

The Nature of US Democracy Promotion Policy: Reality versus Illusion The Case of Iraq

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Abstract

United States has had a greater impact on global democratization, for better or for worse, than any other country during the past century. No country has used its vast political, cultural, economic, and military resources toward recreating other states in its own image. Not surprisingly, U.S involvement in democracy promotion has attracted such great attention, together with a good deal of skepticism and suspicion. In fact, the building blocks of U.S. democracy promotion have come into question after September 11, 2001 and recent events within the Middle East. The pursuit of democracy promotion policy historically has served US national self-interests. This paper argues that placing U.S. democratic ideals in a secondary rank to geopolitical concerns along with the tendency to promote US-style democracy resulted in ideological polarization within many countries and brought about an atmosphere of mistrust and ill feeling that has yet needed to be overcome. Pursuit of democracy promotion has often been at variance with other US foreign policy objectives. By examining the US democracy promotion in Iraq, the paper argues that when such policy contradicts the US security and economic interests, policymakers put the US interests first and apply universal values selectively.

Key Words: Democracy Promotion, US Foreign Policy, Iraq War, Ideological Polarization

The nature of history is that we know the consequences only of the action we took. But inaction would have had consequences, too. Imagine what the world would look like today with Saddam Hussein still ruling Iraq. He would still be threatening his neighbors, sponsoring terror, and piling bodies into mass graves.

George W. Bush, Decision Points

1. Introduction

In recent years, “democracy promotion” as a contested concept came to be the formal currency of US foreign policy. United States and democracy promotion entwined together but no longer synonymous (McFaul, 2004). Democracy turned into a disputable term that is sometimes synonymous with political unrest and economic inequality (Wittes, 2008). However, it has found a central position in the US foreign policy. Since Middle East has been bombarded with the rhetoric of democracy promotion more than any other region this paper will focus on Middle East and in particular, on Iraq. Since the first time Alfred Mahan, American naval officer and historian, coined the geopolitical term Middle East in 1902 for this part of the world, it was clear that the region would be of a vital importance for American statesmen.

Conflict and uncertainty has bestridden the region for a long time. Interstate conflicts, political unrest and tensions, outside interventions, interethnic hostilities, religious and nationalist movements, and oil price fluctuations, *inter alia* has engulfed this strategic part of the world, which has 60 percent of known global oil reserves. Iraq inevitably is the conundrum in the region given its invasion of Iran in September 1980 and Kuwait in August 1990, launching Scud missiles against Israel in 1991 and US-led coalition occupation of Iraq in March 2003. Bush’s invasion of Iraq was justified by Saddam’s possession of weapons of mass destruction and deceptive links between Saddam and Al-Qaeda. Failing to prove weapons of mass destruction and Saddam-Al-Qaeda ties, Bush justified occupation of Iraq by the name of promoting democracy and, the premise that overthrow of Saddam dictatorship would lead to a new version of a democratic domino effect throughout the region. So democracy promotion became the tertiary goal for occupation of Iraq.

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It should be noted that democracy promotion is an evolutionary phenomenon rather than a revolutionary one; Elections were held in Iraq in 2005 as a sign of transition from dictatorship to democracy and as constituting the arrival of democracy in the country, though that was the visible tip of an effective democratic iceberg. There are still insecurity and instability in Iraq, given 7 years of American military presence in the country. Long standing presence of Americans in the country to maintain security and to initiate the so-called democratization process may be open to question, while the number of human cost emanating from bombings, armed conflicts, and sectarian conflicts still lingers on, though fundamentally diminishing compared to initial years after Saddam fell. However, focusing on the Middle East especially Iraq, this paper tries to answer two core questions. Firstly, what is the true nature of US democracy promotion policy? To put it differently, how far has US democracy promotion been a genuine cause? Secondly, how far has American policy to promote democracy in the Middle East, in particular, in Iraq, been in consort with the interests of the people of the region or US own interests and ambitions?

This paper explores and evaluates the experience of US democracy promotion policy generally and specifically in Iraq. First, an overview of that policy is presented. Second, the importance of democracy promotion as a central objective of US foreign policy is evaluated. Then, such that policy is placed in historical context, one that came into being just before the Cold War. Forth, using a diagram, the paper puts into discussion democracy promotion in great detail as a multipurpose tool of US foreign policy and a continuation of 'Manifest Destiny,' that served US interests better. The nexus of Iraq and US policy of democracy promotion are then assessed before the paper concludes that, given the recent uprising in the Middle East and Mearsheimer's argument that the failure of US foreign policies is not the outgrowth of 'clash of civilizations' but 'double standard' in US foreign policy behavior toward the region, it seems that US should come to terms with the realities of world politics and instead of forging democracy at gunpoint, for example, in Iraq and Afghanistan, take more pragmatic steps regarding that policy in the world, in particular, in the Middle East.

