THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE:
REGIME CHANGE, NEOLIBERALISM AND US
GLOBAL HEGEMONY*

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ABSTRACT

The George W. Bush Administration launched the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) as "a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East" in November 2003. The policy emerged as a central plank in the "war on terrorism" just as Operation Iraqi Freedom began to encounter stiff resistance to the US occupation of Iraq. Marketed as a "brand new strategy" of "ending autocracy" in the region and bringing democracy to those deprived of freedom, officials claimed the policy was designed to "clean up the messy fart of the world." This article argues that the GMEI is not about waging democracy in the Middle East, but rather neo-Wilsonian ideological cover for the neoconservative agenda of controlling the entire world by force. On the drawing board, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its affiliated organizations, working clandestinely through US private transnational corporations, are to serve as conduits for the imperialist control of local political parties and elections. This will allow for the neoliberal control of the region by US and Israeli capital, help to contain China and Europe through the control of oil, and bolster US capitalist accumulation. Ultimately, the US is certain to fall back on business as usual, supporting local autocracies which serve "US national interests."

KEYWORDS
Civil society, democratization, imperialism, neoliberalism, neo-Wilsonianism, terrorism, Turkey

"...The United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East." (George W. Bush, 6 November, 2003)

"We are always threatening the Middle East with Democracy... But there is another kind of freedom they would like, and that is freedom from us." (Robert Fisk, 24 November, 2005)

"The Alternative to the old realpolitik is a brand new strategy oriented toward ending the entire apparatus of autocracy and creating in its place the conditions for future political legitimacy and economic growth." (Victor Davis Hanson, 21 October 2002)

"...I don't think in any reasonable time frame the objective of democratizing the Middle East can be successful... and in the process of trying to do it you can make the Middle East a lot worse." (Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor under George H.W. Bush)

"Where democracy appears to fit in well with US security and economic interests, the United States promotes democracy. Where democracy clashes with other significant interests, it is downplayed or even ignored." (Thomas Carothers)

Introduction:

The Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) for "democratization" is not about increasing freedom and democracy for people in the region but about increasing freedom for Western capital and ensuring continued US political control of the region. Military force, along with other US foreign policy instruments under occupation, continues to be employed to secure the resources of Iraq for US global hegemony and corporate profits. Since maintaining economic and political control over the entire Middle East through military force would prove too costly, taking control through clandestine political and economic control, under the rubric of a "democracy initiative," is to be pursued in cooperation with the

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European Union. The institutions for such control, through a partnership between US Government, private US capital, US corporations operating in the region, and local comprador elites, have been in place for some time, as pioneered in US economic and political control in Latin America.

With the neo-conservative perception that the US policy of supporting authoritarianism in the Middle East has outlived its historical usefulness, renovation of politics and consolidation of US hegemony is now to be carried out through a combination of force and guile, namely incentives purporting to create a free and democratic society. As can be easily understood, at root, neoliberalism is neither free nor democratic. It is the prevailing form of corporate-capital-totalitarianism being locked upon countries and societies around the entire world today. It is not certain if the neo-conservatives believe their rhetoric that terrorism will be suppressed through Western corporate control of the region. The bottom line is control of the politics and capital of the Middle East region through a combination of military force and new institutions working in league with or under the cover of US corporations. The mechanism is explained below. The GMEI is nothing other than the vehicle and blueprint for the extension and consolidation of neoliberalism in the Middle East. In the neo-conservative vision, anything which presents a barrier to this agenda must be ruthlessly rooted out and destroyed.

Since World War II, the United States has largely followed a policy of realist politics around the world in the interests of serving the interests of its domestic ruling class and political constituency, the owners of corporate capital. The core of the US domestic political constituency is the corporate class. Under capitalist logic, it was necessary to secure the resources, raw products, labor and markets, of the entire globe as a source of capitalist accumulation. To some extent, benefits would filter down to other classes of the population within the US domestic political economy.

Nevertheless, this agenda, under Cold War containment, counterinsurgency, and subversion of uncooperative regimes, was carried out under the cover of various ideological devices, such as "preserving freedom and the American way of life," "freedom and
democracy,” and spreading “freedom.” The well-established Wilsonian millenarianism, often with a crusading zeal, served as an appropriate ideological cover for the US enterprise of global hegemony and pursuit of the interests of the domestic ruling classes, once the US took on the role of global hegemon after World War II.

Consequently, under this rubric, the US carried out the cold war, conducted counterinsurgency against potential social democratic governments, supported authoritarian governments in Latin American and elsewhere, or supported more democratic states as well, depending upon whether this was deemed to serve its interests. National interests were calculated primarily in terms of the needs and benefits to the corporate class in the pursuit of global capitalist accumulation.

Within this framework, the US approach to the Middle East was relatively simple and straightforward, having been essentially settled at the end of the Second World War. Democracy was not considered to be on the charts, under the rubric of Middle Eastern exceptionalism, and the United States would support the autocratic and dictatorial regimes which were in place as long as the oil flowed through the US corporate structure. The US would be the regional hegemon with ostensibly independent states. This arrangement was referred to as the “Arab façade.” The US would sponsor local “cops on the beat,” Israel and Turkey, to help keep order in the region. This was part of the deal which was struck at the end of World War II. “Security” referred to the preservation of the system of capitalist accumulation in the interests of the ruling classes of the US. This “security” arrangement would be enforced by regional arrangements

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with Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and so on. This often precluded democracy, as with the overthrow of Mohamad Mossadegh in Iran, and put the US at odds with more democratic states, such as India.

Consequently, while lip service was often paid to “democratization,” in actual practice, democratic regimes were supported only in cases in which it was clear that it would protect capital and serve the US corporate class. In practice, US foreign policy was generally one of “deterring democracy,” in which scores of regimes were overthrown by the CIA, which held the promise of the emergence of local democratic autonomy, which was deemed to militate against the needs of the US corporate ruling class.4

The history of US foreign policy since World War II has been fairly consistent and significant shifts in the policy of support for authoritarian regimes, such as in Latin America in the 1970s, have been consistent with the bottom line of a rational calculus about what served the domestic ruling class, rather than any abstract ideals about freedom and democracy. There is no reason why one should expect any radical shift in this historical approach in the near future trajectory of US foreign policy.

Prior to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in March 2003, and following the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, some of the neo-conservatives in the Bush Administration declared that the US policy of appeasement of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East had failed and that the US must move quickly to remove these regimes and establish democracy across the region.5 Regime change emerged as a new buzz word.

