

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

IN SUPPORT OF
ARAB DEMOCRACY:
WHY AND HOW

MADELEINE K. ALBRIGHT AND VIN WEBER
CO-CHAIRS

STEVEN A. COOK
PROJECT DIRECTOR

INDEPENDENT TASK FORCE REPORT No. 54

In Support of Arab Democracy: Why and How

Report of an
Independent Task Force

Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations

Founded in 1921, the Council on Foreign Relations is an independent, national membership organization and a nonpartisan center for scholars dedicated to producing and disseminating ideas so that individual and corporate members, as well as policymakers, journalists, students, and interested citizens in the United States and other countries, can better understand the world and the foreign policy choices facing the United States and other governments. The Council does this by convening meetings; conducting a wide-ranging Studies program; publishing *Foreign Affairs*, the preeminent journal covering international affairs and U.S. foreign policy; maintaining a diverse membership; sponsoring Independent Task Forces; and providing up-to-date information about the world and U.S. foreign policy on the Council's website, www.cfr.org.

THE COUNCIL TAKES NO INSTITUTIONAL POSITION ON POLICY ISSUES AND HAS NO AFFILIATION WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. ALL STATEMENTS OF FACT AND EXPRESSIONS OF OPINION CONTAINED IN ITS PUBLICATIONS ARE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AUTHOR OR AUTHORS.

The Council will sponsor an Independent Task Force when (1) an issue of current and critical importance to U.S. foreign policy arises, and (2) it seems that a group diverse in backgrounds and perspectives may, nonetheless, be able to reach a meaningful consensus on a policy through private and nonpartisan deliberations. Typically, a Task Force meets between two and five times over a brief period to ensure the relevance of its work.

Upon reaching a conclusion, a Task Force issues a report, and the Council publishes its text and posts it on the Council website. Task Force reports reflect a strong and meaningful policy consensus, with Task Force members endorsing the general policy thrust and judgments reached by the group, though not necessarily every finding and recommendation. Task Force members who join the consensus may submit additional or dissenting views, which are included in the final report. "Chairman's Reports" are signed by Task Force chairs only and are usually preceded or followed by full Task Force reports. Upon reaching a conclusion, a Task Force may also ask individuals who were not members of the Task Force to associate themselves with the Task Force report to enhance its impact. All Task Force reports "benchmark" their findings against current administration policy in order to make explicit areas of agreement and disagreement. The Task Force is solely responsible for its report. The Council takes no institutional position.

For further information about the Council or this Task Force, please write to the Council on Foreign Relations, 58 East 68th Street, New York, NY 10021, or call the Director of Communications at 212-434-9400. Visit our website at www.cfr.org.

Copyright © 2005 by the Council on Foreign Relations®, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

This report may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form beyond the reproduction permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law Act (17 U.S.C. Sections 107 and 108) and excerpts by reviewers for the public press, without express written permission from the Council on Foreign Relations. For information, write to the Publications Office, Council on Foreign Relations, 58 East 68th Street, New York, NY 10021.

In Support of
Arab Democracy:
Why and How

Task Force Co-Chairs

Madeleine K. Albright

Vin Weber

Project Director

Steven A. Cook

Task Force Members

Feisal Abdul Rauf
Khaled M. Abou El Fadl
Odeh F. Aburdene*
Madeleine K. Albright
Nancy Birdsall
Daniel M. Brumberg
Leslie Campbell
Steven A. Cook
Larry J. Diamond
Michele D. Dunne*
Noah Feldman
F. Gregory Gause III*

Amy W. Hawthorne
Robert J. Katz
Mel Levine
Abdeslam E. Maghraoui
Joshua Muravchik
Michael N. Pocalyko*
William A. Rugh*
Anita Sharma
George Vradenburg III
Vin Weber
Tamara Cofman Wittes
Tarik M. Yousef

*The individual has endorsed the report and submitted an additional or a dissenting view.

Arab Interlocutors

Cairo, Egypt
January 26–28, 2005

Fahd bin Abdullah
al-Mubarak
Malaz Financial Advisory
Saudi Arabia

Osama al-Ghazali Harb
Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya
Egypt

Ahmad E. Bishara
National Democratic Movement
Kuwait

Taher S. Helmy
American Chamber of Commerce
Egypt

Rola Dashti
Kuwait Economic Society
Kuwait

Sa'eda Kilani
Arab Archives Institute
Jordan

Abdel Raouf El Reedy
Mubarak Public Library
Egypt

Habib C. Malik
Lebanese American University
Lebanon

Munira Fakhro
University of Bahrain
Bahrain

Hala Mustafa
al-Dimoqratiya
Egypt

Mustafa B. Hamarneh
University of Jordan
Jordan

Abdulaziz Sager
Gulf Research Center
United Arab Emirates

Note: The Arab interlocutors from the Cairo consultations are not responsible for the content of this report. They participated in their individual and not institutional capacities.

