



Middle East Studies

at the Marine Corps University

MES Insights • Volume 5, Issue 4

July 2014

MES to Focus on Democracy and Democratization in the MENA

In a speech before the UN General Assembly in 2004, then U.S. President George W. Bush proclaimed that, “for too long, many nations, including my own, tolerated, even excused, oppression in the Middle East in the name of stability... We must help the reformers of the Middle East as they work for freedom, and strive to build a community of peaceful, democratic nations.” The speech came almost three years after the terror attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing military action toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and a year and a half after the U.S. invasion of Iraq to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussain. Although the U.S. began to emphasize democracy promotion in the Middle East in the 1990s, the U.S. drastically increased its democracy aid to the region following the attacks of 9/11; by Fiscal Year-2009 the annual U.S. democracy aid was more than the total amount spent in the decade from 1991-2001.

Democracy... (CONTINUED ON PG 2)

Afghanistan's Presidential Elections

by Amin Tarzi

On 5 April 2014 Afghanistan managed to hold relatively fair and reasonably violence free presidential and provincial council elections. Eight candidates competed for the first democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan’s turbulent history of succession. In fact, the last peaceful and pre-arranged transition of power occurred more than a century ago. Afghans and the international community alike lauded Afghanistan’s success in the elections and the lack of direct interference in the results by the country’s outgoing president, Hamid Karzai.

Afghanistan... (CONTINUED ON PG 3)

Like his predecessor, democracy promotion has been a pillar of President Barak Obama Administration's national security and foreign policy strategies. The 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy recognizes the expansion of human rights and democracy as "fundamental" to U.S. national security. Furthermore, the President has made democracy promotion a key talking point in many of his foreign policy addresses, including speeches at Cairo University in 2009 and West Point in 2010. In the 2009 Cairo speech, President Obama stated that he was there to "seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world" and to voice his "commitment to governments that reflect the will of the people." President Obama went on in his Cairo speech to describe "the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose" as not just American ideas but universal human rights that the U.S. will support everywhere.

Since President Obama's Cairo speech, the region has undergone considerable political change, with long standing authoritarian regimes and young transitioning democracies put under increasing pressure from above and below to reform. The wave of uprisings which began in December of 2010 in Tunisia has had varied results throughout the region and resulted in mixed responses from local, regional, and international actors alike, especially concerning democratic reforms. These events have also ushered a multilayered debate on the very nature and aim of democracy among the public, political players and even terrorist entities. In the case of Egypt, the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak through public uprisings, the subsequent election of a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government, and later the ouster of the democratically elected government of President Muhammad Mursi by the military, as well as the regional and international response, have had a profound effect on regional perceptions of democracy and the West's objectives alike.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the popular uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and the current crisis in Syria and Iraq have and are reshaping the political and social landscape of the region. The unexpected territorial gains in Iraq and Syria in the summer of 2014 by the group calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and its stated opposition to "the idol of democracy" have further complicated the meaning and future of democracy in the region. As this environment evolves, the United States Marine Corps, as the Nation's force in readiness and its premier crisis response force, must stay current on the emerging realities in the Middle East to ensure they stand ready to respond to the Nation's needs. Because of ongoing deployments of U.S. forces in Middle East and the continued U.S. military presence in the Gulf region for the foreseeable future, the Middle East Studies at Marine Corps University (MES), as part of its mission to assess current events, regional trends and U.S. policy decisions and strategies in the Middle East, will focus its efforts in academic year (AY) 2014-15 on broadening the Marine Corps' academic understanding of the events taking place throughout the region as well as of the impact these changes will have on U.S. policy and Marine Corps planning for future operations. To support this, MES will host a series of lectures concentrating on the concept of democracy and democratization in the MENA for its AY 2014-15 Lecture Series. The lecture series will bring in regional subject matter experts to discuss such issues as: United States expectations from the expansion of democratic norms and institutions in the MENA; differences in perceptions and policies about democracy and democracy promotion among U.S. policymakers and regional actors; and how the concept of democracy is evolving in the region, especially since 9/11, the U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, events associated with the Arab uprisings, and the current upsurge of terrorist activities in the region.

The AY 2014-15 lecture series will run from October 2014 through May 2015 with one lecture per month. The first lecture will focus on U.S. perspectives and policies on democratization and democracy promotion to be followed by lectures examining the cases of Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Tunisia. Additionally, MES will host panel discussions on Iran and Turkey as part of the Lecture Series and the Marine Corps War College's "Diplomacy and Statecraft" instructional block, in which perspectives on democracy will be a topic of discussion for the panel of experts.

