

Trans-Atlantic Cooperation on Middle East Reform: A European Mis-judgment?

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Abstract

The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMEI), agreed at the G8 meeting in Sea Island in June 2004, offers the prospect of greater trans-Atlantic cooperation to encourage reform in Arab states. But European positions continue to exhibit significant unease over the EU associating itself with US policies in the Middle East. Although US proposals have been watered down, European governments have continued to resist anything but very limited forms of coordination with the US on the question of Middle East reform.

However, differences between US and European approaches to democracy promotion are not as clear-cut as invariably assumed. Europeans have regularly issued warnings aimed at the US that democracy cannot be imposed 'through the barrel of a gun'. But, much of US policy takes the same kind of gradualist, bottom-up and extremely cautious approach to encouraging political reform in the Middle East. The common shortcomings that beset both US and EU policies are more striking than the differences between these two actors.

Both European and US strategies continue to invest limited resources in Middle East political reform; both actors have been poor at rewarding relatively reformist moves in the region; both have eschewed systematic engagement with key strands of political Islam; and both continue to suffer from poorly coordinated decision-making in the area of democracy policy.

A key European demand has been that backing for US-led political reform efforts through the G8 be accompanied by more effective and balanced efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is undeniably the case that the failure to resolve this conflict renders the prospects for Middle East democracy less good than they would otherwise be. But there is a risk that by placing such primary emphasis on this link Europeans will hold support for genuine reform opportunities hostage to trans-Atlantic differences over the Middle East peace process.

Europeans' concern with distancing themselves from the US should not blind them to the advantages of trans-Atlantic coordination on Middle East reform. Tighter trans-Atlantic cooperation would make it more difficult for Middle Eastern regimes to play the EU and US off against each other; facilitate a division of labour on different aspects of the democratic reform agenda; and reduce the risks of new US initiatives cutting across existing EU strategies.

A change in attitude is required on both sides of the Atlantic. Rather than belittling EU weakness, the US could usefully work to strengthen and broaden European initiatives. The EU for its part should resist the temptation to see the detail of a democracy promotion strategy through the lens of a desire to temper US unilateralism.

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Introduction

June 2004 witnessed a concentration of summit activity on the issue of Middle East reform. At the G8 meeting in Sea Island, a Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMEI) was agreed, while further discussions at the subsequent EU-US summit in Ireland considered the detailed form that trans-Atlantic cooperation within this new framework might take. A prominent feature of recent diplomatic activity has been Europe's hesitant response to US calls for trans-Atlantic coordination in the promotion of political change in the Middle East.

Shortly after the attacks of 9/11, the Bush Administration formulated a new Middle East Partnership Initiative, which was followed by a proposed Greater Middle East Initiative, of which the finally agreed BMEI is a scaled down successor. In the development of its own democracy and human rights policies, the EU has increasingly found itself obliged to respond to US initiatives and policies. The extent of possible trans-Atlantic cooperation on democracy promotion in the Middle East has risen to the top of the international agenda. Even though European governments tentatively backed the BMEI at Sea Island, the perception is that profound differences remain between Europe and the US over the Middle East. It is widely judged that the well-established issues of trans-Atlantic divergence – Iraq, Iran, Syria, the Arab-Israeli conflict – have crystallised into conceptually different approaches to the broad agenda of democratic reform in the Middle East. The International Crisis Group recognized that the BMEI 'may at least apply some balm on a trans-Atlantic relationship rubbed raw by difference over Iraq', but concluded pessimistically that 'friction is almost as likely as balm...over the next few years'.¹

This paper questions some of the positions adopted by the EU towards trans-Atlantic coordination in the Middle East. It develops three arguments. First, that differences between US and European

¹ International Crisis Group (2004), *The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth*, Briefing, June: pp.1, 12.

approaches to democracy promotion are not as clear-cut as invariably assumed. Second, that the EU has been mistaken in the grounds on which it has chosen to confront US initiatives. And third, that the potential benefits of stronger trans-Atlantic cooperation on Middle East reform outweigh the likely drawbacks. Running through the paper is a central, critical theme: many aspects of the Bush Administration's Middle East policies have elicited justified European opprobrium; but Europe risks letting a general environment of trans-Atlantic tension lead it into potentially serious mis-judgment on the specific design of an effective Middle East reform strategy.

The paper first presents an overview of how European governments have reacted to new US initiatives on the Middle East. It then questions the validity of some of the assumptions made by the Europeans and concludes by suggesting areas of transatlantic coordination that could benefit both EU and US strategies towards democratic reform.

