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**DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MAGHREB: THE EU AND
THE US-COMPETITION OR COOPERATION?**

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Over the past several years, United States policy in the Euro-Mediterranean region, particularly in the Maghreb, has provoked many reactions. Some researchers and politicians in Europe and the Maghreb have raised alarms about US policy as well as its imposing presence in the Mediterranean, seeing it as a threat to the interests of the members of the European Union, and argued that, in addition to protecting and strengthening Israel, the United States was intent on taking hold of the hydrocarbon resources in the region.¹ In fact, its heightened presence in the Maghreb has caused fears that the United States is seeking to weaken the influence of Europe, especially France's, as this region has traditionally been perceived as its "chasse gardée,"² (private preserve). Thus, the belief is that the US has been seeking to undermine the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and impose unrivaled unilateralism and hegemony. Others, on the contrary, have expressed the idea that US policy in the Mediterranean, more particularly in the Maghreb, is or should in fact be complementary to that of Europe and, as a result, a path to transatlantic cooperation could open which would benefit the region and help in the resolution of many common problems.³ Yet others go as far as claiming that "the Middle East and North Africa are in the process of being divided into spheres of influence between the European Union and the United States. Essentially the division of the Middle East and North Africa are between Franco-German and Anglo-American interests."⁴

Whatever these claims from opposite sides, one can make the argument at the onset that while there is definitely a strategic division of labor and a great degree of convergence toward the Mediterranean, the Greater Maghreb in particular, an inevitable competition between the United States and Europe also exists; President Sarkozy's initiative regarding the Union for the Mediterranean might partly be an

*The author wishes to acknowledge Louisa Dris Aït-Hamadouche and Isabelle Werenfels for their comments on the draft of this article.

¹ In 1996, already, a keen analyst of the Mediterranean wrote an article in which he highlighted the hegemony of the United States in the region; see, Mustapha Benchenane, "La Méditerranée, espace de stabilité ou protectorat américain?" Available at: http://www.fmes-france.net/article.php?id_article=119

² See, in particular, Cécile Jolly, "Ambitions américaines en Méditerranée," *Arabies*, September 1999. The author argues that the Maghreb is becoming an "American Maghreb" and that the Americans are doing everything in their power to rid the Maghreb of Europeans, who have traditionally been partners of this region. The Press in the Maghreb region supports this thesis and examples are abundant. See, Hamida Ben Salah, "Le Maghreb suscite l'intérêt grandissant des Etats-Unis," *Le Quotidien d'Oran* (Algeria) 3 February 2004; Sarah Raouf, "Maghreb: Les Regards identiques de Paris et Washington," *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, 8 December 2003; Moussa Horat-Allah, "USA-Maghreb: Les Dessous des cartes," *L'Opinion* (Morocco), 1st part 16 January 2003 & 2nd part 11 February 2003.

³ Simon Serfaty, "Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East," *JFQ* (Spring 2000). Available at: http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/jfq_pubs/1224.pdf ; Kenneth B. Moss, "Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (March 2000), available at: <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2000/issue1/moss.pdf>.

⁴ Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, "The Mediterranean Union: Dividing the Middle East and North Africa," <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=6879>

attempt to reassert France's influence in the Maghreb, a region where the United States has established a visible presence, not only in the security sector, but also in the economic realm, especially in hydrocarbons.

Before reviewing the evolution of the Maghreb scene it would be useful to address the question of the respective roles that the United States and the European Union are playing in the Euro-Mediterranean zone.

The United States, the Euro-Mediterranean, and the Regional Division of Labor

Despite the distance that separates it from the region, the United States has been a major power in the Mediterranean since the early foundation of the republic. The US has played an important role ever since, although it has seldom developed a clear and coherent policy towards this strategic region.⁵ Even if the US has ample commercial exchanges with the Maghreb countries, it remains a rather insignificant economic actor in the region. Indeed, US economic relations in the region, with the exception of Egypt, were negligible compared to those that the EU has with its southern neighbors. During the Cold War and until 9/11, the western part of the Mediterranean, primarily Morocco and Tunisia, remained a mere springboard to the Middle East and the Gulf region. For the European countries, especially France, Spain, and Italy, the Southwestern Mediterranean, in essence the Greater Maghreb, is vital for their political, economic, security, and cultural interests. The focus on the Eastern Mediterranean partly explains why the United States failed, or perhaps did not feel the need, to elaborate a well thought-out, coherent policy toward the Barcelona Process or even the Mediterranean dialogue. Yet, this has helped it devise a more flexible approach to political-military partnerships with governments that are more or less close to the United States. Furthermore, this strategy seems to rest on a great deal of pragmatism that allows the US to spread its influence, to disrupt the established (European) order, all without getting encumbered with the constraints that an alliance would have entailed.

In sum, despite the importance of its strategic interests in the Western Mediterranean, the United States never needed to impose heavy and direct presence, except for the VIth Fleet and a few military bases. The paradox is only superficial for the division of labor has permitted US interests to be indirectly preserved through Europe's omnipotence, particularly in the Maghreb. The only exception to this rule is of course the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over which Europe's influence has been negligible, despite the considerable role that Europe played during the Oslo process and the funds that it has contributed. The US and Israel not only have restrained Europe's role in the Middle East; they consider that all European initiatives toward a Mediterranean dialogue would be a disguised method for Europeans to meddle in the 'peace process,' a domain reserved for the US. Given that Israel is party to the conflict and accepts no other intermediary but the US, the division of labor functions here yet again. There is no doubt, though, that the US neither can nor wants to do away with Europe's cooperation. In fact, one can argue that Nicolas Sarkozy's Union for the Mediterranean project is a way of not only providing a political superstructure to NATO, a military organization dominated by the United States, but also to integrate the

⁵ See, Ian O. Lesser, "L'Europe et les USA unis pour la Méditerranée...", interview with Hassan Moali, *El Watan* (Algeria), 28 May 2008; also, Jean-François Daguzan (dir.) *Les Etats-Unis et la Méditerranée*. Publisud, Paris, 2000.

