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Review of the doctoral thesis of Mr Abdellateef M. Al-Weshah
US Foreign Aid towards Democracy Promotion in the Middle East 2003-2013:
A Case Study of Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan
(Wsparcie Stanów Zjednoczonych skierowane na promowanie demokracji na
Bliskim Wschodzie w latach 2003-2013 na przykładach Egiptu, Iraku i Jordanii)
written under the supervision of
Prof. Dorota Piontek of Adam Mickiewicz University

I. Choice of topic

Abdellateef M. Al-Weshah's choice of topic for his Doctoral thesis is pertinent, needed and important from a cognitive and practical viewpoint. Despite the Middle East region's enormous potential, the conflicts under way there generate numerous challenges and threats also for other regions of the world. Stabilizing the situation in Middle Eastern countries, their effective functioning and sustained development are thus a desirable aim not only for the societies living there, but also for the entire international community. One of the methods used for many years to achieve this goal is the promotion of democracy which, in keeping with the premises of the liberal theory of international relations, contributes to the establishment of peace, stability and prosperity. A closer examination of the question, however, leads the observer to the conclusion that the promotion of democracy in Middle Eastern countries by external actors is in large measure of a declarative nature, whereas the essence of the actions such actors take up under the guise of democratization is, in fact, quite different.

In his doctoral thesis, Abdellateef M. Al-Weshah took up the task of analyzing this issue. His thesis concerns the United States' promotion of democracy in the Middle East in 2001-2013, using the case studies of Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. The conclusions from the

research he conducted make it possible to better understand the question of promoting democracy in the Middle East by external actors including, as in this case, the USA. For this reason, I find that the choice of topic is pertinent and needed, and his thesis constitutes an original contribution to the scholarly question defined in the title.

II. Methodology

The methodology used in this study fulfills the requirements for a doctoral thesis. In the *Introduction*, the author points out elements that are necessary for an academic dissertation: the goal of the study, its hypothesis, the research questions, and the formal structure of the dissertation.

As his **goal**, Mr Al-Weshah chose 'to indicate whether or not there exists a relationship between the use of the bottom-up approach to democracy promotion and the success rate as well as the permanence of the produced results' (p. 10), and 'to indicate that the democratization outcomes obtained using different approaches may vary in terms of their efficiency levels' (p. 17). To attain this goal, the author formulated the **hypothesis** that 'there is a systemic relationship between the use of the bottom-up approach to democracy promotion and permanence of the yielded results' (p. 18), on the assumption that 'the bottom-up approach towards the promotion of democratic values is more likely to yield long-term and a stable outcome' (p. 17). In order to verify this hypothesis, the author formulated three **research questions**: '1) does the use of the top-down approach in democracy promotion result in increased efforts required to achieve stable result? 2) how does the status of democracy promotion within a given campaign influence contributes to the creation of conditions conducive to democratization?; and 3) how does the type of the previous political system impact the process of democracy promotion? (p. 18). These questions were raised in the *Introduction* twice, which seemed unnecessary (p. 10, 18). This remark about the unnecessary repetition also applies to the author's justification for his choice of countries in his analysis. In the *Introduction*, Mr Al-Weshah mentions on two occasions that he chose three countries – Egypt, Iraq and Jordan – for his comparative analysis because of 'their special status on American diplomatic agenda' (p. 10, 16). The justification for choosing Egypt, Iraq and Jordan is substantively understandable, subject to the reservation that the internal conditions for the democratization process in each of them

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vary greatly. As the contents of the dissertation make clear, the author is aware of these differences.

The dissertation's time frame, however, is not entirely clear. While the choice of 2003 as the point of departure is appropriate, the choice of 2013 as the closing time mark is puzzling. The author explains in the *Introduction* that he chose 2003 because that year 'marks the temporary departure of the USA from its post-Cold War bottom-up approach advocating the use of "soft" solutions rather than military power' (p. 11). While the implied statement that prior to 2003 the USA were pursuing a bottom-up approach is debatable, it has to be agreed that the military attack by the United States on Iraq in 2003 was an important event that affected the entire Middle East and, in return, it affected the policies of the USA with regard to all countries of the region. The adoption of 2013 as the closing time mark is doubtful, though. The author did not justify this choice of date. Including at least two more years (2013-2015) in this analysis would have provided more pertinent information, and it would have produced additional conclusions in consideration of the internal conflicts under way in Egypt and in other countries of the region, and on account of the decreasing importance of the region (or at least of some Middle Eastern countries) in the US policy.

