

THE CIVILITY POLICY AGENDA
WESTERN STRATEGIES FOR MIDDLE EAST
REFORM

ABOUT THE CIVILITY PROGRAMME

The events of the past two years have catapulted the Middle East into the centre stage of international politics and forced Western governments to focus their attentions on what is widely perceived as a threat of conflict emanating from the region. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq directed this attention to the *symptoms* of this threat such as 'Islamic terrorism', dictatorships and the dangers posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to the *causes* of this threat and the remedial actions available to Western governments.

By informing Western strategies of the indigenous movements towards political reform and civil society development and the best policies with which to aid their growth, one can create a practical, demand-led programme that will finally realise the economic, political and cultural potential of the region. Such an approach is positioned to dispel the myth of a civilisational conflict long-maintained by some in the West and echoed by extreme voices in the Middle East.

A small number of colloquia and research programmes have been formed over the past few years to enquire further into these issues of development in the Middle East. Some have focused upon the democratic deficit and the lack of the rule of law in countries throughout the region while others have concentrated on the specific power struggles at the heart of Middle Eastern political elites. But there has been little pooling of resources amongst academics and policy-makers on both issues of political reform and civil society in the Middle East and no concerted effort to formulate a long-term strategy for addressing the social dimension of the current political problems. In short, the case for Middle East reform has been made, but the question of *how* to realise such an aim now requires far more systematic attention.

The Civility Programme, launched at the Foreign Policy Centre, is positioned to occupy this gap in the current debate on the Middle East. It seeks to measure the existence of civil society and develop realistic policy proposals through engagement with policymakers,

journalists, academics, business leaders and representatives of civil society in the region. By doing so Civility aims to encourage the foreign policies of Western nations towards active and long-term support for the development of Middle Eastern civil society.

Civility is chaired by Rouzbeh Pirouz, co-chaired by Marcus Gerhardt and its director is Mark Leonard. Professor Benjamin Barber (author of *Jihad versus McWorld* and former advisor to President Clinton), Fareed Zakaria (Editor of *Newsweek International*), Dr. Rosemary Hollis (Head of the Middle East Programme at the Royal Institute of International Affairs) and Reinhard Hesse (advisor to the German Chancellor) make up the Civility Advisory Board. For more information please visit www.civility.org.uk

ABOUT THE FOREIGN POLICY CENTRE

The Foreign Policy Centre is an independent think-tank launched by Prime Minister Tony Blair (Patron) and former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook (President) to revitalise debates on global issues. The Centre has developed a distinctive research agenda that explores the strategic solutions needed to tackle issues which cut across borders – focusing on the legitimacy as well as the effectiveness of policy.

The Foreign Policy Centre has produced a range of **Publications** by key thinkers on world order, the role of non-state actors in policymaking, the future of Europe, international security and identity. These include *The Post-Modern State and the World Order* by Robert Cooper, *Network Europe* and *Public Diplomacy* by Mark Leonard, *NGOs Rights and Responsibilities* by Michael Edwards, *After Multiculturalism* by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Trading Identities* by Wally Olins and *Third Generation Corporate Citizenship* by Simon Zadek.

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Time for Change: Re-assessing Approaches towards the Middle East

New approaches are called for in the West's relations with the Middle East. Traditional alliances with authoritarian regimes in the Middle East are not working to protect and further Western interests. They are incapable of dealing with the contemporary security issues that the attacks of 9/11 pushed so painfully to the fore of international debate. Rather, policy must comprehend the provenance of discontent and of violence legitimised in religious terms by its perpetrators.

Western governments have so far shown insufficient urgency and commitment in elaborating new approaches towards the Middle East. There has been too much focus on the use of military power and the threat of force. Yet such standard 'hard security' perspectives are at best insufficient, and at worst counterproductive. Anti-US – and to a lesser extent, anti-Western – sentiment has if anything intensified since 9/11. Counter-terrorist strategies have targeted the symptoms of the disease without concern for its causes. Renewed aggression in Afghanistan, new releases of tapes by Osama bin Laden and startling levels of instability in Iraq are testament to the need for a broader policy framework. The preoccupying narrowness of thinking has been revealed dramatically in the patent failure to plan any comprehensive state-building strategy for post-conflict Iraq.