Middle East and North Africa under the same structure where Arabs and Israelis would coexist. This supranational organization would obviously neutralize the Arab-Israeli conflict, without however resolving it. In other words, Europe would serve as a subcontractor for the United States in the region. No doubt, Europe has an advantage over the United States owing to its geography, history, the weight of Maghrebi communities on its soil, its economy, and the familiarity of its members with Maghrebi political regimes. Furthermore, Europeans enjoy a relatively better image in the Maghreb than the US does, not only because of the different approaches between these two powers, but also because US policies, at times at odds with Europe's and a source of transatlantic tensions, have resulted in widespread anti-Americanism in the region.⁶ Indeed, the occupation of Iraq, the treatment by the US military of Muslim prisoners in Guantánamo and in Abu Ghraib, support for Israel in its destructive war against Lebanon in summer 2006, the outsourcing of torture of Muslim prisoners, and the support for authoritarian Arab regimes, are factors which have discredited US claims to be spreading democracy around the world.⁷ Furthermore, US policymakers' tendency to prefer military solutions and their skepticism regarding the capacity of European institutions to resolve conflicts has occasionally resulted in transatlantic tensions, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the war in Iraq being cases in point.

In the division of labor, there is no doubt that the EU as an entity and its members have considerable economic interests in the Maghreb. In 2005, the EU represented 64% of imports and over 70% of exports in the region.⁸ The EU has also established Association Agreements with Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, which should result in the establishment of bilateral free trade areas. Libya only has observer status in the EMP and thus does not have Association Agreements. In fact, one might argue that the considerable economic relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean are the main factor in attenuating Europeans' zeal for democracy promotion. Any analysis of the bilateral economic relations between Southern European countries and Maghreb states demonstrates the weight of economics in overall EU-Maghreb ties. This explains why the EU has provided substantial aid to authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes in the region. The benevolence shown to Kaddafi in recent years is only surpassed by the multi-million dollar deals secured by Europeans in Libya, which has also received military assistance to protect European shores from clandestine migration. Spain, France, and Italy have all increased their aid to Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, without making such aid conditional upon democratic reforms.

American Unilateralism and Neo-conservatism: A Trans-Atlantic Divide?

Since the Cold War, the US has shown little enthusiasm for any initiatives in the Mediterranean region taken outside the framework of East-West relations. Any regional

⁶ Yahia H. Zoubir and Louisa Aït-Hamadouche, "Anti-Americanism in North Africa: Can State Relations Overcome Popular Resentment?" *Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, March 2006, pp. 39-58.

⁷ Yahia H. Zoubir, "The United States, Islamism, and Democracy: The Predominance of Security?" in, Yahia H. Zoubir and Haizam Amirah-Fernández, *North Africa: Politics, Region, and the Limits of Transformation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 266. See also, Ehsan Ahrari, "The Post-9/11 American Conundrum: How to Win the War of Ideas in the World of Islam," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (spring 2008): 82-98 and Anthony H. Cordesman, "Winning the 'War on Terrorism': A Fundamentally Different strategy," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (fall 2006): 101-108.

⁸ Gonzalo Escribano and Alejandro V. Lorca, "Economic Reform in the Maghreb: From Stabilization to Modernization," in Zoubir and Amirah-Fernández, *North Africa*, op. cit., p. 145.

dialogue on security, such as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean or the 5 + 5, was perceived as a masked attempt to limit the power of the United States and its freedom of action. Thus, Mediterranean issues in general remained secondary for quite some time. It was not until the Algerian crisis that the Clinton administration demonstrated an increased interest in the region. As a result of an efficient Franco-American dialogue, US policymakers realized that the Algerian crisis would have severe repercussions on the stability of the neighboring countries, Morocco and Tunisia, both allies of the United States.⁹ The US was still toying, until 1996, with the idea that the coming to power of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), seen as a 'moderate' party, might not be so negative or be detrimental to Western interests, particularly those of the United States. Southern Europeans objected to such interpretation, perceived as quite naïve.

The differing approaches between Americans and Europeans toward the Mediterranean in general can partly be explained by the influence of neoconservative thinking in Washington. The neoconservative American intellectual, Robert Kagan, currently advising Republican presidential candidate John McCain on foreign policy and an advocate of the creation of a 'League of Democracies,'¹⁰ declared that "It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world. On the all-important question of power — the efficacy of power, the morality of power, the desirability of power — American and European perspectives are diverging."¹¹ There is a US current that sees a political-cultural conflict between the United States and Europe. According to the neoconservatives, the gap which has developed between the US and Europe cannot be filled because the cultural, political, and ideological differences are simply too great. Using such arguments is quite shrewd on the part of the neoconservatives, for by raising issues of cultural and ideological differences, they attempt to hide the fact that the true nature of transatlantic rifts is one over national interests.¹² Claiming victory over communism, US decision-makers assert the position of sole power capable of protecting the world against possible enemies. These enemies can be found primarily in the Muslim World (pre-2003 Iraq, Syria, and Iran), and now in the Maghreb-Sahel region, proliferating nations, such as China, or "rogue states" such as North Korea. Europe's repudiation of the easy stereotypes emanating from the White House concerning the notion of "Axis of Evil," as described by George W. Bush, and its opposition to the war in Iraq, seen as a distraction from the war on terrorism after 9/11 reinforced the image that Americans have of Europe. Thus, Europeans are seen pejoratively as "effeminate," whereas Americans see themselves as real "machos." With respect to international relations and questions of security, neoconservative-inspired Americans see themselves as pragmatic realists who apply "hard power" in a Hobbesian world, while characterizing Europeans as naïve idealists content with applying "soft power" through multilateral institutions and international treaties, which offer peaceful solutions to international conflict.¹³ Leaders of a superpower, US decision-makers contend that

⁹ Yahia H. Zoubir, "Algeria and US Interests: Containing Radical Islamism and Promoting Democracy," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 64-81.

¹⁰ Robert Kagan, "The case for a league of democracies," *Financial Times* May 13 2008, available at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f62a02ce-20eb-11dd-a0e6-000077b07658.html>

¹¹ See, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3460246.html>

¹² Leon T. Hadar, "Mending the US-European Rift over the Middle East," *Policy Analysis*, No. 485, 20 August 2003, pp. 1-20.

¹³ Kagan, op. cit.

