

Bi-Partisan Group of Prominent Scholars and Experts Urge President Obama to Make Democracy



More than 80 scholars and experts—including Egyptian democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim and former deputy prime minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim—are urging President Obama to adopt a consistent and credible policy to the president [open letter](#) that supports democracy in the Arab and Muslim world. The group will formally issue an at a news conference Tuesday, March 10, at 2:30 p.m. at the National Press Club in Washington.

“For decades, the United States and Europe have been coddling and supporting dictators in the Arab world, and this has been disastrous for the region and for U.S.–Islamic relations,” said Radwan Masmoudi, president of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy and a co-convener of the letter. The letter states that for decades the United States has “supported repressive regimes that routinely violate human rights, and that torture and imprison those who dare criticize them.”

The signatories call on the administration to make supporting democracy and its proponents in the Middle East a top foreign policy priority, even in countries that are U.S. allies such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. The authors call on the United States to “use its considerable economic and diplomatic leverage to put pressure on its allies in the region when they fail to meet basic standards of human rights.”

“Because of its association with the Bush administration, there is a temptation to move away from any discussion of

democracy promotion in the Middle East. That would be a mistake,” said Shadi Hamid, director of research at the Project on Middle East Democracy and a letter co-convenor. The letter lauds the President’s initial efforts to reach out to the Arab and Muslim world, but cautions that the U.S. must demonstrate its commitment to democratic reform through actual policy changes.

The letter demonstrates strong support across the ideological spectrum for a renewed commitment to supporting democratic reform in the region, and for supporting the political inclusion of moderate Islamist groups. Among the more than 80 signatories are: Francis Fukuyama of Johns Hopkins University; Morton Halperin, former director of policy planning at the State Department; Jennifer Windsor, executive director of Freedom House; Peter Beinart, contributing editor at The New Republic; Georgetown Professor John L. Esposito, and democracy expert Larry Diamond of Stanford University; author and blogger Matt Yglesias, and Robert Kagan of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Several of the co-signers will be available during the news conference to answer questions from the media about , including Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Radwan Masmoudi, Jennifer [open letter](#) the policy recommendations included in the Windsor, Larry Diamond, Geneive Abdo, and others.