2. The Place of Democracy Promotion in US Foreign Policy

Democracy promotion is among the abundant supply commodities in US foreign policy lexicon and among US presidents' vocabulary. From its inception, the Founding Fathers held the idea that America is an exceptional country, which based on this ideal that humans have inalienable rights. This notion was an internal boon for the founding fathers in order to solidify the rule of democracy. Later after the US emerged as a global power, the notion imbued to the foreign policy in the time of President Roosevelt. Since then, democracy has been always an exceptional word among American presidents. In particular, it dates back to World War I when Woodrow Wilson asserted that American entry into the Great War would make the world safe for democracy [1], though recent democratization efforts go back to 1983 when Ronald Reagan created National Endowment for Democracy to promote democracy in Latin America [2]. Scholars such as John Ikenberry and Tony Smith have argued that democratic advancement has been a fixed theme in both Democrat and Republican parties and the defining feature of American role in the world (Smith *et al.*, 2000).

Promoting freedom and democracy and protecting human rights around the world have long been central components of U.S. foreign policy. With these goals in mind, the United States seeks to: [3] i) promote democracy as a means to achieve security, stability, and prosperity for the entire world; ii) assist newly formed democracies in implementing democratic principles; iii) advocates around the world to establish vibrant democracies in their own countries; and iv) identify and denounce regimes that deny their citizens the right to choose their leaders in elections that are free, fair, and transparent. However, democracy promotion has been one of the justifications of US administrations for intervention abroad, and that is American foreign policy pattern since World War I (Wittes, 2008).

According to Thomas Carothers(2000), democracy has intertwined in complex ways with American economic, security, and sociopolitical interests. He argues that every American president over the last 30 years has ended up his presidency with an emphasis on democracy promotion. President Reagan formulated his policy of countering the Soviet Union in terms of democracy promotion and established some programs that continue today in this area. President Bush, Sr. became substantially involved in establishing U.S. policies as support for democratic transitions around the post-communist world after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. President Clinton, as part of his effort to redefine America's security profile and global outlook in a post-Cold War world, settled upon democratic enlargement as one of his key themes and engaged in support for democracy activities in many parts of the world.

And President Bush, Jr. moved quickly away from his own realist instincts after September 11 to embrace his global freedom agenda and become substantially involved in democracy promotion for the rest of his presidency, i. e., “Greater Middle East Initiative” [4]. Emphasizing that “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,” Gorge W Bush remarks on the importance of democracy in his memoir, *Decision Points*, in such a way that

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. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. ... So it is 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. (Bush, 2010)

Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State, on her nomination hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on January 18, 2005 announced three top priorities for her administration’s diplomacy:

First, we will unite the community of democracies in building an international system that is based on shared values and the rule of law. Second, we will strengthen the community of democracies to fight the threats to our common security and alleviate the hopelessness that feeds terror. And third, we will *spread freedom and democracy throughout the globe*. That is the mission that President Bush has set for America in the world and is the great mission of American diplomacy today (Emphasis by the writers) (Epstein, Serafino and Miko, 2007).

As 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States of America clearly points out, democracy promotion is the most effective way of reaching security: “Because democracies are the most responsible members of the international system, promoting democracy is the most effective long-term measure for strengthening international stability.” [5]. Democracy therefore had to be promoted abroad because it is an integral part of US foreign policy and as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams aptly observed,

“*Democracy became the organizing principle of our policy.*” [6]

3. US Democracy Promotion Policy in Retrospect

Democracy promotion has been an ever-present theme in the rhetoric of American administrations, but volatile and tempered over different periods by the circumstances of time and place. They have been selective about when and where to resort to promoting democracy. Franklin Roosevelt was more interested in securing a democratic France than in supporting democracy in Poland. Ronald Reagan pushed for democratization more forcefully in the Communist world than in Africa. Bush seems passionate about supporting democrats in Iraq but indifferent to the struggles of democrats fighting authoritarian drift in Pakistan and Russia (McFaul, 2004). The US government, for example, gave significant military and economic support to Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippine, until the late 1980s, and turned a blind eye to his abuses of human rights and embezzlement of government funds (Wittes, 2008). Even in the absence of the Cold War concerns, the United States did trade off political liberties with economic and strategic interests; the elder Bush made a weak response to China’s Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989; and President Clinton overlooked China’s human rights record for the sake of its trade interests (Neier, 1997).

The US government withdraws its support for dictators once they become weak; for example, once democratic opposition became too popular in the Philippines and Marcos violence became intolerable, President Reagan withdrew his support for Marcos Dictatorship (Wittes, 2008). Even Americans turned their head from Saddam’s slaughter of his own people in 1991 to maintain status quo. Washington supported Saddam during Iran-Iraq war but changed its mind and no longer liked Saddam once he thought of invading Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, US allies and oil suppliers. All of these are well supported by Condoleezza Rice remarks at the American University in Cairo in June 2005 where she aptly pointed out the shortcomings of American past-decades policies:

“For 60 years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East....Now we are taking a different course. We are supporting democratic aspirations of all people. “Freedom and democracy are the only ideas powerful enough to overcome hatred, and division, and violence.” [7]

In her statement, Rice considers democracy as a panacea for the entire world's violence.

Since then the priorities has changed little, as in the words of Obama, addressing the House of Commons And so to them, we must squarely acknowledge that, yes, we have enduring interests in the region — to fight terror, sometimes with partners who may not be perfect; to protect against disruptions of the world's energy supply. But we must also insist that we reject as false the choice between our interests and our ideals; between stability and democracy. For our idealism is rooted in the realities of history — that repression offers only the false promise of stability, that societies are more successful when their citizens are free, and that democracies are the closest allies we have[8].