The **methodology** adopted in the dissertation is appropriate. The author made use of institutional analysis, which consists in collecting data for policy analysis, the method of qualitative research, and the comparative method. As Mr Al-Weshah states, 'the majority of the study is qualitative and based on the body of collected facts: both subjective observations formulated as reports, and measurable indices subjected to academic commentary. [...] The observations and comparisons are only made on the already available and complete data' (p. 20).

The **dissertation structure** is clear and reflects the successive stages of the analysis. The study is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, the author presented the most fundamental information concerning the nature of the American approach to democracy promotion worldwide and focused on the region of Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Mr Al-Weshah successively discusses issues such as: the American concept of democracy, MENA as a key strategic region, the history of financial and democratization assistance in the MENA region, top-down vs. bottom-up democratization strategies, expert-led projects and surveillance, governmental bodies and NGO's involved in the process of democratization, critical opinions on American promotion of democracy as well as major challenges. The

author devoted the second chapter to discuss US involvement in the Middle East, on the premise that democracy promotion is a type of 'soft-power execution'. The chapter thus begins with a definition of the category of soft power in reference to such recognized academic authorities in this respect as Joseph Nye, Lilie Chouliaraki, David L. McConnell and Yasushi Watanabe. The author then presents the historical use of soft power by the USA with regard to Middle Eastern countries, singling out the periods of the Cold War and Containment, the Post-Cold War era and US responses to the 21st century challenges. In the last three chapters, the author analyzes the three Middle Eastern countries he has chosen – Egypt (chapter three), Iraq (chapter four), and Jordan (chapter five). In each of these chapters, Mr Al-Weshah presented the US support for democracy. Such a structure of the dissertation is logical and justified. The dissertation would have benefited from adding a closing chapter that would include comparative analysis of the US democracy promotion with regard to these three countries. While the author laid out the findings produced by his research in the *Conclusions*, it seems to me the inclusion of another chapter – a compare-and-contrast summary – would have contributed to greater clarity in the presentation of research results.

About the **language of the dissertation**: the dissertation is written correctly, it is understandable and reads well. The footnotes are done correctly. In terms of form and technique, the dissertation stands at a good level.

The **sources** the dissertation is based on are sufficient to conduct an appropriate analysis. The author also used books and articles on the topic being researched, written by such renowned analysts and scholars as Thomas Carothers, Michael Cox, Anthony Cordesman, Ana Echagüe, Hélène Michou, Louis Fawcett, Fred Halliday and David W. Lesch. It should be stressed that the author reached out to very diverse sources, thanks to which he was able to familiarize himself with different viewpoints and opinions, and this enabled him to maintain a very high degree of objectivity and reliability in his research. The historical part of the dissertation would have undoubtedly been enriched by the works of George Lenczowski, and in contemporary issues of by those of Marina Ottaway. It would also have been worthwhile for the author to include in the *Introduction* a synthesis of the research published thus far and concerning the USA's promotion of democracy in the Middle East, and showing the innovative nature of his own research in relation to that which has already been done. A list of the sources used in the dissertation has been given in the form of a

bibliography. A division into several categories – books, articles and internet sources – makes the bibliography well organized and clear.