Foreword

Over the past five decades, U.S. policy in the Arab world has been predicated largely on the notion that the political status quo in the region best served Washington's interests. With the assistance of Arab partners such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Morocco, the United States built a remarkably good record of achieving its objectives—notably, protecting the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, ensuring Israel's security, confronting rogue states, battling terrorism, and during the Cold War, containing Soviet influence in the region. Yet the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC, on September 11, 2001, challenged the underlying assumption of U.S. Middle East policy. Within a short time after the attacks, policymakers began to question whether authoritarian political systems in the Middle East were sources of stability or the primary causes of the political alienation and extremism that fueled organizations like al-Qaeda. The Bush administration clearly believes the best way to “drain the swamp” that produces terrorists is to promote democracy and reform more broadly in the Middle East.

The Council on Foreign Relations established this Independent Task Force to consider whether promoting democracy in the Middle East is in the best interests of the United States and, if so, how Washington should implement such a policy. The Task Force reached the conclusion that, notwithstanding short-term risks, democracy in the Middle East is a desirable goal. In its report, the Task Force asserts that over the long run, the development of democratic institutions in Arab countries

“will diminish the appeal of extremism and terrorism, the risks of revolutionary upheaval, and the emergence of regimes openly hostile to the United States.” From these important findings this Task Force report offers a comprehensive set of policy recommendations for the Bush administration to promote an “environment in the Middle East that is conducive to peaceful democratic change.”

The Council is deeply appreciative of two eminent public servants, former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright and former Representative Vin Weber (R-MN), for chairing this effort. Their intellectual leadership steered the Task Force toward consensus on an issue of significant importance to the United States and the Arab world. My thanks also go to Steven A. Cook, a next generation fellow at the Council who specializes in Arab politics, who skillfully directed this project from its beginning. Finally, I wish to thank the Task Force members for this important contribution to the national debate.

Richard N. Haass
President
Council on Foreign Relations
June 2005

Acknowledgments

The Independent Task Force on U.S. Policy toward Reform in the Arab World is grateful for the leadership of the co-chairs, Madeleine K. Albright and Vin Weber. Their intellectual leadership, broad experience, and bipartisan spirit were the invaluable foundations upon which this project was developed.

From September 2004 to February 2005, Task Force members and observers participated in seven meetings held at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, DC, and New York, as well as at the offices of Monticello Capital in Reston, Virginia. This diverse group of regional specialists, business leaders, foreign policy practitioners, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) brought unrivalled expertise to the challenges and opportunities confronting the United States and the Arab world.

This Task Force benefited immensely from the input of a group of Arab interlocutors from across the region who spent three days with the co-chairs and me in Cairo in late January 2005. We appreciate their time and pointed critique on the substance of our report. We are also grateful to the Council's national members in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Atlanta, and Chicago for their helpful comments on various drafts of the report.

The co-chairs and I are grateful to Kareem Idriss, Task Force research associate, for his constant resourcefulness and energy, his deft diplomacy throughout our Cairo consultations, and his editorial and substantial contributions and close attention to Arab sensitivities throughout the

drafting of this report. Special thanks to Lee Feinstein for his guidance throughout this entire project. Lindsay Workman provided generous support in handling a variety of tasks associated with this project and was an invaluable asset to the co-chairs and me during our trip to Cairo. Lindsey Iversen developed the Task Force website with the assistance of Cree Frappier and Tom Davey. Irina Faskianos and the Council's National Program were extraordinarily helpful in reaching out to the Council's national members in various cities.

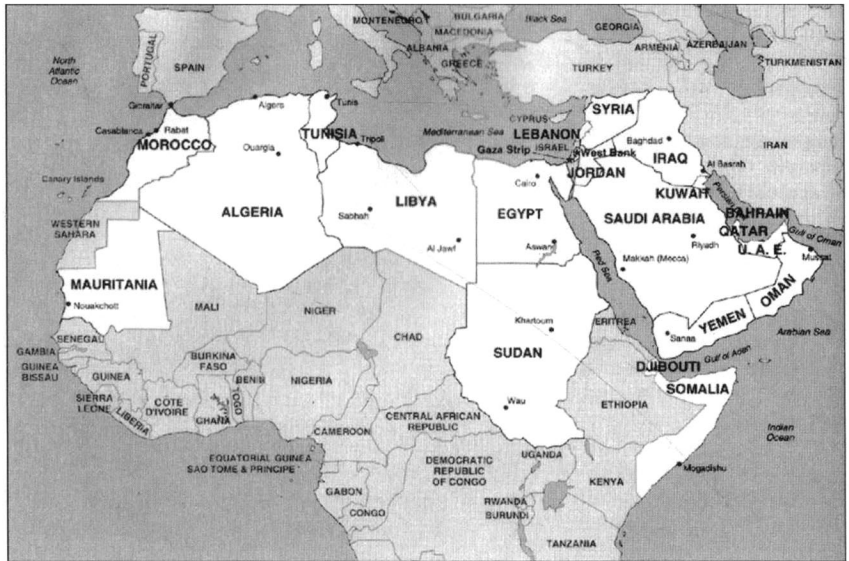
Thanks to Patricia Dorff for her careful support in the editing and publishing stages of this report. Special thanks to Lisa Shields and the Council's Communications Department for their efforts with press activities during the report's rollout. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Jamie Smith, Diana Sierra, Suzy George, MargaretAnn Corbett, and Tyler Brown for their wonderful cooperation and support from the planning stage to completion of this report. Hassan Al-Ashhab did a great job of translating this entire report and Evan Langenhahn helped develop the appendixes.

