

## Introduction

On December 17, 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old Tunisian, set himself alight with paint thinner outside the Sidi Bouzid regional council house. He died of his wounds nearly three weeks later on January 5, 2011. This self-immolation was a direct protest against the injustice of the Tunisian political system and a lack of economic opportunities. Indeed, Bouazizi was responding to being beaten and humiliated and having his property confiscated by Tunisian police officers for selling fruit and vegetables from a street stool without a licence. The following day hundreds of youths gathered in Sidi Bouzid to protest about the way Bouazizi had been treated, only to be met with police firing tear gas at the crowds. Further suicides followed, with Lahseen Naji electrocuting himself in despair at 'hunger and joblessness', and Ramzi Al-Abboudi killing himself because of the business debt accrued under the 'country's micro-credit solidarity programme' (Sadiki 2010; Andoni 2010). Throughout late December 2010, what started as an isolated incident had sparked the 'Sidi Bouzid Revolt', or so-called 'jasmine revolution', in which 'solidarity' uprisings rapidly began spreading throughout Tunisia.

By December 26, 2010, social protests against unemployment broke out in the capital Tunis. With state media limiting its coverage of events, protesters increasingly turned to both new methods of mobilisation, such as text messaging, Facebook, Twitter and BlackBerry Messenger, in combination with older institutions such as labour unions. President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's regime responded with increasingly violent strategies on the street combined with night-time raids, leading to the detention of lawyers, journalists, students and bloggers. Yet, as popular pressure began to mount, the regime began to increasingly concede ground to the protesters, offering to create 300,000 jobs, reshuffling the cabinet, releasing many of the people who had been detained during the riots and creating a committee to investigate corruption, and on January 13, 2011, Ben Ali declared that he would not be standing for 're-election' in the presidential 'campaign' due in 2014. This, however, was all too little too late. President Ben Ali had begun to lose the support of the army that had brought him to power in 1987. By January 14, thousands took to the streets calling for the President's immediate resignation, leading to the Ben Ali family fleeing to Saudi Arabia, and Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi becoming interim President.

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The removal of President Ben Ali marked a significant turning point for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Within 28 days, popular protest had managed to end President Ben Ali's 23 years of power. The Tunisian people had succeeded in overthrowing their authoritarian regime and opened up a new realm of political possibility. Tunisia's had accomplished something that the 2006 'Arab Spring' and the 2009 Iranian 'green revolution' had failed to deliver. Tunisia had demonstrated to the world, and more specifically to the peoples of the wider MENA region, that change is possible and that autocrats can be overthrown through popular protest. Thus, the Sidi Bouzid revolt fundamentally altered the prevailing narratives about the MENA and inspired much wider revolts against autocratic regimes throughout the entire region.

In Egypt, January 25, 2011, became the 'Day of Rage', sparking anti-government demonstrations across the country, and Tahrir Square in Cairo became a central locale for youth movements to call for President Hosni Mubarak to leave. On January 27, the Mubarak regime blocked Facebook and Twitter, in an attempt to prevent the following day turning into a 'Friday of Anger'. This failed, and, as Tahrir Square was occupied by protestors, army tanks moved into the city and mobile phones and internet services were shut down. The police met protestors with violence, driving vehicles into crowds, throwing tear gas and firing shotguns filled with metal pellets at random. In return protestors began setting fire to buildings, targeting the police and defying the imposed curfew. February 2 turned into the 'Battle of the Camel', with Mubarak supporters storming Tahrir Square on camels and horseback, starting fierce street battles and intensifying the mêlée. Yet, in spite of this, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians continued to march to Tahrir Square and protests continued throughout the country. February 8 saw the largest demonstrations in Tahrir Square yet, as Egyptians responded to Wael Ghoneim's television appearance, following his release from nearly two weeks of interrogation by state security services. Ghoneim was a marketing manager at Google Middle East and North Africa, who set up a Facebook page called *We Are All Khaled Said*, in response to a the murder of a young man outside an internet café in Alexandria in June 2010. Khaled Said was beaten by police officers before being arrested and dying in custody. His brother took photos of his nearly unrecognisably disfigured corpse, which was then shown to the world as an example of the routine manner in which Mubarak's police violated human rights with impunity. By February 11, as protestors began marching towards the presidential palace in Heliopolis, a highly distinguished suburb of Cairo, Mubarak finally heeded to calls to step down.

Within 18 days, protests had ended nearly 30 years of Mubarak's autocratic rule, and six months later the former President, his sons, and seven other officials would have their trials televised. Within less than two months, two autocrats had been removed, and popular protests in Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen had broken out to greater and lesser degrees. In Libya a civil war against Colonel Gaddafi's regime was initiated, with the United Nations Security Council coming together to pass Resolution 1973 backing NATO intervention to secure a no-fly

zone and protect civilians. Given such circumstances, it is clear that the MENA kaleidoscope was shaken and that the pieces placed in flux. Events throughout the end of 2010 and 2011 occurred at such a rapid pace that it remains far from certain where the pieces will eventually land, and what sort of geopolitical landscape will emerge in the MENA in the decades to come. Will the fall of autocratic regimes lead to turbulent transitions to democracy or simply the emergence of renewed autocratic rule? Needless to say, the 'crisis' introduced a considerable amount of uncertainty. Nonetheless, before anything resembling democracy can emerge, generations of transformatory consolidation work will need to be conducted throughout the region. This is perhaps the only certainty the revolutions in the MENA brought with them.

In spite of this uncertainty, however, 2011 also brought with it a considerable level of premature triumphalism from within the United States. Overlooking the uncertainty that these events have brought to the international system, former members of the George W. Bush administration attempted to seize the crisis, and imbue it with a very particular meaning: one that attempted to rescue the legacy of George W. Bush's so-called Freedom Agenda, and justify the history of American intervention in the region. On the day that President Mubarak stepped down, Paul Wolfowitz appeared on BBC *Newsnight*, asserting the triumph of the Freedom Agenda and comparing the events to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Wolfowitz argued that the Bush administration had played an important role 'leaning hard' on Mubarak and challenging the regime 'on the record'. The Fox news network equally attempted to highlight the role of the Freedom Agenda, with *Fox and Friends* asking Donald Rumsfeld 'Does the George W. Bush Freedom Agenda deserve credit for some of this change?' and ramping up the rhetoric of the Freedom Agenda being 'vindicated' (Kilmeade 2011; Wolfowitz 2011, February 11 and Wolfowitz 2011). Further still, Elliott Abrams, former national security adviser to President G. W. Bush, declared in *Foreign Policy* that 'it is neither perfect nor pretty, but the Arab Spring proves that neoconservatives were right all along' (Abrams 2012). This built on his earlier assertions that 'in the streets of Cairo, proof Bush was right ... it turns out ... that supporting freedom is the best policy of all' (Abrams 2011). Similarly, the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Texas held a conference, on May 23, 2011, entitled *The Wave of Freedom: The Early Lessons for the Middle East*. Condoleezza Rice once again argued that there are 'moral' and 'practical' reasons for the United States to spread human freedom', and the former President G. W. Bush himself added that:

I'm not surprised that freedom continues to march forward ... I have read a lot of history in my sixty-four years. It's clear that it takes time for freedom to take root, so whilst these are exciting times these times also require a degree of patience ... one of the dangers for the freedom movement around the world is that the United States grows weary, and becomes isolated from the inevitable march of freedom.

(Bush 2011, May 23)



#### 4 Introduction

Clearly the G. W. Bush administration considers the Freedom Agenda to be the greatest foreign policy legacy of its time, and in part has attributed the events in the MENA to its actions when in office. Members of the administration have attempted to appropriate these events in their official narrative in an attempt to vindicate, and rescue, their record. Equally, attempts to do this have been undertaken by parts of the Washington commentariat, with Charles Krauthammer writing in the *Washington Post* that:

Today, everyone and his cousin supports the 'freedom agenda'. Of course, yesterday it was just George W. Bush, Tony Blair and a band of neocons with unusual hypnotic powers who dared to challenge the received wisdom of Arab exceptionalism – the notion that Arabs, as opposed to East Asians, Latin Americans Europeans and Africans, were uniquely allergic to democracy. Indeed, the left spent the better part of the Bush years excoriating the freedom agenda as either fantasy or yet another sordid example of US imperialism.

(Krauthammer 2011a)

Krauthammer would later add that 'revolutions are sweeping the Middle East and everyone is a convert to George W. Bush's Freedom Agenda . . . Facebook and Twitter have surely mediated this pan-Arab (and Iranian) reach for dignity and freedom. But the Bush Doctrine set the premise' (Krauthammer 2011b).

What is notable about these prematurely triumphant statements is that the official representation of the Freedom Agenda suggests that it was more concrete than the policy in fact was. The policy is being articulated into contemporary discourses and misrepresented for political advantage, rather than being analysed and reflected upon with due care and attention. Indeed, many of the arguments currently presented in the mythology of the Freedom Agenda narrow, distort and essentially misrepresent the policy. Furthermore, when it is credited with causing the events of 2011 it is clear that such arguments are premised on the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy. This is clearly problematic at best and dangerous at worst.

The narrative presented by members of the former administration, its supporters and those who have bought into the mythology risks obscuring what important lessons can be drawn from the Freedom Agenda, and how these can better inform democracy promotion policy. The mythology surrounding the Freedom Agenda also creates a perverse logic, attributing revolutions to policy in Washington, whilst writing out the extent to which Washington had continued to support autocratic regimes throughout the twentieth century and continued to do so during President Bush and President Obama's time in office. This is a strategic discursive move designed to remove democratic ownership of the regions struggles from those fighting throughout the MENA region, and attribute revolutions to a foreign polity. Yet, more fundamentally, the official narrative of the Freedom Agenda attempts to promote itself as both successful and causally attributable, when in fact the events of 2011 are the ultimate expression of the policy's failure.

In light of the events of 2011, the notion that the Freedom Agenda was a

failure will be highly contested. Yet the conclusion presented in this volume draws together nearly a decade's worth of research, and is based on the analysis of over 2,500 texts, interviews with officials in Washington and throughout parts of the MENA, extensive interviews with recipients of aid from Freedom Agenda institutions, including civil society groups and international organisations, interviews with protesters and political groups throughout the MENA, and ethnographic research with youth movements and organisation leaders protesting in Tahrir Square. The findings in this volume clearly problematise and challenge the 'official' representation of the Freedom Agenda.

To elucidate this position, this book goes beyond the superficial nature of the official Freedom Agenda narrative, and returns to first-order questions, such as 'how and why was the Freedom Agenda constructed by the Bush administration?' and 'how was the Freedom Agenda constituted by the Bush administration and why was it done in this way?' This allows the volume to demonstrate the Bush administration's prioritisation of a particular understanding of democracy promotion, elevating it to the level of grand strategy in US–MENA relations, whilst also providing a broader commentary on US foreign and security policy relating to the MENA in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. This is important because all too often the analysis of the Freedom Agenda has been based on the assumption that what is meant by democracy promotion is unitary and widely understood. This is a factor that proponents of the Freedom Agenda's success now rely upon. Yet it is imperative to look beyond this, and ask what definitions the Bush administration was using, and how these were operationalised. Answering these questions reveals the highly ideological manner in which the Bush administration articulated particular discourses to legitimise its Freedom Agenda policy.

This volume proceeds on the premise that interrogating the deeper meanings and narratives underpinning the construction of the Freedom Agenda, is simply fundamental to understanding it fully. Consequently, this volume provides an assessment of the policy through an analysis of the ideological-discursive formation (IDF) underpinning its construction. Such an approach requires an empirically rich, but theoretically driven, methodology as a guide. Consequently, this book mixes theoretical innovation, which builds on the 'constructivist turn' in the social sciences, with empirical research, adding value to the current debate on the Freedom Agenda at both a theoretical and empirical level. As a result this volume looks at the Freedom Agenda through a constructivist institutionalist lens. Adopting this interdisciplinary approach strengthens the arguments being made, and provides a heuristic tool to demonstrate how the Freedom Agenda was constructed in a particular manner after discursive tracks were laid in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. The Freedom Agenda was designed to *gradually* reform the region over a period of generations working with *friends* and *partners*. The objective was to incrementally transform the region in a stable manner compatible with the pursuit of American interests, such as the free flow of oil and gas, the movement of military and commercial traffic through the Suez Canal, contracts for infrastructure construction projects, the security of regional allies such



as Israel and Saudi Arabia, and cooperation on military, counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation issues. Accordingly, the findings of this volume are important on multiple levels. First, they provide a deeper understanding of the Bush administration's policy towards the MENA, explicating the level of continuity and change that the Freedom Agenda presents within a *longue durée*. Second, they problematise and critique the policy by illustrating how essentially contested concepts such as 'freedom' and 'democracy' were sedimented into a particular IDF, consequently constructing and propagating particular power relations and rule structures. Third, they illustrate problems with democracy promotion both philosophically and in practice, therefore signalling wider problems with the modality of the Freedom Agenda.

To undertake this task, Chapter 1 provides a historical context to the Freedom Agenda, and illustrates how America's traditional interests have historically led to the USA promoting a status quo policy in the region. Since the end of the Second World War successive administrations have propagated the notion that American national interests in the region were satisfied by preventing the spread of communism, securing the free flow of oil and protecting the security and integrity of Israel's borders. By advocating the democratisation of the region, however, the Bush administration was seen by many to challenge this status quo. Instead the Bush administration argued that American national interests lay in promoting democracy, as this would be a method of eradicating terrorism, promoting regional stability, creating regional economic growth and ending tyranny. This added to the 'conflict of interests' problem at the heart of US-MENA relations, which the Bush and Obama administrations have attempted to navigate and resolve throughout their times in office.

By constructing the Freedom Agenda, the Bush administration invited a considerable amount of discord concerning US-MENA relations. A series of critiques emerged that challenged the Freedom Agenda by arguing that it would empower Islamist movements, would cause regional instability, was based on a misunderstanding of movements such as al-Qaeda, and ultimately that the Freedom Agenda would harm indigenous groups promoting democratic reform. Conversely, a wide-ranging consensus emerged to support the Freedom Agenda and argued that promoting democracy in the region was a necessity and the only method of combating the form of terrorism that demonstrated itself on September 11, 2001. Yet the level of this debate has been overly concerned with strategic questions, rather than exploring what exactly the Bush administration believed the Freedom Agenda was supposed to be promoting. To redress this issue it is argued that an analysis is needed, which returns to first-order questions, before critiques of praxis are conducted. It is only by doing this that it is possible to reactivate the sedimentary logics that underpinned the Freedom Agenda.

Before proceeding with this analysis, however, Chapter 2 of this volume sets out the ontological and epistemological foundations of the constructivist institutionalist methodology. It is argued that such a methodology is theoretically robust, and better equipped to answer the questions of how and why the Freedom agenda was constructed, and why it evolved in its particular institutional

formation. It is not vital that the reader engage with this methodology to understand the empirical case set out in the following chapters; however, this methodology does set out the worldview that underpins this volume. It provides a highly theoretical account of why we should ask different questions of the Freedom Agenda than typically has been the case, and outlines how constructivist institutionalism is capable of theoretically and historically (re)constructing the context from which the Freedom Agenda developed whilst being sensitive to institutional changes. The constructivist institutionalist methodology is able to guide this research because it builds on an insight by Michael Barnett (1999), who argues that traditional constructivist literature in International Relations has failed to incorporate a core insight of institutionalism, namely that actors strategise in institutional settings. Conversely, institutionalism fails to incorporate a core insight of constructivism, namely that actors are embedded in and circumscribed by a normative structure that demarcates the limits of legitimate and possible policy options.

With this guiding mantra in place, it is argued that the constructivist institutionalist methodology is able to surmount this problem by explicitly developing a stance on ontological and epistemological debates, namely the role of structure and agency, and ideas and material in political action. By virtue of engaging with these debates, it is argued that political time can be understood as a process of punctuated evolution, whereby 'normal' policy making is disrupted by crises and consequently evolves along an alternative path. Whereas this describes the shape of political time, it is argued that how crises are narrated provides the content of political change. Consequently, it is necessary to elucidate the IDF and rule structures that underpin post-crisis narration to understand policy development and institutional evolution. Deploying the constructivist institutionalist methodology in this research has a direct impact on the methods used for data analysis, and, at the end of this chapter, the qualitative methods used in this research are outlined along with specific details of how a process-tracing narrative discourse analysis was conducted using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

With the methodological premises of constructivist institutionalism established, Chapter 3 elucidates the empirically rich but theoretically driven findings. It presents an analysis, embedded within a narrative of its own, that sets out the post-Cold War context in which the 2000 presidential campaign was contested. It argues that, although the presidential campaign between Al Gore and George W. Bush was unexceptional, the importance of the campaign for the Freedom Agenda was that Bush set out a distinctive IDF. Notably, Bush's vision for US foreign policy, under the banner of a 'Distinctly American Internationalism', combined US primacy with hegemonic stability theory as a proposed means of preventing American decline. Furthermore, this was articulated with an understanding of how 'freedom' could be promoted through neoliberal methods, based on a particular understanding of modernisation thesis, to create a utopian organisation of democratic, prosperous, peaceful, secure interdependent states. Notably, this guiding philosophy was *not* applied to US-MENA relations prior to September 11, 2001. However, the importance of this IDF was that it provided the

foundations for the initial response to September 11, 2001, and evolved throughout the end of 2001 to early 2009, culminating in the Freedom Agenda being institutionalised.

Furthermore, the chapter details how the events of September 11, 2001, constituted a moment of punctuation in political time, which allowed the Bush administration to construct a strategic narrative that would underpin any policy innovation. Accordingly, it is possible to understand the events themselves as critical to the structuring of political time, in that they introduced an uncertainty condition that strategically selective actors in the state bureaucracy sought to overcome. Initially, this was done by narrating the events as a tragedy. However, the Bush administration radically began to assimilate the events into a large historical understanding, constructing them as part of a morality play that required a 'war on terrorism'. By seamlessly transforming this morality play into a moral crusade, the Bush administration foregrounded moral realism and American exceptionalism in an attempt to legitimise its response. As this IDF grasped multiple concepts together, the Bush administration provided a distinctive understanding of terms such as 'freedom', 'democracy', 'peace' and 'security', which were then institutionalised into the Freedom Agenda.

Chapter 4 continues this analysis by tracing how discursive tracks were laid in the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks through to December 2001. It argues that the Bush administration was strategic in the construction of its war on terror narrative, and turned the war in Afghanistan into a moralistic crusade. Crucial to this were multiple definitions of 'justice' articulated with the concept of 'security', which helped construct a policy that was focused on counter-terrorism and disembedding the USA from legal norms. Such a strategy was adverse to the notion of nation-building and democracy promotion, and ran counter to the strategy being pursued by the UN. However, by consistently evoking the concept of freedom, and articulating it with security, the Bush administration invited contestation within the foreign policy bureaucracy. This shaped the content of change in the post-crisis context, and opened up a political space for contestation within the administration over what exactly had gone wrong and what should be done. This established a milieu conducive to construction and evolution of the Freedom Agenda throughout 2002 and 2003.

Chapter 5 takes this analysis forwards, detailing how the perceived success of the war in Afghanistan emboldened the Bush administration to construct a vindicationist strategy for the Middle East. It characterises the manner in which policy-makers puzzled under conditions of uncertainty, to construct the Iraq war and the Freedom Agenda. These are analytically separate, but were conceived to be part of the same strategic plan derived at a secret 'Bletchley II' meeting held in late November 2001, whereby pushing Iraq would create a domino effect throughout the region. By late 2002, Freedom Agenda institutions were being constructed to aid in this process, but, as the Iraq war became a growing problem, these institutions would evolve a distinctiveness of their own. They would be underpinned by an IDF that articulated multiple ideas together to justify an imperial policy. This formed the basis of a new policy paradigm.

Chapter 6 explicitly deals with the institutionalisation of the Freedom Agenda and the manner in which it evolved from 2002 until President Bush left office. It argues that, in spite of the Bush administration's bold assertions that democracy promotion was in the national interest, the Freedom Agenda can be described as a policy of conservative radicalism. The approach is *radical* to the extent that it insists on political democracy, yet *conservative* in its desire to safeguard the socio-economic privileges and power of the established order to secure regional stability. Such a strategy was caught between democracy promotion and free trade as the positive route to liberty, and domination to the extent that negative liberty was undermined in favour of stability. As the Bush administration oscillated between emphasising both of these elements it enabled a double standard in the Freedom Agenda to emerge. This was characterised by a slow gradualist policy guided by an understanding of freedom in economic terms for regional allies. However, for regimes that challenged American policy in the region, a strategy of regime change was pursued. This approach highlights the central contradictions in the Bush stratagem, which ultimately led to a retreat from the agenda in 2006 through to leaving office in January 2009. The Bush administration was ultimately unable to convert vision into action, because the zeal with which the strategy had been constructed contained ideological blind-spots. Because of the shallow understanding of freedom, based on neoliberalism, and the modernisation thesis being a dominant part of the Bush administration's IDF, it became evident that the administration was promoting a policy of low-intensity democracy in an inhospitable strategically selective context. Indeed, the Freedom Agenda contains within its very construction and institutionalisation a supposed imperial right to rule over the region informally.

Chapter 7 details how Obama inherited the Freedom Agenda and silently carried on the policy. What emerged from the Obama administration was a policy of conservative pragmatism, whereby the administration attempted to reach out and engage regimes such as Iran and Syria, downplaying the radical dimension of the Freedom Agenda, but continued with attempts to gradually reform the region in partnership with autocratic regimes. What it reveals is a high level of continuity between the Bush administration and the Obama administration, but also areas in which the Obama administration's policy evolved to include a greater focus on civil society, development and the use of digital technology. Nonetheless, with these elements proving to be somewhat marginal, in the aftermath of the 2011 revolutions the administration increasingly relied on a mixture of pragmatic moves underpinned by the same neoliberal doctrine espoused by the Bush administration.

The Conclusion provides an overview of the analysis and demonstrates the importance of challenging the representation of the Freedom Agenda. There is value in highlighting the imperial pitfalls of the approach the Bush administration constructed, the limitations of the approaches institutionalisation, and ultimately the conservative manner in which the policy was pursued. The importance of this cannot be overstated given that the Obama administration not only inherited these problems but has largely embraced them in its response to regional unrest. This highlights the unfortunate manner in which the Bush and Obama administrations

clearly recognised the symptoms of the 2011 revolutions long before they happened, but ultimately failed to prescribe the correct policy. What is needed is a post-colonial approach to democracy support for the twenty-first century, which embraces dialogue, empowerment and respect, rather than seeking to socially engineer the peoples of the Middle East towards some externally inspired utopian end state.

## 1 American interests and a history of promoting the status quo

The ambition of promoting democracy in the Middle East is not new to the American people or their foreign policy. Since the early nineteenth century, American missionaries have sought to take American values and plant them in the region. Inspired by the Second Great Awakening of the nineteenth century and a desire for adventure on a new frontier, missionaries went to the Middle East to set up schools, clinics, churches and colonies, all with the aim of 'letting in the light' and spreading the 'American' Eagle of freedom' (Oren 2007: 210–27; Mead 2001: 158–62; Hahn 2005: 2). Moreover, after the First World War, whilst Britain and France were fighting over 'the great loot of the war',<sup>1</sup> it was President Wilson who was arguing for 'self-determination' and 'autonomous development' for all 'nationalities . . . under Turkish Rule' (Oren 2007: 377).<sup>2</sup> Subsequent American presidents have claimed that they support democratic governance for the Middle East, and at the birth of the Eisenhower Doctrine the President argued that 'Our country supports without reservation the full sovereignty and independence of each and every nation of the Middle East' (Eisenhower 1957).

Contrastingly, in the same period, the political rhetoric did not match policy, with American idealist notions of self-determination and anti-colonialism giving way to imperial counter-revolutionary policies (Hahn 2005: 35–46; Yaqub 2004: 87–121; Gaddis 1997: 172–6). Thus, as Steve Smith (2002: 65) has noted, 'the debate about US democracy promotion seems to assume that the US has had a clear long-standing commitment to such a policy, I see the record as far more complex'.<sup>3</sup> What can, however, be asserted is that throughout the twentieth century, as the United States increasingly became involved in Middle Eastern affairs, and concerned with the region's geopolitical orientation, the notion of promoting democracy in the Middle East was always at least a stated goal of US foreign policy.

Yet it was under the George W. Bush administration, and in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks, that promoting democracy in the Middle East was elevated and believed to be central to American national security interests. Thus, as Jessica Mathews (2005: vii) notes:

Of all the tectonic shifts in US foreign policy emerging from the aftermath of 9/11, none is more potentially transformative than the widespread conviction



in the US policy community that America must reverse its long time support for friendly tyrants in the Middle East and push hard for a democratic transformation of that troubled region.

At a surface level President Bush provided a succinct answer to explain why this shift was necessary. He argued that:

Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe . . . As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. And with the spread of weapons that can bring catastrophic harm to our country and to our friends, it would be reckless to accept the status quo.

(Bush 2003, November 6)

Accordingly, the intention behind the Freedom Agenda was to use the full spectrum of means available to the United States for the 'advancement of human freedom and human dignity through effective democracy' (NSCT 2006: 9). The objectives were to 'eradicate terrorism', 'promote regional stability', 'promote regional economic growth', 'end tyranny' and 'create peace' (see NSCT 2006).