Juxtaposing two visions set by Rice in 2005 and by Obama in 2011 reveal the same pattern in US foreign policy regarding the democracy promotion. That is, little has changed in the US policies in theory and practice. In theory, Rice, with hindsight of the experience of US during the past sixty years, now comes to a turning point that is change from mere stability disregarding the necessities of it to stability with a bonus of freedom and democracy for the people. That seems a red herring, since in practice, US winked at the presence of repression and autocratic leaders in the region whose same leaders are close allies to US. Now, in the word of President Obama the same is reveals itself. In recent unrests in Egypt and Tunisia, US was indifferent to the situation until the near fall of Mubarak and Bin Ali when US supported the public unrest and warned Mubarak not to pursue his rule over Egypt. But at the same time US was indifferent to situation in Bahrain which is an important alley to US in the region. In Practice US ideals have been synonymous with maintaining the national interests in the face of any sort of repression, corruption and injustice in the countries which are its allies.

Accordingly, America's record of promoting democracy made many doubt that it is a genuine goal for American officials as some experts (for example, Chomsky, 1992; Robinson, 1996, 2004; Schweller, 2004) argue that American democracy promotion is a red herring to attain national interest, especially, economic ones.

Anastasio Somoza, Nicaraguan general and president, created a dynasty of dictators and ruled the country brutally for 43 years but with support of America. All of this suggests that US democracy promotion policy is not to build democratic states for the benefit of their citizens—a glance at U.S. support of authoritarian regimes from Southeast Asia to Latin America appears to give such an impression (Feldman, 2004). America's fickle record of commitment to support democratic governments, especially once they are considered unreliable allies to Washington is obvious; some cases are the US intervention to overthrow elected government in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, and Brazil in the mid1960s, and Chili in 1973, though, they are seen as outgrowth of the Cold War circumstances (Bunce and Wolchik, 2005).

“Democracy Enlargement” was the main theme of President Clinton's foreign policy in both first and second terms. Advocating the policy of democracy enlargement, Clinton National Security adviser, Antony Lake, believes that “the addition of new democracies makes us more secure because democracies tend not to wage war on each other or sponsor terrorism.” [9]Smith, however, argues that Clinton policy was less about democracy promotion than American economic interests. Arguing that US has historically stood for resistance to democracy rather than promoting it and such a point that the policy behind democracy promotion has been US economic interests, he points out,

In sum, I think that the Clinton administration's commitment to democracy enlargement was more of a public relations ploy than an achievable, and maybe even desirable, goal for US foreign policy (2000).

Given Smith argument, democracy promotion was a tool of statecraft for Clinton's foreign policy. Of course, there are instances, according to Lake, in which US policy seems to have solely been for promoting and protecting democracy (e.g., Panama and Haiti) and for benevolent and humanitarian purposes (e.g., Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia) (Hippel, 2004). And the other cases that Bush Jr. included them as democracies US helped to build (Germany, Japan, and South Korea) (Bush, 2010). Beyond all, American version of democracy promotion, according to Barry Gills and Joel Rocamora (1992), is a very limited format or so-called “low-intensity democracy:”which focuses electoral rights and pays little attention to socioeconomic structures.Noam Chomsky asserts that the US promotes a special form of democracy whose main objective is to preserve the economic status quo. Democracy then becomes less of a goal of foreign policy and more a tool of economic policy (Chomsky, 1992).Brinkley (1997) has paid more attention to relationship between American democracy promotion and its economic foreign policy; according to him, American policy of democracy promotion serves its economic policy, and democracy expands via global economy. It implies that global economy is a path to democracy promotion.

As Cox (1995) has observed of Clinton administration, geopolitics has been replaced by geo-economics in the US foreign policy. It seems that American aim at promoting democracy is not the expansion of the deep concepts of democracy but a form that is in consort with its economic interests. William Robinson captured this point better

The *impulse* to ‘promote democracy’ is the rearrangement of political systems in the peripheral and semi-peripheral zones of the ‘world system’ so as to secure the underlying objective of maintaining essentially undemocratic societies inserted into an unjust international system . . . Just as ‘client regimes’ and right-wing dictatorships installed into power or supported by the United States were characteristic of a whole era of US foreign policy and intervention abroad in the post-World War II period, promoting ‘low-intensity democracies’ in the Third World is emerging as a cornerstone of a new era in US foreign policy (1996).

It seems that, as Walker argues, the US commitment to democracy had been in furtherance of “strategic globalism” and concerned geopolitics and economy more than commitment to human security (Walker, 2009). Thus US democracy promotion policy sounds like a concept whose form and content is not alike. In other word, it wears various masks; as Takashi Inoguchi points out,

“As the sole superpower with the will and the ability to act globally, and as a nation required to deal with a vast array of problems occurring intermittently around the globe, the United States assumes a very different visage depending on the nature of the problems it faces. At times it looks like a guardian angel, at times like a monster. One cannot imagine any other country whose foreign policy could be characterized as ‘beautiful imperialism’.” (Cox and et al., 2000) Thus it seems that when the policy of democracy promotion clashes with the security and economic interests, policymakers find they have to apply universal values selectively.

