

## BROADER MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA INITIATIVE AND BEYOND

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The UNDP annual human development reports clearly present that the Middle East is one of the most dilemmatic regions in the world with respect to the socio-economic conditions and life quality. Particularly, the annual Arab Human Development Report(s) prepared by the UNDP experts with a great majority from the Arab countries, inform the world public about how the rich and poor standards coexist in the 22 Arab countries and beyond.<sup>1</sup>

The region includes both extremely rich and extremely poor countries. Even in many oil-rich nations, the domestic income distribution is unbalanced, the unemployment level is high, the volume of direct foreign investment in non-petroleum related fields is almost none, illiteracy is extremely high among women, life expectancy is low and the high infant mortality rate could not be reduced through years. Democratic values such as pluralism, political representation and respect for the human rights are not enthusiastically embraced by the ruling bodies in the entire region.

Many Middle Eastern countries were / are suffering the difficulties posed by internal ethnic or religious clashes, civil unrest, foreign occupation, bilateral / multilateral armed confrontation or terrorist activities, as well as, long lasting structural problems such as the scarcity of clean water, environmental pollution from excess consumption of chemical products in agriculture, famines, frequent epidemics and poor level of health services.

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1. United Nations Development Programme Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, *Arab Human Development Report-Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*, New York, UNDP, 2002; United Nations Development Programme Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, *Arab Human Development Report-Building a Knowledge Society*, New York, UNDP, 2003; United Nations Development Programme Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development/Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report-Towards Freedom in the Arab World*, New York, UNDP, 2004; United Nations Development Programme Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development-Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report-Paving a New Way Forward*, New York, UNDP, 2005.

After analyzing the essential causes of the poor level of human security in the Middle East, this paper will focus on possible solutions for the problems. Framework presented by recently launched Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative will also be taken into consideration.

### *The Main Problems of the Middle East Region*

If someone should make a list of problems in the Middle East, it would be befitting to start with the naming problem. Although it is hard to build a connection between the naming of a region and the contemporary humanitarian, economic and political difficulties it hosts, many of the current problems of the Middle East, just as its name, are more related with the external influence and interference than domestic parameters. The term “Middle East” represents a euro-centric, British invented approach to the western outmost corner of the Asian continent.<sup>2</sup> Should we ask to the people of the region, they would most surely, prefer another name instead of “the Middle East” for their region.

Although developments in the history are unique in nature and can not repeat themselves in the same way, this should not prevent us from making analogies between historical phenomena and current affairs for better understanding of today and predicting the future. Therefore, in order to understand the basic motives behind recent generalizations towards the Middle East, a highly strategic and important portion of the globe which houses 65 percent of world's proven oil reserves and almost 20 percent of proven natural gas reserves, 450 millions of people and 25 countries, we may recall some previous generalizations in the history and the reasons for them.

The naming of the “region” by the Europeans is not only confined to the 19th and the 20th centuries. Much before the era of the “industrialized empires”-starting with the Crusades of the Middle Ages- Western languages possessed specific words for the “region”. The word *Levant* was created in the middle ages in order to define today's Eastern Mediterranean. Rather than taking into consideration of the commonalities or differences among the

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2. The term “Middle East” was first used by Alfred T. Mahan, an American naval historian and strategist in his article titled “The Persian Gulf and International Relations” published in *National Review* in 1902, in order to describe the region between the Arabian peninsula and India.

peoples living in the region, such as the religion, tribal bonds, race, linguistic affinities etc., the essential motive, which forced the creators for such a generalization, was the economic and commercial importance of the ports and cities in the region.<sup>3</sup>

The very same economic and trade priorities, as well as strategic needs paved the way for the creation of other definitions almost for the same region, such as the *Near East and the Middle East*. The previous is a “made in nineteenth century” term, which reached its final shape within the long debates and confrontations among the *Great Powers over the Eastern Question*, while the latter is a early twentieth century term proposed and developed by then world leader / hegemonic power; The Great Britain.

