



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**9/11 and American Democracy Promotion in the Arab Gulf States:  
Strategic Frameworks and Diplomatic Initiatives**

**Dr. Muhammad Azam**

Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sargodha,  
Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan

**\*Corresponding Author:** writetoazam@hotmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

Focusing on American efforts to implement the Freedom Agenda in the Arab Gulf States, the objective of this study is to explore how democracy promoting states and societies strategize in particular cases and how do such nations harness diplomatic resources to push the democratic reforms. Following the events of 9/11, American attention increasingly shifted towards the Middle East and its efforts to promote democratic governance. The investigation is grounded in both primary and secondary source materials. The Bush Administration employed four distinct institutional frameworks for promoting the democratic reforms in the Gulf states: (a) governmental departments; (b) American private organisations; (c) international organisations; and (d) regional organisations originating from the Arab Gulf states. In order for the Gulf states to have constitutional monarchy in the near future, it is crucial to strengthen the constitutions.

**KEYWORDS** Democracy, Gulf States, Human Rights, Middle East, US Democracy Promotion

**Introduction**

The Bush Administration gave democracy promotion more thought in its foreign policy with the Arab countries after the events of 9/11. US approach towards the Arab world underwent a sea change with the introduction of the Freedom Agenda. For them, it represented a renunciation of the sixty years of the American approach, which was based on establishing stability and providing backing to autocratic, tyrannical regimes throughout the Middle East, especially those in the Gulf. The American administration, through its focus on democratic development, diminished the significance of arguments rooted in Arab or Middle Eastern exceptionalism—narratives that had long dominated U.S. policy in the region. According to President Bush, there are similarities between the Middle Eastern people and the Americans in terms of high civilisation, personal responsibility as a religion, and a profound thirst for freedom. He further argued that the belief that the Arab world is not fit for freedom is neither realistic nor acceptable, dismissing it as a form of pessimism and condescension that should not be tolerated.

The Bush Administration utilized four distinct institutional models to promote democracy in the Gulf states: (a) governmental organizations; (b) American NGOs operating within public-private partnerships; (c) international organizations, including the U.S.-Kuwait Alliance and the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative, in which the US is a participant; and (d) regional organizations originating from the Gulf states. Both bilateral and multilateral institutions were incorporated into this international framework, contributing to the diversification of activities undertaken in pursuit of democratic development in the region.

The increased funding dedicated to promoting democracy reflected the Bush Administration's commitment to this objective. For example, the Human Rights and

Democracy Fund (HRDF) received \$48 million in the 2005 fiscal year, a significant rise from the \$13 million allocated in 2001. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an NGO, was granted 22 percent of the total funding (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, p. 12). During the Clinton Administration, just over \$5 million was directed towards political assistance in the Middle East, though other bilateral funding amounts remained modest (Youngs, 2005, pp. 49–50). In 2002, the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs and Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor pledged \$29 million for democracy promotion in the Middle East (Fact Sheet on U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative, 2002). The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) allocated \$143 million for the 2003–2004 period, with \$35 million specifically designated for democratic assistance (Youngs, 2005, p. 70).

The withholding of military supplies, particularly those used for internal repression, along with the restriction of valuable commodities that confer prestige upon Gulf regimes, demonstrated the United States' concern regarding domestic policies in the region. This approach may have compelled Gulf regimes to implement certain reforms (Wehrey, 2014, p. 4). Echoing the stance of President Bush, President Barack Obama similarly declared that the US government would no more support the existing status quo in its future engagements (Abdullah, 2011).

Diverging approaches to a shifting Middle East have strained U.S. relations with the governments of the Arab Gulf states. While Washington advocated for liberal reforms, it simultaneously sought to reassure its Gulf partners about the steadfastness of their security alliances. However, the domestic policies pursued by the Gulf states have increasingly distanced them from these reformist demands. Following the Arab Spring's dramatic emergence in 2011, the U.S. security establishment recognized that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states might reduce their political instability risks through gradual domestic reforms, thereby safeguarding key U.S. interests such as energy security and counterterrorism (Wehrey, 2014, pp. 1, 3). Since the autumn of 2013, the primary aim of U.S. policy has been to reassure Gulf states regarding the stability of American support by emphasizing that the United States shares their concerns about regional threats and is committed to providing security in response. In practical terms, the U.S. has expedited its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program and continued with its scheduled armament transfers to the Gulf (Wehrey, 2014, pp. 2–3).

