THE FREEDOM AGENDA

WHY AMERICA MUST SPREAD DEMOCRACY

(JUST NOT THE WAY GEORGE BUSH DID)

JAMES TRAUB

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Introduction

In his second inaugural address, in January 2005, President George W. Bush declared, "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands." This was the most succinct possible statement of the post-9/11 doctrine that came to be known as the Freedom Agenda. Of course it was an arguable proposition: Perhaps our liberty depended more on the success of something else in other lands—economic growth, the rule of law, simple justice. But all that was, in a sense, detail. For if the deeply repressive political cultures of Saudi Arabia or Egypt had helped produce the foot soldiers and the leadership cadre of Al Qaeda, and if the chaos of Afghanistan had served as the petri dish for the Taliban, then it was plain that our safety depended on the internal conditions, and not just the foreign policy, of other states. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put it with a bit more intellectual finesse: "The fundamental character of regimes now matters more than the international distribution of power."

The Freedom Agenda was a restatement, in far more urgent terms, of a venerable American axiom. From the time of the founding of the republic, Americans had believed that Providence had singled them out to offer a world living in darkness the great blessings of liberty—to serve as "a standing monument and example for the aim and imitation of people of other countries,"

as Thomas Jefferson wrote. We hold that the principles upon which our country is founded are not peculiar to us but, rather, constitute timeless and universal truths. The Declaration of Independence, Abraham Lincoln said, gave "liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time." And as our reach became global in the twentieth century, we would not only testify to the glories of democracy, but actively seek to propagate them across the globe. To this day we describe this policy as "Wilsonian," after Woodrow Wilson, the first president to explicitly seek to spread democracy abroad.

Our pursuit of these ideals has led us to make choices that would not have been dictated by a strict calculation of national interest: building the foundations of democracy in the Philippines in the first years of the twentieth century; defending the right of self-determination of colonized peoples; establishing after World War II a network of multilateral institutions that constrained our own power; rebuilding Germany and Japan as well as our wartime allies; assailing not just our adversaries but our friends for the abuse of human rights; undertaking a humanitarian intervention in Kosovo; and in recent years, supporting the solitary voices calling for reform in the Middle East. But there's a reason the term *Wilsonian* conjures up naïveté and recklessness as much as it does moral commitment. As the political theorist Hans Morgenthau wrote soon after World War II, "The missionary conception of the relationship between our domestic situation and our foreign policy" blends inevitably into a crusading one, in which "the American example is transformed into a formula for universal salvation by which right-thinking nations voluntarily abide and to which the others must be compelled to submit"—"with fire and sword, if necessary."

And this brings us back to President Bush. Democracy has always been our national credo, and the ambition to spread it abroad, our missionary impulse. The terrorist attacks of 2001 reconfigured this act of cultural self-affirmation into a matter of national security. The assault might well have persuaded a President Al Gore—or John McCain—that our liberty depended on the success of liberty in other lands. But the language that the Bush administration used to express this new principle had a self-righteous and theological flavor; and the policies with which it pursued this goal were heavy-handed and often bellicose. In Iraq, the president tried to bring liberty to the Middle East by fire and sword. America's own past experience, and the history of the Arab world, offered all the lessons he could have needed in the difficulty and perhaps the futility, and certainly the hubris, of this exercise. Iraq was meant to be a demonstration model, and it has been—but not in the way the administration intended. Iraq is now taken as proof of the folly, and indeed the hypocrisy, of America's idealistic adventures abroad; of a brute doctrine of transformation by warfare; of the hollowness of *democracy* as uttered by our leaders; and of the absurdity of imagining that the United States can promote its values abroad, whatever they are.

And it's not only in Iraq that America has been seen to discredit its own professed principles. At the very moment when officials were trying to repair the damage done to our image by decades of steadfast support for Arab dictators, the worldwide media were dominated by stories of American torture at the Abu Ghraib prison, perpetual imprisonment without judicial recourse at Guantánamo Bay, the clandestine smuggling of detainees to third world countries with scant regard for human rights. America had tried to promote democracy abroad while showing contempt for it at home. Is it any wonder that in a recent poll, only 29 percent of respondents in eighteen countries thought that the United States was having a "mainly positive" effect on the world, while 52 percent considered the effect "mainly negative"? In Turkey, America's chief ally in the Muslim world, the number of respondents who expressed a "favorable view of the U.S."—a phrase that usually elicits a much more positive response—had fallen from 52 percent in 1999–2000 to 9 percent in 2007. How

can you seek to universalize your values in places where ordinary citizens think you stand for something deplorable?

The Bush administration first codified the core principles of the post-9/11 world in the National Security Strategy of 2002. The document posited that we must be prepared to act preemptively, as well as unilaterally, to prevent terrorists from acquiring, or of course using, weapons of mass destruction; that we must be willing to overthrow a regime that threatens us and the international order, as we had in Afghanistan; that we must retain unrivaled military supremacy; and that we must remove the conditions that foster terrorism by making "freedom and the development of democratic institutions key themes in our bilateral relations." We can now say, in retrospect, that the Iraq war, and the larger war on terrorism, have discredited the doctrines in whose name they have been fought. This is, in effect, the intellectual wreckage left behind by the political and diplomatic fiasco of the last eight years.

We have had only one foreign policy since 9/11. And that policy has been shaped by the fear and anger and sense of vulnerability provoked by that horror, and by the ways in which President Bush and his team have responded to, and exploited, that national mood. As I write these words, the Bush era is drawing to an end. We will soon have another president, and thus another way of understanding our place in the world. We will have, in effect, a post-post-9/11 policy. And in shaping such a policy, we need to ask what, if anything, we should rescue from the rubble of President Bush's national security strategy. We will, of course, continue to reserve the right to act preemptively and unilaterally under certain circumstances, to act against state sponsors of terrorism, to retain our military superiority. We have done so in the past—but without elevating these principles to the status of core doctrine. And as the world has become so much more dangerous, at least compared to a decade ago, we need to be unambiguous about our willingness to use force.

But since 9/11 we have defined ourselves almost exclusively by our heightened awareness of danger, and our heightened willingness to respond with a show of military might. We have made ourselves awesome, and frightening. Or rather, to give both principal moods of the Bush White House their due, we have bristled with terrible force, and beckoned to an almost magical realm of possibility—with Vice President Dick Cheney in charge of bristling, and President Bush urging the people of Iraq, and of Palestine and of Egypt, to somehow claim the universal birthright of freedom. We need to learn once again to speak to the world with hope—but a hopefulness tempered by a sense of the possible. And this requires clearing away the wreckage of recent years.

If we accept that the character of many regimes now affects us more than the way in which they project power abroad, and thus that our own security depends on the progress of liberty—or of something—among those regimes, then we must, in fact, find a way to revitalize, and rethink, the Freedom Agenda. What would this mean? Perhaps, for example, it's not liberty—or freedom, or democracy—that we should seek to support abroad. Assailing the bipartisan faith in "Democratism," Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, the authors of *Ethical Realism*, a scathing critique of Bush administration policy, propose instead that we seek to fashion "The Great Capitalist Peace," incorporating nations into the global economy. Others argue that infant democracies are actually more turbulent and dangerous than authoritarian regimes. In *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*, Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder insist that we should forestall elections until countries develop the liberal institutions that will permit a more stable transition.

There's a lot to be said for this view. Nations such as Poland and Hungary, which had lived under Soviet domination, made a swift and relatively pain-free transition to democracy when the Russians pulled out, because they had a long tradition of liberal values and institutions. In Africa, where no such tradition exists,

the arrival of democracy has often done nothing to mitigate, and at times has even exacerbated, corruption, poverty, and warlord rule. And we cannot simply assume that democracy is an unmitigated good for citizens, or a bulwark against terrorism. The link between democracy and development is tenuous, if broadly positive; Asia furnishes any number of examples of dynamic autocracies. And it is blithe to imagine that democratic states do not foster terrorism. The democratic Philippines produces far more terrorists than does authoritarian China. And many of the jihadists who have murdered civilians in Europe were born and raised in the democratic, cosmopolitan West.

Democracy does not cure all ills. And yet people want it. What's more, the era when you could tell people to wait until they were "ready" is long since over. In recent years, citizens in both Ukraine and Nigeria have clamored for genuinely democratic rule. Ukraine is a largely middle-class European nation with decent democratic prospects; Nigeria is a giant, chaotic, impoverished African country with a tradition of tyranny and corruption. Should we have supported the Ukrainians and told the Nigerians to hang on? We didn't; but it wouldn't have made much difference if we had. Democracy has become a near universal aspiration about which we cannot choose to be agnostic. And you cannot spend time in even the most wretchedly impoverished democracies without learning that people everywhere care about having a voice in their own affairs, and having recourse in the face of abusive treatment.

But what can we actually *do* to help the democratic cause? At critical moments in a nation's history, when an authoritarian leader refuses to step down, or when the military overthrows a democratically elected figure, or when an election pits democratic against autocratic forces, outsiders can play a crucial role, as the United States has over the years in Chile, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, and Soviet Georgia, among other places. Otherwise, however, outsiders can only nurture. Democracy cannot be "exported," much less imposed, as of course autocracy can be; outsiders can help only where the wish for democracy already exists (as it did not in Iraq). And even where a seed has already sprouted, outsiders can only help coax it out of the ground and into the air. "Democracy promotion" is too aggressive by half, and its history over the last century counsels modest expectations.

Perhaps outsiders can make a difference; but what if the outsider is the United States? How, today, can we promote anything, much less democracy? The American project in the Middle East is now associated, fairly or not, with regime change and global aggression. It may be that the very word *democracy* has become so tainted that we will have to put it away until the toxins have leached out. And even a new and more charitably regarded president would confront the same strategic issue that this White House has faced: We rely on autocrats such as Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to play a moderate role among neighbors, just as in the cold war we relied on anticommunist dictators in Latin America and elsewhere. They need us, but we need them; and they know it. How do we respond when a Mubarak, or a Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, claims that opposition forces are destabilizing their regime? Can we call their bluff? What if the opposition forces are Islamist? Should we be willing to support "moderate Islamists"? Is there such a thing?

Democracy promotion presents a series of hard choices about our behavior abroad; but it also demands that we think about the principles we apply to ourselves. We have called insistently for democracy elsewhere, and yet rarely, if ever, in our history has the United States itself been seen as so poor a model of democracy. We seem to be trapped in a paradox: The same threats that have prompted us to try to shape more liberal outcomes beyond our shores have persuaded us, or at least the current occupants of the White House, that we can no longer afford to be the open society we were before 9/11. Thus we reserve for ourselves the right to

torture prisoners because the stakes of the war on terrorism are so high. And yet it's precisely at such moments when a nation's commitment to its principles are tested.

We cannot escape the accusations of hypocrisy. We cannot hide the facts from those others to whom we wish to preach, any more than from ourselves. We live in a transparent world, and we must treat transparency as our great advantage, not a threat to our security. Bill Clinton recently remarked that when he convened Israeli and Palestinian officials in a last-ditch effort to make peace at the end of his tenure, he didn't know if he would succeed, but "I was going to get caught trying." Clinton was right in thinking that the effort itself would help our standing in the Middle East, no matter what the outcome. And the principle applies in general: Just as we can get caught trying to ship "enemy combatants" to secret interrogation camps, so we can get caught trying to sustain the forces of democracy in authoritarian countries, overmatched though they are. We can get caught engaging with moderate Islamists who believe in free speech and the rule of law. We can get caught offering a democratic alternative to African countries beguiled by the Chinese model of top-down, autocratic development. We can get caught, in short, behaving in conformity with our deepest principles.

1

An Education in Self-Government

In Which We Teach the Filipinos, and They Teach Us

American foreign policy throughout the nineteenth century was largely governed by the principle that President John Quincy Adams famously laid out in his 1824 inaugural address: "America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy." With our own continent still to explore, and an apparently bottomless supply of natural resources, we had little need of foreign markets or foreign products, and we deprecated the European scramble for colonial dominion as unworthy of a democratic nation. But by the end of the century we had exhausted our frontier, we had become a global trading power, and we had surpassed much of Europe as an industrial and financial force. Our long era of self-absorption ended with a bang when Adm. George Dewey sank much of the Spanish fleet in Manila Harbor on May 1, 1898. Woodrow Wilson, a historian before he was president, wrote, "The battle of Trenton was not more significant than the battle of Manila. The nation that was one hundred and twenty-five years in the making has now stepped forth into the open arena of the world."

But the battle weighs less in our national annals than does the subsequent decision to annex and colonize the Philippines. This was precisely the kind of entanglement against which Adams—and George Washington before him—had warned. Throughout the nineteenth century we had been content to serve merely as an example to others. Our infant republic offered, as Jefferson

ture as one of "perfect freedom" and also of equality, "there being nothing more evident than that Creatures of the same species and rank . . . should be equal one amongst another without Subordination and Subjection."

Could it be that citizens in deeply illiberal places had gotten it into their heads that they too were equal to their masters, and thus had an equal right over their destiny? Was it possible, that is, that meddlesome outsiders weren't holding a gun to the heads of third world democrats, as Kaplan thought, but, rather, trying to speed a process already in motion? It was true that it often made more sense to hold off on national elections until liberal habits had begun to form and the rule of law had taken hold. But, as Thomas Carothers asked, "what to do if the people of the society are pressing for democracy? Should the U.S. government tell them not to? *Can* it?" Carothers agreed that "deferred democratization" was an effective formula in nineteenth-century Europe. But, he said, "the global political culture has changed. For better or for worse (and I think much for the better), people all around the world have democratic aspirations."

And if democracy promotion was not simply a liberal peccadillo but rather a response to a global demand for rights and representation, however inchoate and even subject to cynical manipulation, then the central question to be asked was not whether it should be done, but how it could be done effectively. People like Carothers feared that whoever succeeded President Clinton would react to the failures by eliminating the policy itself. It did not occur to them to worry that democracy promotion would be discredited not by timidity but by recklessness.

5

"Realism Died on 9/11"

But What Was Born in Its Place?

In the 2000 election, George W. Bush was the candidate of the Republican foreign policy establishment. The neoconservative thinkers associated with a doctrine known as "greatness conservatism," which proposed that American power be boldly deployed to advance American values, found the maverick candidacy of Senator John McCain far more appealing. McCain was deeply acquainted with foreign affairs; Bush seemed almost entirely uninterested in the world beyond America's borders. Though he had been raised in the kind of elite settings where virtually everyone traveled abroad, he had not so much as left the country until 1975, when he went to China, where his father was serving as U.S. ambassador. He next ventured beyond our borders in 1990, when his father, then president of the United States, asked him to go to Gambia. Thereafter he went to Europe several times with the Young Presidents' Organization, and as governor of Texas he traveled regularly to Mexico.

Bush began learning about the world only when he decided to run for president, and he enlisted Condoleezza Rice, his father's former aide, as tutor. Rice, in turn, assembled a group of experts known informally as "the Vulcans" and drawn largely from the elder Bush's circle. The only bona fide neoconservative among them was Paul Wolfowitz, who as assistant secretary of state under Ronald Reagan had advocated applying pressure to Fer-

dinand Marcos. The others, including Dick Cheney, Steven Hadley, Robert Zoellick, and of course Rice herself, were drawn from the more conservative end of the Republican mainstream. Their collective critique was less ideological than managerial: Bill Clinton had overcommitted the American military in morally driven adventures in the Balkans and elsewhere; had rashly thrown in his lot with the drunken and unpredictable Boris Yeltsin in Russia; and had staked America's prestige on a doomed Middle East peace process. America needed to recover from what was, in effect, a binge of foreign policy romanticism.

The Bush team laid out its agenda in a pair of essays written by Rice and Zoellick for the January/February 2000 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Zoellick's contribution offered five principles for a Republican foreign policy. "First," Zoellick wrote, such a policy "is premised on a respect for power, being neither ashamed to pursue America's national interests nor too quick to use the country's might." Second, it "emphasizes building and sustaining coalitions and alliances." Third, "Republicans judge international agreements and institutions as means to achieve ends, not as forms of political therapy." In short, a Republican foreign policy, unlike a Democratic one, would be clear-eyed, unsentimental, and professional.