Although we can extend the naming game (The Western Hemisphere; the Sub-continent; the Far East; the Black Africa etc.), none of these definitions were made by the peoples and nations that lived in those regions. They, which very often ignored the substantial differences among the people, cultures and the nations of the regions, were imposed by the outsiders. It is clear that in today's highly globalized world, it is becoming more and more irrational for a Chinese, for example, to name his country's geographic location as the Far East. In parallel, the so called Balkan counties started to use the term “the South Eastern Europe” to denote the region they are located in. If we continue the chain, the creation of the terms *Greater Middle East* or the *Broader Middle East*, both invented in Washington DC, coincided with a time, when some intellectuals of the Middle East were starting to define their region as the “Southwest Asia”.

The process of naming and defining a region by outsiders is highly problematic, as the creators of definitions gradually become ones, who determine the scope of the regional problems and propose solutions for them. Particularly after the end of the Cold War, we started to witness such a development about the problems in the Middle East. Rather than asking the people in the region about what they suffer most in their daily life or their expectations from their governments, so-called regional experts, overwhelmingly citizens of the Western countries that have direct interest in

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3. Etymologically the term “levant” (the Orient) derives from prp. of lever “to rise” from Latin *levare* “to raise”. (See *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 2000).

the large hydrocarbon reserves of the region, wrote many books and articles about the regional problems. Their record of the problems in the Middle East is mostly prepared with a western-oriented approach and their proposals for solutions are also reflecting a western manner.

The priority of the “free and safe access to the energy resources”, as a much used framework for any kind of conceptualization in the Middle East during the 1990s, was changed by the extended terminology about “fighting against international terrorism” after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States. Apart from the concrete economic and humanitarian problems of the Middle Eastern people, Western “capitals” put their own priorities to the top of the “concerns list”. For instance, according to the United States strategy documents the essential problem in the Middle East is the continuous production of threats targeting the Western nations.<sup>4</sup>

In order to deter threats to Western interests, the American policy makers built up a new set of strategic concerns. Although some of these concerns were already mentioned in the National Strategy documents during the Clinton era,<sup>5</sup> the so called “Bush Doctrine” of 2002 enlarged the list and clearly described a new method to overcome the risks:<sup>6</sup> “preemptive strike”. We can summarize the current strategic goals of the US in the region as follows:

- Preventing the asymmetric threat towards the Western, American or allied citizens, possessions, and interests, posed by the radical and the fundamental terrorist networks; To destroy all kinds of possibilities for new “September 11”- type incidents.
- To deter Syria and Iran to support terrorist networks;
- To stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction;
- To block Iran's efforts to built its nuclear facilities;
- To deter countries trying to improve middle and long range missile launching capabilities;
- To guarantee free and secure flow of oil and natural gas from the region to the world markets.

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4. See, *The National Security Strategy*, Washington D.C., The White House, 2006.

5. For an example see, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, Washington D.C., White House, 1997.

6. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington D.C., The White House, 2002.

- To sustain survival of Israel within recognized and secured borders;
- and,
- To control energy flow to China, an emerging possible challenger for the US global leadership.

However, the problem perception of the US governments has been diverging for some time from the Middle Eastern people's actual problems. According to the UNDP Arab Human Development Report published in 2002, the Middle Eastern nations were suffering at the time huge economic, political and humanitarian problems. The Report was composed of eight main sections titled, "Human Development: Definition, Concept and Larger Context"; "The State of Human Development in the Arab Region"; "Building Human Capabilities: The Basics, Life, Health, Habitat"; "Building Human Capabilities: Education"; "Using Human Capabilities: Towards a Knowledge Society"; "Using Human Capabilities: Recapturing Economic Growth and Reducing Human Poverty"; "Liberating Human Capabilities: Governance, Human Development and the Arab World" and "Arab Cooperation".<sup>7</sup>