European “soft power” would not exist without American “hard power.” This way of thinking is certainly not new, but the 9/11 events provided neoconservatives with the opportunity to implement their vision of the world and to start an active interventionist unilateralism. The alliance of the neoconservatives with the Christian Right worried not only Arabs but also Europeans, who refuted their ideology based on prophetic truths; Bush’s use of the term “crusade” fit well into their ideology. Neoconservatives, most of them close to hawks in Israel,¹⁴ used 9/11 as a golden opportunity to target regimes that had no involvement whatsoever with those terrorist attacks. The neoconservatives who dominate the Bush administration argued that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the intifada demonstrate the existence of an ideological and strategic threat arising from the explosive blending of radical Arab nationalism (Iraq, Syria, and Palestine) and Muslim extremism.¹⁵ They were thus convinced, unlike Europeans, that the elimination of Saddam Hussein’s regime would create the conditions to stabilize the Middle East and favor democratization throughout the region. This, they believed, would help America, whose power they saw as declining, reassert itself as a moral and military force in a basically corrupt world. Whatever neoconservatives’ overall ideological trend, the perception was that these individuals who acceded to the heights of governmental influence were intent on advancing the interests of Israel against the Arab and Muslim world and establish a Judeo-Christian condominium. This is probably the primary reason why many in the Middle East and North Africa saw the call for democracy as a neo-imperialist ploy.

Undoubtedly, events in Iraq have had repercussions not just in the Middle East; they have also had a serious impact on developments in the Maghreb. These developments, as we shall see, have not only discredited the United States but they are making it increasingly difficult for Europeans to lay out strategies that could eliminate the very problems that are causing instability in the Maghreb and, simultaneously creating “fortress Europe.”

The Euro Mediterranean Partnership and the Middle East Partnership Initiative: Rivalry or Complementarity?

Following the Cold War, the US and the European Union had common objectives concerning issues in the Middle East and North Africa. Some initiatives could have had a positive effect on the region. In fact, Europe and the US agreed to consider that all economic development would have to be supplemented with considerable political change; thus, as early as the 1990s, Europeans linked economic and political development. At that time, they became aware of the problems of the countries south of the Mediterranean (demographics, economy, environment, politics, absence of democracy, terrorism, and authoritarianism). All of these problems were seen as threats and risks which could destabilize southern European societies. Did terrorism in Algeria not have direct and deadly repercussions in France? It was probably not by chance that France was one of the most fervent promoters of the Process of Barcelona in 1995.

The Barcelona Declaration stressed the importance of political change by intertwining political and economic dimensions, “convinced that the general objective of turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing

¹⁴ Jacob Heilbrunn. *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008)

¹⁵ Hadar, op. cit., p. 3.

peace, stability and prosperity requires a strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights, sustainable and balanced economic and social development, measures to combat poverty and promotion of greater understanding between cultures, which are all essential aspects of partnership.”¹⁶ Thus, the MEDA program established as the EU’s main tool for implementing the EMP had the task of promoting Human Rights, democratization and economic development.

Having failed to obtain a place in the EMP, the US settled for taking the driver’s seat in the NATO Mediterranean dialogue/forum. Before 9/11, US interests in the Western Mediterranean were primarily economic, the Eizenstat Initiative being a clear indicator of the Economic Alliance between the USA and North Africa. Started in 1999, later named the American Economic Program for North Africa, the declared objective was to intensify trade and investments between the United States and the three Maghreb countries. The objective, according to its initiators was, on the one hand, to promote international trade among us, motivate more US companies to invest in the Maghreb, create well-paid jobs and, on the other hand, to breakdown the countries’ internal barriers that have slowed down the flow of normal trade between these countries.¹⁷ However, even if the last part of the statement refers implicitly to the mediocre Algerian-Moroccan relations, the initiative says nothing about the major political problem responsible for the diplomatic stalemate in the region, i.e., the Western Sahara conflict. While the Eizenstat initiative encourages the three Maghreb countries to revive the moribund Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), which also includes Libya and Mauritania, and the reopening of the Algerian-Moroccan border closed since August 1994, the United States and Europe have been instrumental in the persistence of this stalemate rather than part of the solution that would also allow the construction of Maghreb integration.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, from an economic perspective, the United States wishes to look at the Maghreb as an integrated whole, which will expand eastward and include Libya. Furthermore, the Maghreb, as an integrated region, would, in US eyes, eventually include America’s strong ally, Egypt, which already holds an observer status in the AMU. The inclusion of Egypt would undoubtedly serve as a link in the chain of states normalizing relations with Israel. The US North Africa Economic Program is now an integral part of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) that the United States launched in late 2002. However, neither the Eizenstat initiative nor the MEPI, which operate on negligible financial budgets despite its ambitious goals, could compete with the EMP which allocated billions of Euros. This factor, however, does not indicate that the United States has little interest in the region; quite the contrary. However, it supports the view that there is a division of labor whereby the United States guarantees “hard power” while Europeans are more focused on “soft power.” In fact, as George Joffé observed astutely, the normative objective in the Barcelona Declaration for the creation of a “region of shared peace, prosperity, and stability in the Mediterranean basin,” concealed the real purpose of the policy, which was to apply the principles of soft security to enhancing European security along its southern periphery...objectives to be achieved primarily by stimulating economic development in the Southern

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/bd.htm

¹⁷ Stuart E. Eizenstat, Undersecretary for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs. Third Annual Les Aspin

Memorial Lecture, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC, 8 March 1999.

¹⁸ Hakim Darbouche and Yahia H. Zoubir, “Conflicting International Policies and the Western Sahara Stalemate,” *The International Spectator*, Vol. 43, No. 1, March 2008, pp. 91-105.

Mediterranean countries in order to minimize labor migration into Europe...¹⁹ And, it is precisely in the area of business and trade that competition is open. US policymakers argue openly that this is the nature of free markets and should thus not be interpreted as US willingness to supplant Europe in the region.²⁰ Therefore, the United States did not refrain from competing with Europeans through bilateral trade relations but also through the creation of its own instruments to establish its influence in that area. A close analysis shows that the objectives of MEPI differ very little from those of the EMP, which, incidentally, has two offices, one in Tunis and the other in Bahrain, highlighting US strategic, global supremacy. However, outside a few grant recipients, MEPI is practically unheard of to the public at large. Undoubtedly, the objective of US policy, dominated by neoconservative ideology, sought nothing less than a new international order ruled by the United States, which can overturn international law²¹ to further its interests or those of its allies. Although Europeans may agree with some of the neoconservatives concepts, especially as they pertain to Islam and the Islamic world, they are still reluctant to engage in a “clash of civilizations,” opting instead for the preservation of diplomacy and international law as the foundation of relations between nations.