Nevertheless, the Iraq war was not launched upon the rationale of establishment of democracy, but rather upon the rationale that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein had established links with al-Qaeda. When the Iraq War began to go badly and encounter stiff resistance from indigenous forces, in the fall of 2003, it became clear that the US was in for a long hard slog. The

4Chomsky, Deterring Democracy; Blum, Killing Hope.
Bush Administration fell back upon the position of presenting “democratization” as the center plank in the “War on Terrorism.” George W. Bush made his famous November 6, 2003 speech at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is located, announcing a US “forward strategy of freedom.” Bush called for $40 million for the NED budget to be targeted for the Middle East alone.6

The idea of Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI), developed by the US State Department was to be another tool of imperialist control which could be used to secure the resources, labor and markets of the region to beef up US global hegemony and secure corporate profits in the region, while theoretically, ending any incentives for terrorism. It is not clear if the neo-conservative ideologues took this argument seriously, but the rational of “democratization” went forward under the same rubric as the invasion of Iraq, that of the “War on Terrorism.” In fact, as will be argued below, both enterprises were of a piece with pushing forward the logic of serving the US ruling class in consolidation the global rule of neoliberalism and increasing global power and corporate profits. Under sleight of hand, the same mechanisms developed and used in Latin American would be brought in, opening the channels and floodgates for a massive flow of new CIA money into the region on behalf of US capital.

The Greater Middle East Initiative: Emergence and Profile

One might reasonably expect that the GMEI would be taken with a huge grain of salt, given the history of US foreign policy since World War II. Nevertheless, it has largely been taken at face value by most analysts and commentators.7 The original US State Department

document was leaked in February 2004 to the Arab newspaper, al-Hayat. It was to cover 22 Arab nations plus Turkey, Israel, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The modified document actually promulgated at the Sea Island, Georgia meeting of the G-8 in June 2004, was a greatly modified version of what was leaked to the press. The GMEI was the third initiative to be launched by the US since 9/11. In December 2002, a US-Middle East Partnership Initiative was launched and in February 2003, the US-Middle East Free Trade Area.8

The Greater Middle East Initiative was first developed in the US State Department, Bureau for Near East Affairs. The 2002-2003 UN Arab Development report was used to provide demographic and economic background data to underpin the thrust of the initiative. Also the Helsinki Agreements of 1975, which were seen to encourage the reforms in the governments of Eastern Europe, were seen to provide a model for the process of political reform which was envisioned.

The 2002-2003 UN Arab Human Development Report (AHDP) highlighted “three deficits” in Middle Eastern societies: Freedom, Knowledge, and Women’s Empowerment. The logic forwarded was that these deficits contributed to a pool of disenfranchised individuals and led to an increase in extremism, terrorism, international crime, and illegal immigration to Europe and beyond. The thrust of the initiative was that to address these deeper problems, which bred terrorism and other ills, political reform and democratization was a priority.

The AHDP presented a profile of the region in which the GDP of the 22 Middle Eastern countries had a combined GDP less than


that of Spain, 40 percent of adult Arabs (61 million, 2/3 women) were illiterate, six million new jobs needed to be created per year, only 1.6 million had access to the Internet (the lowest proportion in the world), women held only 3.5 percent of seats in the parliaments of Arab countries (compared to 8.4 percent in sub-Saharan Africa), and some 51 percent of Arab youths wanted to emigrate, mostly to the EU or America.

There was also said to be a “freedom deficit,” in which Israel was the only country in the region rated “free” by the 2003 report of Freedom House. Only four countries in the region were rated “partly free.” Of the seven world regions, the Arab world had the lowest freedom score in the late 1990s. Empowerment of women ranked only above sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, it was reported that democracy was rated high among the peoples of the Middle East as the most desirable form of government.

The launching of the GMEI was problematical, after the leaking of the initial document, and the negative image that the US had suffered in the Middle East after the invasion of Iraq and the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandals. The “sharp crisis of confidence” was reflected in the image of the US as a neo-colonial power in the region.9 Further, the US had failed to consult with the governments of the countries to be targeted and failed to mention the Arab-Israeli conflict in the document.10 It was recognized that Middle Eastern governments would see such a “patronizing” initiative as a “new form of economic and cultural hegemony.” They would understand that Washington wished to extend the programs of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) from Eastern Europe and the Balkans to the Middle East.11 The NED uses tax payer money to fund favored political parties in elections around the world, a practice which is illegal in the US. The US Office of Management and the Budget (OMB) had announced the allocation of $458 million for

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“democracy promotion” in Iraq for the first six months of 2004 alone in Iraq. It was subsequently exposed that the US carried out a secret operation to rig the January 30, 2005 elections in Iraq. Therefore it was realized that the launching of the program would need to be compromised by the views of the Europeans and the Arab leaders.

The Americans would have to link the GMEI with the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and the European program known as the Barcelona Process, launched in 1995. The first includes Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and four North African states in a “security partnership.” The Barcelona Process adds Syria and Lebanon to the other countries and is supposed to lay the foundation for an economic partnership and a free-trade area starting in 2010. The European program speaks of “modernization” rather than “democratization.” Unlike the original GMEI proposal, the European program agreed upon the need to address the Israel-Palestinian problem and the ongoing crisis in Iraq. The European program also put some emphasis upon addressing poverty and underdevelopment.

The US would have to use a “clever” approach and get the regional leaders engaged, “gain local acceptance” by “providing them with the necessary safety net,” and “put serious money into the region.”12 It was never pointed out that since the GMEI would be patently illegal in the United States, perhaps the leaders of the Middle East had legitimate reasons for questioning the initiative.

In brief, the initiative was based upon five core components. First, the initiative would provide a venue for discussion of reform goals and programs; encourage cooperation between states; and bring business and civil society leaders into the process. Secondly, there would be a Greater Middle East Democracy Assistance Group to coordinate the American and European groups “promoting democracy.” On the American side, this would include the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and its four major organizations (discussed below). In Europe it would involve the affiliated stiftungs associated with German political parties and the Westminster Foundation in the UK. Thirdly, the initiative would establish a multilateral foundation modeled on the NED to focus on political

12Ibid.
change in the Middle East. Fourthly, there would be a Greater Middle East Literacy Corps. Fifthly, it would establish a G-8 microfinance pilot project, based upon an existing French proposal, fund new small businesses, and contribute to building an Arab "middle class." Other elements of the program included "civic education" programs, technical assistance with voter registration, parliamentary exchanges and training, women's leadership workshops, legal aid, media training, "anti-corruption" efforts, strengthening NGO's (which may actually only masquerade as NGOs), and support for certain labor unions.

One can get a better picture of what is intended here by noting the emphasis upon business initiatives, business education, civil society, human rights, and training political party leaders. The document suggests that the Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance, with an American director and a partnership with several US universities, could serve as a model for other countries. The program would provide an avenue for US universities to market their educational programs, tailored to corporate needs, to the Middle East region. It was said that the "key" to the program was "unleashing the region's private potential", under the auspices of Western and American capital, of course, which has ever been the formula for US requirements for allowing a region of the world to develop. The initiative also emphasized the growth of an "entrepreneurial class" to "help democracy and freedom flourish." This also gives a clue as to the type democracy that the program will foster. A neoliberal capitalist framework that provides freedom for Western capital and defined as "democracy," is the desired final product. In fact, it is widely recognized by serious political economists that in today's global political economy, there is a sharp contradiction between capitalism and democracy, between corporate profit and democracy, and between corporate control and democracy. The GMEI is clearly concerned with freedom for capital, rather than freedom for human individuals.