The report set forward a detailed record of economic, social, humanitarian and political data about 22 Arab countries and reached a conclusion that, in order to prevent emergence of a large spectrum of threats in the region, such as terrorism or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, it was vitally essential to strengthen economic conditions of the people, to increase the life quality, to improve education and to support human rights and democracy. According to the report;

entering the new millennium people in the Arab countries face two intertwined sets of challenges to peace and to development. The first set has been made ever more conspicuous and pressing after the tragic events of 11 September 2001. These are the challenges to the pursuit of freedom from fear. Regional and external factors intersect in this realm of peace and security. The second set of challenges is equally important if not more critical. It encompasses challenges to the achievement of freedom from want. These are the challenges faced by people and governments, states and societies as they attempt to advance human development. These challenges are fundamental, not only for their instrumental significance to development and growth, but also for their intrinsic value. Equity, knowledge, and the freedom and human rights integral to good governance matter for their own sake as well as for their critical role as enablers of development. They are both means and ends. They are central to both the process and the state of human development.<sup>8</sup>

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7. *Arab Human Development Report- Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*, New York, UNDP, 2002.

8. *Arab Human Development Report*, 2002, pp. 1-2.

The report also asserts that the “Israel's illegal occupation of Arab lands is one of the most pervasive obstacles to security and progress in the region geographically (since it affects the entire region), temporally (extending over decades) and developmentally (impacting nearly all aspects of human development and human security, directly for millions and indirectly for others)”. However, other military and political conflicts and upheavals also have affected many economies in the region, causing declines in productivity and disrupting markets, the report evaluates. Furthermore, all affected countries have emerged with compounded socio-political problems that have retarded progressive moves towards liberalization and democratization. The direct impact of wars is registered in slowed growth, damaged infrastructure, social fragmentation and public-sector stagnation. Some countries have experienced hyperinflation, severe currency devaluations and curtailed foreign-currency earnings. Others have seen their standing in the international community collapse. Most affected countries have lost important human and capital resources critical for the renewal of stability and competitiveness.<sup>9</sup>

Lack of political stability and the persistent turmoil directly stimulated the reluctance of the Arab governments to adopt democratic values and approaches, are clearly undermine human development in the region. “While *de jure* acceptance of democracy and human rights is enshrined in constitutions, legal codes and government pronouncements, *de facto* implementation is often neglected and, in some cases, deliberately disregarded”.<sup>10</sup> In most of the Middle Eastern countries the omnipotent executive branches strictly control the other branches of the state system, such as judiciary and legislature, no check and balance system exists.

As for the social problems, gender inequality, which affects half of the population, is the most pervasive manifestation of discriminatory implementations within the Middle Eastern societies. According to the Arab Human Development Report of 2002, “more than half of Arab women are illiterate. The region's maternal mortality rate is double that of Latin America and the Caribbean, and four times that of East Asia. Women also suffer from unequal citizenship and legal entitlements, [...and] the utilization of Arab

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

10. *Idem.*

women's capabilities through political and economic participation remains the lowest in the world.<sup>11</sup>

If we have a look at the general educational level of the Arab Middle East, incredibly poor figures that should not exist in such a “rich” region, emerges. About 65 million adult Arabs are illiterate, two thirds of them women. Illiteracy rates are much higher than in much poorer countries of the World. Moreover, data show that educational problem is unlikely to disappear in the near future. Arab Human Development Report emphasizes that “ten million children between 6 and 15 years of age are currently out of school; if current trends persist; this number will increase by 40 percent by 2015. The challenge is far more than overcoming the undersupply of knowledge to people. Equally important is overcoming the undersupply of knowledgeable people, a problem exacerbated by the low quality of education together with the lack of mechanisms for intellectual capital development and use.”<sup>12</sup>

Access to and use of technology is another indicator of the humanitarian development level in the region. Unparallel to the region's average per capita income, access to information and communication technology is limited. In 2002, Arab population with internet access was lower than 0.6 percent, while only 1.2 percent of the population had the personal computer penetration. Governments are not enthusiastic to change these figures positively, and the research and development investments do not exceed the 0.5 percent of average gross national product.<sup>13</sup>

Unemployment remains as one of the primary problems of the region. According to the Arab Human Development Report, economic growth in the Arab countries continues to stagnate, and the quality of public institutions as measured by poor cost-effectiveness and heavy regulatory burdens, is low. Critical macro variables are still under-performing, including employment, savings, productivity and non-oil exports. At about 15 percent, average unemployment across Arab countries is among the highest rates in the developing world.

