

Us role in middle east democracy



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Democracy is described as a system of government whereby the power is vested in the people by electing representatives who rule them. It is also described as a government of the people by the people. Democracy was started in the ancient Greece and in England after the Magna Carta treaty of 1215. Greece citizens were allowed to speak and vote in the assembly. The Magna Carta treaty, on the hand, delegated some of the king's powers to the people. The American Revolution is also credited with making a landmark in democracy by the creation of the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson in 1776. Democratic principles require the equal treatment of all people and running an institution in a manner that is deemed impartial and fair. Other principles of democracy include respect to the rule of law and protection of the rights of the minorities (Diamond, Plattner, & Brumberg). Democracies have been for and granted as a result of wars, revolutions, and economic circumstances. Today the Middle East and in the greater Arab states' democracy has been plagued by conflicts and authoritarian regimes exercising total control over the people. In the early 1990's the United States began emphasizing on the development of civil societies in the Middle East through democratic aid pacts. By the 2009 fiscal year, the US annual assistance in the region surpassed the total amount of democratic aid pacts spent between 1991 and 2001. Though the pacts were categorized as democratic aids, it was not necessarily meant to promote the Middle East democracy rather than stability. Most of the Ngo's who received US assistance avoided doing any act that could be construed as supporting a regime change (Diamond, Plattner, & Brumberg). The US is more concerned about maintaining stability rather than the tenets of democracy. Democracy entails the alternation of power from the state to the people. America's

diplomacy in the Middle East is based on maintaining the status quo and endorsing sheer stability, rather than upholding the ideals and principles of democracy.

Tamara Wittes on America's role in building Arab democracy

In the recent years, the promotion of democracy has been a pillar of the US foreign policy not only in the Middle East, but across the globe. However, the true tenets and principles of democracy have always been evaded and questionable in the US foreign policy in the US. The US has supported authoritarian regimes and dictators to ensure stability and US interest and in return turned a blind eye to regime's usurping of democracy. The US supported Saddam Hussein in Iran-Iraq war but later turned against him when he was perceived as weak after invading Kuwait, a longtime US ally in the Middle East. The Middle East is known to harbor over 60 percent of the world's global oil reserves, and thus the US is more inclined to maintain stability in the region by overlooking implementation of democracy by the ruling regimes (Wittes, 2008). Democracy is an evolutionary aspect rather than revolutionary. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the country held its first general election in 2005 to mark a transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy. However, to date, America still maintains a military presence in Iraq not to further the course of democracy but to maintain stability and security crucial to US foreign policy interests.

Schools of thought in the US foreign policy international relations in the Middle East believe the country pursues stability at the expense of democracy in the region. When the Bush administration failed to prove

Saddam's weapons of mass destruction after 9/11, the administration used the notion of democracy to invade Iraq to stamp out Al-Qaeda. The use of democracy as an affront to war was based on the notion that, the overthrow of Saddam's rule would bring a democratic domino effect across the entire Middle East region. The invasion of Iraq was not entirely based on ensuring democracy, but a US policy of maintaining security and stability in the region. The then, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice on her nomination hearing before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee in January 2005, announced that one of the administration's diplomacy priorities is to strengthen the community democracies to fight and alleviate common security threats and ensure stability (Wittes, 2008).

The US 'soft democracy promotion' in the Middle East can be explained in two ways. The US fears it may bring about unfavorable results that may not be in tandem with Washington's interests. This can be attributed to the election of Islamic factions in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq who oppose America's liberal democracy in the region. In Palestine, the US pushed for elections in return for a guaranteed US support for a future Palestinian state. The elections culminated in the election of Hamas, an Islamic group classified as a terrorist organization by the US and EU. Hamas refused to recognize Israel's right to exist, and it later led to the refusal of the UN, EU, US and Russia to recognize Hamas as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. (Wittes, 2008). Witte also articulates that, the US fears a conflict of interest situation with its allies which may hinder co-operation on strategic issues in the region. For example, to openly demand for the promotion of democracy in Saudi Arabia may constrain its relationship with

the US and push towards China or Russia or run the risk of Islamic radicals taking over the country.

Principal determinants of the US Policy in the Middle East

Since the Second World War, the Middle East has been of essential interest to the United States. Today, the Middle East has evolved to become a permanent US geopolitical interest. The US policy in the region has long been based on economic factors and regional stability. These determinants have been essential to US that they have overridden democracy and the principles of democracy in the region (Dodge, 2008). Middle East's presence of oil reserves is a key determinant of the US policy and relations in the Middle East. A 1945 US State Department memorandum described Saudi Arabia's oil reserves as a stupendous source of strategic and one of the world's greatest material prizes in history. In 2006, 27 percent of the world's oil came from the Middle East with the US buying over half of it. President G. W. Bush acknowledged this by stating that, ' America is addicted to oil' (Dodge, 2008).

US's dependence on the Middle East oil illustrates that the US will always be cautious about taking any aggressive stance that might be upset or strain its Middle East allies. Nonetheless, as the world's most powerful nation and the biggest economy, the US has a responsibility to protect this vital interest. In return, the US gets favorable oil prices and strategic partners in the region. The vital oil interest in the Middle East makes the US overlook the exercise of democracy in the region, keep supporting the ruling regimes to ensure there is stability in the region. Today, in Saudi Arabia women are not allowed to

vote or lead certain key institutions and the US is its biggest oil importer (Dodge, 2008). The US turns a blind eye on this key violation of democracy for fear that democracy may lead to instability in the region. The US instead keeps a diplomatic policy that maintains the status quo in the region to maintain stability and protect this key economic interest.