European Reactions to US Reform Initiatives

Europeans have reacted with notable scepticism to the succession of new US initiatives. A commonly expressed fear is that well-designed, under-stated EU reform efforts will suffer from being associated with more intensive or intrusive US activity.² European criticism has taken two forms. On the one hand, the US has been admonished for being more drawn to reactive, symptoms-rather-than-causes approaches to security; on the other hand, it is (often simultaneously) berated for backing democracy in too heavy-handed and instrumental a fashion. And there is much European commonality in this view. Efforts to renew UK-French-German collaboration suggest that the depth of division over Iraq may have been salutary enough to jolt European states into a more common endeavour on Middle East reform – this in part serving the UK's desire to counterbalance its military involvement in Iraq as an ally of

² See for example, V. Perthes (2004) 'America's Greater Middle East and Europe: Key Issues for Dialogue', *Middle East Policy*, 11/3: 85-97.

the US with its need to recover a broader sense of European distinctiveness.

The Greater Middle East Initiative met with a cool, and in some cases openly hostile, response from European governments. A range of European objections surfaced against the initiative's proposal for greater trans-Atlantic cooperation on Middle East reform. One concern has been with the US trying to use the EU's well-established presence in the region for its own ends or to assert control over European initiatives. Another has been with the US 'pinching our ideas' and undermining Europe's distinctiveness – the search for which often appears to have become an end in itself for some in the EU. Still another reaction has been the fear that partnership with the US would constrain European options – as it has in respect of the Palestinian Occupied Territories – while doing little to share the financial burden.

The most specific European complaint was that the Greater Middle East Initiative was not drawn up in consultation with either governments or civil society in the Middle East. In order to sign up to a common initiative at June's G8 summit, Europeans – sometimes in conjunction with Arab governments – insisted on far-reaching revisions: a change of name (to the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative); a narrower geographic focus (excluding Pakistan and Afghanistan); a strengthened link between reform potential and progress on the Arab-Israeli conflict; reference to 'modernisation' instead of 'democratisation'; and the absolute centrality of consultation with Arab governments and of references to the fact that 'change cannot be imposed'. This last concern was reflected through the BMEI's centre-piece 'Forum for the Future', a ministerial forum designed to discuss reforms in partnership with government representatives from the Middle East.

For the EU, the focus of the whole Initiative turned from engaging civil society forces towards ensuring Arab governments' participation – or at least forbearance.³ In the end, five Middle Eastern heads of government did attend the G8 meeting. The US was keen for

³ ICG, *The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth*, p.13.

political aid programmes to be managed under a common fund, to reduce duplication and attain greater critical mass, but Europeans agreed only to information sharing within a new democracy assistance dialogue (co-sponsored by Turkey, Yemen and Italy). Europeans argued against the creation of new structures, agreeing to consultations but not formal cooperation on the concrete implementation of a democracy strategy.

In short, a widespread view is that Europeans have contributed to reining back the US from a heavy-handed imposition of democracy through the original Greater Middle East Initiative. In this broader sense, European policies have in recent months evolved in large measure as a counter-reaction to US policy. Driven by a desire to avoid being written out the Middle Eastern script as the Bush Administration ratcheted up its reform commitments in the region, some European donors have been galvanised into strengthening their democracy policies. But far from promising greater trans-Atlantic cooperation, such efforts have been designed to further distance European policies from those of the US. Recent European initiatives have been imbued with notable features that are as much about off-setting American efforts as supporting them. Indeed, a kind of reverse osmosis is becoming increasingly evident. An association of 'democratic imperialism' with the ascendancy of US neo-conservatives has strengthened European determination to stake out what can be presented as a different approach to Middle East reform. Most European governments have, for example, remained decidedly cool towards the Community of Democracies, seeing this as an 'overly Americanised' initiative – an ambivalence that has persisted in many cases even as Arab activists have increasingly pushed for reform strategies to be pursued through this framework. And on Iran, a judgment that the Bush administration has increasingly conflated pressure related to Iranian acquisition of weapons of mass destruction with advocacy of regime change has played a primary role in European governments' de-linking of these two areas.

Many European policy-makers have clearly used the Middle East reform agenda as an arena for staking out broader positions towards US pre-eminence. This found expression in the frequent warnings

issued by Europeans to the US that democracy cannot be 'imposed by force'. The 'partnership' approach is explicitly justified and advocated as the EU's 'comparative advantage' over the US.⁴ European donors acknowledge that they have been galvanised in large part by their judgment that a more concentrated EU effort is required to neutralise the likely counterproductive effects of the US administration's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). One advisor admits to how his minister was mobilised into new action by the 'embarrassment' that the US had pulled 'so far ahead' on democracy policy since 9/11. Across the Middle East, the factors both driving and inhibiting European democracy policies often reflect a perceived need either to assuage or counter the US, more than deliberation over the strategic effects of political change itself.