The Rice essay is now remembered—as the Zoellick is not—because it drew such a bracing, if hyperbolic, contrast between Democratic softness and Republican toughness. "Many in the United States," she wrote, "are (and always have been) uncomfortable with the notions of power politics, great powers, and power balances." For these latter-day Wilsonians, she wrote, "The 'national interest' is replaced with 'humanitarian interests' or the interests of 'the international community.' " The Clinton administration had put far too much store by treaties, international law, and the United Nations. The most striking thing about Rice's essay was not so much the doctrine it advocated, which differed only in emphasis from Zoellick's call for realism and consistency,

but the bellicosity of its tone. Here was a disciplined realist who could barely restrain her contempt for a woolly-brained administration whose "pursuit of, at best, illusory 'norms' of international behavior" had become "epidemic." At times Rice adopted a tone of Reaganesque patriotism, writing that "American values are universal" and are bound to triumph in the long run. Her point was not that statesmen should actively promote these values, but the opposite: though we should seek an international balance of power favorable to our principles, "in the meantime, it is simply not possible to ignore and isolate other powerful states that do not share those values."

George Bush the candidate automatically fell back on Rice's brand of hardheaded realism in the rare moments when he was called on to discuss foreign policy. Asked in the second presidential debate about his "guiding principles" for the exercise of American power, Bush said, "The first question is what's in the best interests of the United States." His opponent, Vice President Al Gore, staked out what was, in effect, the opposite position. "I see it as a question of values," said Gore. The dichotomy was, of course, a facile one, for any rational policy must combine values with interests; but the difference was not merely rhetorical. Vice President Gore "believes in nation-building," Bush said accurately. "I believe the role of the military is to fight and win war." The Republican candidate had also absorbed his adviser's scorn for the sort of moral grandiosity that had led Madeleine Albright to call America "the indispensable nation." "If we're an arrogant nation, they'll resent us," he said. "If we're a humble nation but strong, they'll welcome us." He expanded on this theme of self-restraint in an unscripted response to Gore, saying, "I'm not so sure the role of the United States is to go around the world and say, 'This is the way it's gotta be.'" The United States could "help people help themselves" rather than flaunt the American way.

In January of 2001, I wrote a cover story about Bush and his

team for *The New York Times Magazine*; the title was, "Downsizing Foreign Policy." In this new era of "worldly pragmatism," I wrote, George Bush the elder's euphoric "new world order" was "as distant a memory as the evil empire." Reagan's Wilsonianism of the right would prove as unfashionable as Clinton's "assertive multilateralism." I got one thing right: "What one feels, in talking to the people who are likely to determine foreign policy in the Bush administration, is . . . a preoccupation with threat, a suspicion about negotiations, a willingness to go it alone." I got everything almost absurdly wrong, though I did leave myself what turned out to be a very convenient escape hatch: "Perhaps the most hopeful thing one can say is that administrations rarely stick to the abstract principles they lay out during the campaign." Of course, I had a very different escape route in mind from the one the Bush administration would actually take.

The new Bush administration at first looked very much like the old one minus the faith in multilateral institutions and international law. Robert Blackwill, a member of the Vulcans who had been Rice's boss under Bush 41, says, "I think it would be fair to say that our transition preparations and the application of those ideas which had been approved by the president were routinely realist in character. We were on the way to be a conventional Republican administration." Reaganite neoconservatives occupied key second-tier positions in the Pentagon, the vice president's office, and the National Security Council; but all the top jobs went to cold war pragmatists, including Donald Rumsfeld, the secretary of defense; Colin Powell, the secretary of state; National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice; and, of course, Vice President Dick Cheney. The focus of the early months was national missile defense; trade; the charting of new relationships with Russia, India, and Mexico. Lorne Craner, assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor in an administration that had only a modest interest in spreading democracy and human rights abroad, spent much of the year preparing for the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, where his goal was largely to prevent an auto-da-fé of Israel. When it ended, on September 10, 2001, Craner assumed that he had just seen the high point of his year.

And then, from the maelstrom of 9/11, a new world emerged. A president with no clear sense of purpose discovered his calling: to pursue and crush a monstrous adversary, "the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century," as he put it in his address to a joint session of Congress on September 20. That meant, above all, a direct assault on the forces of Al Qaeda and their state sponsors and protectors in Afghanistan. In the months after 9/11, the administration was consumed by the planning and execution of the war, and by the vast criminal justice effort to track down a supposed Islamic fifth column at home.

But the attacks also forced a rethinking of the nature, or the boundaries, of foreign policy itself. The Condoleezza Rice of early 2000 viewed diplomacy much as Clemenceau, or even Metternich, had—as the correct management of the behavior of states. Given the rise of such "transnational" issues as drug trafficking, infectious disease, and terrorism, her views were already archaic; the domestic policy and the internal conditions of other nations affected us every bit as much as did the statecraft of foreign leaders. But the terrorist assault made this conclusion self-evident. As Barry Lowenkron, a Rice aide first at the NSC and then at the State Department, says, "Realism died on September 11, 2001." Until 9/11, Lowenkron says, "what happens inside states is a humanitarian imperative"—precisely the kind of concern that the Rice of 2000 had ridiculed. Of course, President Clinton's doctrine of "enlargement" dictated that what happened inside states had very practical significance for the global economy. But there is all the difference in the world between a policy that promises to boost our GNP and one that aims to keep terrorists at bay. What happened inside states was now a matter of national security.

And Americans quickly came to understand that hunting down the terrorists would not be enough. They were a tiny band; but millions of ordinary citizens across the Arab and Islamic world despised the United States and the West, and rallied to the side of the killers. Some on the left, such as the writer Susan Sontag, argued that the problem lay in American policies toward the Middle East. But whatever truth this claim may have had, Americans were in no mood to hear it. A more popular, and maybe more plausible, suggestion was that the problem lay inside Arab states. V. S. Naipaul, the Nobel Prize–winning author, said that the angry young men of the Arab street really wanted an American green card; furious at the reactionary and paralytic states in which they lived, they lashed out at the world of prosperity and freedom that they desperately envied but could not enjoy. Conservatives agreed, of course; but this was no mere ideological hobbyhorse. In a cover story in the October 15, 2001, issue of *Newsweek* bluntly titled "Why Do They Hate Us?" Fareed Zakaria located the answer in "the sense of humiliation, decline and despair that sweeps the Arab world." Zakaria specifically attributed the rise of Islamic fundamentalism to "the total failure of political institutions" in Arab society. Of course the United States had to wage remorseless war against Al Qaeda and kindred forces, Zakaria wrote, but it must also "help Islam enter the modern world."

This was an idea profoundly congenial to President Bush, for whom the war on terror had already taken on the proportions of an antinomian struggle between "freedom and fear, justice and cruelty." In the months after 9/11, Bush began raising the idea of promoting reform in the Middle East. The president, says Douglas Feith, the former undersecretary of defense for planning and a key architect of policy on the Middle East and Iraq, "thought at the grand level. He is a strategic thinker—high-level, conceptual, long-term and global. And the idea that a substantial part of the answer to the ideological problem in the war on terror is democracy is his idea." A senior White House official agrees that the

whole idea of democracy promotion "was driven by the president. He felt that we couldn't get to the bottom of this as long as we ignored the nature of these societies—that they were closed societies, they were unjust societies. There were plenty of discussions with the president about individual countries—Egypt, the former Soviet states and so on."

Less than a year earlier, of course, Bush had been warning against the arrogance of imposing the American way on others. But Bush's sudden conversion to the cause of liberty did not have the feel of mere expedience or of hypocrisy. If anything, the realism and restraint he had preached in the campaign seemed like a poor fit for his sunny and deeply moralistic nature; he had absorbed from Condoleezza Rice a doctrine that offered a satisfying critique of his opponent without necessarily fitting his own intuitive worldview. The president believed in transformation; he had, after all, abruptly reversed his own life trajectory. What's more, his politics were infused with an evangelical faith in America and the American way, a deep belief that people everywhere aspired to the American condition of freedom. The terrorist attacks may have reordered an incoherent world into a reassuringly clear alignment. Like Reagan before him, though far more dramatically, Bush experienced a Wilsonian conversion. Indeed, this most plainspoken and tongue-tied of presidents availed himself, apparently un-self-consciously, of the high diction and cadence of the Founding Fathers: "America, in this young century, proclaims liberty throughout the world, and to all the inhabitants thereof."

Rice's own conversion experience is harder to explain. As an academic and a policy-maker, she had a long-established reputation as a steely realist who scorned the idea that changes in a nation's internal political life would alter its diplomatic behavior. She was allergic to Reaganesque moralizing. "Like most Americans," she told an interviewer, "I listened with some skepticism to claims that America was 'a beacon of democracy.' When American presidents said that, I chalked it up to bad speechwriting and

hyperbole." As the Russia expert for Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser to the elder George Bush, she had distinguished herself by being yet more hard-boiled than her colleagues. One State Department official who worked with her closely recalls, "She tended to be more dismissive of non-state-centered things like the environment. I suspect that some of it was, as an African American woman in the security field she needed to demonstrate that she was hard and tough and understood power politics."

There was something almost atavistic about Rice's worldview; she seemed to be a throwback to the realpolitik of Henry Kissinger. And yet, as a liberal Stanford colleague observes, Rice "always had a belief in American power as a force for good." She was acutely conscious of her own life journey as a black girl who had grown up in racist Birmingham, Alabama; who had absorbed from her parents the lesson that "the only limits to our aspirations came from within"; and who had reached heights that few blacks, or few women, had attained. In congressional testimony she gave in the course of being confirmed as secretary of state in 2005, she spoke of her own life as "a story of the triumph of universal values over adversity"—a moral that the far earthier Colin Powell, for example, would never have thought to draw. Those values, she went on, offer "a source of hope to men and women across the globe who cherish freedom and work to advance freedom's cause." Rice, like Bush, was a deeply religious figure; and this evangelical mode of speaking appears to have come as naturally to her as did her bleak dismissal of humanitarianism. It may be, of course, that only someone who had not fully explored her own thoughts could be equally comfortable in both of those modes.

Nor was it only personal experience that led Rice to see American power as a force for good. During the two years she had spent in the George H. W. Bush National Security Council, she had watched the cold war come to a close in a far more benign and peaceful fashion than anyone could have imagined. She had seen the unambiguous triumph of America, and of American values. She had played a role in the reunification of Germany. And according to the memory of Daniel Fried, the State Department desk officer for Poland, she had been receptive, as others had not, to the momentous sense that "history is open."

By September 2001, Rice "was juggling a number of ideas that weren't even consistent with one another," says Philip Zelikow, a colleague from the first Bush administration, a fellow academic, and a friend to whom she would frequently turn in the years to come. "She came in with a legacy view of a classic international system that was already coexisting uneasily with a lot of ideas about how the system has changed." Rice herself says that from the time she took office she had been thinking about ways to "rebuild a consensus about foreign policy." In July 2001, at the summit of the world's eight industrialized nations in Genoa, she met with Bono, the lead singer of U2, who had just created a new organization to lobby for increased aid to Africa. Bono suggested a plan his aides had been designing to direct funds to a small number of highly impoverished but well-governed countries. The program might well have fallen to the bottom of the pile; but the terrorist attacks had created an urgent demand for new tools of statecraft. And with a major UN conference on financing development in the third world scheduled for January, President Bush needed a "deliverable." Working frantically, Rice's staff and Bono's policy aides hammered together the Millennium Challenge Account, the first major innovation on foreign aid since Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.

The MCA was a startling departure from GOP orthodoxy. Generations of Republicans had denounced foreign aid as a preposterous waste of money. The critical insight behind the MCA was that while the corrupt and despotic regimes to which we had often given aid in the past did, in fact, squander the funds, that money could be used far more effectively in better-governed countries. More than that, aid could encourage good governance. Recipients would become eligible for MCA grants based on their

performance on a range of indicators, including civil liberties, political rights, rule of law, and control of corruption; expenditures on health and education; fiscal and trade policy; and natural resource management. No less important, it would be the recipient countries themselves who identified projects to be funded and then carried out the programs, with consultation and oversight from Washington.

President Bush (along with Bono) was able to announce the MCA prior to the conference in Monterrey, Mexico. He vowed that the Millennium Challenge Corporation, as the organization was to be called, would be disbursing $5 billion by its third year—the largest single increase in American development assistance in years. But once the announcement was made, the entire project disappeared into dark bureaucratic byways. Only after two years was the MCC even chartered. It took more time before the organization was prepared to actually award grants. The delay, in turn, gave Congress all the rationale it needed to authorize less money than the White House requested; in no year did the sum appropriated reach $2 billion, much less the advertised $5 billion.

The Bush administration was scarcely alone in thinking about the connection between the failures of development and the kind of political failures that lead to terrorism. In mid-2002, the UN Development Programme produced a document that dramatized those failures as never before. The Arab Human Development Report, part of a regular series of studies on regional development produced by UNDP, astonished readers with its blunt and unforgiving analysis; the fact that it was produced by leading Arab academics made it impossible to impeach on grounds of Western bias or neocolonialism. Arab states, the authors argued, suffered from a "freedom deficit," a "women's empowerment deficit," and a "human capabilities/knowledge deficit." The Arab world scored dismally on indexes measuring all three of these attributes. The authors observed that the "wave of democracy" that had swept over much of the developing world in the 1980s and

'90s had "barely reached the Arab States." And they insisted, crucially, that education, political freedom, and economic development were linked in a tight nexus: "Human development, by enhancing human capabilities, creates the ability to exercise freedom, and human rights, by providing the necessary framework, create the opportunities to exercise it. Freedom is the guarantor and the goal of both human development and human rights."

Colin Powell, who was in any case no theoretician, would never have said that realism died on 9/11, but he did believe that the Arab world needed "reform," and the Arab Human Development Report made that proposition inescapable. Under Powell's direction, the State Department developed a new aid program to address the deficits the UNDP report had identified. The Middle East Partnership Initiative, unveiled in December 2002, was designed to provide short-term grants to encourage political, economic, and educational reform and women's empowerment. Some portion of the funds, including those for explicitly political activities such as party-building, would go directly to the Arab world's nascent civil-society groups. This was itself a serious departure, since traditional development assistance went straight into the coffers of the state and was designed to strengthen the state's capacity. The Arab Human Development Report had criticized Arab governments for stifling all forms of citizen initiative, concluding that most treated relations with NGOs as "a zero-sum game." MEPI was something genuinely new; but it was also something modest. At a time when the U.S. Agency for International Development was spending more than $600 million a year in Egypt alone, MEPI never disbursed more than $100 million throughout the Middle East.

The terrorist attacks had forced administration policy-makers to think about how they could reach the insides of states. But they had also forced the president and his team to think about how they could shape the way people thought about the United States—above all, people in the part of the world where anger at

the United States translated into acts of violence. For President Bush, who had never traveled when young, who had maintained a scrupulous ignorance of the world beyond our borders, the very fact that the United States was hated was well-nigh incomprehensible. In a prime-time press conference held one month after 9/11, he said, "I'm amazed that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about, that people would hate us . . . Like most Americans, I just can't believe it. Because I know how good we are, and we've got to do a better job of making our case." And so if one answer to "Why do they hate us?" pointed to the "democracy deficit" of the Arab world, another pointed to a marketing deficit on our part: too many people didn't know the truth of America.

The art of shaping the way people abroad think about you is known as public diplomacy. During the cold war, the United States spent billions promoting our image and ideals, in both open and clandestine ways, on both sides of the iron curtain. But when the cold war ended, so, it seemed, did the need to shape public opinion. In the 1980s and '90s, according to the 2003 Djerejian Report, named after its chairman, Edward Djerejian, a veteran Middle East diplomat, staffing for public diplomacy programs in the Arab and Muslim world fell by a third, and funding by a quarter. Only fifty-four officials in the entire State Department spoke fluent Arabic. Programs to bring future leaders to the United States had been all but eliminated, as had the widely appreciated American Studies centers. Actual spending on diplomatic outreach in the Arab world—as opposed to exchange programs or administrative overhead—came to a grand total of $25 million. This "process of unilateral disarmament in the weapons of advocacy over the last decade," the authors concluded, "has contributed to widespread hostility toward Americans and left us vulnerable to lethal threats to our interests and our safety."