The GMEI also calls for the establishment of a Greater Middle East Development Bank (GMED Bank), a "partnership for financial excellence," and an emphasis upon "removing barriers to cross-border financial transactions." In other words, neoliberal financial liberalization, which has been the cause of many financial crises around the world in recent years, is given a high priority. Financial
services will be liberalized, to allow the marketing and control of local financial institutions by Western capital. There will be promotion of intra-regional trade, a push for WTO accession for countries, export processing zones, which are referred to as Business Incubation Zones (BIZ), and special trade zones. This will increase the process of the maquiladorization of the Middle East. Of course when small business enterprises succeed through US taxpayer dollars, the big sharks, Western corporations will be there to buy them up and broaden the foundation of firms for capital accumulation on a global scale. From the above, we see that the GMEI is clearly the thin edge of a wedge to transform the entire Middle East under the banner of neoliberal global corporate control. The Arabs were not being unrealistic when they charged that the program was designed for imperialist control of the region. That is what it is for. But generally, analysts have been observed to dismiss such charges out of hand as they are not considered to be in good taste in today's global business environment.

At the same time, this is not to say that nothing is positive about the program. For example, literacy and women's education could be a positive contribution. In a dialectical way, capitalism often develops the tools for potential human liberation. On the other hand, we are not to see the "invisible hand" of the CIA that is driving this program in the interests of the domestic ruling class in the interests of US and Western capital. This is to remain hidden.

One can readily discern that the elements laid out here are in fact those already established in the NED model that have been pioneered outside the Middle East region and which serve as mechanisms of control by the US Government through concealed arrangements with private corporations. The mechanism and operative principles of this regime, promulgated from the bowels of the CIA in Washington, is laid out in some further detail below.

While the initial reaction in Arab countries was negative, it has been argued that the document had some immediate positive results in forcing governments to take some reform initiatives, however halting. In Egypt, the Legal Committee of the Government appointed a National Council for Human Rights (NCHR). This committee proceeded to recommend that the state of emergency be rescinded. In Libya, Colonel Gaddafi pledged to cancel the Emergency Law.
Palestinian Authority announced that elections would be held. In Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Abdullah hosted a series of "National Dialogue Forums" and promised that municipal council elections would be held. To some extent these were efforts to pre-empt pressures which these nations expected from the West. The feeling among many was that the proposal would not be accepted as long as US troops occupied Iraq.

More negative opinions were held in Syria by President Bashar al-Asad and in Tunisia by President Sine El Abidine Ben Ali. Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa of Bahrain, where the US Navy Fifth Fleet is home-ported, also rejected the initiative. Subsequently, the Arab League came forward with the "Tunis Declaration" on May 22, 2004, which expressed "commitment to the humanitarian principles of noble values of human rights... freedom of expression, thought, belief, and the independence of the judiciary." Twenty-two Arab governments pledged to pursue reform and modernization; consolidate democratic practices; enlarge participation in political, economic, social, cultural and educational fields; and reinforce the rights and status of the above in their societies.13

In Egypt the "chronic indifference" to reform and moving toward "democratization" was apparent. Members of the ruling National Democratic Party defended the Government and criticized the US initiative. Mohamed Abdellah, former head of Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee called the GMEI a "smokescreen." Abu Zejd, Chairman of the Parliamentary Arab-Affairs Committee said the Arab-Israeli conflict, which breeds terror, must first be solved. Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher said "reform must come from within the Arab world" and claimed that Egypt had already made democratic achievements, such as democratic reform, women's emancipation, human rights, and educational reforms. Gamel Mubarak, the son of the President and Chairman of the NDP Policy Secretariat, argued that the Party is truly open to reform. Others, such as Secretary General Hussein Abdel-Razeg of the leftist Tagammu Party, stated truthfully what everyone knew, that the NDP was "dragging its feet" and would be subject to more pressure from the US. Egypt had yet to

13Gambill, "Jumpstarting Arab Reform."
"appease" the US in the area of democratization because the ruling party considered it so dangerous. The Secretary General of the NDP, Safwat El-Sharif had announced that amending the Constitution is not on the agenda of political reform in Egypt. Many other members of the opposition in Egypt were seen to be supporting the US pressure for reform as the ruling party had refused to make any reforms over a 22 year period. In practice, however, as Patrick Buchanan has pointed out, opening up the system has perils for Washington too, as it would likely bring the Islamist fundamentalists to power.

At the G-8 Summit in Sea Island Georgia, after considerable modification, two documents were actually approved, designated collectively as the “Broader Middle East and North African Initiative (BMENAI). Many leaders, including Mubarak, refused to attend the Sea Island meeting. Leaders came from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen, and Iraq. Documents approved were a 12-point Partnership for Progress and a Common Future With the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa" and the “G-8 Plan of Support for Reform.” Unlike the GMEI, the actually agreed upon BMENAI received little attention in the press, after being watered down to pass muster with European and Middle Eastern Nations. The original document was modified in significant ways. First, the BMENAI acknowledged the Arab-Israel conflict and called for support for reform in the region to go “hand in hand” with “support for a just, comprehensive, and lasting settle to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Secondly, the revised document stressed that reform should not be imposed from the outside but depend upon countries in the region. Third, governments should not necessarily be expected to change. Fourth, there would be no universally recognized standards. Diversity of countries should be respected. Fifth, each country would decide upon the “pace and scope of change.” Sixth, the idea of organizing an NGO to monitor reform progress was rejected. Seventh, government to government meetings would be held as a “Forum for the Future.” Conferences would be arranged for exchanges between business and civil society leaders.15

Academics and analysts, rather than analyzing the roots of the

14Gamal Essam El-Din, “Reformed and Reformulating.”
15Gambill, “Jumpstarting Arab Reform.”
initiative, generally took the initiative at face value as one can see from a number of academic exchanges which have taken place concerning the initiative and the larger question of democratization in the Middle East.16

The ideological Neo-conservative Perspective:

The hard vision was laid out by Victor Davis Hanson in the Weekly Standard.17 This is a crusading vision which rejects both those who argue that it will be difficult to establish democracy in Iraq after US invasion and occupation, and those who argue that the best course will be for the US to fall back upon pro-US despotism. Hanson rejects the notion that lack of a democratic tradition and a middle class militates decidedly against the establishment of democracy. He extends this vision to the subsequent reconfiguration of the Middle East, across a wide region. He has little patience with the arrangement of supporting the pro-US despotism of General Pervez Musharaf in Pakistan. He urges the US to decide upon a course of


17Hanson, “Democracy in the Middle East.” The idea of spreading democracy by the sword, by force and violence, has been challenged by a wide range of comment, including former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. In the words of Michael Scheuer, it is “Pure Wilsonian claptrap.” In the case of Bush himself, it appears to be related to his believe that he has been anointed to carry out a divine mission. See Charley Reese, “The Prospect for Democracy in Iraq,” Antiwar.com, Dec. 7, 2005; Steve Clemons, “Brent Scowcroft ‘Breaks Ranks’ with George W. Bush in Major New Yorker Article,” October 23, 2005, The Washington Note Archives; Larry Everest, “Lessons of History: Nothing Good Can or Will come from U.S. Occupation,” Sept. 21, 2005, ZNET; Michael Scheuer, “Deliberately Destroying America’s Soul,” April 22, 2005, Antiwar.com.
action before the invasion and stick to it, regardless of the cost.