It is widely judged that US perspectives fail to share a European recognition that reform policies properly require a long term and holistic approach. The distinctive European approach in the Middle East is asserted to be one based on gradual and comprehensive processes of reform that link political change to broader issues of social justice, local participation and the modernization of governance structures. In a widely quoted recent speech, EU Commissioner Chris Patten felt it important to warn US policy-makers that 'developing democracy is not like making instant coffee'.⁵

European policy-makers have professed concern at the US tendency to overplay the link between 9/11 and democracy promotion in the Middle East. Geographic proximity – it is commonly suggested – has imbued European strategies with a more sensitive, more complete and more long-term take on security and reform in the Middle East that is adjudged by Europeans to eschew the 'pick and choose' short-termism of US diplomacy. The US-proposed exclusion of certain states – Iran, Syria and initially, Libya – from new economic and political projects self-evidently takes policy in the opposite direction from recent European initiatives towards these

⁴ Commission of the European Communities, *European Security Strategy – Options for an EU Strategy towards the Middle East*, March 2004, p.1.

⁵ 'Islam and the West: At the Crossroads', speech at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 24 May 2004.

states. Indeed, Europeans distinguish their self-consciously regional approach from the erstwhile US preference for approaching reform through preferential bilateral relations. Congressional proposals for a \$1 billion a year Trust for Democracy have been criticised by Europeans, sceptical of such overtly political approaches.

Over-stating the EU-US Divide?

Many of these European concerns are not without foundation. Significant differences between US policies and European strategies clearly persist. At the very least, the BMEI 'papered over differences' on the more concrete aspects of reform policies.⁶ But, there has also been serious misperception, and an exaggeration of the presumed breach between American and European approaches to political reform in the Middle East. Three factors are pertinent in this regard.

First, the US has in fact come to engage in the same kind of bottom-up and indirect work that many in the EU suggest is indicative of a uniquely European approach. European strictures warning the US not to seek democracy 'through the barrel of a gun' look incongruous aside the gradualism of much US work on the ground in the Middle East. There is something of a straw man quality to many EU pronouncements. Much State Department and USAID rhetoric shares the same language and strikes the same tone as European documents and ministerial speeches. Even the most hawkish of Pentagon neo-cons do not appear to be engaged in serious planning to use force as a general means of spreading democracy.

In many countries the EU and US have in fact funded a strikingly similar range of civil society organisations. The EU orientation towards service delivery organisations has more in common with US strategy than many in the EU realize or care to acknowledge.⁷ While the US does fund much highly instrumental democracy propaganda, well over 50 per cent of the USAID democracy budget now goes to

⁶ M. Yacoubian (2004), *Promoting Middle East Democracy I: The Trans-Atlantic Dimension*, USIP Working Paper, forthcoming: 2

⁷ For an overview of US funding, see A. Hawthorne (2004), *Middle East Democracy: Is Civil Society the Answer?*, Carnegie Working Paper no. 44.

bottom-up civil society projects, and most of the rest to a similar array of good governance, women's rights and 'civic education' projects as makes up European funding profiles. Whatever the grating discourse heard from some senior members of the Bush administration, a detailed look at the kinds of concrete political aid projects funded by the US suffices to render unconvincing the contention that the US 'only does hard power'. US policy was already becoming increasingly gradualist before European governments sought to influence the Greater Middle East Initiative, with MEPI itself focusing on governance issues and fairly soft civil society projects. Experts had from early on criticised the Greater Middle East Initiative for progressing little beyond the ineffectual and tentative policies of the 1990s.⁸

Second, it is necessary to question the notion that European approaches are far more focused on the roots of terrorism in preference to US-style hard security proclivities. While routinely admonishing the US for its direct security approaches, the EU has itself also prioritised defensive measures most notably since 9/11. By far the most significant areas of EU policy-making activity since 9/11 have been in the justice and home affairs field, with governments agreeing tough new anti-terrorism legislation; more police and judicial cooperation; increased powers for Europol; a new Common Arrest Warrant; strengthened border controls; a new border police and external borders agency; and new anti-terrorist and readmission clauses to be included in all EU trade and cooperation agreements. Funding for such measures has far outstripped new democracy promotion resources. Significantly, European governments have readily cooperated with the US on extradition and migration matters, in sharp contrast to their reluctance to be associated with US democracy promotion goals. Spain, France and the UK all signed up to the new \$10 million anti-proliferation initiative launched by the Bush administration. Europeans have routinely berated the US for focusing purely on the symptoms of terrorism with a reactive and short-term mentality; but, it would be hard not to inveigh against EU strategies for exhibiting

⁸ T. Carothers and M. Ottaway (2003) *The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start*, Carnegie Briefing.

exactly the same bias. It is salutary to observe that while the Madrid 3/11 bombings appeared initially to have widened some EU-US differences, they may over the medium term bring European and American threat perceptions into line, investing European perceptions with greater defensive immediacy.