This served as maybe the only positive news in the midst of the chaos overtaking the region stretching from North Africa to South Asia and the failures of budding democratic experiments in most of the cases following the Arab revolts. It was a relief for the states contributing forces to NATO's International Security Assistance Force whose mandate in Afghanistan is coming to an end. For Washington in particular, the smooth transfer of power in Afghanistan is necessary not only for an orderly withdrawal of the bulk of U.S. forces in the country but also for determining the future shape, size, and mandate of U.S. presence in Afghanistan. The latter is currently on hold mainly due to President Karzai's refusal to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement with the United States.

MES Notes (cont.)

19 May 2014

Amin Tarzi presented a talk entitled "The Internal Debate over Iran's Nuclear Policy" at the Alliance Center for Iranian Studies, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel.

21 May 2014

Amin Tarzi presented a talk entitled "Iran's Nuclear Politics" at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel.

21 July 2014

Amin Tarzi was a panelist at the Middle East Policy Council's 77th Capitol Hill Conference entitled "Obama's Foreign Policy and the Future of the Middle East" at the U.S. Capitol, Washington, DC.

The celebration of Afghans for exercising their right to choose their next leader was cut short when none of the candidates secured at least fifty percent plus one vote, which is required for victory by the Afghan Constitution. This forced the presidential runoff election between frontrunner Abdullah Abdullah (45.00%) and Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai (31.56%). In the runoff, Ahmadzai came out on top with 56.44 percent of the votes to Abdullah's 43.56 percent with the former claiming much higher voter turnout by his supporters and the latter crying foul on an "industrial scale." With Abdullah's boycotting the vote counting process and threatening to form a parallel government, the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stepped in to find an expedient solution to the Afghanistan's electoral impasse to avoid the possibility of the country's reverting back into civil war. Kerry's efforts paid off, at least temporarily. Each candidate has agreed to an audit of all of the votes and, should he win, to forming a "national unity" government immediately following becoming Afghanistan's next president.

As the saying goes, the devil is in the details.

Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission has begun the auditing process in Kabul in the presence of representatives from both candidates, the United Nations, and other interested countries. However, the parties have yet to agree on the process for classifying votes invalid. The second open-ended and potentially perilous issue involves the nature of the "national unity" government should the result of the audit satisfy both candidates.

Afghanistan's tumultuous political history since 1978 should serve as a warning and dictates that preplanning be given a higher priority than hope. In the mid-1980s, various Afghan resistance groups based in Pakistan and Iran—some of whose members make up the current political teams hoping to lead the country in the future—discussed, signed, and sealed (even in Mecca) agreements on forming "national unity" governments to pave the way for a smooth transition should the Soviet-backed government in Kabul fall. Without going into all the details, the history of the entire region, including the upsurge of terrorist entities with international reach, mostly likely would have been very different had any form of "unity" existed among the Afghan resistance groups.

Then, as now, well-intentioned mediators of all stripes have tried tirelessly to forge power-sharing agreements between the Afghan groups. However, most of these agreements have been very vague in details and designed as a temporary measure to plug a hole to avert or manage a crisis. Furthermore, those agreements containing execution details have lacked clear, actionable measures for handling the violation of the agreement terms.

Afghanistan... (CONTINUED ON PG 4)

Last round, the result was a fragmented country in war with itself that served as host to the most unsavory terrorist organizations of the time. This is somewhat similar to what is currently going on in Iraq.

Afghans, similar to the many Arabs who poured in the streets, believe in the message and promise of democracy. Afghans ignored the threats made by the Taliban against participating in the elections, and some lost their lives and others their fingers for voting. These are a testament to their belief in democracy. Bringing democracy to Afghanistan is a delicate and detailed process. The first order of responsibility lies squarely on the shoulders of Afghan leaders—the two current presidential candidates in particular. However, the democracies that have bled with the Afghans have also a responsibility—if only out of their own national security concerns—to work for a well-grounded solution that leads to a reasonably swift, transparent, and enforceable outcome for Afghanistan's presidential election impasse. Otherwise, erecting facades may avert an immediate crisis but could result in a much more dangerous outcome in the long-term.

Summer Research Intern at MES: Introducing Francis Wilson

Francis Wilson is a summer Research Intern at Middle East Studies at the Marine Corps University. His placement at MES is supported through a partnership between the Marine Corps University Foundation and the University of Washington's Middle East Center. A sophomore in fall 2014, Mr. Wilson is pursuing a double major in International Studies and Applied Math, with a minor in Arabic at the University of Washington in fall 2014. During his internship at MES, Mr. Wilson is working on a research paper that explores the usage of foreigners in the security apparatuses of states such as Bahrain and Libya, and the potential consequences that can result from the outsourcing of security.

To contact Mr. Wilson, please email him at: franciswilson95@gmail.com.