Undoubtedly, these objectives were dominated by liberal ideals, and the Freedom Agenda was the quintessential expression of a liberal grand strategy, whereby it was the 'policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world'. Not only was the Bush administration concerned with the 'fundamental character of regimes', but changing the nature of these regimes was portrayed as 'the best way to provide enduring security for the American people' (NSC 2006: 1). Within this context, America's self-interest and values align and assist one another whilst enhancing American global influence (see Smith 2000).

The Bush administration was not the first to assert this symbiotic synergy of principles and interests, as the origins of this approach date back as far as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet the innovation of the Freedom Agenda was the manner in which the Bush administration sought to spread democracy through coercive regime change, and to institutionalise a *Forward Strategy of Freedom in the Middle East* (FSFME). Whereas the former was most obviously expressed in the form of the 2003 Iraq war, the latter culminated in the Bush administration reinforcing and expanding the bureaucratic organisations in the US government that promote democracy. Indeed, just as the Iraq war is part of the President Bush's democracy promotion legacy, so too is the institutional construction of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) and the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative (BMENA). Furthermore, it was President Bush who codified his democracy promotion strategy in *National Security Presidential Directive 58*, entitled *Institutionalising the Freedom Agenda*, and who signed the ADVANCE Democracy Act of 2007 into law.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is important to note that the Freedom Agenda was far more

than simply the war in Iraq. By the time President Bush left office, hundreds of millions of dollars had been channelled through these institutions and spent on promoting democracy in the MENA, and the USA had declared with the force of law that it would prioritise, along with other foreign policy goals, the promotion of democracy and human rights around the world.

Accordingly, the decision to advocate freedom and democracy in the MENA challenged decades of US foreign policy. That President Bush challenged the historical conduct of past policy was in and of itself a rare admission of failure, which reflected a serious conceptual change concerning US-MENA relations. President Bush accepted a consistent pattern of American foreign policy towards the region, whereby in the name of stability the US backed autocratic regimes with diplomatic, military and economic assistance. To point out the obvious implications of the President's admission, since the steady growth of American involvement in the MENA from 1945, the USA has tried to control events in the region. To this extent, it is widely acknowledged that the USA slowly took over Britain's historical 'oversight role' and the 'security management services' of the region (Boot 2004: 47; Murden 2002: 43). That this role began during the Second World War is not a coincidence. It coincided not only with the decline of the British and French imperial moments in the Middle East, but also with the rise of the USA as a global superpower and the onset of the Cold War.<sup>5</sup>

It was during the Second World War itself that the geopolitical orientation of the MENA was for the first time seen as vital to US interests, both through the need to maintain a supply corridor to the Soviet Union through Iran, and as a staging ground to invade Italy from North Africa. Yet it was in the war's aftermath and the accompanying new international order that subsequent US administrations increasingly began to define US interests as intrinsically linked to the fate of the MENA region. In the immediate post-war milieu, containment became the dominant US strategic doctrine in US-MENA relations, and as the USA sought to contain Soviet expansion it began filling the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of old colonial powers (Taylor 1991: 49). The first sign of this creeping insurrection occurred over the issue of post-war Soviet retention of troops in Northern Iran (see Truman 1956: 98, 100-1).<sup>6</sup> This subsequently expanded into concerns over the Turkish-Iranian border, Turkish sovereignty and ultimately the geopolitical orientation of the entire Middle East. Reacting to the July 1946 note from Moscow to Turkey, proposing a new Turkish-Russian defence structure to control the Dardanelles, President Truman (1956: 102) argued:

The Russians, in addition to their efforts to outflank Turkey through Iran, were beginning to exert pressure on Turkey for territorial concessions . . . This was indeed an open bid to obtain control of Turkey . . . To allow Russia to set up bases in the Dardanelles or to bring troops into Turkey, ostensibly for the defense of the straits, would, in the natural course of events, result in Greece and the whole Near and Middle East falling under Soviet control.

In response to these events a 'patience and firmness' strategy was adopted, which ultimately transformed itself into the Truman doctrine (Gaddis 1982: 22-3). This

established for the first time, and albeit focused on the 'northern tier', a situation in which the USA would actively endeavour to strengthen its own position in the MENA whilst containing Soviet advances.<sup>7</sup> To this end, the USA increasingly asserted the need for stability and the maintenance of the established political order in the region throughout the Cold War. The regional status quo was favoured to the extent that it was perceived to benefit US interests, even if this meant challenging the internal dynamics emerging from the region. This was certainly the case with the 1953 CIA-engineered coup of Mohammed Mossadegh and the reinstatement of Mohammad Reza Shah in Iran (see Kinzer 2003; Pollack 2004: 40–80). In a similar vein, the Eisenhower doctrine led to the interventions in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq through the 1957–8 period, with the aim of maintaining the regional status quo and winning American influence in the region. This status quo policy was pursued by successive administrations throughout the Cold War, culminating in President Carter advising the Shah of Iran to use force to crush the 1979 Islamic revolution to maintain 'an island of stability', and President Reagan asserting that 'I will not permit [Saudi Arabia] to be an Iran' after US-trained Saudi Arabian National Guard forces crushed an anti-regime uprising in 1981 (see Hahn 2005: 42–43, 70–85; Zunes 2003: 15; Freedman 2008: 63–149). Accordingly, to fortify this counter-revolutionary policy in the early stages of the Cold War, the USA demonstrated willingness to condone and participate in both coercion and subversion in an effort to dominate the region.

In addition to directly violent methods of securing stability and the maintenance of the established political order, the USA also sought to pursue a status quo policy through foreign and military assistance. The genealogical origins of this, in US–MENA relations, lay with the precedent set by the Truman doctrine's aid packages to Greece and Turkey. With this as a model, President Eisenhower declared his own doctrine to a joint session of Congress on January 5, 1957. Approving it in March the same year, Congress authorised the Eisenhower administration to use force if necessary to protect American interests in the Middle East. However, this was coupled with \$200 million in economic aid to support any nation in the Middle East 'requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism'. This was substantially less than the \$400 million originally intended by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who retained the idea that economic aid would be used 'as a means of building our position in the Middle East' (Little 2004: 132–7; Yaqub 2004; Heiss 2006).<sup>8</sup> Commenting at the time, Milton Friedman observed:

The President is empowered to make payments to certain countries, particularly in the Middle East, the purpose of which is to induce the recipient countries to support particular policies that are thought to be in our interest – these are, in essence, straight military or political subsidies.

(Friedman 1958 [1995]: 3)

As a method of securing stability and influence, economic and military aid to the MENA has waxed and waned but continues to the present day. From 1950 to 1970

both economic and military aid to the region totalled a sum of \$7,845 million.<sup>9</sup> This figure takes into account the 80 per cent drop in foreign assistance between 1965 and 1970, which was the result of the June 1967 War and the impact of the war in Vietnam. Yet these sums are meagre in comparison with the dramatic rise in foreign assistance that accompanied the 1970s, and would continue into the 2000s. From 1971 to 2001 economic and military aid to the region totalled a sum of \$144,969 million, and by the time President Bush left office, the region was receiving 16 per cent of all American global economic assistance, and 49 per cent of American global military assistance (see Sharp 2011; USAID 2011).<sup>10</sup>

During the Cold War, foreign assistance packages to the MENA were portrayed as necessary for containing communism. The assumption was that patronage could be bought and foreign aid used as a bargaining chip to stop key strategic countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Iran and Syria falling under Soviet influence. In effect, it provided a less direct means of confronting the Soviet Union than military intervention, which would have increased the risk of escalating the Cold War (see Banfield 1963). An added virtue of foreign assistance was that it was also perceived in terms of a development policy, which would strengthen the Western bloc. Indeed, a predominant assumption in America at the time was that 'communism flows from poverty' (Packenham 1973: 52). As a logical corollary of this, economic aid was portrayed as a method of combatting communism by helping raise the living standards in less developed areas and making communism less attractive. In turn, raising living standards would also bolster the Western powers, by laying the foundations of 'world prosperity, political freedom, and international cooperation' (Packenham 1973: 50–1). That foreign assistance to the MENA continued in the post-Cold War era is testimony to the fact that it also sought to guarantee longer-term interests in the region that have survived the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Although the USA has no other superpower challenging its hegemonic power over the region in the post-Cold War era, reasons for America to intervene in the region remain. Accordingly there are a set of interests that the USA consistently maintains, which could be jeopardised by regional instability. Notably geography has played a distinctive role. The reason for this was recognised as early as 1945 by the State Department, which described the Middle East as 'a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history' (in Zunes 2003: 2). This was a far cry from earlier assertions by the State Department in 1923 that the region 'is of little commercial importance' (Oren 2007: 407). The fundamental distinction between these two quotes relates to the role of oil in the region and the manner in which it began transforming the world in the early twentieth century. Accelerated industrialisation combined with an increasing demand on oil-dependent consumer goods, such as automobiles and household electricity supplies in the United States, played an unprecedented role. Moreover, what became apparent from both world wars was that oil was a decisive factor in providing military personnel with the ability to travel further faster, consequently providing a strategic advantage in warfare. To quote the young Winston Churchill's enduring principle, which referred to the use of oil instead of coal on British warships: 'Mastery itself is the prize' (Yergin 1993).



Notably, by 1947, oil-producing MENA states provided half of the oil consumed by the US armed forces, which led to the CIA deeming Middle Eastern oil 'essential to the security of the United States' (in Hahn 2005: 7). Yet oil from the region was playing a much more important strategic role by fuelling the revitalisation of Western European economies. As one US government report commented at the time, 'without petroleum the Marshall plan could not have functioned' (Yergin 1991: 424). This was because in the post-war era a fundamental transition in Europe took place, in which coal-based economies transitioned to importing oil.<sup>11</sup> This helped produce a symbiotic confluence of events in which European needs and the development of Middle Eastern oil combined. Thus, by 1955 approximately 90 per cent of oil consumed in Western Europe came from the Middle East (Hahn 2005: 7; see also Kapstein 1990; Yergin 1991: 425). From the American perspective, Middle Eastern oil was now fundamental to the material balance of the world, and its efforts to create an integrated transatlantic market system.

The twenty-first century still bears the marks of the post-war decision to move from coal power to oil. As Kenneth Pollack (2003: 3) has argued:

The reason the United States has a legitimate and critical interest in seeing that Persian Gulf oil continues to flow copiously and relatively cheaply is simply that the global economy built over the last 50 years rests on a foundation of inexpensive, plentiful oil, and if that foundation were removed, the global economy would collapse.

Furthermore, in today's highly technological hydrocarbon society the demand for oil is increasing, and the Middle East contains around 66 per cent of the world's known oil reserves (Milton-Edwards 2006: 73). Of particular concern to the United States is that in the intermediate future 'oil supply is expected to continue to concentrate in the Persian Gulf, which holds the world's largest geologically attractive reserves' (CFR 2006: 22). The cause of America's concern is that the highly industrial US economy is becoming more dependent on oil for growth. The United States, with only 4.3 per cent of the world's population, uses 25 per cent of the world's oil, and significantly 60 per cent of this need is dependent on import and expected to rise in the coming decades (CFR 2006: 22). Yet, as consumption is increasing, America's domestic production is decreasing. This makes the USA significantly dependent on foreign oil from places such as Saudi Arabia, which provides 20 per cent of America's crude oil imports (Milton-Edwards 2006: 239). As Beverley Milton-Edwards (2006: 239) argues:

The maintenance and future growth of the American economy owes much to the import of oil from the Middle East. In this way unimpeded access to that resource is vital to national interest. If there were any doubt that this were not the case, the Arab oil embargo during the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict, although it occurred more than thirty years ago, remains fresh in the collective consciousness of American policy-makers.

In addition to American demand for oil, however, the region's resources are also increasingly being claimed by expanding global economic powers such as India and China. Indeed, the Chinese government is pursuing a strategy of 'locking up' particular supplies for the Chinese market, and is aligning its relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran in order to secure these exclusive oil supplies. This is a direct challenge to American hegemony in the region and is impacting Middle Eastern politics more widely (see Salameh 2003; Jaffe and Lewis 2002; Xu 2000; Rubin 1999: 49–50). The effect of this is that US influence in the region was diminishing before the 2011 revolutions; this caused foreign policy analysts such as Henry Kissinger to predict international conflicts over hydrocarbon resources (see Leverett and Bader 2005: 187; Ikenberry 2008). This demonstrates that concerns over the material balance of the world and the geopolitical orientation of the Middle East are as strong in the twenty-first century as they were in the Cold War era. With oil being linked to the 'American way of life', economic growth and strategic military power, the consequences of instability or a loss of regional hegemony are intricately linked to America's global position.

The geographical location of the Middle East also plays a distinctive role in wider military-strategic concerns of the USA. Previous to the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles in the 1960s, the USA enjoyed a significant strategic advantage over the USSR by having allies that bordered the Soviet Union. This gave the USA the potential power to invade its rival from Turkey or Iran, whereas the Soviets had no comparable access to the United States (Sluglett 2005: 43). More widely, throughout the Cold War, military bases were seen as a strategic advantage essential to winning a direct conflict with the Soviet Union. Not only would they have provided the ability to launch aerial offensives, but they also allowed the build-up of troops for a ground invasion and the positioning of intelligence-gathering personnel and equipment for covert operations (see Cohen 1997: 1–94).

Significantly, although the threat of war with the Soviet Union passed, the Middle East remains an important strategic location for American defence interests. Military bases in the region could provide a method of projecting American military might in future conflicts with rising powers. With bases in the Middle East, the USA would be able to strike China from the west, as well as from eastern bases in the Pacific. Whereas this represents an 'external' dynamic to the projection of US military power from the region, there are also 'internal' and 'inter-regional' strategic concerns. With political unrest spreading throughout the region even before 2011, the dilemma represented by Iran's nuclear programme and the instability in Iraq, there is a perceived need to maintain a military presence in the region (see Pollack 2003, 2004; Sick *et al.* 2008; Cordesman 2008). Furthermore, the MENA has been considered part of an 'arc of instability' and a 'breeding ground for threats' to US interests (NMS 2004: 5). In the 2005 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS), the USA declared the objective of securing 'strategic access' and retaining 'global freedom of action'. The logic underlying this is simple: 'the United States cannot influence that which it cannot reach' (NDS 2005: 6; see also Posch 2006). That is to say that military bases are part of the US security

governance architecture and linked to the notion that American interests are global in scope. The overall result of this is, as the highly influential Council on Foreign Relations has concluded:

Even if the Persian Gulf did not have the bulk of the world's readily available oil reserves, there would be reasons to maintain a substantial military capability in the region . . . At least for the next two decades . . . the United States should expect and support a strong military posture that permits suitably rapid deployment to the region, if required.

(CFR 2006: 29–30)

In addition to the region's oil supply and military strategic concerns, the USA has also held a historical interest in maintaining the security of Israel. At times the US–Israeli 'special relationship' has conflicted with the goal of securing the region's oil, by antagonising the populations of other regional allies. However, the extent of the relationship is visible in the vast quantity of foreign assistance that Israel has received. Notably since France withdrew its assistance to Israel, in protest at the pre-emptive launch of the June 1967 War, the USA has stepped into a patron role (Sharp 2011: 5; Mearsheimer and Walt 2007: 53; Bowen 2005: 55). From 1971 to 2010, the USA gave foreign assistance to Israel at an average rate of \$2 billion per year, making it the 'largest annual recipient of US aid and the largest recipient of cumulative US assistance since World War II' (Mark 2006: 2–21; Sharp 2011: 5).<sup>12</sup>

A clear turning point in the US–Israeli relationship, and in the US–Egyptian relationship, was the signing of the Israel–Egypt Peace Treaty in 1979. This was the result of secret negotiations and the signing of the Camp David Accords, which ushered in an era of financial support for relative stability between Israel and its Arab neighbours (Milton-Edwards 2006: 247). As a consequence, Israel and Egypt became sequentially the highest recipients of US aid. Combined, these two countries receive almost 93 per cent of all annual funding to the region (Sharp 2011: 7). Since this period the USA has remained 'engaged' in the peace process as a 'peace broker', but remained committed to strengthening Israel.

America's interests in the MENA are large and expanding. The USA not only perceives its security interests ranging from oil and gas to military reach, cooperation on counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation issues and the security of Israel and Saudi Arabia, but also has more commercial interests in securing the movement of commercial traffic through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean, and the procurement of lucrative contracts for business and infrastructure projects. Given this, US interests in the region cannot be parsimoniously reduced to economic and material factors. Rather they are a much more complex and multifaceted collection of perceived material and ideational interests that are intricately entwined and often conflicting. This is what makes the delineation between them often ad hoc, and perceived to be better served by the status quo in the region. Uncertainty, within this context, is highly problematic. Yet the Bush administration's addition of democracy promotion as a national interest added another

layer of complexity within this ad hoc system. This contributed to what Tamara Coffman Wittes (2008a: 18) has termed the 'conflict-of-interests' problem at the heart of US–MENA relations. On one hand, the Bush administration asserted the need for regional reform through democratisation, and, on the other, the need to meet traditional long-term interests persisted. Although the Freedom Agenda was portrayed as 'challenging' past policy, these long-term historical interests remained, providing the strategically selective context in which the Freedom Agenda had to navigate. Accordingly, it was this conflict of interests that caused the greatest level of debate and discord within Washington through Bush's time in office, and led to considerable debate about the merits of promoting democracy versus maintaining the established stability approach to US–MENA relations; a debate that, in light of the 2011 revolutions, is worthy of much more attention than it received at the time.

### The Freedom Agenda's critics: Islamists, instability, terrorists and credibility

The conflict of interests problem has been central to critiques of the Freedom Agenda, from even some who served within the Bush administration. Thus, as Flynt Leverett, Middle East expert on the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff from 2001 to 2002 and Senior Director for Middle East Affairs at the National Security Council (NSC) from 2002 to 2003, argued:

Spreading democracy in the Middle East is a bad idea . . . Of course US interests in the Middle East are complex and multifaceted, but . . . our most important interests in this critical region . . . [are] first, the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, second, the security and welfare of the state of Israel, and third, keeping the Middle East from providing a platform for further mass-casualty terrorist attacks of the sort that we suffered on 9–11 . . . I believe that promoting democracy in the Middle East is not just not helpful for these interests, it is downright harmful to them.

(IQ2 2007)

Beyond the administration itself, however, opposition to the Freedom Agenda has come from a wide and varied range of proponents, that cut-cross any party political and indeed ideological divides. However, many of the arguments presented overlap and can be broken down into a series of four core objections to democracy promotion in the Middle East:

- 1 The 'Islamist dilemma'.
- 2 Promoting democracy in the Middle East may cause regional instability.
- 3 Promoting democracy does not weaken terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda, because they rely on ideological appeal and are not a product of political or economic marginalisation. They do not rely on a lack of democracy or poverty to recruit future terrorists.



- 4 The USA is a discredited actor and by promoting democracy may harm indigenous groups promoting democratic reform.

The 'Islamist dilemma' has been a dominant argument summoned in order to reject promoting democracy in the MENA. At its core lies an empirical observation: throughout the MENA, Islamists have established themselves as major political players and before the 2011 revolutions in the region it was widely believed that they represented the only viable opposition forces to undemocratic regimes (see Sharp 2006). Consequently, as many argued, 'should free and fair elections be held in the Middle East tomorrow, it would be likely that radical religious forces [sic] would win a sweeping victory in many countries' (Neep 2004: 82; see also Byman 2007: 143–4). This was seen as a problem because it could result in the 'one person, one vote, one time' scenario, in addition to helping the formation of 'Islamic' states. The creation of such states raises the spectre of the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the prospect of hostility towards American interests. It is still commonplace to ask the questions 'will country X be another Iran? Is so-and-so another Ayatollah Khomeini?' (Esposito and Voll 1996: 150). Accordingly, as many critics of the Freedom Agenda have illustrated:

The problem with promoting democracy in the Arab world is not that Arabs do not like democracy; it is that Washington probably would not like the governments Arab democracy would produce . . . Assuming that democratic Arab governments would better represent the opinions of their people than do the current Arab regimes, democratisation of the Arab world should produce more anti-U. S. foreign policies.

(Gause III 2005)

Proponents of this argument often cite the events of 1989–91 and its aftermath in Algeria, as evidence for their position. In response to outside pressure and the desire for internal stability the single ruling party in Algeria, the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), began making attempts at pluralism in 1989. Through constitutional changes the FLN monopoly on the state apparatus was to be ended and a competitive multiparty system established. However, as a direct result the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) swept to victory in municipal and later parliamentary elections. As a result, an Islamic movement had come to power 'not through bullets but through ballots, not by violent revolution but by working within the system' (Esposito and Voll 1996: 150; see also Esposito and Voll 1996: 150–72; Burgat 2003: 102–21). In January 1992, the military decided that the Algerian people had 'voted unwisely' and that the FIS had 'hijacked democracy'. This led to military intervention, which amounted to a de facto coup, and a civil conflict that reversed the political openings made throughout 1989–91 (see Quandt 2003; Willis 1999).

For many proponents, the Islamist dilemma argument was vindicated throughout the 2005–6 period, with the electoral victory of Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya ( Hamas) in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections.<sup>13</sup> This represented a pattern of Islamic groups, hostile to Washington and Israel, winning

significant gains through elections in what the Bush administration termed the 'Arab Spring'. This included the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Shiites backed by militias in Iraq (Weisman 2006a). This was coupled with the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah war in Lebanon and increasing civil violence in Iraq despite hopes that the elections would calm the insurgency (Kurth 2006).

In addition to the Islamist dilemma argument being propagated by some of the US foreign policy commentariat, it has also been voiced within the MENA region. Within the region itself autocrats regularly depicted Islamists as the only viable alternative to their own autocratic rule. This served their interests by generating support and backing from Western governments, and created a 'stability bargain' between autocratic rulers and sections of their own societies that saw Islamists as a threat (Feldman 2004: 19–25; Deeb 2008). Accordingly, as Noah Feldman (2004: 23) has noted:

The optimal strategy for the autocrats is [or was] therefore to eliminate secular democratic dissent, keeping just enough Islamist opposition alive to make Islamism the only alternative without enabling it to become strong enough to overthrow the government.

A second dominant argument summoned in order to reject promoting democracy in the MENA has been the assertion that promoting democracy may cause greater regional instability and conflict. This argument has been widely asserted and strongly influenced by Mansfield and Snyder's book *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (see Epstein *et al.* 2007: 8; Smith 2007: 159–61; Traub 2008: 7; Kaye *et al.* 2008: 25; Owen 2005). The thrust of the argument directly challenges the manner in which democratic peace theory was portrayed by the Bush administration. Although Mansfield and Snyder (2005: 1–2) acknowledge that 'no mature democracies have ever fought a war against each other', they argue that 'in the short run . . . the beginning stages of transitions to democracy often give rise to war rather than peace'. Moreover, in agreement with Fareed Zakaria's (2004) analysis in *The Future of Freedom* and Samuel Huntington's (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Mansfield and Snyder (2005: 13) argue that 'rising political participation leads to conflict and instability in states with weak political institutions'.

For those who opposed the war in Iraq, the implications of this study directly challenge the Bush administration. As Tony Smith (2007: 159) has pointed out:

If Mansfield and Snyder are correct, their findings deliver a body blow to the facile assumption of the Bush Doctrine that terrorism is more likely to come under control in the Middle East as a result of the conquest of Iraq followed by its democratisation. Indeed, exactly the opposite seems likely.

Moreover, when Mansfield and Snyder's (2005: 278) findings are applied to the MENA, and vis-à-vis the Freedom Agenda, they argue that 'democratising the Arab states is a major political gamble in the war on terror'. The reasoning behind this is worth quoting at length.

Although democratisation in the Islamic world might contribute to peace in the very long run, Islamic public opinion in the short run is, in most places, hostile to the United States, reluctant to condemn terrorism and supportive of forceful measures to achieve favourable results in Palestine, Kashmir and other disputed areas. Although much of the belligerence of the Islamic publics is fuelled by resentment of the U.S.-backed authoritarian regimes under which many of them live, simply renouncing these authoritarians and pressing for a quick democratic opening is unlikely to lead to peaceful democratic consolidations. On the contrary, unleashing Islamic mass opinion through sudden democratisation could only raise the likelihood of war. All the risk factors are there: the media and civil society groups are inflammatory, as old elites and rising oppositions try to claim the mantle of Islamic or nationalist militancy. The rule of law is weak, and existing corrupt bureaucracies cannot serve a democratic administration properly. The boundaries of states are mismatched with those of nations, making any push for national self-determination fraught with peril.

(Mansfield and Snyder 2005: 13)

For those who oppose the Freedom Agenda the notion that emerging democracies in the Middle East may in fact have a destabilising effect on the region is highly problematic, and would jeopardise American security.<sup>14</sup> The events of 2011 certainly do not refute Mansfield and Snyder argument, with varying degrees of regional instability resulting from the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain.

The third argument put forward to reject the Freedom Agenda has been the assertion that promoting democracy and/or reducing poverty does not weaken terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda. They rely on ideological appeal, and therefore a 'drain the swamp' approach fails to provide an effective counter-terrorism strategy. Notably, this challenges the core assumption of the Freedom Agenda: that political and economic marginalisation cause the sort of terrorism witnessed on September 11, 2001. One of the most prominent proponents arguing against this premise has been Gregory F. Gause III, who argues that al-Qaeda 'are fighting to impose their vision of an Islamic state', and that this is no evidence to support the notion that 'democracy in the Arab world would "drain the swamp", eliminating soft support for terrorist organisations among the Arab public and reducing the number of potential recruits for them' (Gause III 2005: 62). The implication of Gause's argument is that an absence of democracy is not an underlying causal factor leading to the sort of terrorist threat presented on September 11, 2001. This conclusion is seconded by Katerina Dalacoura's (2011: 180; see also Dalacoura 2006) extensive case study research, which concludes that:

There is no necessary causal link between the lack of democracy in the Middle East and Islamist terrorism. Although in some cases a link does exist, it is not consistent enough to establish a regular (that is, theoretical) pattern.