US democracy effects of in respective Middle East states

The US and Israel-and the Palestinians

The Jewish state is a key US ally in the Middle East since the recognition of the state by President Harry Truman in 1948. Since then Israel has continued to enjoy US support over time. Israel's support has remained to be a pillar of US foreign policy in the Middle East as the one of the few democratic states in the region. The US policy of the state is based on several factors in that, to ensure stability in the region and a stable ally. However, Israel's unwavering US support however, pitted it against its neighbour states who viewed it as a threat to Palestine (Dodge, 2008). Israel has over time been accused of violating known international human rights, and the tenets of democracy but the US has however supported the state for the maintenance of stability in the region. The US backed Israel in its military strikes against the Palestinian authority and militants in the Gaza strip and the occupied territories of the west bank during the rule of Ariel Sharon.

Subsequently, the US push for democracy in the Palestinian territories led to the election of a religious extremist group with terrorist affiliations. The US preconditioned the Palestinian territories to allow room for democracy and in return the US would support the formation of a future Palestinian state

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(Dodge, 2008). The elections culminated in the election of Hamas, an Islamic group classified as a terrorist organization by the US and EU. Hamas refused to recognize Israel's right to exist, and it later led to the refusal of the UN, EU, US and Russia to recognize Hamas as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The preset preconditions were that the Palestine territories would accept Israel's right to existence, abandon violence and acknowledge previous Palestine-Israel agreements.

In 2007, following a forcible capture of Gaza by Hamas the US responded by imposing economic sanctions on the Palestinian enclave. The US at the same time rapidly increased funding of the West-Bank under the control of Fatah. Fatah was headed by Mahmoud Abbas had received US support in his candidacy for prime minister and president in 2003 and 2005 respectively. The US's intention of the increased Fatah's funding was to undermine the Hamas movement and strengthen the Fatah party. This scenario indicates that the US promoted Fatah because there was a viable condition for having a democracy and ensuring in the region (Dodge, 2008).

Bahrain

In the Middle East Bahrain is an key US ally primarily due to the location of US Navy Fifth Fleet command headquarters situated in the country's capital and due to Bahrain's importance to Saudi Arabia as a check to Iran.

Bahrain's ruling government is comprised of the Sunni minority whereas the Shia Muslims, who are the country's majority are minimally represented in government. The principles of democracy articulate that, in any democratic setting the ruling government must respect and treat the minority in equal

measure as the majority. However, the US tends to overlook this aspect for the maintenance of stability in the region. Military aid in the country increased in 2001 from 235, 000 dollars to 90. 4 million in 2004 (Carothers & Ottaway, 2010). This was largely attributed to the US's policy of key Bahrain as an ally and maintaining stability in the region by allowing the continued stay of US troops in the region.

Iraq

The Iraq invasion of 2003 was based on based on the notion that there was a need to counter US threats and bring stability and the only way viable way to do so was by introducing democracy in Iraq. Saddam's twenty four year rule was overthrown amid an effort to bring democracy to the country and the entire Middle East region. The introduction of democracy in Iraq was seen as the cornerstone of democracy in the entire region. US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice termed the transformation of Iraq as a key element of a very distinct Middle East (Dalacoura, 2005). The fall of Saddam's Baath party led to a collapse of public order which was highly unanticipated by the US. The collapse gave birth to the formation of Islamic insurgent groups that engaged the US in a war to push them out of Iraq. An extreme shortage in basic necessities such as food and water swept across the country. Insecurity became rampant and majority of the people were displaced, and a new conflict was formed. A conflict between the US military and Iraq insurgents. The collapse of public order threatened stability in the region and led engagement of the longest US war in history. In Saddam's twenty-four year rule, Iraq largely experienced stability and public order which was constrained by US's introduction of democracy in the country. After the

formation of an elected government, the country privatized all state-owned companies in all sectors except oil and minerals. This was viewed as an economic reform of the country. New bilateral agreements were signed to ensure stability in the region (Dalacoura, 2005).

Jordan

Due to its constitutional monarch, Jordan has for a long time been regarded as one of the most stable states in the Middle East. During the Bush administration, Jordan and the US only engage on an 'as needed' basis only. However, after the Iraq invasion in 2003, this need be basis changed. The US reviewed its relations with the Jordan and democratic reforms. However, the renewed interest of democracy in US was based on ensuring stability in the region and the significance of maintenance of peace with Israel. An agreement with the US was signed that allowed Jordan to consolidate its debt with the US. In return, Jordan agreed to train Iraq police on its soil to help combat the growing insurgency in Iraq. State interactions between the two countries increased (Carothers & Ottaway, 2010).

Lebanon

Renewed calls for democracy in Lebanon led to the country's first free and fair general elections in 2005. The election resulted in the election of Hezbollah, a terrorist group in government. Election of the group to government led to widespread negative press against the US, but the US still kept maintaining diplomatic relations with the country for the sake of stability. The introduction of democracy in the country by US was perceived as a way maintaining stability by giving people a chance to elect leaders of

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their choice (Carothers & Ottaway, 2010). However, the election of Hezbollah faced the US with a dilemma of how to maintain diplomatic relations with the country with a government that representatives with known terrorist affiliations

Syria

Due to Syria's classification as a state sponsor of terrorism the US only exercises minimal direct interactions with the state. Syria has been ruled by the Assad dynasty for decades. The Assads practice total authoritarian rule over their subjects. Under the Obama administration, the US threatened to invade Syria to impose democracy and rule of law in the country. The invasion was vetoed by Russia in the UN Security Council meeting. After the veto of military intervention, the US sponsored a revolution to topple that Assad government by supplying weapons to the revolutionary groups Documents on Democracy. (2014). A general election was held in 2014, and Bashar al-Assad won by a landslide victory. 88.7 percent of the electorates elected him even after been opposed by the US. Though the US did not explicitly acknowledge Assad's election it recommended the people for participating in the election.

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