Hanson argues that this is the “practical” course of action because legitimate governments have power over dictatorships. He argues that past US policy has failed, such as the “appeasement of [Yassir] Arafat” and the Palestinians, while pushing for democratic reform with no significant results. He sees this as a process, not the installation of “Jeffersonian Democracy” at once. The first step is to “remove the dictator,” and this is most likely to have to be done with a war or at least considerable force. He is apparently not concerned about the international illegality of such use of military force. He is not concerned that “regime change” by the US may create chaos. Even chaos is seen as better than what exists. What emerges will be flawed, to be sure, but this is not to deter the US. The emergence of a flawed democracy is better than the status quo because eventually the people will realize that it is up to them to make things better. “Better to deal with a subverted democracy: At least its people will soon realize they, not the United States, are responsible for their disasters.” The people are responsible. The model will be something like Panama, Grenada, Serbia, and Philippines. Regardless of the risks, the venture is necessary because it is not possible to leave the Middle East alone, after 9/11. It is “pathological” and will only get worse, so the US really has no choice.

He says that Americans have been told that there are two types of regimes in the Middle East, except Israel which is democratic. The first type includes “sponsors of terrorism,” such as Afghanistan (before the removal of the Taliban), Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. The second type includes the “moderate dictatorships,” such as Egypt, the Gulf states, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. But on balance, after 9/11, there is not a lot of difference between these regimes for Hanson. They are all sick societies, breeding terrorists. He argues that both kinds of governments “seek to survive through bribery, oppression, and censorship, and by scapegoating Israel and America.” There is the absence of elections, no free speech, lack of any public audit of government finances, and use of the “bogeyman of the West” as an excuse for all their ills.

Nevertheless, in the end, he believes the fact is that the Arab masses hate their own governments more than they hate the US. The last two decades of ruined economics has “brought nothing but
disaster." He sites the Arab Human Development Report 2002, as the best evidence for this. There is a high population growth leading to 38 percent of the population being under fourteen years of age. The minimal GNP in the region means that 22 Arab countries have a combined GDP of less than that of Spain. On the other hand, the wealthiest 85,000 Saudi families have $700 billion in overseas assets.

Hanson neglects to explore how the US encouraged this situation, selling useless arms, and recycling petrodollars through US banks so that some seven percent of the US economy is now owned by the Saudi Royal Family. It is also not explored how well global capitalism has done in developing the world in general. And what exactly does Western capital want to see happen in the region? Will the profits stay in the countries of the region or go to US, Israel, and Europe. These are larger questions that need to be addressed in a critique with a historically realistically view. Labor productivity in the Middle East has actually fallen between 1960 and 1990, Hanson notes, and even Africa has outperformed the Middle East in economic growth. Too few foreign books are being translated into Arabic. Half of the youths wish to emigrate, most often to the US and Europe. Rather facetiously, Hanson presents the US as a country that has tried everything in the Middle East, and is now "exasperated" at the lack of cooperation and progress.

In other words, with things so bad and getting worse, the US really has nothing to lose in going after the Middle East with a meat cleaver. Whatever the result, it can't get worse. In any event, there is really no choice. Supporting these regimes did not address the problem of "Arab development." It failed, but now there is little to fear. Without the USSR, the US is free to do what it wants in the region. Great progress has been made in Afghanistan, he believes. He dismisses the critics. They were wrong about Japan, Italy, and Germany after WWII. The US overcame all the predicted difficulties, so there is no reason why this should not happen in the Middle East as well. It is uncertain if Hanson would still defend this pre-Iraq invasion version of events after the chaos the US has encountered there, as predicted by the most knowledgeable about the region.

And "democracy" is the only game in town. For Hanson, it has no rivals. He does not define what he means by "democracy" but it is obviously the US vision of "neoliberalism." It is Francis Fukuyama's
liberal utopia of the “last man”. What it seems is really being forwarded is the thesis that “there is no alternative.” This is because “democracy” has no rivals. The US need not fear competition from “French Marxism,” “communist nostalgia,” “Baathist nonsense,” nor “Islamist fundamentalism.” On the other hand, the US “has an ally in global popular culture.” It becomes obvious that Hanson is talking about the type of “democracy” which exists in the United States, in which the actual constituency is the corporate ruling class. He does not recognize the possibility of a popular democracy in which the constituency would be the masses or majority of the people. So this ties in nicely with the Fukuyamian thesis that liberalism, or rather neo-liberalism, is the end of history and nothing else can challenge this paradigm. Neoliberalism has become the global totalitarian ideology and we can all be happy that we live in such a totalitarian world. Now we just have to make sure that the Middle East goes along with the program.

But there are dangers too, for Hanson. “Establishing lawful rule in lawless places entails costs and dangers,” he quickly adds. He argues that either war or the threat of force must be used. “Military power must be decisive.” Another price the US must be ready to pay is “the lengthy presence of American troops.” Not everyone will be happy. “We must expect and not fear anti-Americanism.” So for Hanson, the old game of “propping up strong men in the name of stability” is over. It is to “flout the aspirations of long-suppressed peoples and forget out national principles.” The world has changed since the end of the Cold War, and “in our own national interest, we must make sure that our policies evolve with it.” The old option is no longer there and “the Islamic world lost the privilege of being different.” They too are to be brought into the neo-liberal totalitarian world and serve their proper role of serving the needs of global capitalist accumulation. Having committed the sin of defying their masters, in 9/11, they will now be taken to the woodshed and learn their proper place in the world. This vision is indeed consistent

with the prevailing racist and neocolonial world view of the neo-conservatives on the Potomac.

The Real key: The model, which is the basis of the GMEI, and how it works

Philip Agee, a former CIA employee, has explained the evolution and functioning in practice of the institutions which the US has set up to control the politics and economics of countries around the world. The GMEI seeks to extend this system to the whole of the "greater Middle East." Disguised as activities to "promote democracy," "resolve conflicts," and "strengthen civic life," the United States has spent some nine million US dollars in 2005 to remove President Hugo Chavez Frias from power in Venezuela. This is up from two million dollars in 2001, when a failed coup was carried out. The United States provides money, training, counsel, and direction to a network of political parties, NGOs, mass media outlets, trade unions, and businessmen to end the democratic reforms being carried out by Chavez. One can readily see that this is the same model which is to be applied to the Middle East. In other words, to call such a program of regime change against the democratic wishes of the local people "democratization" is, to say the least, the epitome of Orwellian doublespeak.