Actually, it was impossible to prove that the hostility was a consequence of the unilateral disarmament. If Arabs hated us because they were enraged at their own repressive regimes, and because those regimes were all too happy to redirect that public frustration at the United States (and Israel), then no amount of advocacy would avail. And if it was our policies Arabs hated, then we would have to change those policies to alleviate the hostility. Indeed, the authors of the report pointedly observed that "surveys show much of the resentment toward America stems from our policies." But policy lay beyond the report's mandate.

For President Bush, rethinking American policy in the Middle East in order to cool the rage of the Arab street would have amounted to appeasement. Public diplomacy post-9/11 thus meant selling America. Scant weeks after the attacks, the administration created the new post of undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, and hired as its first occupant Charlotte Beers, a celebrated advertising executive who had successfully marketed such brands as Uncle Ben's Rice and Head & Shoulders shampoo. For Beers, who had no prior experience in the Middle East, America was a uniquely powerful brand that was poorly understood in its target markets. In testimony before Congress a week after taking over, she explained that "the burden is now on us to act as though no one has ever understood the identity of the United States, and redefine it for audiences who are at best cynical." She was making sure that our embassies received copies of articles showing America's compassionate treatment of its Muslim population; she was striving to infuse official communiqués with the kind of emotional resonance that advertisers use to reach potential customers.

By mid-2002, Beers had come to understand that the American brand faced far more formidable resistance than her favorite shampoo had. In a speech in May, she described meeting a teacher in an Arab capital—"she's a composite, but she's real"—who had said that her students flatly refused to believe that Islamic fundamentalists had flown planes into the World Trade Center, though they had seen a videotaped statement made by

one of the bombers before he died. "They refused to hear," Beers concluded. "It's a painful reality that we have to come to grips with every day. It's not what you say, it's what you hear—what they can hear, what they can take in, what's allowable." Beers was noticeably more rueful than she had been before. She was, she said, uncomfortable with the expression "winning hearts and minds." "I know it's intended to sound positive," she said, "but we need a more modest and substantive goal, which would be just to create a dialogue, to engage in a productive debate that allows anger and frustration and disagreements, but not hate—hate that's used to justify the killing of innocents."

But Beers felt that she had found a solution to the problem of willful deafness. The most powerful weapon in her quiver, she said, were exchange programs that let people see America for themselves. But how to reach the millions who would never leave home? That, Beers explained, was a "modern marketing question that we know something about." The trick was to listen to the audience, to empathize with it, to speak from its point of view. Muslims abroad believed that America was a corrupt and impious land. Beers had, in response, begun working on a set of TV spots called "Muslim Life in America," in which American Muslims would discuss the tolerance and respect for faith of their adopted home.

The Shared Values campaign, as it was known, debuted in late 2002 during the monthlong holiday of Ramadan, when television viewing is typically heavy. The brief segments featured Muslims who worked as paramedics or scientists or teachers talking about their lives and extolling America's religious tolerance and diversity. Beers said that 288 million people saw these messages two to three times during the month. Follow-up research in Indonesia had found excellent recall and "message retention." Perhaps that was so; but the elite response, and the state response, drowned out the popular one. Governments in

Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, where television was largely state-run, refused to air the programs at all. And Arab commentators generally condemned the exercise as crude and condescending counterpropaganda. The spots were pulled.

By early 2003, when the war in Iraq was drawing near, Beers had been thoroughly defeated. In late February, she told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that in the Islamic world, "millions of ordinary people . . . have gravely distorted but carefully cultivated images of us—images so negative, so weird, so hostile that I can assure you a young generation of terrorists is being created." The following week, the sixty-eight-year-old ad maestro resigned for "health reasons." An anonymous administration official was quoted as saying that they had waited for the negative fallout from Shared Values to subside so that Beers could be afforded "an honorable exit." It's tempting to say that Beers had failed because she mistook public diplomacy for advertising. But public diplomacy *is* a species of advertising. Beers failed because, as she herself seemed to recognize, the problem she had been asked to solve lay beyond the reach of public diplomacy. The issue, in many ways, was the pathology of the Arab world, which expressed itself in unreasoning contempt for the United States, and which was, in turn, compounded by American behavior and policies.

Charlotte Beers stepped down on March 4, 2003. The war in Iraq began two weeks later. The job of explaining the ways of America to the Islamic world, and of encouraging the spread of democracy there, was about to become vastly more difficult.

President Bush began using new language in the months after 9/11, but the word *democracy* was not a major part of his lexicon. In his 2002 State of the Union address—the one in which he decried a new "axis of evil"—Bush pledged his nation to support

"the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice, and religious tolerance." This came pretty close to a description of democracy, but it could also be understood (at least if you left aside "free speech") as accepting the distinction made by Zakaria and others between liberalism and democracy. That, says Philip Zelikow, was no coincidence. "The consensus," he says, "was in favor of limited government that respected human dignity." Rice had tasked Zelikow with writing the administration's new national security strategy, and the document (which appeared only in September 2002) echoes the language of the State of the Union speech. It includes the sentiment that the nonnegotiable demands "can be met in many ways," depending on local traditions of governance.

This cautious agnosticism about political forms appears to have lasted until the middle of 2002, when President Bush formulated a long-awaited policy toward Middle East peace. The Bush administration collectively viewed President Clinton's melodramatic efforts to forge agreement between Israel and Palestine as the perfect example of grandstanding and presidential overreaching. Bush was not about to push Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon to make concessions. Along with Cheney and Rumsfeld, he had come to view Yasir Arafat, the Palestinian chieftain, as a "terrorist leader" who should not be courted or even engaged. But after returning from a swing through the Middle East in April 2002, Colin Powell concluded that the administration had to restart the peace process, if only to bolster its standing in the Middle East; he urged the president to call for a regional peace conference. Over the next several months, the administration was convulsed by internal debate. James Mann reports in *The Rise of the Vulcans* that the text for the speech Bush was to deliver on June 24 went through "at least twenty-eight drafts."

But the debate had three sides, not two. Rice, who viewed Middle East peace negotiations as quicksand that the president must at all costs avoid, had come to see Palestine as a test case of the new doctrine of internal reform. Philip Zelikow points out that Rice, the convert from hardheaded realism, did not share his own cautionary preference for limited government, but embraced "a positive vision of democracy as appropriate." Along with the administration's leading neoconservatives, Rice pushed for a new grand strategy offering the possibility of statehood for Palestine in exchange for democratic reform. The idea was in the air. A few weeks before the president was to give the speech, Natan Sharansky, the Israeli leader and former Soviet dissident, had proposed a new Palestinian administration, "which would be chosen by a coordinating body headed by the United States," to rule over the territories for "at least three years" while democratic institutions were taking form. Then, when they were deemed ready, the Palestinians would be permitted to hold elections and choose a government that would negotiate peace with Israel. Sharansky had laid out this vision at a retreat held by the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Beaver Creek, Colorado; the next day, he writes, he spoke for more than ninety minutes with Vice President Cheney, who was also attending the event. Soon afterward, he explained the idea to Rice, whom he found receptive.

Here was a bold, affirmative policy rather than the merely negative one of refusing to act until the Palestinians got rid of Arafat. Rumsfeld and Cheney, quite comfortable with the negative policy, opposed the statehood-for-democracy transaction. But the president, always attracted to the dramatic gesture, came down on Rice's side. In his speech, Bush said nothing about a peace conference; instead, he spoke directly to the Palestinian people. "If Palestinians embrace democracy, confront corruption and firmly reject terror," he declared, "they can count on American support for the creation of a provisional state of Palestine." Bush cast this prospect in epochal terms: "If liberty can blossom in the rocky soil of the West Bank and Gaza, it will inspire millions of men and women around the globe who are equally weary

of poverty and oppression, and equally entitled to the benefits of democratic government." Bush never mentioned the word *Iraq*, but the administration had already begun its planning for a war to overthrow Saddam Hussein, and the dream of churning up a tidal wave of freedom in the Middle East would soon become a fixed element of his rhetoric. Perhaps the wave would begin in Ramallah and Gaza.

The offer, however, fell on deaf ears—as Powell and others must have imagined it would. The problem was not that the Palestinian people didn't hunger for an honest and democratic state—they did. But they were not a captive people looking to the West for rescue, like Poland or Czechoslovakia in the 1980s. Whatever they felt about their own leadership, the Palestinians believed deeply in the rightness of their struggle against Israel, loathed the government of Ariel Sharon, and profoundly distrusted the Americans. Why would they renounce that struggle when nothing remotely reciprocal was being asked of Israel? Here was an early-warning sign about the blithe hopes of making freedom bloom in the rocky soil of the Middle East—and about the president's own cast of mind. Bush had not reached his new set of convictions about democracy after fighting his way clear of old convictions or the lessons of old experience. He had switched from one view to something like its opposite without passing through any of the intermediate stages. The president had little sense of the rough terrain that lay beneath his splendid words, and thus of what it would mean for the United States not only to proclaim liberty but to somehow help it come to pass.

The United States did not go to war in Iraq in order to democratize the Middle East. Virtually all accounts agree that George Bush and his closest aides considered Saddam Hussein an intolerable threat to the region, and ultimately to the West. Conservatives had been making this case since the middle of the 1990s;

in 1997, *The Weekly Standard* had declared, "Saddam Must Go." The Clinton administration's national security team had entertained little doubt that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, and that he had been rebuilding his weapons program under the nose of UN inspectors. "Regime change" was the official policy of both the Clinton and Blair administrations. And 9/11 only made those concerns more urgent—though the Bush administration insisted on fortifying the case by connecting nonexistent dots between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. Finally, the administration's volley of threats in late 2002 and early 2003, and Saddam's intransigent responses, established a logic of its own. According to Bob Woodward in *Plan of Attack*, an account of the months after 9/11, both Bush and Rice focused on the danger of letting Saddam flout the will of the international community. Rice is quoted as telling the president in late 2002, "To let this threat in this part of the world play volleyball with the international community this way will come back to haunt us someday. That is the reason to do it."

Maybe that was the reason to do it—that, and the wish to reassert America's potency, to fight a new kind of war with a new kind of army, to ensure a steady supply of oil, to defend Israel, to banish the ghosts of a father who had failed to "finish the job." But a democratic transformation of the Middle East, if not the war's underlying motive, was certainly understood to be its great consequence. The administration's chief intellectual supporters, including Fouad Ajami, William Kristol, and Charles Krauthammer, made this case. The neoconservatives inside the administration, such as Paul Wolfowitz and Elliot Abrams, made this case. And, most important, the president himself embraced the transformative vision.

Three weeks before the invasion of Baghdad, President Bush delineated his new philosophy of democracy promotion in the Middle East in a speech before the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "There was a time," Bush asserted, "when many

said that the cultures of Germany and Japan were incapable of sustaining democratic values. Well, they were wrong. Some say the same of Iraq today. They are mistaken. The nation of Iraq—with its proud heritage, abundant resources and skilled and educated people—is fully capable of moving toward democracy and living in freedom." Bush went on to repeat one of Bill Clinton's favorite nostrums: "The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values, because stable and free nations do not breed the ideologies of murder." Therefore, he declared, "A new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region." Bush seemed to have concluded that the chain reaction of freedom which he had hoped to set off in the West Bank would begin instead in Baghdad.

It was a powerful vision; but what was the reality it was based on? Even some democracy experts inside the administration viewed Iraq as a very stony field for the seeding of democracy. Iraq lay at the heart of a region that had no experience of democracy and almost none of liberal rule. These countries, as the Arab Human Development Report had made all too clear, lacked a civil society, a rule-of-law tradition, elementary political freedoms, an active middle class, and many of the other features correlated with democracy. And of all the Arab nations, Iraq had the most brutal history of repression. Moreover, its "proud heritage" was an authoritarian one, its resources had been exhausted by years of warfare and sanctions, and its skilled and educated workforce had been idle for years. The president had grandly declared: "It is presumptuous and insulting to suggest that a whole region of the world—or the one-fifth of humanity that is Muslim—is somehow untouched by the most basic aspirations of life." But even critics of the "clash of civilizations" theory agreed that democracy was likelier to grow in some places than others.

In October 2002, soon after Bush had begun talking about war in Iraq, four scholars at the Carnegie Endowment—including Thomas Carothers—published a paper speculating

that while overthrowing Saddam might prove easy enough, "democracy will not soon be forthcoming." First, they observed, prior experience in nations such as Haiti, Panama, and Afghanistan was scarcely encouraging. "Like Afghanistan," they went on, "Iraq is a country torn by profound ideological, religious and ethnic conflicts." The United States would have to reconcile Sunni, Shia, and Kurd, and then hold the state together until legitimate indigenous leadership arose. "In short," they concluded, "the United States would have to engage in nation-building on a scale that would dwarf any other such effort since the reconstruction of Germany and Japan after World War II." They also poured cold water on hopes for a democratic "tsunami" originating in Iraq. "For example," they wrote, "an invasion would very likely intensify the anti-Americanism already surging around the region, strengthening the hand of hard-line forces." What's more, "many Arabs, rather than looking to Iraq as a model, would focus on the fact that Iraq was 'liberated' through Western intervention, not by a popular Iraqi movement." If the Bush administration really wanted to democratize the Middle East, they concluded, "the goals must be initially modest, and the commitment to change long-term."

The problem was not only that Bush, Rice, and others believed that they could use the invasion of Iraq to spread democracy across the region, but rather that they undertook this stupendous adventure so blithely. The year before, they had prepared to overthrow the Taliban government in Afghanistan while virtually leaving the country's postwar status to the whim of fortune. According to *Bush at War*, three days before hostilities began, Rice and Paul Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld's top aide, had suggested seeking contributions from other nations to reconstruct Afghanistan after the war. When the president asked, "Who will run the country?" his national security adviser had no idea: Rice, Woodward writes, had thought, "We should have addressed that." At a press conference the following week, Bush had suggested that "it would be a useful function for the United Nations to take over

the so-called 'nation-building' . . . after our mission is complete." The president apparently could not even bring himself to use the term without calling it into question.

In Iraq, unlike in Afghanistan, the administration had the time to prepare for the postwar effort. And this time, also unlike in Afghanistan, the United States would step in as sovereign until the Iraqis were ready to take over. But what form would that rule take? Planners in the State Department spent months assembling a vast body of material in what came to be known as the Future of Iraq Project. Yet after the kind of bruising interagency battle that had become routine in the Bush administration, the Pentagon, rather than State, won the job of running postwar Iraq. No one in the administration was more hostile to peacekeeping and nation-building, or more indifferent to the promotion of democracy, than Donald Rumsfeld. The defense secretary had tried to eliminate the Pentagon's Office of Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Affairs, established under Bill Clinton. In May 2002, with the postwar effort in Afghanistan just getting under way, Rumsfeld had ordered the Army War College to shut down its Peacekeeping Institute, another unwanted reminder of the Clinton years.

Rumsfeld had viewed postwar Afghanistan as a boondoggle from which the United States should extricate itself as rapidly as possible. And in late 2002 and early 2003, as he thought (or chose not to think) about the question of postwar Iraq, Rumsfeld looked upon Afghanistan, then being touted as a smashing success, as a counter-paradigm to the Clintonian principles of peacekeeping and nation-building. In mid-February, barely a month before the invasion of Iraq, Rumsfeld gave a speech in New York in which he extolled the "light footprint" in Afghanistan, and criticized the nation-building exercises in Kosovo and East Timor for distorting local economies and creating a culture of dependency. The defense secretary vowed that the lessons of Afghanistan would be applied to "post-Saddam Iraq." And he proceeded to dispose of the Future of Iraq Project, and to ignore the studies by experts in postwar reconstruction drawn up by virtually every national security–related think tank in Washington.