In short, the War on Terror requires not more resources, but a qualitatively new battle plan that focuses on the internal pathologies of Middle Eastern societies.

For many years authoritarian regimes were backed on the assumption that political openings in the region could only bring instability and less pro-Western government. It has now been conclusively demonstrated that such reasoning is misplaced.

- Far from fulfilling their supposed role of tempering Islam, autocrats have stoked up anti-Western feeling and played to Islamist opinion in order to shore up the precarious legitimacy of their own rule.
- Far from regimes having ensured favourable orientations towards key challenges such as the Arab-Israeli peace process, state controlled media have presented such issues in an increasingly hyperbolic fashion.
- Far from having engaged in deep-rooted security cooperation, Middle Eastern regimes have presided over rises in military expenditure unmatched in any other developing region.
- Far from opening markets and facilitating investment in key natural resource sectors, regimes' opaque systems of patronage and protectionism have severely limited the potential for Western trade and investment in the region.
- Far from securing a stable process of modernisation, 'firm hand' governance has been a direct cause of increased migration to the West.
- Far from providing secularist states with welcomed protection, Western support for authoritarian regimes has helped breed widespread resentment against the West.

In the words of Fred Halliday, 'the client ha[s] slipped the leash'.¹ The roots of Western concerns lie firmly in the Middle East's repressive systems of governance.

The Middle East lacks any fully developed high-quality democracy, and current trends do not suggest any overwhelming or self-sustaining momentum towards greater political openness.² In Egypt, Tunisia and Syria political systems have if anything become more closed and repressive in recent years, and leaders still openly challenge the concept of democracy. Even in more reformist regimes such as Morocco and Jordan significant limits remain on genuine political pluralism. In Algeria, the army's pre-eminence and the

¹ Halliday F. (2002) *Two Hours that Shook the World* (London, Saqi), p.124

² Brumberg D. (2003): *Liberalization versus Democratization: Understanding Arab Political Reforms*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Working Paper no. 37

exclusion of Islamist opposition have ensured a stagnation of the promised reform process. The gradual reversal of many aspects of president Khatami's liberalising measures in Iran has engendered increasing societal discontent and instability.

The issue of political reform and civil society development in the Middle East has been galvanised by the UN's first Arab Human Development Report, compiled in 2002 by a team of Arab experts. This much-cited report carefully catalogues the Arab world's deficiency in political liberties and urges policies aimed at 'reinvigorating civil action', 'dynamising civil society' and 'reducing the burden of domination by the state'. The authors conclude evocatively that: 'as the world moves into the twenty-first century, the Arab world is at a crossroads'

The fundamental choice is whether the region's trajectory in history will remain characterised by inertia, including the persistence of institutional structures and types of actions that have produced the substantial development challenges it currently faces, or whether prospects will emerge for an Arab renaissance that will build a prosperous future for all Arabs, especially coming generations

Highly instrumental and partial processes of change will not suffice. One strain of opinion in the State Department has advocated 'supporting an authoritarian leader who is a modernizer and is willing to gradually loosen the reins'.³ Other eminent experts have advocated efforts to improve respect for basic rights as a means of actually helping to head off the uncertainties of full democratisation in the Middle East.⁴ Such assertions fail to comprehend the essential nature of autocratic rule and the precarious status of liberal rights that are not underpinned by genuinely open politics. Events in

³ Richard Haas, director of the Department of State's Policy Planning Staff, quoted in Nicholas Lemann "Order of Battle: What the War Against Iraq – and Its Aftermath – Might Look Like" The New Yorker, November 18, 2002

⁴ Indyck M. (2002) Back to the Bazaar, *Foreign Affairs*;

Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Algeria demonstrate the insufficiency of shallow reform processes controlled by nominally pro-Western political elites. The aim must be to promote not stage-managed formal change designed only around external interests, but rather to examine how the values of civility can be more pervasively embedded.

There is, in short, a pressing need to focus on the reform of Middle Eastern societies. It is important to explore how Western nations can best assist in the Middle East's political modernisation. The case for Middle Eastern reform has increasingly been made; greater attention is needed as to *how* such reform can be encouraged in practice.