Moreover, as Douglas Borer and Michael Freeman argue, al-Qaeda's goals are to stop the perceived foreign occupation of Islamic lands and to establish Sharia law as a guiding principle of an Islamic caliphate. Democracy promotion is unlikely to satisfy these grievances and may in fact create the perception that Islamic identity and culture are threatened (Borer and Freeman 2007; Freeman 2008; Kaye *et al.* 2008: 21). Further still, Scott Atran (2006: 144) argues that:

Those who believe suicide terrorism can be explained by a single political root cause, such as the presence of foreign military forces or the absence of democracy, ignore psychological motivations.

Significantly, empirical evidence appears to raise serious questions concerning the 'democracy deficit-terrorism' and 'poverty-terrorism' links. It has been widely demonstrated that the MENA does not have a monopoly on terrorism, and that factors other than a democratic deficit and poverty play a role (see Hobson 2005: 43; Dalacoura 2006). As Flynt Leverett has argued:

From Osama bin Laden on down, that claim that jihadist terrorists are products of economic and political marginalisation is simply false. The 9-11 hijackers were truly trust-fund terrorists, from economically and politically advantaged backgrounds.

(IQ2 2007)

Moreover, there is the phenomenon of 'home grown' terrorists in democratic states, such as three of the individuals who carried out the July 7, 2005, bombings in London, or Rezwan Ferdaus, who was arrested in Boston after planning to fly remote-controlled aircraft with explosives into the Pentagon. Such cases clearly demonstrate the falsifiability of a causal link between a democracy deficit or poverty and terrorism, as presented by the Bush administration.

The impact of questioning these links has been pronounced. It has led Francis Fukuyama and Michael McFaul, long-term proponents of democracy promotion, to assert that:

The deep sources of terrorism are much more complex than just the Middle East's democratic deficit. One can argue in fact that the modernisation process produces terrorism and that more democracy is likely to exacerbate the terrorism problem, at least in the short run.

(Fukuyama and McFaul 2007: 30)

This builds on Francis Fukuyama's earlier assertion that attacked the Bush administration and the Freedom Agenda directly:

The problem of jihadist terrorism will not be solved by bringing modernisation and democracy to the Middle East. The Bush administration's view that terrorism is driven by a lack of democracy overlooks the fact that so many



terrorists were radicalised in democratic European countries. It is highly naïve to think that radical Islamists hate the West because of ignorance of what the West is.

(Fukuyama 2006a: 12)

Notably, however, this has not stopped these authors asserting that democracy promotion is a moral good in and of itself, and that the USA should enhance the role of democracy promotion in its foreign policy (Fukuyama and McPaul 2007: 34–44).

The fourth argument put forward to reject the Freedom Agenda has been the assertion that the USA is a discredited actor. For some, this has been caused by US actions over the last few decades, in which it has 'allied itself with autocratic regimes and has supported Israel against the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people' (Dalacoura 2005: 973). Further still, some have argued that the invasion of Iraq has discredited US democracy promotion efforts. As Shibley Telhami has argued:

In essence, we have given democracy a bad name. It is hard for people in the region, including people who badly and desperately are looking for democracy and freedom, to think of democracy and freedom the American way without thinking about the horrors of Iraq. We have paid a price by diverting attention from the important issue of human rights, which we often confuse with spreading democratic systems. That issue which we should trump and advocate has paid a price as a consequence of this policy.

(IQ2 2007)

Notably, because the Iraq war was constructed by the Bush administration as a method for promoting democracy in the MENA region, many critics of the Freedom Agenda have argued that US democracy promotion is in disrepute. For example, Strobe Talbott (2008: xi–x) has argued that 'democracy' has become 'a controversial if not dirty word' caused by 'George W. Bush's invocation of that goal in Iraq and in the Greater Middle East'. This setback to democracy promotion as a cornerstone of American foreign policy was exacerbated by events in Abu Ghraib prison. Indeed, upon capturing Saddam Hussein, President Bush (2003, December 14) declared that 'this event brings further assurance that the torture chambers and the secret police are gone forever'. Yet, months earlier, the USA had taken over Abu Ghraib prison, which for over 40 years had been a notorious centre for torture under the Ba'ath Party regime in Iraq. Under the prison's new title, Baghdad Central Confinement Facility, torture did not stop (see Williams 2006: 7–49). Throughout 2003–4, American military personnel engaged in practices such as stripping prisoners naked, binding them, sexually abusing them, beating them, menacing and attacking them with dogs, and killing them (see Eisenman 2007: 7).

The visual documentation of these events has been widely broadcast throughout the world, and for many has severely damaged America's 'soft power' (see Nye 2004; Gardels 2005). Similarly, the use of extraordinary rendition and the role

of detention facilities in Guantanamo Bay and beyond have raised serious credibility questions about the Freedom Agenda (Hassan 2008; Neep 2004: 79–80). Thus, as Thomas Carothers (2006: 64) argued, 'even as the president [Bush] has repeatedly asserted his commitment to a "Freedom Agenda," he has struck blow after self-inflicted blow against America's democratic principles and standards'. The effect of the Bush administration's policies has been to raise suspicion about US motives, which, combined with the MENA region's colonial legacy, has had a significant impact on the Freedom Agenda, leading many indigenous groups to distance themselves from Washington and from the democracy assistance offered (Dalacoura 2005: 969; Kubba 2008; Hassan 2011a). Indeed, as founding members of the April 6th movement in Egypt argued, 'We can't be seen anywhere near an American, could you imagine if we were photographed outside the American embassy what that would do [to our movement]?' (Rashed 2011). Such sentiments are constantly expressed by multiple groups and activists across the region, and hostility towards the USA was clearly evident in Tahrir Square with signs reading 'America, should support the people not the tyrant' and 'USA WHY YOU SUPPORT Dictator' (sic) (Hassan 2011a).

### The Freedom Agenda consensus and necessity

In spite of the Freedom Agenda's critics the Bush administration did receive considerable support within the US for promoting democracy in the MENA. The reasons for this are complex, but were well summarised by one of the architects of the Freedom Agenda, Elizabeth Cheney, who argued that:

The truth is that spreading democracy in the Middle East is not a bad idea nor is it a failed idea. Nor is it an idea that would have been good except that George W. Bush adopted it. It is, by any objective measure, a good idea, the right idea and a necessary policy choice for America today . . . For too many years America perpetuated this status quo. We supported those authoritarian regimes; we ignored the aspirations of their people. This policy . . . brought only a false sense of security and stability.

(IQ2 2007)

By many commentators the notion that the USA should democratise the MENA, coercively if necessary, has been attributed to the neoconservative movement. Since September 11, 2001, it has been widely asserted that a 'neoconservative revolution' or 'neoconservative coup' took place within the Bush administration (Lind 2003: 10; Hudson 2005: 298–301). Accordingly, President Bush was described as the 'callow instrument of the neoconservative ideologues' (Epstein 2003: 13). For some, this 'coup' was simply self-evident, leading to claims such as:

Unless you lived at the bottom of a well, you've probably noticed that 9/11 and Iraq have had a transforming effect on the American Right. The short formulation is that so-called neoconservatism has triumphed.

(Rauch 2003: 1607)

This is an assessment shared by both critics and advocates of neoconservatism. Richard Perle has argued that the Bush administration followed a neoconservative agenda on 'issue after issue', and William Kristol argued that President Bush's foreign policy was 'basically a neocon foreign policy' (in Hurst 2005: 75–6; see also Fukuyama 2006b). Moreover, by accepting the premise that the Bush foreign policy was neoconservative, some academics have even resorted to critiquing the Bush era vis-à-vis critiquing the neoconservative ideology (see Reus-Smit 2004; Hudson 2005).

That many neoconservatives have advocated democracy promotion in the MENA is unquestionable. Equally, that many neoconservatives advocated the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq is unquestionable. Assertions of these positions are readily available within the records of the neoconservative magazine the *Weekly Standard* and past papers produced by the American Enterprise Institute. Relatedly, upon hearing President Bush's second inaugural address, which placed democracy promotion centre stage, Robert Kagan asserted that, 'This is real neoconservatism . . . It would be hard to express it more clearly' (in Mcmanus 2005). Throughout the 1990s, many neoconservatives openly disagreed with the Clinton administration's policy towards Iraq and the MENA more broadly. Paul Wolfowitz long opposed American policy in the region adopted after the 1991 Gulf war, claiming that 'containment is not a static policy: the political dynamics of the Middle East will tend to weaken sanctions over time' (Wolfowitz 1997: 111). By December 1997, this culminated in the conclusion:

Overthrow Him . . . Military force is not enough . . . it must be part of an overall political strategy that sets as its goal not merely the containment of Saddam but the liberation of Iraq from his tyranny.

(Khalilzad and Wolfowitz 1997: 14)

Similarly, the desire to overthrow Saddam Hussein was recorded as a wider neo-conservative commitment in 1998, under the auspices of *The Project for a New American Century* letter to President Clinton, which argued that it was a 'necessity' to deal with Iraq (PNAC 1998; see Plesch 2005; Mann 2004).<sup>15</sup>

Simply put, the reason for many neoconservatives advocating democracy promotion as a strategy towards the MENA is ideological. It derives from the belief that the internal constitution of a state, and the nature of a regime, matters in international affairs, and that there is an imperative to liberate people (Fukuyama 2007: 114). This belief is supplemented by the notion that values such as 'freedom, democracy and free enterprise' are not culturally specific. Accordingly, they are prescribed a 'universal' appeal, in which all cultures desire them. As a logical corollary of this premise, these values can be applied to all cultures. Democracy constitutes the default condition all societies would adopt, if and only if tyrannical rule were removed (Reus-Smit 2004: 47; Fukuyama 2007: 114–54; Mead 2005: 117). These premises were certainly embedded within the Bush administration's discourse. However, the notion that the Freedom Agenda was the result of a 'neo-conservative coup' is deeply problematic, both theoretically and empirically.

On a theoretical level, the 'neoconservative coup' thesis is problematic because it asserts an overtly intentionalist argument. This is done by removing agents from wider cultural and bureaucratic structures. As Tony Smith (2007: 43–4) has argued:

If the neoconservatives did indeed pour a poison of unlimited expectations into the president's ear, along with those of Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, these men were more than ready to heed the tempters' message . . . The neoconservative appeal could not have been as great as it was without finding resonance in older and varied sources of American culture and belief.

The 'neoconservative coup' thesis writes out responsibility, and indeed culpability, attributable to a wider group of political actors. This is the case regarding the Iraq war and the Freedom Agenda more broadly. Accordingly, it is essential to note that there was a broad bipartisan consensus in Washington to invade Iraq in 2003, which was demonstrated by the overwhelming congressional approval for the war.<sup>16</sup> As commentators pointed out at the time:

Not since Congress passed the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which helped Lyndon B. Johnson to rapidly expand the Vietnam War, has a President won such broad authority to prosecute an undefined military operation and possible war.

(Reid 2002: 20)

Similarly, calls for promoting democracy in the Middle East, to combat terrorism, have come from a wide spectrum of political actors who are not affiliated with the neoconservative movement, but who contributed to the debate before the 2011 revolutions (see Gause III 2005: 62–3). There are, of course, individuals associated with neoconservatism, such as Charles Krauthammer, who proposed a doctrine of 'democratic realism'. He has argued that 'there's nothing neo about Bush, and there's nothing neo about Blair', and regarding democracy promotion in the MENA claims that 'there is not a single, remotely plausible, alternative strategy for attacking the monster behind 9/11' (Krauthammer 2004a,b).

However, the need to promote democracy in the MENA has also come from neoliberal 'hawks' and political 'moderates'. This is evident in Madeline Albright's (2003) claim that:

Although I was proud of the Clinton administration's foreign policy, and I understand that democracy cannot be imposed from the outside, I regret not having done more to push for liberalisation in the Arab world.

Further still, individuals such as Kenneth Pollack (2006), former director of Persian Gulf affairs at the NSC, have argued that



The end state that America's grand strategy toward the Middle East must envision is a new liberal order to replace a status quo marked by political repression, economic stagnation, and cultural conflict... America must move aggressively and creatively to help reformers throughout the Arab world.

Similarly, Larry Diamond and Michael McFaul (Diamond and McFaul 2006: 49–50) have written for a think tank affiliated with the Democratic Party, the Progressive Policy Institute, claiming that:

In this new embrace of democratic reform in the Middle East, Bush has been correct in intent, even if late to the cause... Over time, expanding political freedom and accountability through democratising reforms would help to change the political and socio-economic conditions that have spawned terrorist groups and ideologies in the region.

This line of argument strongly resembles that put forward by a Council on Foreign Relations task force directed by Steven A. Cook and co-chaired by Madeline Albright and Vin Weber. One of the central conclusions of this report was that:

The United States should support democracy consistently and in all regions of the world. Although democracy entails certain risks, the denial of freedom carries much more significant long-term dangers. If Arab citizens are able to express grievances freely and peacefully, they will be less likely to turn to more extreme measures. They will also be more likely to build open and prosperous societies with respect for human rights and the rule of law.

(Cook *et al.* 2005: 3–4)

Further still, Tamara Cofman Wittes (2008b: 146), in the highly detailed analysis of the Freedom Agenda *Freedom's Unsteady March*, argues that promoting democracy in the Middle East is 'neither a luxury nor a pipe dream. It is a necessity'.

The emergence of a consensus among 'neoconservatives', 'neoliberal' hawks and parts of America's 'moderate' political commentariat has been widely discussed (see Smith 2007; Kaye *et al.* 2008). For Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman the emergence of this consensus represents the formation of a 'Democratist ideology' or 'Democratism' (Lieven and Hulsman 2006). Undoubtedly, there are risks in conflating proponents of democracy promotion into a single united ideology. Although such an approach can be used as a heuristic tool, it runs the risk of obscuring significant disagreements between actors. However, to the extent that there has been disagreement between proponents of democracy promotion it has largely concerned questions of means. The most serious example of this concern is the use of military force, which, in light of the Iraq war, has increasingly been condemned; either entirely as a method of promoting democracy, or through claims that the Bush administration's approach was an 'unsound application' of a 'sound doctrine' (see Traub 2008; Lynch and Singh 2008; Carothers 2007a; Diamond 2005; Fukuyama 2005; Asmus and Pollack 2003). This represents a

tension between those who advocate a vindicationist strategy and those who favour exemplarism. The distinction between the two positions is that those advocating the former view 'America as [a] crusader', whereas those advocating the latter see 'America as [a] beacon' (Kissinger 1994: 18).

A similar tension exists concerning the most fruitful methods of providing democratic assistance to bring about democratic change, in which many exponents of promoting democracy have debated the virtues of promoting economic growth, institutional reform and directly targeting civil society. This is unsurprising given that there is no consensus in the democratisation literature over how best to promote democracy through foreign assistance. Consequently this debate has been particularly pronounced over the question of 'sequencing' and issues concerning how to reshape America's democracy bureaucracy to better coordinate and deliver assistance (see Carothers 2007b). Accordingly, much of the academic and policy debate about the Freedom Agenda was persistently concerned with issues of tempo, between exponents who viewed democracy promotion as best delivered gradually through 'top-down' liberalisation of authoritarian regimes, those who saw the Freedom Agenda as acting slowly alongside already emerging regional trends, and those who saw a more urgent imperative to encourage challenges to autocratic regimes from below (Fukuyama and McFaul 2007; Wittes 2008b; Gerech 2005).

### Going beyond the debate

What is clear from an analysis of the debate surrounding the Freedom Agenda is not only how bifurcated the debate is, but also how the level of analysis underpinning the debate is operating at a purely policy level. It has been based around strategic questions, reviewing issues of whether the United States 'should' promote democracy in the MENA given other long-term interests, and issues of whether the USA 'can' promote democracy given problems such as the 'Islamist dilemma'. In light of the 2011 revolutions, these questions remain important for US policy, but, despite the extensive level of debate, the deeper and more analytical questions appear to have been overlooked almost in their entirety. The question of what exactly President Bush and members of his administration meant when they referred to 'democracy' and 'freedom' is shrouded in silence. Put differently, what exactly was it that the Bush administration believed the Freedom Agenda was supposed to be promoting? These are particularly pertinent questions given that both 'democracy' and 'freedom' are essentially contested concepts (see Whitehead 2003). Both terms are descriptive labels as well as values, which are highly contested between and within specific cultures. Such concepts have contingent meanings, with the 'democracy' of Ancient Greece not being equivalent to the 'democracy' of modern-day America. Similarly, what the Founding Fathers meant by the term 'freedom' is not the same as how the term 'freedom' is deployed in modern-day America. Carl Becker summed up this problem when he referred to 'freedom' as a 'magic but elusive word' (in Foner 1998: xiv). The obvious implication of this is that deploying essentially contested concepts is not

## 5 Constructing the Freedom Agenda for the Middle East

With the Bush administration having laid discursive tracks in response to the crisis constructed out of September 11, 2001, the perceived early successes in Afghanistan only helped the administration move closer to constructing the Freedom Agenda as a policy paradigm towards the MENA. With the Taliban removed from power and al-Qaeda being 'hunted down', some of the immediate elevated tensions between the administration's definitions of freedom and justice, were resolved in favour of the former. Yet, just as significantly, important lessons were learnt in the first few months of the war in Afghanistan that both the administration and the US military would seize upon and appropriate into the war on terror narrative. As President Bush argued:

These past two months have shown that an innovative doctrine and high-tech weaponry can shape then dominate an unconventional conflict . . . *our military are rewriting the rules of war* . . . The conflict in Afghanistan has taught us more about the future of our military than a decade of blue ribbon panels and think-tank symposiums.

(Bush 2001, December 11)

In essence the President was arguing that the USA had developed military supremacy through technological innovation, which was powerful, swift and effective enough to be projected across the world and achieve a desirable outcome. This certainly appeared to be the case as the Northern Alliance, with US support, was able to take the city of Mazar-e-Sharif by November 9, 2001, and then capture Kabul by November 12, 2001 (Katzman 2005: 9; Struck 2001). The rapid collapse of the Taliban regime appeared to vindicate the Rumsfeld-Franks strategy of combining the indigenous Northern Alliance with US Special Forces and airpower (Call 2007: 25–41). This not only silenced critics, but fundamentally altered how the Bush administration viewed the strategically selective context; it altered what was seen as politically feasible, practical and desirable. No longer was the military seen as 'declining', which had been the position put forward in the 2000 presidential campaign (see also Rumsfeld 2011: 331–3). Rather, a military strategy had supposedly been constructed by the Pentagon and the CIA, which made fears of military overstretch appear redundant.

The pessimistic declinism embedded in the administration's espoused IDF had been vanquished by swift military success. As a consequence, the triumphant exhilaration born out of the end of the Cold War became dominant. Afghanistan facilitated this roll, because the rapid success of the operation offered a low-cost option of regime change, and provided a model for future military action (Woodward 2004: 5, 30; Dunn 2005: 18). In effect, the Afghanistan campaign, and subsequent rapid regime change, facilitated the conditions for the USA to foster and narrate a new hubris, which helped dispel the myth of US weakness, which had been a lasting legacy of the Vietnam War. The war in Afghanistan represented an *anagnorisis* moment in the narrative presented by the Bush administration:

When I committed U.S. forces to this battle, I had every confidence that they would be up to the task. And they have proven me right. The Taliban and the terrorists set out to dominate a country and intimidate the world. Today, from their caves, it's all looking a little different. And no cave is deep enough to escape the patient justice of the United States of America. We are also beginning to see the possibilities of a world beyond the war on terror. We have a chance, if we take it, to write a hopeful chapter in human history.

(Bush 2001, December 11)

Furthermore, this turning point was assimilated into the American exceptionalist narrative. Having removed the Taliban regime, the Bush administration by the spring of 2002 narrated the reasons for removing them as 'liberation', and increasingly began to align its stated mission objectives with those of the UN nation-building efforts. It thus began to alter its narrative, assimilating the events into a privileged genealogical past; for the Bush administration the war represented a continuation of America's democracy promotion tradition:

None of us would ever wish the evil that has been done to our country, yet we have learned that *out of evil can come great good*.

(Bush 2001, November 8)

*There's jubilation in the cities that we have liberated.* And the sooner al Qaeda is brought to justice, the sooner Afghanistan will return to normal.

(Bush 2001, November 19)<sup>1</sup>

Part of that cause was to *liberate the Afghan people from terrorist occupation, and we did so . . . In Kabul, a friendly government is now an essential member of the coalition against terror.*

(Bush 2002, March 11)

The first phase of our military operation was in Afghanistan . . . *You've got to understand that as we routed out the Taliban, they weren't sent in to conquer; they were sent in to liberate . . . America seeks hope and opportunity for all people in all cultures. And that is why we're helping to rebuild Afghanistan*

... The Marshall Plan, rebuilding Europe and lifting up former enemies, showed that America is not content with military victory alone. Americans always see a greater hope and a better day. And America sees a just and hopeful world beyond the war on terror ... by your effort and example, you will advance the cause of freedom around the world.

(Bush 2002, April 17)

The importance of this transformation should not be understated. Whereas the Bush administration had originally rejected the need for nation-building, its objectives in Afghanistan had incrementally transformed to the point at which the Bush administration would repeatedly declare that the success of a free Afghanistan was a large rationale behind the reasons for war. Such is the prominence of these assertions that in President Bush's memoir *Decision Points* he argues that he changed his mind about nation-building after September 11, 2001, and that 'Afghanistan was the ultimate nation-building mission' (Bush 2010: 205) – although, rather disingenuously, the former President also edits out the length of time it took to arrive at this decision, arguing that 'helping a democratic government emerge' was a *cause célèbre* of the original 'comprehensive' strategic vision for OEF (Bush 2010: 205).

Nonetheless, that as early as 2002 the war in Afghanistan was being constructed as a 'war of liberation' is instructive. It demonstrates how the projection of US power, and the US construction of a crisis, could be assimilated into the rubric of democracy promotion and liberation. That is to say, the two discourses, and objectives, could coexist within an IDF. The meaning and usage of the concept of justice was consequently subtly changed, and came to legitimise a nation-building project under the banner of 'freedom', whilst also continuing to be a central discursive structure underpinning anti-democratic practices, such as indefinite detention, torture and targeted assassinations. This proved to be a critical dynamic in the evolution of the Freedom Agenda, which posited both the need for US primacy over, and the democratisation of, the Middle East.

Moreover, with the removal of the Taliban regime, under the banner of justice and peace, the Bush administration was now characterising US military intervention as strong, resolute, credible, anti-imperialistic and able to deliver a nation, to freedom. However, with the dispelling of the myth of American weakness, a fundamental shift in the power structure of the US corporate bureaucracy occurred. No longer was Colin Powell's State Department seen as the key institution with regard to foreign policy in the MENA region; the door had been opened for other strategically selective actors in the state system to reassert themselves. The military success created a shift in power from the State Department, which was increasingly being accrued by Pentagon officials and the Vice President's office; this laid the foundations for 'phase two' of the administration's moralistic crusade in Iraq and the institutionalisation of the Freedom Agenda. That is to say, there was a shift in the perceived deontic power of the players statuses within these institutional settings, which had begun as a result of the crisis narrative but was reified in light of the perceived success in Afghanistan. Moreover, this

shift in institutional statuses empowered officials inclined to use military power to reshape the Middle East in its image, and set the scene for the Bush administration to make its most controversial foreign policy decision.

The decision to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003 generated a considerable level of debate and confusion around the world, and events in Iraq did little to relieve the original sense of puzzlement. This was most instructively demonstrated when Richard N. Haass, the former director of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department and President of the Council on Foreign Relations, was asked why President Bush had decided to go to war. He replied:

I will go to my grave not knowing that ... I can't answer it. I can't explain the strategic obsession with Iraq – why it rose to the top of people's priority list. I just can't explain why so many people thought this was so important to do. (in Lemann 2004: 157)

This is a sentiment Haass would repeat in his memoir *War of Necessity; War of Choice*. Haass points out that the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was not the product of a definitive moment in which principles met to discuss the pros and cons of the invasion before a final decision was made. Rather, the decision was the product of a cumulative process (Haass 2009: 234). To the extent that Haass does offer a modicum of an explanation, he argues that

after 9/11, the President and those closest to him wanted to send a message to the world that the United States was willing and able to act decisively. Liberating Afghanistan was a start, but in the end it didn't scratch the itch. Americans had no long standing history of feud with Afghanistan ... Iraq was fundamentally different. The President wanted to destroy an established nemesis of the United States. And he wanted to change the course of history, transforming not just a country but the region of the world that had produced the lion's share of the world's terrorists and had resisted much of modernity. (Haass 2009: 234–5)

This explanation is one that resonates with many academics' and political commentators' accounts (Bacevich 2008: 59–60; Lieven and Hulsman 2006; Traub 2008: 118–19; Monten 2005; Jervis 2003). Embedded in this explanation is an answer to why the Freedom Agenda emerged: it was, in conjunction with the Iraq war, an attempt to transform the Middle East with the aim of countering terrorism and delivering 'modernity'. However, such a position is not without its critics. Tamara Cofman Wittes, in her sustained and highly detailed account of the Freedom Agenda, *Freedom's Unsteady March: America's Role in Building Arab Democracy*, excludes any analysis of Iraq, arguing that:

[I]n the public discourse both in the United States and abroad, the Bush administration's policy of advancing Middle Eastern democracy is inextricably linked to the war in Iraq. Yet this conflation misunderstands both the



Iraq war and Bush's policy of democracy promotion. Humanitarian intervention to topple a brutal dictatorship was a distant third among rationales put forward by the Bush administration and its allies for the invasion; the primary arguments had to do with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, both past and presumed, and its alleged links to terrorist groups. Hope that Saddam's fall would produce a democratic 'domino effect' in the region was expressed by the president and other senior officials as a hope, and not as a war aim. The United States would not have gone to war simply to create a democracy in Iraq, absent what was then viewed as a compelling security rationale.

(Wittes 2008a: 8–9)

In an interview at the Brookings Institute, she expanded this argument by asserting that:

the marketing of the war was number one WMD, number two links to terrorism, number three humanitarian intervention . . . If the core motivation of Iraq was to set up a democracy and create this domino effect then the military implementation would have looked very different, because, you do not create a democracy with that kind of post-invasion force structure . . . if the President were wholeheartedly committed to setting up a democracy in Iraq that would create this domino impact throughout the region, he would have . . . at some point during the process when he and his advisers were being briefed on the military planning for the war, [President Bush] would have said how are we going to create a democracy afterwards? There is no evidence in anything that has been written so far about the planning for the war that that question was ever asked.

(Wittes 2008b)

Evidently, there is a clear divergence of opinion between proponents who articulate a close relationship between the Iraq war and the Freedom Agenda and those who view them as separate policies. Moreover, it is clear from the two positions that the relationship between the Iraq war and the Freedom Agenda requires an analysis of the period leading up to the Iraq war. Instructively, the constructivist institutionalist methodology sheds light on this issue through its commitment to process-tracing narrative analysis.

#### Diagnose, proselytise and impose: Iraq and the Freedom Agenda

The shift in bureaucratic influence within the Bush administration away from the State Department's policy of smart sanctions, and towards the Defense Department's regime change policy in Iraq, came shortly after the Northern Alliance had captured Kabul. According to President Bush, he asked Donald Rumsfeld to turn his attention to Iraq for an assessment of possible military options on November 21, 2001 (in Woodward 2004: 30). Thus, before the Bonn

Agreement was signed the Bush administration was already turning its attention away from Afghanistan towards the build-up to war with Iraq. Symptomatic of this was the manner in which Tommy Franks was told to conduct war-planning against Iraq, whilst he was in Kabul, and briefed the President on December 28 2001, just days after the Interim Authority had come to power in Afghanistan.

For many commentators the shift from focusing on Afghanistan to Iraq has been seen as a product of the Vice President's office, where Dick Cheney adopted the role of 'examiner of worst case scenarios' in which he had to 'think about the unthinkable' (Woodward 2004: 29). In this role, Vice President Cheney began to focus on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) being used by terrorists against the US. The fear of such an occurrence was compounded by intelligence gathered before September 11, 2001, which appeared to show Osama bin Laden meeting with Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood in Kandahar. This meeting was of great significance, as Mahmood was the former chairman of Pakistan's Atomic Energy Commission and an expert on uranium enrichment (Suskind 2006: 27; Overbye and Glanz 2001). In light of the events of September 11, 2001, this meeting was interpreted as a 'nightmare' by George Tenet and consequently presented to Dick Cheney and other principals of the US intelligence community. The result of this meeting was dramatic, as it provided the first articulation of what the Pulitzer Prize winner Ron Suskind termed *The One Percent Doctrine*. Suskind quotes the Vice President's assertion that

If there's a one percent chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response . . . It's not about analysis, or finding a preponderance of evidence . . . It's about our response.

(Suskind 2006: 62)

This was an extraordinary assertion, which fundamentally altered the rules of the game. No longer was policy to be led by evidence, but rather a dichotomy had been constructed between analysis and action. This disarticulation created a scenario in which the possible was to be deemed more important to strategic policy action than the probable. Within such a context the causes for action fundamentally changed, as the strategically selective actors viewed the strategically selective context differently. Ultimately, policy became heavily reliant on the productive imagination, which in turn became embedded in the Bush administration's narrative through semantic innovation. The consequences of this were highly apparent to Sir Richard Dearlove, head of the UK intelligence agency MI6, who briefed Prime Minister Blair nine months before the invasion commenced in Iraq. In his assessment he argued that war was 'inevitable' and that 'the facts and intelligence' were being 'fixed round the policy' by the Bush administration (Rycroft 2005; Fielding 2005).

Instructively, the Bush administration was concerned about possible links between WMD and 'terrorism' before September 11, 2001. The administration framed its argument for withdrawing from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile

(ABM) Treaty by arguing that it was concerned about the link between 'missiles and terror' and the possibility of 'attack and blackmail' (Bush 1999, September 23). The need for a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) shield was marketed as necessary for maintaining US primacy and preventing the perceived threat from 'rogue nations' willing to 'blackmail', 'threaten' or 'attack'. The importance of this discursive structure is that it was a readily available discourse, which was expanded after the September 11, 2001, attacks. In particular this discourse was assimilated into the Bush administration's moralistic crusade plot in light of the anthrax attacks that followed September 11:

*We have faced unprecedented bioterrorist attacks delivered in our mail . . . And tonight, we join in thanking a whole new group of public servants who never enlisted to fight a war, but find themselves on the front lines of a battle nonetheless: Those who deliver the mail – America's postal workers. We also thank those whose quick response provided preventive treatment that has no doubt saved thousands of lives – our health care workers . . . The first attack against America came by plane . . . The second attack against America came in the mail.*

(Bush 2001, November 8)

*America's next priority to prevent mass terror is to protect against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them . . . One former al Qaida member has testified in court that he was involved in an effort 10 years ago to obtain nuclear materials. And the leader of al Qaida calls that effort 'a religious duty.' Abandoned al Qaida houses in Kabul contained diagrams for crude weapons of mass destruction. And as we all know, terrorists have put anthrax into the U.S. mail . . . And almost every state that actively sponsors terror is known to be seeking weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them at longer and longer ranges. Their hope is to blackmail the United States into abandoning our war on terror.*

(Bush 2001, December 11)

The anthrax attacks provided a physical incarnation of 'terrorists' using WMD on American soil. Thus, although the origin of the attacks was unknown, they were articulated as a 'second wave', a phrase which alludes to causality on the basis of succession in time.<sup>3</sup> This created a *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy rooted in a conflation between the 'terrorists' who carried out the September 11, 2001, attacks and the 'terrorists' who sent anthrax in the postal system (see Egan 2002; Vulliamy 2002). Through doing this, the Bush administration was able to reify an association of ideas between WMD and terrorism, and sell this as an immediate threat to the US populace. This was an audience that no longer thought in the abstract of such attacks, but rather through collective fear had 'experienced' the attacks and was readily interpellated. As a direct consequence, US counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation policies were increasingly portrayed in synergy as the Bush administration's narrative amalgamated them together.

The linguistic embodiment of such an articulation was delivered through phrases such as 'mass terror', 'catastrophic harm', 'catastrophic terrorist violence', 'turn their hatred into holocaust', 'technologies to kill on a massive scale', 'massive and sudden horror', 'maximum death and destruction', and 'unprecedented dangers'. This list is by no means complete, but rather provides a sample of the language used to represent the alleged danger facing the USA. This tendency to inflate danger was evident during the anthrax attacks, when the Bush administration portrayed them as threatening 'thousands of lives', rather than the five deaths and 15 sicknesses that actually resulted from the attacks (Bohn *et al.* 2008). The propensity to inflate threat was increasingly utilised and assimilated within the Bush administration's 'war on terror' narrative. As a consequence the characterisation of the 'enemy' began to undergo a process of metamorphosis. Claims were increasingly made concerning terrorism and the use of WMD:

These same terrorists are searching for weapons of mass destruction, the tools to turn their hatred into holocaust. They can be expected to use chemical, biological and nuclear weapons the moment they are capable of doing so . . . We face enemies that hate not our policies, but our existence.

(Bush 2001, November 10)

[S]ome states that sponsor terror are seeking or already possess weapons of mass destruction; terrorist groups are hungry for these weapons, and would use them without a hint of conscience. And we know that these weapons, in the hands of terrorists, would unleash blackmail and genocide and chaos. These facts cannot be denied, and must be confronted.

(Bush 2002, March 11)

Our adversaries have now shown their willingness to slaughter thousands of innocent civilians in a devastating strike. If they had the capacity to kill millions of innocent civilians, do any of us believe they would hesitate to do so?

(Wolfowitz 2002, October 4)

We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud . . . that would make September 11 look small in comparison . . . We're in a new world. We're in a world in which the possibility of terrorism, married up with technology, could make us very, very sorry that we didn't act.

(Rice 2002, September 8)

Highly observable in these quotes is the manner in which the characterisation of the enemy changed from merely 'evil terrorists' to a triad of 'evil terrorists, WMD and rogue states'. This was accompanied by a narration of a possible future that was not only apocalyptic, but a dystopia in which the 'American way of life', 'civilization' and 'freedom' were destroyed and 'fear', 'evil' and 'tyranny' replaced them. This imagined future was seen as a possibility because, as the Bush administration argued, there were 'evil states' and 'evil terrorists' working

together to challenge and destroy the USA with WMD. This conflated an essentialised identity of 'terrorists' and 'rouge states':

Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction . . . We know their true nature . . . Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade . . . States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil.

(Bush 2002, January 29)

Terror cells and outlaw regimes building weapons of mass destruction are different faces of the same evil. Our security requires that we confront both.

(Bush 2002, October 7)

Evidently, the Bush administration's narrative continued along the plot of a moralistic crusade. However, by expanding the characterisation of the enemy to an essentialised 'evil' triad, the Bush administration began reforming the boundaries of what constituted the national interest and how to pursue it. The original response to the war on terror was abstractly defined as 'ridding the world of evil' and defeating 'every terrorist group of global reach' (Bush 2001, September 20). However, by late 2001 this had changed, and now the national interest was expanded to dealing with terrorism and proliferation, through 'pre-emptive' force, to 'prevent mass terror' and the 'proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them' (Bush 2001, December 11). Problematically, this distinction would be written out of the official narrative as the President began claiming that the objective was 'always the same' (Bush 2002, April 17). This shift in the construction of the national interest is fundamentally important to understanding the evolution of the Freedom Agenda. Whereas the moralistic crusade in Afghanistan was conducted under the banner of Just War theory, the build-up to the Iraq war was constructed as a prudent measure, given the possibility of 'mass terror'. However, whilst the administration was focusing on 'mass terror', it also began to focus on the MENA region more broadly.

On November 29, 2001, the issue of Iraq and the idea of democratising the Middle East began to be developed as two distinct, but conjoined, ideas. In another demonstration of the influence the Department of Defense had gained through the President's decision to construct a decisive intervention as a war, Donald Rumsfeld asked Paul Wolfowitz to bring together scholars from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) (Rumsfeld 2006, July 6). This meeting, which Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld's consultant Steve Herbits termed 'Bletchley II', was called together to answer broader questions that the Pentagon was unable to answer, such as 'Who are the terrorists? Where did this come from? How does it relate to Islamic history, the history of the Middle East, and contemporary Middle East tensions? What are we up against here?' (Woodward 2006: 83).<sup>4</sup>

The goal of this meeting was to construct post-9/11 policy towards the Middle East, which would be drawn up as a memo and circulated around the Bush administration (see Bosman 2006). Although this memo remains classified, what little information is available is highly revealing. The title of the memo was *Delta of Terrorism*. Significantly, the metaphor of a *delta* was chosen to conjure images of the mouth of a river from which terrorism flows from the entire MENA region. According to Christopher DeMuth, an instrumental actor in the meeting:

the general analysis was that Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where most of the hijackers came from, were the key, but the problems there are intractable. Iran is more important, where they were confident and successful in setting up a radical government . . . We concluded that a confrontation with Saddam was inevitable. He was a gathering threat – the most menacing, active and unavoidable threat. We agreed that Saddam would have to leave the scene before the problem would be addressed.

(in Woodward 2006: 84–5)

DeMuth's description of the meeting's conclusion is instructive as it put forward a wide-ranging plan for US–MENA relations. Countries that were deemed important to long-term national interests, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, were highlighted as important to transforming the region, but as part of a gradual process resulting from the removal of Saddam Hussein. Iran was believed to be a threat, but too difficult to deal with. Consequently, Saddam Hussein was seen as an easier, more vulnerable target that could be removed. At the meeting Baathism was seen as 'an Arab form of fascism transplanted to Iraq' and that the Bush administration should consider itself 'facing a two-generation war' starting 'with Iraq'. This, it was believed, would be 'the only way to transform the region' (Woodward 2006: 83–5).

This memo certainly proved to be a tipping point for many in the administration, as it provided a broad vision, strategy and alternative policy paradigm for dealing with the MENA region. When the memo was hand-delivered to members of Bush's war cabinet, Rice said that the memo was 'very, very persuasive', Cheney was 'pleased with the memo' and the President was now focused on the 'malignancy' of the Middle East (Woodward 2006: 85). Moreover, the memo reveals an important chain of events. First, the notion of invading Iraq was set in motion before any conception of its wider impact on transforming the region. However, within less than a fortnight after the President asked Donald Rumsfeld to look into invading Iraq, a much wider policy paradigm was being established that would transform the MENA, starting with an invasion of Iraq. This was the ideational birth of a liberal grand strategy for democratising the MENA region. Consequently, it is possible to concur with Andrew Bacevich's assessment of the situation:

[T]hrough a war of liberation, the United States intended to convert Iraq into what Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz termed 'the first



vision for the future of the Middle East. If Iraq could be emancipated from Saddam Hussein it would become a pro-American bastion of freedom in the region. It was believed that it would provide a 'model' for pro-American forces in the region to rise up and demand similar levels of democracy and freedom. This was, as John Lewis Gaddis declared, a formula of 'Fukuyama plus force' (Gaddis 2004: 90). However, as events in Iraq began to challenge the Bush administration's teleological understanding of history, demonstrating problems within the administration's IDF, the Freedom Agenda would come to evolve distinctively and become the defining feature of the new policy paradigm.

### The incremental evolution of a new policy paradigm for the Middle East

By understanding the Iraq war and the Freedom Agenda as part of a grand vision for the MENA region, articulated together by the vision set out at 'Bletchley II', it is possible to trace the gradual evolution of the Freedom Agenda back to within months of the September 11, 2001, crisis. Indeed, by early 2002, policy practice began to catch up with the initial transformative discourse the administration set out in its initial crisis narrative. Yet the evolution of the policy itself was not a smooth process, as the Bush administration needed to adapt its crisis narrative to events, setbacks and challenges to the policy's institutionalisation. This became all the more apparent throughout the end of 2002 when long-term MENA allies, such as Egypt, began facing increasing pressure from the administration to reform. Equally, as the build-up to the war in Iraq was unfolding, the administration's thinking about the Freedom Agenda was evolving to provide a more distinctive policy coupled with a distinctive set of institutions. Thus, although the Iraq war was intended to create a domino effect, the Freedom Agenda was departing from relying on the fall of 'dominos' alone.

Long before the Freedom Agenda was declared the leitmotif of Bush's second term in office, the policy came into fruition through a slow gestation of ideas. What distinguishes the period between early 2002 and the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003, and why it is important to the evolution of the Freedom Agenda, is that the Bush administration began to shift the definition of the national interest. No longer was simply 'eradicating terrorism' at the core of the definition, but at the same time as the administration began to include the use of 'pre-emptive' force to 'prevent mass terror' it also slowly began to see a national interest in addressing wider social conditions in the MENA. What emerged was a definition of the national interest that sought to deal with what the administration saw to be the causes of terrorism. As strategically selective actors within the state bureaucracy began to interpret the strategically selective context differently, as a result of a crisis, the construction of the national interest shifted to solve the puzzle the crisis appeared to present. The Freedom Agenda in its final evolutionary form is the product of this shift.

That the Bush administration's post-crisis narrative was evolving to include a more prescriptive approach to dealing with the causes of terrorism before the Iraq

war was launched became highly evident in the President's West Point speech. As early as June 2002, the President declared to West Point candidates that

the 20th century ended with a single surviving model of human progress, based on non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women and private property and free speech and equal justice and religious tolerance. America cannot impose this vision – yet we can support and reward governments that make the right choices for their own people... A truly strong nation will permit legal avenues of dissent for all groups that pursue their aspirations without violence. An advancing nation will pursue economic reform, to unleash the great entrepreneurial energy of its people. A thriving nation will respect the rights of women, because no society can prosper while denying opportunity to half its citizens. Mothers and fathers and children across the Islamic world, and all the world, share the same fears and aspirations. In poverty, they struggle. In tyranny, they suffer. And as we saw in Afghanistan, in liberation they celebrate.

(Bush 2002, June 1)

These sentiments were repeated in the *National Security Strategy* published in September 2002. Such assertions represented an evolutionary step in the moral crusade plot presented by the administration. In narrating a future utopian vision 'beyond the war on terror', the President asserted the need to confront 'poverty' and 'tyranny' by supporting and rewarding 'governments that make the right choices for their own people'. This was to be done by countries adopting the 'single surviving model of human progress'. Such a statement is notable for its teleological understanding of 'progress' towards a single vision, and the prescription of democratisation as a solution to terrorism. This added a much more complex understanding of how to 'fight' the 'war on terror' than had been initially constructed.

The implications of this statement became all the more evident in US–MENA relations. Chiefly, US–Egyptian relations were symptomatic of the coming problems that would prove highly troublesome for the Freedom Agenda when it was formally institutionalised. On June 8, 2002, President Bush held a joint press conference with President Mubarak in which he thanked Egypt for its 'strong support in our war against terror', claiming that 'we've got a good friend, Americans have a good friend, when it comes to this war on terror, in Egypt' (Bush 2002, June 8). However, by August 2002 the White House refused to honour an Egyptian request for \$130 million in supplementary aid. This was a direct protest against the July sentencing of the prominent Egyptian-American democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim and his colleagues for apparent fraud and defamation. This was the first time the USA had linked the provision of aid to a human rights case in the Arab world (Hawthorne 2003a: 23). As the Bush administration became increasingly concerned by the internal politics of regimes it regarded as allies, tensions began to surface. This saw the creeping insurrection of the 'conflict of interests' problem, which slowly began to ferment in US–MENA relations.

Within the early evolutionary phase of the Freedom Agenda, it became abundantly clear that the Bush administration was asserting the need to promote 'freedom' in the region, but that the narrative failed to provide a robust and consistent understanding of why this applied to the entire region. Consequently, it failed to set out a strategy other than deploying the 'domino' metaphor. This became all the more evident when the Bush administration began re-engaging in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, seeking an end to the second Intifada. Indeed, President Bush argued that,

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, equally entitled to the benefits of democratic government.

(Bush 2002, June 24)

This vision was narrated as the end point of the President's proposed two-state solution, which would be supported if 'a new and different Palestinian leadership' was elected. Evidently, Washington wanted 'regime change' in the Palestinian Authority, and argued that this would allow 'democratic reforms' to move forward (Bush 2002, June 24). Removing Arafat had now become US policy in an effort to restart negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis; this later culminated in the 'Road Map' (see Mearsheimer and Walt 2007: 199–228; Hudson 2005).

Without a coherent narrative of why the USA needed to promote 'freedom' in the region, the Bush administration once again narrated the 'universal value' of freedom within an exceptionalist discourse:

Prosperity and freedom and dignity are not just American hopes, or Western hopes. *They are universal, human hopes.* And even in the violence and turmoil of the Middle East, America believes *those hopes have the power to transform lives and nations.*

(Bush 2002, June 24)

Americans are a free people, who know that *freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity.*

(Bush 2003, January 28)

That 'freedom' was 'God's gift to humanity' was an articulation that was often deployed to legitimise the Freedom Agenda. Without a coherent rationale or strategy in place, the phrasing legitimises the Freedom Agenda by implying that God demands such a policy. Not only does it provide a sense of moral mission, but it places God on the USA's side in that mission. To promote freedom is to do God's altruistic work, and, consequently, human actions imitate God's will whilst building a utopia on Earth. Evidently, through rationalising the policy in these transcendental terms the Bush administration was attempting to maintain the interpellative resonance of the war on terror as a moral crusade, whilst silencing critics.<sup>6</sup>

This transcendental argument, derived from a US exceptionalist discourse, underpinned the Freedom Agenda's social engineering project. This was social utopianism par excellence. As Donald Rumsfeld had explained:

we have a choice, either to change the way we live, which is unacceptable, or to change the way that they live . . . we chose the latter.

(Rumsfeld 2001, September 18)

Yet failure to assert a coherent rationale proved highly problematic for the Freedom Agenda throughout the early phase of its institutionalisation. At the launch of MEPI in December 2002, the flagship programme underpinning the Freedom Agenda, Colin Powell argued that focusing on development would fill the 'hope gap' in the region and that:

[U]ntil the countries of the Middle East unleash the abilities and potential of their women, they will not build a future of hope. Any approach to the Middle East that ignores its political, economic, and educational underdevelopment will be built on sand.

(Powell 2002, December 12)

However, with an initial budget of only \$29 million, this was derided in the region as tokenism (Sharp 2005a: 3). This fact was not lost on US officials, who increasingly argued that MEPI represented a 'philosophical commitment' towards reforming the region (Sharp 2005a: 3). Accordingly, as the administration tried to justify its position, claiming that this was a strategy of 'partnerships' and 'principle' (Powell 2004), it became all the more evident that the Freedom Agenda was not a direct challenge to MENA allies. Rather, the Freedom Agenda's intended purpose was to work with regional allies, in 'partnerships', to try and alleviate the social conditions that were undermining their legitimacy.

### The rise of the Freedom Agenda: consolidating the paradigm

Whilst the Iraq war was being fought, the Bush administration toned down the prominence of the Freedom Agenda in its espoused narrative. Instead, the Bush administration concentrated on explaining its operational doctrine and focused on the particulars of the conflict rather than the wider regional strategy. However, after the swift collapse of the Iraqi regime, the Freedom Agenda began to be increasingly seen as the overarching rationale for US policy. Thus, although the Iraq war was a point of origin for the Freedom Agenda, it also served as a point of departure that ultimately led to the Freedom Agenda becoming deemed the central policy paradigm of the Bush administration's tenure in office.

The rise in the Freedom Agenda's prominence was directly linked to failures in Iraq. The celebration of the liberated masses, which the administration had promised prior to the invasion, failed to materialise. In its place came a growing insurgency and increasing instability in the country. This fundamentally challenged the simplicity of the 'war on terror' narrative; far from removing the 'shackles on

democracy', the removal of Saddam Hussein brought with it sectarian violence and the possibility of the territorial integrity of the country being split along Shia, Sunni and Kurdish lines. As a result, the Bush administration faced increasing problems in securing its war on terror narrative. The facts on the ground directly contradicted its parsimonious assertions that an invasion of Iraq would increase the security of the USA. On the contrary, reports from the country were showing that supporters of al-Qaeda were increasingly infiltrating the country and seeking to set up a 'kind of safe haven for jihad against the West that Afghanistan was before September 11' (Diamond 2005: 320).

This represented a crisis of its own in the post-crisis narrative, which opened up space to criticise the Bush administration's foreign policy, and the narrative it espoused. It is important to recognise that, as Stuart Croft argues:

Any new policy programme prescribed in and through this new discourse [the war on terror] would inevitably be challenged over time. Policy programmes decay in the normal course of debate as issues and attitudes change over time; and new crises are constructed, ones that produce different discourses that take different directions. (Croft 2006: 2)

The growing unease about the moral crusade plot the Bush administration had put forward was evident in speeches the President began to make. In an attempt to defend the war on terror as an overarching rationale he began arguing that:

[A]s democracy takes hold in Iraq, the enemies of freedom will do all in their power to spread violence and fear. They are trying to shake the will of our country and our friends, but the United States of America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins. The killers will fail, and the Iraqi people will live in freedom. (Bush 2004, January 20)

This, and many other statements to the same effect, attempted to assimilate the growing insurgency into the original narrative in an attempt to salvage the original construction of the war on terror. Those who opposed the US occupation were deemed the 'enemies of freedom', masking a divergent set of political objectives. Similarly, the original decision to cast the terrorist attacks as an 'act of war' began to be challenged in a manner that had not been done in 2001, leading the President to assert in his 2004 State of the Union address:

I know that some people question if America is really in a war at all. They view terrorism more as a crime, a problem to be solved mainly with law enforcement and indictments. After the World Trade Center was first attacked in 1993, some of the guilty were indicted and tried and convicted, and sent to prison. But the matter was not settled. The terrorists were still training and plotting in other nations, and drawing up more ambitious plans. After

the chaos and carnage of September the 11th, it is not enough to serve our enemies with legal papers. The terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States, and war is what they got. (Bush 2004, January 20)

The strength of the counter-narrative, however, was too persuasive in the face of evidence throughout 2004. This led to active and retired military leaders charging that the war on terror was too simplistic in its prescriptions, and that the term conveyed the impression that military power alone could address the threat (see Chollet and Goldgeier 2008: 314). The result of this pressure gave the President cause to assert that:

We actually misnamed the war on terror. It ought to be the struggle against ideological extremists who do not believe in free societies who happen to use terror as a weapon to try to shake the conscience of the free world. And, you know, that's what they do. They use terror, and they use it effectively. (Bush 2004, August 6)

Similarly, as Donald Rumsfeld was leaving office he argued that:

I don't think I would have called it the war on terror . . . I don't mean to be critical of those who have or did or – and certainly I've used the phrase frequently . . . it's not a war on terror. Terror is a weapon of choice for extremists who are trying to destabilise regimes and impose their . . . dark vision on all the people that they can control. So 'war on terror' has a problem for me. (Rumsfeld 2006, December 7)

Such statements marked a significant alteration in the Bush administration's espoused narrative. When faced with increasing challenges to the simplicity of the narrative, the Bush administration chose not to abandon it, but rather to modify it to become more accommodating to the challenges. The enemy was no longer defined by its 'evil' nature alone, but rather by an 'ideology'. The logical conclusion of this alteration was delivered by President Bush when he asserted that:

While the killers choose their victims indiscriminately, their attacks serve a clear and *focused ideology*, a set of beliefs and goals that are evil, but not insane. Some call this evil Islamic radicalism; others, militant Jihadism; still others, Islamo-fascism. Whatever it's called, this ideology is very different from the religion of Islam. This form of radicalism exploits Islam to serve a violent, political vision: the establishment, by terrorism and subversion and insurgency, of a totalitarian empire that denies all political and religious freedom . . . Islamic radicalism is more like a loose network with many branches than an army under a single command. (Bush 2006, October 6)



The change in the characterisation of the enemy had a profound impact on the manner in which the Freedom Agenda evolved. It was no longer portrayed as a policy to prevent terrorists being recruited, but rather as a 'foreign policy based on liberty' motivated by 'hopeful ideology called freedom'. It was no longer just a strategy to transform the Middle East, but rather a challenge to a 'hateful ideology' (Bush 2006, July 28). The shift in focus to an ideological struggle re-invented the importance of the Freedom Agenda. It built on the original narrative, presented after September 11, 2001, to include more than just military means, therefore answering critics of the war on terror. Yet, in doing so, the Freedom Agenda was presented as the overarching rationale for US foreign policy. Accordingly, the President argued that:

*The war we fight today is more than a military conflict; it is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century. On one side are those who believe in the values of freedom and moderation. . . And on the other side are those driven by the values of tyranny and extremism.*

(Bush 2006, August 31)

*We are engaged in the defining ideological struggle of the 21st century. The terrorists oppose every principle of humanity and decency that we hold dear. Yet in this war on terror, there is one thing we and our enemies agree on: In the long run, men and women who are free to determine their own destinies will reject terror and refuse to live in tyranny. And that is why the terrorists are fighting to deny this choice to the people in Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Palestinian Territories. And that is why, for the security of America and the peace of the world, we are spreading the hope of freedom.*

(Bush 2008, January 28)

Within this iteration of the war on terror narrative, ideological struggle was seen to be the central plot and the Freedom Agenda as America's method of victory. This was an implicit recognition of the limitations of the previous narrative; the narrative was cumulatively yet iteratively adapted so that the Freedom Agenda transformed into the central paradigm in what remain a moral crusade.

Making the spread of liberty central to US foreign policy was explicitly the goal of President Bush's second term in office. When informing Michael Gerson, the President's chief speech writer, of what he wanted to be included in his upcoming second inaugural address, President Bush explicitly told him that he needed to get across a single idea: 'The future of America and the security of America depends on the spread of liberty' (see Woodward 2006: 371). This was to be as central to the war on terror as containment had been in the Cold War. The President was explicitly trying to modify the war on terror narrative so that the Freedom Agenda would become the single overarching policy paradigm for US foreign policy. Through claims that the regional status quo had not provided security, the President increasingly asserted that:

*As long as the Middle East remains a place of tyranny and despair and anger, it will continue to produce men and movements that threaten the safety of America and our friends. So America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East. We will challenge the enemies of reform, confront the allies of terror, and expect a higher standard from our friends.*

(Bush 2004, January 20)<sup>8</sup>

Given the centrality of the Freedom Agenda, it was no longer sufficient to argue that it was a product of transcendental values or based on principle alone. Rather, the policy was endowed with a more complex security rationale. Throughout 2004 until the end of Bush's tenure in office, the Bush administration increasingly began to narrate the Freedom Agenda as a method of securing a global democratic peace. To substantiate these claims the Bush administration increasingly justified the pursuit of the Freedom Agenda by appropriating the logic of democratic peace theory. In the President's own words:

*The freedom agenda is based upon our deepest ideals and our vital interests . . . We [Americans] believe that freedom is a gift from an almighty God . . . And we also know, by history and by logic, that promoting democracy is the surest way to build security. Democracies don't attack each other or threaten the peace. Governments accountable to the voters focus on building roads and schools – not weapons of mass destruction. Young people who have a say in their future are less likely to search for meaning in extremism. Citizens who can join a peaceful political party are less likely to join a terrorist organisation. Dissidents with the freedom to protest around the clock are less likely to blow themselves up during rush hour. And nations that commit to freedom for their people will not support terrorists – they will join us in defeating them.*

(Bush 2006, July 28)

This was coupled with continuous assertions such as 'in Europe, as in Asia, as in every region of the world, the advance of freedom leads to peace' (Bush 2003, November 6) and 'we believe democracy yields peace' (Bush 2006, August 7). Such calls appeared to give Washington's national security liberalism the guise of a scientific imperative, because of the empirical strength of the thesis. Indeed, many academic studies have demonstrated that the number of wars between democracies during the past two centuries has been low, ranging from 'zero to less than a handful depending on precisely how democracy is defined' (Levy 1988: 661). Consequently, as Jack Levy argues, the 'absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations' (Levy 1988: 662).

Significantly, the appeal to democratic peace theory is not new to American foreign policy, as similar sentiments have been expressed by successive administrations since the end of the Cold War.<sup>9</sup> However, the G. W. Bush administration was the first to suggest that this could be implemented in the Middle East and create institutions in the foreign policy bureaucracy to pursue this end. The vision

that the Bush administration increasingly espoused was one in which the national interest is satisfied by creating a 'zone of peace' in the Middle East, in which the nature of democracy creates a reluctance to go to war with other states in the region, whilst also undermining the appeal of terrorism. This created a cocktail in which democratic peace theory not only was the route to peace but had universal applicability, and democracy promotion was seen as the silver bullet to problems ranging from terrorism to proliferation. Democratic peace theory therefore played a significant role in justifying the direction of US strategy. It provided part of the administration's IDF that motivated and legitimised a liberal grand strategy for the MENA region.

### The shape and content of post-crisis continuity and change

By attempting to answer how and why the Freedom Agenda was constructed, using a constructivist institutionalist approach, the empirical chapters thus far have set out the results of a textually orientated process tracing discourse analysis. They have presented a narrative of the Bush administration's strategic narrative, which traced the institutional and discursive processes of the Freedom Agenda's construction and highlighted the key events that helped the Freedom Agenda develop as a policy paradigm. What they reveal is that the shape of political time can best be described as punctuated evolution, in which an existing policy paradigm (status quo) was interrupted by a moment of crisis (September 11, 2001), and a new policy paradigm ultimately emerged (the Freedom Agenda) (see Figure 5.1).

However, although this characterises the shape of political time, and clearly demonstrates the importance of crises in policy more generally, it says nothing about the content of political continuity and change. For this, it was necessary to focus on how strategically selective actors, situated within the institutional bureaucracies of the state, first narrated the crisis (tragedy, morality play, moralistic crusade), second engaged in puzzle-solving (post-crisis meetings, Afghanistan, Bletchley II, Iraq) and third articulated elements of their IDF together (such as primacy, hegemonic stability theory, unilateralism, neoliberalism, modernisation thesis, teleological understanding of history, American exceptionalist identity, moral realism, transcendentalism, domino theory and democratic peace theory). All of this contributed to the construction of the Freedom Agenda as central to US national interests. Moreover, although these categories are analytically distinct,

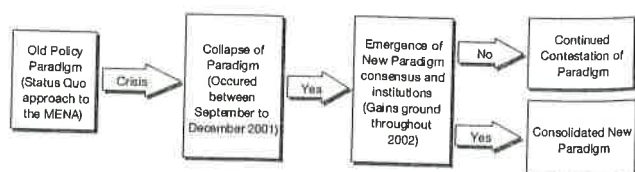


Figure 5.1 The shape of post-crisis political change: old paradigm, crisis, new paradigm.

the nature of narratives is that those espousing them combine elements with ease, masking the enormous complexity of what is being presented. However, by asking questions about the Freedom Agenda's construction, it has become possible to demonstrate some of this complexity and reveal how the narration of the war on terror was particularly dynamic, and ultimately gave birth to the Freedom Agenda as a policy paradigm.

Rather than the Freedom Agenda lacking a coherent rationale, which was a consistent critique of the Freedom Agenda when the administration was in office, these chapters have shown how the Bush administration increasingly articulated various discourses together to justify and construct its policy (see Hawthorne 2003a: 22). Indeed, this was a distinguishable feature of the crisis narrative presented, which was clearly a product of the administration laying discursive tracks as it expanded, enhanced, refined and even contradicted its initial construction of its war on terror. This fact is unsurprising given that, in the immediate years following September 11, 2001, the USA undertook two foreign wars, re-engaged in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and constructed a strategy that would 'democratised' the Middle East. The birth of the Freedom Agenda is not separate from these developments; it is a direct product of them. It is the result of strategically selective agents arguing, diagnosing, proselytising and imposing various notions of what caused the crisis in the first place, and how to deal with such a threat to provide 'security'. The Freedom Agenda was the institutionalisation of such processes, which although somewhat obvious has been missed within a considerable amount of literature. Indeed, as David H. Dunn argued:

while it is widely recognised that American foreign policy changed quite radically following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, what is less obvious in the commentaries of these events is how much the foreign policy strategies adopted by the United States have continued to evolve and change since that time. This is the case in part because America's responses are often presented, especially by the Bush administration, as part of one relatively continuous or seamless approach.

(Dunn 2005: 1)

All too often the decision to 'democratised' the MENA has been described as a direct result of September 11, 2001, but the nature of its development as the war on terror unfolded has been ignored. This gap in the literature has been problematic because it is only by analysing the creeping insurrection of the policy, and the ideas and narratives that underpinned it, that it is possible to understand how it was constituted and why it was done in this way. This pre-formative analysis of the Freedom Agenda's institutional development is instructive because it provides a more holistic understanding of the policy, and establishes a basis from which to explore the policy paradigm's institutionalisation, consolidation and evolution. It is to elucidating the nature and effectiveness of these institutions that the next chapter turns, but it is clear from the analysis that follows that the Bush administration's IDF and crisis narration of the war on terror had a dramatic impact on the shape and nature of the Freedom Agenda's institutions.



peace, delivering greater prosperity and security to the region and the world; yet it may well have laid the foundations for something radically different. If Gills is correct, and the 'simultaneity of economic liberalisation and democratisation creates particular problems of transition for all these societies and generally exacerbates the problems of maintaining social and political stability' (Gills 2000: 331), then it would appear that the final iteration of Bush's Freedom Agenda may well achieve neither democratisation nor domination. A strategy of economic reform first was perceived by the Bush administration as a method of slowly transforming the region, securing US primacy and maintaining regional stability in 'partnership' with its allies. This strategy was specifically designed to avoid the unpredictability, uncertainty and instability of the 2011 revolutions. Far from Bush's Freedom Agenda inspiring such events, as some revisionist accounts have argued, the 2011 revolutions represent the ultimate failure of this economics-first strategy and the Freedom Agenda's attempts to maintain stability. Yet it was a lack of stability that the Obama administration inherited along with the institutional legacy of the war on terror and the Freedom Agenda it gave birth to.

## 7 Obama's Freedom Agenda

### Conservative pragmatism and the 2011 revolutions

On January 15, 2009, a ceremony to commemorate the foreign policy achievements of the G. W. Bush administration was held in the Department of State. With President Bush sitting centre stage, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared that 'today is a very special day. We are going to commemorate many of the achievements of our nation over the last eight years in furthering the Freedom Agenda' (Rice 2009, January 15). The Secretary of State also added that there were now 'democratically-elected leaders in Kosovo, Lebanon, Liberia, Afghanistan, and Iraq', and that these countries 'have experienced a new birth of freedom . . . Because when impatient patriots looked for support in their struggle for liberation, America and you, Mr. President, stood with them' (Rice 2009, January 15). This was just one event that followed a flurry of activity in mid to late 2008, where the Bush administration sought to narrate the Freedom Agenda as the central platform of his foreign policy legacy. Indeed, on October 9, 2008, the Bush administration elected to partially declassify *National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 58: Institutionalising the Freedom Agenda*, which stated that:

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 the world. This policy goal was established and elaborated in the 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States of America, which declares the promotion of freedom, justice, human dignity, and effective democratic institutions to be central goals of our national security.

(DOS 2008)<sup>1</sup>

However, the Bush administration's legacy, and its relationship with democracy promotion, was represented by the newly elected President Obama somewhat more pejoratively. Keenly aware that for many observers the Freedom Agenda had been exclusively conflated with the war in Iraq, albeit incorrectly, President Obama asserted the need for a 'new beginning' in a speech made at Cairo University, arguing that:



I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation on any other.

(Obama 2009, June 4)

Such a statement was indicative of the Obama administration's attempts to both publicly distance itself from the Iraq war and downplay the Freedom Agenda as a central platform of US–Middle East relations. This was the position taken throughout the 2008 campaign and in the initial months of coming into office, when the Obama administration publicly narrated the Iraq war as a 'war of choice' (Obama 2009, June 4). Indeed, there was a conspicuous silence on the issue of democracy promotion from the Obama campaign. However, when the *Washington Post* directly asked 'should democracy promotion be a primary US goal?' a much more nuanced narrative emerged. Candidate Obama replied:

We benefit from the expansion of democracy . . . Our greatest tool in advancing democracy is our own example. That's why I will end torture, end extraordinary rendition and indefinite detentions; restore habeas corpus; and close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay . . . I will significantly increase funding for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and other nongovernmental organizations to support civic activists in repressive societies . . . I recognize that our security interests will sometimes necessitate that we work with regimes with which we have fundamental disagreements; yet, those interests need not and must not prevent us from lending our consistent support to those who are committed to democracy and respect for human rights.

(Obama 2008, March 2)

This narrative suggested that, once successful, Obama's approach would be to downplay the vindicationist policies of the Bush administration in favour of a more stealthy and modest exemplarist strategy, whereby the administration would attempt to restore the USA as an example to the rest of the world on democracy and human rights. In effect the Obama administration had recognised that the deontic power of the USA had been damaged by the Bush administration's record in office, and sought to restore its credibility as a symbol of democracy. This was not an abandonment of the Freedom Agenda per se, as the institutions of the Freedom Agenda remained actively in place, but rather recognition that the radical dimension of the Freedom Agenda had delegitimised and damaged America's reputation. The Obama administration's approach was to be more pragmatic and downplay the radical dimension, whilst steadily allowing the conservative side of the agenda to evolve and expand as it was articulated within the new administration's IDF. This approach was unsurprising given that as early as 2005 Senator Obama signalled a clear dedication to the Freedom Agenda. The Senator had co-sponsored an early version of the ADA introduced by Senator John McCain,

which went further than that eventually adopted as part of the *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007*.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the ratified 2007 version qualified democracy promotion, by asserting that democracy would be promoted 'along with other key foreign policy goals', the 2005 version had contended more assertively that 'It shall be the policy of the United States to promote freedom and democracy in foreign countries as a fundamental component of United States foreign policy' (ADA 2005: Sec. 3).

Once elected to office, it was clear that the new administration was remaining conspicuously silent on the issue of democracy promotion, whilst attempting to start Obama's exemplarist strategy. The limited references to 'democracy' and 'freedom' in President Obama's inaugural address were widely commented upon (Carothers 2012: 9). This silence was also noticeable across much of the administration, as democracy promotion was disarticulated from public announcements of American foreign policy and policy makers' everyday lexicon more generally. This impression was compounded when Hillary Clinton was willing to assert the need for a 'comprehensive plan' for 'diplomacy, development and defense', in her Senate confirmation hearing, but reduced 'advancing democracy' to a mere background 'hope' (Clinton 2009, January 13). This had left some analysts wondering if the 'fourth "D"' of democracy promotion was being abandoned' (Bouchet 2010: 572). Further still it became clear that, whereas President Bush had underpinned the plot of the war on terror with a temperament of triumphant exhilaration, the Obama administration was altering the narrative and beginning to pragmatically deal with an increasing sense of US decline: an increased sense that the USA was being challenged by rising powers in a multipolar world, combined with the shock of the global economic crisis, a recession in the US economy, fears about global climate change, the threat of nuclear proliferation, the continued wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a new front in Pakistan. Within this context the Freedom Agenda was removed from the overarching narrative of US foreign policy, until the Obama administration began rethinking its approach in light of an unsuccessful policy in Iran and the events of 2011. The Obama administration removed notions that the USA was on a moralistic crusade, and replaced Bush's policy of conservative radicalism with a policy of conservative pragmatism.

### Obama's Freedom Agenda: a conservative pragmatist approach

The pragmatic approach adopted by the Obama administration certainly sent mixed messages, which gave the impression that US foreign policy had jettisoned the Freedom Agenda. Accordingly, many analysts argued that Obama had returned to a status quo policy that existed before the September 11, 2001, crisis. Some simply asserted that 'Obama is a realist, by temperament, learning, and instinct' (Zakaria 2009) and that before the 2011 revolutions he had said 'almost nothing about broader goals like spreading democracy, protecting human rights, or assisting in women's education' (Kagan 2009). Further still, other analysts simply dismissed what the administration had said on these issues as 'lip service', arguing



that President Obama simply returned to a traditional policy of 'reliance on Arab strongmen' (Fukuyama 2010). Yet a deeper analysis of Obama's foreign policy reveals a much more nuanced relationship with democracy promotion. Although initially silent on the issue the administration secured increased Congressional support, which manifested itself with improved funding for Freedom Agenda institutions at a time of serious financial and budgetary constraint for the US government over all. In FY2009, MEPI was granted \$50 million, which rose significantly in FY2010 to \$65 million and \$80 million in FY2011 (McNemey 2011: 7). Moreover, President Obama also made some high-level appointments that clearly indicated that democracy promotion was not being jettisoned from the political agenda. Within the State Department Anne-Marie Slaughter, the Princeton University professor who had been on Condoleezza Rice's Advisory Committee on Democracy, was appointed Director of Policy Planning. Similarly, Tamara Coffman Wittes, who had long argued that democracy promotion needed to be a fundamental component of US foreign policy in the MENA and predicted the increasing instability in the region, was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs. This was complemented by appointing Samantha Power, author of *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, and Michael McFaul, author of *Advancing Democracy Abroad: Why We Should and How We Can*, to the National Security Council. With these appointments it was highly unlikely that democracy promotion was going to be removed from the Obama administration's agenda, even if these individuals had to fight bureaucratic battles with more realist appointments within the administration. Rather, as McFaul explained, in the early days of the administration, given how contaminated the term 'democracy promotion' had become, the aim was to 'talk less and do more' (Cooper 2009).

Obama's reforms of the Freedom Agenda, from Bush's conservative radicalism to a policy of conservative pragmatism, began immediately upon his coming into office. The radical side was downplayed as the administration signalled a desire to pragmatically engage with the regimes in Syria and Iran. At the President's inauguration he asserted that:

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West – know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

(Obama 2009, January 20)

Just two days later, the President appointed George Mitchell as Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, and, by January 26, Mitchell was sent to the region for a 'listening tour' (Lander 2009). Moreover, signalling the importance of engaging with the Middle East and changing the tone of US–MENA relations, President

Obama elected to give his first televised interview at the White House to the news channel Al-Arabiya. He announced that Mitchell's tour would launch the administration's 'holistic' approach to the region, arguing that:

I do think that it is impossible for us to think only in terms of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and not think in terms of what's happening with Syria or Iran or Lebanon or Afghanistan and Pakistan . . . These things are interrelated . . . if we are looking at the region as a whole and communicating a message to the Arab world and the Muslim world, that we are ready to initiate a new partnership based on mutual respect and mutual interest, then I think that we can make significant progress.

(Obama 2009, January 26)

The pragmatic nature in which the Obama administration began engaging with the MENA demonstrated an acute sensitivity to perceptions of the USA in the region and a desire to 'restore' good relations that 'America had with the Muslim world as recently as 20 or 30 years ago' (Obama 2009, January 26). This mix of an exemplarist strategy and acknowledgement of the USA's damaged reputation was a trope of the Obama campaign, and once in office Obama was able to issue three executive orders which called for the closure of Guantanamo Bay within one year, a ban on the CIA's controversial interrogation techniques and a review of detention policy options. Thus, within just a week of taking office, the administration had set itself upon what it believed to be a more pragmatic path to engaging with the MENA and restoring America's reputation in the world; albeit these policies proved to be more difficult to enact than originally perceived.

Whereas the shift towards engagement itself represented a break with the Bush administration, it was the manner in which the Obama administration asserted that there would be no 'preconditions' for such talks that made the policy distinctive. The Bush administration had long held that engaging with Iran was possible if and only if Iran suspended its uranium enrichment programme. However, in a pragmatic move President Obama, having sent two personal letters to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, asserted that it would 'talk to our foes and friends', breaking the convention of setting conditionality for open talks (see Borger 2009). By April, however, Hillary Clinton was threatening tougher sanctions against the regime in Tehran, if the Iranian regime failed to acknowledge the offer to engage in 'constructive dialogue' (Clinton 2009, April 22).

The pattern of offering talks, but threatening sanctions, was combined with reassurances that the USA was not attempting to push for regime change in Iran; it was simply attempting to 'engage and change the behaviour of advisors' (Clinton 2009, July 10). However, by June the Obama administration faced its first serious challenge to this policy, as the Iranian regime began to blame the USA and UK for protests breaking out in major cities across Iran against the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The 'Green Revolution', or as some have called it the 'Twitter Revolution', marked a significant moment for the administration as it presented a tension between engaging the Iranian regime, in



the hope of halting uranium enrichment, and openly supporting the protesters and questioning the legitimacy of the election. Much to the chagrin of many members of congress and political commentators, the White House selected the former, opting for a policy of non-interference (MacAskill 2009). In part the construction of this strategically selective strategy reflected a cornerstone of the Obama administration's preference not to align with protesters, for fear that this would damage the legitimacy and domestic image of protesters. Indeed, openly supporting protesters does risk playing directly into the hands of regimes that have typically appealed to the colonial policies of the West in their narratives.

With increasingly violent images being seen around the world, the President's response was to condemn the violence and call for it to stop, deny Iranian claims that the revolution was inspired by the West, and assert recognition of Iranian sovereignty. It was not until Obama's engagement strategy was seen as problematic, and other Western powers led with strong criticism of the Iranian regime, that the USA toughened its discursive posture towards the regime. Thus, in what would be a precursor to the 2011 revolutions, the Obama administration made it clear that, where engagement and supporting democratic struggles conflicted, on Iran his pragmatic position favoured the former. This was made all the more evident when the White House discovered that Jared Cohen, a member of the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department, had 'interfered' in the revolution by contacting Twitter's chairman, Jack Dorsey. Cohen urged Dorsey to reschedule planned maintenance, so Iranians could continue tweeting, and 'he almost lost his job over it' (Lizza 2011: 9). Cohen was, however, protected by a State Department that was increasingly concerned with democracy promotion and experimenting with new strategies to reform and reinvigorate the conservative side of the Freedom Agenda. Indeed, one of the characteristics of the Obama administration's inherited Freedom Agenda was a tension between the White House and the Department of State over if, how and why democracy should be promoted in the Middle East.

Many elements of the conservative side of Bush's Freedom Agenda remained under the Obama administration before the 2011 revolutions, in part because of institutional inertia, but also because the Freedom Agenda, as inherited from Bush, did not conflict with the desire to listen and engage with the region. The neoliberal backbone of the Freedom Agenda made it amenable to the MENA regimes that Obama was now 'listening' to. These relationships were made easier by virtue of the Obama administration's continued downgrading of elections as an important indicator for democratic progress, which was a continuation of Bush's policy following the electoral success of Hamas. Indeed, although Obama was touting the need for engagement and 'talking to foes', it was clear that this was not to apply to Hamas despite its elected status. For the Obama administration, winning an election did not confer democratic legitimacy and an automatic right to engagement, as the administration increasingly articulated democracy promotion with the concepts of justice, dignity, human rights and the rule of law. There were limitations to Obama's pragmatism.

Where the Obama administration did, however, begin to reform the conservative

side of the Freedom Agenda was by increasingly articulating democracy promotion with development. What the Obama administration was proposing before the 2011 revolutions was a more complex strategy, whereby a modernisation process for the region would be spurred on not simply by free trade, but also through a gradual process of development. Thus, as Obama had argued when a candidate:

In the 21st century, progress must mean more than a vote at the ballot box – it must mean freedom from fear and freedom from want. We cannot stand for the freedom of anarchy. Nor can we support the globalization of the empty stomach. We need new approaches to help people to help themselves.

(Obama 2007: 2)

The Obama administration was proposing to shift from 'democracy promotion' signified by elections but spurred on by free trade modernisation, to what has been termed 'dignity promotion' that would seek to 'fix the conditions of misery that breeds anti-Americanism and prevent liberty, justice, and prosperity from taking root' (Ackerman 2008). Whereas G. W. Bush saw the Freedom Agenda as eradicating terrorism through the promotion of the free market, the Obama administration increasingly saw the same role for development. This position was widely held within the Obama administration. As Susan Rice, the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, wrote critiquing the Freedom Agenda:

Promoting both development and democracy in far away countries is a 21st century security imperative. We need a dual strategy. We must combine effective formulas for fostering freedom through building civil society and transparent democratic institutions with a determination to 'make poverty history'. If we fail to do so, we will have squandered a crucial chance to accomplish what President Bush boldly staked out as his ambitious legacy: 'to advance the cause of liberty and build a safer world'.

(Rice and Graff 2009: 51)

Just as in the Cold War development had been narrated as a method of containing communism, the Obama administration now articulated development as a method of engaging with the MENA and eradicating terrorism. This rationale was also partly behind the launch of the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) to look at how development and diplomacy could be coordinated, integrated and complemented by each other, and make use of what Hillary Clinton termed 'smart power' (Clinton 2009, July 10). Indeed, when the QDDR process was announced, it was clear that evaluating US development policy's relationship with democracy promotion was in the administration's sights. The Secretary of State declared that:

we are working for a world in which more people in more places can live in freedom, can enjoy the fruits of democracy and economic opportunity and have a chance to live up to their own God-given potential . . . instead of



simply trying to adjust to the way things are, we need to get in the habit of looking to the horizon and planning for how we want things to be . . . We will be doing this quadrennial review, which will be, we hope, a tool to provide us with both short-term and long-term blueprints for how to advance our foreign policy objectives and our values and interests.

(Clinton 2009, July 10)

The release of the QDDR in late 2010 simply reaffirmed the administration's previous assertions that a more sustainable form of democracy support was needed, and set out the rationale for articulating democracy support and development policy:

Through an aggressive and affirmative development agenda and commensurate resources, we can strengthen the regional partners we need to help us stop conflict and counter global criminal networks; build a stable, inclusive global economy with new sources of prosperity; advance democracy and human rights; and ultimately position ourselves to better address key global challenges by growing the ranks of prosperous, capable and democratic states that can be our partners in the decades ahead.

(QDDR 2010: ix)

The importance of what some have termed Obama's 'sustainable democracy promotion' approach is multifaceted (see Patterson 2012). It represents a partial shift away from neoliberal modernisation thesis, as development was seen as an approach to democratisation. This, however, does not necessarily deal with issues of informal rule that were part of the Bush administration's institutionalised imperial right. The approach remained conservative and shared a similar goal of ensuring gradual transformation in the region that was compatible with US interests. Whilst the USA was pursuing its neoliberal approach in partnerships with governments top-down, it was also now conceptualising a modernisation approach that was bottom-up. This demonstrated a shift in the proposed means of informal rule, rather than representing any paradigm shift. It was an adjustment of the of settings and instruments within the Freedom Agenda paradigm. The objective of such a strategy was to replace the technology of 'free-market democratisation' with the technology of foreign assistance and development to achieve continued domination of the region and the continued pursuit of American interests. This is an adjustment of means to meet the same ends as the Freedom Agenda constructed by the Bush administration. The USA, whether through a strategy of promoting free trade or development, was still not going to abandon long-term partners in the region, but rather would continue to work with them in 'partnerships'. The development strategy did not challenge the power of MENA regimes, and was still reliant on a gradualist strategy. Its focus, in the MENA context, was on undermining extremist Islamist groups by using development as a tool for socially engineering the region. Thus, as Samantha Power had argued:

Look at why these baddies win these elections . . . it's because [populations are] living in climates of fear . . . Their fears of going hungry, or of the thug on the street. That's the swamp that needs draining. If were to compete with extremism, we have to be able to provide these things that we're not.

(in Ackerman 2008)

Although the Obama administration was attempting to change the modality of the Freedom Agenda, the narrative they constructed still articulated democracy promotion as a method of eradicating extremism and fighting terrorism (see Al-Anani and Patkin 2008). The Obama administration had not entirely jettisoned the narrative that underpinned the Freedom Agenda, and the President regularly made appeals to the universality of democracy, and to teleological notions of progress and being on 'the right side of history'. As the President explained in his Cairo speech:

I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; the confidence in the rule of law and equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere.

(Obama 2009, June 4)

In this respect there was a considerable amount of continuity between Bush's Freedom Agenda and the overarching approach adopted by the Obama administration. They both predominantly adopted conservative strategies when approaching allies and friendly regimes in the MENA. Of course the Obama administration's conservative strategy is somewhat complicated by the timing of the 2011 revolutions. It was just as the administration's thinking on this issue was maturing and the State Department began developing a more novel and dynamic approach to democracy support, through digitising the Freedom Agenda and engaging beyond the state, that the 2011 revolutions began.

#### Engaging beyond the state: civil society partnerships and the digitisation of the Freedom Agenda

The first steps towards the digitisation of the Freedom Agenda started in 2008, as the Bush administration began to transfer power to President-elect Obama and his new administration. It began with the Obama campaign team's cooperation and participation in the December 3–5, 2008, *Alliance for Youth Movements* (AYM) Summit held at Columbia University Law School. The AYM Summit was the brainchild of Jared Cohen in Condoleezza Rice's Policy Planning Staff. In October 2008, just weeks before Barack Obama was elected President, Cohen persuaded the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, James K. Glassman, to take a trip to the Republic of Colombia. The purpose of

the trip was to meet with the founder of a Facebook group called *No More FARC Movement* and observe how social media could be used as a tool for combating extremism. Subsequently, Glassman instructed Cohen to run with his idea of

Put[ting] people together, shar[ing] best practices, produc[ing] a manual that will be accessible online and in print to any group that wants to build a youth empowerment organisation to push back against violence and oppression around the world.

(Cohen 2008, November 24)

The result was the AYM Summit, which partnered the Department of State with the private sector companies Howcast, Google, Facebook, YouTube and MTV, and brought civil society activists from all over the world together in New York City. This included representatives of Egypt's April 6th Movement and others from around the MENA (Glassman 2008, November 24). Notably, this summit, in light of the 2011 revolutions, should not be overemphasised in terms of its importance to inducing the revolutions themselves, as has been attempted by individuals such as Paul Wolfowitz (2011, February 11). The April 6th movement launched its Facebook page on March 23, 2008, to support a textile workers' strike planned on April 6 in Mahalla al-Kobra, to protest against low wages and high food prices. The group had formed and then studied 'the American civil rights movement' and in particular 'Martin Luther King, Rosa Park and Malcolm X', along with the struggles in 'Poland, Georgia, Ukraine and Serbia', which led them to develop relations with Otpor! in Belgrade (Rashed 2011). From its founding, the group was particularly savvy at using Facebook as a tool for communication and organising protest (see Wolman 2008). Indeed, it is clear from Wikileaks papers that April 6th regarded the AYM Summit as 'interesting', but plans to remove Mubarak from power were already under way. Thus, as Cohen argued, regarding the AYM Summit 'we wanted to partner with as many people as possible to help *what was already happening* on a larger scale' (Cohen 2008, November 24).

The importance of the AYM Summit, however, was threefold. First, Joe Rospars, Obama's New Media Director, and other members of Obama's campaign team participated, demonstrating that on the issue of democracy promotion and counter-extremist measures there was a willingness to cooperate with the departing administration. Second, Jared Cohen's role proved pivotal to the AYM summit, and it was therefore important that Hillary Clinton retained Cohen on her Policy Planning Staff before he became director of Google Ideas in 2010. Finally, and most importantly, this marked the intellectual beginning of the Obama administration's *Internet Freedom Agenda*, which would be formally announced by Hillary Clinton in January 2010; in it the Web 2.0 techniques that helped President Obama get elected were articulated with international relations and civil struggles around the globe.

From the AYM Summit, a website called *movements.org* was constructed, which seeks to 'identify', 'connect' and 'support' '21st century activism' and provide a 'new model of peer to peer training' ([www.movements.org/pages/](http://www.movements.org/pages/)

about). Indeed, it is highly evident that this site has connections with multiple civil society organisations within the MENA, and helps put groups in contact with one another within countries, across regions and globally. Amongst other things, the site also acts as a hub for information in publication form such as *Creating Grassroots Movements for Change: A Field Manual* and *How to Bypass Internet Censorship*, and the site was touted as particularly useful during the 2011 revolutions for providing information that helped circumvent the Mubarak and Gaddafi regimes' internet closures. The particular importance of this site is that it appears to be an effective tool for putting groups in contact with one another, whilst facilitating discussions of best practice. In effect it allows groups to learn from one another, from across the globe, and then use these lessons to aid with their own indigenous forms of resistance.

Shortly after the AYM Summit in April 2009, having remained at the State Department, Cohen began heading up routine 'technology delegations', in which he would assemble delegations of US technology company chief and senior executives and go to Iraq and Syria, amongst other countries, in an effort to develop technology-based solutions with local stakeholders in these countries. In essence such practices amounted to what Hillary Clinton and Jared Cohen termed '21st Century Statecraft', which entailed 'building connections' to 'empower citizens, promote greater accountability and transparency, and capacity build' (Cohen 2010, September 7).

The next iteration of the Obama administration's digitisation of the Freedom Agenda came in November 2009, when in a speech at the Forum for the Future, in Morocco, Hillary Clinton launched the *Civil Society 2.0* initiative. The Secretary of State announced that:

We seek to support civil society efforts worldwide because we believe that civil society helps to make communities more prosperous and stable. It helps to drive economic growth that benefits the greatest number of people. And it pushes political institutions to be agile and responsive to the people they serve. So the United States is launching an initiative called Civil Society 2.0. This organized effort will provide new technologies to civil society organizations. We will send experts in digital technology and communications to help build capacity . . . Now, these are some of the ways that the United States is pursuing President Obama's vision for a new relationship. Our work is based on empowering individuals rather than promoting ideologies; listening and embracing other ideas rather than simply imposing our own; and pursuing partnerships that are sustainable and broad-based.

(Clinton 2009, November 3)

Conspicuously, the Obama administration became at ease with using the term 'partnership', which carries intertextuality with the Bush administration's discourse. Discernibly, however, the Obama administration began broadening the concept. No longer were 'partnerships' simply between the US and MENA governments, as had been the usage under Bush's conservative dimension of the



Freedom Agenda, but rather partnerships under Obama were increasingly understood as a triangular relationship between the US government, MENA regimes and civil society organisations. Along with an emphasis on 'engagement' announced in Cairo, 'engaging in partnerships' with civil society groups provided the intellectual basis of Obama's digitised Freedom Agenda and the reforms made to existing Freedom Agenda institutions. Thus, whereas in 2009 the Obama administration made the decision to provide bilateral funding to only those Egyptian NGOs that were registered with the government, by 2010 there were increased calls by the administration for 'civil society dialogues' and need to 'engage beyond the state' (QDDR 2010: vii; McInerney 2010: 24). Such an approach increasingly built on some of the activities conducted in the Forum for the Future, where in 2009, for example, government ministers from the region were placed on the same platform as civil society leaders, to talk about common issues.

The emphasis on civil society partnership was also consolidated as a commitment within MEPI. Since 2004 MEPI had developed a local grant programme, which would provide funds to indigenous NGOs in the region through US embassies averaging around \$50,000 per NGO. However, this remained a limited proportion of MEPI's overall programme portfolio. The Obama administration significantly increased both the average total amount given under the local grant programme and its proportion of MEPI's total portfolio. This led to 'a lot more funding of indigenous NGOs close to the ground in the region ... backed up by branch management staff in regional offices in Tunis and Abu Dhabi' (Wittes 2011). Yet the most dramatic alteration in this programme is the extent to which funding began shifting from being allocated through a 'call driven' process to being 'demand driven'. When this author interviewed MEPI grant recipients, the most dramatic shift many of them highlighted was that increasingly, as MEPI has reformed and evolved, potential recipients have been able to design projects and directly appeal to US embassies for funding consideration. Moreover, many recipients commented on their ability to change budgets and project design once grants have been approved, which MEPI often allows within their two-year projects as long as there is a justifiable rationale. Given this, many recipients described MEPI as 'flexible', whilst also commending the institution for 'risk taking', and being a core funding source for new and innovative NGOs.

This of course is not to suggest that there are no problems in MEPI's shift to focusing more on civil society. At a practical level, there continue to be problems with MEPI funding only short-term projects. Many grant recipients aired their frustration with a lack of 'continuation' funds, even in projects that by the standards initially agreed with MEPI would be considered highly successful. Indeed, the rationale for MEPI's local grant programme was that it did not overlap with USAID, but all too often once grants had expired it was evident that 'USAID won't step in' and was not 'interested'. MEPI does of course make the terms of its grant clear, but the local grants programme creates only limited 'start up' partnerships with civil society organisations that can seriously struggle to find funds once MEPI funding runs out. This raises a range of sustainability and budgeting issues, and has led many organisations to seek greater funding from the private sector, which all too often ends up being large multinational companies, and in

particular corporate sector companies. However, some grant recipients noted that their golden standard was to receive funds from local indigenous business, with one in Egypt commenting that 'getting local money is very powerful ... [it shows] Egyptians are working on their own development' (Hassan 2011b). This has been particularly important since the 2011 revolutions, as some international donors have withdrawn from funding projects in the region.

Beyond the practical short-term issues, however, more theoretical concerns were raised by grant recipients, not least the problem that, although prospective grant recipients could design projects and take them to MEPI, there is a tendency for MEPI to fund things 'specific to their view of development'. As one grant recipient noted, 'this isn't helping, it's meddling' (ibid.). This was followed by complaints that MEPI was not 'doing evaluations of their own performances because they are the ones with the money' (ibid.). There were further complaints that grants were being made from embassies based on existing personal relationships and networks, and that it was difficult for small NGOs to 'break into this' and cultivate the same sorts of relationships required in the donor-recipient nexus. Evidently, although MEPI is increasingly funding civil society organisations, there are still issues regarding the power relationship this represents in a region with strong colonial awareness and sensitivity. Grant recipients were clearly aware of these issues as they often provided a frame of reference during discussions, but, as one grant recipient argued, 'I don't care about the source [of funding], it is [about the] purpose ... you have to ask yourself, what [is] my project [about], what is my strategy for helping the human right situation here; that need[s] money' (ibid.).

The shift towards further engaging with civil society in a more sustained and frequent basis, through the Forum for the Future, the Internet Freedom Agenda and MEPI's local grants programme, was making the Obama administration's Freedom Agenda more distinctive and marked a partial evolution of the Freedom Agenda's institutionalisation. There has, of course, always been a focus on reform-orientated programming, but under the Bush administration this was often limited and conservative and was clearly not digital given that sites such as Facebook and Twitter had little momentum until the last years of the Bush administration.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Obama administration's policy was more salient and distinctive in the manner in which it quantitatively and qualitatively engaged with civil society. This shift has been noted by grant recipients, with one commenting that under Obama there was a less 'imperialist and colonial way of thinking of things'. These perceptions appear to reflect the Obama administration's more amenable and consultative approach, and demonstrate certain benefits gained from the administration's insight that 'fundamentally change comes from within. If you believe that, then that is where you have to invest' (Wittes 2011). The Obama administration's strategy represents the beginning of a partial shift from a Freedom Agenda focusing on 'democracy promotion', to a policy of 'democracy support'. This has powerful implications because as this strategy is further developed it may well offer an innovative route for US policy to take in the region. Such a strategy offers the possibility of potentially removing the imperialist modalities of informal rule and seeking to genuinely empower the peoples of the region to take charge of



their own politics and economics. The possibilities of the 2011 revolutions would therefore offer the chance not only for the region to transition to democracy, but also for the USA to transition from a policy of informal rule to genuine dialogue, engagement and empowerment.

With the Freedom Agenda beginning to demonstrate a more pragmatic approach, less driven by utopian visions of remaking the region to fit neoliberal principles, it may well be able to escape the serious issues the Bush administration's imperial strategy brought with it. Indeed, supporting the people of the region to reach their goals and achieve their aspirations is dramatically different to socially engineering the societies of that region to fit US interests. Providing access to information and tools to empower and mobilise people against oppressive regimes, through open access on the internet, does not carry the same problems as seeking to impose an imperial right on the region. Indeed, the importance of the tactics and guidance provided on *movements.org*, for example, is that it does not discriminate between groups. Provided they have access to the internet the information about best practice is free and openly available to liberal civil society movements and Islamist movements. The site does not limit access to information based on ideology or geography in the same way that direct civil society work with the US government does. This creates an important distinction in what promises to be an expanding area of democracy support in the digitised twenty-first century. There is a difference between supporting people to be free through their own labours to achieve the type of society they demand and want to construct and a society that is subjugated to the social experiments and rules of another. It is the difference between supporting the rights of a people to have their own negative liberty and move *away from tyranny*, rather than the USA attempting to impose its own positive conception of liberty upon the region and attempting to steer it towards a US-inspired free market utopia. Given this, it is unfortunate that the Obama administration was late in developing this approach and that it was such a limited part of the Obama administration's Freedom Agenda.

The Obama administration's incremental emphasis on 'engaging beyond the state', 'civil society partnerships' and partial digitisation of the Freedom Agenda is indicative of the way the Obama administration was attempting to develop new strategic thinking before the 2011 revolutions. Thus, as President Obama declared to the UN General Assembly:

Civil society is the conscience of our communities and America will always extend our engagement abroad with citizens beyond the halls of government. And we will call out those who suppress ideas and serve as a voice for those who are voiceless. We will promote new tools of communication so people are empowered to connect with one another and, in repressive societies, to do so with security.

(Obama 2010, September 23)

This was part of what some within the administration referred to as developing the 'long-term plan' for democracy promotion in the MENA (State Department Official B 2011). As these developments began to lay discursive tracks, the

President increasingly began to concern himself with what this would mean for the MENA, issuing a five-page memorandum called *Political Reform in the Middle East and North Africa* to senior members of his foreign policy team on August 12, 2010. Accounts of the memo assert that it began by arguing that 'progress toward political reform and openness in the Middle East and North Africa lags behind other regions and has, in some cases, stalled' (in Lizza 2011). The President continued by arguing that there was, however, 'evidence of growing citizen discontent with the region's regimes ... [and] if present trends continue ... [MENA allies would] opt for repression rather than reform to manage domestic dissent' (in Lizza 2011). This marked the beginnings of the President seriously attempting to strategise how to deal with the conflict of interests problem and move the Freedom Agenda forward. He argued that:

Increased repression could threaten the political and economic stability of some of our allies, leave us with fewer capable, credible partners who can support our regional priorities, and further alienate citizens in the region ... our regional and international credibility will be undermined if we are seen or perceived to be backing repressive regimes and ignoring the rights and aspirations of citizens.

(in Lizza 2011)

Obama's solution was to instruct Samantha Power, Gayle Smith, the Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director at the NSC, and Dennis Ross, the Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Central Region at the NSC, to develop a 'tailored' approach to the region looking at 'country by country' strategies for political reform. In essence the President had asked them to evaluate the costs and benefits of undertaking a conservative approach to the region. The results of this review challenged the assumption that modernisation or sequencing, through the free market or development, was a prerequisite for democratisation. Rather 'all roads led to political reform'. Moreover, it began challenging the 'conflict of interests' problem itself, asserting for example that Egyptian cooperation on counter-terrorism and relations with Israel were in fact in the regime's interest too, which would provide more room for the Obama administration to challenge the regime without greatly jeopardising these other interests (Lizza 2011). However, just as this review was being finished in mid-December 2010, events triggering the removal of Ben Ali were being set in motion that would culminate in the precise form of instability the conservative side of the Freedom Agenda was designed to avoid.

### The 2011 revolutions: a pragmatic approach to regional instability

The sudden collapse of Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia, followed by the fall of Mubarak in Egypt, the removal of Colonel Gaddafi in Libya and the multiple resistance struggles sparked throughout 2011, marked a period of crisis in the MENA. Protracted problems with changing demographics, economic stagnation,

alienation and human rights abuses generated enough anger within these countries to challenge long-standing autocratic regimes and ferment instability. Notably, these were the conditions that the Bush administration had highlighted as problematic when constructing the Freedom Agenda, and they were the problems that the Obama administration was increasingly recognising as troublesome throughout 2009 and 2010. They were the problems that the conservative side of the Freedom Agenda, within both administrations, intended to militate against, and therefore prevent the instability of 2011 taking shape. That is to say, the long-term gradual reform of these regimes was intended to ensure that the events of 2011 did not unfold, and that the region remained stable, with 'partnerships' amenable to US interests. The revolutions started in 2011 may well represent a serious step forward for the MENA eventually becoming more democratic, although this remains to be seen, but equally they represent the ultimate failure of the Freedom Agenda and the gradualism that underpinned its strategic thinking. Simply put, the Freedom Agenda was attempting to control the uncontrollable, and the USA failed to recognise the speed at which these transformations would take shape; as is often the case, events outpaced policy.

Both the surprise and the strategic challenges presented by the 2011 revolutions were evident in the Obama administration's reactions. Although Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation had occurred on December 17, 2010, and there were growing protests throughout Tunisia by early January, it was clear that the holiday season in Washington, DC, left the administration ill prepared to keep pace with events (Ghattas 2011). Moreover, there was a low US diplomatic profile in the country, in spite of MEPI having a regional office in Tunis, which reflected the low priority the US government afforded the Ben Ali regime (State Department Official C 2011). Before the revolution, the basis of this relationship was largely around counter-terrorism and Ben Ali's attempts to eradicate the main political opposition party in the country, the Islamic Tendency Movement (*Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique*, MTI), also known as En-Nahda (Renaissance). As Yahia H. Zoubir argues:

Ben Ali, a resolute enemy of political Islam, sought to counter En-Nahda through an economic modernisation program and the mobilisation of the middle class . . . The regime imprisoned and tortured thousands of En-Nahda sympathisers . . . the Tunisian government obtained support from the US and France for its policy of eradicating Islamists.

(Zoubir 2009: 254)

Once the protests were under way, the Obama administration resorted to its default approach of not taking sides, but urged the Ben Ali regime to demonstrate restraint and respect the right of protesters to assembly. With the removal of Ben Ali on January 14, the Obama administration moved forward by voicing its wish for free and fair elections in Tunisia. Just 11 days later, however, the onset of a much larger policy issue for the USA began to take hold, as hundreds of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets on the January 25 'Day of Revolt'.

Once again, the Obama administration appeared surprised and thoroughly underprepared as events began to unfold. Hillary Clinton's initial reaction was to assert that:

We support the fundamental right of expression and assembly for all people, and we urge that all parties exercise restraint and refrain from violence. But our assessment is that the Egyptian Government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people. (Clinton 2011, January 25)

As one senior state department official told this author, 'we were expecting something to happen eventually, as there was a problem with the model in region, but we didn't expect it in 2011; to happen so soon' (Senior State Department Official B 2011). Nevertheless, as violence in and around Tahrir Square increased, and the protests began to swell around the country, the administration broke with its non-interference strategy and, on February 1, Obama spoke with Mubarak and made a public statement on the situation. He asserted that:

Throughout this period, we've stood for a set of core principles. First, we oppose violence . . . Second, we stand for universal values, including the rights of the Egyptian people to freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and the freedom to access information . . . Third, we have spoken out on behalf of the need for change . . . the status quo is not sustainable and . . . change must take place . . . what I indicated tonight to President Mubarak – is my belief that an orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful, and it must begin now. (Obama 2011, February 1)

The following day, pro-Mubarak demonstrators rode into Tahrir Square on camels and horses to beat protesters, in what was the start of a protracted battle, lasting until the military stepped in to restore relative calm. This merely added to Washington's sense of frustration with the Mubarak regime and on February 10, after Mubarak made a speech but failed to announce his departure, President Obama unequivocally declared that:

The Egyptian people have been told that there was a transition of authority, but it is not yet clear that this transition is immediate, meaningful or sufficient . . . The Egyptian government must put forward a credible, concrete and unequivocal path toward genuine democracy, and they have not yet seized that opportunity . . . We therefore urge the Egyptian government to move swiftly to explain the changes that have been made, and to spell out in clear and unambiguous language the step by step process that will lead to democracy and the representative government that the Egyptian people seek. (Obama 2011, February 10)



The next day Mubarak finally stepped down, leaving the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), headed by Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, to oversee Egypt's future. Within less than three weeks the USA was forced to abandon an autocrat it had supported for 30 years. Serious uncertainty had been introduced into US–Egyptian relations and questions were being raised about how the USA was going to navigate the 'conflict of interests' problem in this moment of transformation.

The situations in Tunisia and Egypt were, however, only compounded by the outbreak of protests in Libya and the sudden deterioration into civil war. As an armed opposition group emerged to challenge Colonel Gaddafi's regime, it became increasingly clear that this was not going to be the start of a peaceful transition process. The Interim Transitional National Council was able to establish its authority over the cities of Benghazi and Tobruk, whilst claiming to have taken control of many other major cities throughout the country, only to be met by Colonel Gaddafi's forces. By late February and early March, Gaddafi's forces had driven the rebels back to Benghazi in a counter-offensive, and by the middle of March were threatening to take Benghazi. With European governments, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council all calling for the establishment of a no-fly zone, in response to Gaddafi's threats to crush the rebellion, the Obama administration finally decided to intervene to prevent a humanitarian disaster. Crucial to this decision were the cases made by Samantha Power and Hillary Clinton, who were able to persuade the President, over more sceptical colleagues, that intervention was the best course of action (Stolberg 2011). Consequently, the administration supported UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorised NATO intervention to protect civilians (see Bellamy and Williams 2011). By March 19, the Obama administration was 'leading from behind' in a NATO intervention that would last seven months and decisively contribute to the rebel victory (Lizza 2011).

The importance of the initial months of 2011 with regards to US–MENA relations was that, for the first time, the USA was faced with the practical implications of supporting democracy and breaking partnerships. No longer was this a choice concerning how best to reform the status quo and navigate the 'conflict of interests' problem. The 2011 revolutions mark a serious shift in the strategically selective context, in which strategically selective actors were operating. Events in Iran during June 2009 certainly acted as a precursor, but unlike the revolutions in 2011 there was no partnership to break. Throughout 2011 the Obama administration was forced to intervene in the unfolding crises, and, as Thomas Carothers notes, 'the administration faced a defining question of democracy support: Should it now shift gears and put democracy at the core of its policy in the Middle East?' (Carothers 2012: 29). As the conservative side of the Freedom Agenda was increasingly challenged the Obama administration once again demonstrated its preference for pragmatism. The administration sought to maintain the conservative side of the Freedom Agenda where possible, but jettisoned it in favour of pushing for democratic openings where either the USA had an interest in the transformation removing a hostile regime, or transition looked highly probable

and would restore some semblance of stability. The Obama administration therefore supported democratic transitions, but tried to remain a background character in the unfolding narrative; it did not attempt to get in front of events. What the Obama administration has demonstrated is cautious, restrained and careful strategising. For example, in Morocco the USA has remained a supportive partner, largely because of intensely close security cooperation, having conferred major non-NATO ally status on the country, and King Mohamed VI's monarchy's constitutional referendum and reforms. Further still, with Saudi Arabia responding to the 2011 revolutions with financial distribution and mobilisation of security forces in the Kingdom and Bahrain, the USA has remained largely silent on human rights abuses and sought to reassure the regime that it was not going to abandon it as it had Mubarak. Yet, with Syria and Yemen, the Obama administration increasingly moved towards pushing for change as human rights abuses mounted and it was clear that Bashar al-Assad and the USA's long-time ally President Ali Abdullah Saleh were facing protracted problems with protests.

Nonetheless, once the USA had embraced the transitions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the Obama administration moved swiftly to buttress democratic trends. In Tunisia and Egypt, for example, the administration spoke out in favour of democratic transitions and provided multiple sources of funding to support a new range of programmes from 'elections administration, civic education and, and political party development' (Carothers 2012: 31). As a senior state department official explained:

the decision was made to do a lot more work with local civil society as soon as we could. . . . In Tunisia and Egypt we have done a lot of work this year . . . there has been a lot of focus on those two countries.

(Senior State Department Official B 2011)

Before the revolution in Tunisia, for example, MEPI was dealing with around five NGOs, but afterwards demand 'skyrocketed' from both local and international NGOs. As a result MEPI began pushing out grants, and replicated this process in Egypt. The flexibility of MEPI allowed it to respond to the crises relatively swiftly, but as some admitted the fear was that in the rest of the region, 'where demand has skyrocketed, we haven't been able to respond quickly' (Senior State Department Official A 2011). The response from MEPI was first to 'throw money at Egypt and Tunisia', followed by 'coalition building amongst NGOs' and 'establish regional networks' (Senior State Department Official B 2011). Indeed, with MEPI having 10 years of institutional experience to draw from, it mobilised the MEPI alumni network, rolled out seminars on using social media as a tool for advocacy, ensured that activists met at conferences and ultimately attempted to ensure that learning was occurring throughout the ongoing revolutionary transition processes. Indeed, MEPI's response has been to consider a lot more regional programming, and establish more detailed sector-by-sector analyses of where it can strengthen networks to help continue the sharing of information that drives change. The aim is to 'grow and sustain the demand for change' (Wittes 2011).



These initial steps were intended to contribute to what the President would announce, on May 19, 2011, as a 'bold new approach to foreign policy' and US relations with the MENA. Taking centre stage in the Department of State's Benjamin Franklin room, the President argued that the 2011 revolutions were caused by a denial of dignity, a lack of political and economic self-determination throughout the region, the role of new media and the region's young demographic. He argued that Tunisia and Egypt were entering years of transition and that this process of transition would have ups and downs potentially challenging America's core interests, but that the administration would continue to 'keep our commitments to friends and partners'. However, he clearly signalled that such partnerships were problematic in the long term if autocratic regimes did not embrace reform:

The status quo is not sustainable. Societies held together by fear and repression may offer the illusion of stability for a time, but they are built upon fault lines that will eventually tear asunder. So we face a historic opportunity... There must be no doubt that the United States of America welcomes change that advances self-determination and opportunity.

(Obama 2011, May 19)

What was highly evident about this apparently 'new approach to foreign policy', however, was that it was remarkably similar to Bush's Freedom Agenda and downplayed many of the incremental innovations the Obama administration had made throughout its time in office. It appealed to similar premises to those of Bush's liberal grand strategy, arguing that, 'after decades of accepting the world as it is in the region, we have a chance to pursue the world as it should be'. Within such a context, the President began to construct more of an overarching narrative for its approach to the region, setting out a liberal, albeit pragmatic, grand strategy under the headings of political reform, human rights and economic reform. The supposed new strategy would be to help support reform across the region starting with the Tunisian and Egyptian transitions to democracy, and noted the serious problems in Libya, Syria and Iran, whilst also condemning partners such as Yemen and Bahrain for their use of force; and by implication Saudi Arabia.

The President, at considerable length, detailed how the USA would support change in the region through economic reforms for nations that are transitioning to democracy, asserting that:

America's support for democracy will therefore be built on financial stability, promoting reform, and integrating competitive markets each other and the global economy... starting with Tunisia and Egypt.

(Obama 2011, May 19)

He continued to argue that the problem with the region was its 'closed economies' and that the region needed 'trade' and 'not just aid'; 'investment' and 'not just assistance'; and that 'protectionism must give way to openness'. President

Obama's strategic narrative had all the hallmarks of proposed informal rule and the expectations of the imperial right, as it was announced that:

- The World Bank and IMF were to construct a plan to present to the G8 Summit about what would be needed to stabilise and modernise the economies of Tunisia and Egypt.
- Egypt would be relieved of \$1 billion in debt and allocated \$1 billion in loans for infrastructure.
- The USA would help to recover assets that had been stolen by members of the former regimes in Tunisia and Egypt.
- Enterprise Funds would be set up to invest in Tunisia and Egypt, modelled on the funds that helped transitions in Eastern Europe.
- OPEC would create a \$2 billion facility to help support private investment.
- The USA would work with allies to refocus the European Bank for reconstruction and development so it provides the same support for democratic transitions and economic modernisation in the MENA as it has in Europe.
- It would establish a comprehensive trade and investment initiative with the MENA, working with the EU to facilitate more trade from within the region, and build on existing agreements to provide integration with the US and EU markets.
- It would help these transition countries 'tear down the walls' that stand in the way of progress and help them fulfil their 'international obligations' (see Obama 2011, May 19).

Conspicuously, shortly after this speech Egypt rejected the IMF offer of a \$3.2 billion loan, arguing that it would be an infringement of Egyptian sovereignty to accept a loan requiring 'mandatory reforms and austerity measures, like cutting food and fuel subsidies' (NYT 2012). Although Egypt wanted the money, it did not want to accept the neoliberal logic that underpinned the loan. It had rejected the offer of informal rule. However, by early 2012, with falling foreign currency reserves, Egypt was succumbing to reopening the loan request with an IMF delegation (Kirkpatrick 2012). This was indicative of the Obama administration's emphasis on the same rationale that underpinned MEFTA and much of the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda. In spite of all the grand assertions of a 'new approach' the administration had returned to the logic of the imperial right that underpinned the Bush administration's IDF. The overarching narrative presented by Obama foregrounded the typical aspects of a neoliberal approach, at a time when neoliberalism was facing a serious crisis as an approach to political economy in the USA and Europe. In effect the Obama administration's new approach was remarkably similar to that institutionalised by the Bush administration throughout the post-crisis period of September 11, 2001, demonstrating how entrenched the logic of the Freedom Agenda had become as a policy paradigm.

This demonstrated that, in spite of the evolutionary steps the new administration had made to make its own agenda distinctive, ultimately these were largely peripheral to the default appeal of neoliberalism, and the definition of freedom



that had underpinned the conservative dimension of the Freedom Agenda. Such a definition was at odds with the problems and the solutions being presented by protesters in Tahrir Square. It was not a definition of freedom underpinned by economic liberalisation that they were willing to die for, but rather a plethora of messages surrounding issues of human rights, social justice, adherence to the Islamic faith in one form or another and equality (Hassan 2011a). Economic issues were of course a large part of why these protests took place; Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation was after all in part a protest against economic helplessness which resonated beyond Sidi Bouzid. However, it was the former Egyptian regime that had embraced the neoliberal logic of Bush's Freedom Agenda most swiftly, and, as protesters in Tahrir Square complained, all it brought was inequality whereby the Egyptian Army and members of the Mubarak regime profited, creating greater inequality throughout the country (Hassan 2011a).

Given the profound nature of the 2011 revolutions, it was therefore a major problem that the Obama administration was unable to construct a new paradigm for the region and the US approach to democracy promotion. This was not because the USA was pursuing a sound policy programme, but rather that there was a serious lack of grand policy innovation within the administration, and the Obama administration has been unable to develop a strategy for dealing with the landscape presented by the conflict of interests problem. With the USA constructing its interests around conceptions of global military reach, its security relationship with Israel and access to the region's resource in the carbon economy, the strategically selective context in which the Obama administration could strategise remained limited. Ultimately, US policy choices remain shaped by the landscape set out by the conflict of interests, and, in spite of multiple efforts to reform the status quo, the Freedom Agenda failed. The USA has lost the grand strategy 'gradualism' provided, and has little by way of an alternative strategy in response. To substitute this, the Obama administration was pragmatic in its response, but has ultimately failed in constructing a policy that allows it to delineate when to push regimes towards democratisation, and when to ensure continued cooperation on economic and security issues. This of course is not to say that the administration did not attempt to adjust, but rather that the administration was slow to do so.

Attempting to adjust to the new strategically selective context, wherein Islamist parties have proved to be successful in elections, Israeli security is less guaranteed by allies and Iran has increasingly behaved provocatively, did, however, rise up the administration's agenda by late 2011. Having appointed William B. Taylor as Special Coordinator for Transitions in September 2011, the Obama administration sought to move beyond the traditional approach to the region and help support transitions across the region. As Ambassador Taylor argued, 'it is important to us that the transitions succeed' (Taylor 2011), and consequently the administration has constructed a position from which to coordinate policy between the US government and other global and regional actors. Taylor has also been placed in charge of efforts to coordinate the efforts of America's democracy bureaucracy, spread out across the Department of State, USAID, the DRL and MEPI, to ensure a greater level of coherence. Thus the Obama administration's approach

increasingly attempted to coordinate the Freedom Agenda institutions in combination with other parts of government, and therefore ensure that the response is done in what has been considered a 'whole government way'. This brings 'the assistance side' together with 'trade policy, whilst [also] seeing what the private sector can do, what we can do with our diaspora communities here in the US . . . and bring a lot of different pieces together' (Senior State Department Official B 2011). The newly established coordination office does not implement programmes, but rather strives to better synchronize and harmonise programme implementers, to make the democracy bureaucracy more efficient. Taylor acknowledges, however, that the US government does not have the same resources it had during previous attempts to support transitions 'in Central Europe and the former Soviet Union for example', and that the USA must therefore support transitions 'more efficiently and more creatively' (Taylor 2011). Moreover, when asked about the conflicts of interests problem and how the Obama administration was attempting to overcome it, Taylor argued at length that:

This is a big issue that is very important. We are looking at it very carefully and giving it a lot of attention, to deciding how can we do both our principles, the principles of democratic transitions and democratic governance and minority rights, women's rights, assembly, expression; those principles that are important to us. Reconciling those with our interests, in the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, transit rights, over flight rights etc. . . in particular with Egypt. Finding the right balance, in each individual country is going to be important, but I think that this administration has been very clear that it puts a very high importance on the principles side, and democratic government, and democratic ideals. In the past we let interest dominate, but this administration has been clear that principles will guide us. We have problems all the time and we will have compromises in the short term, but in the medium to long term the focus is on democratic governance in this part of the world, like other parts of the world, will be in our interest.

(Taylor 2011)

Nonetheless, when pressed about whether this will be done on an ad hoc basis or through an institutional mechanism, it was clear that the National Security Council and the interagency process would continue to govern such decisions on an ad hoc basis. Moreover, as a senior State Department official added:

All of those other interests we pursued over the decades are still our interests. They haven't changed, but the environment in which we pursue them has changed fundamentally, therefore our foreign policy has to change in response. That's the way the President articulated it in May [2011], that's the new policy. We are working on the premise that these things will come into alignment, and we will work to bring them into alignment by helping to cultivate the changes that are needed which will bring them into alignment.

(Senior State Department Official A 2011)



This echoed the message presented by Hillary Clinton in her keynote address to the National Democratic Institute on November 7, 2011, in which the Secretary of State argued that:

transitions are filled with uncertainty . . . We believe that real democratic change in the Middle East and North Africa is in the national interest of the United States . . . Why does America promote democracy one way in some countries and another way in others? Well, the answer starts with a very practical point: situations vary dramatically from country to country. It would be foolish to take a one-size-fits-all approach and barrel forward regardless of circumstances on the ground . . . Our choices also reflect other interests in the region with a real impact on Americans' lives – including our fight against al-Qaida, defense of our allies, and a secure supply of energy. Over time, a more democratic Middle East and North Africa can provide a more sustainable basis for addressing all three of those challenges. But there will be times when not all of our interests align. We work to align them, but that is just reality . . . As a country with many complex interests, we'll always have to walk and chew gum at the same time.

(Clinton 2011, November 7)

In essence, the Secretary of State's address asserted many of the ideas that had underpinned the construction of the Freedom Agenda back in 2002. This demonstrated how the Bush administration had laid the discursive tracks leading to the institutionalisation of the Freedom Agenda in the crisis narrative set out after September 11, 2001, but over a decade later the USA was struggling with the same 'conflict of interests' problem. Only now, with the conservative side of the Freedom Agenda having demonstrably failed, the USA was faced with the Islamist dilemma it had been reluctant to embrace, and the increased level of instability that it sought to avoid. Ultimately the Freedom Agenda, born out of crisis, had failed as a policy paradigm and the Obama administration was pragmatically attempting to navigate the contours of yet another crisis in a period of the USA's declining influence in the region.

## Conclusion

In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 revolutions there was considerable debate concerning the role the USA had played in bringing about these events. Multiple media outlets and commentators were asking whether the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda contributed directly or indirectly to the uprisings. Whereas the Bush administration was keen to suggest that this may well be the case, and that events had vindicated their strategy, a closer analysis of the Freedom Agenda reveals a far more problematic picture than the one they have chosen to narrate. Having traced the construction and institutionalisation of this policy by the Bush administration, it is clear that the policy recognised the symptoms, but ultimately failed to prescribe the right policy. Thus, although former members of the Bush administration may well be attempting to construct a legacy underpinned by a simplistic mythology of the Freedom Agenda, it is clear that, just as Reagan did not bring down the Berlin Wall, G. W. Bush did not lead the protests in Tahrir Square. Moreover, it should be stated that the removal of heads of state in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen is not equivalent to predestined democratic transition. It may well be a useful start to such a process, but there is no guarantee that these states will inevitably transition to democracy. Within this context, the 2011 revolutions may have done more for international democracy support than international democracy support ever did for the 2011 revolutions.<sup>1</sup>

By challenging the official representation of the Freedom Agenda, the research presented here reveals the imperial pitfalls of the approach the Bush administration constructed, the limitations of the approaches to institutionalisation and ultimately the conservative manner in which the policy was pursued. The importance of this cannot be overstated given that the Obama administration not only inherited these problems, but has largely embraced them in its response to regional unrest. Yet, beyond these empirical issues, what this research has shown, through the development of the constructivist institutionalist approach, is that there is a benefit in theorising and analysing post-crisis policy making. By tracing the IDF that underpins policy construction, it was possible to generate a highly detailed and rigorous understanding of how and why the Freedom Agenda was developed, and what cumulative and evolutionary steps and obstacles led to its institutionalisation. It simultaneously allowed a return to first-order questions, to address what the Bush administration meant by the terms 'freedom' and 'democracy', and how these definitions translated into a policy of conservative radicalism.



By setting out an approach that was explicit in detailing its ontological and epistemological foundations, the manner in which it conceptualised the role of structure and agency, ideas and material, and continuity and change, an ordering framework was established that drove this empirically rich research. Its strength lies in the fact that it is philosophically rigorous, has an interdisciplinary focus and is capable of theorising the complex processes of continuity and change. By combining critical and historical analysis, the strengths of this methodology have come to fruition in this research, and have proved intrinsic to guiding its empirical focus and findings. Notably, the constructivist institutionalist methodology was able to theorise the relationship between the events of September 11, 2001, and the development of the Freedom Agenda, rather than simply asserting a relationship based on their succession in time. This is a meaningful contribution, as it highlights the central role of September 11, 2001, and the manner in which it marked a moment of punctuation in US-MENA relations. The implications of this assertion are evident throughout this research, in which it was shown that the 2000 presidential campaign set the stage for the future Bush administration to outline a distinctive IDF. This appropriated and articulated primacy, hegemonic stability theory, neoliberalism and modernisation thesis into a distinctive formation, which in turn, sedimented particular definitions of concepts such as 'power', 'peace', 'democracy' and 'freedom'. The importance of this cannot be overestimated.

From January to September 2001, President Bush was asserting the need for continuity in US-MENA relations. The most prominent reform in this inter-regional relationship was Bush's decoupling strategy vis-à-vis the peace process and Iraq. However, this situation changed as a result of the events of September 11, 2001, generating a moment of punctuation in political time. This moment of punctuation created a space for Bush's distinct IDF to be strategically embedded within a post-crisis narrative, which laid discursive tracks for the evolution of the Freedom Agenda. This post-crisis narrative foregrounded the concept of 'freedom' and asserted that America was attacked because it was 'free'. What was remarkable about such a depoliticising conclusion was the absence of detailed expansive studies into the 'causes' of terrorism to justify this assertion. To deal with the uncertainty created as a result of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration primarily utilised logics arising out of the post-Cold War era, the perceived need for an overarching rationale for US foreign policy, and a reconstructed sense of America as 'exceptional'. That is to say, the form of change that followed the moment of punctuation was largely an endogenous product of how strategically selective actors viewed the strategically selective context. Consequently, it is safe to conclude that post-Cold War identity politics proved to be a critical dynamic in shaping the post-crisis narrative, and played a vital role in the eventual evolution of the Freedom Agenda.

Understanding the role of post-Cold War identity politics allows a more generalisable point to be made. September 11, 2001, was not epochal and certainly did not, as the Bush administration argued, 'change everything'. Rather, the nature of political change is more akin to that of a 'kaleidoscope'. Indeed, this is a metaphor deployed by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair in his response to September 11, 2001:

This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us reorder this world around us.

(Blair 2001, October 2)

This vignette is instructive because it captures a certain quality about political continuity and change that was evident in the process-tracing narrative discourse analysis carried out through this research: namely, that discourses are important in the conduct of foreign policy, and when moments of punctuation occur they can be reconstructed by articulating them into a different formation. This suggests that there is always a binding with the past, as these discourses have genealogies, but when placed in a different formation they can lead to political change.<sup>2</sup> The Freedom Agenda was a product of exactly this sort of situation, in which a new strategically constituted narrative grasped together multiple factors to construct a plot that guided a new policy paradigm towards the Middle East policy.

Understanding the Freedom Agenda required reconstructing the context from which it arose, and fundamentally analysing the post-crisis narrative that guided its institutionalisation. From doing so, this research has demonstrated that the Freedom Agenda constituted a new policy paradigm in US-MENA relations, which was a product of a cumulative post-crisis policy making process. Thus, events following September 11 were analysed in this research not based on the notion that 'history is just one damn thing after another', but rather, because events, such as the war in Afghanistan, the Bletchley II meeting and the Iraq war, all added to how strategically selective actors viewed the strategically selective context. As a result, what was considered feasible, practical and desirable changed, and out of this reformulation the Freedom Agenda was perceived to be in America's national interest, and institutionalised as a new paradigm. The historical narrative presented in this research, therefore, demonstrates that policy evolves over time as policy-makers try to solve policy puzzles in conditions of uncertainty. Consequently, they develop and deploy specific IDFs (embedded within narratives) to support their strategic actions, and legitimise the policy directions they have constructed within institutional settings.

Policy making is not, however, an exact science. Herein, despite the Bush administration attempting to make democracy promotion the central objective of US-MENA relations, both in the form of creating a domino effect after the Iraq war and through the Freedom Agenda institutions, it became clear that the new paradigm was problematic. Whilst the administration gradually recognised that the war on terror could not be fought through military means alone, promoting democracy in the MENA proved to be more difficult than the Bush administration had originally conceived. In the belief that 'freedom' was a universal value, and the natural political arrangement societies would adopt if authoritarian rule was removed, the Bush administration lowered the bar of how difficult promoting democracy in the MENA would be. Indeed, with a growing insurgency in Iraq, and the democratic victory of Hamas in the 2006, it was clear that the Freedom Agenda withdrew to relying on its neoliberal core, and became characterised by both conservative and radical dynamics. As a result, the Freedom Agenda was

strongly committed to regional stability and the gradual reform of ally regimes, whilst seeking to challenge regimes hostile to the USA. This realisation adds to the existing debate about the Freedom Agenda, because it generates a more complex understanding of the policy, and consequently moves the debate forward. Indeed, the Bush administration's vision for the Middle East is made considerably clearer once it is acknowledged that the United States sought to promote democracy because it believed that this would tip the global 'balance of power' in the USA's favour and subsequently assure continued US preponderance and ascendancy. It was not democracy in and of itself that was being advocated, but rather democracy that would suit perceived US interests. By highlighting the conservative radicalism dyad, this research illustrates a fundamental tension in US-MENA relations: September 11 may have changed the manner in which the USA viewed the Middle East, but it merely compounded the perceived need for short-term cooperation in the pursuit of other more immediate security goals. Where this occurred, the Bush administration consistently gave priority to the latter, justified with particular definitions of justice and the need for security. Consequently, this research has demonstrated that the Freedom Agenda was contradictory at best, and, at worst, a legitimising concept for the pursuit of US preponderance over the MENA. It was ultimately a policy caught between pursuing democracy and domination. The implications of this clearly demonstrate that, despite the constant repetition of the word 'freedom', which became the trope of the war on terror, elevated to chief purveyor of legitimacy and idol of the tribe, it was necessary to look past this essentially contested term and return to first-order questions about how the Freedom Agenda was constituted.

The narrative presented by the White House obfuscated the degree to which there were tensions in the administration over the institutionalisation of the Freedom Agenda. Indeed, the 'official' narrative wrote out the extent to which members of the Department of Defense and Department of State were hostile to the Freedom Agenda. This was a particularly fecund finding of this research, as it reveals how the 'conflict of interest' problem was difficult for the administration to address throughout its time in office, and in spite of its proclaimed new policy paradigm. Moreover, it demonstrates how a mismatch between regional specialists and the growing democracy bureaucracy proved to be an obstacle in coordinating and entrenching the Freedom Agenda. Herein, it is safe to conclude that, despite President Bush's grand rhetoric, a more complex reality was unfolding within the administration itself. More generally, however, it has been shown that the USA struggles to promote democracy, because it is not clear how best to do so. This accounts for the ad hoc programmes the Freedom Agenda institutions pursued, and was reflected in J. Scott Carpenter's assertion that 'we don't know yet how best to promote democracy . . . there are times when you throw spaghetti against the wall and see if it sticks' (Finkel 2005). Despite this insight, however, it was unambiguously clear that the Bush administration relied on ideological convictions, rather than detailed empirical subscriptions, in its assertions that the democratisation process could be brought about by subscribing to neoliberal reforms and modernisation thesis.

Given such an analysis it is unfortunate that the Obama administration's conservative pragmatist approach has increasingly embraced many of the key notions embedded within the Bush administration's IDF. Many of the universal and exceptionalist notions that underpinned Bush's rhetoric have been evident in Obama administration's thinking, along with a renewed appreciation for the role of neoliberalism, and refreshed appeals to democratic peace theory. This is particularly distressing as the Obama administration had in fact laid the path to a distinctive, less imperial strategy through the digitisation of the Freedom Agenda and the engagement and empowerment of civil society. What is revealed in this analysis is that these strategies may well help move the Freedom Agenda institutions forward in a less imperial fashion, and therefore help provide answers to moral and normative questions about the desire to support democracy in a manner that is respectful of negative liberty and heeds the warnings put forward by Isaiah Berlin about imposing models of positive liberty. In effect they may well lay the foundations for a post-colonial approach to democracy support for the twenty-first century, which embraces dialogue, empowerment and respect. These distinctive approaches seem to lay the foundations for a light footprint approach to democracy support, whereby the focus of the activity is to empower people with tools and networks to move away peacefully from tyranny, rather than seeking to socially engineer peoples towards some outside-inspired utopian end state.

Nonetheless, the prevailing feature of the Obama administration's approach to democracy promotion has been its conterminous nature with that of Bush's Freedom Agenda, and the manner in which the 'conflict of interests' problem dominated the policy before and after the 2011 revolutions. The Obama administration clearly needed to be more innovative than embracing a discredited strategy, and needed to establish a new paradigm for US-MENA relations to deal with the profound nature of change initiated by the 2011 revolutions. The administration was clearly slow in doing this, which was unsurprising given the size of the democracy bureaucracy and the strategically selective context in which US policy operates in the region. However, until the USA creates enough space for policy innovation it will remain stuck with a conservative and reactionary policy; a policy caught between indigenous demands for democracy and the US domination of the region to secure its interests.

## Notes

## 1 American interests and a history of promoting the status quo

- 1 A term used by William L. Westermann to describe the interwar Middle East (cited in Oren 2007: 380).
- 2 Of particular importance is Point Twelve of the Fourteen Points Plan presented to Congress in January 1918.
- 3 For a lineal account of US democracy promotion see Tony Smith (1994).
- 4 This acronym stands for *Advance Democratic Values, Address Nondemocratic Countries, and Enhance Democracy Act*.
- 5 Although Britain and France retained influence in the region into the 1960s and the 1970s, their place as the hegemonic external powers was gradually being eroded by the USA (Halliday 2005: 95).
- 6 This broke an agreement made at the London conference of ministers in September 1945. It had been agreed that Soviet troop withdrawal would be completed no later than March 2, 1946 (Truman 1956: 98).
- 7 This was originally done in partnership with Britain until the 1950s. Spurred by the failure to establish either the Middle East Command or the Middle East Defence Organisation, US officials increasingly questioned the ability of Britain to protect Western interests in the region (see Hahn 2005: 15). The 1956 Suez Crisis exacerbated this, leading to the USA taking a 'leadership' role and becoming the primary 'Western' power in the region.
- 8 For a systematic analysis of how economic aid was conceptualised from 1947 through to the 1970s see Packenham (1973).
- 9 This figure is in constant-dollar data and combines loans and grants given to 'Near East' countries.
- 10 In 2009, US economic assistance totalled \$33946.9 million, and the region received \$5439.0 million. In the same year, US military assistance around the globe totalled \$13681.3 million, and the region received \$6668.9 million (figures available from USAID 2011).
- 11 In 1955 coal provided 75 per cent of total energy use in Western Europe, and petroleum just 23 per cent. By 1972, coal's share had shrunk to 22 per cent, while oil's had risen to 60 per cent. This was almost a complete reversal (Yergin 1991: 545).
- 12 Assistance from the USA has consisted of two thirds military assistance to one third economic aid.
- 13 The Arabic name translates as 'Islamic Resistance Movement'.
- 14 It should be noted that Mansfield and Snyder (2005: 14, 283) themselves do not oppose democracy promotion, but rather favour a cautious approach.
- 15 Notably the signatories of this letter included Elliott Abrams, Richard L. Armitage, William J. Bennett, Jeffrey Bergner, John Bolton, Paula Dobriansky, Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kagan, Zalmay Khalilzad, William Kristol, Richard Perle, Peter W. Rodman, Donald Rumsfeld, William Schneider, Jr., Vin Weber, Paul Wolfowitz,

R. James Woolsey and Robert B. Zoellick. Many of these individuals later became key members of the Bush administration, but not all would be considered neoconservatives.

- 16 This was evident in the Republican-led House, which voted 296-133, and the Democrat-led Senate, which voted 72-23 (Reid 2002: 20).
- 17 Here 'sedimentation' refers to the concealment of an original act of institutionalisation, and 'reactivation' is to make such acts visible again (see Laclau and Mouffe 2001: viii).

## 2 A constructivist institutionalist methodology

- 1 This has also been termed discursive, ideational, and economic constructivism (see Schmidt 2006: 109; Hay 2006: 56; Campbell and Pedersen 2001: 193-275).
- 2 This could read as methodological individualism. This is not the intention. To argue that the micro level is ontologically primary is not the same as saying the macro level is ontologically non-existent or constitutive in some way. What is being questioned is the status; actions and conditions must be accounted for. Levels exist in relation to one another through collective intentionality.
- 3 For an excellent overview of new institutionalist scholarship see Peters (2005), Steinmo, Thelen and Longstrech (1992) and Campbell and Pedersen (2001).
- 4 Thus, even Kenneth Waltz's neorealist position explicitly asserts that states are not and have never been the only actors, but that they are the *most important actors*. More recently, he has argued that:

Structures condition behaviours and outcomes, yet explanations of behaviours and outcomes are indeterminate because both unit-level and structural causes are in play... structures shape and shove. They do not determine behaviours... the shaping and shoving of structures may be resisted... with skill and determination structural constraints can sometimes be countered. (Waltz 1986: 343)

This is a significant admission highlighting that even the most systemic theories cannot do without both structure and agency if they are to withstand critique (see Hollis and Smith 1991: 92-118). Indeed, as Stanley Rosen (2003: x) points out, the intelligibility of structure requires the 'absence of structure'.

- 5 This has a striking similarity to Onuf's assertion that:  
When we, as human beings, act as agents, we have goals in mind, even if we are not fully aware of them when we act. If someone asks us to think about the matter, we can usually formulate these goals more or less in the order of their importance to whomever we are acting as agents for, starting with ourselves. Most of the time, agents have limited, inaccurate, or inconsistent information about the material and social conditions that effect the likelihood of reaching given goals. Nevertheless, agents do the best they can to achieve their goals with the means that nature and society (together - always together) make available to them. (Onuf 1998: 60)
- 6 This term is being used because it is an accepted term in philosophy and therefore carries with it a conceptual baggage that I want to introduce. The term literally means 'being-there', referring to an inquiring entity (Heidegger 1967: 28-9):

The essence of Dasein lies in its existence. Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not 'properties' present-at-hand of some entity which looks so and so and is itself more than that... so when we designate this entity with the term 'Dasein', we are expressing not its what (as if it were a table, house or tree) but its being.



- 7 Relatedly Dasein has free will in the sense of its ability to choose how it will be, and lives through its possibilities. It is always engaged with the world and the entities within it. This conception is fundamental to transcending the Cartesian dualism upon which mind/body and agency/structure are separated.
- 8 Note that this is intentionality-with-a-t, which is a property of the mind by which it is directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world independent of itself. This should not be confused with intentionality-with-an-s (see Searle 2004: 122–5).
- 9 Not duality, which implies separation, much like the morphogenetic approach.
- 10 Weldes notes that the concept of interest is itself a construction. The very notion that interests motivate action and therefore should be referred to in explanations of behaviour and social outcomes is itself a relatively new concept that came with the rise of liberalism and capitalism (Weldes 1996: 306).
- 11 For alternative constructivist conceptions of the national interest see Wendt (1999), Finnemore (1996b) and Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel (1999). For an excellent overview of this literature see Burchill (2005).
- 12 The Weldes version of constructing the national interest places a clear emphasis on agency in constructing the national interest. Finnemore, however, stresses normative structures.
- 13 The reason I have termed these 'naturalist assumptions' is the manner in which Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein (1996: 65) refer to the methodologies espoused throughout the book as explanatory in their engagement with 'normal science', and thus posit 'causal effects either of identities or of the cultural/institutional content of global or domestic environment'. For a more thorough critique see Ruggie (1998b: esp. 38); however, it should be noted that because it is an edited book the extent to which naturalism is subscribed to varies across authors.
- 14 The emergence of this definition has largely arisen from the observed empirical regularity that 'ideational change invariably precedes institutional change' (Hay 2006: 66).
- 15 For a detailed account of this and other approaches to social change see Boudon (1986: esp. 16–18).
- 16 'The crisis which resulted from Khrushchev's decision secretly to install intermediate and medium-range nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962' (Young and Kent 2004: 236).
- 17 According to Kennedy's National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, 'most of us agreed with McNamara's summary judgement at the outset, that the Cuban Missiles did not change the strategic balance – not at all' (Weldes 1999a: 95). For an excellent account see Errol Morris's film *The Fog of War*.
- 18 It involves the encoding and ascription of meaning to events, in order to represent them to the recipient narratees for the process of active interpellative decoding.
- 19 Since Aristotle's *Poetics*, narrative has been regarded as a temporal sequencing of events into a beginning, middle and end (see Dienstag 1997: 18). The term 'emplotment' refers to the assembly of historical events into a narrative, within a plot.
- 20 Thus, instead of the Cartesian 'subject-object' divide, this is a distinction between 'organism' and 'environment'.
- 21 The term 'de-structuring' has been used here as an affinity to Gadamerian method. Notably the term is derived from the Heideggerian method of *Destruktion*. Using this term was a deliberate move by Gadamer to locate a common dimension between his hermeneutical project and the projects of both Heidegger and Derrida (see Michelfelder and Palmer 1989: 6–8).
- 22 Michael Barnett could be seen as adding to this argument through his assertion that narratives provide a mechanism to 'situate events and to interpret problems, to fashion shared understanding of the world, to galvanize sentiments as a way to mobilize and guide social action, and to suggest possible resolutions to current plights' (Barnett 1999: 15).

- 23 The impact of adopting this definition may appear to represent a fundamental contradiction to the early appeals to John Searle's work. The key point, however, is to note that with regards to truth claims this research is underpinned by a 'minimal perspectivism' or 'soft philosophical realism' and not relativism (see Prado 2006). This is akin to Richard Bernstein's (1983) *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*.
- 24 Within the espoused 'critical' view ideology is not simply reducible to an ideational disposition, but rather is a modality of power (see Fairclough 2003: 9; 1992: 86–96).
- 25 The ideas that follow from here come from a synthesis of Hall, Weldes, Onuf and Searle. Thus it is crucial to understand that what I have done here is mix vocabularies to construct a worldview, the result of which is that I remain oblivious to the extent to which these authors would individually agree with this synthesis.
- 26 This research does not reduce all social practices to the discursive, that is to say it does not follow in the footsteps of Laclau and Mouffe's later work in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). The 'worldview' stated above is clearly a rejection of anti-foundationalist discursive idealism. Given this, Stuart Hall's definition of the term is particularly instructive as 'he elevates the importance of articulating discourse to other social forces, without going "over the brink" of turning everything into discourse' (Slack 1996: 121).
- 27 This point reflects Searle's notion of the 'ontologically subjective'. For example we can say that the US Presidency is an observer-relative phenomenon, hence ontologically subjective, but it is an epistemically objective fact that G. W. Bush was the 43rd President (see Searle 2007: 82–4).
- 28 By extension this should highlight that within FPA this study sits on the hermeneutical side of the divide, and not that of behaviourism (see Hollis and Smith 1991: 68–91).
- 29 Note that, consistent with the above worldview, such notions are not considered causal factors.
- 30 To use the language of John R. Searle, the events had an intrinsic quality, but the 'crisis' is an observer-relative phenomena; as such, it is constructed. It is important to note that being a 'construct' does not make it somehow not 'real'; rather it recognises an intrinsic quality of human intentionality to project itself onto the world. Searle's analysis of money provides an excellent analogy.
- 31 For a more specific use of these categories see Vivien Schmidt (2000).
- 32 That is, dependent upon an 'outside' that both denies the positions and provides the conditions of their possibility (Du Gay *et al.* 2000: 2).
- 33 Notably, this system was not used for data collected from autobiographies, which are referenced in the standard manner.

### 3 From candidate to crisis

- 1 Indeed President Bush later wrote in an autobiographical account of his journey to the White House:

It was a great honor to meet president-elect Reagan . . . President Reagan was resolute in his goals and confident in his philosophy. He set a clear agenda of limited government, of economic growth through tax cuts, and of peace through strength. His Presidency was a defining one . . . President Reagan realized the greatness of America was found not in government in Washington, but in the hearts and souls of individual Americans.

(Bush 2001: 177)

- 2 These were mainland China, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, Russia and Germany, which spent a total of approximately US\$275,100 million, compared with the US military expenditure of \$281,000 million.

- 3 All italics entered in quotes from this section on have been added by the author for emphasis, unless stated otherwise.
- 4 This followed advice given by President Clinton, in which he told President-elect Bush not to misjudge Arafat in the same way he had during his own attempts in the Peace Process (Rubin and Rubin 2003: 213).
- 5 This reflected the Bush campaign's declared approach of being selective over diplomatic engagements. Indeed, in late January 2001, the Bush administration had declined to send an envoy for final attempts at peace talks in Egypt, and later decided to abolish the post of a special envoy to the Middle East. Moreover, when Senator George Mitchell reported back with his report on the causes of the second Intifada in April 2001, his three-step peace plan was endorsed by the administration but given little political support. By June 2001, escalating violence in the region did lead the administration to make a slight reversal on the decision to disengage, leading to the President dispatching the CIA director, George Tenet, to act as a special envoy to negotiate a cease-fire. However, like the Mitchell Plan it was endorsed but given little political support by the higher echelons of the administration (Quandt 2005: 385–96; Daalder and Lindsay 2003: 66).
- 6 It is particularly worth adding that the Bush administration also consistently made reference to 'civilisation' as under attack, thereby expanding the 'we'. For an excellent analysis of this discourse see Richard Jackson (2005), *Writing the War on Terrorism*.
- 7 A clear indicator of this level of national unity and patriotism was the extent to which American flag sales increased rapidly: from September 11 to 13, 2001, Wal-Mart alone sold 450,000 and Kmart sold another 200,000 (Andrews 2007: 103).
- 8 The term 'sacrifice' in modern-day usage often refers to a form of transference: giving one thing for another. Yet the etymological roots of the term are from the Latin *sacrificere*, to perform priestly functions. This is derived from *sacra*, sacred rites, and *facere*, to perform.
- 9 For a detailed analysis of such authors views of tragedy see Jennifer Wallace's (2007) *Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy*.
- 10 The word 'harbor' was included after the terms 'tolerated' and 'encouraged' were considered too vague by the President (Woodward 2002: 30). Moreover it is important to note that this passage was not a spontaneous decision. Bush had made a similar claim in the 1999 Republican primaries, and consequently this assertion was drawn from and framed by previously declared policy statements (see Bush 1999, September 23).

#### 4 September to December 2001

- 1 In Bob Woodward's account of September 11, 2001, he argued that President Bush decided that the day's events constituted an act of war upon being told that 'a second plane hit the second tower'. In an interview with Bob Woodward, President Bush recalled his thoughts at the time; 'They have declared war on us, and I made up my mind at that moment that we were going to war' (see Woodward 2002: 15). This is repeated in G. W. Bush's (2010) autobiography *Decision Points*.
- 2 Instructively this metaphor is used by many members of the G. W. Bush administration, and is notable in its use because it reinforces the construction of the events of September 11, 2001, as acts of war.
- 3 Notably, in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, presidential approval ratings soared, going from 51 per cent in a poll conducted from September 7 to 10 to 90 per cent by September 22, 2001 (Gallup 2009).
- 4 It should be noted that there is an American tradition of using the term 'crusade' in the figurative sense of an aggressive movement or public campaign against some public evil, which was first recorded in Jefferson's 1786 writings.

- 5 To eliminate monarchical rule (the War of 1812), to defeat the Catholic forces of superstition (the Mexican War), to eliminate slavery (the Civil War), to end colonialism in the Americas (the Spanish-American War), to make the world safe for democracy (the First World War) and to resist totalitarian expansion (the Second World War and Korea) (Lipset 1996: 65).
- 6 For example, the term 'justice', used by the administration, did not invoke Immanuel Kant's notion of retributive justice as a legal concept, in which punishment is imposed on the guilty party, and not used as a means to promote some other good. Indeed, Kant makes this point rather poignantly when he argues that:

Judicial punishment can never be used merely as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society, but instead it must in all cases be imposed on him only on the ground that he has committed a crime; for a human being can never be manipulated merely as a means to the purposes of someone else and never be included among objects of the Law of things.  
(Kant 1999 [1797]: 331)

The moralistic crusade plot contradicts this, as the war on terror was not just about punishment per se, but described as being motivated for the greater good of 'ridding the world of evil' and 'advancing human freedom'.

- 7 For a legal argument supporting the case for war see Robertson (2006: 511–21). It is also important to note that the Bush administration was eager to avoid taking this into the litigious realm, which is why, for example, President Bush argued:

I also had a responsibility to show resolve . . . No yielding. No equivocation. *No, you know, lawyering this thing to death, that we're after 'em*. And that was not only for domestic, for the people at home to see. It was also vitally important for the rest of the world to watch.  
(in Woodward 2002: 96)

This is corroborated by Richard A. Clarke's account, in which he asserts that the President declared:

I want you all to understand that we are at war and we will stay at war until this is done. Nothing else matters. Everything is available for the pursuit of this war. *Any barriers in your way, they're gone*.

Indeed, when Donald Rumsfeld informed the President that international law did not allow retribution, only the prevention of further attacks, he averred that 'I don't care what the international lawyers say, we're going to kick some ass' (in Clarke 2004: 24). Rumsfeld's specific concern was with General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) (1970) (Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations among States).

- 8 The title Operation Infinite Justice has a clear intertextuality with Operation Infinite Reach, which was President Clinton's response to the US Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. However, the title was changed because of deeply religious connotations it has in some branches of Islam, in which only Allah can deliver such finality (see BBC 2001).
- 9 See PDD39, Point Two: Detering Terrorism (Clinton 1995).
- 10 This is in spite of US legislation passed in 1998, which codified that:

The policy of the United States not to expel, extradite, or otherwise effect the involuntary return of any person to a country in which there are substantial grounds for believing the person would be in danger of being subjected to torture, regardless of whether the person is physically present in the United States.  
(in Williams 2006: 125)



- 11 That the UN would favour such an outcome is unsurprising given that it had officially made multiple calls for Afghanistan to move towards democratisation throughout the 1990s, and UN officials saw this as an opportunity to pursue this normative agenda. Moreover, such calls reflect what has become known as 'the New York Consensus' that has flourished since the end of the Cold War. Given this, the UN has increasingly seen the need for a more transformational role in fragile and failed states, and regarded democratisation as the best means of securing so-called international 'goods', such as the creation of liberal democratic polities with vibrant civil societies and market economies.
- 12 The Bonn Agreement, signed in December 2001, consequently asserted that the Afghan people would 'freely determine their own political future in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice'.

### 5 Constructing the Freedom Agenda for the Middle East

- 1 That the President used the term 'normal' is indicative of his stance that democracy is the natural structure any state would adopt once tyranny was removed. Yet, given Afghanistan's history, 'normal' was certainly not a democratic system.
- 2 It is interesting to note that Wittes's assertion is contradicted by Strobe Talbott's Foreword in the very same book, in which he argues that:

Bush's Freedom Agenda faltered in the Arab world because of the instability unleashed by the invasion in Iraq. But the administration also failed to take account of risks to American interests and let itself be lulled into believing that the toppling of a tyrant in Baghdad would vindicate a benign version of the domino theory throughout the region.

(Talbott 2008: x)

- 3 It was not until August 2008 that these attacks were attributed to the US Army biological researcher Bruce Ivins (Bohn *et al.* 2008).
- 4 The name 'Bletchley II' was chosen because Wolfowitz wanted to create something akin to Bletchley Park in the Second World War, where a team of mathematicians and cryptologists was set up to try and break German communication codes.
- 5 Attending on the proviso that the meeting be kept secret, a group of academics assembled in a secured conference centre in Virginia. The attendees included Christopher DeMuth, President of the AEI; Bernard Lewis, a close friend of Dick Cheney and scholar on Islam; Mark Palmer, the former US ambassador to Hungary, who would later be instrumental in authoring the ADVANCE Democracy Act of 2007; Fareed Zakaria, editor of *Newsweek International* and author of *The Future of Freedom*, which sets out the case for the USA to support the democratisation of the Middle East (Zakaria 2004: 150–9); Fouad Ajami, friend of Condoleezza Rice, director of the Middle East Center at SAIS and author of *The Arab Predicament*; James Q. Wilson, former President of the American Political Science Association, specialising in morality and crime; and Reuel Marc Gerecht, senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, former CIA Middle East expert and former director of the Project for the New American Century's Middle East initiative.
- 6 Indeed this was certainly the sentiment behind Donald Rumsfeld's quoting the Bible on the front of his briefing papers for the President. Pertinent to this point was quoting the First Epistle of Peter: 'It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men' (BBC 2009).
- 7 What is particularly noteworthy about this passage is that the characterisation of the enemy remains defined as 'evil', yet the concept of evil is articulated with conceptions of rationality and a political vision. That is to say, no longer were the terrorists being defined by their 'apolitical madness' (see Chapter 8), but rather they were being credited with rationality and motivation towards an alternative political vision.

By making this discursive move, the notion that the war on terror was an ideological battle could be put forward, and the official narrative could gain added complexity to maintain its legitimacy in the face of criticism.

- 8 Note the intertextuality of the 'forward strategy of freedom' with Bush's assertions, when a candidate, about the Reagan presidency (see Bush 1999, November 19).
- 9 Accordingly, President G. H. W. Bush argued 'In a world where we are the only remaining superpower, it is the role of the United States to marshal its moral and material resources to promote a *democratic peace*. It is our responsibility – it is our opportunity – to lead' (Bush 1993, January 11). Moreover the notion of democratic peace theory was carried through to the Clinton administration and had a significant impact on its foreign policy. Thus, as Michael Cox notes, 'possibly no other academic idea emanating from the academic community exercised as much influence as this one on the White House' (Cox 2000: 326).

### 6 Institutionalising the Freedom Agenda

- 1 Elizabeth Cheney is the daughter of former Vice President Richard Cheney and in 2002 was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.
- 2 For a more expansive outline of the individual programmes see Hassan (2009).
- 3 MEPI works in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Yemen. After the Bush administration left office Iraq was added as a partner country (see MEPI 2011).
- 4 These countries were Algeria, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, the Gaza Strip/West Bank, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen (see Bolle 2006).
- 5 The GMEI was the original US name given to a more ambitious version of BMENA. The name was changed because MENA governments objected that GMEI was too intrusive in their internal affairs, but also because of objections from the US government that GMEI in its original form replicated European initiatives conducted through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.
- 6 Note the intertextuality with Bush's 'Distinctly American Internationalism'.
- 7 See H.R.1 Public Law 110-53, 22 USC 8201n; Title XXI, Sections 2101–62, as passed by the 110th Congress.
- 8 The bill was sponsored by Representative Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Representative Frank Wolf (R-VA) in the House, and Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT) in the Senate. Moreover, that this author attended the secret Bletchley II meeting that resulted in the Delta of Terrorism paper is in and of itself somewhat suggestive of what this classified document contains.
- 9 Definitions of non-democratic and democratic transition countries are provided in the legislation.
- 10 The first meeting of the Advisory Committee on Democracy was held on November 6, 2006. Administration officials that attended were Condoleezza Rice, Randall L. Tobias (USAID), Paula J. Dobriansky (Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs), Barry F. Lowenkron (DRL), Stephen Krasner (Director of Policy Planning). The ACDP members include Anne-Marie Slaughter, chair (Princeton University), Lorne Craner (International Republican Institute), Chester Crocker (Georgetown University), Bernard DeLury (formerly of Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service), Aaron Friedberg (Princeton University), Carl Gershman (National Endowment for Democracy), Mary Ann Glendon (Harvard Law School), Donald Horowitz (Duke University), Clifford May (Foundation for the Defense of Democracies), Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute), Mark Palmer (Council for a Community of Democracies and Freedom House), Richard Soudriette (International Foundation for Election Systems), Vin Weber (National Endowment

for Democracy), Jennifer Windsor (Freedom House), Richard Williamson (Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw) and Kenneth Wollack (National Democratic Institute) (see DOS 2006a; Rice 2006, November 6; Milbank 2007).

- 11 J. Scott Carpenter served in the Bush administration as assistant secretary of state in the NEA, and oversaw MEPI from 2004 until becoming coordinator of the BMENA in 2006.
- 12 I have deliberately not listed the activities here because my interviews were conducted on the basis of complete anonymity. Many of the funding recipients I interviewed still use MEPI funding for their programmes, and consequently were reluctant about going on record, but were nonetheless very candid about the benefits and problems surrounding MEPI funding.
- 13 This argument was not only put forward concerning the MENA, but was also applied to China, in which the President argued that:

the advance of markets and free enterprise helped to create a middle class that was confident enough to demand their own rights . . . Our commitment to democracy is tested in China . . . Yet, China's people will eventually want their liberty . . . China has discovered that economic freedom leads to national wealth. China's leaders will also discover that freedom is indivisible – that social and religious freedom is also essential to national greatness and national dignity. Eventually, men and women who are allowed to control their own wealth will insist on controlling their own lives and their own country.

(Bush 2003, November 6)

- 14 This has been implemented on the ground through programmes such as the Partnership for Financial Excellence, Middle East Entrepreneur training, the Commercial Law Initiative and the Middle East Finance Corporation.
- 15 For an excellent analysis of Berlin's conception of positive liberty see Quentin Skinner's (2006: 243–65) *A Third Concept of Liberty*.

## 7 Obama's Freedom Agenda

- 1 NSPD58 codified the policies and practices of the Freedom Agenda on July 17, 2008.
- 2 This was also co-sponsored by Senators Evan Bayh (IN), Mike DeWine (OH), Joseph I. Lieberman (CT) and Rick Santorum (PA).
- 3 Facebook and Twitter were launched in 2004 and 2006 respectively. It was not until September 2006, however, that Facebook opened up membership to anyone with a valid email address.

## 8 Conclusion

- 1 For this insight I would like to thank my colleague Peter Burnell at the University of Warwick.
- 2 It is instructive here to recall the concluding words to John Maynard Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, in which he asserts that:

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men [sic], who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen [sic] in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.

(Keynes 1936: 383)

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