exercise in empty dialogue. The initiative should make clear in its mission that democratization is a real aspiration of the people of the Middle East and that democratic reform is on the international agenda to stay. It should be clarified that BMENA offers an opportunity to work together, through partnerships, to gradually liberalize political processes in a way that would advance the human dignity of Middle Easterners rather than constitute any adversarial “clash of civilizations.”

In addition, the G8 must ensure the sustainability of initiatives such as BMENA as presidencies shift. Countries should not introduce programs that require a long-term commitment without detailed plans and the G8’s clear intention to follow through on them. Not only do waning interest and fatigue undercut these programs, but they further risk the perception that all G8 president-sponsored initiatives reflect empty hopes, rather than concrete plans of action.

Finally, workshop participants recommended that the “B” from BMENA be dropped to rebrand the program as a MENA initiative that takes advantage of Arab world synergies in a coherent framework. Military-political-development coordination on Afghanistan and Pakistan is deeply important, but it should and does happen elsewhere.

OECD Good Governance for Development Initiative (GfD)

A little-known yet unique initiative, GfD was established by the Jordanian government in 2005 and works in tandem with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). GfD seeks to modernize governance based upon six working groups: civil service and integrity; e-government and administrative simplification; governance of public finance; public service delivery; public-private partnerships and regulatory reform; the role of the judiciary and enforcement; and civil society and media. Membership is voluntary and currently includes: Algeria, Bahrain, UAE, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Palestinian Authority, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. Each working group is chaired by one of these members and co-chaired by two OECD members.

The provenance of GfD speaks to its strengths. Voluntary membership ensures that the initiative has legitimacy and ownership, i.e. it represents the demands and interests of the member coun-

tries in which it operates. It also provides a forum for voluntary intra-regional cooperation, which tends to be lacking in the Middle East. That the agenda is set by regional member countries makes GfD a unique complement to other multilateral initiatives in which the agenda is usually set to some degree by Europe or the United States. Co-chairmanship of working groups facilitates inter-regional cooperation, with Europe and the United States playing supporting roles.

The aim of GfD is political reform that modernizes governance, not political reform that democratizes governance – an aim that is feasible for autocratic regimes that have an interest in ruling more efficiently. Technical reform, however, can indirectly play an important role in moving toward democratization. For example, moves to transparency, openness, and rule of law in some sectors of governance make persistent opaqueness in other sectors all the more obvious. These adjustments provide benchmarks against which “modernizing” regimes should be held accountable. Reforms to enhance efficiency remove layers of bureaucracy, disentangle overlapping departments or functions, remove cumbersome rules of human resource management, and generally cut red tape. The more streamlined government bodies are, the more transparent their actions appear. Autocratic regimes may gain a level of sophistication unrelated to democratization, but as they continue to modernize, their feigned openness and respect for human rights should increasingly be laid bare.

The weakness of this focus on technical modernization as a means toward democratization is that there is not a clear link between the two. There is a risk that democracy could even be undermined, since modernizing the institutions of autocratic regimes can enable these regimes to become further entrenched and sophisticated at repressing the opposition. The relationship between modernization and democratization appears to change depending on the country, the context, and the sector involved in reforms. A lack of transparency within GfD itself is a weakness that must be redressed. In the name of good governance, GfD should be more open about its own purpose and activities by widely disseminating information about which actors are involved, what activities are they engaged in, and how they evaluate the effectiveness of their activities.

There are a number of structural changes that GfD could make to enhance its utility as a vehicle for driving political reform. While GfD’s Arab government-driven agenda ensures participants have a stake in the process, the fact that it does work in partnership with OECD means that the latter’s interests should not be ignored. The OECD should expand the agenda to include a working group on political and human rights, while providing appropriate incentives to GfD members. One suggestion is to offer a certification system that would measure the extent to which Arab governments’ activities in a specific sector meet OECD standards for openness and transparency; governments who meet these standards would then be able to advertise their success.

European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean

In 2004, the ENP was designed as a bilateral policy between the EU and Mediterranean countries to build on the Barcelona Process, a set of predominantly multilateral policies initiated in 1995 by the EU to promote greater regional ties between the EU and its Mediterranean neigh-

bors. The Barcelona Process, since re-christened the “Union for the Mediterranean,” is divided into three main baskets—politics, economics, civil society. The principle goal of these programs is to cultivate more favorable political and economic climates in the participating countries of the Middle East in order to reduce pressure for immigration.

The ENP and Union for the Mediterranean aim to benefit from a partnership approach in which the countries of Europe and the Middle East work together on joint policies with equal voices. According to the theory of socialization, more reforms should be successfully implemented as a result of this cooperation, as the interests and values of Europe and Middle Eastern partners converge over time. The ENP and Union for the Mediterranean’s emphasis on technical political and economic reforms holds much the same value as the GfD initiative. Improved efficiency, transparency, and accountability may lead to a more stable and transparent political climate, which combined with economic development, may give Middle Easterners and civil society organizations more resources to engage in democratization campaigns. This is complemented by a civil society-to-civil society component, which works to endow Arab civil society organizations with the resources, training, and financial support necessary to undertake the difficult task of pressing for democracy. A bonus of the Union for the Mediterranean is that it is one framework in which both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories participate. At the same time, it is true that the political implications of the Israeli-Arab conflict have often impacted the efficiency of the dialogue.

A structural challenge that both the ENP and the Union for the Mediterranean face in terms of their respective capacities to facilitate democratization is that political reforms are not a high priority for either initiative. Emphasis is placed on modernization, rather than on fundamental democracy promotion – for example, only 3% of total ENP disbursements to Egypt support political reform. Although, as noted previously, there is potential for technical reform to positively correlate with eventual democratic reform, in this case technical emphasis is aimed at improving the business climate in the Middle East as a gradual effort to replace EU aid with private investment. Without the stability that democracy brings to a country and its people, however, one cannot count on mass capital inflows. With this in mind, the EU should make clear that democratic reform, though not directly required by these initiatives, is an important prerequisite for long-term economic stability.

Given the interests of the European and Middle Eastern actors involved, it is clear that the EU cannot make democratic reform the central focus of its state-to-state initiatives. There is value, however, in modestly encouraging democratic reforms alongside its promotion of technical reforms, including for the economic and business reasons previously stated. A modest emphasis on democracy promotion would furthermore be consistent with European countries’ positions in the G8, thereby presenting a coherence of policy across the EU.

Additionally, there are ways in which the ENP and Union for the Mediterranean can step up their civil society-to-civil society exchanges. For example, it is essential that the EU improve screening procedures for civil society actors applying for EU funding to verify their independence from their respective national governments. Governmental initiatives should also be

supported, but not through civil society institutions. The EU's Mediterranean policies should establish or strengthen NGOs in the Middle East that are dedicated to monitoring government and holding the private sector accountable, such as consumer lobbies.

The EU should also consider expanding its translation services to enable Europeans to read Arabic-language blogs. A European University for the Mediterranean could be established to focus not only on technical education, but to offer academic programs in social sciences and the humanities, so that students from across the region can engage on serious issues of political science and philosophy. Classes could be offered in Arabic so as not to limit options to English-speakers, and Arab professors should be invited to teach. More broadly, care must be taken to establish a basis for program continuity, as valuable programs otherwise risk being dissolved or lost as decision-making power shifts from one EU presidency to the next, each with different priorities.¹⁵

UN Arab Human Development Report (AHDR)

The AHDR is one of the flagship products of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It was first published in 2002 with the aim of making a positive contribution to the region's development. In 2008, the report organized development issues around the concept of human security. Human security refers to the liberation of human beings from threats to their lives and freedoms. The AHDR outlines threats to human security according to seven pillars that pertain to the state of: the environment, the State and security, vulnerable groups, the economy, hunger, health, and occupation and military intervention.¹⁶ Authored by Arab academics, there is a regional report as well as country reports that present in-depth research on deficits in development. The AHDR thus presents a local, original perspective on the development needs of each country. Moreover, by focusing on human security, the reports address people's most basic needs and draw attention to areas for reform that would create tangible change in people's daily lives. The reports garner considerable media attention and reach a wide audience in the Middle East. They educate the public about important issues for which their governments should be held accountable as priorities in their national strategies. The AHDR also provides regional comparisons by which countries can identify their relative strengths and weaknesses, and share best practices and lessons learned.

The resignation of Mustafa Kamal Sayed, one Egyptian author of the 2009 report, belies a key weakness in the reports. Although they are written by Arab scholars and are meant to reflect local perspectives too often ignored by development practitioners, the most recent report was subject to controversial editing, which in Sayed's opinion, undermined the integrity of the report. In this example, although the section on military occupation was originally placed as

¹⁵ The Treaty of Lisbon, which took effect after we conducted these workshops, created the post of president of the European Council, elected for two and a half year terms. This position may give the EU a more stable leadership than the previous system, whereby the EU presidency rotates among the member states every six months.

¹⁶ United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Arab States, "Arab Human Development Report 2009: Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries," July 2009.

the second chapter to mark the immediacy of the problem,¹⁷ it was edited to become chapter eight. In effect, this transferred military occupation from being the first to the last pillar addressed in the report.

A potentially insurmountable challenge of the AHDR is that its recommendations are left to be operationalized by autocratic governments that selectively pick and choose reforms while spinning successes as progress made on the AHDR suggestions as a whole. Governments can also attempt to consolidate legitimacy by pointing to the AHDR in support of existing policies, thereby sustaining the status quo. Though the reports are careful not to point fingers or lay blame on particular actors, if regimes fear being held responsible for their countries' development deficits, they can turn a blind eye to the report and a deaf ear to the media surrounding it.

The AHDR can be strengthened in several ways. First and foremost, final editorial decisions should be left in the hands of the reports' authors. These reports address the basic needs of people in the region, and tampering with sections on the basis of political pressures is inappropriate and runs counter to the UNDP's mission. Second, to strengthen the connection between problems and how to solve them, the AHDR should take steps to offer clear policy prescriptions in addition to diagnoses. This could be achieved by widening the base of development practitioners, economists, and environmental experts involved. Finally, greater efforts should be made by the UNDP to encourage donors to incorporate the findings of the AHDR in the structure of their work. The AHDR does an extraordinary, and somewhat underappreciated, job at identifying problems as perceived by scholars and experts in the region. It is already being used by programs such as U.S. State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to identify areas for reform, and this practice should be widely encouraged.

Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)

MEPI is a bilateral program that provides an interesting point of comparison with the previously described multilateral initiatives. It was launched in 2002 with the objective of changing U.S. foreign policy as part of a "3D" strategy to unite its diplomacy, development and democracy efforts. Aid and assistance are dispersed as part of an open process in which mainly NGOs but also businesses and governments in the Middle East competitively apply for grants advertised by MEPI. MEPI's mission is informed by the Arab Human Development Report and U.S. National Security Strategy, centered on the goals of: giving people a voice in their future, supporting quality education, developing economic opportunity, empowering women, and increasing opportunities for youth.

MEPI has had measured success in building relationships with Arab civil society through small grants and a large alumni network, but it remains to be seen if it can make inroads on democratization. The initiative has its strengths, including competitive funding in which the U.S. grants projects according to locally-defined priorities rather than imposing its program goals on part-

¹⁷ Saseen Kawzally, "UNDP Arab Human Development Report: Security first, occupation last," Menassat Online, July 24, 2009.

ner organizations in the Middle East. MEPI funds are dispersed more efficiently than USAID funds, allowing ambassadors and political officers flexibility to respond quickly to political changes in the region. MEPI also registers an individual impact, specifically through its youth leadership program in which students and professionals from the Arab world are brought to the United States for meetings and workshops, eventually joining an alumni network of young professionals with some interest in promoting democracy. At the same time, however, overlaps persist between the missions, projects, and jurisdictions of MEPI, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), though with time and practice their respective roles have been clarified.

In order to get a better sense of what has worked for MEPI thus far and how it can improve going forward, it is important that MEPI conduct an independent, ongoing review that assesses (1) MEPI's impact in the region and (2) MEPI's contribution to implementing foreign assistance reform. On another practical note, the State Department should address the fluctuation of funding in order to make MEPI programs more sustainable in the middle- to long-term. It should also expand translation services and engage more non-English speakers, especially in exchange programs, to enable the participation of diverse civil society actors.

Though essentially bilateral, MEPI represents an important initiative that could be nominally "multilateralized" by exploring the potential for greater coordination, lesson-sharing, and cooperation with other national and multilateral donors. For instance, meetings between the EU and U.S. to examine explicitly the civil society-to-civil society work of MEPI and ENP provide a means for identifying common objectives and sharing best practices. Comparing EU and U.S. stances vis-à-vis Arab governments on the issue of freedom of association and related matters likewise provides an opportunity to coordinate messages. A more united policy front and expression of values by Europe and the United States, no matter how modest, would make it that much more difficult for Arab governments to avoid the issues.

Conclusion and New Ideas for Multilateralism

Each of the frameworks discussed at the workshop has its strengths, weaknesses, and potential for improvement. They are driven by multiple actors, which in turn are motivated by a variety of interests. However, if multilateral institutions are to succeed in encouraging Middle East reform, greater efforts must be made to strengthen coordination with reform as an explicit goal. U.S. engagement is necessary, but not sufficient. More must be done if the U.S. wishes to lead these institutions toward having a more significant, positive impact on liberty and justice in the region.

Broadly speaking, multilateral frameworks dedicated to reform in the Middle East should clearly identify purpose, actors, and benchmarks in order to manage incentives and expectations, and avoid easily exploitable ad-hoc policies. Coordination within these frameworks is an important step, and will prevent beneficiaries from resorting to the type of donor shopping that has undermined real reform efforts. Periodic reviews and evaluations of progress should ensure that all parties remain engaged in the process with an incentive to continue working towards pre-determined goals.

More specifically, a number of improvements can be made to strengthen the frameworks discussed above:

- The **Arab Human Development Report** can be used to identify primary areas of need as outlined by credible regional experts.
- A re-branded “**G8 MENA**” Initiative would need to incorporate European interests (such as migration) in order to receive better buy-in from European partners. Middle Eastern governments should also be included in the process from the start so they are not considered third-level parties.
- The U.S. and EU should more actively participate in the **OECD’s Good Governance for Development Initiative** by creating a certification system that rewards meeting specific standards that include political reform.
- The **Middle East Partnership Initiative**, growing in popularity, has the potential to play a greater role if it incorporates consultations with the EU in order to identify contradictions between MEPI and the ENP that may frustrate and eventually undermine political reform in the region.
- As a complement to existing programs on Middle East political reform, the workshop put forth the concept for a new dialogue-based multilateral framework: **The Arab Social Forum**.

The **Arab Social Forum** is envisaged as a non-governmental, non-partisan open platform for organizations and individuals, organized by Middle Easterners to discuss their experiences, successes and challenges in supporting political reform in the Arab world. It would be open to all non-violent organizations and individuals, deriving its funding from NGOs and individuals, as well as from private donors. Bringing together a plurality of voices from across the world—the Arab region in particular — with a stake in democratic reform would expand interpersonal and inter-organizational networks, encouraging a critical mass of democracy supporters to share information, form new working relations, and create new social networks and channels to disseminate information. Overall, the forum would facilitate the scaling up of civil society programs to new levels of outreach capacity and operational efficiency.

Most importantly, rhetoric from both sides of the Atlantic must be followed by action. Faith in the U.S. and Europe is waning. The recent upsurge of violence surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the entrance of new regional actors into more prominent mediating roles has not helped the image of the U.S. and EU as mediators. Important upcoming elections in Egypt, Jordan, and possibly the Occupied Palestinian Territories will demand the attention of the U.S. and Europe, and their actions in that regard will undoubtedly speak louder than words.

At this key moment in the trajectory of both U.S. and European foreign policy, lack of coordinated action will lead only to greater frustration in the Middle East. Exacerbated by economic crises, regional conflict, and prolonged suppression of dissent, this frustration is unlikely to pick sides. It will negatively affect both the U.S. and Europe equally. Rather than engage in a race to the bottom on reform, now is the time for the West to stand firmly in support of those Middle Eastern leaders- government officials and activists alike- who are calling for genuine political reform. For the sake of the common good, we must do everything we can to support them.



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