The Illusory Arguments against Middle East Reform

Despite the patent failure of traditional approaches to the Middle East, the Arab reform agenda has been slow to take shape. Claims are still forwarded that such an agenda would be inappropriate in the Middle East. The Civility project starts from a belief that these often heard claims are misplaced

Myth Number 1: 'Muslims don't want democracy'.

Integral to the 'clash of civilisations' worldview has been the suspicion that democratic values remain alien to the Middle East. Persistent intellectual Orientalism remains sceptical that 'Western' measures of social and political freedom can appropriately be applied to the Middle East.

The notion that there is some culturally-derived proclivity towards paternalistic styles of government is as dangerously pervasive as it is misguided. The same arguments were made to suggest, in turn, that Catholics, Asians and Slavs would not aspire to democracy. As these assertions were progressively proved invalid, so might doubts that Middle Eastern populations have little appetite for or understanding of democratic norms.

The most recent World Values Survey shows that Islamic peoples value democracy to almost exactly the same extent as people in the West. Democratic ideals are strongly endorsed by those interviewed in Islamic countries. When asked by a PEW 2003 survey whether democracy would work well in their own countries, over 65% of people interviewed from six Middle Eastern countries sampled gave a positive reply. In another PEW survey, 73% of people stated that they did not see democracy as a specifically 'Western' value. The failure of Middle Eastern states to reform politically does not appear rooted in the temperament of the people or the values of Arab society.

Indeed further poll data demonstrates that the majority of Arabs are not happy with the rights granted and protected by their own governments. Another PEW poll, for example, showed that, of the

Middle Eastern countries surveyed, the majority of people felt that their rights to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, fair elections and a fair judiciary were lacking. Furthermore, a Gallup poll of Islamic culture showed only 25% of people in the Islamic world felt free to control their own lives, while only 31% believed that their governments take the practical measures necessary to improve the economic lot of their own people. The scientific value of such polls may not be incontrovertible, but it is notable that there is no recent poll in existence suggesting that Arabs oppose democracy.

Some of the focus groups conducted recently in post-war Iraq uncovered a strong degree of support for writing a new democratic constitution; opposition to re-establishing monarchical rule; understanding of the need for term limits; and ambivalence over the notion of an Islamic state.

Myth Number 2: 'There is no Civil Society in the Middle East'

Largely ignored by policymakers and academics, much of civil society in the Middle East consists of a complex network of Islamic organisations and charities that supplement welfare, education and community services provided by the government through the religious 'taxation' system that redistributes wealth even across national borders. Suppression of civil society activity by oppressive state regimes has forced many activists to channel their energies through religious establishments so that, as in Latin America and Eastern Europe, there exists a great wealth of civil society actors under an enormous and diverse religious aegis.

Almost no efforts have been made by Western governments to engage this civil society in any meaningful dialogue about reform. Not all Muslim groups are fanatical and active engagement with the great number of moderate groups in a dialogue of human rights and reform issues is a policy option that has received little serious attention. Only the German *Stiftungen* have attempted to develop such a relationship and in these cases there has been little clarity over what agenda to develop in the dialogue and until very recently no political weight has been committed to supporting this process at the state level. The majority of Western civil society initiatives in the region have led to the creation of a parallel civil society that tends to

serve the needs of its Western funders rather than any significant domestic constituency⁵.

Myth Number 3: 'Islamic doctrine and democracy are incompatible.'

Many see the rise in Islamic identities as incompatible with democracy and pluralist civil society. Critics still assert that many Muslims have needed to make an enemy of the West as an integral part of their fundamentalism.⁶ For a long time, the standard claim has been that Islamists are at best likely to favour democracy merely as an expedient means of obtaining power; power that would be used to disenfranchise the electorate. 'One man, one vote, one time' was presumed to be the extent of the Islamist agenda.

Such views look simplistic against the backdrop of the growing complexities evident within Islam.⁷ Trends in Islamist opinion are varied and the contention that Islam stands at odds with basic democratic tenets cannot be sustained.

Islam is an extremely fluid body of thought. The nature of political Islam has been conditioned by social, economic and political circumstances. Islamist positions are not fixed against some unchanging reading of religious texts. These texts could anyway be quoted as easily in favour of democracy as against it. The grievances expressed through Islamist organizations share much in common with standard nationalist, third world platforms. History shows that there is nothing inevitable about Islamists espousing a fusing of religion and state. As any other ideological system, Islam has constantly adapted to the material exigencies of the day.