A third factor often overlooked is that a range of different perspectives on democracy promotion cut across a simple Europe-US division. There are a range of views and approaches towards democracy promotion in the Middle East but it is not always the Atlantic that divides. While the contours of some distinctively European logic can be detected, on some issues a variety of views has been evident within Europe. Many of the most significant divisions are not so much between Europe and the US, or even between different European nation states, as between different ministries. The approaches pursued by different European development ministries have more in common with each other and with USAID than with other agencies of their respective national administrations. The lines adopted by European foreign ministries often have more in common with State Department discourse than with their own defence departments – although some practitioners do see something of a gap opening as the State Department considers a more ‘forward-leaning’ approach. Some Europeans acknowledge that on the ground within the Middle East, discussions on funding and lobbying strategies often produce unity around a ‘like-minded’ group incorporating select European states, the US, Canada and Norway, far more than at the EU level.

In relation to Turkey, the UK and some other member states have moved closer to the US line of supporting a relatively low democratic threshold for Turkish EU accession. While dealing with Iran has engendered something of a genuine EU-versus-US split, a spectrum of opinion within the EU has been evident on the issue of political change. Moreover, seeking to offset other agencies, the US State Department has itself begun to adopt a more bottom-up gradualist approach in this case, looking at ways of circumventing legislative restrictions to fund civil society organisations in Iran. Divergence also exists beneath the often-stated EU concern with developing a distinctive approach towards Syria. The UK has blocked the signing

of a new association agreement with Syria, ostensibly over language on non-proliferation, but other European states suspect Washington’s influence over London on the broader principle of engagement with Damascus (a charge denied by the UK). US sanctions against Syria were themselves agreed rather reluctantly by president Bush and in relatively limited form. More generally, while some European states have been concerned at their policies being ‘infected’ by association with Washington, the UK has seen merit in joining forces with the US as a way of sending a more forceful political signal to the region. Overall, intra-EU differences indicate that the paucity of coordination across the Atlantic is not qualitatively different from the limited coordination within Europe. Indeed, most European donors have a better knowledge of US policies than the initiatives of their European partners!

Even in the more indirect sense of the kind of political and societal model being conveyed, in many respects there has clearly been little in the way of a common European model to sell to the Middle East. European states’ different legal traditions can often produce confusing results for aid recipients; for example, Anglo-Saxon regulatory codes have often been promoted within economic governance work alongside French-based provisions in administrative and constitutional law projects. The resolute secularism of the French state and disestablishment of the Swedish church exist alongside the Church of England’s privileged position in British political life. (UK Ministers have frequently used this latter proposition to rebut Muslim concerns over the compatibility of democracy and religion.) The French government’s aim of creating a ‘French Islam’ appeared more concerned with curtailing practices in France through the state than with disseminating a model based on the genuine privatisation of religion. The banning of headscarves in French schools has resonated far more in the Middle East than European governments’ claims to represent a democratic model for the region to aspire to, and was openly rejected by other European states. European governments have often sought to use this variety of institutional models as a means of helping sell to Arab countries the message that democracy can take a range of locally generated forms. Arguably, however, this often slips into tautology aimed unconvincingly at patching up differences: the very lack of a

European model, it is sometimes suggested, *is* Europe's distinctive model!

Misdirected Fire?

In sum, the distinction between US and European strategies has been far more blurred than is often assumed. Crucially, this suggests that the EU's recent criticisms of US approaches have often taken aim at the wrong targets. European positions on trans-Atlantic cooperation have diverted attention from the most pressing challenges for political reform strategies in the Middle East.