All those involved in this project are grateful to Richard N. Haass, president of the Council, who presented the Task Force with its mandate and challenged the group to think critically in examining the issues at stake.

Finally, the Task Force would not have been possible without the financial support of Robert Belfer, the Ewing Marion Kaufman Foundation, Merrill Lynch & Co., Enzo Viscusi and ENI S.p.A., and Ezra Zilkha. We deeply appreciate their generosity.

Steven A. Cook
Project Director

Map of the Arab World



Courtesy of Arab American National Museum.

Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Foreword | xiii |
| Acknowledgments | xv |
| Map of the Arab World | xvii |
| Task Force Report | 1 |
| Executive Summary | 3 |
| Introduction | 10 |
| The Arab World: Politics, Economics, Media, and Education | 16 |
| Current U.S. Approaches to Promoting Democracy: How Effective? | 36 |
| Conclusion | 43 |
| Additional or Dissenting Views | 45 |
| Task Force Members | 49 |
| Task Force Observers | 55 |
| Appendixes | 57 |

Task Force Report

Executive Summary

The Middle East will be a central focus of U.S. foreign policy for the next generation and beyond. While the list of challenges in the region is long, the Arab world also presents opportunities. In a region marked by a “democracy deficit” and limited economic prospects, there is also ferment. From Marrakesh to Cairo and Ramallah to Riyadh, Arabs are engaged in intense debate, self-reflection, and reassessment of their societies. Washington has a chance to help shape a more democratic Middle East. Whereas emphasis on stability was once the hallmark of U.S. Middle East policy, democracy and freedom have become a priority. Indeed, U.S. policymakers concluded shortly after the September 11 attacks that the prevailing domestic political, economic, and social conditions within Arab countries were a serious national security concern.

Through a critical examination of regional developments and an assessment of U.S. options, the Task Force sought to answer two primary questions: First, does a policy of promoting democracy in the Middle East serve U.S. interests and foreign policy goals? Second, if so, how should the United States implement such a policy, taking into account the full range of its interests?

The Task Force’s answer to the first question is “yes.” The United States should support democracy consistently and in all regions of the world. Although democracy entails certain inherent risks, the denial of freedom carries much more significant long-term dangers. If Arab citizens are able to express grievances freely and peacefully, they will

be less likely to turn to more extreme measures. They will also be more likely to build open and prosperous societies with respect for human rights and the rule of law.

In answer to the second question, the United States should promote the development of democratic institutions and practices over the long term, mindful that democracy cannot be imposed from the outside and that sudden, traumatic change is neither necessary nor desirable. America's goal in the Middle East should be to encourage democratic evolution, not revolution. Policymakers should take into account the region's political and economic diversity, its lack of a strong democratic tradition, and the challenge of moving beyond the relatively simple process of holding elections to the construction of independent and sustainable democracies. America's goal should be to support the development of democratic systems that are open to participation across the ideological spectrum, excluding only those who refuse to commit to peaceful procedures.

Findings and Recommendations

- Promoting political, economic, and social change in the Arab world requires a country-by-country strategy. Nevertheless, a number of basic principles should be emphasized across the region, including human rights, political representation, constitutional checks and balances, tolerance, rule of law, women's rights, and transparency of decision-making. Despite its recent emphasis on democracy in the Middle East, Washington has yet to speak in a consistent manner to various Arab countries on these important issues.
- The Bush administration should encourage Arab leaders to develop public, detailed "pathways to reform" that respond to the specific demands for change made by citizens within their countries. The public nature of these plans would help Arab citizens hold their leaders accountable to specific political, economic, and social benchmarks.
- This report is not about the Arab-Israeli conflict, but U.S. policy on that subject is relevant to America's credibility in the region. The Task Force believes the United States should continue its renewed