

**Testimony before U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
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Thank you very much for the invitation to comment here today on the concept of the Greater Middle East Twenty First Century Trust proposed by Senator Lugar.<sup>1</sup> I am happy to do this.

As someone who has been studying the development problems of the region for 35 years, it seems to me that this proposal has at least *seven* quite positive elements.

*First*, the proposal's overall perspective seems entirely correct. We simply *cannot* successfully combat the violence emanating from the region through military force alone. We must, therefore, formulate a long-term strategy to help regional political actors manage better the profound social, economic, and political challenges which they face.

*Second*, the proposal recognizes the complexity of the problems facing the region. These societies are now enmeshed in a *huge* crisis, with social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions.<sup>2</sup> No single country—least of all the United States—can control these tumultuous changes. The proposal appears to recognize this complexity.

*Third*, there is a very healthy stress on the absolute necessity for international cooperation, for the involvement of the G-8 countries, and for serious ownership of the process of change by countries of the region.

*Fourth*, the proposal seeks to engage with broad elements of the societies in the region—it does not pretend that a better approach can come from existing governments alone.

*Fifth*, it explicitly recognizes that change cannot be imposed from outside. This is a crucial, fundamental point, which we Americans, with our impatience and inattention to history, regrettably forget far too often.

*Sixth*, the proposal forthrightly and correctly recognizes how the on-going violence and lack of a political settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians poisons any attempt of the US or the G-8 to help manage the broader problems facing the region. The concept of expanding the “Quartet” to include Egypt and Saudi Arabia seems to me a particularly interesting idea.

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<sup>1</sup> Senator Richard Lugar, “A New Partnership for the Greater Middle East: Combatting Terrorism, Building Peace”, speech at Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., March 29, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> For a sketch of some key dimensions of the crisis, see Appendix 1.

*Seventh*, the three specifics of the proposal for the Trust seem sound. The stress on a partnership between the G-8 and regional donors, the focus on broad, mutually negotiated goals rather than on specific projects, and the plan's openness to conforming to the norms of Islamic finance—all three of these features are consistent with the proposal's broader aim of a truly cooperative approach.

These are all highly positive features. Let me now sound a few cautionary notes. Senator Lugar's proposal cites the *Arab Human Development Reports* some nine times, by my count. Three weeks ago I was invited to join a "Readers' Group" at UNDP headquarters in New York to discuss a draft of the 2004 report, which will be devoted exclusively to the questions of democracy and freedom. These reports are, of course, written by the friends of political liberty and democracy in the region. The authors share our values, and they hope for fundamental political change in their homelands. I regret to tell you, however, that they are also absolutely furious at the United States government—for our policies toward the Palestinian issue and for our invasion and occupation of Iraq. If such people—who share our values—are this viscerally angry, it takes little imagination to realize what a daunting task *any* proposal for American leadership for change in the region will face.

The sad reality today is that the United States is almost universally perceived as a neo-colonial power throughout the Arab world and in many other circles in the Greater Middle East. Our reputation has sunk to an all-time low throughout the region.<sup>3</sup> So long as such perceptions persist, any proposal for international cooperation to effect positive changes in governance in the region will face the gravest difficulties.

This is one reason why I think that the proposal's concept of linking the Trust with moving vigorously toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is such an excellent idea. However, in my judgment, it is equally true that sensible proposals such as the Trust will be hobbled so long as the U.S. is so widely perceived as an illegitimate, occupying power in Iraq. Our behavior in Iraq over the past months seriously compromises the laudable goals of the Trust proposal.<sup>4</sup> With more than 130,000 troops in Iraq, few people in the region believe us when we say that we know that we cannot impose change on the region. An early exit of American military force from Iraq is a necessary condition for the success of helpful proposals such as that of Senator Lugar.

We Americans say that we want to promote democracy in the region. We may actually mean this, but given the history of the region, it is hardly surprising that we are widely disbelieved. The proposal correctly and forthrightly states that governments in the

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<sup>3</sup> My friend and co-author, John Waterbury, President of the American University of Beirut, wrote on May 27: "In the 44 years I have been dealing with this part of the world I have never seen relations between the US and the Arab world remotely as bad. The most worrisome shift is that the old distinction of opposing US policies is now slipping into dislike for Americans as individuals and as a people." (Personal communication)

<sup>4</sup> The lead author of the *Arab Human Development Reports* writes: "To those Arabs who dream at freedom at the hands of the Americans, I have this to say: Look at what is happening the the Iraqis". Nader Fergany, "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib" *Al Ahram Weekly On Line*, No. 691, 20-26 May, 2004, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/691/op65.htm>

region continue to block the transition to democracy there. Many long-time students of the region, including this one, think that our own government's actions too often create additional obstacles to democratic change. We continue to support authoritarian states throughout the region, particularly if they help us hunt for *al-Qaeda* militants. Part of the problem remains the clash between our perceived strategic goals, and the fact that democracy is inherently unruly and unpredictable.

Let me elaborate this last point very briefly.<sup>5</sup> A necessary condition for a democratic transition is for both government and opposition politicians to “play by the new rules” and to control their more radical elements. In many countries of the Greater Middle East, the best organized opposition forces today and for the foreseeable future are those of “political Islam”. The Islamist movement is huge and diffuse, with many national and local variations. Increasingly, what were formerly called “secular nationalists” in opposition have either joined Islamist movements or are co-operating with them politically.

The logic of transition to democracy implies that moderates within the Islamist (and nationalist) camp must be willing to play by democratic rules, convince reform elements within the state of their sincerity, and maintain control over their radical allies. Likewise, reformers in government must be willing to allow the full participation of Islamist forces in the political process.

*If we are really serious about promoting democracy in the region—and we certainly should be—then we simply **must** learn to distinguish among the different types of political Islam. **There will be no democracy, and no stability, without their participation in the politics of the region.*** If we are serious, we must recognize that future democracies of the Greater Middle East will often have lukewarm, sometimes testy, and occasionally frigid relations with the United States.

A half-century ago some Americans believed that we could play a central role in shaping the modes of governance in China. We discovered that this was impossible. A generation ago, many Americans hoped that we could bring democracy to the countries of Indo-China. We found, much to our cost, that we were incapable of doing this. A decade ago some Americans thought that we could transform the Russian economy, all at once. Again, history intruded, and the results of our efforts were far more complicated than we had initially imagined.

In China, in Southeast Asia, in Russia, *and* in the Greater Middle East, the United States can, at best, facilitate indigenous change. To believe that we can do anything else is, in my view, dangerous, a-historical hubris. Since the Trust proposal appears to avoid this delusion, it could make a real contribution to a safer, more prosperous world. It is vital that we not pretend that we can do more than is possible, and it is essential that our actions conform to our stated intentions and to our most deeply held values.

Thank you.

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<sup>5</sup> For greater detail, see Appendix 2.