European concern with the overly muscular tenor of US plans looks increasingly overstated. Much commentary has scored as a victory the role played by Europeans - and Middle Eastern governments - in diluting US plans. This dilution may indeed have helpfully succeeded in chastening some in the Bush administration, but it is doubtful that it represents much of an advance for democratic possibilities in the Middle East. It may be viewed as puzzling that concern arose over Arab regimes' hostile reaction to the Greater Middle East Initiative proposals. While such opposition from the Middle East engendered much worried comment both in Europe and the Middle East, it was arguably not surprising: it might be thought incongruous if a strategy designed to further democracy were not opposed by those autocratic elites standing to lose from any dispersal of political power in the Middle East. Debate has centred extensively on the concern that 'change cannot be imposed from outside' - this being a constant warning issuing from Arab governments, European ministers and international organizations such as the United Nations. Quite undeniable, of course, but not an assertion that illuminates greatly in debating concrete reform strategies - this frequently repeated refrain posits a sharp dichotomy between internal and external factors, when these are in practice deeply entwined and mutually conditioning.

Moreover, signs of a tough, coercive imposition of democracy have hardly been the most widespread and eminent feature of US policy. Take Iraq out of the equation - along with occasional and so far

apparently speculative remarks in relation to Iran and Syria - and it would be more convincing to fault US strategy for its extreme caution than its undue heavy-handedness. Neither the GMEI nor MEPI intimated the use of punitive policy instruments. The new BMEI remains vague on implementation details, fails to offer new funding and includes no mention of prospective conditionality being exerted against non-reforming regimes. Apart from the 'Forum on the Future' and the democracy assistance dialogue, the BMEI's main concrete programmes are focusing on literacy, vocational training, entrepreneurship, small business development and microfinance. The Economist opined that the Initiative had 'ended up more like a traditional development project in the Arab world than an attempt to use democratisation as an instrument in the war on terror'.⁹ There has been no commitment, either in the BMEI or more generally, to support moderate Islamists in any politically significant sense. Some critics have even charged the Bush administration with being 'a discreet missionary for the faith', in its indulgence of the more problematic elements of political Islam¹⁰ -- precisely the inverse critique of the European opprobrium directed at US policies. The US has remained relatively soft on its autocratic 'allies' in the region: a few days after his apparently historic NED speech committing the US to move away from authoritarian alliances, president Bush received president Bin Ali in the White House with warm conviviality and no mention of democracy. It might be argued that the BMEI is the inverse of what would be most advisable: a high profile initiative with limited substance, when what is needed in the context of the Middle East is more rigorous and critical low profile activity without the political fanfare.

Indeed, of far greater significance than any defining 'Europe-versus-US' dichotomy have been the shortcomings common to *both* European and US policies. The striking aspect of both European and US strategies is the limited amount of resources so far devoted to Middle East political reform. Most of the proposed increases in US political aid budgets have already been slashed by Congress, while

⁹ *The Economist*, 4 June 2004, p.23.

¹⁰ D. Pipes and M. Stillman (2002), 'The United States Government: Islam's Patron?', *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter: 25-35.

the Middle East will still receive under 10 per cent of the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights after the budget for this increased to 132 million euros in 2004. Both US and European resources have been targeted at relatively apolitical civil society organizations, while failing to promote genuine local ownership over the design of reform-related work. Both actors have been poor at rewarding reformist moves in the region; both have eschewed systematic engagement with key strands of political Islam; and both continue to suffer from poorly coordinated decision-making in the area of democracy policy.¹¹

And this leads onto a second area of questionably aimed European fire, namely the link made between democratic reform prospects, on the one hand, and the Arab-Israeli and Iraq conflicts on the other. However valid and important the contention that these areas of policy cannot be conceived in isolation from one another, it is one that risks becoming too predominant in European positions. It is on US policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iraq that most high profile critical attention in Europe has centred. The focus in the European debate has overwhelmingly been on asserting how these areas of policy undermine US credibility and thus caution against Europe associating itself with new US reform initiatives. This focus has trumped – and in fact, distorted – assessment of reform strategies themselves. The tenor of much comment has been that reinvigorated initiatives on the peace process need to be linked more tightly and systematically to US-led political reform efforts through the G8.

The Arab-Israeli conflict's complicating impact on reform potential is indeed both well-established and of undeniable significance. But it is helpful only to a point for Europe to continue in effect to assert to the US: 'We will not join you on Arab reform until you change your policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict'. The EU should press the US towards a more balanced and committed effort on the Middle East peace process in a way that does genuinely unlock the potential for democratic reform in Arab countries. But, there is a danger of the EU

¹¹ For details on European initiatives, see R. Youngs (2004), *Europe's Uncertain Pursuit of Middle East Reform*, Carnegie Working Paper no. 45.

using the US's plea for trans-Atlantic cooperation on democracy primarily as a negotiating lever to extract changes related to the peace process. Placing such primary emphasis on these links is a strategy that risks neglecting those reform opportunities that may exist in the short term. Arab activists gathered in Doha on 3-4 June 2004 addressed this issue, asserting in their declaration that, 'hiding behind the necessity of resolving the Palestinian question before implementing reform is obstructive and unacceptable'.¹²

This has indeed become an increasingly recognised lesson from the EU's own experience within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The EU has criticised the US for focusing on select bilateral relations in the region – while also generalising too much about reform prospects at the regional level – and for a reluctance to acknowledge the link to the Middle East peace process. But it has itself begun to de-regionalise aspects of the EMP as a means of circumventing the Arab-Israeli conflict. Conscious of its own experience, the EU should not adopt postures that effectively hold cooperation on the Arab reform agenda hostage to the arrival of a less short-sighted US policy towards the Palestinian issue.