Based on the quotations above, it seems that US foreign policy is interest-oriented and it will pursue the promotion of democracy as long as it guarantees US economic interests. Often times security concerns has worked along with economic ones to maintain the status quo. US will pursue democracy in the case that it finds no clash between its interests and democracy. This means that US style of democracy promotion is based on liberal values and this will lead to stability paradigm, along with US interests, for democracies will never fight each other. This will lead to expansion of hegemonic culture.

A new paradigm set by Dueck (2008) argues that the Wilsonian style of promotion suffers from the historical reluctance of US to providing means of support for their grand visions around the world. He asserts that Americans are crusaders, but they are reluctant. He gives the example of Iraq as his assumed reluctance. Based on this, one can argue that, US failure in promoting democracy around the world has roots in the history of ‘cyclical tradition’, in the sense that this tradition has repeated during the history of US different administrations. This has contributed to failures US has experienced as the result of disproportionate ratio of ‘vision’ to the ‘means’ and provisions necessary to fulfill them.

4. Democracy Promotion: A Multipurpose Tool of US Foreign Policy

Countries try to expand their influence with myriad of tools in the global system and United States is not exception to the rule. Expansion can have two forms; they are territorial and ideological for the United States, though it may be argued that territorial expansion necessitates ideological one (Layne and Thayer, 2007). Expansion also requires some tools; set in its historical context, US expansion has two forms, via hard power and soft power and the tools being “Manifest Destiny” and “democracy promotion,” respectively. Indeed, ‘Manifest Destiny’ originally meant westward expansionism, but later evolved into a campaign bent on spreading democracy to foreign cultures (Hippel, 2004). It worked as a justification for US expansionist foreign policy including the conquest of northern Mexico and bringing Latin America into the US sphere of influence (Merk, 1963). Winston Churchill once aptly observed, “The empires of the future are the empires of the mind.” Knowing Churchill’s account of future, it seems that American policymakers have changed their tactic and camouflaged manifest destiny with a less harsh face, military intervention but by the name of democracy promotion, humanitarian purposes, human rights, and defending democracy; a combination of the hard and soft power or what Joseph Nye called “Smart Power” (see Figure 1)

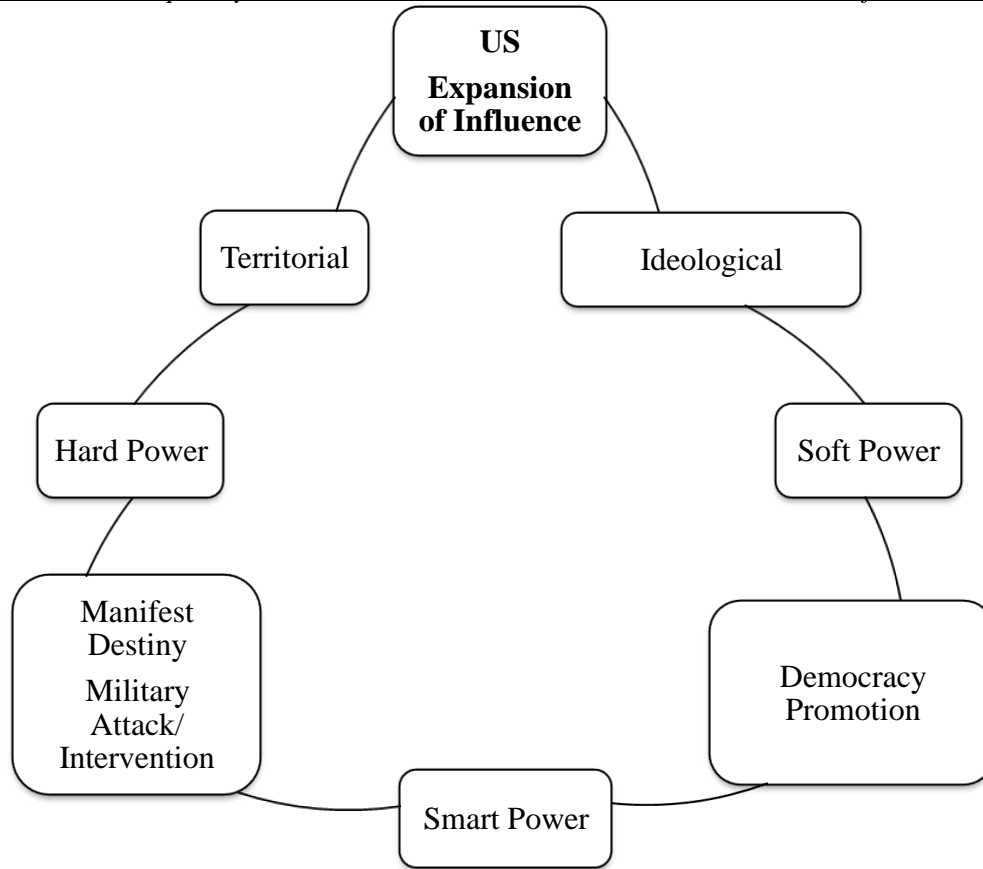


Figure 1: Historical route of US expansion via different methods and tools, by the authors.