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11. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

12. *Idem.*

13. *Idem.*



Another indicator for humanitarian situation and life quality in the region is the poverty. “While the Arab countries have the lowest level of dire poverty in the world, it remains the case that one out of every five people lives on less than \$2 per day, according to World Bank estimates for the Middle East and North Africa”.<sup>14</sup> But, the daily income level is not the only indicator for poverty. A large variety of data, from unavailable health care or opportunities for a quality education to a degraded habitat form part of the nexus of poverty and are widely prevalent in the Arab and other Middle Eastern countries.

*The “Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative”*

Following the US-led military operation in Iraq in the first half of 2003, the US officials started to mention a multilateral project to change the economic and political conditions of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) region, which would help to flourish democracy and free market economies. The essential logic behind such a passionate project was to create a better humanitarian environment for the Middle Eastern peoples, and therefore to diminish the risks targeting US and other western interests. In other words, the final goal of the new initiative was to solve US security problems stemming from the region. The “formula” to solve the problem had a linear logic and three main axioms:

*Axiom 1:* The United States and the other parts of the World perceive major threats from the region (the Middle East), such as the fundamentalism, terrorism and spread of the WMDs.

*Axiom 2:* As stated by the UNDP Arab Human Development Report, the lack of democracy and human rights, poor level of socio-economic conditions and ignorance in the Broader Middle East region were major causes for existence of terrorist networks and the failed governments of the rogue states.

*Axiom 3:* “If these conditions should be changed in a positive direction, the new dynamics in the region will lead a better life quality for the Middle Eastern society and to facilitate solving of security problems.

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<sup>14</sup>. *Ibid.* p. III.



The BMENA project first made known to the world public through a London based Arabic newspaper *Al-Hayat*. In its 13 February 2004 issue, the newspaper published the draft version of the “G-8 Greater Middle East Partnership Working Paper”, an early version of the BMENA project, which would be officially initiated in June 2004, in Sea Island, US. According to the *Al-Hayat*, the US government had presented a plan to group of developed countries (G-8) “to bring democracy to the Middle East”.

According to *Al-Hayat*, the new plan was stating that “democracy and freedom are essential to the flourishing of individual initiative, but sorely lacking throughout the Greater Middle East (GME)”. In Freedom House's 2003 report, Israel was the only GME country rated “free”, and just four others were defined as “partly free.”<sup>15</sup> The Arab Human Development Report noted that out of seven world regions, the Arab countries had the lowest freedom score in the late 1990s. Databases measuring “voice and accountability” rank the Arab region the lowest in the world. Further, the Arab world ranked above only sub-Saharan Africa in the empowerment of women. However, these discouraging indicators hardly squared with the expressed wishes of the region's people: In the 2003 AHDR, for example, Arabs topped the worldwide list of those supporting the statement that “democracy is better than any other form of government” and expressed the highest level of rejection of authoritarian rule. Furthermore, *Al-Hayat* asserted that the Plan was targeting to establish a knowledge society in the region:

The GME region, once the cradle of scientific discovery and learning, has largely failed to keep up with today's knowledge-oriented world. The region's growing knowledge gap and continuing brain drain challenge its development prospects. Arab countries' output of books represents just 1.1 percent of the world total (with religious books constituting over 15 percent of this) roughly one-fourth of all university graduates emigrate, and technology is largely imported. Five times as many books are translated into Greek (spoken by just 11 million people) as Arabic. Building on education reform efforts already underway in the region, the G-8 could provide assistance to address the region's education challenges and help students acquire the skills needed to succeed in today's global marketplace.

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15. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World-2003*, <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15&year=2003>>.