The coup being carried out from behind the scenes in Venezuela is directed by the US State Department, the architect of the GMEI, the Agency for International Development (AID) and the CIA. The primary organization is the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its four subsidiary organizations. These are the National Democratic Institute (NDI) of the Democratic Party, the International Republican Institute (NRI) of the Republican Party, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) of the US Chamber of Commerce, and the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). The last organization was formerly called the American Institute for Free Labor Development

(AIFLD) which “worked hand in glove for many years with the CIA.”\(^{20}\) A contractor for AID for the insertion of these programs into Venezuela is the US consulting firm, Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI). It is possible that similar contracts exist in other countries.

Agee has traced the history of these operations, which began shortly after the founding of the CIA in 1947. In October 1947, the CIA began operation in Italy to prevent the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) from winning the elections held in April 1948. President Harry Truman gave the CIA $10 million dollars for the operation. Teamed up with the Vatican, secret operations were launched to discredit the PCI and support the Christian Democratic Party (CDP). Over the years, these secret electoral operations became routine in many countries.\(^{21}\)

The US secretly penetrated political parties; trade unions; student and youth organizations; cultural, professional and intellectual societies; women’s organizations; religious organizations; the communications media; and civil society organizations. Money was funded through third foundations, often foundations set up for the purpose by the CIA. These programs became important for Latin America in the 1970s, under President Jimmy Carter, when the US shifted its policy from supporting dictatorships in Latin America.

These CIA operations ran into trouble in 1967, when the CIA cover was blown and the operations revealed to the public. Over the next few years, the system was revamped and put back on track through a new set of organizations which appeared to be above board and legitimate. What came to be put in place is primarily the set of organizations which operate under the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) today, and which are to be a very vital part of the GMEI. NED was established by Congress in 1983 and put under the control of the State Department. Money would be funneled to political parties and organizations abroad which supported policies which strengthened “US national interests.” Today political parties and civil society organizations are supported which promote


\(^{21}\)Agee, “How United States Intervention Against Venezuela Works.”
neoliberalism, privatization, deregulation, control of trade unions, reduction of social welfare, elimination of tariffs, and free access to markets. In other words, these operations are very much an integral part of US foreign policy operations.

While the NED is legally an NGO, this is not actually the case, and USAID and the CIA fully participate in these programs to “promote democracy.” NED functions, for all practical purposes, as an arm of the US State Department. In 1984, USAID established the Office of Democratic Initiatives (ODI), renamed as the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in 1994. Along with NED, these organizations channel funds abroad through a network of US Foundations, consulting firms, and public relations firms, in order to conceal the US Government connection. While the official line is that these organizations work to “strengthen civil society,” they merely support the groups that support US interests and oppose those which do not. This, of course, is again Orwellian, as it promotes US control, not democracy. Undermining local democratization is promoted as “democratization.”

These organizations were used to defeat the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua in the 1990 elections and similar operations are now being conducted against President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. It is believed that the cost of the Nicaragua operation in 1989 was some $20 million.22

Today, the consulting firm, Development Alternatives, Inc., has carried out development projects in some 150 countries including a number of countries of the Middle East. The corporation is considered to be an ideal corporate structure for inserting CIA officers and agents. Contracts with USAID, operating in Venezuela, have been obtained and posted on the Internet. It is clear that these operations are designed to carry out the precise programs outlined in the GMEI. They conduct “workshops, seminars, conferences and training courses to develop political parties. They form political party coalitions, run programs to register voters, and conduct programs to

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Can Turkey be a Model For Democracy in the Middle East?

Some analysts have made the case that for the US and European approach to democratizing the Middle East, the current Turkish Government under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan can serve as an instructive example.\textsuperscript{24} The Justice and Development Party Government (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or Ak Parti) shows that “religious political movements in the Muslim world can take the lead in introducing greater social, political and economic freedom to their societies.” It is claimed that in Turkey’s case “the evolution of a modernizing Islamist political force was facilitated by external pressures for reform.” “Turkey has been cajoled, pressured and encouraged by the West in its journey toward full and mature democracy.” The conclusion is that “if Western governments hope to see this evolution take place across the Middle East, they would do well to study closely what is happening in Ankara.”


\textsuperscript{24} Thomas Patrick Carroll, “Turkey’s Justice and Development Party: A Model for Democratic Islam?” \textit{Middle East Intelligence Bulletin}, Vol. 6, No. 6-7, June/July 2004. The notion that the Ak Party could actually want democracy to function is not even taken seriously. For example, allowing the Turkish Parliament to democratically reject the bill for a US invasion of Iraq from Turkish soil is often explained as due to the “inexperience” of the leaders of the Ak Party. That is seen as a mistake, despite the fact that around 90 percent of the Turkish people opposed the bill. The mainstream US sentiment is that once the leaders get the knack of ruling, the new ruling party will fall into the grove of crushing democracy in the interests of United States. See Alexander Cooley, “Base Politics,” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, 84 (6), Nov.-Dec., 2005, p. 84. For Cooley, this democratic decision revealed an “institutional weakness” typical of “young democracies.” In this US view, the Turkish Prime Minister was mistaken that it was a “victory of democracy.” Rather, “democracy,” in US terms, would have meant going against the will of 90 percent of the Turkish people. It would be difficult to find a better example of how “democracy” for the US is defined as that which serves US national interests.
It is true that Turkey has taught the West, particularly the United States, something about democracy, in the recent past, but it is not what is suggested by this argument. In fact, Turkey taught the US a lesson in democracy when in 2003, the Turkish Parliament voted to refuse permission for the US army to cross Turkish soil in its invasion of Iraq. This was met with an angry reaction from US authorities who upbraided the Turkish military for not carrying out their duty and ensuring that the bill would pass. The US threatened to cut aid to Turkey. In the Spring of 2005, the US Ambassador, Kenneth Adelman, requested that Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdogan, request the Turkish newspaper, *Yeni Safak*, not to publish articles critical of the US in Iraq. Over and over, the US Embassy in Ankara has made moves to counter the emerging spirit of democracy in Turkey, especially in relation to the unpopularity of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq.

In the realm of civil society, the weekend of 24 June, 2005, the world tribunal on the Iraq war was being held in Istanbul, which also militates against the image of the US in the region. This is part of democratization, of course, and was widely covered by TV in Turkey, while being boycotted by the supposedly “free press” Western press outlets like BBC and CNN. In other words, the United States has expressed hostility to democratization in Turkey in a number of ways, as it is seen to militate against US interests.

The above argument made by Thomas Carroll about Turkey under the Ak Party as a model is misleading in a number of ways. Most significantly, it is not very convincing that the Turkish experience is relevant to the Arab countries of the Middle East. It does not seem very profound that Turkey shows that democracy can co-exist with Islam, as this has been shown in a number of countries, for example, India.