As the Figure 1 illustrates, US expansion assumes two forms, territorial and ideological; two muscles of US expansion are hard and soft power. Manifest destiny or military attack/intervention and democracy promotion are the tactics of hard and soft power, respectively. Manifest destiny means annexing a territory (Indians Lands, northern Mexico), and military attack/intervention not necessarily means taking over a territory but a tool of paving the way for democracy promotion (Japan, Germany, Iraq, Panama and Haiti) and humanitarian purposes (Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia). Layne and Thayer (2007) argue that Americans have always tried to continue the policy of expansionism and primacy. They also argue that US expansion of influence has been crystalized in two strands; first, the appetite for territorial expansion which satisfied by 1900 and, the second, expansion via ideological influence. History of the ideological expansion dates back to the inception of territorial expansion but its appetite has never yet been satisfied. Thus the United States no longer seeks to maintain control via other means such as “conquering territory and imposing colonial rule” but through “expanding its ideology of democracy and free market economy;” i. e., “It does not covet territory or resources. It covets ideas,” what Churchill called “empire of the mind.” (Layne and Thayer, 2007)

According to the Figure 1, it can be said that today territorial expansion is no longer matters and military intervention and wars is meant to enlarge the scope of dominion. On the other hand, this can be achieved via the expansion of American ideology and culture. Hard power is meant to expand territorially and soft power to ideological expansion. However not exact in strict sense of the term, soft and hard powers have been used in parallel by the US as the manifestations of carrot and stick policy.

Schools of thought in international relations on United States policies may be divided as advocates of isolationism, selective engagement, and primacy. Followers of each have assumptions peculiar to themselves; advocates of isolationism [10]call for cutting America’s role abroad and highlight domestic problems; selective engagement supporters [11]believe that for the US have to remain powerful enough to preserve simply the global economy centers, especially Europe and southeast Asia. But apostles of primacy school [12]argue that the US should be *the* great power in international scene and preserve its primacy via its military and economic power.

They try to formulate a grand strategy to preserve the US prestige in international politics.

To formulate foreign policy, countries should not only match their resources with security demands, but also should provide a proper balance between their foreign and domestic policy needs. In that regard, Grand Strategy requires the integration of economic and military might to attain interests. As Paul Kennedy (1991) has noted, the crux of grand strategy is to bring together all the military (hard power) and non-military (soft power) elements to preserve and enhance long-term best interests.

By the turn of the twenty century and the declaration of the Open Door policy in 1900, America emerged as a great player in international arena, and intended to dominate the world, then, to reach this goal, campaigned with its European imperial rivals. But at the end of World War II, given Allied triumph and American military and economic might, US emerged as one of the superpowers of the time and even the greatest in international scene in a bipolar system, US and Soviet Union being its two poles. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s disrupted the bipolar system, and America called for a “new world order” known as unipolar world led by itself. In spite of the emergence of a multipolar system, the US officials avoid accepting this reality and expect other countries to accept the US primacy in international politics. Condoleezza Rice has explicitly captured this point; “from Washington’s standpoint, multi-polarity is not a good thing at all.”

(Qtd. in Pape, 2005) Bush’s hostility to multi-polarity was implicit in 2002 National Security Strategy by saying that US is “attentive to the possible renewal of old patterns of great power competition.” [13] From standpoint of US three recent administrations, “antidote to multipolar instability has been the US primacy.” (Layne and Thayer, 2007). Many of American neoconservatives such as William Kristol and Robert Kagan share this viewpoint that American hegemony is the only reliable guardian of international peace and order (Kristol and Kagan, 1996). Zalmay Khalilzad, American ambassador to Iraq and Afghanistan during the Bush Jr. administration, argues that American leadership is more contributing to global stability than a bipolar or multipolar balance of power [14]. The fact that the US became superpower in international arena as a consequence of Soviet Union collapse should not mislead us about the fact that achieving geopolitical primacy has been driving force behind the US grand strategy from the beginning of 1940s (Layne, 2006).

Indeed, the end of the Cold War deprived the US of having a real enemy and challenged the foundations upon which American foreign policy was built over four decades. Georgi Arbatov, a Russian Professor, asked the US at the end of the Cold War that “now that you have lost your enemy, what will you do?” [15] The end of the Cold War left no guidelines for the US foreign policy. September 11 was a day that changed America forever. Since then, war on terrorism became new defining paradigm in US foreign policy after the Cold War [16]. As some experts indicate,

Fear of alien ideas – once Communism, now Islamic fundamentalism – permeates official thinking. The perceived need to combat threatening forces, once the Soviet Union, now Iran and Iraq, remains pervasive. And a preference for military intervention to achieve policy objectives continues [17].

Ronald Reagan once, to deter Communism, framed the Cold War setting in the context of campaign for democracy or global democracy promotion. In the absence of Soviet Communism threat and after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, global democratization again became a central foreign policy goal and identified as a key element of Bush administration’s “New World Order.” Clinton embraced “Democracy Enlargement,” what Brinkley labeled “Clinton Doctrine,” as a key element of US foreign policy (Brinkley, 1997). National Security Adviser Anthony Lake formally observed:

The successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement—enlargement of the world’s free community. . . . We must counter the aggression—and support the liberalization—of states hostile to democracy. . . . The United States will seek to isolate [nondemocratic states] diplomatically, militarily, economically and technologically (Lake, 1997).