Finally, *Al-Hayat* informed public that, the Plan's third objective was to improve prosperity in the region. The newspaper quoted from the draft Plan as follows: "Closing the Greater Middle East region's prosperity gap will require an economic transformation similar in magnitude to that undertaken by the formerly communist countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. Key to that transformation will be to unleash the region's private sector potential, especially small and medium enterprises, which are the primary engines of economic growth and job creation. The growth of an entrepreneurial class in the GME would also be an important element in helping democracy and freedom to flourish".<sup>16</sup>

*Al-Hayat's* report about the Plan triggered a large debate in the Middle East region. Intellectuals from the regional countries gathered in Alexandria, Sana'a and Aqaba in Spring of 2004, in order to discuss the exposed Plan. The Plan was also discussed during the Arab League annual summit in Tunis. While some of the discussants were enthusiastically supporting the US initiative, a majority of them claimed that "democracy can not be imposed from out side. The region should enter a period of transition to democracy depending on its own domestic parameters". Moreover, most of the Arab intellectuals stressed that, "without finding a just and peaceful solution to the Palestinian problem, and ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories, the Plan would reach less of the expected results."

While the debate on the Plan was ongoing in the Middle East, the United States invited representatives of the regional governments to the G-8 Summit in Sea Island, Georgia, USA, in June 2004. While a number of leaders of the BMENA countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey and Yemen participated to the Georgia Summit, majority of the regional governments remained reluctant to take part in the initiative. Nevertheless, on 9 June 2004, leaders of the G-8 issued a declaration titled "Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa".<sup>17</sup> The declaration was a highly modified version of the draft Plan, which was published by *Al-Hayat* newspaper in February. The new version was reflecting a mood that the US

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16. "G-8 Greater Middle East Partnership Working Paper", < <http://www.meib.org/documentfile/040213.htm>>.

17. "Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa", < <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/fs/33375.htm>>.

government had taken into consideration of the reactions from the BMENA governments and intellectuals and removed some parts of the draft, while adding some phrases about the Palestinian question.

Starting with an announcement that the leaders of the G-8 were mindful that peace, political, economic and social development, prosperity and stability in the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa represented a challenge which concerned them and the international community as a whole, the declaration continued with the G-8 commitment to support for democratic, social and economic reform emanating from that region. In the declaration, the G-8 leaders stated that “this partnership will be based on genuine cooperation with the region's governments, as well as business and civil society representatives to strengthen freedom, democracy, and prosperity for all”.

The values embodied in the Partnership declaration were counted as human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, economic opportunity, and social justice; all of them were universal values and were reflected in relevant international documents, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Furthermore, the declaration announced the essential principles, into which the G-8 countries adhered, as follows:

- Strengthening the commitment of the International Community to peace and stability in the region of Broader Middle East and North Africa is essential;

- The resolution of long-lasting, often bitter, disputes, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is an important element of progress in the region;

- At the same time, regional conflicts must not be an obstacle for reforms. Indeed, reforms may make a significant contribution toward resolving them;

- The restoration of peace and stability in Iraq is critical to the well-being of millions of Iraqis and the security of the region;

- Successful reform depends on the countries in the region, and change should not and cannot be imposed from outside;

- Each country is unique and their diversity should be respected. Our

engagement must respond to local conditions and be based on local ownership. Each society will reach its own conclusions about the pace and scope of change. Yet distinctiveness, important as it is, must not be exploited to prevent reform;

-Our support for reform will involve governments, business leaders and civil societies from the region as full partners in our common effort;

-Supporting reform in the region, for the benefit of all its citizens, is a long-term effort, and requires the G-8 and the region to make a generational commitment.

The G-8 leaders also emphasized that their support for reform in the region would go hand in hand with their support for “a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, based upon U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338.” Moreover, they stressed that, they fully joined the Quartet in its “common vision of two states, Israel and a viable, democratic, sovereign and contiguous Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.” Not neglecting Iraq, the G-8 leaders announced that they stood together united in their support for the Iraqi people and the fully sovereign Iraqi interim government as they sought to rebuild their nation.

Consequently the partnership declaration shaped the methodology for cooperation in the region. According to the declaration, a Forum for the Future, would be established and would serve as a central dialogue layer. The Forum would provide a framework at ministerial level, bringing together G-8 and regional Foreign, Economic, and other Ministers in an ongoing discussion on reform, with business and civil society leaders participating in parallel dialogues. The partnership would focus on three main areas, namely the political sphere, the socio-cultural sphere and the economic sphere.