Thus, in May 2003, the United States initiated the Middle East Free Trade Area (META), linked to the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which, according to its framers, “helps democracy to spread, education to thrive, economies to grow, and women to be empowered.”²² With respect to the Maghreb, the policy of establishing free-trade zones has materialized with Morocco, which now has a free trade agreement with the United States that entered into effect in 2006. While this is an economic accord, it has some political significance since it thwarts the renegotiation of the European Association agreements with the third Mediterranean countries, the objective of such European agreements being the ultimate creation of a free trade zone in the Euro-Mediterranean by 2010, which will not happen. This economic competition provides the southern Mediterranean regimes with the possibility (or perhaps the illusion of) exploiting the contradictions between the United States and the EU. But, it is not in the terrain of economic relations—though Algeria and Libya certainly tried—that the southern Mediterranean regimes have succeeded in playing one side against the other; their main appeal, to the United States, has been the collaborative role they can play in the “Global War on Terror.” But, it is also true that the Maghreb regimes tilted toward the US because they felt neglected by their northern neighbors, accusing the EU of paying greater interest to the eastern part of the continent than to the southern shore of the Mediterranean. The fact that the United States puts 18% of its Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in South America, Japan 27% of its FDI in South Asia, while France and Germany together place a mere 2% of their FDI in their southern flank²³ Confirms this observation.

Undoubtedly, there has been complementarity or rather similarity between the US and the EU in the Maghreb. The US, for instance, has promoted its Middle East Partnership

¹⁹ George Joffé, “European Policy and the Southern Mediterranean,” in Zoubir and Amirah-Fernández, *North Africa*, op. cit. p. 311.

²⁰ Author’s interviews with US officials.

²¹ Nicole Gnesoto, “EU, US: Visions of the World, Visions of the Other,” in Gustav Lindstrom (Editor). *Shift or Rift – Assessing US-EU Relations after Iraq* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2003), p. 26.

²² <http://mepi.state.gov/>

²³ Fayçal Metaoui, “Le projet d’union méditerranéenne en débat hier à Alger—les Français offensifs, les Algériens critiques,” *El Watan*, 4 novembre 2007.

Initiative (MEPI), while the EU has developed a Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern countries, complemented by its European Neighborhood Policy. The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA), for its part, has merely embodied the incongruity in transatlantic preferences. In fact, many view BMENA as the product of European efforts to dilute President Bush's proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative, perceived by Member States like France, under the presidency of Jacques Chirac, as being too overbearingly American which explains why the BMENA initiative's dawning has been rather slow and unable to fill the void in transatlantic synchronization of political reform strategies in the Middle East and North Africa. Recent initiatives, such as the Union for the Mediterranean, seem to confirm the trend that has developed hitherto. Indeed, asked what the position of his government was regarding the UPM project, US Ambassador to Algeria, Robert S. Ford, declared that, "this [project] does not concern us...Many countries are meeting, but, as far as we are concerned, this project does not directly concern us."²⁴

Before looking at how the United States has refocused its foreign and security policy in the Maghreb, it is necessary to provide an overview of developments in the Maghreb.

The Maghreb: *Plus ça change...plus c'est la même chose!*

The outlook for the Maghreb countries in the late 1990s seemed rather promising. The relative victory of the Algerian security forces against Islamist extremists, the potentially successful reforms in Morocco, the progressive return of Libya's to the community of nations and its commitment to international norms of conduct, the changes in Mauritania, and the economic success in Tunisia provided well-founded optimism. Furthermore, new leaderships in Algeria and Morocco in 1999, which, incidentally, coincided with the Libya's decision to handover the two accused in the Lockerbie affair, provided ground for optimism.

In this section, two questions retain the analyst's attention: have the regimes changed in any meaningful ways? Have the European Union and the United States succeeded in fulfilling, even partially, the much-trumpeted objectives of democratization in those countries?

The regimes, despite claims to the contrary remain autocratic. Clearly, because these countries are still governed despotically they will have great trouble maintaining political stability, economic development, social unity, and cultural advance.²⁵ For example, in May-June 2008, Algeria,²⁶ Morocco, and Tunisia²⁷ witnessed riots in many

²⁴ Z. Mehdaoui, "A quelques jours de son départ : L'ambassadeur américain regrette la cuisine algérienne et promet plus d'investissements," *Le quotidien d'Oran* (Algeria) 14 June 2008. Available at: http://www.lequotidien-oran.com/index.php?news=5105138&archive_date=2008-06-14, accessed on 15 June 2008.

²⁵ For a detailed analysis, see, Louisa Dris -Aït-Hamadouche and Yahia H. Zoubir "The Maghreb: Social, Political, and Economic Developments," in Mehdi Parvizi, Editor. *The Greater Middle East in Global Politics: Social Science Perspectives on the Changing Geography of World Politics*, Leiden, Boston, & London: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007, pp. 249-278.

²⁶ In Algeria, these recurrent riots have affected many regions of the country: Berriane, Chlef, Oran, Ksar Boukhari, among others. The Algerian press has reported these riots in detail. The authorities have foolishly blamed "foreign forces" for having instigated these disturbances.

²⁷ The riots in Sidi Ifni, Morocco, and Gafsa, Tunisia, like those in Algeria resulted from unemployment, especially among the youth, the absence of prospects for the future, and the disdainful attitudes of the regimes. For the events, see, Florence Beaugé, "Troubles sociaux meurtriers au Maroc

cities; those riots illustrate the lack of legitimacy of the regimes in place and their resilience to change. And yet, both the United States and Europe view Morocco and Tunisia as encouraging models in the Arab World. No one would dispute some progress as far as relative freedom of the press in Algeria and Morocco is concerned or the remarkable reforms to the family code in Morocco, which gave more rights to women than ever before. However, if one looks at the overall picture, it is rather bleak;²⁸ the regimes are aware that authentic democratization, no matter how gradual, would reduce their power and force them to become more transparent. They have, nonetheless, become adept at organizing regular elections in the hope of gaining a degree of legitimacy; “electoral authoritarianism” has become the norm in the region. The regimes set in place “institutional façades of democracy, including regular multiparty elections for the chief executive, in order to conceal (and reproduce) harsh realities of authoritarian governance.”²⁹ Naturally, these “institutional façades of democracy” are also meant to placate any criticism from the US and the EU, the major democracy promoters. In many cases, this has proved successful; indeed, both Presidents Jacques Chirac, and his successor Nicolas Sarkozy have praised Tunisia’s progress in human rights and pointed to other socioeconomic successes when in fact the situation of human rights in Tunisia is dreadful. Nothing is said about the violations of these rights, let alone, about the probability of Zine el Abidine Ben Ali’s presidency for life, which has also inspired Abdelaziz Bouteflika and his supporters inside the regime, who have “encouraged” Bouteflika to seek a third mandate in a breach of the Algerian Constitution—of course, they plan on revising it to make it possible for him to stay in power, as did Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. Throughout the Maghreb, civil liberties are curtailed; religious freedom is violated, especially in Algeria; the use of torture has continued and the rights of prisoners are transgressed; terrorists in Algeria have been granted amnesty for their crimes; gender equality remains a myth regardless of the reforms that the regimes in Algeria and Morocco have introduced. Corruption has practically been institutionalized in the Maghreb. The oil rent in Algeria and Libya has increased the power of those regimes but also reduced their willingness to bring about meaningful reforms. In Algeria, in particular, the considerable financial assets have not incited the regime to alleviate poverty and create jobs for the youth who prefer to risk their lives crossing illegally the Mediterranean than remain in the country. The regime, instead, uses the oil rent to co-opt so called “opposition parties.” The regimes in Libya and Algeria, in particular, succeeded in defeating extremist Islamism through co-optation of “moderate” Islamist parties. Morocco had actually done that well before in order to prevent the emergence of Islamist extremism. In the case of Algeria, this was done through National Reconciliation, which has offered former terrorists not only amnesty but also the possibility to engage in commercial activities. The state of siege remains in place in Algeria, but, at the same time, the regime continues to stage-manage