Under a category Building Democracy, USAID declared,

faltering democracies and persistent oppression pose serious threats to the security of the United States. Because democratic regimes contribute to peace and security in the world and because democracy and respect for human rights coincide with fundamental American values, the Clinton administration has identified the promotion of democracy as a primary objective of U.S. foreign policy (1994).

Democracy promotion became a key element of George W. Bush foreign policy after 9/11. For Bush administration, it found a central position in the “war on terror” policy. In sum, US policy of promoting democracy as a ‘multiple personality’ phenomenon has conformed well to the realities of world politics and, in Schraeder’s words, “has long served as a key vehicle for the projection of U.S. political ideals as well as for the pursuit of the country’s material self-interests,” (Schraeder, 2002) accordingly a tool of US grand strategy and an operational foreign policy ‘doctrine.’ And once (regional) security considerations are at variance with the policy of promoting democracy, they generally prevailed. For example, violations of human rights and repression of political rights in Israel and Egypt as the primary recipients of US aid [18]are overlooked at the expense of democracy and for the sake of security considerations[19].

All three post-Cold War administrations adopted the primacist vision of American grand strategy (Layne and Thayer, 2007). So democracy promotion has been a multipurpose tool that has served Reagan administration (for contaminating terrorism), the elder Bush’s (a tool for New World Order), Clinton’s (for pursuing global economic interests), and Bush’s (as a key element of ‘war on terror’). As some neoconservatives such as Kristol and Kagan have argued about American primacy; “in Europe, in Asia, and the Middle East, the message we should be sending to potential foes is: Don’t even think about it.” [20]They believe that the objective of American foreign policy should be maintaining the United States hegemony as far into the future as possible.Indeed, pursuing primacy the policy the US has followed after the end of the Cold War came to life under the Bush administration. In the US 2002 National Security Strategy, George Bush called for American primacy role in the world; the right to preemptive war, the overthrow of regimes considered hostile, and immunity from treaties and constraints imposed on other nations [21]. Generally speaking, it may be concluded that democracy promotion is a ploy of enhancing the United States primacy rather than promoting democracy in the target country.

5. Iraq and US Democracy Promotion Policy

Two years after crossing the Rubicon in March 2003, President Bush, in his inaugural address in 2005, used the word “freedom” 25 times, “liberty” 12 times, and “democracy” or “democratic” three times [22]. He, in Francis Fukuyama words, entered White House with the intention of promoting democracy in the world, but, indeed, September 11 attacks made Bush reevaluate national security policy, accordingly, September 11 made `security` the main objective for Bush and `democracy promotion` as one of the means to reach it. Thus, democracy promotion turned to be Bush’s foreign policy main objective (Fukuyama and McFaul, 2007). In March 2003, a US-led coalition invaded Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The rationale for invasion was that regime change was the only reliable tool to disarm Saddam of weapons of mass destruction and also disrupting the potential link between Saddam and Al-Qaeda. But democracy promotion, according to Fukuyama and McFaul (2007), became formal currency of Bush’s foreign policy once other arguments rang hollow (the disclosure of fabrications of such claims on Iraq in particular). However, many argue that democracy promotion is not a US genuine objective. For example, opinion polling in Western Europe implies that the US traditional allies consider war against Iraq as a war for Iraqi oil reserves [23].

And even many Arabs believe that September 11 was a US self-inflicted wound to justify a crusade against Islamic world (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004).Robinson (2004) believes that democracy promotion programs are part of a broader four-step plan for the whole Middle East using Iraq as leverage; 1) providing a solution for Arab-Israeli conflict; 2) Middle East Partnership for a civil society in the region; 3) further integration of the region into global economic system through liberalism; and 4) avoiding the emergence of a regional power. But Bush himself doesn’t think so and considers protecting the American people as the right claim (Bush, 2010).United States needs a war once for a while to fuel the military and the defense industries; the US can test its arms through which profits a lot (O’Hullachain and Sharpe, 2007). During the crisis in the Persian Gulf, analysts said that it provided military companies with a glimmer of hope, and “if Iraq does not withdraw and things get messy, it will be good for the industry”, said Michael Lauer [24]. According to *Washington Post*, “The possible beneficiaries of the crisis cover the spectrum of companies in the defense industry.” [25]For example, over the two or three years ago, the US sold 15 to 20 billion dollars’ worth of arms. War was then the business for Americans and many are oblivious to that, though, it, as a major aspect of U.S. security policy, compromised democracy promotion (Walker, 2009). From the inception, the US has been an imperially-powered engine. By 1900 with territorial expansion satisfied, the US ideological influence, which Robinson and Gallagher (1953) called “free trade imperialism”, and what William called “idealism imperialism” [26], turned out to be US foreign policy cornerstone but under the rubric of democracy promotion (McMahon, 2009).