⁵ Sheila Carapico (2002) 'Foreign Aid for Promoting Democracy in the Middle East' *Middle East Journal* Vol 56, No. 3 Summer; Carapico gives the example of civil society organisations run by bilingual, western-educated academics that set up their offices nearer to the airport than to the local constituencies that they are meant to serve

⁶ B. Lewis (2003) *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson): 21

⁷ G. Keppel (2003) *Bad Moon Rising: A Chronicle of the Middle East Today* (London, Saqi): 17

In short, if Western powers ceased to shore up autocratic regimes and contributed more tangibly to economic and social development in the region, much of the grounds for Islamists' anti-Westernism could dissipate.

In recent years, parties such as the Egyptian and Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood parties, the Tunisian Nahda party and the Justice and Development party in Morocco have all adopted more unambiguously pro-democratic stances. Several of these, moreover, appear to have acquiesced to elite-controlled stability-oriented processes of reform: in recent elections in Jordan and Morocco, for instance, Islamists fielded limited numbers of candidates specifically to avoid confrontation with the respective regimes.

The most significant role model for a pro-democratic Islam could be Turkey. Since assuming power a year ago, the Justice and Development party has introduced bold steps towards Turkey's full democratisation. Doubts over the depth of prime-minister Erdogan's democratic credentials are continually raised, but have so far been confounded. If Turkey can continue on its path towards more genuinely open politics under the stewardship of an Islamist-oriented party, this will undoubtedly help dispel the myth that Islam and democracy are destined to be 'rival' thought-systems. The ramifications of Western – and particularly EU – policy towards Turkey in the next few years will be felt far beyond Turkey itself.

Myth Number 4: 'There is little basis for the rule of law in the Middle East'.

Even those with vast experience of the Middle East will maintain that by and large in the greater Middle East, the rule of law is critically absent. However, explanations for this that are rooted in the culture, religion or temperament of the region's people are no less erroneous than tales of a mythical Middle Eastern aversion to democracy.

Various countries in the Middle East do have quite extensive legal systems which, though often beleaguered by parallel bodies of Emergency law, can be invoked under the right political circumstances. The release of Saad Eddin Ibrahim earlier this year, for example, had its legal basis in the Egyptian laws that predate the

assassination of Sadat and the 'temporary' system of emergency law introduced by Mubarak in 1979.

Similarly almost every country from Morocco to Iran has some form of constitution (excluding only Somalia and the Palestinian Occupied Territories) each of which have been formed or at least amended post-independence with popular backing. These constitutions provide for the rule of law but their derogation by the illegitimate use of extra-judicial powers on the part of leaders does not, by itself, render the region unruly or incapable of respecting the rule of law. The Middle East is, after all one of the most law-abiding regions with crime rates that are the envy of the world.

Adherence to constitutions and the rules of the democratic game have developed a robust democracy in predominantly Islamic Turkey, where elections do change governments and parliaments exercise their powers in a relatively representative fashion. The role of the EU in this case has been instrumental by exerting political pressure on particular processes of reform. Thus legal reform is possible in the region and external pressure can have a positive effect.

Contrary to what is commonly asserted, it is not the case that only *Sharia* can be made to work in the Middle East, and that this must necessarily collide with rule of law principles. The *Sharia* is simply too imprecise and too contested to provide a practicable system of jurisprudence. With the proliferation of CD Rom versions of the Qu'ran and the democratisation of Islam across the worldwide web the *Sharia* is increasingly becoming unmanageable as a legal basis for law-making. The principles of the *Sharia* will inevitably inform the judicial climate on what many objectives of the law should be; but this does not preclude the strengthening of the rule of law. Current trends do not suggest that we must await wholesale reformation of Islam before the need for more transparent, objective and accountable judicial systems is recognised.

Myth Number 5: 'The Al Jazeera Phenomenon is deeply worrying for the West.'

The emergence of critical media outlets, linked by new technology across national borders, has played a crucial role in democratisation processes across the world. Yet in the Middle East, increasingly popular satellite channels are widely seen in the West as more cause for concern than for hope.