Defenders of Bush and Rice have come to view Donald Rumsfeld as a kind of rogue element in the administration. Philip Zelikow insists that "the president accepted the nation-building requirement for Iraq; that's the policy that the president believed he approved." But there is little if any evidence that either Bush or Rice tried to ensure that any such policy was carried out, or even that either had come to terms with the burden they were about to shoulder. As one former Rice aide puts it, "For eight years"—the Clinton era—"we heard, 'Nation-building—awful.'" President Bush's own views about postwar Iraq seemed to be based on an a priori faith in human nature, and on an analogy—to the democratization of Germany and Japan—that would be difficult for a person familiar with history to seriously entertain. But Rice herself made the same analogy, and also spoke of the democratic transformation of Eastern Europe that she had witnessed in the first Bush administration.

And so Donald Rumsfeld had his way. Jay Garner, the retired general chosen to head up the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs, a name chosen to indicate the narrowness of his ambit, was given seven weeks to prepare for postwar Iraq, though essentially the entire United States military had spent the previous six months preparing for the war itself. In *The Assassin's Gate*, George Packer describes Rumsfeld's spokesman, Larry DiRita, in Kuwait, addressing Garner's team as they prepared to head into Iraq behind advancing troops. DiRita vowed that the Pentagon would not make the hash that the State Department had in Bosnia and Kosovo. "We're going to stand up an interim Iraqi government," DiRita announced, "hand power over to them, and get out of there in three to four months."

Garner explained to people that he would rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, appoint an interim government, oversee a new consti-

tution and elections, and then go home by August—all this in a country where even the tiniest breath of political life had been snuffed out by Saddam. That, in any case, is the brief he had been handed. At a meeting in late April between Garner and 350 Iraqi leaders, according to Packer, a sheik asked, "Who's in charge of our politics?" And Garner said, "You're in charge"—a response that provoked "an audible gasp." State-building would be the responsibility of the indigenous people. Good luck.

Though the war in Iraq was not fought to replace a fascist leader with a democratic one, it would forever after define, and discredit, the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda. The war would stand as irrefutable proof that the president and his team of neocons believed that democracy was something that could be imposed at gunpoint, and thus that any other nation to which they proposed to bring this great benefit, especially one in the Middle East, could expect an equally terrifying treatment. That wasn't true, of course; but there was no way of establishing the truth in the face of this overwhelming, catastrophic reality.

6

Bringing Democracy into Disrepute

Two days after winning his bruising reelection battle, President Bush, relaxing at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, looked through the galleys of a new book that a friend had recommended. The title was *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror*, and the author was Natan Sharansky, a friend of the administration who had favored regime change in Iraq and democracy promotion in the Middle East. Sharansky shared the president's habit of thinking in grand terms. Unlike Jeane Kirkpatrick, who distinguished between "totalitarian" and "authoritarian" societies—and thus invited a certain moral nonchalance toward autocratic allies—Sharansky divided the world cleanly into two parts, with "fear societies" on one side and free ones on the other. It was, Sharansky argued, a terrible mistake to try to accommodate authoritarian states in the name of stability, as the realists had done with the Soviet Union—not only because such regimes responded to pressure rather than to blandishments, but because the stability so purchased was bound to be ephemeral. Autocrats manufacture external enemies to justify repression: "in order to avoid collapsing from within, fear societies must maintain a perpetual source of conflict." Classic realism was thus not only morally reprehensible but strategically self-defeating.

The United States, Sharansky wrote, had once understood

that repressive regimes had to be confronted head-on. Ronald Reagan, casting aside the conventional wisdom of détente, had "insisted that America use the advantage of a free society and a free market to win the Cold War." Had Reagan and others listened to the realists "who called them dangerous warmongers," Sharansky wrote, "hundreds of millions of people would still be living under totalitarian rule." Although most scholars and diplomats give Mikhail Gorbachev credit for recognizing that the Soviet Union was collapsing, and for ushering it to a more or less peaceful demise, Sharansky insisted that it was the combination of internal dissent and external pressure from outsiders, above all Reagan, that had brought the Soviet Union to its knees. He drew a sharp distinction between the heroic Reagan and the first President Bush, the latter determined to work with Gorbachev to preserve the Soviet Union and thus consign the Russian people to perpetual servitude.

And now, Sharansky asserted, "the free world continues to underestimate the universal appeal of its own ideas." "Freedom's skeptics" waved off the prospect of a democratic Middle East that President George W. Bush had conjured up in his speeches, and had sought to bring into being through the invasion of Iraq. In fact, Sharansky asserted, the desire to live free from fear was universal. The tyrannical regimes of the Middle East had tried to distract their citizens by blaming everything on the machinations of Israel and the West, but it wouldn't wash. And of course democracy was exportable: Look at what the United States had accomplished in Germany and Japan, and look at what Reagan and other resolute statesmen had accomplished by conditioning relations with the Soviet Union on internal reform. The moral was clear: "The nations of the free world can promote democracy by linking their foreign policies toward non-democratic regimes to how those regimes treat their subjects." The Soviet Union had bent under pressure; so would Arab regimes. And just as Soviet dissidents had taken heart from the knowledge that, if they were

punished or imprisoned, "the free world would stand by our side," so would Arab democrats. Sharansky was calling on the West to do for democracy what Jimmy Carter had done for human rights—but to do so with much greater singleness of purpose.

In *The Case for Democracy*, history and culture melt away before the universal hunger for freedom. Sharansky seemed to take it for granted that Arab citizens despised their governments, valued political liberties, and looked to the West for intervention to the same degree and in the same way as Russians or Poles did. Perhaps that explains why he had also believed that the Palestinians would accept a three-year tutelage from American governors, and then accept an American- and Israeli-imposed solution that offered no recognition of their claims to Israeli territory or to the right of return.

Bush was so impressed with what he read that a week later he met with Sharansky in the Oval Office. "Mr. President," his visitor said, "you are a real dissident." As this was a term Bush had probably not heard applied to him before, Sharansky explained what he meant: "You really believe that Arabs can live in freedom. People criticize you for this. They call you naïve. But you stick to the idea of bringing democracy to the Middle East even when it is unpopular . . . That is the mark of a dissident." One can only imagine the power of such a blessing, conferred by a man like Natan Sharansky upon a man like George W. Bush. The president had an a priori belief in freedom, but Sharansky was a martyr to the cause. Bush relished confounding the policy elites, and Sharansky had recast the debate over democracy promotion as a tale of St. George and the dragon. Bush was forever trying on the mighty cloak of Ronald Reagan, seeking to fill its dimensions. And the opportunity to break cleanly with the habitual caution of his father—well, one can only speculate. Several weeks later, Bush told his chief speechwriter, Michael J. Gerson, that he wanted to make democracy promotion the centerpiece of his second inaugural address.

Sharansky was scarcely the only influence on Bush's thinking. Bush and Condi Rice, who was to replace Colin Powell as secretary of state, had been talking about the need for bold new policy in the Middle East. And events themselves were confirming Bush's faith that the arc of history moved toward freedom. In late January, the Iraqi people were to hold the first democratic ballot in their history, which the president saw as the supreme affirmation of his decision to overthrow Saddam. A few months earlier, Rafik Hariri, the popular prime minister of Lebanon, had sparked protest by resigning rather than submitting to Syrian dominion. And in early December, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens had taken to the streets rather than accept the transparently fraudulent results of the presidential election. On January 10, two weeks before the inaugural, Bush's speechwriters and communications aides met with a group of conservative foreign policy thinkers to work out the speech's larger themes. The Yale historian John Lewis Gaddis, author of the recent pro–Iraq war volume *Surprise, Security and the American Experience*, proposed that Bush "throw an anchor into the future" by vowing to end tyranny by some specific date in the future. Michael J. Gerson later recalled that he was intrigued by such a "bold, but limited" goal—as opposed, for example, to "the universal triumph of democracy."

In his first inaugural address, Bush had delivered a rather windy sermon on the virtues of civility, compassion, courage, and personal responsibility. The terrorist attacks had given the president a clear and commanding sense of his role; and now, in the rolling cadences supplied by Gerson, he laid out the Freedom Agenda. "For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny," the president said, "violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the

decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom. We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands."

Even presidents as skeptical of grand formulations as Bush's own father had used the inaugural address to speak of America's democratizing mission. But in most cases, it had just been rhetoric. Not here. Bush 43 proceeded to lay out a policy of transformation breathtaking in its scope. "It is," he declared, "the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." The president was, in effect, endorsing the Sharansky Doctrine. "We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation," he went on. "We will encourage reform in other governments by making clear that success in our relations will require the decent treatment of their own people." The president concluded, as was very much his wont, with an evocation of transcendent forces: "History has an ebb and flow of justice, but history also has a visible direction, set by liberty and the Author of Liberty."

Whatever restraint had once tethered the president to the modest goal of "limited government" was long gone. Some of the less zealous officials in the administration were boggled by the sheer ambition of the speech. Michael Gerson writes, perhaps a bit defensively, that while "in some ways, the President's second inaugural was radical," he was saying nothing more or less than President Kennedy had when he asserted that "the 'magic power' on our side is the desire of every person to be free," or than Ronald Reagan had in his address to Westminster, or than FDR or Truman had before them. This president, like those, Gerson writes, believed that the United States benefits in the long run from "the growth of a liberal international order." There is, of course, a world of difference between positing that democracy or a liberal international order will triumph in the long run and vow-

ing to produce such an outcome in real time. And as Stephen Krasner, then the State Department head of policy planning, observes, no matter how often Rice or Bush noted that democratization was the work of generations, "the body language was always, we can go in and do this in a relatively easy way."

Democrats and liberals criticized the speech as the reckless vision of a president increasingly unmoored from reality. But so, strikingly, did many traditional conservatives. It was in many ways a watershed moment for a class of Republicans who equated conservatism with caution, and who shared Edmund Burke's sense that the noblest human designs tended to go awry, thanks to the limits of human wisdom and virtue. How could a conservative, especially one who not long before had promised to stop telling countries how to behave, proclaim a "policy" of "ending tyranny in the world"? Did he understand the difference between the desirable and the possible? Peggy Noonan, speechwriter for Bush 41, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that the president might as well have "announced we were going to colonize Mars." To others, Bush's sweeping universalism sounded like liberal piffle. George Will observed,"Everyone everywhere does not share 'our attachment to freedom,'" and tartly suggested that advocates of building democracy in the Middle East "remember an elementary principle of moral reasoning: there can be no duty to do that which cannot be done."

The spring of 2005 was a giddy time for democracy enthusiasts in Washington and elsewhere: The "color revolutions" were sweeping across Eastern Europe, while in the Middle East "the Arab spring" was blossoming. Only days after the president's speech the people of Iraq would ignore death threats to vote for a national leader; the purple-dyed index finger was to become, if briefly, the icon of a Middle East liberated from tyranny. The

White House was working closely with France, with which it had been at daggers drawn after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, to defend a fragile democracy in Lebanon against Syrian encroachment. President Bush and his team believed that the war in Iraq had truly provoked the long-awaited wave of democratization.

The bull's-eye in the White House's target of Arab reform was Egypt—the most populous and politically important country in the region, the historic heart of Arab culture and politics. We had friendly relations with the regime of President Hosni Mubarak, and the $2 billion we had been giving the country annually since the Camp David agreements in 1979 meant that we had substantial leverage there as well. Cairo did little without calculating the likely reaction from the White House. And while Mubarak was an authoritarian leader, Egypt, unlike Saudi Arabia, our other major Arab ally, was no theocracy. There were an obstreperous press, free-thinking intellectuals, a large class of secularized professionals, opposition parties, and a profoundly cherished history of constitutionalism. Real reform in Egypt thus didn't seem nearly as far-fetched a prospect as it did in Saudi Arabia, Syria, or Iran.

Efforts to push reform in Egypt had begun years before. State Department officials had established modest benchmarks of reform that the Mubarak administration had to hit in order to have its aid released. Mubarak had removed a number of old party figures from economic ministries and replaced them with young, more forward-looking technocrats. But he and the old guard retained total control on political matters. In early 2004, Bush invited the Egyptian leader to the ranch in Crawford, Texas—itself a signal honor. Bush hoped that he could nudge Mubarak to make real political concessions. At the press conference after their talks, Bush lavished praise on the Egyptian supremo for his love of peace, his staunch opposition to terrorism, and so forth, and then added, "Just as Egypt has shown the way toward peace in the Middle East, it will set the standard in the region for

democracy by strengthening democratic institutions and political participation." In private, Bush urged Mubarak to loosen the iron grip he kept on political debate and assembly.

Mubarak began ever so delicately opening the pressure valves that governed political expression. In March 2004, the regime permitted a group of intellectuals, diplomats, and businessmen to gather at the Alexandria Library and issue a declaration calling for increased freedom—though local observers were quick to note that the government had carefully vetted the group to exclude members of the opposition. And Egypt's feared and ubiquitous security apparatus, the Mukhabarat, relaxed its vigilance sufficiently to permit the kind of demonstrations heretofore almost unknown. In December 2004, the courts permitted a new political party, Al Ghad ("Tomorrow"), to register, normally a virtual impossibility under Egyptian law. The Arab Spring seemed to be dawning in Cairo. "It was getting toward the end of Mubarak's tenure," says Scott Carpenter, then an official in the State Department's Office of Near Eastern Affairs, "and we were hoping that he would be thinking about his legacy."

The Bush administration was determined to push hard on this half-open door. Several weeks after the inaugural speech, Bush called Mubarak to urge him to open up the political playing field, and to permit independent figures to monitor the election. The Egyptian press was astonished. One of the cheekier newspapers ran pictures of both men on the front page. Bush was quoted as saying, in Arabic, "Mr. President, we will not allow you to use the police to attack peaceful demonstrators." And Mubarak meekly answered, in English, "Yes, Mr. President." Soon afterward, Mubarak announced that he would call for an amendment to Article 76 of the Constitution, which limited presidential elections to a "yes" or "no" referendum on the incumbent. The decision was almost universally ascribed to White House pressure, though Mubarak clearly felt that he had to deal with rising demands for

political participation. It was not a good omen, Scott Carpenter thought, that Mubarak had kept the parliament in the dark, apparently to demonstrate the irrelevance of his own legislature.

The Mubarak regime was plainly nervous about the forces it had unleashed. In early March, the security forces arrested Al Ghad's charismatic young leader, Ayman Nour, and charged him with forging signatures on petitions. The allegation may have had some substance, but it was plainly meant to eliminate a potentially popular opponent. Condoleezza Rice responded by canceling an upcoming trip to Cairo, in which she was to discuss a free trade agreement that Egypt had been eagerly seeking. The regime was stunned; Washington had never before exacted any price for acts of domestic repression. But Mubarak had, in effect, tested the Bush administration's bona fides; as one State Department official says, "You cannot have that inaugural address on January twentieth and six weeks later the Secretary of State shows up in Egypt as if nothing had happened."

State Department officials applied pressure on other issues. Elizabeth Cheney, a senior official in the State Department's Near East Bureau and the vice president's daughter, pushed the regime to allow the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, the two chief democracy-promotion NGOs, to work in Egypt, chiefly to train election monitors and offer technical assistance to political parties. The Congress was also getting involved. Egypt had always insisted on control over the expenditure of the vast American aid package, a privilege granted to no other major recipient of development assistance. But in December 2004, Congress passed an amendment to the foreign aid bill stipulating that all funds spent on democracy promotion would be disbursed directly by the U.S. Agency for International Development. This was quite possibly a bitterer pill to swallow than the actual presence of the NGOs, and there were protracted negotiations over the oversight of the $25 million the

United States planned to spend. But Egyptian officials felt that they could not reject either demand; in May, the NDI and the IRI set up shop in Cairo.