Better Alone or Together?

Europeans risk becoming so fixated with disassociating the EU from the US that they are blinded to the advantages of trans-Atlantic coordination. Arguably, the paucity of trans-Atlantic cooperation has been by far a greater negative outcome for democracy promotion efforts than any disadvantage suffered by Europeans being identified with the US. The European focus has been firmly on US policies infecting and sullyng EU initiatives. Such a fear is not unreasonable in the prevailing climate. It may, however, underplay the potentially positive side of the equation, namely that harnessing US political will to the EU's bottom-up approach might actually increase the latter's effectiveness.

¹² Quoted in *Arab Reform Bulletin*, June 2002, www.ceip.org.

The fact that new US activity has galvanised some in the EU into ratcheting-up their own efforts indicates the strength of their determination to defend a separate European identity and profile. This may for now be the most telling effect of recent US initiatives: somewhat paradoxically, by calling for trans-Atlantic cooperation the US may push some Europeans into doing more in an effort to render such a US-led partnership less necessary.

At the very least, tighter trans-Atlantic cooperation would make it more difficult for Middle Eastern regimes to play the EU and US off against each other. This has on occasions worked to the detriment of both the EU and US: when the EU started to raise reform issues with the Egyptian government in the mid-1990s, Mubarak's regime could confidently rebuff these efforts by pointing to continued unconditional US support; conversely, when the US moved to push the Algerian regime towards reform, the latter was able to cite continued French backing. One trans-Atlantic group of experts has advocated a 'common trans-Atlantic benchmark' for offering solidarity to democracy activists, that could be brought about through the US and EU pressing regimes to sit down with a range of opposition and civil society organisations to design national reform projects.¹³ Certainly, given the extreme lack of coherence between different donors' projects, the US proposal to pool and commonly plan political aid initiatives was not without merit.

For all the EU's defensiveness over being emasculated by intensified US involvement, American policy-makers have frequently acknowledged that the US 'carries more baggage' in the Middle East and consequently has greater need of a more multilateral effort. This gives the EU leverage to negotiate forms of cooperation that boost its own aims and approaches to reform. As within the EU itself, cooperation need not completely suppress areas of particular national expertise; it can be readily acknowledged that some things may be better done by the Europeans, others by the US. A common trans-Atlantic reform agenda should be able to combine the benefits

¹³ *Democracy and Human Development in the Broader Middle East: A Trans-Atlantic Strategy for Partnership*, Istanbul paper no. 1, German Marshall Fund and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation: p.5.

of a united front with space for diversity in European and US priorities on the ground.

If a change in attitude is required from Europe, however, this must be assisted by a concomitant shift in US positions. Many in the US, of course, still see the European Union as chronically divided, unable to assume effective leadership and unwilling to undertake tough action. However, such dismissals fail to appreciate the source of European strengths. Diversity, multi-faceted layers of initiatives and subtle balance contribute towards a distinctive form of European power. The same features held up in Washington as symptomatic of European prevarication and wimpishness in fact lend the EU a form of embedded influence particularly relevant to the aim of fundamentally remoulding the politics of the Middle East. The EU possesses genuine presence and purchase, which the US should recognise and embrace, not belittle and challenge.

While the US's new emphasis on promoting democracy across the Middle East is welcome, and correctly identifies the source of terrorism and instability, this is an area where the EU could most productively play a lead role. EU initiatives in the Middle East still require more resources and the backing of firmer political will, but they have laid the foundations from which effective and context-sensitive support for political liberalisation can be built. Rather than trying to assume the role of lead protagonist, the US might be wiser to content itself with a secondary role. It is self-evidently the case that in the Middle East the US lacks the kind of legitimacy that enabled it to play a role in developing democracy in Eastern Europe and parts of East Asia. The US's most effective contribution to outside support for Middle East reform would be to back European initiatives, working behind the scenes to encourage a gradual strengthening and broadening of ongoing EU programmes.