et en Tunisie,” *Le Monde*, 10 June 2008. See also, “Maroc: Événements de Sidi Ifni ou l’échec de l’État de Droit,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 15 June 2008. accessed on 15 June at <http://reflexionsetautresidees.blogs.courrierinternational.com/archive/2008/06/14/maroc-violences-des-forces-de-l-ordre-a-sidi-ifni-ou-la-poli.html>

²⁸ For detailed analysis of each Maghreb countries see the chapters of John Entelis (Maghreb in general) Ahmed Aghrout (Algeria), Larbi Sadiki (Tunisia), Greg White (Morocco), Ronald Bruce St John (Libya), and Mohameden Ould-Mey (Mauritania), in Zoubir and Amirah-Fernández, *North Africa*, *op. cit.*

²⁹ See, Andreas Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” in Andreas Schedler, Editor. *Electoral Authoritarianism-The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2006).

religion through various concessions made to the strictest interpretations of Islam which are the cause of the rise of extremism. Regardless of the various measures, the jihadist movement continues to attract young people willing to commit martyrdom, as seen in Morocco and Algeria; young Libyans³⁰ and Tunisians join Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb to allegedly serve the cause of God by committing martyrdom. Despite the destructive jihadist actions, the regimes, which in many ways have been responsible for the emergence of such nihilistic movements, have drawn dividends from the existence of jihadism, since they not only depict this movement as a global phenomenon, but they also posit themselves as the protectors of Europe and the United States against this menace. This is why the Maghreb regimes have not only become part and parcel of the “Global War on Terror” but both the EU and the US seem to have concluded that it is better to maintain relations with these authoritarian regimes, provided they make some cosmetic changes, than allow Islamists to come to power; this has become a conspicuous policy since the democratic electoral victory of Hamas in Palestine in January 2006. Furthermore, this seeming competition between the two outside actors in some areas has offered the Maghrebi regimes the opportunity of playing one power against the other, as they did (or threatened to do) during the Cold War when they played relations with the Soviet bloc against the West.

The United States, Europe, and the Maghreb: Adaptable Partnership

In the aftermath of 9/11, democracy promotion in the Arab world has dominated the transatlantic foreign policy agenda, despite the bitter tensions that often pitted US and European policymakers against each other over issues pertaining to the region from Iraq to the Greater Middle East Initiative. The two actors have made explicit the correlation between democracy promotion and stability, on the one hand, and their strategic interests, on the other. Both equate the ‘enduring security’ of the American and European peoples with the promotion of ‘a world of democratic and well-governed states’.³¹ Furthermore, they both stress their ‘...shared commitment to promoting democracy...’ as ‘...one of the fields where... [they] can do, and should do, even more together.’³² Nevertheless, this joint emblematic pledge has not resulted in a cohesive viable strategy. The EU and the United States tend to pursue their own, often divergent, approaches in confronting the challenges emanating from the “democratic deficit” that has pervaded the region.

US foreign policy as well as its security policy has undergone a transformation following the events of the 9/11 and the war in Iraq in 2003. This policy is no longer centered around regions and structured around alliances but is now determined by key issues adapted to specific problems and finally put into practice with tailor-made coalitions depending on the mission. In other words, the tendency is toward flexible coalitions for varying missions but always under US command. Regional strategy,

³⁰ Yahia H. Zoubir, “Contestation islamiste et lutte antiterroriste en Libye (1990-2007,” *L’Année du Maghreb 2007* (Paris : CNRS, forthcoming). See, also, Mathieu Guidère. *Al-Qaïda à la Conquête du Maghreb-Le terrorisme aux portes de l’Europe* (Monaco : Editions du Rocher, 2007).

³¹ See for instance, ‘The National Security Strategy of the United States of America’, March 2006 (available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf>) and ‘the European Security Strategy’, December 2003 (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>).

³² Jose Manuel Barroso, EU-US Summit Press Conference, Vienna 21 June 2006.

regional partnerships, regional alliances are now obsolete in US strategy and are no longer talked about in Washington. Global issues, such as the proliferation of WMDs, terrorism, energy security, economic and political reforms as well as what one can term “selective demands for democratization” occupy the list of priorities. US policymakers suggest that since these phenomena are global in nature, the fight must be global with appropriate regional applications. George W. Bush announced in the *United States National Security Strategy Report, 2002* “We will continue to encourage our regional partners to take up a coordinated effort that isolates the terrorists. Once the regional campaign localizes the threat to a particular state, we will help ensure the state has the military, law enforcement, political, and financial tools necessary to finish the task. With respect to the Southern Mediterranean this translates into establishing new priorities which must be tackled with or without the help of partners. So whether we speak of the Mediterranean or the Middle East, the US has today identified an ‘arc of crisis,’ or less subtly, ‘the Islamic arc,’ which begins in West Africa and stretches across the Mediterranean, the Gulf, South Asia and Central Asia.³³ It is precisely this perspective that explains current US involvement in the Western Mediterranean, especially in the Maghreb-Sahel region.