Rice rescheduled her canceled trip to Egypt for mid-June. By this time the security situation had begun to darken. Private goons retained by the government had beaten up peaceful demonstrators, even tearing the clothes from some women—a shocking violation of Egyptian norms. The secretary of state arranged to meet with President Mubarak in the resort town of Sharm el-Sheik but insisted on adding a speech at the American University of Cairo. The speech had been crafted with enormous care by her counselor, Philip Zelikow, among others. Rice would later tell friends that this was the most important speech she had ever given. Mindful of Egyptian pride and sensitivity, she began by flattering her hosts' sense of historical greatness, citing the reformist nineteenth-century ruler Mohammad Ali, the liberal interval between the world wars, and the bravery of Anwar Sadat. Then she went on to speak of her own government with a candor few Egyptians were accustomed to hearing—about the United States or about their own country. "For sixty years," she said, "my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East—and we achieved neither. Now we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people."

Rice offered what had by now become the standard White House tableau of freedom on the march in the Middle East—in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Palestine, and so forth. And then she turned back to her hosts. "We are all concerned," she said, "when peaceful supporters of democracy—men and women—are not free from violence. The day must come when the rule of law replaces emergency decrees—and when the independent judiciary replaces arbitrary justice . . . Egypt's elections, including the parliamentary elections, must meet the objective standards that define every free election." This was genuinely startling language. No

high-ranking American official had ever admonished the regime so publicly. Bush had said that "success in our relations will require the decent treatment of their own people." Rice had just put Cairo on notice.

After the speech, Rice met with Ayman Nour, who had been released from jail pending trial, and one of Nour's chief lieutenants, Hisham Kassem, the founder and publisher of a respected new daily, *Egypt Today*. This, too, was a pointed statement to the regime. Rice spoke enthusiastically of reaching the Egyptian people with the message that America stood with their aspirations. "Not on your watch," Kassem recalls saying. "It's a lost cause trying to shift public opinion." Public opinion was, in fact, sharply split over Rice's democratic call to arms; leftists and nationalists denounced the speech as a new front in the Bush administration's campaign for regional domination. But others, including Kassem, were far more receptive. Strange though it seemed, the Bush administration could be simultaneously despised for its policies and welcomed for its democratic advocacy.

The three-week presidential election, terminating in early September, produced the expected landslide victory for Mubarak, at least given the state's near-total control over the media and its vastly superior funding. But in the first round of the parliamentary elections, held two months later, the candidates of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, running as independents, did far better than the regime had ever imagined; in the next two rounds, the state security apparatus and its shadowy crew of hired thugs beat up and terrorized Brotherhood voters, shut down polling places, and instigated riots in which a dozen or so Brotherhood supporters died. The ballot was denounced by Egyptian election monitors and foreign groups. Immediately after the results were announced, the White House was silent, while the State Department issued a statement noting that it had found "no indication that the Egyptian government isn't interested in having peaceful, free and fair elections." This bland expression of see-no-evil pro-

voked such uproar that it had to be amended: the spokesman now declared that officials had "serious concerns about the path of political reform in Egypt."

Rice had put Mubarak on notice; and then Mubarak had called her bluff. One American diplomat in the region insists that there was little choice in the matter: "We can stand up on a soapbox any day of the week and complain about the way things are going in Egypt. But when we do, we play into the hands of the state, which would incite its own people against an outside power which otherwise would be seen as a friend and benefactor." But if that's so, then why had Rice issued her bold proclamation? "It trapped us," said Stephen Krasner. "We pushed for something we couldn't get." Perhaps Rice, and the White House, had gotten caught up in the euphoria of the moment, or had been hypnotized by their own rhetoric. "Did anyone think about the consequences?" asks Scott Carpenter. "What were you prepared to do if? If this, that? No. We believed in our own backbone."

American ambassador Frank Ricciardone, an Arabist and a professional diplomat, declined to issue a statement criticizing the elections, nor to privately read the riot act to Mubarak and his team. But White House officials were also afraid to threaten Mubarak with restrictions on the aid package, or with a future renegotiation of the terms. They worried that Mubarak would walk away, that he would incite his people against us, that we would damage our very substantial interests in the Middle East. Mubarak was, in this regard, little different from the cold war dictators whom we had once felt we had no choice but to support—even though Rice had announced that sixty years of such policies had proved self-defeating.

The Arab Spring had proved to be very brief—and perhaps illusory. By the end of 2005, the euphoria of the purple index finger in Iraq had faded to a dim memory. The sovereign Iraqi government barely functioned. Rather than stemming Iraq's terrifying violence, the election had, if anything, deepened sectarian

rivalry by installing the Shias in power. Iraq was not progressing toward democracy by any recognizable standard. Between the fear that Iraqi violence could spill into the region, and the growing truculence of Iran over attempts to curb its nuclear program, the Middle East looked more and more like a zone of danger, and less like one of hope and possibility. Fearing a Shia tide rolling in from Tehran, from the Iraqi government in Baghdad, and from the forces of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Bush administration came to rely increasingly on moderate Sunni states—moderate, that is, in their regional policy—such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. We needed them; and this meant, as Mubarak and others understood very clearly, that we would be prepared once again to trade democracy for stability.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration's bid to forge a democratic Palestine moved toward a denouement. After Yasir Arafat died at the end of 2004, Bush threw his support behind Arafat's successor, the moderate Mahmoud Abbas. Rice began pressing Abbas to consolidate and legitimize the authority of his Fatah party by holding elections. Both Abbas and leading Israeli officials had warned that Fatah had lost so much of its support that it might lose to Hamas, the militant Islamic group; but the administration insisted on forging ahead.

Hamas defeated Fatah by a sizable margin. Philip Zelikow, who played a key advisory role in Middle East policy, insists that he and his colleagues were well aware of the dangers. "We thought about it and argued about it, and concluded that they needed to go ahead with the elections," he recalls. "If you postpone the elections you don't solve the problem, and you completely delegitimize Fatah." But outsiders like Dennis Ross, President Clinton's chief Middle East negotiator, were struck by the blitheness of White House and State Department officials. And Rice later admitted to an interviewer that she was so shocked by the news that she climbed off her elliptical trainer to call her aides. Told that Hamas had in fact outpolled Fatah,

she said to herself, "Oh my goodness, Hamas won?" This was scarcely what she had imagined in 2002 when she took on both Colin Powell and Dick Cheney to argue for democracy promotion in the Palestinian Territories.

The Hamas victory, a State Department official says, "clarified many, many areas." First, it showed that Rice and Bush had been naïve to imagine that free and fair elections in the Middle East would bring democratic figures to the fore, as they had in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The analogy was wrong—as more knowledgeable and dispassionate figures had been saying all along. Rice seemed not to have come to grips with the fact that elections could have bad outcomes. As Dennis Ross says, "She does have kind of a view that elections are a built-in self-correcting mechanism. You may bring in people you don't like, but accountability will bring changes over time." That certainly wasn't true here: the White House was not about to do business with an organization that openly avowed terrorism. The Bush administration, along with its European allies, took the position that it would not recognize the new government unless Hamas renounced the use of violence—which of course it would not do.

The Palestinian election also cast a harsh retrospective light on the Egyptian one. Hamas was the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In both cases, an election had bolstered Islamists at the expense of secular parties. The Brotherhood confined itself to democratic methods, though it stoutly supported Hamas policies in the occupied territories. In her Cairo speech, Rice had specifically ruled out support for the Islamists, formally a banned organization. But there had been, according to Stephen Krasner, little if any discussion about how to deal with the consequences of electoral gains by the Brotherhood. The administration seems to have been taken by surprise in this case as well.

The realists, and the State Department Arabists, had been vindicated. We had demanded a democratic opening—and wound up emboldening our enemies. And the outcome had been a gift to

dictators like Mubarak, who offered themselves as the only bulwark against radical Islam. The message of the events was, stick by your friends. Michael Gerson, one of the chief apostles of democracy promotion in the White House, writes that he protested the decision to go easy on Mubarak, but "with little effect." Gerson bitterly complains that career diplomats in the State Department—figures like Ambassador Ricciardone, no doubt—ensnared efforts to raise human rights and democracy concerns all over the globe "in a thousand sticky strands of objections and cautions."

In Washington, democracy promotion began to look like another species of neoconservative delusion. "After the Hamas election," says Scott Carpenter, "I felt that the chill was on. Rice and Bush were still committed to the idea. But for those who were implementing the policy, it became much more difficult."

A nation that does not hold itself to democratic standards can no more serve as a force for the propagation of democracy than a parent with an unacknowledged drinking problem can lecture his children on the evils of alcohol. Yet the Bush administration increasingly found itself in this position after the publication in late April 2004 of photographs of horrific abuse in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. President Bush blamed the problem on a small group of rogue soldiers. But it quickly became clear that prisoners in American custody elsewhere were being systematically abused, humiliated, and even tortured, and that the mistreatment was a direct consequence of decisions made at the highest levels of the White House—very much including the president himself, who had signed an executive order exempting enemy combatants captured on the battlefield from the terms of the Geneva Conventions.

We now know, of course, that the same White House that had vowed that "success in our relations" with other governments

"will require the decent treatment of their own people" had secretly formulated and approved a series of legal opinions giving the president unprecedented powers over the conduct of the war; authorizing the CIA to engage in interrogation tactics not permitted by the U.S. Army manual; and establishing the practice known as "rendition," in which individuals suspected of terrorist ties could be apprehended abroad—kidnapped, in some cases—and then secretly sent to a third country, often one where torture was routine. The administration had also established a prison on Guantánamo Bay, technically outside of American territory and thus arguably beyond the reach of American law, and there incarcerated hundreds of suspects without access to counsel, with no meaningful ability to challenge their status as enemy combatants, and with no access to civilian courts—even though few of them had any useful intelligence to offer and many had simply been swept up in raids on the battlefields of Afghanistan.

We also now know that principled men and women inside the Justice Department, the State Department, the Pentagon, and elsewhere tried to prevent the worst abuses—and, in almost every case, failed. The chief figures in the debate—Rumsfeld, Cheney, and Alberto Gonzales, first White House counsel and later attorney general—all favored the most single-minded possible prosecution of the war on terror, and at critical moments threw their support behind their own hard-line aides. None of these figures had any particular interest in the promotion of democracy, and in any case would have viewed a concern for how America looked in the world as pusillanimous and even threatening to our national security.

What about Condoleezza Rice, seen inside the Bush administration as the bearer of the democracy gospel? One of her close aides describes a policy process in which the hard-liners inside the White House Office of Legal Counsel systematically excluded Rice's own legal staff from the formulation of policy, whether the development of the judicial system at Guantánamo,

the question of detainee treatment, or the establishment of a terrorist surveillance program at the National Security Agency. At the interagency meetings run by Rice's chief legal figures, he says, Rumsfeld's and Cheney's aides behaved with studied indifference. But Rice herself eventually took over these interagency meetings. She was familiar with the secret rulings as well as the growing evidence of mistreatment, yet she appears never to have used her privileged position with the president to demand a change in policy. Indeed, according to Seymour Hersh in *Chain of Command*, Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, met in June 2003 with Rice and her legal deputy, John Bellinger, and asked that the president promise to abide by the terms of the Convention Against Torture. Rice refused. In a second meeting a year later, soon after the revelation of Abu Ghraib, Rice insisted that the problem lay not with White House policy but with "implementation," and said only that "there's a need to clarify whether there's a need for better training."

Rice made a renewed push when she became secretary of state. In June 2005, just as Rice was preparing to go to Cairo to talk to the Egyptians about democracy, her counselor, Philip Zelikow, and the deputy secretary of defense, Gordon England, circulated a nine-page memo that proposed that the administration apply to prisoners the terms of the Geneva Conventions, including the treaty's ban on the use of "humiliating and degrading treatment." It also called for the administration to bring to trial prisoners held by the CIA overseas, and move toward closing the Guantánamo facility. Rice approved the memo and sent it on to the NSC. But Rumsfeld was so outraged, according to a report in *The New York Times*, that he and aides gathered up and shredded copies of the document. In subsequent discussions, David Addington, Cheney's counsel, opposed accepting the Geneva language or offering more legal safeguards to detainees at Guantánamo. Cheney's and Rumsfeld's aides continued to block the proposed reforms for months. Only when the Supreme Court

struck down key elements of the Guantánamo legal system in late June 2006 did the White House move to adopt many of the memo's suggestions—though even then Cheney succeeded in significantly watering down the crucial language. And the vice president continued to argue publicly that interrogators should be permitted to use techniques like "waterboarding" if such techniques produced crucial information.

This, then, was the debate the world was overhearing as President Bush was rolling out the Freedom Agenda. Did anyone at the White House or in the State Department worry about the appearance of gross hypocrisy—not to mention the fact of hypocrisy? When I posed this question—in more delicate form—to one of the administration's most prominent advocates of democracy promotion, he said, "The argument that anger at America feeds an inability to promote democracy is a dictator's argument."

"What about torture?" I asked.

"I think that's very hard to measure. It *is* a logical point. Why would it not hinder our ability? I have to tell you that I don't find it to be true. It's an argument used by human rights violators. I have never heard a political prisoner say, 'Ah, a visit from the Americans. I don't want it because I'm mad about Abu Ghraib.'"

Another senior administration official insisted, "If you're looking at what affects negatively America's ability to operate in the Arab world, the perception that we're somehow falling victim to some of the debates in Congress"—over support for the Israeli incursion into Lebanon, for example—"that's what hurts our ability to operate. People say, 'If somebody like Bashir Assad'"—the president of Syria and backer of Hezbollah—"'can cause you this kind of damage to your image and he's paid no price, does that mean he's going to scare you out of the region? Is Iraq going to scare you out of the region?'" The Arab street, as well as the elite, respond to strength and fear, not justice and hope—a remarkable view for an advocate of democracy promotion in the Middle East.

Again, I asked about torture.

"I want an American president who will do everything possible to keep us safe," this official went on, "and that is much more important than whether it has made people in any other country think less of us as a nation. It would be ludicrous to have a president who said, 'These things'"—Guantánamo or "special interrogation techniques"—"'are going to keep us safe, but it's going to make some people in France, or some people in Morocco, angry.'"

This was the view among the conservative ideologues who were the figures in the Bush administration most inclined to bear aloft the flag of democracy promotion. Others, however, were appalled. One of Condoleezza Rice's key aides, both at the NSC and the State Department, said, "We've got a lot of people thinking that we don't believe in the rule of law or share the same values they do. And it's done us deep and lasting damage."

That, certainly, was what democracy activists and journalists in the Middle East were finding. Mikaela A. McDermott and Brian Katulis, democracy activists with long experience in the Middle East, wrote in *The Christian Science Monitor* in 2004, "On a recent trip to Syria, Bahrain, and Jordan, reformers told us, with great distress, that they can no longer even use the words 'democracy' and 'human rights' in their communities, let alone work publicly on US-funded democracy promotion projects. Sadly, these terms have become synonymous with military occupation, civilian casualties and abuse of prisoners in Iraq and around the globe." A reporter for *The Washington Post* quoted a prominent writer in Syria as saying, "The Americans came to Iraq to make it an example to the other countries to ask for change. But what happened was the opposite. Now everyone is saying we do not want to be like Iraq." The reporter noted that the bloodshed in Iraq "has accomplished what human rights activists, analysts and others say Syrian president Bashir al-Assad had been unable to do by himself: silence public demands for democratic reforms here."

Indeed, the association of democracy promotion with regime change was a tremendous boon to autocrats, who could enlist

and exploit nationalist feeling in order to discredit international efforts to bring reform. A backlash against democracy promotion had been building ever since the "color revolutions" in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and elsewhere had demonstrated the role that outside groups could play when elections hung in the balance. In Egypt, as well as in Bahrain and a number of other Middle Eastern countries, the NDI and the IRI were either prohibited from working or simply instructed to pack up and leave. The backlash was even stronger in Eastern Europe, where autocrats could plainly see the effectiveness of democracy strategies. Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, accused Russian NGOs that took money from Western groups to advance democracy and human rights of engaging in subversive, anti-Russian activity. In January 2006, Putin pushed through laws clamping tight controls on the activities of both international and domestic groups. Over time, Putin became a sort of sentinel of autocracy, issuing dark warnings about the perils of Western NGOs to his autocratic neighbors and to the Chinese. Belarus president Aleksandr Lukashenko banned all foreign funding of political or even educational activity. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan enacted similar laws.