Indeed, Bush used September 11 to breathe a new life into American Exceptionalism, which is considered the foundation of America's primacy and empire. In fact, September 11 drastically changed American grand strategy, and it was a pretext for those who wanted to use American hard power to create a new American empire. But this new American empire was different from that of 20th century whose geographical center was Western Europe and East Asia. The focal point of new American empire is the Middle East and its ambition is to change Islamic World (Layne and Thayer, 2007). An American crucial policy objective is to have access to the Persian Gulf oil reserves (Walker, 2009). According to Christopher Layne, *faux realism* of primacy and Wilsonian ideology are constituents of American empire. The advocates of empire argue that America can achieve peace through maintaining American primacy and exporting democracy. But he contends that American empire version of peace is a peace of illusions (Layne, 2006).

As Fukuyama has also observed, "the US has promoted democracy in such places as Germany and Japan after World War II but when it has been in concert with its security objectives" (Fukuyama and McFaul, 2008). He continues that "trade-offs occur in areas such as the Middle East where the closest American strategic allies are autocracies such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt." Thus, it seems that there is a large gap between Americans' rhetoric and actions, and democracy promotion is more of a smokescreen to advance interests than a genuine objective for American officials. Put simply, not only has the US not promoted democracy in the region, but also, as Wittes (2008) has argued, "The failure of democracy in the Arab world is partly the result of the Americans' closing their eyes to human rights and democracy."

It seems that American hesitation and half-measures about democracy promotion can be explained by two reasons. The first reason is that democracy promotion results may be unfavorable to Washington and may not be in concert with America's preferences. This has been the case as Islamic factions- whose values are far from Americans' presumed liberal democracy- were victors of elections in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq (Wittes, 2008). The second one is the "conflict of the interests"; more important issues may be overshadowed by more emphasis on democratization policies, and hinder Arab regimes' cooperation with the US on strategic interests. For example, to emphasize seriously on openness and democracy in Saudi Arabia may disrupt its cooperation with the US, which, in turn, may push it toward China and Russia or lead to the risks of Islamic radicals' takeover. And Americans' ambivalence toward democracy promotion is captured well in the remark of a journalist; "How is it possible to promote democracy and fight terrorism when movements deemed by the United States to be terrorist and extremist are the most politically popular in the region?" (Qtd. in Silverstein, 2007).

Regarding Iraq, Renshon maintains that,

In Iraq, there was only one effective political party and it had a monopoly on political power. Elections were rigged and no one could complain about that and live. Public debate was stifled and large areas of political, economic, and social life were off limits to it. Power was maintained by force, not legitimacy. The legislature was hand-picked and a rubber stamp for Saddam Hussein. The same was true of the judiciary. There was not rule of law, but rather rule by fiat. (Renshon, 2010)

As Renshon noted above Saddam's Iraq experienced a highly low level civil rights and democratic principles. But after toppling Saddam, it seems that "Iraqi people," using Bush's words, "are better off with a government that answers to them instead of torturing and murdering them." Once elections were held in Iraq and then Prime Minister Maliki, a Shia, President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and Sunni sheikhs sitting around a table discussing the future of their country, one can see that democracy is at work there, though that is the visible tip of an effective democratic iceberg. According to Bush, "Maliki thanked America for liberating the country and affirmed his desire for a close friendship" and said "We will achieve victory over terror, which is a victory for democracy." (Bush, 2010). In sum, democratization is often an uncertain and volatile phenomenon (Wittes, 2008). One should be patient to see hope for the future of Iraq democratization and how the United States trades off between its interests and promoting democracy in depth in Iraq.

6. Coda

This paper ends not with a conclusion but a coda, linking recent events to the discussion of US policy of democracy promotion. Offering a conclusion would be misleading, because it could be taken as being more definitive than suggestive.

Democracy became a catchword in the Middle East under the forty-third American chief executive. Bush championed freedom more than that of his predecessors. He envisaged establishing “made-in-USA” democracy first in Iraq and then in the greater Middle East, though, the policy brought neither self-sustaining democracy nor stability to the invaded peoples, at least in the short term (Henriksen, 2007). Bringing down Saddam ushered in an ongoing conflict in Iraq where human costs alone up to 31 December 2010 have claimed 4,430 American troops [27], 9,537 Iraqi troops [28] and 99,285-108,398 Iraqi citizens [29]. Providing security (provided by America), which Harvard professor Joseph Nye (1995) compared it to oxygen for the people, is not a commodity in abundant supply in Iraqi society, though it is increasing compared to initial post-Saddam years. Indeed, had Americans supposedly intended to promote democracy, it would require some proper mechanisms since, as in Talleyrand’s words, “Any system intended to bring liberty by open force to neighboring nations can only make liberty hated and prevent its triumph.” (Qtd. in Lebow, 2008)

In fact, the fundamental gap between talk and action among past American officials caused resentment and lack of confidence among Arab democratic movements towards the US-style democracy promotion. Given this circumstances, the US has failed to make contact properly with Arab reformers in the region. In other words, unlike their governments, many Arab citizens have no desire to interact with the US. For example, in an opinion poll conducted among citizens of six Arab countries in the Middle East in 2006, 65 percent of respondents said that democracy promotion is not a US genuine goal (Telhami, 2006). It is concluded that the US reputation in the region has tarnished due to its falsely claiming of democracy promotion. Instead of being calculators, Washington’s decision-makers were crusader in dealing with the Middle East. Iraq war, in Louis Fisher’s words, “cast a dark shadow over the health of U.S. political institutions and the celebrated system of democratic debate and checks and balances.” (Fisher, 2004).