The Integration of the Maghreb in US Global Strategy

Although they may deny it publicly, Europeans, especially the French, are apprehensive about US intentions in the Maghreb. As seen above, the free trade agreement between the United States and Morocco did nothing to assuage these suspicions. Why such suspicions? The obvious answer lies in US increased interest in the Maghreb, particularly in the security and political realms. The most notable change is the rapprochement with Algeria which began after Algeria’s referendum on Civil Concord in September 1999 and was consolidated after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Thus, since the end of the nineties, despite its traditional attachment to bilateral relations, US policy has undoubtedly displayed a more regional policy toward the Maghreb, an entity integrated into an economic marketplace in the framework of the development of “trading blocs” or “trade zones.” Originally excluded from this scheme, Libya is reinserting itself into its natural environment, a wider environment already envisaged by the US, stretching from Libya to Morocco, including the Western Sahara. Furthermore, energy-rich Libya has already begun to play an important role in US strategy in the Western Mediterranean and, like Algeria, represents a market where the US and Europe compete with one another.

From a more global perspective, the Middle East remains the principal preoccupation of the US presence in the Mediterranean; however, since 9/11 there has been significant activity in the Southern Mediterranean. Countering, or at least keeping under close watch European initiatives, provides a credible but only a partial explanation. The other explanation results from the post-9/11 attacks, which changed the Maghreb’s status; indeed, the latter is no longer a subsystem of the Middle East, but rather an extension of it. Today, the Middle East stretches from Morocco to Afghanistan and even further. All

³³ See, Ted Galen Carpenter, “The Bush Administration’s Security Strategy: Implications for Transatlantic Relations,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 16, Number 3 (October 2003): 511-524; Jean Dufourcq, “Méditerranée, le bon voisinage stratégique en questions,” in Azzouz Kerdoun et Farouk Nemouchi (Eds..) *Euro-Méditerranée, le processus de Barcelone en question* (Ain M’Lila, Algérie : Dar El Houda, 2004), p. 28.

along this area the problems are practically the same: an increase in Islamic politics (Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan), strategic resources, mainly hydrocarbons (Algeria, Libya and soon, Mauritania, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and the Arabian Persian Gulf), a need to promote 'democratic' states since, according to the *2006 National Security Strategy of the United States* document, "the advance of freedom and human dignity through democracy is the long-term solution to the transnational terrorism of today;" which includes 'moderate,' 'tolerable' Islamist parties, and curtailing clandestine immigration (no region is spared this). Thus, US main objective in the Maghreb is to develop close security, political, and military cooperation, as well as greater economic ties with the region. A review of official statements, press conferences and documents show that the US is not limited to the security relations: it is also trying to put in place closer economic cooperation, which explains why it insists that the regimes undertake structural reforms, promote the private sector, and break down intra-regional barriers which represent obstacles for trade and investment—this of course implies the reopening of the Algerian-Moroccan border, closed since 1994. This has represented a challenge for the European Union, which has counted on the EMP to "integrate" the countries of the Maghreb. Europeans suspect, quite rightly, that the free trade agreements concluded between the Maghreb countries and the United States (Algeria may well sign the same type of agreement as Morocco) represent obstacles for the execution of Euro-Mediterranean accords.

The US is fully cognizant of the importance of oil and natural gas in the region and of having access to current and future reserves; bearing this in mind, the Western Sahara conflict takes on a new dimension, since without its resolution it could impede the execution of US Maghreb policy, for it constitutes an obstacle to Maghreb integration and has created a policy dilemma for the United States. It is for this very reason that US policymakers, including George W. Bush, insist on the necessity for Algeria and Morocco to develop "strong and positive relations."³⁴ On this point, the US faces a predicament: it supports Morocco, its traditional ally in the region, endorsing, like France, Morocco's so called 'autonomy' proposal for the Sahrawis³⁵—in violation of international law—while seeking to develop a close partnership with Algeria, which Condoleezza Rice describes as "the champion of regional and international security,"³⁶ i.e., whose role in the fight against terrorism is crucial. However, the balancing of interests between Algeria and Morocco, with unquestionable bias in favor of Morocco to the detriment of Algeria's interests, has been partly responsible for US failed attempt to set up the new African Command, AFRICOM, in the region. Furthermore, US and EU failure to resolve the conflict has led to a recent arms' race in the region, which has allowed Russia to regain its weighty presence in Algeria and Libya.

Under the pretense of Al-Qaida's presence in the Maghreb-Sahel region, the United States has intensified its activities in this zone. Thus, on 6 February 2007, Bush declared that the United States would create a new military command for Africa, known as Africa Command or AFRICOM. On 1 October 2007, AFRICOM gained the status of a sub-unified command under the European Command; it is scheduled to be fully

³⁴ K. Abdelkamel, "David Welch, l'émissaire américain reçu par Bouteflika-Washington tente un rapprochement entre Alger et Rabat," *Liberté* (Algiers), 27 February 2008.

³⁵ See statement of Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman, Office of the Spokesman, Washington, DC May 1, 2008.

³⁶ Brahim Takheroubt, "Quand Washington dit bravo à Alger," *L'Expression* (Algiers), 21 May 2008, p. 3.

operational as a separate unified command no later than 1 October 2008. AFRICOM is headed by four-star, African-American, General William E. “Kip” Ward. As a specialist on US military activities in Africa observed, the United States is “making [Africa] into another front in its Global War on Terrorism, maintaining and extending access to energy supplies and other strategic raw material, and competing with China and other rising economic powers for control over the continent’s resources.”³⁷ Because it is bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan and preparing for possible war with Iran, the United States would prefer to avoid direct military involvement and would instead use friendly regimes, preferably those rich in natural resources, which can serve as proxies for the US. “The hope that the Pentagon can build up African surrogates who can act on behalf of the United States is precisely why Washington is providing so much security assistance to these regimes and why it would like to provide even more in the future.”³⁸ In order to achieve its objectives, which also include counteracting China’s growing presence, Washington has devised, in addition to the military sales programs, numerous other instruments. One can cite the joint military exercises (Flintlock 2005 and 2007), the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership, TSCTP, the International Military Education and Training Program, IMET, the African Coastal and Border Security Program, ACBSP, the Excess Defense Articles Program, EDA, Section 1206 Fund (both Algeria and Morocco received funds from this program), the Joint Task Force Aztec Silence, JTFAS (which gathers intelligence, using a squadron of U.S. Navy P-3 “Orion;” Algeria granted permission to the Pentagon to use operations from a base in Tamanrasset in the deep south of the country). However, despite all these efforts, the United States has failed to find a country to host AFRICOM mostly because of the local regimes’ fear of a backlash from their populations bitterly opposed to the United States owing to its policies in the Arab world. While waiting to find a hosting place, the United States has opted in the meantime for “a distributed command” that would be “networked” in different countries in various African regions. This has been confirmed by General Ward during his visits to Morocco (and Tunisia) in late May 2008: “US Africa Command is intended to provide African nations and regional organizations with an integrated Defense Department coordination point to help address their security and developmental needs. At present, three different US regional military headquarters maintain relationships with countries in Africa.”³⁹