In a 2006 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Thomas Carothers ascribed the backlash to a combination of opportunism by powerful countries such as Russia and China, which would seize upon any useful pretext to crack down on sources of dissent, and a genuine fear among their weaker brethren of being overthrown in the next color revolution. But Carothers also observed that, thanks to the Bush administration's aggressive rhetoric and behavior, democracy promotion had come to be seen in much of the world as a synonym for regime change. And the Bush administration's own conduct in the war on terror had, Carothers added, "made it all too easy for foreign autocrats to resist U.S. democracy promotion by providing them with an easy riposte: How can a country that

tortures people abroad and abuses rights at home tell other countries how to behave?"

The Bush administration was not prepared to change its approach to terrorism in order to present a different and more sympathetic face to the world; it was, however, eager to show the world, and especially Arab publics, that they had a mistaken view of American intentions and policies. Margaret Tutwiler, a longtime aide of the president's father, had replaced Charlotte Beers, but she lasted less than a year. In September 2005, as the hopes of an Arab spring were fading and Iraq was taking a turn for the worse, President Bush announced that he was appointing Karen Hughes as the new undersecretary of state for public diplomacy. Hughes had no more knowledge of the Middle East than either of her predecessors. But what qualified her for the job was that she had spent the previous decade crafting George Bush's message as both governor of Texas and president. She had largely written some of his most important speeches, including several on the Middle East. And she was one of the president's very closest friends and advisers. "She understands what we stand for," as Bush said in introducing her. "Karen will deliver the message of freedom and humility and compassion and determination." Hughes's appointment was intended to be a sign that the White House was taking public diplomacy seriously.

Hughes explained her role to her new colleagues in a town hall meeting. "I like to boil things down to pretty basics and things that are memorable," she said, "so our pillars are going to be the four E's: . . . Engage, Exchange, Educate, and Empower." She planned to enlist diplomats to highlight America's good works abroad; to develop a rapid-response capacity to counter terrorist propaganda; to "forward-deploy regional SWAT teams who can look at the big picture"; to expand exchange programs; to

promote language learning both at home and abroad; and to enlist "citizen ambassadors" to "share their unique American stories with appropriate audiences around the world."

And then Hughes sallied out bravely into the Arab world, introducing herself to carefully screened audiences in Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. "My most important title is Mom," she said. And, "I'm the granddaughter of a Pennsylvania coal miner and a Kentucky railroad engineer." She talked about American values: "We are a country that has freedom of religion, but that does not mean freedom from religion, although people are also free not to have faith in America, but many, many Americans like me feel that our faith and our family are really the most important things in our lives." She marveled at the bonds that united people of different faiths and backgrounds: "It's amazing as I look out on your faces and I realize that you're all unique individuals and yet I think if I was sitting on a college campus anywhere in my country, the United States of America, I would hear almost the same answers I just heard—that I would hear young people that wanted to be successful and help their country." And then, having woven these strands of connection, she took questions.

Hughes's listeners were invariably polite; this was scarcely "the Arab street." But few seemed inclined to join her celebration of multicultural harmony. "As representatives of your country call for and fight for respecting human rights, how can you face questions, directed at you, about violating human rights in Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib by the American army?" asked a student in Cairo. In other forums, Hughes was confronted more directly. At a meeting in Saudi Arabia with forty journalists and civic figures, she was peppered with angry speeches about American support for Israel and the invasion of Iraq. When Hughes told a group of Saudi women that they should be permitted to drive, she was met not with applause or murmurs of support, but with a rejoinder that Saudi women were quite happy and needn't be told otherwise by Americans. In Turkey, America's steadiest ally in the Islamic world, listeners denounced America's record abroad as simply indefensible.

Hughes's barnstorming tour of the Middle East, like Charlotte Beers's Shared Values campaign two years earlier, was ridiculed both there and at home. Hughes was another innocent abroad; her "communication" skills were no better suited to defusing the hostility and skepticism of the Arab world than Beers's gifts in marketing had been. Hughes continued to travel to the Middle East, but she kept a much lower profile. She did, indeed, launch some of the initiatives she had described, including the rapid-response unit, the "regional public diplomacy hubs" (the rechristened SWAT teams), and some new education and exchange programs. But both she and public diplomacy itself largely disappeared from view after the fiasco of "my most important title is Mom."

I interviewed Hughes in late 2006, and she cheerily agreed—indeed, insisted—that all her comments be on the record. When I asked her what she had found to be the most serious obstacles to explaining U.S. policy in the Middle East, she listed four, in order: Israel-Palestine, detainee abuse, Iraq, and the difficulty of obtaining visas. And like Beers, she had come to recognize how very different the world looked from the Middle East—that it wasn't simply a matter of countering propaganda. Whenever she returned from the Middle East, she said, she made a point of telling both the president and the secretary of state that "to the extent that we can be seen visibly helping the Palestinian people to achieve their state and to achieve a better life and to end some of the humiliation that they experience on a daily basis, that is the single most important thing we could do around the world to create and foster a more favorable impression of America." In one of her first White House meetings after taking her new job, she had, she said, raised the issue of the treatment of detainees. "It was a little bit of the elephant in the room," as she put it delicately. Explaining to the world that "we are a country of law and

justice and that . . . we do respect our international obligations" was, she conceded, a "big challenge." And she had told Bush and Rice that too.

Hughes stepped down in the fall of 2007. After six years of public diplomacy, America was feared, loathed, and misunderstood across the globe as never before. According to surveys conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts, between 2002 and 2007 favorable views of the United States fell from 61 to 29 percent in Indonesia, from 30 to 9 percent in Turkey, and even from 60 to 30 percent in Germany. Hughes's exit was generally greeted with a combination of derision and relief. She was ill suited to the job, of course. But it probably wouldn't have mattered if the president had instead appointed an Arab-American with a good grasp of Middle Eastern realities. Our credibility was gone; we had never been less able to persuade others of our good intentions.

Eleven elections were held in Middle Eastern nations in 2005. In 2006, the number was two—the fiasco in the Palestinian Authority at the beginning of the year, and a more gratifying ballot in Yemen at the end. Backlash, rather than progress, was the rule. President Bush himself was undaunted. In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* in September 2006, he continued to insist that Iraq was "the first real test" of our commitment to "the ideological struggle" pitting "reformers against tyrants." He was still hopeful about Egypt—if not about Mubarak, then about Gamal—and the reform-minded economic ministers. But Bush's rhetoric seemed increasingly divorced from reality. When Condoleezza Rice returned to Cairo in January 2007, she declared that the United States had "an important strategic relationship" with Egypt, but said nothing at all, at least publicly, about democracy. She had taken to describing the region as split between "mainstream states," including the Gulf nations, and "extremists"—a formulation with which the elder George Bush would

have been perfectly comfortable. The new dispensation, a *Washington Post* editorial observed, "betrays President Bush's Freedom Agenda, giving a free pass to dictators who support the new geopolitical cause."

This was no time for hosannas to the march of liberty. Freedom House, which keeps a global scorecard of democracy, reported that 2006 had been a year of "freedom stagnation" as well as "pushback." The group described a "glacial change of peace in the Middle East." Lebanon's "Cedar Revolution," a tremendous source of hope a year before, had been thwarted by the growth of Hezbollah and the refusal of Syria to relinquish its influence over the country. And when Israel responded to provocations by Hezbollah with a massive bombardment of the country, all hope for democratic progress was lost.

The Bush administration, defying pleas from its allies, declined to press Israel to call an early halt to the attack or the subsequent ground invasion. Rice, in fact, went so far as to characterize the violence as "the birth pangs of a new Middle East"—an expression that sparked fury across the region. Perhaps she really did believe that democracy could be promoted by missiles and tanks. The war in Lebanon turned the U.S. image in the Islamic world a darker shade of black. A poll of citizens in Rice's "mainstream" states in early 2007 found that only 12 percent had favorable views of America, while two thirds insisted that democracy was not the real U.S. objective in the Arab world. Another poll sampling attitudes in Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and Indonesia found that 79 percent of respondents believed that the real U.S. objective was to "weaken and divide the Islamic world." In Egypt, the most anti-American of the four countries, eight in ten believed that attacks on American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan constituted justified resistance.

In the Islamic world, the United States was increasingly seen as the friend not only of Israel—an alliance we would not sacrifice even if it brought hatred down upon us—but also of the au-

thoritarian states of the region. The president's second inaugural address had been intended to signal that this would no longer be so; but it was so. Egypt was one case; Pakistan was another. President Pervez Musharraf had gained power in a military coup, and he continued to wear his uniform and to exercise military powers. But President Bush had treated Musharraf as a close and trusted ally in the war on terrorism after the latter had denounced the 9/11 attacks. Since that time the United States had given the regime more than $10 billion, much of it to be used in the fight against the Taliban. And yet the Musharraf regime had allowed the Taliban to set up headquarters in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the border with Afghanistan; after being bloodied in an attempted incursion, the Pakistani army had even accepted a sort of nonaggression pact. In fact, as diplomats and area scholars noted, the Pakistani army and intelligence service had long drawn on the tribal areas to harass both Afghanistan and India, and had helped organize both the Taliban and home-grown Islamist extremists. Secular political parties were not allowed to operate in the tribal zone, thus leaving those areas wholly under the sway of the mullahs. Musharraf's failure to decisively break that pattern had fostered extremism inside Pakistan and had helped keep much of Afghanistan ungovernable.

The army, which had remained the ultimate source of power in Pakistan even during periods of civilian rule, had seen fit to quietly encourage Islamist parties as a counter to the secular opposition, both marginalizing the secularists and presenting a threat that would gain Washington's attention—much as Hosni Mubarak had done in Egypt. And as in Egypt, it worked. Musharraf's autocratic rule had made him profoundly unpopular at home, but the White House, convinced that the only alternative was Islamic radicalism, declined to push him. In fact, Islamists had never gained more than 14 percent of the vote in legislative elections, but the ever-present fear that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal could fall into the hands of terrorists gave Musharraf a trump

card he scarcely even needed to brandish. His critics argued that the only way to drain the Islamist swamp was to open up the tribal areas to nonextremist influences and, more broadly, to remove the clamps from the nation's political life; but Musharraf refused, and the White House went along.

And then, in March 2007, Musharraf began to make an open mockery of the Freedom Agenda. He fired Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudry, who had ruled against the government in a number of key cases. In the ensuing weeks, thousands of lawyers and democracy activists took to the streets, braving police attacks to defend Pakistan's constitution—precisely the kind of secular opposition that Musharraf had claimed did not exist. Here was the middle force, neither autocratic nor theocratic, that the Bush administration had sought all across the region and had rarely found, and yet the White House remained mute in the midst of the crackdown. Embassy officials didn't want to see a great ally "humiliated." And American diplomats never understood the depth of Pakistani feeling on either Musharraf or the judges.

Musharraf was ultimately forced to restore Chaudry to his position, but in early November, fearing a ruling that might prevent him from serving another term as president and ignoring entreaties from Washington, the general declared emergency rule. He dissolved the Supreme Court and arrested thousands of lawyers, journalists, and opposition activists. The White House once again trod lightly. President Bush urged Musharraf to surrender his military post and to schedule elections "as soon as possible," but issued no threats.

Perhaps Musharraf really did have the White House over a barrel, but the administration had gotten itself into this compromising position. Michael Gerson, the former speechwriter, recalled in *The Washington Post* that in the years after 9/11, there had been "a significant push at the White House"—presumably from him, among others—"to expand democracy-promotion efforts in Pakistan, to encourage party-building, modern electoral

systems and the rule of law." The effort, he wrote, "got little traction." The aid package to Pakistan was never used for political leverage. Of the $10 billion officially declared—more was funneled through secret programs—$6 billion went to the military for what it claimed were antiterrorist efforts, $1.6 billion went to buy American weapons, and only about $1 billion was spent on governance and humanitarian assistance. Musharraf had used the money largely to shore up his rule rather than to enlist in the war on terror, and to buy warplanes he could use against India should the occasion arise.

President Bush did in fact press Musharraf to step down as general and permit his archrival, Benazir Bhutto, to return from exile and contest elections. Under intense domestic pressure as well, Musharraf ultimately complied. Then in December 2007, Bhutto was assassinated, apparently by Islamic extremists. The Pakistani people turned overwhelmingly against Musharraf. Yet the Bush administration continued to treat him as the key to the country's future. Nowhere else had the imperative of the war on terror so plainly trumped the imperative of democratic promotion. *The Economist* observed that the administration had permitted Musharraf to trample on his people's liberties owing to "the pre-eminent importance of 'stability' in the world's most dangerous place." That justification had been proved hollow. "It is time to impress upon him and the generals still propping him up," the editors wrote, "that democracy is not the alternative to stability. It is Pakistan's only hope." Indeed, in February 2008, Musharraf's party was overwhelmingly defeated in a parliamentary election. And in a striking sign of the appeal of secular democratic principles, Pakistan's Islamist parties performed almost as poorly as the Musharraf bloc had done.

Pakistan and Afghanistan were stitched together at the chest like very unhappy Siamese twins. The Taliban had fled across the border in the face of American attack, destabilizing Pakistan, and then had used their mountain fastness to launch attacks on

Afghanistan. The only secure way to conquer terrorism in the region was through democratization in Pakistan and nation-building in Afghanistan, and neither had happened. President Bush had not, of course, believed in nation-building back in 2001. Barnett Rubin, one of the foremost experts on Afghanistan, says that he was invited to a White House meeting on September 22, 2001, in which he urged a crash program of state-building once the Taliban were driven from Afghanistan. But he was told that counterterrorism would have to take precedence. And so the White House had declined to support the initial efforts by the UN to build the country's shattered institutions; had refused to let a NATO force operate beyond the confines of Kabul; and later, when Afghanistan's opium production exploded, threatening to reduce the country to a narco-state, had supported crop destruction but refused to pay for programs to give farmers a meaningful alternative.

Afghanistan, once the administration's one unadulterated success in the war on terror, deteriorated from year to year. As the Taliban regenerated itself in the Pakistani tribal regions, larger chunks of Afghanistan became ungovernable. Suicide attacks occurred even inside Kabul. In many areas, development work had ground to a halt for lack of security. Tensions between the United States and its NATO partners increased, as European militaries declined to take the battle to the Taliban. In late November 2007, *The New York Times* carried a front-page story that began as follows: "Deeply concerned about the prospect of failure in Afghanistan, the Bush administration and NATO have begun three top-to-bottom reviews of the entire mission . . ." It was a little late.

By late 2007, the Freedom Agenda had disappeared into the war on terror. Whenever there was a choice to be made, President Bush, who had warned the world's dictators that "success in our relations will require the decent treatment of their own people," had backed away in the face of fears over national secu-

rity—even in cases where our security might have been better served by requiring that decent treatment. The cold war calculus had come back with a vengeance. Ronald Reagan, the president George Bush most admired, had begun with very much the same mentality, but over time had come to accept, if grudgingly, the wisdom of demanding democratic reform even from our cold war allies. The Bush White House, in its second term, had moved in the opposite direction—from splendid pronouncements to realist arrangements. Of course, the cold war had been waning in Reagan's era, while the war on terror was waxing in Bush's. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of chastened naïveté bore a passing resemblance to the Carter administration—not a comparison Bush would find flattering.

President Bush's rhetoric remained majestic—indeed, transcendent. In July 2007 he explained that his belief in democracy promotion had less to do with "political science" than with religious faith: "I do believe there is an Almighty, and I believe a gift of that Almighty to all is freedom. And I will tell you that is a principle that no one can tell me doesn't exist." And yet by that time the policy itself was effectively dead. Thomas Carothers observed that of the forty-five nations that Freedom House counted as "not free," "the Bush administration maintains friendly, unchallenging relations with the governments of more than half." Looking around the world, Carothers found that Bush had seriously pushed for democracy in no country save Egypt, while "outside of the Middle East it is difficult to find evidence of any major positive U.S. impact on the state of democracy." The view that the Bush administration had embarked on an "all-out democracy crusade" was, he concluded, "an illusion."