In the political sphere, steps to be taken were “progress toward democracy and the rule of law, which entail instituting effective guarantees in the areas of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which notably imply respect for diversity and pluralism”. This would result in cooperation, the free exchange of ideas, and the peaceful resolution of differences. State reform, good governance, and modernization are also necessary ingredients for building democracy. In the socio-cultural sphere “education for all,

freedom of expression, equality between men and women as well as access to global information technology are crucial to modernization and prosperity” would be guaranteed. The G-8 would focus their efforts to reduce illiteracy and increase access to education, especially for girls and women. In the economic sphere, creating new jobs was counted as the number one priority. The G-8 leaders committed to work with governments and business leaders to promote entrepreneurship, expand trade and investment, increase access to capital, support financial reforms, secure property rights, promote transparency and fight corruption.

### *The Short Term Repercussions of the BMENA Initiative*

Two meetings of the Forum for the Future were held in Rabat, Tunis in December 2004 and in Manama, Bahrain in November 2005. Foreign and economic ministers of the almost 30 countries of the BMENA region and their G-8 partners discussed reform efforts in the region and reviewed progress on initiatives launched at the G-8 summit at Sea Island, Georgia in June 2004. Representatives from the Civil Society and Business Dialogues presented their recommendations.

In accordance with the Sea Island Summit conclusions and the decisions taken in the two follow up meetings of the Forum for the Future, the participants of the BMENA initiative have taken concrete steps in seven main areas of cooperation.<sup>18</sup> Under the title of “Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD)” significant activities have taken place in each of the lead DAD countries -Turkey, Yemen, and Italy-, including four conferences engaging hundreds of BMENA civil society and governmental representatives and emphasizing women in public life and strengthening political parties and electoral processes. In the field of “Entrepreneurship”, Morocco and Bahrain started working with the G8 to create two regional entrepreneurship centers to provide regional business training and job creation expertise. Separately, Japan, Jordan, Germany, and Egypt have taken the lead in vocational training. For the “Microfinance” field, the G8 asked the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) to develop a training center to promote microfinance for the region. CGAP established a regional training center in Jordan and conducted microfinance assessment

18. “BMENA Forum for the Future”, <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/39698.pdf>>.

missions to several countries. USAID's \$125 million micro enterprise program would reach two million entrepreneurs over the following five years in countries including Egypt, Morocco and in Palestine.

In order to support the growth of small and medium-sized business, as the fourth field of cooperation, "International Finance Corporation (IFC)" established its regional Private Enterprise Partnership to support the growth of small and medium-sized businesses, and became active by early 2006, in 13 countries and the West Bank/Gaza. G8 and regional partners have already pledged two-thirds of a three-year funding goal of \$100 million. To facilitate cooperation and improve the effectiveness of official financing in the region, regional and international development institutions established and their representatives met in September 2005 in Cairo and Washington.

As the sixth field of cooperation, "Task Force on Investment" led by the "Network of Funds" by institutional Business Council was established. The private sector Task Force started to analyze barriers to investment and to advise regional governments and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on reform measures to improve the investment climate. Finally, in the field of literacy and education, Education Ministers of the BMENA region met at the Dead Sea in May 2004 and agreed to a Framework for Progress stressing the importance of education reform for regional prosperity. They also agreed to a goal of increasing literacy by an additional 20 million people in 2015, with emphasis on female literacy.