In the case of the Ak Party Government in Turkey, first, it is incorrect that Erdogan’s program for further democratization and entry into the European Union has been driven by outside pressure. In the past, traditional Turkish leaders simply dug in their heels when confronted with outside pressure from Europe. Erdogan knew that the desire to move forward on democratization and entry into the European Union was broadly popular in the country and used this to
gain votes in the November 2002 election. Secondly, political modernization for the Ak Party sometimes means greater freedom for Moslems, for example in terms of wearing headscarf in schools, and so is useful not in terms of moving in a secular direction, but in giving more religious freedom from the state. While this could be seen as political modernization, it is generally seen by secularists as regression, rather than modernization, in the social arena.

Secondly, there is no other country in the Middle East where the people are driven by the historical desire to be part of Europe and today see the possibility of actually joining the European Union. Thirdly, much of the population of Turkey does not see the Ak Party agenda as a modernizing force at all, but rather pursuing an agenda in which a religious party in secular clothing pursues a hidden sometimes religious agenda and is rolling back the modernizing secular reforms of Atatürk. The secular elites feel threatened by the wide scale staffing of state institutions, including culture and education, with Islamists. Fourth, it is not clear that the Ak Party is, in fact, a modernizing regime. In the economic field, the agenda is one of neoliberalism and privatization. While this may be seen by some as "freedom" it is not the case for workers and trade unions, nor those who want Turkey to have some democratic economic autonomy from the IMF neo-liberal agenda. In the changing of the laws to conform to the European Union, this is not always seen as modernization in the Turkish context as it opens the way for greater freedom for religious movements. It is not clear that ruling Turkey from Brussels is exactly "democratic" as it surely strips the local people of any control over their own lives. It seems that roads and shopping centers are being modernized but not necessarily culture and society. Fifth, people voted for Erdoğan not because he was a "modernizer" but mainly because they were fed up with every other political party in the country for failing to provide a stable economy and government. The other parties were accurately seen as either corrupt or incompetent. Moreover, Erdogan had promised to largely keep the state and government secular. People wanted to throw the old leaders out and get beyond the series of economic crises. Sixth, the extent of reforms which have been achieved should not be exaggerated. The state security courts have been officially abolished, but states are creative in finding new ways to continue the same old practices in new ways.
Seventh, the United States is not happy with the Ak Party Government as noted above. Erdoğan’s government does not fit the mold of what the US would like. Moreover, the Government is pursuing many programs which depart significantly from neoliberalism in giving opportunities to the downscale in the country. These include subsidized loans for low-income housing and so on. Erdoğan has sometimes sharply criticized US policies in Iraq and foreign policy more generally a number of times, which has not gone down well with the United States. Further, the United States has pointedly let the Government know that it is not happy with the level of anti-Americanism in Turkey after the invasion of Iraq. The United States has criticized the Government for not doing more to influence public opinion. This is surely a shocking and shameful attack upon Turkish democracy. Appealing to the Turkish Government to crush public opinion regarding US foreign policy in the region is not likely to enhance the US as a country which promotes democracy. The Turkish public has enough examples to get the picture. It is not clear exactly what the Turkish Government is supposed to do to control public opinion. Considering these facts, the Turkish model could sink US hopes in the Middle East quite decidedly.

Finally, rather than enhance the image of the Western democracy, European Union and American pressure on the country has actually caused a backlash of public opinion, with more and more people saying that they do not really care if Turkey enters or not. So external pressure may in fact be doing more harm that good.25

Given the operational plans of the US, the argument misses the point. The US has no desire to transfer the Turkish model, which is defective in many ways from the US standpoint. It is not the Islamist element that the US opposes, but the courage of those in the Government to refuse to toe the US party line. On the other hand, the US has tried and true methods to create the sorts of US engineered “democratic” systems that will serve its purpose, as we see above. This makes the argument quite irrelevant and shows that it misses the point of what is going on, rather badly.

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25Ibid.
What is Democracy?

It appears that nowhere in the documents and discussion of the GMEI is there a working definition of democracy. There are at least two different categories of definitions of democracy. One is the plain English, generic, definition of democracy. Second is the doctrinal definition of democracy which might be used by a regime to define “democracy.” In the US context, the doctrinal meaning has very little to do with the generic meaning. Democracy may be defined as “a government by the people, especially rule of the majority. A government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held elections.”

On the other hand, there is the doctrinal definition of democracy. This is what is used by the Bush Administration. In this sense, “democracy” is that which serves the US “national security interests.” This can be further clarified by noting that it is what serves to insure and protect capitalist accumulation and power. It serves both US global hegemony and capitalist accumulation. It will be seen that within this context, the rigged elections carried out under US occupation in Iraq, as in January 30, 2005, are “democratic. On the other hands, the June 2005 elections in Iran are not “democratic.” Elections in Venezuela, which continue to keep Hugo Chavez in power, are not democratic since they do not serve the interests of US and global capital. For the US, genuinely democratic elections

George W. Bush has recently called President Hugo Chavez a “threat to Democracy” and a “demagogue.” Venezuela has been identified by the Pentagon as a “post-Iraq threat.” In November in Brazil, Bush launched an attack on Chavez. Yet, Chavez got 56 percent of the vote in the 1998 elections, some six percent more than Bush in Florida in 2000. Some 56 to 60 percent have supported Chavez in eight elections and referendums, including his reelection. The US recognized the short-lived coup in 2002, headed by Pedro Carmona, head of the Venezuelan Business Association. Chavez, unlike Bush, has used the nation’s wealth for social welfare, that is, for the people. Some 1.4 million have learned to read, three million adults have enrolled in schooling projects, thousands of medical clinics have been built, 20,000 doctors have been brought in from Cuba to provide free health care to 70 percent of the population and 60 percent get free food. A chain of 14,000 stores have been created to sell at a 35 percent
which bring popular leaders to power, but which militate against the interests of capital, are, by definition, not democratic. What democratic elections are to protect is capital and not the people. They are to bring to the fore governments of capital, by capital and for capital.

We can see that in the US context, democracy also involves rigging the system. There are many ways in which this is accomplished in the US. The first past the post system, the redistricting and gerrymandering, elimination of sections of the population who are not desirable voters, and so on, are actually ways to rig elections. A narrow political spectrum exists, which also effectively precludes democracy. Neoliberalism, perhaps is the most pointed mechanism today for the elimination of democracy on a global scale, as it precludes allowing people to make the democratic decisions about matters, such as jobs and benefits, that most affect their lives.

In Japan, after WWII, the US set up the desirable type of system, from the point of view of capital, where a conservative pro-business party was the only party which could actually win the elections. This means that in such a “liberal system,” a pro-capital party, such as the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is going to end up controlling the system in the interest of US capitalist accumulation.