7

Mubarak's Egypt

The Dark Arts of "Liberal Autocracy"

In March 2007, the people of Egypt went to the polls to vote on a package of constitutional amendments submitted by the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Or rather, they didn't go to the polls. Egypt's opposition parties had united around a call to boycott the vote, and the streets and polling places of Cairo were empty that day. Reports from around the country showed equal apathy, save among voters paid and bused in by supporters of the regime. The official tally put the turnout at 27 percent. Egyptians are so profoundly cynical about their country's politics that no election in Egypt in recent memory had attracted much more than 10 to 15 percent of the country's voters; civic groups who canvassed polling stations offered estimates of 2 to 8 percent.

The referendum nonevent was the kind of political ritual that had become increasingly common in Egypt in the period since the Bush administration had begun demanding evidence of reform from the Mubarak regime. The regime, fearful of defying its most important ally, would kick the machinery of representative government into gear in a manner meant to imply genuine commitment, but which the Egyptian people themselves recognized as hollow. Opposition parties, civic activists, journalists, and the like, taking advantage of a public sphere far more open than in years past, would denounce the empty exercise; the regime would recoil in a spasm of outraged virtue, often breaking up

American role in Egypt. Feeble democracies presented very different problems from liberal autocracies. The politics were relatively easy; the difficult thing was to find ways of supporting such frail states that increased their autonomy and self-reliance, while also of course making inroads on poverty. NDI was working with legislators to try to make the parliament more effective, and to somehow connect politics with legislation. The Pentagon had given USAID $2 million to create livelihoods among Touareg youth, and thus, in effect, outbid the Salafists. The only problem was finding some useful way to spend the money, since the north had no natural resources and no obvious source of employment. They had tried marketing camel cheese; the product appeared, however, to be an acquired taste.

The MCC held out the possibility of change on a vastly greater scale. It was a hopeful model, but it looked more like a hypothesis. The Bush administration, which was prepared to threaten a constitutional crisis over funding for the war in Iraq, had surrendered when Congress took a meat-ax to its requests for foreign aid. Even the modest sums for the MCC were being taken from other aid programs, and there was a real danger either that promises the MCC had made would have to be postponed or that money would be doled out on an annual basis rather than through the five-year guarantees that allowed recipients to commit themselves to ambitious plans. There was no way to sustain the feeble democracies without spending significantly more money than we had in the past, and here, as elsewhere, the Bush administration was largely failing the test.

9

Democracy Promotion in the Post-Post-9/11 World

The post-9/11 era is drawing to a close. Until now, the foreign policy of the United States has been governed by the reaction the terrorist attacks produced in George W. Bush and his team. American behavior toward the world would have looked very different—more classically "realist," in all probability—had the attacks never occurred. Our behavior would probably also have been very different—more internationalist and less bellicose—had Al Gore been declared president in 2000. But this event happened to this administration, and so we have the "war on terror," the war in Iraq, and the doctrines laid out in the National Security Strategy of 2002 and President Bush's second inaugural address. All that will necessarily shape and constrain the choices of whoever succeeds George Bush. But he or she will make a new set of choices—a post-post-9/11 strategy.

Where, in this thinking, will the Freedom Agenda fit? Where should it fit? It is an article of faith among current and former Bush administration officials that democracy promotion, with whatever modifications may be introduced, will remain a fixed element of our policy. Liberty at home now depends on liberty abroad, and so any president will do whatever he or she can to promote democracy. But that assumes a great deal: both that the formulation is true, and that, whether true or not, the president's

self-defeating policies have not deeply curbed both the national appetite and the national capacity to promote democracy.

The boldness of President Bush's assertions and actions sent deep currents coursing through the academies, think tanks, and publications where foreign policy theory is debated. In Bush's first term, when the war on terror seemed to have carried the day, the "forward-leaning" neoconservative paradigm was celebrated in books by major scholars of international relations, including John Lewis Gaddis, Walter Russell Mead, and Robert Kagan. In the second term, the failures of this policy were brutally anatomized in works not just by liberals but by mainstream and even conservative figures, including Francis Fukuyama, Andrew Bacevich, and John Hulsman, and by former Bush administration officials, including Richard Haass of the State Department and Flynt Leverett of the NSC. Neoconservative foreign policy was, in effect, discredited by virtue of having been put into practice. The Freedom Agenda, which the president had presented as a central element of his worldview, may well be in jeopardy of being discarded along with the rest.

Indeed, Bush's reckless behavior and self-righteous rhetoric have inflamed opinion at home as they have abroad. One class of critics now explains Bush-era policy, very much including the Freedom Agenda, as merely a particularly blunt expression of the long-standing American drive for global dominance. In 2007, Tony Smith, who in *America's Mission* offered an extensive and highly nuanced history of democracy promotion, produced a drastically different account in his flavorsomely titled *A Pact with the Devil: Washington's Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise*. Smith argues that centrist Democrats such as Madeleine Albright who favor a strong military and an interventionist policy in the Balkans have become "indistinguishable" from the neoconservatives who made the case for war in Iraq: both advocate a "progressive imperialism" whose goal is to promote "human rights and democratic government among peoples

who resisted American hegemony." Andrew Bacevich, a military historian, writes that if Americans insist on promoting democracy in the Middle East, we should no longer "bamboozle ourselves with claims of righteousness which few believe," but rather acknowledge our actual goal: "to keep the world safe for our economy and open to our cultural assault."

Prolonged exposure to George Bush has blinded some critics with rage—just as at one time it blinded others with hero worship—and led them retrospectively to recast the American narrative in the darkest possible terms. But there is a more serious and measured case against the promotion of democracy—or any other founding American principle, for that matter. The realists of the 1950s entertained few of the doubts about the merits of American democracy that one finds today on the left, but they considered the Wilsonian ambition to spread democracy across the globe a grave mistake, as well as an act of hubris. Hans Morgenthau ridiculed this "missionary" impulse, whether expressed through diplomacy or foreign aid. George Kennan insisted that, far from representing a universal aspiration, the system of democratic government was suited to the distinctive history and values of the Anglo-Saxon world. He scoffed at those who dreamed of the democratic conversion of Russia or of other outposts of despotism.

The scholar and essayist William Pfaff laid out the case for a neo-Kennanite policy in *The New York Review of Books* in early 2007. "It is something like a national heresy to argue that the United States does not have a unique moral status and role to play in the history of nations, and therefore in the affairs of the contemporary world," Pfaff writes. "In fact it does not." Pfaff traces this sense of divine election back to the nation's origins. He argues, as Kennan did, that the cold war proponents of "rollback" sought to unleash this deeply arrogant self-conception on the world. The fall of the Berlin wall removed the restraints of prudence, and entranced policy-makers of both sides with a vi-

sion of endless intervention on behalf of democracy and free markets. In Pfaff's view, George Bush updated and reinterpreted this tradition of providentialism for the post-9/11 age. The administration proposed to replace the centuries-long balance-of-power system, in which states acknowledged one another's inevitably conflicting interests and unequal capacities, with a coalition of democracies led by Washington. Bush thus demanded that the world fall in behind American leadership. And to the surprise of all those sharing his delusions, the world resisted, sometimes subtly and sometimes violently.

Pfaff notes that in *Around the Cragged Hill*, Kennan's memoirs of his old age, the diplomat and scholar asserted that democracy would arise only among a people who fully understood it and who would do whatever was needed to bring it about. Kennan went on to acknowledge that many autocracies were unstable. But, he insisted, "We are not their keepers. We never will be." We should leave such peoples "to be governed or misgoverned as habit and tradition may dictate," asking rather that their ruling regimes observe "the minimum standards of civilized diplomatic intercourse." Pfaff thus recommends, as Kennan had, a "noninterventionist" policy that presumes that "nations are responsible for themselves," and avoids the cataclysmic mistakes of crusading America—Vietnam as well as Iraq—by adopting a policy that "emphasizes pragmatic and empirical judgment of the interests and needs of this nation and of others." In effect, Pfaff presents the elegant version of the claim George Bush advanced in the 2000 campaign when he said, "I'm not so sure the role of the United States is to go around the world and say, 'This is the way it's gotta be.'"

Noninterventionism is not isolationism, but rather a policy of prudence, modesty, watchfulness. It would ward off the worst at the expense of forgoing the best. But Pfaff would have us forgo a great deal. He asks us, astonishingly, to accept Kennan's archaic and at times very unsavory views about culture and democracy.

Kennan expressed a seigneurial contempt for the mass of men, whether at home or abroad; chafed against the very idea of democratic accountability; and in the late thirties started in on a book recommending that Americans adopt a more authoritarian model of government that would, among other things, restrict suffrage. The naïveté of the faith in the universal aspiration to democracy seems much preferable to such Tory cynicism. Worse still, are we really prepared to leave citizens in autocracies to be governed as "habit and tradition" dictate? Is authoritarianism a quaint species of folk culture?

Classic realism of this sort bids us forgo something else as well: the focus on the rights of the individual rather than the prerogatives of the state. We are to accept that nations are responsible for themselves rather than thinking that regimes are responsible to the citizens from whom their legitimacy arises. It's none of our business if some states ignore or trample popular will or the public good—to each his own habits and traditions. This is not just reactionary but archaic. The recognition that individual rights may supersede those of the state is now enshrined in international law. The principle goes back at least to the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and is recognized as well in documents such as the Helsinki Declaration. The UN itself, founded as a club of states, has come to be defined, as Kofi Annan put it, "by a new, more profound awareness of the sanctity, and dignity of every human life." The organization has formally endorsed this principle by accepting, first, a right of access of humanitarian organizations to beleaguered individuals, and then, the right of humanitarian intervention, or "the responsibility to protect." Pfaff himself accepts such intervention when it is "relatively simple to deal with," but notes that humanitarian crises "are often the current manifestation of intractable historical grievances." The wish to do nothing thus happily coincides with our own helplessness.

Realist nonintervention thus depends on a willed indifference

to the fate of others. This isn't just morally unacceptable; in a world where we can no longer seal our borders against the consequences of state failure halfway across the world, it's self-defeating, not to mention impossible. But if we are to intervene in the hopes of making life better for people elsewhere in the world, ought it be in the name of democracy? In a recent tract, *Ethical Realism*, Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, also great admirers of the strategic thinkers of the 1950s, insist that policy-makers on both sides have fallen prey to "democratism," a "messianic commitment" to spread democracy across the globe. In fact, they say, "the beliefs that democracy can be easily spread, that it can be combined with free market reform, and that it will lead to countries becoming peaceful and pro-American" is a delusion born of ideology and of a specious analogy to the experience of Eastern Europe after the end of the cold war. What's more, they observe, the very act of promoting democracy provokes a nationalist backlash, above all among citizens of the Arab world. "Preaching democracy and freedom at them," the authors write, "will be useless if they associate the adoption of Western-style democracy with national humiliation and the sacrifice of vital national interests."

But Lieven and Hulsman seek to practice an "ethical" realism, and so instead of pursuing a "Democratic Peace" that they predict will be neither democratic nor peaceful, they propose that we seek to spread a "Great Capitalist Peace." Marketplace values, they suggest, are far more widely accepted than democratic ones, while prosperity is a surer hedge against aggression than democracy is. They propose trade reform to help developing nations, a focus on good governance rather than on individual rights, and a huge increase in foreign aid directed toward strategically important countries such as Pakistan. (Africa loses out.) The fact that Lieven is a journalist of the left who regards the United States in terms not so different from those of Tony Smith, while Hulsman

is a conservative who supported the war in Iraq, speaks volumes about the bipartisan disillusionment with the Bush administration's Wilsonianism of the right.

Realist noninterventionism has become broadly unpalatable, but the argument for less-than-democracy or other-than-democracy has gained many adherents as a result of the failures of the Freedom Agenda. It offers a kind of fallback position for those who are uncomfortable with the language of democracy as well as with the stark calculus of traditional realism. Autocratic regimes themselves are far more receptive to the message of "good governance," "the rule of law," and "modernization." And those who believe that democracy will be solidly founded only when regimes have passed through the long period of gestation while institutions become mature also believe that we should focus on governance and institution-building.

In 2006, the Princeton Project on National Security, which brought together almost every major national security expert from the moderate left to the moderate right, issued a report titled "Forging a World of Liberty Under Law." The authors write, "Democracy is the best instrument that humans have devised for ensuring individual liberty over the long term, but only when it exists within a framework of order established by law . . . Elections remain important as a long-term goal, but a grand strategy of forging a world of liberty under law means broadening our approach by bolstering the many elements that underpin a stable and sustainable democratic government and by countering the multiple ills that may destroy it."

Why not, then, seek to spread the free market, the rule of law, human rights—instead of *democracy*, a word that has been almost fatally tainted? Well, what would that mean? Does it mean that we will help train judges and prosecutors and policemen and jail wardens, but not political parties? That we will not exert diplomatic pressure to ensure that elections are transparent—or that

they occur at all? Will we protest when prisoners are abused but not when newspapers are shut down? Where, in short, is the barrier between democracy and its many constituent elements?

The authors of "Forging a World of Liberty Under Law" write that rather than use the divisive language of democracy, we should seek to nurture "Popular, Accountable and Rights-regarding government." They characterize these regimes as follows:

> PAR governments are more transparent, due to the checks and balances that naturally result from pluralist, participatory systems. They are more effective, because accountability reduces corruption and increases competence. And they are more trustworthy, because they are constrained by the laws governing their behavior toward their own citizens. Further, PAR governments provide many more opportunities for their citizens to achieve their goals through ordinary political processes and to make better lives for themselves through economic opportunity.

These are, of course, the central attributes of democracy. The only thing gained by the change in terminology is the clear recognition that stable democracies rest upon strong institutions, and not simply on the outcome of elections. But we know that.

If there is any meaningful debate here at all, it is not really about one thing as opposed to another, but rather one set of things before another: rule of law/economic development/marketplace reform before elections. But elections can be the crucial catalyst for those broader, slower changes, as in the "color revolutions" of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. And how do you respond, as Thomas Carothers asked in response to Fareed Zakaria, when people say that they want elections even though the state is not "ready" for them? Do you tell them to wait? You can't, of course. And you shouldn't. Even desperately poor people sometimes care very much about representation.

The "participation explosion" that Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba observed forty-five years ago is vastly more powerful and widespread today. And yes, that demand for voice can be, and is, stoked by illiberal democrats and even genocidal maniacs. So is religious belief; the problem lies not with the belief but with the political mechanisms by which it is manipulated. Democracy promotion offers a means, however limited, by which outsiders can help shape those mechanisms for the purpose of authentic representation rather than exploitation.

Democracy promotion is not only something we should do but also something we should be seen doing. Of all the candidates for president of either party, the one who spoke most often of democracy, and of what our democracy means to the world, is Barack Obama. Unlike any of his rivals, Obama was raised outside of the continental United States, in Hawaii and Indonesia; his father was Kenyan, and much of his family remained there. Obama is acutely aware of what America looks like from the outside—both the resentments it engenders and the profound sense of hope it raises. In a speech delivered in Washington in August 2007, he observed that United States senators typically see "the desperate faces" of Darfur or Baghdad from the height of a helicopter. He added: "And it makes you stop and wonder: when those faces look up at an American helicopter, do they feel hope or do they feel hate?" Obama believes not only that our well-being depends on the well-being of ordinary third-world citizens—as George Bush and Condoleezza Rice do—but that it also depends on what those children thought as they gazed up at an American helicopter. Those children had to feel that their well-being mattered to us.

Obama believes that the spread of democracy is in our power as well as our interest. He (along with John McCain, among others) cosponsored the 2005 ADVANCE Democracy Act (which never became law), which instructed U.S. diplomats and officials "to use all instruments of United States influence to support,

promote, and strengthen democratic principles, practices, and values in foreign countries." But Obama also thinks that the Bush administration has lost sight of the daily reality of the people they proposed to help. In a conversation just before his Washington speech, Obama pointed out to me that FDR hadn't even included voting in his famous 1942 "Four Freedoms" speech. "People want freedom from fear, they want freedom from want. To some degree those are the foundational freedoms. We have to be focused on what are the aspirations of the people in those countries. Once those aspirations are met, it opens up space for the kind of democratic regime that we want."