Initially the Arab Human Development Report of 2002 and subsequently the BMENA partnership environment generated an atmosphere of reforms, though in a lower degree than it was expected, in the region. For instance, in Morocco, human rights and political organizations persuaded the government to acknowledge earlier violations, in particular relating to the disappearances of political opponents, and to begin to address the issue. In Bahrain, the National Committee for Martyrs and Torture Victims began demanding compensation for the families of those killed and tortured by the security forces. It also called for those responsible for human rights violations in Bahrain to be brought to justice. In Syria, civil society organizations asked for the state of emergency to be lifted and freedoms expanded. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood announced an initiative for

general reform. At the beginning of 2004, Saudi Arabia witnessed an unprecedented number of civil initiatives, distinctive insofar as they were relatively acceptable to the government. A number of petitions and documents were addressed to the Crown Prince, some of which contained the demands of minority groups, such as the Shias, for religious freedom, civil rights, and equality among citizens. Others criticized acts of violence and called for political openness as a means out of the present crisis. Still other demands centered on improvements in the status of women, including guarantees of their full participation in public life. In Palestine, civil society organizations were active in many areas, from resisting occupation and defending human rights to assisting in relief and humanitarian aid operations and calling for reform.<sup>19</sup>

The period between the launching of the Sea Island declaration and April 2006 also covered a series of highly important political developments. In Iraq, the constitution was approved in a referendum and the new Iraqi parliament was formed through elections in 2006. In Palestine, following the death of Yasser Arafat, the long time leader of the PLO, a presidential election was held first, through which Mahmoud Abbas (Abou Mazen) became the Palestinian President, and then the parliamentary elections in early 2006, formed the new Palestinian legislative authority, in which HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement) held the majority of the seats. In Egypt, presidential elections were held, first time by attendance of a number of candidates other than President Hosni Mubarak. However, President Mubarak preserved his 26 year-old seat. In some of the Gulf countries, first time the women were allowed to vote and to become candidates in the municipal elections.

In spite of the positive steps forward, according to the 2004 and 2005 Arab Human Development reports, there are still too much to be done in the region for betterment of humanitarian conditions and in order to flourish a real democracy. The poverty continues, the political and social rights of majority of the women were not granted, political system in the region is far from fulfilling essential rules of democracy and human rights are still widely violated.

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19. United Nations Development Programme Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development-Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report - Towards Freedom in the Arab World*, New York, UNDP, 2004, pp. 5-6.



Furthermore, the conduct of occupation regime in Iraq does not serve the ambitious goals of the BMENA initiative. Especially, ongoing instability causing approximately 50 Iraqi civilian deaths on daily basis and widely broadcasted incidents of torture and abuse of the Iraqi prisoners and civilians by American and British soldiers decrease the level of support to the BMENA initiative, solely because it is backed by the US government. Even in Turkey, a half-a century strategic ally of the US, only 28 percent of the people think that Turkey should support US initiatives in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, 94 percent of the Turkish people are against an American military operation against Iran, while 58 percent of them support immediate withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.<sup>21</sup> These results clearly show that the US has much to do to solve the problems of frankness and credibility in the region and needs to generate public and civil society support in order to overcome governments' resistance to reforms. However, paradoxically, occupation in Iraq and the growing instability in the country accelerate anti-American sentiments among the Middle Eastern peoples, diminishing their support for US initiatives. As a result, the Middle Eastern governments continue to preserve their anti-democratic regimes.

### *Conclusion*

For the last three years, the Middle East has been passing through a process of reforms that was not witnessed in the region before. However, since majority of the reform initiatives have been mostly cosmetic nature, the region is far from embracing a good level of democracy and human rights. Despite the initiatives supported by the G-8 and by some regional countries in order to improve the life standards of the Middle Eastern people, to flourish democracy and civil society and to strengthen the economic infrastructure, most of the political, economic, social and humanitarian problems mentioned in the Arab Human Development Report of 2002, persist. Unfortunately, there exists no clear sign of strong domestic will either to change the conditions in a positive way.

The US policies in the region might solve some of the western security problems in the short run. However, without securing reliability among the Middle Eastern people, American policies to eliminate the

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20. The German Marshall Fund of the United States, *The Transatlantic Trends 2005 - Key Findings*, 2005, pp. 78.