Prominent American officials continued to publicly advocate for democratic reform in the region. However, the reality appeared markedly different, particularly given the widespread perception that the Obama administration had scaled back its efforts to push the democratic agenda in the Arab world. Several of these initiatives, including the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), faced significant resistance from the Gulf monarchies following the onset of the Arab uprisings (Wehrey, 2014, p. 3). In December 2013, during the Manama Dialogue on Gulf security, Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel emphasized the importance of stability and political reform as interconnected objectives, underscoring the link between stronger state power and top-down reform.

Focusing on American efforts to implement the Freedom Agenda in the Arab Gulf States, this study explores how democracy promoting states and societies strategize in particular cases and how do such nations harness diplomatic resources to push the democratic reforms. Which new governmental and international institutions were established, modified, or utilized to advance democratic reforms across the Middle East? This research study explores the goals and objectives of American democracy promotion policy, particularly during the Bush Administration (2000–2008), along with the methods, strategies, and tools employed to achieve these aims. It examines the American

government departments, initiatives, and programs that played a role in shaping and implementing this policy, as well as those launched specifically to further democratic reforms.

### **Literature Review**

Observers in the Middle East have engaged in extensive discussions on various aspects of the ongoing transformations in the Gulf region, including the role of the international community in shaping these changes. Some have also addressed the American-led initiatives aimed at promoting democracy in the region. Levitsky and Way (2005), in their paper "International Linkage and Democratisation," explore how global actors contribute to the democratisation process. Carothers, Elshtain, Ibrahim, and Bangura (2007) note that significant progress has been achieved in promoting democracy over the past 25 years. However, Puddington (2007) observes that recent democratic setbacks pose a serious challenge to efforts to advance freedom, particularly in authoritarian nations. Abu Khalil (1992) highlights the presence of powerful forces within the Arab world that actively resist the democratic movement.

O'Loughlin et al. (1998) have explored the interrelations between the time and space aspects of democratic progress. Breuning and Ishiyama (2007) analyze the impacts of various external strategies, such as financial aid, used to promote democratization within a nation or region. Neep (2004) has investigated the United States' proactive policy of promoting freedom and its commitment to democratization. Craner (2006) has examined the feasibility of the Freedom Agenda in the Arab World. Gause (2005) does not agree with the American government's assertion that establishing democracy in the Arab countries would mitigate terrorism. The author (2009) also examines the linkage between democratic reforms and internal security in Saudi Arabia. Sharp (2006) provides an overview of U.S. policies towards Islamist organizations in the Middle East. Boduszyński (2019) scrutinizes American democratic initiatives in Arab states in relation to its national interests.

The American government's initiative to push the Freedom Agenda in the Arab world is perceived by some as a failure. However, advocates of the program argue that it has achieved several notable successes. They highlight, for example, the policy's role in increasing awareness in favor of democracy and against authoritarian regimes. Prominent critics of U.S. policies in the Arab world include Chomsky and Ibrahim. Chomsky (1991a; 1991b) has critically examined the shortcomings of the 2004 democratization efforts by the US government and their impact on regional peace and conflict. In a later work, Chomsky (2003) contends that the Iraq War undermined efforts at democratization in the region. Ibrahim (2006) discusses significant events and turning points in the regional democracy movement, as well as the Bush administration's responses to these developments. DeBartolo (2006) posits that America's credibility as a democracy will hinge on its approach to Hamas. Hamid (2007) suggests that American efforts to advance democracy have been hindered by concerns about Islamist groups.

### **Material and Methods**

The investigation is grounded in both primary and secondary source materials. Primary sources comprise interviews and official records. These documents were analyzed to assess the strategies and resources employed by the U.S. government in advancing democratic norms and values in the Gulf countries, particularly following the events of September 11. Secondary sources encompass handouts, books, articles, and websites, including content from newspapers, journals, and magazines. By utilizing

these primary and secondary sources, the endeavors of American official institutions to promote democratic values and norms in the Gulf region have been evaluated from various perspectives.

## Results and Discussion

The following sections examine goals, objectives, techniques, tactics, and tools. An analysis of awareness campaigns and diplomatic efforts is provided, along with a discussion of relevant departments, programs, and projects.

*Objectives, Approaches, Plans, Techniques, and Resources.* The American government's declared goal of promoting the Freedom Agenda in the Arab countries following the events of September 11 was to mitigate the security challenges. Consequently, this objective was intricately linked to American security interests. One of the principal aims of promoting democracy was to advance gender equality and enhance human rights across the six Gulf nations. Another goal was to improve governance throughout the Gulf, although the specific term "reducing governmental cronyism" was used in reference to Kuwait, while terms such as rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and governmental oversight were applied to the other five nations. The State Department also aimed to assist the Gulf countries in establishing and sustaining democratic institutions. Kuwait was distinct in this context, as it had already commenced democratic reforms. Hence the priority areas in Kuwait were accountability of democratic institutions and the stability of democracy. Kuwait remained an outlier compared to the other Gulf countries.

The Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports illustrate that the U.S. government's policy to promote democracy in the GCC countries encompassed several key initiatives. These reports indicate that the State Department also focuses on enhancing religious freedom and combating human trafficking in the region. Furthermore, the Improving Freedom and Democracy Reports offer detailed insights into the American strategy, underscoring the nation's principal priorities for advancing the Freedom Agenda in the region.

Overt propaganda efforts were undertaken to enhance political awareness among the general public, as evidenced in the history of democratization across various regions. The United States funded numerous radio stations, such as Radio Martí in Cuba and Radio Free Europe, Asia, Iraq, and Iran. Additionally, financial support was extended to political opposition groups and exiled dissidents (Youngs, 2005, pp. 37-38). Despite the establishment of radio stations targeting the Gulf region, the U.S. strategy for promoting democracy in these countries remained largely covert, relying on gradual, nonviolent methods. A critical element of this approach was its focus on local engagement. Powell emphasized that any strategy for the Middle East that disregards the region's political, economic, and educational underdevelopment would be fundamentally flawed (Colin Powell cited in Wittes and Yerkes 2006). Initiating efforts at the grassroots level was considered a prudent approach, given regional arguments that external attempts to impose democracy would be ineffective due to prevailing skepticism. It was posited that democracy would only succeed if it originated internally, as this would ensure genuine ownership by the people. Although the regimes made this argument, the U.S. government did not dismiss it.

The fact that the Americans were busy in fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan simultaneously further justified the adoption of gradual and nonviolent strategies. Initiating new wars would have been both impractical and unreasonable. Additionally,

the Gulf regimes had been supporting the Americans, unlike the adversarial governments of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. There were no significant disruptions in the oil supply from the Gulf to the West, and the Gulf regimes did not pose any trouble to the United States. Conversely, the U.S. found the governments in Afghanistan and Iraq to be sources of considerable frustration. Consequently, President Bush and his administration deemed the use of force to overthrow these regimes necessary to safeguard American security and liberate the populations from oppressive rule. Although coercive measures were employed to install elected regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, the outcomes were not particularly promising. It is, however, unlikely that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were primarily motivated by a desire to advance democracy.

The current governments in the Gulf were influenced by commercial incentives, conditionalities, and diplomatic initiatives. They were encouraged to undertake reforms in both the political and economic domains to foster a more open, participatory, and representative system. To achieve democratic objectives, the U.S. administration pursued bilateral cooperation with Gulf governments. Coordinated diplomacy was identified as a primary strategy for advancing democracy in the region (Craner, 2006). Additionally, the concept of public-private partnerships was employed to enhance the effectiveness of projects and initiatives. The U.S. administration also urged American non-governmental organizations to collaborate with regional reformers, providing support to those advocating for human rights and pressing for reforms within the region.