The de facto system of “democracy” in the US also means that it eliminates any group or party that would serve to help the poor. Any voices that might militate against the agenda of capitalist accumulation will be eliminated. This is also seen in the approach to Venezuela. When genuine democracy emerges, it must be denied that it is democratic and destroyed. This is the historical pattern. Traditionally, when the masses raise their heads to participate, political scientists in the US have treated this as a “crisis of democracy.” It signifies the problem of too many demands on the system or “too much democracy.” What this means is that participation of the masses does not serve the agenda of accelerating capitalist accumulation.

Democracy in the Middle East and US National Interests:

As noted above, since WWII, the US has operated covert election operations. These essentially subvert “free elections” around the world. This started with Italy after WWII to prevent the Communist Party from coming to power. This activity continues today. It is clear that if the US was really interested in supporting free and fair elections, there would be a sharp break from this standard operating procedure. But it is simply not plausible that the neo-conservatives in Washington would be interested in opening up electoral systems in the Middle East to genuine democracy.27 As Robert Fisk has pointed out, the US has not tolerated undemocratic regimes, it has actively promoted them for more than 50 years.28 Given the record and the objectives of the neo-conservatives to control the entire world as the global hegemon, it is simply not plausible that they would take their chances in an area so vital to US national security interests. We can understand this by considering the possible scenario in a number of countries in the region.

Egypt: While the Bush Administration pays lip service to democratic change in Egypt, there is no sign that the US government

is serious about opening up the system if it would bring Islamists to power. The US has praised Mubarak for changes, but these have so far been only cosmetic. In the September 2005 Presidential election, some 23 percent of eligible voters went to the polls. Bush called Mubarak and congratulated him on his victory, although the outcome was never in doubt. The White House put out the statement: “This election represents an important step toward holding fully free and fair competitive multiparty elections and both supporters and opponents of the government have told us that it has occasioned a vigorous national debate in Egypt on important issues.”

There is not much evidence that the system is actually becoming democratic to a significant extent. The Muslim Brotherhood and the new movement, Kifayah (Enough) continue to be suppressed. Muslim Brotherhood protests have been stopped. Hundreds of members and leaders remain in prison, including 754 for peaceful protests. Ayman Nour, leader of al-Ghad (Tomorrow) was kept in prison recently for 45 days on trumped up charges.

Nevertheless, it is hypocritical for the West to accuse these states of lack of democracy. The West never encouraged democracy when they could have, such as during British control from 1882-1922. The regime engages in “goat barrel politics” and the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) might still get a majority in fair elections. Even with many unhappy, Egyptians do not want Western interference in the elections.

29The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East is Elizabeth Cheney, who is Vice President Dick Cheney’s Daughter. In a recent trip to Egypt, she stated to Gamal Mubarak (the President’s son and leader of the ruling National Democratic Party) that the Bush Administration’s commitment to expanding democracy in the Arab world is “Absolute and very firm” and that the US national security is at stake. Now let me get this straight. The son of George Herbert Walker Bush sends the daughter of the US Vice President to talk to the son of Hosni Mubarak about democracy? We can, then, surely all take the proposition that this is about democracy seriously! See Juan Cole, “Bush’s War and the Egyptian Elections,” Salon.com, Sept. 19, 2005; Nadia Abou El-Magd, “U.S. Official Urges Egypt on Democracy,” AP, Sept. 30, 2005; “Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood Seizes increased freedom ahead of polls,” The Daily Star, Agence France Presse, Nov. 8, 2005.
Iran. In the early 1950s the US overthrew Mohammad Mossadegh, restored Shah Reza Pehlavi to power, and kept the Shah in power until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The US overthrow was a case of ending a regime that had come to power democratically. Is it plausible that the US will support popular democracy today in Iran, given the level of anti-Americanism?

In the elections of 24 June, 2005, the hard-line former mayor of Tehran, Ahmadinejad was elected President. Even though there were clear irregularities, it can be seen that this was basically a democratic process, at least as democratic as that in Iraq on January 30, 2005. The US has recently called the Iranian elections "illegitimate." The turn out was more than twice that in Egypt. If the candidates are controlled, then by the same token, there is a quite tight controlling of the candidates in the US elections as well. It is true that there were dirty tricks and that liberal candidates were disqualified. So democracy is working to a significant extent. It was the result of a populism which mobilized the votes of the poor Muslim masses from the mosques, for better social welfare, some sops from the regime and to get them to support the more conservative clerics. The critical remarks of George W. Bush about the Iranian election also seem to have backfired. So here the result of democracy is the opposite of what Bush and the neo-conservatives would like to see.30

Israel: The changing nature of the political regime in Israel has been noted by some scholars who argue that it is difficult to refer to this regime as a democracy for a number of reasons.31 The state of

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Israel has no constitution. It is democratic by definition, but not when one looks at the actual content and practices in how the system operates. The United States will not demand that democratic reform take place in Israel, which is already rated as a free and democratic state.

Iraq. The US sought to guide a process in which genuinely free elections, which were risky, were avoided. The US was actually in favor of postponing elections until the situation would be less volatile and easier to control. But the US was compelled to go ahead with the elections because of Grand Ayatollah Ali al- Sistani. Even so, the US was pressed to control the results, staging a large-scale election rigging operation in the January 2005 elections so that the Shiites would not get an absolute majority and control the writing of the new constitution. In the event, the elections could not be rigged well enough, and the situation was made more difficult for the US. Nevertheless, the US has attempted to capitalize on the results of the elections. The de facto situation after the elections has been much worse, in terms of the “insurgency,” that is the resistance to occupation. It is unknown as to what extent the referendum on the Iraqi Constitution was manipulated in October 2000, but it is well known that the US has pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into the country for the “promotion of democracy.” One cannot have a great deal of faith that the elections were “free and fair” to say the least. Elections held under military occupation are not generally considered to be legitimate. It is possible that democratization will lead to the regime becoming a theocracy, and may break up into three countries.32 The results of the December 2005 elections are yet to be determined but it is clear that the US has spend hundreds of millions

32Juan Cole, “Thoughts in the Middle East, History and Religion,” Informed Consent, Sept. 2, 2005; Dafna Linzer, “U.S. Says it Did Not Carry Out Plans to Back Iraqis in Election,” Washington Post, July 18, 2005. Juan Cole points out that the Iraqi Constitution is a serious setback for women and they could yet be subject to Islamic personal law. Linzer reports that Bush authorized covert plans to try to rig the Iraqi elections but that the plans were not carried out. This contradicts the report by Seymour Hersh that the US did carry out a large election operation using retired CIA officers to try to cover their tracks. In any event, the US attempt to get Iyad Allawi elected was a hopeless failure. Perhaps it was a small victory for democracy in the collapse of the US plans.
of dollars under occupation to promote its favored candidates, namely Iyad Allawi and Ahmed Chelabi.

**Palestine:** The US would not allow elections to be held in the territories as long as Arafat was living, as he would have won. Now the US has the problem of the popularity of Hamas and the danger of their winning. It will be very problematic for the US to promote genuine democracy here and it would be exceedingly foolish to imagine that this would happen.