21. Uluslararası Stratejik Araştırmalar Kurumu (USAK), *Ortadoğu Algılama Anketi* (Middle East Perception Survey), March 2006, p.2.

security threats will open the way for more sophisticated threats, not only for the Americans but for the entire world. The lack of frankness behind the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative will prevent it to become a new Marshall Plan for the region in the near future. The goals presented in the 2004 Sea Island Summit were encouraging. However, two years after the BMENA project was officially launched, it is hardly possible to find regional leaders to create a consensus on the real meaning and targets of the Plan. Moreover, there still is not a consensus among the G-8 countries on what to do, when to do and how to do it? The Plan remained mainly an American one, and lack of sustained multilateral support does not facilitate its implementation.

The developments in Iraq do not constitute a good example for other regional countries. Although, the country is becoming more and more democratic every day and certainly the most democratic climate is being created in the country since its independence, the death toll is increasing daily and there is a civil war in the country, which nobody can predict its end. The problems such as spread of the WMDs, terrorism and the security of energy resources are universal problems. Trying to solve those problems through a unilateral approach and unilateral policies might not give the expected results. Therefore, the United States, the global leader today should develop more multilateral cooperation apparatuses. The UN should be used as the main cooperation venue for any initiatives in the Middle East.

*Appendix: Some Figures about Humanitarian Conditions in the Middle East*

**I-ADULT LITERACY RATE:**

Men (%): Lebanon (92.4), Kuwait (84.7), Saudi Arabia (84.1), Algeria (78), Sudan (70.8), Yemen (69.5), Egypt (67.2).

Women (%): Kuwait (81), Lebanon (81), Saudi Arabia (69.5), Algeria (59.6), Sudan (49.1), Egypt (43.6), Yemen (28.5).

**II-LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (years):**

Men: Kuwait (74.8), Bahrain (72.4), Saudi Arabia (71), Egypt (66.6), Morocco (66.6), Yemen (58.7), Sudan (54.1), Mauritania (50.7).

Women: Kuwait (78.9), Bahrain (75.8), Saudi Arabia (73.6), Egypt (70.8), Morocco (70.3), Yemen (60.9), Sudan (57.0), Mauritania (53.9).

**III-POPULATION WITHOUT SUSTAINABLE ACCESS TO AN IMPROVED CLEAN WATER SOURCE (%)**

Mauritania (63), Oman (61), Yemen (31), Libya (28), Syria (25), Morocco (20), Tunisia (20), Palestine (14), Saudi Arabia (5)

**IV-CHILDREN UNDER WEIGHT FOR AGE (% under age 5).**

Yemen (46), Mauritania (32), Oman (24), Djibouti (18), Sudan (17), UAD (14), Egypt (11).

**V-POPULATION BELOW INCOME POVERTY LINE 2 USD A DAY)**

Mauritania (63.1), Yemen (45.2), Egypt (43.9), Algeria (15.1), Morocco (14.3), Jordan (7.4).

**VI-UNDER 5 MORTALITY RATE OF CHILDREN (per 1000 live births)**

Somalia (225), Iraq (140), Yemen (107), Sudan (94), Algeria (49), Egypt (41), Lebanon (32), Saudi Arabia (28).

**VII-IMMUNIZED ONE YEAR OLD CHILDREN (TB- polio3- measles) (%):**

Syria (99- 98-99), Egypt (98-97-97), SA (98-95-97), Yemen (74-69-65), Sudan (48-40-49), Somalia (60-40-45).

**VIII-PECENTAGE OF WOMEN AMONG ADULTS WITH HIV (AIDS)**

Sudan (56), Libya (16), Morocco (15), Mauritania (15), Yemen (15), Oman (15), Egypt (10). (no sufficient data is available for many countries in the region).

**IX-TUBERCULOSIS CASES PER 100.000 PEOPLE**

Djibouti (1,161), Mauritania (437), Sudan (346), Yemen (145), Morocco (100), Saudi Arabia (59), Syria (54), Kuwait (53).

**X-MALARIA CASES PER 100.000 PEOPLE**

Yemen (15,160), Sudan (13,934), Mauritania (11,150), Saudi Arabia (32).

**XI-CONVENTIONAL ARMS IMPORTS (Millions of USD) (2003)**

UAE (922), Algeria (513), Egypt (504), Saudi Arabia (487), Jordan (258), Yemen (30), Syria (15).NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS