



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



GREEN- Global Re-ordering: Evolution through European Networks

This policy brief reports on emerging findings and policy recommendations from the Framework Programme 7 project GREEN, coordinated by the University of Warwick with partners from 16 countries.

Ongoing project

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring: US Policy and lessons for Europe

The revolutions that began in 2011, sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), raise serious questions about the EU's role in the region and its purported goal of supporting democratisation. With European states having a considerable number economic and security interests in the region, the long standing "conflict of interests" problem between supporting democracy and pursuing more immediate goals has been exacerbated. As such, the EU not only has to negotiate a changing landscape in the region but also negotiate between Members States competing and overlapping interests. This makes dealing with the "conflict of interests" problem in the region all the more important for the EU to take control of.

Such a problematic is not of course unique to the EU, albeit if geography makes crises in the Southern Mediterranean more acutely felt on the shores of Europe, and the institutional structures of the EU pose their own particular impediments. Indeed, the United States of America shares similar strategic concerns and democratic aspirations for the MENA region. However, research carried out as part of the GR:EEEN project has shown that the US has been somewhat more efficient and better prepared for the Middle Eastern revolutions, which has been demonstrated in the American's relatively more consistent and assertive policy response. This is not to say that the US response has not been without its problems, but it does provide insights that can advance the state of the art and provide lessons for the EU as it attempts to navigate the new strategic landscape. Moreover, during this period of fiscal responsibility, many of the new strategies adopted by the US would, if adopted by the EU, offer the ability to be more effectual and cost effective.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

All too often the US and the EU have relied on a gradualist policy paradigm in its democracy support policies. The underlying assumption has been that through emphasising free trade and free markets a process of modernisation could be initiated. Prior to the 2011 revolutions, this strategy was seen as a method of maintaining stability whilst promoting reform. It was in essence a strategy that sought to navigate the “conflict of interests” problem. The assumptions within this policy paradigm are now being challenged by the 2011 revolutions. Far from such a strategy creating the seeds of gradual reform, in practise economic reforms have fermented “crony capitalism”, which in turn has been a source of considerable anger on the streets of Cairo and Tunis. As such, the continuance of such a strategy is problematic. In light of this, the US has expanded the manner in which it seeks to support democracy in the MENA focusing on; 1) a heavier emphasis on linking development with modernisation; 2) digitising its democracy support strategy; and 3) placing a greater emphasis on the concept of partnerships. These are lessons that the EU could adopt to enhance its strategy.

EVIDENCE & ANALYSIS

Democracy and Development

The Obama administration has modified the modality of democracy promotion in the Middle East and North Africa from that of his predecessor. The Freedom Agenda, adopted in 2003 by the G.W. Bush administration, placed a heavy emphasis on free trade and free markets as a method of security governance and as a technology of economic statecraft. Strategically, autocratic regimes would accept this form of intervention in the region as it allowed their wealth to grow, which could be used for the personal benefits of their regimes and also for resisting the onset of legitimisation crises from economically marginalised classes. For the US, it was believed that free trade and free markets would allow these regimes to gradually reform whilst also allowing a middle class to be socially engineered through a process of modernisation. This was seen as both a method of engaging with the MENA region, but also of “draining the swamp” of Islamic terrorism.

The Obama administration began changing this calculation before the 2011 revolutions. For the Obama administration, it was argued that a process of modernisation was needed, but that this would be best induced through utilising US development policy. Herein, the Obama administration attempted to align US development policy with security imperatives through the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR). The QDDR reviewed how development and diplomacy could be coordinate, integrated and complemented by each other to achieve what Secretary of State Hillary Clinton referred to as “smart power”. The thrust of this review has been to create a form of “sustainable development” and “sustainable democracy” within the region, which is capable of combating Islamist groups that all too often provide needed social welfare.

Democracy and Digitisation

The US has been particularly effective at combining the expertise of the private sector with its stated ambition of promoting democracy. With companies such as Howcast, Google, Facebook, Youtube and MTV the US has been able to effectively reach out to civil society movements in the MENA. Not only has the Obama administration sought to promote and Internet Freedom Agenda, but it has constructed websites such as movements.org to run along side the US democracy bureaucracy. Such sites link civil society groups across the MENA region with each other, and also with movements across the globe. Through such efforts, these groups have been able to create and share documents such as *Creating Grassroots Movements for Change: A Field Manual*, and *How to bypass Internet Censorship*. This has been a fundamental part of the administration's Civil Society 2.0 initiative that has sought to build connections, build capacity and empower citizens.

Democracy and Partnerships

The third significant step the Obama administration has taken is to redefine how the US defines the concept of partnerships. Under the Bush administration, the term partnership was largely used to refer to bilateral relations between the US and other states, whilst the US "engaged" with civil society organisations. However, in an attempt to heighten the profile of civil society organisations, the Obama administration has begun to form partnerships with them, heightening their profile. This has redefined the term to constitute trilateral relationships between the US, authoritarian states and civil society organisations. This has provided a renewed emphasis in the Forum for the Future, when government representatives and civil society organisation representatives are placed on the same platform to discuss issues.

The renewed emphasis on civil society organisations has also been reflected in the US response to the Arab Spring more widely. In the aftermath of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, the Obama administration was able to respond rapidly to civil society organisation's demands for funding through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS & RECOMENDATIONS

Lessons for Europe

The US focus on development, digitisation and partnerships, offers an approach that can build on the EU's engagement with the MENA. Such an approach offers an opportunity to; 1) work more closely with the US to pursue its democracy support objectives, helping to build on transatlantic cooperation and a coordinated approach; 2) to bring EU policy more closely inline with its stated normative aspirations; and 3) help the EU more effectively navigate the transforming landscape in the MENA.

Development

- 1) The EU should conduct a review of its development strategy in the MENA and more closely align it to the aspiration of democracy support in light of the Arab Spring.
- 2) The EU should coordinate its development policy in the region with its other Common Foreign and Security Policy goals through the European External Action Service. This should place a particular emphasis on how a process of modernisation can help support current trends and be done in consultation and dialogue with key stakeholders in transforming states.
- 3) The EU should more closely focus on coordinating development policy with the US. Whilst this is being done in Washington D.C. and Brussels, a more concerted effort should be made at the delegation and embassy level on the ground in transitioning states. This would not only mean meeting each others representatives, but rather attempting to engage with civil society groups in meeting at the same time.

Digitisation

- 1) The EU has lagged behind in its emphasis on new social media and technology as a platform for engagement. However, given the EU's unique geographical position, diaspora links with the region and ability to communicate in French, English and Arabic the EU should seek to create further opportunities in this area.
- 2) The EU should look towards building upon existing social media platform to build interregional links and engage in dialogue and support.
- 3) The EU should seek to include private European companies in the ongoing dialogue and approach, including social media companies, telecommunication companies and those with a focus on electronics. Building such links and providing apprenticeship opportunities and scholarships will also help build capacity within the region.

Partnerships

- 1) The EU long argues that it places a greater emphasis on civil society support in its democracy promotion efforts. As such, the Obama administration's renewed emphasis on partnerships should be welcomed and embraced as an opportunity for closer cooperation.
- 2) The EU should seek to work with the US more closely in the Forum for the Future and in ensuring that it to embraces the renewed emphasis on partnerships and not just engagement.
- 3) The EU needs to be more responsive to the demands of civil society groups in the MENA at this critical time. All too often the EU is perceived as being too bureaucratic and slow to respond to urgent needs on the ground. Simplifying the application process for funds along with grant processing procedures would ensure that the EU is more responsive.