If this would be good both for Europe and the US, it is a prospect rendered less likely by the current tenor of US approaches. Europeans were right to fear that the GMEI appeared to draw Europe in to a US-owned process, no the reverse. Indeed, relying more on European leadership would reverse the whole shift in US policy in recent years and appear to many in Washington as almost

counter-intuitive after the divisions engendered by Iraq. Despite some intensified EU efforts, there is still a danger of an inverse logic prevailing: the harder the US presses and the louder it protests at European weakness, the more reluctant the EU becomes to adopt more muscular political approaches that are now derided in Europe as 'the American approach'.

Aspects of current US strategies certainly risk cutting across European work. The US's move towards a series of bilateral free trade areas, for example, has already complicated European schedules to create a regional free trade zone and to harness such regionalism as a key part of its democracy promotion policy. Bilateral US trade negotiations with Bahrain have angered Europeans by undercutting GCC unity just when EU-GCC free trade area talks look set to make progress. (Indeed, the structuring of EU policy around a 'Mediterranean' framework has no counterpart in the American diplomatic mindset and continues to add further differentiation).¹⁴ The US must be wiser in appreciating how Europeans tend to counteract shifts in American policy and in recognizing the damage heavy-handed, instrumental new strategies could do to the purchase already being developed through EU initiatives. This might in turn encourage Europeans to move beyond their current obsession with being 'different' from the United States, and to harness in a more positive fashion the US' new commitment to supporting political change in the Middle East.

Clearly some fast-solidifying attitudes on both sides of the Atlantic would have to shift to permit such a Faustian bargain of mutual compromise. Getting the balance right between cooperation and variation in the Middle East is of potentially unparalleled importance. The skirmishing witnessed so far has engendered questions of profound magnitude. Is the Middle East set to become the theatre of a major family feud within the trans-Atlantic community, the trigger for a seismic parting of the ways for that family's increasingly fractious members? Or are we witnessing the squabbling of siblings still united by the strong bonds and ultimately shared visions that are

¹⁴ I. Lesser (2004) *The United States and Euro-Mediterranean Relations: Evolving Attitudes and Strategies*, Euromesco Brief No. 10, July: 10.

precisely what permits differences to be expressed so forcefully? In this latter, less apocalyptic scenario much could depend on the convergence and effectiveness of European and American approaches to democracy promotion.

This suggested coordination could be realised in a number of ways:

- The democracy assistance dialogue that is starting under the rubric of the BMEI should not limit itself to a modest exchange of information, but explore areas where European and US funding can be coordinated to ensure greater effectiveness and impact.
- Where appropriate, joint EU-US declarations on political developments in the Middle East – reacting, for instance, to the arrest of a democracy activist or the introduction of a repressive new NGO law – would make it harder for Arab governments to play the two sets of actors off against each other.
- A systematic and joint 'lessons learned' exercise, examining the effects and shortcomings of democracy aid given by the US and EU to the Middle East over the past decade, would help both actors develop more sophisticated and nuanced initiatives.
- Regular high-level coordination is urgently needed to explore ways of ensuring that differences in European and US trade policies do not spill over to prejudice cooperation on political reform in the Arab world.
- With both the US and EU declaring a new conviction of the need to engage with moderate Islamists, a joint forum would help shed light on this difficult area, in which all donors acknowledge a relative paucity of information.

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As of October 2004, persistent violence in Iraq and the legacy of opposition in some European countries to the US-led invasion continued to militate against more extensive EU engagement in the country. A new EU strategy, agreed in the summer of 2004, promises consideration of a range of new forms of cooperation and dialogue. Yet a coherent European democracy strategy for Iraq has been conspicuously absent. A number of member states have actively reined back the scope of the new institution-building initiatives. The security situation continues to discourage European donors from dispersing significant amounts of aid to post-conflict state-building and reconstruction efforts. Europe's absence has been felt most acutely in the security sphere, both in terms of troop deployments and the contribution to the training of Iraqi security forces. European governments have valid criticisms over the coalition's handling of Iraq's post-conflict imperatives, and are right not to over-commit to Iraq under the present circumstances. However, this pamphlet provides a number of concrete suggestions for stronger European engagement might now be both possible and helpful.

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whatever leverage it possesses (including through multilateral economic co-operation agreements) to vigorously promote the protection of the hard-won rights and freedoms in Russia.