Many such channels have emerged in recent years, but it is of course Al Jazeera that has attracted most attention. Al Jazeera has pioneered coverage of many topical issues that have previously been marked forbidden territory by regimes. Governments from Kuwait to Morocco have attempted unsuccessfully to impose nationwide bans on the channel's broadcasts in response to its scrutiny of their national politics. With phone-in debates, adversarial talk-shows featuring exiled Islamists from throughout the Middle Eastern Diaspora, Al Jazeera offers the region's intellectuals the opportunity to make their cases without governments lurking over their shoulders. Contrary to Western misperceptions, the majority of discussion broadcasts does not centre on the evils of the West but instead on a wide range of issues from the legitimacy of state boundaries to divorce and homosexuality. Furthermore, programmes that *do* handle issues related to the West or Israel often feature US, European and even Israeli representatives in order to fulfil the station's motto 'Akthar min Ra'i' (more than one opinion).

Two strands of Western attitudes have reflected a misguided interpretation and response to the Al Jazeera phenomenon. On the one hand, the West appears obsessed with fabrication of replica TV and radio stations that promote Western culture. The Voice of America – or its equivalents - is not the solution. Rather, Arab media must talk to Arabs about the values of liberty. On the other hand, Western states have often sought to influence the output of state owned media. This has not succeeded and today the output of publicly owned media is often more inflammatory and more unhelpful to Western policies than that of the new private channels.

Public opinion in the Middle East is set specifically against America's war on terror. This demonstrates that attempts to win over the

people of the region through measures like the export of pop music has not, as some commentators contend, paid dividends.⁸ Anti-Westernism cannot be 'suppressed out' of the media, or transcended through some artificial import of Western media and cultural forms. It must be addressed through lively and open debate, and reasoned away.

⁸ Marc Lynch 'Taking Arabs Seriously' *Foreign Affairs* September/October 2003

Challenges for Western Policies

The Civility project sets out to demonstrate that reform is possible and that it is in the interests of both Western nations and the people of the Middle East. Clinging to the status quo is not an option. Change is already afoot in the Middle East; its end point could be more or less benign. Inertia in Western policy will consequently be increasingly exposed and prejudice both the West itself and Middle Eastern citizens. It is imperative that Western nations elaborate more concerted and effective policies aimed at assisting social and political modernisation in the Middle East.

The perspectives of key ministers and policymakers do appear to have evolved. Countless statements from the US, the EU, individual European governments and international organizations claim recognition that attacking the roots of terrorism requires political reform in the Middle East. Tony Blair has opined that external aggression and WMD development has occurred *because* regimes lack democratic legitimacy.⁹ Colin Powell argued after the 9/11 attacks that 'we will continue to advance our fundamental interests in human rights, accountable government...for we believe a world of democracy...is a world in which terrorism cannot thrive'.¹⁰ European Commissioner, Chris Patten has argued that 'fostering human rights should become an integral part of the fight against terrorism'.¹¹ French statements have generally been slightly more elliptical, but Dominique de Villepin has acknowledged that today's security thinking can 'no longer be explained by a series of alliances'.¹² In his November 2003 National Endowment for Democracy speech, President Bush acknowledged that '[s]ixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe'.¹³

While acknowledged in principle, the need for such a political focus has translated into concrete policy initiatives to only a limited extent.

⁹ Financial Times 27 April 2003

¹⁰ Powell C. (2001) 'A Long, Hard Campaign', *Newsweek*, October 15, p. 51

¹¹ Speech, European Commission Weekly News Digest, July 14-20 2003

¹² Speech at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 27 March 2003

¹³ www.whitehouse.gov/news/release/2003/11/20031106-2.html

And where efforts aimed at human rights and civil society development in the Middle East have emerged they have suffered from manifest shortcomings. Improvements in this area of policy constitute one of the most urgent imperatives for Western foreign policies.

As outlined in the previous section, particular challenges present themselves in four areas: norms and values; civil society; the rule of law; and the media.

Each of these thematic issues must be addressed through a combination of top-down and bottom-up policy tools.

Top-down levers relate to the need for critical high-level engagement with Middle Eastern regimes and for debate over the possible uses of state-to-state conditionality and diplomatic pressure in order to generate meaningful reform within the region.