Undoubtedly, the Maghreb-Sahel region is slowly moving toward US domination, although Russia still plays an important role as an arms’ supplier and the US does not have military bases).⁴⁰ However, this domination is not without serious consequences, for, as some analysts have noted, whenever there is US military presence, jihadists

³⁷ Daniel Volman, “AFRICOM: What Is It and What Will It Do?” *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 34, No. 114, (December 2007), pp. 737-744.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ U.S. Army General William E. “Kip” Ward, Commander of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) visited Rabat, Morocco on May 28-29, 2008. <http://rabat.usembassy.gov/>

⁴⁰ The question of bases is moot: while some American officials state off the record that the US does have an intelligence base in Algeria, Algerians vehemently deny such assertion. However, today, the US does not need permanent bases; all it needs are facilities that it can use when the need arises. But, military cooperation and bonding between US and Maghrebi troops is an ongoing occurrence. This is a totally new phenomenon with respect to Algeria. For cooperation in the desert between Algerian and US soldiers, see, Robert D. Kaplan. *Hog Pilots, Blue Water Grunts—The American Military in the Air, at Sea, and on the Ground* (New York: Random House, 2007). American TV Channel ABC did a special report on the cooperation between Algerian and American special forces.

emerge. For instance, Tunisia, which was spared from jihadist attacks after the bloody one in Jerba in 2002, witnessed Islamist assaults in December 2006 and January 2007. And, it is precisely during that period that salafist groups proclaimed the birth of the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb which regroups fighters from the Maghreb-Sahel. Furthermore, there is now considerable debate as to the real nature of the jihadist threat in the Maghreb-Sahel zone; while no one disputes the fact that this sector boasts all kinds of trafficking (drugs, light weapons, cigarettes, food products...), terrorism is only a small part which blended in with such phenomena. For some critics, US presence in the region is not only a destabilizing factor, but they also argue that the United States has “fabricated” and greatly exaggerated the terrorist threat in order to maintain its presence—which will be institutionalized through AFRICOM—and achieve its goals of controlling the hydrocarbon resources and warding off China’s advance in mineral-rich Africa. According to this view, the United States connived with the Algerian intelligence services to fabricate the al-Qaida threat in the Sahara.⁴¹ While these assertions are hard to gauge, what is certain is that there is great cooperation in the realm of security between the United States and the authoritarian regimes in the region, making it, according to US officials “the new front in the global fight against terrorism,” which provides the rationale for devising the various programs and instruments mentioned above. Undoubtedly, the United States has established its predominance in the area of hard security; but, as seen earlier, these have also been accompanied by soft security approaches that compete with, or perhaps complement, what the EU has set in place.

The EU and Security in the Maghreb

Merely ten days after 9/11, the EU’s heads of states and governments (European Council) initiated an action plan to fight terrorism. On 3 October, the European Commission proposed to the member states to freeze the funds of 27 organizations or individuals suspected of terrorist activities. These two decisions represent a small example of the numerous antiterrorist initiatives that accelerated ever since, such as the strengthening of Europol or the creation of Eurojust. Additionally, the EU reinforced its cooperation with the Southern Mediterranean countries, especially in the area of justice and internal affairs. However, unlike the United States, the EU has sought to put less emphasis on military and security aspects, trying to find in the third aspect of the Barcelona Process (the social, cultural, and human dimension, which “stresses the essential nature of the development of human resources, both as regards the education and training of young people in particular and in the area of culture”), an already available framework to launch new cultural initiatives. Rejecting the notion of “clash of civilizations, or at least its inevitability, as well as the US more militaristic approach, Europeans observed that too much alienation, despair, and injustice in the southern

⁴¹ Jeremy Keenan, “Waging War on Terror: The Implication of America’s ‘New Imperialism’ for Saharan Peoples,” *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3-4 (fall-winter 2005): 610-638; Jeremy Keenan, “Security and Insecurity in North Africa,” *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 33, No. 108 (June 2006), 269-296; see also, “L’expert marocain Mohamed Drif à *El Khabar* ‘Washington utilise Al-Qaïda comme un épouvantail pour implanter Africom au Maghreb’” *El Khabar* (Algiers), 24 May 2008 and François Gèze et Salima Mellah, “Al-Qaïda au Maghreb, ou la très étrange histoire du GSPC algérien,” *Algeria-Watch*, 22 September 2007. http://www.algeria-watch.org/fr/aw/gspc_etrange_histoire_partie_2.htm

shore are responsible for the rise of radical Islamism. Thus, in addition to the strengthening of international cooperation in the security sector, the objective was to boost dialogue between cultures and eventually erect a security community in the Mediterranean. The EU launched other initiatives, such as the European Security Strategy (2003) or the European Neighborhood Policy (2004), which offered a “privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development)...and goes beyond existing relationships to offer a deeper political relationship and economic integration.” However, it was apparent that the EU gave more consideration to the states in the Southern Mediterranean, which it needed in the “war on terror” and other issues (drug trafficking, terrorism, illegal migration, organized crime, and other such scourges) than to support forthright civil societies and commitment to democracy and human rights, which it claims are a major part of its policy. It became rather apparent that a substantial percentage of the funds to the Southern Mediterranean countries were aimed at improving the effectiveness of the police and security forces than to the reform of the latter. Clearly, despite the good intentions of European decision-makers, the promotion of a democratic neighborhood has taken the backseat due to security concerns which rank first. The rehabilitation of the Libyan regime by both the United States and EU members illustrates this reality.