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**BLAIR'S DOPPELGÄNGER:
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David Mathieson argues that the two Prime Ministers urgently need to strengthen their relationship. Though relations between their respective parties were strained by the war over Iraq, and the warm relationship between Blair and Aznar, there is now real scope for cooperation between them. Blair has proven that he can work well with partners from the Right like Bush and Berlusconi. He now has the chance to show that he can work equally well with a modern European social democrat. This is also important for domestic reasons. In the approach to the 2005 elections, Blair needs to reposition himself within the Labour Party and emphasise his social democratic, redistributionist credentials. Despite important foreign policy differences, Mathieson argues that both governments should avoid caricatures of each other. PSOE is not a continental version of 'Old Labour' and Blair is not a neo-liberal stalking horse. There is now a window of opportunity: Zapatero will be the Prime Minister of Spain until 2008 and Labour look set to win the next General Election in the UK. Both have the chance to prove that Social Democracy can work in Europe and that European social democrats can work together.

DARFUR AND GENOCIDE

Greg Austin and Ben Koppelman
July 2004
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The unfolding of the Darfur crisis since January 2003 shows that the United Nations, the USA, the UK and the EU have not lived up to their promises for more effective conflict prevention or their obligations to monitor, prevent and punish the crime of genocide. The lessons of failure to prevent the Rwanda genocide have not been fully institutionalised. This pamphlet lays out the sort of measures that need to be taken in such cases and that could have been taken much earlier in the Darfur case. Policy must focus on the

perpetrators. The start point has to be measures personally targeted against them. Early measures for preventing imminent genocide must also include contingency planning for multinational military intervention as a means of bolstering diplomatic pressure.

THE BEIJING CONSENSUS

Joshua Cooper Ramo
Spring 2004
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The former Foreign Editor of Time magazine, Joshua Ramo, argues that there is a new 'Beijing Consensus' emerging with distinct attitudes to politics, development and the global balance of power. It is driven, the author argues, by a ruthless willingness to innovate, a strong belief in sovereignty and multilateralism, and a desire to accumulate the tools of 'asymmetric power projection'. Though it is often misunderstood as a nascent superpower, China has no intention of entering an arms race. Instead, it is intent on projecting enough 'asymmetric power' to limit US political and military action in its region. Through fostering good international relations, it is safeguarding the peaceful environment needed to secure its prosperity, and deterring the attempts of some on the fringes of US politics to turn it into a pariah. Ramo argues that China offers hope to developing countries after the collapse of the Washington consensus. It provides a more equitable paradigm of development that countries from Malaysia to Korea are following. Based on more than a hundred off the record discussions, *The Beijing Consensus* captures the excitement of a country where change, newness and innovation are rebounding around journal articles, dinner conversations and policy-debates with mantra-like regularity.

MORAL BRITANNIA?

Evaluating the Ethical Dimension in Labour's Foreign Policy

Nicholas J Wheeler and Tim Dunne
Published on 26 April 2004
£4.95, plus £1 p+p

Moral Britannia? examines how far reality has matched the famous promise made by Robin Cook to formulate 'a foreign policy with an

ethical dimension' in the first weeks of the new government in 1997. The phrase came back to haunt Labour on issues as varied as arms sales to support for Bush in Iraq - and, according to authors Tim Dunne and Nicholas Wheeler, led to one of the great foreign policy debates since the 1930s.

It debunks some of the myths surrounding the issue, arguing that an 'ethical foreign policy' can be pragmatic, does not necessarily involve the sacrifice of national interests, and is not always as self-evident as critics suggest. Dunne and Wheeler's audit of Labour's record is broadly positive though it concludes that British involvement in the invasion of Iraq was not justifiable. Finally, *Moral Britannia?* sets out ten lessons to rescue the ethical foreign policy and re-establish relations with the rest of the world based on internationalist values and multilateralist institutions.

EUROPEAN POLICIES FOR MIDDLE EAST REFORM:

A Ten Point Action Plan

By Richard Youngs

March 2004; available free online

This paper offers 10 proposals that could inject greater clarity, dynamism and coherence into EU democracy promotion efforts in the Middle East.

'An interesting prospectus'

Martin Woollacott – *The Guardian*

GLOBAL EUROPE:

Implementing the European Security Strategy

By Richard Gowan

February 2004; available free online

The European Security Strategy emphasised the need to spread good governance and build more effective multilateralism. The Foreign Policy Centre has published the first major action-plan for achieving these goals.

THE EUROPEAN INCLUSION INDEX:

Is Europe ready for the globalisation of people?

By Mark Leonard and Phoebe Griffith

October 2003; available free online

The European Inclusion Index will rank European member states' attempts to promote progressive citizenship and inclusion policies. The Index will assess the policies put in place to challenge discrimination, as well as the ability of migrants and ethnic minorities to participate actively in the social, political and economic lives of their host communities.

REORDERING THE WORLD:

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March 2002

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