So far, the use of such top-down approaches has been sparing. Many aspects of Western policy since 9/11 appear to have prioritised alliance-building dynamics over concerns with democracy and human rights in the Middle East. Support for the US's 'war on terrorism' secured new benefits for authoritarian regimes, with new military aid being channelled to Jordan, Oman, Yemen, Tunisia and Egypt.¹⁴ European states have similarly sought rapprochement with Syria, Libya, Central Asian states and Pakistan, often providing assistance to highly repressive local security forces to help deal with terrorist groups.

Bottom-up levers relate to the targeted use of aid and dialogue to support reform-oriented actors and organisations within Middle Eastern civil society, media and legal institutes.

Again, this bottom-up dimension urgently needs investing with greater content. New aid initiatives aimed at encouraging political change and civil society development in the Middle East have remained relatively weak and limited in scope. Democracy and

¹⁴ *Middle East Report* 222, Spring 2002: 11

human rights funds still account for a limited share of overall aid budgets; are negligible relative to the magnitude of political reform challenges; and represent a tiny proportion of military-defence expenditure. European civil society assistance has actually decreased in many important Arab countries and remains negligible in Iran.

Notwithstanding ubiquitous official statements that democracy and Islam must be seen as fully compatible, in practice Western governments have shied away from any practical engagement with this sector of civil society in the Middle East. Support has been given to Western style activist NGOs rather than locally specific civil society forms based around the mosque, neighbourhood groups or the professional syndicates. No systematic rapprochement has been forthcoming with 'moderate' Islamists. While the persecution of internationally prominent human rights activists has elicited the West's condemnation, defence of repressed religious figures has been conspicuously weak. The plethora of 'dialogue between civilisations' initiatives that have emerged in the last two years invariably neglect to include the strongest sectors of Islamist opposition. These traits of Western policy have bred confusion, many Arabs apparently perceiving the interest in secular democracy as an effort to undermine religious identity.

In short, despite repeated calls for a paradigm shift in thinking on the Middle East, Western policies show more signs of continuity than qualitative change in the wake of 9/11.

As one expert notes, there has not been the necessary fundamental rethink of how the West can assist in building pluralistic politics.¹⁵ Europeans must move beyond their preoccupation with measuring their policies primarily against US policy. The main thrust of much European analysis has been with warning that 'democracy doesn't come from precision missiles'¹⁶. But this relatively incontrovertible straw man also does little to advance understanding of how

¹⁵ Carothers T. (2003) *Is Gradualism Possible?* (Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Working Paper no. 39): 14

¹⁶ Chris Patten 'Democracy doesn't come from precision missiles' *International Herald Tribune* Tuesday, September 16, 2003

European 'civilian power' policies – themselves patently ineffectual so far – need to be made more sophisticated.

In light of these considerations, thinking through how Western policies might be developed should involve the following elements:-

Top-down Issues

- Since its inception, the EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has been constantly criticised for arbitrarily engaging with one group of Middle Eastern states and excluding others. Events in Iraq, the prospect of agreements with both Iran and the Gulf Co-operation Council and the Wider Europe proposal have all engendered debate over what kind of overarching structure the EU should aim for in its relations with the Middle East. **Is there a case for the EU creating a Wider Middle East Partnership, based on a far more coherent and far-reaching set of incentives?**
- It is clear, and often remarked, that the prospects of influencing change from outside the region must be fewer if European and US policies undermine each other. As the recriminations over Iraq (hopefully) recede, it is necessary to explore **what type of EU-US coordination on the Middle East reform agenda might be most fruitful?**
- Discrepancies are still evident *within* the EU too, with different European states holding to rather different visions of political reform in the Middle East. There is a pressing need for tighter consultation, not just at the level of implementation on the ground, but at the higher level of analysis and strategy. It might consequently be helpful to consider **how something like a European Initiative for Middle East Reform might be established and organised?**
- Without completely sacrificing existing partnerships with Middle Eastern states, the strategic use of aid needs to be

assessed and consideration must be given to practicable forms of political and economic conditionality. But, **exactly what degree and kind of conditionality should Western governments exert?**

- The link between civil society and the ongoing economic change in the region is both tighter and more complex than Western policy-makers appear to acknowledge. We must consequently ask **how Western governments can best harness on-going economic change in the Middle East as a force for progressive political change?**