Conclusion⁴²

One of the objectives of the Barcelona Process was to “socialize” the Southern Mediterranean member nations into democratic norms and practices, as well as good governance. However, an analysis of the EU’s democracy promotion in the Maghreb shows very clearly that, instead of pursuing resolutely such promotion, the EU has strengthened its relationship with the states in the south, not just energy-rich Algeria and Libya but also with Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia, which have yet to show genuine willingness to democratize their systems. In Algeria, the state of emergency has practically been institutionalized. While Libya has vowed to change its international actions, the regime has maintained harsh repression domestically. Tunisian society continues to suffocate under one of the worst dictatorships despite the good marks it receives from European heads of states and governments and the United States. Morocco, too, receives high grades from both the US and the EU; yet, the repression and the violations of human rights in Western Sahara, a territory it occupies illegally, have not elicited much public criticism from these two powers, champions of democracy. Sahrawis are not the only victims of the regime’s repression; Moroccans, journalists and other critics, know the limits of the freedoms they allegedly enjoy. Yet, Morocco has received considerable funds from EU members despite the fact that the regime is at best a “slightly liberalized authoritarian one, not a democracy.”⁴³ The

⁴² This section draws from the conclusion in Hakim Darbouche and Yahia H. Zoubir, “The Algerian Crisis in European and US Foreign Policies: ‘Venus and Mars’ or ‘the Gods’ Helplessness,” Paper presented at the 41st Middle East Studies Association Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada, November 2007.

⁴³ Richard Youngs, “Is European Democracy Promotion on the Wane?” *CEPS Working Document*, No. 292 (May 2008): 3.

transition in Mauritania from military dictatorship to civilian rule since 2006 is a welcome development, but it is too early to forecast a democratic future. Both the United States and the EU have identified correctly the main reasons that generated the rise of extremism in the region: bad governance, authoritarian rule, marginalization, high unemployment, lack of democratic channels, absence of civil liberties, limited or no freedom of expression or of the press, and corruption. Both the EU and the US sought to put pressure on their authoritarian allies through the various programs mentioned earlier in the article. The Maghreb regimes paid lip service to the appeal for change and initiated some reforms, but made certain that such reform measures in no way undermined the power and control of the incumbent rulers. Furthermore, they soon realized that the importance of their role in the “war on terror” curtailed EU and US determination to push for real change and that both would, as a democracy expert put it with regard to the Bush Administration, “welcome modest, even cosmetic, reforms with exaggerated praise.”⁴⁴ In reality, one can only concur that “nowhere in the Arab world in the last five years has there been a redistribution of power away from the king or the president and toward the legislatures, nor an increase in the influence of the opposition.”⁴⁵ The regimes succeeded in defusing US and EU pressure for democratization by raising the specter of Islamists taking over power, arguing that further reforms would result in the victory of Islamist parties. Unlike the United States, Southern Europeans, in particular, were much more suspicious of political Islam, primarily because of the potential threat it represented for domestic peace and regional stability, as well as the domino effect that the crisis might have throughout the region. France, Spain, and Italy have sizeable economic, political, security, cultural, and military interests in the Maghreb. So, when faced with the option of backing an authoritarian regime or promoting a democratic process that may bring to power Islamist forces, both actors support the first alternative, while nudging the incumbent authoritarian regime to initiate what in reality is superficial change, resulting in what is referred to today as ‘smarter authoritarianism.’ It should be pointed out, however, that the United States has been keener on talking to “moderate” Islamists than Europeans have; this was particularly apparent during the Algerian crisis in the 1990s and is still obvious today. While this has not alleviated anti-Americanism, it has nonetheless resulted in accusations from various moderate Islamist groups that Europe is even more anti-Islam than the US is. At least, moderate Islamists have benefited, albeit indirectly, from MEPI programs in democracy promotion. Islamists, of course, do not take into account the fact that the European Union is made up of different and competing actors and that the inner-European constellations change depending on the issues at stake (fight against terrorism, migration, democracy promotion, energy, non-hydrocarbon economy, and nuclear energy for civilian use, among other issues).

In addition to the general dissimilarities between the conceptual and historical roots of democracy promotion in European and US foreign policies, such as America’s “Liberal Grand Strategy” and Europe’s Kantian and Grotian precepts, perceptions in the Middle East are another variable to contend with. Colonial legacy is for Europe what contemptible involvement in conflict or ‘liberal imperialism’ tends to be for the US. But the question is whether these apparent disparities provide enough ground for claiming

⁴⁴ Marina Ottaway, “Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Restoring Credibility,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief 60* (May 2008). Available at: http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/pb_60_ottaway_final.pdf

⁴⁵ Ibid.

that transatlantic differences in democracy promotion strategies are diametrically opposed? In spite of the conspicuous absence of systematic comparative work on US and European approaches to democracy promotion in the MENA, one can nonetheless posit a few propositions.

Firstly, it appears that the US enlarged its democracy promotion policies to encompass socioeconomic issues. In this vein, Washington's proposals for the introduction of a US-Middle East Free Trade Area by the year 2013 coincide with Europe's preference as its existing regional ventures, such as the Barcelona Process, illustrate.⁴⁶ Additionally, the Iraq experience has perhaps bequeathed prewar caution that "democracy cannot be imposed" with pertinent sense in US policymakers' perspective. Indeed, since its entanglement in Iraq, the US has greatly toned down its criticism of "undemocratic behavior" in the region. From Algeria to Saudi Arabia, the tone has definitely been softened. The red carpet that the Libyan dictator has received in recent years, to the bewilderment of his opponents, or the praise that Tunisian despot Ben Ali has amassed, to the bemusement of human rights organizations, are the best demonstration of the indulgent policies that both the US and the EU are now pursuing, their continued appeal for democratization notwithstanding. In fact, these attitudes have discredited both actors' claims for democracy promotion.

Secondly, examples of EU approximating US-style hard-line can be seen in the recent cases of Syria and Palestine. The harsh attitude the EU adopted toward Syria since 2004, primarily due to WMD concerns and then in relation to events in Lebanon following Rafik Hariri's assassination in 2005, suggests that the EU has gone further than the US. Indeed, it has suspended *sine die* the already finalized Euro-Med association agreement with Syria and is increasingly warming up to actors of civil society and opposition parties in Syria.⁴⁷ With respect to Palestine, the democratic election of Hamas in January 2006 provided a focal test for EU and US democracy promotion efforts in the region. The alignment of the EU with US policies in reaction to this development is again a sign of an overlap between the two actors' approaches. It remains to be seen whether Nicolas Sarkozy's alignment on US positions is a trend or just an attempt to mend US-French relations. What is sure is that it has broken the antiwar in Iraq front led by France and Germany. Also, it is too early to gauge whether the UPM aims at helping France recover its lost influence in the region or will be used as a tool for France to act as a proxy for US strategic interests.

⁴⁶ Richard Youngs, "Europe and the US in the Middle East," (unpublished manuscript, 2006), p. 32.

⁴⁷ France has improved its attitude toward Syria in June 2008 in the hope of co-opting it for the UPM project. Bashar Assad has been invited to the Paris conference to be held on 13 July 2008.