**Saudi Arabia.** Would the US be willing to see the system here opened up to genuine democracy? The Wahhabis could actually come to power if free and fair elections were to be held. Their base is in the poor and Islamist communities, as well as stretching up into the ruling family. It is not likely that US interests would actually prevail in an election, given the amount of Anti-American sentiment in the region. Elections could well militate against US interests.

According to Milan Rai, in some sense, the Wahhabis are actually in power in the Kingdom as the al-Saud family is the “guarantor and promoter” of Wahhabism around the world. It is the “state religion” and is enforced by “force and largesse.” But it could also lead to the overthrow of the House of Saud because of corruption. So according to this view, terrorism is not being controlled. It would be too dangerous for the present rulers to open up and allow women to vote and drive.\(^3\)

**Pakistan.** The US is firmly behind the military dictatorship of General Pervez Musharif. Musharif says with a straight face that Pakistan is being ruled under a democracy. But political parties have mostly been banned, and it does not appear as a democracy. In fact, the country is one of the most violently anti-American countries, Osama bin Laden is a local folk hero among large masses of the people, and so democratic elections in the country are very problematical for the United States. Democratic elections would not be likely to serve US national security interests.

**Lebanon.** It is not clear what the result of expelling the Syrians

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from the country will be. Democracy in the country has been destroyed in the past, not just by the interference of Syria, but by the invasion of Israel in 1982 that disrupted the country. There could be a return of the violence of the 1970s.

Genuine democracy, and the likely results, is unthinkable and unacceptable to the US in most cases in the Middle East. Only a doctrinaire facade of democracy that allows the US to control elections is likely to be acceptable in Washington. On the other hand, in Latin America, and particularly in Venezuela, where genuine democracy has taken place, the US has a massive program to destroy this democracy.

The Neoconservatives: Where is the Democracy?

Just how far the US has departed from those who founded the Republic can be seen in a quote from John Quincy Adams. “America is not a nation meant to order others how to live and then push them at bayonet point into that lifestyle. The cost of such a policy would be the loss of America’s Soul.”

Moreover, recent polls have shown that majorities neither in the US nor in the Middle East support the goals of the US spreading democracy to the region. This would question whether the Bush approach, itself, has democratic backing. It simply does not. A poll by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the Program on International Policy Attitudes of the University of Maryland (PIPA), showed that of 808 randomly selected respondents in the US, the following results were obtained. Only 35 percent favor the use of military force to overthrow dictators; 74 percent said that the goal of overthrowing the Baathist Regime and installing democracy is not a good enough reason for war, with 60 percent of Republicans agreeing; 66 percent said that threatening military intervention to bring about democratic change does more harm than good; only 26 percent said that more democracies would make the world safer, only 26 percent believed that Saudi Arabia would be more friendly to the

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US if it was a democracy; and only 42 percent said democracy, in general would make countries more friendly to the US. While 80 percent said that democracy is the best form of government, only 50 percent believed that it was best for all countries; 33 percent believed that democracy and Islam are incompatible, with 55 percent believing that Islamic countries can be democratic; 54 percent said that the US should not press for democracy if it is likely it would lead to an Islamic fundamentalist government; only 27 percent said that promoting democracy is a very important foreign policy goal, with 49 percent saying it was somewhat important; 75 percent said the US should not spend money to influence elections in its interests (69 percent of Republicans and 83 percent of Democrats); and 68 percent of people favored working through the UN. When asked how democratic the US is on a scale of 0 to 10, the mean response was 6.2. When asked how much impact the views of the majority have on decisions of elected officials, the mean was only 4.5, but at the same time, the respondents said it should be 8.0.35

As another measure of how well democracy is working in the US, 49 out of 57 communities in town meetings in Vermont approved resolutions to withdraw troops from Iraq. Some 53 percent of Americans say the Iraq War was not worth fighting, 57 percent disapprove of Bush’s handling of the War, and 70 percent say the US casualties are too high a price to pay. Further, only 8 percent supported a hegemonic role for the US in the world, 70 percent opposed the idea of the US as a world policeman and 57 percent said the US should not have an absolute majority at the UN. Some 60 percent approved of making the UN more powerful. A majority approved of the US joining the International Criminal Court, signing the Kyoto Treaty on Global Warming, ratifying the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and ratifying the convention on the ban of land mines.36 This simply shows that the neoconservative agenda in the US is not supported by a majority.

Moreover, Bush’s claim to spread democracy is not popular in the Middle East. A recent poll in six Middle East countries showed

36Zia Mian, “American Domination is in Trouble,” April 24, 2005, ZNET.
that 69 percent say that democracy is not the real objective of the US (78 percent on Egypt and 77 percent in Morocco); only 6 percent said that spreading democracy was an important objective and would make a difference; and some 16 percent said that spreading democracy was an important objective but the US is doing it the wrong way.37

Conclusion: Neo-totalitarianism and Global Capitalist Accumulation

The GMEI for democratization in the Middle East cannot be taken seriously as democracy is incompatible with the central tenets of the ideology of neoliberalism, which is itself essentially a totalitarian system. The neo-conservatives hold that the US must be the global hegemon with no possible rival and that there can be only one possible political and economic system, to which there is no alternative. The recognition of this fact actually means that politics, that is democracy, is actually eliminated for all practical purposes. There can be no democratic struggle over the division of the spoils, as this question has already been settled. If there is no alternative, there can be no democracy.

Genuinely democratic states of the Middle East, on the other hand, would demand to control their own resources, particularly oil. They would demand autonomy from US and Israeli capital with freedom to run their own economies. In genuinely democratic states, people would be free to oppose political regimes and at the same time, the agendas of Washington, including IMF austerity programs. The United States has shown that it is not comfortable with aspects of democratization in Turkey, or elsewhere, which questions US hegemony.

That the US would tolerate a genuine democracy in the Middle East is actually preposterous and inconceivable. The US neo-conservative agenda is all about controlling global resources and power. Democracy would quite clearly be a threat to this agenda. The

GMEI is not about making the Middle East genuinely democratic, except in rare cases where it serves the national security interests. Rather, it is about engineering an alternative to past control through the autocratic ruling elites, which is seen by the US as having outlived their historical usefulness. Therefore we can expect that realism will prevail. Neoliberalism is to be clamped upon the area and the established global institutions brought in to "govern" the region in the interests of the domestic US ruling class. There is nothing the neo-conservatives fear more than genuine democracy.

It is ironic that the neoconservatives have already contributed greatly to the democratization of the Middle East, but in a way that was unintended. By smashing the benign image of the United States which was established after WWII, resistance to Washington has strengthened. The aims of the global superpower have been laid bare as the pursuit of imperialism. This is likely to contribute to the larger movement for democratization around the world today. The Greater Middle East Initiative is not about bringing "democracy" to the Middle East, but precisely the opposite. It is a program to ensure that the only "democracy" to emerge in the region is that which serves the interests of the US domestic ruling class, the corporate or business class.