Bottom-up Issues

- A better thought through approach to the Islamist dimension of Middle Eastern societies is urgently required. **What should the West do in practice to engage with moderate Islamists in a way that can assist democratic change?**
- The EU's role in backing democratic change in other parts of its periphery has not been successfully disseminated in the region. Using the latest enlargement and the case of Turkey, **how might one develop a more systematic and high profile initiative to convey this message to societal actors in the Middle East?**
- Political aid amounts to civil society remain extremely limited. But, **what levels of civil society funding are in fact required to start having a tangible impact?**
- Western support has in practice failed systemically to focus in on promoting the dynamics of civility at the level of local communities, where so much potential exists for the basic values of democratic accountability to be encouraged. This raises the question of **how genuinely grass roots organisational capacity can best be generated?**
- If it is true that only a narrow group of civil society organisations have so far been deemed worthy of support,

we must ask **what kind of new actors should be brought into policy initiatives?**

- Micro-level decision-making machinery in Western, and in particular European, states has not been well moulded to the challenge of delineating a coherent and 'joined up' approach to promoting reform in the Middle East. So, **what kind of policy-making process is needed to ensure that civil society support goes to those organisations with most potential for achieving change?**
- Many initiatives involving political institutions already up and running have not been fully utilised. **How can existing forums such as the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly be given a more effective edge?**
- The relationship between good governance and civil society reform remains unclear. Policy development must ask **how initiatives supporting judicial or public administrative reform can avoid simply strengthening the capacity of ruling elites?**
- One aspect that is still strikingly weak in the Middle East is organised private sector support for democratic reform. With both the EU and US intensifying their efforts to promote free trade with the region, there is urgent need to analyse how rule of law reforms might relate to the complex processes of economic modernisation unfolding in Arab societies. In using the linkage between the economic reform and rule of law agendas, **where are the most promising access points for enhancing democratic momentum amongst the middle classes?**

The Civility Agenda

In response to these pressing questions, Civility intends to provide solutions through the following core activities:

1. **Generating policy** – through a broad consultative network of key figures from the main policy fields and an ambitious timetable of events we aim to identify the priorities for reform in the region and design practical and realistic solutions
2. **Co-ordinating policy** – by mapping Western policymaking in this area and comparing it to the identified priorities Civility will work towards ensuring that Western policy works effectively as a whole
3. **Advocating implementation** – as well as driving forward the policy agenda Civility will seek to monitor the application of policy and address the divide between rhetoric and reality.

Reshaping the Policy Agenda

The case in favour of supporting Middle Eastern reform rests on strong foundations. Twin aspects of much received wisdom have increasingly been questioned. First, the short-sightedness has been recognised of approaching security primarily in terms of backing autocratic regimes to 'keep at bay' anti-Western forces. The choice commonly posited *between* human rights and security ultimately represents a false dichotomy. Second, assertions that the Middle East possesses little democratic will or potential have increasingly given way to calls for more nuanced understandings of the region's evolving political identities. The region is not on the brink of an inevitable democratisation and many of the views held by civil society actors are disquieting. But it is a self-fulfilling and alarmist gloom that casts in stone what in other processes of transformation has been shown to be a fluidity integral to political change itself.

To advocate a more positive engagement with Middle Eastern reform is not to overlook the complexities of the challenges involved. Political transformation should not be seen as a panacea; incipient change has a variety of potential destinies. Indeed, it is precisely because of the region's diverse trends, its distinctive economic structures, its unparalleled geo-strategic fragility and the intricacies of internal Islamist debate that a pro-reform agenda must be fashioned that is more sophisticated, more comprehensive and more attuned to the specificities of the Middle East.

This paper has sought to establish the rationale of Civility's policy agenda. By confronting a number of misperceptions about the contemporary Middle East we have identified the areas where the policies of external actors might most fruitfully be strengthened. Reform-support efforts in the Middle East have so far been unsatisfactory. The need remains for Western strategies that are both more committed and multi-faceted. Questions must be addressed over the sequencing of different aspects of reform and the linkages between different policy instruments. The post-9/11 international scenario has concentrated minds and many useful reform initiatives have been introduced. Contrary to the impression

left by the Iraq conflict, a more convergent assessment of the need for political change in the Middle East now exists among Western states than hitherto. To squander the possibilities of this common concern would constitute a failing of historic magnitude.

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