Obama doesn't favor subordinating democracy to other considerations; in fact, he says that we should be demanding free and fair elections as one of the conditions of our continued aid to Pakistan. Rather, he proposes enmeshing democracy assistance in a larger system of aid. In his speech, he went on to say, "We do need to stand for democracy. And I will. But democracy is about more than a ballot box . . . I will focus our support on helping nations build independent judicial systems, honest police forces, and financial systems that are transparent and accountable. Freedom must also mean freedom from want, not freedom lost to an empty stomach. So I will make poverty reduction a key part of helping other nations reduce anarchy." Obama proposed doubling foreign aid, and vowed to establish a $2 billion fund to promote free access to secular education. He said that he would radically increase our capacity to engage in nation-building to prevent frail states from failing altogether. He would stop using public diplomacy simply as a means to prop up White House policy, and would open up "America Houses" all over the Islamic world. He would restore our ties with multilateral institutions. And above all, he would show the children looking up at the helicopter that the United States held itself to the highest democratic standards. "We will," Obama said, "again set an example for

the world that the law is not subject to the whims of stubborn rulers, and that justice is not arbitrary."

We must set an example; this is where democracy promotion begins. During the 1960s we understood—or at least the "cold war liberals" did—that civil rights legislation helped us win the war of ideas by showing that democracy could better serve marginalized peoples than communism did. We understood that we had to live our ideas. And now? The president who has placed the promotion of democracy at the very core of his foreign policy, at least rhetorically, has behaved with more contempt for the liberties of citizens and noncitizens alike, with less transparency in his deliberations, with a greater readiness to manipulate public opinion, and with less respect for his domestic opposition or for public opinion abroad than almost any of his predecessors.

Nothing any successor administration does with respect to promoting our ideals will matter so long as we appear to be unwilling to apply those ideals to ourselves. And the fact that we are now engaged in a "war on terror" will not be seen as an excuse for the suspension of traditional American liberties, but rather as a test of our commitment to them. It is precisely because torture might possibly produce useful information, and precisely because catching thousands of Muslim men in a legal dragnet might possibly turn up a potential terrorist or two, that we must make, and be seen to make, the choice to forgo such tactics. Thomas Carothers writes of the need for a policy of "decontamination," starting with how we behave at home. The next president, while remaining resolute in such lethal settings as Afghanistan, will have to openly forswear Bush-era tactics, and very publicly act to change them. Of course, it takes much longer to regain a reputation than it does to lose it; we will operate under a very dark cloud of suspicion for a long time to come.

But decontamination is also a matter of rhetoric. It is profoundly discrediting to say that we will judge our relationships with foreign leaders on their progress in democracy so long as other considerations, whether of regional security or trade, dictate otherwise. It is reckless to speak of the spread of democracy in transcendent and theological terms, especially at a time when much of the world is recoiling from what it sees as an American crusade. It is pointlessly alienating and self-righteous to describe the promotion of democracy as a peculiarly American faith and policy—as President Bush did in his second inaugural—when so many Western governments and NGOs are deeply involved in the endeavor. The next president must not abandon the language of democracy or retreat into the kind of hard-shell realism that George Bush the candidate proposed in 2000. But he or she could be more honest, more modest, more generous. As Michael McFaul and Francis Fukuyama suggest in a recent policy brief, "Acting in concrete ways to support human rights and democracy groups around the world, while speaking more modestly about American goals, might serve both our interests and ideals better."

McFaul and Fukuyama, and Carothers too, suggest that we uncouple democracy promotion from the war on terror. While it's true that the terrorist attacks showed how vulnerable we are to the internal political culture of remote countries, the constant linkage of the two policies inevitably implies that we consider regime change and military force instruments of democracy promotion. Our most discredited policies thus taint our most supposedly idealistic one. What's more, so long as those ideals are subsumed into our power, we guarantee the nationalist backlash of which Lieven and Hulsman warn. And our hypocrisy will seem patent. "The Bush Administration," as Carothers writes, "has fallen into the habit of using democracy promotion as a cover for U.S. efforts to change or shape political outcomes in other countries for the sake of U.S. security interests with little real regard for whether the effect on the other country is in fact pro-

democratic." We should rather acknowledge the truth, which is, as Carothers writes, that "the United States balances its interest in democracy against its other interests and often struggles to match its actions to its ideals."

We need equally to find a less strident and breast-beating way to talk about ourselves. The Bush administration has tried to use public diplomacy as a branch of democracy promotion, as if we will win converts by repeating often enough and loudly enough what a noble enterprise is America. This has not worked, and will not work. And the era when America can broadcast its virtues into a void has ended. Local and satellite media, the Internet, podcasts, and so on will largely drown out the American voice. If public diplomacy means arguing our side against their side, we will lose. But it can also mean giving people abroad access to America and to American life. We need to be giving out far more scholarships to young people, and eliminating the humiliations now attendant upon obtaining a visa and passing through our customs checks. And Barack Obama is right that we need to open, or rather reopen, "America Houses," where people can go and read books and magazines and access websites—and, he suggests, get English lessons and vocational training in a safe and pleasant and uncensored setting (though concerns about terrorism will make some of these facilities as much virtual as actual).

In *The End of Poverty*, Jeffrey Sachs uses medical diagnosis as a metaphor for foreign assistance. He argues that since every country's conditions and needs are different, it's foolish and dangerous to insist that each take the same neoliberal medicine, slashing government spending and deregulating the economy. The same may be said of democracy promotion; both the Clinton and Bush administrations were inclined to apply the same formula everywhere, though the two forms of treatment were quite different. Democracy promotion needs less ideology and more of the fine-

grained analysis that realists such as Pfaff consider the groundwork of diplomacy. At the very least, we should begin by thinking about distinct classes of countries. Stable and essentially popular autocracies like Russia and China are very different from the profoundly unpopular autocracies of the Middle East, which are in turn very different from the fledgling and often brittle democracies of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Each presents its own problems and possibilities.

Democracy promotion is scarcely a meaningful policy toward self-confidently authoritarian regimes. We had little ability to shape Russia's political culture in the midst of the cold war. Then we enjoyed a period of influence when Russia's empire and economy collapsed—though even then we turned out to have less capacity to alter domestic events than we imagined. Now that the price of oil and natural gas has made Russia a new, if very different, kind of continental empire, the country is once again all but impervious to outside influence over internal affairs; reducing our consumption of oil, and that of others, would probably constitute our most effective democracy-promotion policy. China's economic boom produces a similar effect; the country is now confidently exporting its own alternative model in the third world. In Iran, whose coffers are filled with oil billions, American democracy promotion efforts provoked such a backlash that Akbar Ganji, a brave dissident celebrated in the West, publicly implored the U.S. Congress to pass a law prohibiting payment to "individuals or groups opposing the Iranian government."

The recognition that we can do little if anything to shape the politics of such regimes does not mean that the United States should simply abandon the brave figures who challenge those regimes. Karim Sadjadpour, an Iranian expert with the Carnegie Endowment, testified before Congress in late 2007 that while the United States should abandon democracy promotion in Iran, it should continue to speak out against political jailings, the persecution of religious minorities, and the like. He also proposed

that the United States fund "objective, professional Persian-language news sources"—as opposed to the highly politicized Voice of America broadcast. In each of these countries, of course, we will continue to face hard choices between advancing our strategic and economic interests on the one hand and protesting human rights abuses on the other.

Impoverished democracies, above all in sub-Saharan Africa, are of course far more amenable to Western help. Few would argue that they shouldn't be helped. But their needs will often seem bottomless. Nations such as Mali or Zambia, or even El Salvador and Nicaragua, force questions about our will to provide economic assistance, the efficacy of that help, and the capacity of the host country to use those resources effectively. We clearly need to spend more money, as Democrats such as Barack Obama argue, and to spend it more wisely. We must also work on building the strength of political parties, on promoting reform in the various aspects of governance and rule of law, on pushing protected markets to open up, on strengthening civil society and the like. We must, as the economist Paul Collier suggests, help countries avoid the "resource trap" by establishing mechanisms to ensure that revenue from oil or copper makes its way to the treasury, and then is used effectively. This is all the work of a generation. And there will be a great deal of backsliding, as the violence in Kenya in December 2007 made painfully clear. Often, there will be little or nothing outsiders can do to ward off catastrophe.

The hardest and most important category is the one in between—be it shaky autocracies like Ethiopia, "liberal autocracies" like Morocco or Jordan, or regressing former democracies like Thailand or Nigeria. And of course this question is most urgent in the Middle East and the Islamic world. And here, also, the Bush administration has left the biggest mess. Should we say that the well is, at least for now, hopelessly poisoned? Flynt Leverett, a former NSC official and a Middle East expert, argues that Bush's democracy policy in the Arab world has "emboldened rad-

icals and weakened moderates," and he pleads for a return to the realism of Bush's father. "While the United States should engage moderate Arab partners more systematically on economic reform and human rights," Leverett concludes, "Washington should drop its insistence on early resort to open electoral processes as a litmus test for 'democratization.'"

Washington has, of course, already done just that, restoring the emphasis on regional stability that Condoleezza Rice publicly renounced in June 2005. The change in policy has done nothing to address the problems outlined in the 2002 Arab Human Development Report. Yet it's true that our ability to shape the internal dynamic of the Arab world is very limited—though not because these states can afford to be indifferent to the U.S. or even because, as the example of Egypt shows, their publics utterly reject an American role. In a study for the Carnegie Endowment, Michele Dunne and Marina Ottaway refer to what Samuel Huntington described as the King's Dilemma: even limited change authorized by the autocratic ruler often emboldens reformers, and thus endangers, rather than secures, his power, as the Shah of Iran learned in the late 1970s. Rulers who resist change are thus acting perfectly rationally. At the same time, however, Arab elites increasingly recognize that they must change in order to keep pace with a globalized economy, and thus satisfy the popular demand for social mobility and economic opportunity. The goal of such regimes, Dunne and Ottaway write, "has not been democratization but modernization."

The Middle East furnishes some slightly more hopeful models, the authors note: in Morocco, the monarchy has made real changes in family law, permitted freer elections, and allowed an Islamic party to operate; an opposition party now functions in Yemen and Algeria. But in every case, the regime has decided how much reform is compatible with retaining an uncontested grip on power. And even where a younger generation, as with Gamal Mubarak in Egypt, has gained some control over the instruments of modernization, hard-liners have retained their monopoly on political and military power. The authors predict "continued political stagnation" rather than risky attempts to offer real political change. Outsiders, they note, have largely accommodated this impulse by focusing on economic and institutional, rather than political, change. The new policy, they argue, "is having very little effect." They conclude by observing that "political reform can never be risk-free: Too much close management perpetuates authoritarianism, and unmanaged processes have unpredictable outcomes."

And so the realists' fear that democracy promotion could endanger stability in the Middle East is scarcely baseless. And there is every reason to expect that regimes will dig in their heels in the face of pressure for real political change. And yet at the same time "modernization only" won't work: Arab regimes must open up if they are to gain real legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens. How, then, to get from here to there? Ideologues such as Natan Sharansky—or George W. Bush—imagined that if you shattered the existing order in the Middle East, a democracy would rise in its place. This fantasy has now been thoroughly chastened. People such as Dunne, Ottaway, and Thomas Carothers, who have extensively studied the political dynamic of the Middle East, recognize that there is no formula for reform, nor even a clear path from autocracy to democracy. Their expectations are suitably modest. But they do not profess nonintervention. As Dunne remarked in congressional testimony in 2006, now that Arab publics have begun demanding change, we must choose between supporting them or not.

Exaggerating our helplessness is at least as great a mistake as exaggerating our capacity. The Bush White House succeeded in pushing Hosni Mubarak further than anyone might have guessed. The mistake was not in the effort but in the failure to rise to Mubarak's challenge, and in the overreaction to the Hamas victory in Palestine. When Congress mandated that American democracy

assistance go directly to civil-society groups rather than through Cairo, the regime resisted, and then relented. We should direct more money throughout the Middle East to reform-minded organizations. And we should begin to put conditions on the vast aid we now give as a reward for compliant behavior on regional security issues. Those billions should also be seen as an inducement for better behavior toward the regimes' citizens. Why should we be predicating our aid throughout the world on democratization, marketplace reform, and progress against corruption and yet make no such demands in the Middle East? Some leaders may walk away rather than accept such demands, and then rally citizens by inveighing against "blackmail." It's far less likely that they will then choose to act as regional spoilers: conservative Sunni states are not going to throw in their lot with Iran or Syria.

And we must accept that "moderate Islam" is a meaningful category, and distinguish between those groups willing to play by democratic rules and those who are not. "If we are serious about Middle Eastern democracy," writes Shadi Hadid, a democracy activist and scholar, "then we must accept that it will come with an Islamist flavor." Hadid lists the chief Islamist parties in Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Kuwait, and, of course, Turkey among the moderates. (The same should be said of mainstream Islamists in Morocco.) Some of these parties, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, endorse the terrorist tactics of Hamas but have explicitly renounced violence in their own countries; and we should view this latter point as the more salient one. Many of those groups have no desire for help from Westerners, and certainly not from the United States. But we should treat them with respect, encourage them to compete in the political marketplace, and welcome their success, even as we make clear that terrorism is unacceptable everywhere and that Israel's survival is not negotiable (though the terms of Israel's relationship with its neighbors certainly are).

Finally, the neoconservative's simple-minded faith in "liberty" and their antipathy to nation-building, quite apart from matters of equity and justice, has painted us into a corner from which we must escape. If democracy has nothing to do with access to school and clean water and health care, or with knowing that the land you farm is yours and can't be stolen from you through force or fraud, then ordinary people won't put much stock in it. As Barack Obama puts it, we should focus on people's real aspirations—which of course include political freedom and democracy. Why should we seek to advance one set of goods to the exclusion of the other? Though there is still some disagreement about whether, or to what extent, political development must follow a certain sequence—with institutions first and elections only later—no one argues that a democracy can become stable absent basic political, economic, and social institutions. The neocons and the small-government ideologues believed that democratic elections would lead these institutions to generate spontaneously, or that we would do more harm than good in trying to nurture them. That a priori view is another casualty of the Bush era.

If rebuilding failed states, conquering infectious disease, training policemen and parliamentarians, nurturing civil society, and strengthening political parties are all of a piece, then we should reorganize our efforts accordingly. Right now such aid originates in the State Department, the Pentagon, USAID, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and elsewhere—and this after Condoleezza Rice streamlined the aid bureaucracy. Michael McFaul and Larry Diamond have called for the creation of a cabinet-level Department of International Development and Reconstruction that would consolidate all of these functions. They also suggest that funds for democracy promotion be disbursed largely through NGOs, including the NED and its party-based branches. This not only helps remove the taint of the American brand but also avoids the situation in which State Department diplomats must cultivate good relations with regimes while at the

same time financing programs that are bound to discomfit those regimes.

Democracy promotion is, in this sense, a single facet of a larger effort or, perhaps one should say, of an idea of our role in the world. We must take far more responsibility than we have in the past for the well-being of weak, endangered, striving states. We are obliged to do so not only out of moral considerations but, as President Bush and Condoleezza Rice concluded, out of calculations of self-interest. Liberty at home may not depend on liberty abroad, but it surely depends on a sense of hope and possibility abroad. Our powers, of course, are limited: we can't cure what ails the Congo, and we seem unable to banish the political nightmares of Sudan, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. But we must try to make a difference where and when and how we can. We have been trying, in our heartfelt, overbearing, and self-righteous way, since the Philippines. It's true that we haven't succeeded most of the time, but it matters now so much more than it ever has before.

A Note on Sources

This book draws on both academic and journalistic sources. I have listed below the books, reports, scholarly articles, and the like that I read in the course of my research, and that especially inform the historical portions of this book. For the latter 60 percent or so of the book, I also read a wide variety of news accounts and conducted a hundred-odd interviews—with officials of the Bush administration; students of democracy promotion; and activists, politicians, scholars, and ordinary citizens in Egypt and Mali.

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