Primacy and empire are the causes of American insecurity (Layne and Thayer, 2007). Pursuing primacy then is a counterproductive strategy for the US and will drag it into otherwise avoidable wars since, as Henry Kissinger rightly observed, “Hegemonic empires almost automatically elicit universal resistance, which is why all such claimants have sooner or later exhausted themselves.” (Kissinger, 2000) The US twenty-first-century theme of “war on terror” has been a war of choice waged by a certain class of American elites, in furtherance of their self-chosen interests, in order to both protect and project American primacy throughout the entire global system (Paupp, 2009). Given the policy of promoting democracy abroad, one can see ‘macro-continuity’ in goal and ‘micro-continuity’ in method in US foreign policy. American officials must clarify what they stand for and face the fact that they must no longer pursue hegemony by the name of “*democracy promotion illusion*,” as some American political figures such as Condoleezza Rice has acknowledged it.

In sum, given the recent uprising in the Middle East and Mearsheimer’s argument that the failure of US foreign policies, including democracy promotion, is not the outgrowth of ‘clash of civilizations’ but ‘double standard’ in US foreign policy toward the region (for example, overlooking Israel human rights violations against Palestinians that is at variance with democratic ideals), it seems that US should come to terms with the realities of world politics and instead of forging democracy at gunpoint and macro-continuation of past policies, take more pragmatic steps regarding that policy in the world, in particular, in the Middle East. In his second inaugural address in January 2005, President Bush declared “So it is 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.” [30]. However, the current conditions in the Middle East will more test the rosy descriptions of American officials as to genuinely pursuing democracy promotion in a possibly ‘post-Arab-autocrats’ world.

Notes

[1] On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson went before a joint session of Congress to seek a Declaration of War against Germany in order that the world “be made safe for democracy.” Four days later, Congress voted to declare war, with six senators and fifty congressmen dissenting. “It is a fearful thing,” he told Congress in his speech, “to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance.” Wilson did not exaggerate; in 1917 the war in Europe had already lasted two-and-a-half bloody years and had become one of the most murderous conflicts in human history. By the time the war ended a year and a half later, an entire generation was decimated—France alone lost half its men between the ages of twenty and thirty-two. The maimed bodies of millions of European men who survived bore mute testimony to the war’s savagery.

[2] Founded in 1983 to promote US-friendly democracy by providing cash grants funded primarily through an annual allocation from the U.S. Congress.

[3] www.state.gov

- [4]US Democracy Promotion under Obama, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2009, Transcript by Federal News Service Washington, D.C.
- [5]The White House, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, March 16, 2006. Downloaded from www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/
- [6]"The Reagan Legacy in Latin America: Active Support for Democracy," January 12, 1989, Current Policy No. 1144, Bureau of Public Affairs U.S. Department of State (emphasis in original).
- [7]Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks at the American University in Cairo," June 20, 2005. Downloaded from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm> (accessed May 15, 2007).
- [8]Obama's remarks to the U.K. Parliament. Downloaded from www.whitehouse.gov
- [9]Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," Johns Hopkins University, September 21, 1993. Downloaded from <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html> (accessed May 14, 2007).
- [10]See Ted Galen Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies: America's Alliances after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1992); Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, Calif.: The Independent Institute, 2004); Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security* 21 (4): 5–48.
- [11]See Robert J. Art, "Geopolitics Updated: the Strategy of Selective Engagement," *International Security* 23 (3): 79–113; Stephen Van Evera, "Why Europe Matters, Why the Third World Doesn't: American Grand Strategy after the Cold War," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 13 (2): 1–51. Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security* 22 (1): 86–124.
- [12]Some articles on this argument are: Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Samuel P. Huntington, "Why International Primacy Matters," *International Security* 17 (4): 68–83; William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24 (1): 5–41. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70 (1): 23–33.
- [13]The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, D.C.: the White House, September 2002), www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf.
- [14]ZalmayKhalilzad, "Losing the Moment? The United States and the World after the Cold War," *Washington Quarterly* 18 (2): 94.
- [15]US Foreign Policy after the Cold War, Global hegemon or reluctant sheriff? 2002 and 2005 Fraser Cameron
- [16]Note 17.
- [17]Kegley and Wittkopf 1996: 7, qtd.in Cameron, Fraser's *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War, Global hegemon or reluctant sheriff? 2002 and 2005*
- [18]Israel received \$3 billion annually from the U.S. government between 1992 and 1996, including \$1.2 billion in economic aid and \$1.8 billion in military aid, while Egypt received an average of \$2.1 billion annually during this period (USAID, 1997: 10, 13) ——— (1997) USAID's Strategies for Sustainable Development. Washington, DC:)
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- [24]Killing Hope; US Military And CIA Interventions Since World War II, Blum, William, Common Courage Press, Second Edition 2004
- [25]*Washington Post*, 10 August 1990, p. F1
- [26]American empire: a debate / Christopher Layne and Thayer, Bradley A. 2007 by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.
- [27]iCasualties.org
- [28]Brookings Institution Iraq Index.
- [29] IraqBodyCount.org
- [30]www.whitehouse.gov

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