III. The content of the dissertation

The contents of the dissertation undoubtedly correspond to the topic defined in the title. In the first chapter, the author included the most important information concerning the question of promoting democracy in the MENA region by the USA, and referred to the top-down and bottom-up concepts, of which he points out the fundamental differences. He also took into account the most important American programs, such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), Near East Regional Democracy (NERD), the Foundation for the Future (FFF) and the activeness of such entities as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), IFES – Democracy at Large, Freedom House, or the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In the second chapter, Mr Al-Weshah successfully attempted to redefine democracy promotion as a type of 'soft-power execution' in the historical sense. He devoted much space to presenting events in the Middle East during the Cold War period, to the development of the situation in this region in the 1990s, and then to the impact of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on international relations in the Middle East. All those periods and events are shown in the context of US policy toward the Middle East region. In chapters 3-5, the author conducts an analysis of US actions on behalf of promoting democracy in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. Each of those chapters takes into account the specificity of each of those three very different countries. In the case of Egypt, stress was placed on relations between the USA and the Egyptian authorities, and especially with President Hosni Mubarak and the army, which plays a key role in the Egyptian regime. Chapter 4 devoted to Iraq contains above all an analysis of US actions aimed at stabilizing Iraq after the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 by the international coalition led by the USA. In the last, 5th chapter, the author concentrated on the analysis of the assistance given by the USA to Jordan – a buffer state, whose existence contributes to the maintenance of an Israeli-Arab balance in the region.

The dissertation is rich in facts. The argumentation in the dissertation is logical and conclusions reached are appropriate. The contents of the dissertation are indicative of the author's high degree of familiarity with the questions he addresses, of his understanding of the complicated processes taking place at the levels of society, states and the international

system. The author shows that the policies conducted by various actors on all three of those levels are co-dependent and the actions of one actor entail actions on the part of the remaining ones. In certain fragments of the dissertation, it would have been preferable to make use of original works, rather than referring to them through secondary sources (e.g., pp. 35, 37, 93).

The research conclusions contained in the dissertation may leave the reader yearning for more. On the one hand, the author claims that promoting democracy through a bottom-up approach is considerably more effective and lasting than the top-down approach preferred by the USA. Mr Al-Weshah writes that 'it is believed that this strategy [bottom-up – JZ] is capable of creating conditions for reform that is genuine, profound, and permanent' (p. 17). On the other hand, the author correctly points out that the promotion of democracy is only for show. He states that 'while the means to achieve the goal are different when compared to the use of hard power, the objectives are largely the same – to maintain control and influence on the area. [...] As the second largest military power in the entire region, investing in sustaining Egypt's might and overall image as a powerful state, the USA could not only control its domestic situation, but promote stability in the region. What ought to be observed regarding the conducted analysis is that by maintaining solid relations with Egypt and Jordan, the USA could to a considerable degree control the situation in the area afflicted by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict' (p. 297). As the events of the Arab Spring have revealed the clearly destructive character of the West's (USA and EU) policies with regard to the Middle East, the thesis about the ineffectiveness of the top-down approach in the democratization process is right on target. It would have been prudent for the author to explain the relation between the US use of the bottom-up approach and the attainment in the Middle East of American interests, defined by the author, quite correctly, as maintaining stability and control in the region. Would supporting bottom-up democratization processes in Middle Eastern states, whose societies are overwhelmingly critical of US policies, allow Washington to maintain its influence and control of the region? The answer to this question is missing. Nonetheless, the comment above does not alter my conviction that the research process conducted by Mr Al-Weshah reflects his familiarity with the facts, his ability to link them together, to present arguments in a logical fashion and to draw the appropriate conclusions.

IV. Final remarks

Mr Al-Weshah's doctoral thesis shows that the author has demonstrated his knowledge of political science and a good familiarity of the questions under examination. He is able to utilize research methods and techniques as well as answer research questions effectively. Many of the author's findings and observations are indicative of his good familiarity with the facts and his adequate understanding of dynamic connections between political events. In his work, the author uses notions of political science in a precise and mindful manner. Mr Al-Weshah does not accept unreflectively commonly-held views, but he formulates his own autonomously. His doctoral thesis skillfully links accepted methodological and theoretical premises with an analysis of the empirical material and constitutes an original treatment of an important research question, as defined in the title.

V. Conclusions

The doctoral thesis under review meets the requirements defined in Art. 13, section 1 of the Act of 14 March 2003 on scientific degrees and academic titles, and on degrees and titles in the arts [Ustawy z dnia 14 marca 2003 roku o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki], in accordance with which I motion for accepting the dissertation under review and allowing Mr Abdellateef M. Al.-Weshah to proceed to the next stage of the PhD program.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping strokes that form a stylized, cursive representation of a name.