According to Sharansky and Dermer (2004), the US president was resolute in advocating for early electoral activities and process in the Arab world. While this stance may have been applicable to certain regions within the Middle East, it did not extend to the Gulf. The Administration employed “persuasion” and “shaming” as methods of soft power, strategies that had previously been used to promote and consolidate democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Additionally, the Administration made extensive use of civic education and democracy awareness campaigns. A variety of instruments were deployed, including trainings and funding. The conditions for political reform were linked to the proposal for the Middle East Free Trade Zone and global aid for governance, which was increased by fifty percent in 2002 (Youngs, 2005, p. 70). Democratizers have utilized several strategies: they offer incentives, develop and implement programs, organize events focused on transnational human rights, apply diplomatic pressure, impose political conditions on both bilateral and global levels, and resort to punitive sanctions when political conditionalities and diplomatic pressure prove insufficient (Levitsky & Way, 2005). Intervention or military pressure is considered only as a last resort. The Bush Administration utilized the first five strategies in the Gulf but did not employ the latter two.

***Departments, Programs, and Initiatives Involved.*** The administration received advice from the White House, prompting numerous governmental agencies, departments, and organizations to engage in the formulation and execution of policies aimed at promoting democracy in the Middle East, including within the Arab Gulf states. Primarily, the State Department develops and implements these policies. Congress established the policy framework, provided legislative support, and authorized funding, while also overseeing the implementation process. Specifically, the responsibility for executing the strategy fell to the State Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (Fact Sheet on U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative, 2002, p. 8). The Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) and the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) received funding and policy approval from Congress (Sharp, 2006, p.

8). Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour (DRL) of the State Department is funded by the HRDF. The Economic Support Fund is the funding source for the MEPI. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) receives financial support from the DRL as well (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, p. 10).

The necessary legal instruments were also granted by Congress. The 9/11 Commission International Implementation Act of 2007 was a detailed piece of legislation comprising 2405 sections. The Advance Democracy Act of 2007 required the state department to promote democracy in the undemocratic states. The act helps and encourages the Saudi Arabian government to implement changes in a number of areas. The United States government offers financial assistance to other governments whose governments are reforming their own educational systems under this statute. It was anticipated that the decree will make tackling the fundamental causes of Saudi Arabia's religious extremism much easier. The Advance Democracy Act of 2007 is an example of how Congress felt that advancing democracy was important for both national security and global security. Congressmen pointed out that the lack of political platforms for the Saudi people endangers the safety of the West. They felt that in order to fight terrorism more successfully, the Saudi Arabian government needed to implement and carry out a number of political and economic reforms, such as giving its people more political rights, advancing women's rights, and instituting extensive educational reform. They pledged that American policies would assist the Saudi Arabian government in its efforts to implement social, political, and economic reforms across the nation.

Therefore, the Congress pushed Saudi Arabia's leadership to implement political, social, and economic changes. The Bush Administration introduced a minimum of fourteen programs and initiatives between 2000 and 2008. These initiatives made a little but significant contribution towards advancing democratic awareness. Here, it appears necessary to give a quick overview of the programs that are being implemented in order to carry out the strategy of promoting democracy. Furthermore, it is vital to explain their goals, tactics, and areas of concentration.

Launched in 2002 by the Bush Administration, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is centred on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and operates under the U.S. State Department. Among its stated goals is to promote the ideas of constitutional government and gender relations, improve and extend schooling. The MEPI directly supports local governments, private companies, non-governmental organisations, and educational institutions. One of the MEPI's offices is located in Abu Dhabi. Through its role in the creation of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiative, which was established in 2004 under G8 leadership, the Bush Administration is recognised for having contributed to the spread of the demand for democratic freedoms in the Arab states. This initiative has contributed to raising awareness of the need for political reform within the Arab world (Sharp, 2006, p. 10). BMENA seeks to foster economic and political liberalization through development and reform efforts, with a focus on Arab countries and nations with predominantly Muslim populations. The Fund for the Future and the Foundation for the Future receive support through BMENA.

The American government had a part in the creation of the Forum for the Future, a part of the BMENA initiative. Additionally, the Bush Administration supported efforts leading to the establishment of the Fund for the Future. The Foundation for the Future was introduced by Condoleezza in 2005 during the BMENA Forum held in Bahrain. Secretary Rice also inaugurated the conference, which gathered activists from the region's civil society. Dubai hosted the Fifth Forum in 2008. The BMENA supports civil

society projects with the goal of advancing democratic reforms in the region that also comprises the Arab states. Its main topics are media independence, constitutional government, and the right to choose representatives. Although the foundation was established under the Forum for the Future, the two are unrelated to one another. On the same day, the Foundation for the Future and the Fund for the Future were established. Fund for the Future is an independent organisation that helps small and medium-sized companies in the area. The countries of the West and the Middle East work together to create the fund. Its objectives are to uphold democracy and assist native reformers.

The MEPI Alumni network is open to thousands of residents of the area who had the chance to participate in MEPI activities. By planning regional gatherings, discussion programs, and meetings, it gives members the chance to network. Its objective is to boost the proportion of women in corporate and leadership positions. Middle East and North Africa Businesswomen's Network (MENA BWN) was product of a joint venture by the Middle East Partnership Initiative and Vital Voices Global Partnership. The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) has been in place since 1940. It seeks to increase understanding between other nations and the United States. Foreign leaders, both established and up-and-coming, are welcomed to the United States to visit educational institutions, experience American culture, and gain knowledge of the political system. Leaders of non-governmental organisations, journalists, lawmakers, businesspeople, scholars, and public servants are among the guests. Motivated by the principle that free trade will facilitate democratic norms and values, the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) was created two years after the 9/11/2001 events. The initiative is based on the principle that economic liberalization and expansion, driven by free trade, will foster the development of a prosperous middle class. This expanding middle class is then expected to demand security for their property, legal justice, and, ultimately, competitive politics (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, p. 6).

The U.S.-Saudi Strategic Dialogue (SUSRIS) was established in 2005 through the collaborative efforts of Crown Prince Abdullah and President Bush. The dialogue convenes biannually to address issues of mutual significance and aims to enhance understanding between the two countries, as well as to foster economic and other forms of cooperation. This initiative is supported by several teams that implement the plans across various domains. The American-Kuwaiti Alliance (AKA) was inaugurated in the US capital in 2003, with top leaders in attendance, alongside Sabah, the then Prime Minister of Kuwait. The event attracted over 350 distinguished participants from both nations, including academics, business leaders, and government representatives. Membership in the alliance comprises prominent companies from both Kuwait and the United States, with the goal of strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre provides scholarships to researchers (Fromherz, 2024, p. xi).

**Awareness Campaigns and Diplomatic Efforts.** Advocating political freedoms and democratic reforms is an integral part of democratic promotion. Various forms of democratization awareness campaigns have been employed to achieve this goal. The U.S. government, in its efforts to increase awareness, organized public awareness campaigns and facilitated visits, tours, and exchanges that allowed for direct interactions between Americans and Gulf Arabs. These efforts included group discussions, debates, dialogues, seminars, video conferences, and conferences, all of which addressed numerous aspects of the Freedoms Agenda and political reforms in the region. Such activities occurred not only in the Gulf but also in other locations. Participants from democratic nations beyond the United States also engaged in these events to foster interpersonal connections.

Through these initiatives, many people from the region participated in discussions on political freedoms. In this regard, a broad spectrum of these efforts played a pivotal role in encouraging the Gulf populace to advocate for and support democratic governance. The US government collaborated with several organisations and groups to further its democratisation objective, which allowed it to reach a larger audience from the Gulf. The activities were distributed across different locations and over various intervals.

MEPI primarily focuses on encouraging interaction between young people from the Arab states and the free world. The MEPI programs were structured around interacting with the Arab people. Through several of its initiatives, people from the Arab states had the opportunity to engage with Americans. In alignment with its reform objectives, MEPI occasionally hosted Arabs in the United States to facilitate such interactions (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, p. 21). Initiatives such as the Forum for the Future and the MEPI Alumni Network were instrumental in advancing awareness through discussion and debate. During a seminar organised in Duabi in 2008, discussions addressed the imperative of involving youth in civil society organizations. One of the issues highlighted was corruption, which is indicative of ineffective governance (Allen, 2008). At a MEPI dialogue, sixteen groups of discussants engaged in deliberations on expanding civic engagement across various domains. Panels covered topics such as free media, education, electoral processes, and government institutions, as well as women's empowerment and legal restrictions on non-governmental organizations. Discussions also included strategies for fostering public-private partnerships and empowering entrepreneurs (MEPI Alumni Network Holds First Regional Summit, 2008).

The initiatives of the American-Kuwaiti Alliance facilitated the dissemination of political freedoms in the Arab nation. Ramadan Ghabga, a Kuwaiti cultural event, attended by distinguished representatives from both the American and Kuwaiti governments, was sponsored by the alliance in 2008. The event was well-represented by academics and business professionals from various sectors of Kuwaiti society. The following month, the Alliance organized a celebration for selected businesspersons, which saw participation from students of Kuwait University and members of the US Embassy in Kuwait. Such interactions contributed to the promotion of cultural values. Additionally, Radio Sawa was established as a dedicated radio station for the Middle East, featuring a distinct broadcast for the Gulf region (Youngs, 2005, p. 70). Radio Sawa is also accessible via live streaming at [www.radiosawa.com](http://www.radiosawa.com).

Several forums addressed issues such as political freedoms and tolerance for diverse religions and ethnic groups. In 2004, the American-Kuwaiti Alliance supported the annual convention of a student association in Kuwait. The Alliance sponsored a trip of a Kuwaiti delegation which visited several American cities in 2007. The American Corners situated in six Omani educational institutions have emerged as focal points for initiatives aimed at enhancing national awareness of democratic principles. On September 15, 2008, International Democracy Day, the US government, in collaboration with others, launched a competition. The online challenge asked young people who could make videos to finish the sentence "Democracy is...." The videos had to be three minutes long. Videos from over 900 users in 95 countries were submitted. The competition also included young filmmakers from the Gulf nations. The public selected six winners online, representing six distinct parts of the world. Hamidi, an Emirates national, was among the successful contestants. The winners received trips to Los Angeles, Washington, and New York City in the United States. In addition to touring film, television, and other media companies, the victors got the chance to engage with



democratic organisations. As a result, the video competition turned out to be a multifaceted exercise concerning democratic consciousness.

US officials in the UAE held a number of events during the 2008 US election campaign, including debates, seminars, video conferences, and other outreach initiatives. This campaign aimed to highlight the value of electoral democracy. Throughout the campaign, a wide range of audiences were made available. Students from universities and high schools participated in debates on democratic subjects. Along with the students, video conferences were arranged for journalists. The chance to engage with American panellists and speakers was provided to the participants. The lectures' main subjects included civic engagement and women's roles in politics. In 2007, a Kuwaiti official took part in an IVLP. The IVLP's main goal was to advance interfaith cooperation. During their frequent visits to *diwanis*, or nightly political salons, the US ambassador to Kuwait and his colleagues discussed ways to advance democracy in the nation.

The impetus on the diplomatic front was steadily built up. The discussions addressed nearly every aspect of democratization, emphasizing its significance. The dialogues often involved philosophical reflections on relevant issues. The president and his cabinet members countered substantial criticisms and objections concerning the Freedom Agenda. They consistently urged Middle Eastern governments to undertake reforms within their countries and called on Western governments to collaborate in fostering democratic governance in the region. Their speeches conveyed their commitment to constitutional rule.

At various international forums, US government representatives articulated the benefits and rationale behind the Freedom Agenda for the Arab states, emphasizing its importance for international security and global peace. Paying attention to personal freedoms of populations living under autocratic rulers was deemed essential for American security, as well as for peace and stability both within the Arab world and beyond. On the diplomatic front, the Administration sought to improve awareness of political rights and highlighted the advantages of laissez faire economies and personal freedoms. Alongside exerting diplomatic pressure on authoritarian regimes, the strong emphasis on the necessity of democratic reform aimed to encourage the Arab public to advocate for political rights (Carothers, 2007, p. 4).

Bush and his colleagues not only defended and elucidated the program, addressing criticisms and counterarguments regarding democracy, but also urged the existing regimes to address human rights abuses, corruption, and poor governance. Increasingly, the regimes in Saudi Arabia faced scrutiny, with the Bush Administration frequently designating it as a "Country of Particular Concern." American embassies and diplomats consistently urged Gulf governments to implement reforms in political, economic, educational, and other domains. For example, American staff in the UAE advocated for making the Federal National Council more representative. The embassy called for the establishment of universal suffrage and greater authority for the council. The ambassadors maintained their efforts to convince the monarchies for constitutional development (Craner, 2006).

Various initiatives have also been undertaken in the recent past to promote democratic transformation in the region. For instance, a conference on the democratization of Saudi Arabia was held in May 2024 in Maryland, USA (Farooq, 2024). The organization and execution of public affairs initiatives, events, and activities related to this effort are managed by a committee based in the US capital, with the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) serving as its secretariat (Koruzhde & Cox,

2023, p. 82). The Americans have recognized Saudi Arabia's significant progress in implementing Vision 2030 and achieving notable social and economic reforms. To enhance cooperation, both nations have expressed their intention to establish bilateral working groups, including one focused on education and cultural collaboration (*Joint Statement of the U.S.-Saudi Arabia Strategic Dialogue*, 2020).

To deflect attention from domestic unrest, ruling elites in Gulf States have consistently framed internal and regional challenges in a particular manner (Ulrichsen, 2024, p. 141). On the other hand, security and economic issues often shift American focus away from democratic promotion in the region. For example, in June 2017, when a diplomatic crisis erupted between Qatar and several Arab states, American attention was diverted primarily towards mediating the dispute. The primary aim of this mediation was to enhance security cooperation and increase arms sales to the Gulf States (Fraihat, 2020, p. 79). The largest American air base in the Arab world is located in Qatar, Al Udaid (Tausch, 2021, p. 383).

## Conclusion

Following the events of September 11, Americans increasingly focused on the Middle East's efforts to advance democracy. A significant shift in the American approach was marked by the introduction of the Freedom Agenda for the Arab nations. The American government launched awareness campaigns, organized travel and exchange programs, and facilitated direct interactions between Americans and Gulf Arabs. These efforts included lectures, seminars, and conferences. Many residents of the Gulf region were provided opportunities to engage in discussions on democracy, human rights, women's empowerment, and reforms. The public's awareness of the need for democratic government was raised in part by these initiatives.

The increase in funding allocated for the goal of promoting democracy is indicative of the American government's commitment to the cause. For instance, the Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) received 48 million dollars in 2005 as opposed to just 13 million in 2001. Addressing the underlying causes of terrorism was the American government's stated purpose of promoting democracy in the region. As a result, the objective was closely related to American security concerns. Among the main goals of promoting democracy were bettering the status of women and human rights in each of the six GCC governments. In a similar vein, strengthening governance throughout the Gulf region was another goal. Terms like rule of law, accountability, responsiveness, openness, and government scrutiny were employed. Another goal of the State Department was to help the Gulf countries establish and maintain democratic institutions. Kuwait was unique in this regard since it had already begun the process of implementing democratic reforms. In Kuwait's instance, the emphasis was on the accountability of democratic institutions and the stability of democracy.

The government received direction from the White House. Subsequently, a multitude of governmental entities began to participate in the development and execution of policies aimed at advancing democracy in the Gulf and neighbouring Arab nations. The State Department was the major player in the creation and application of policies. Congress set policy, provided legislative frameworks, and authorised funding. Additionally, the program on the front end of policy execution was monitored by Congress. The State Department was in charge of carrying out the policy. In order to raise awareness, the US government organised exchanges, travels, and tours as well as increased face-to-face interactions between Arabs and Americans. There were also talks, seminars, and conferences. Numerous topics pertaining to Gulf democratisation and

reforms were discussed at these gatherings. These kinds of things happened in the Gulf and elsewhere. Many Gulf residents had the chance to hear and discuss topics related to constitutional rule, political freedoms and gender relations. Different kinds of initiatives contributed to the general populace in the Gulf region's call for democratic administration.

### **Recommendations**

It is necessary to maintain the momentum that was generated in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. In order to support democratic reforms in the Gulf area, the worldwide democratic community has to fulfil its responsibility. One could advocate for the gradual liberalisation of the political, social, and economic structures of the Gulf monarchies. In order for the Gulf states to have constitutional monarchy in the near future, it is crucial to strengthen the constitutions.

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