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Challenges for the Middle East: Elections and Reforms during 2005

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Abstract: The events and developments in the Middle East over the past 30 years could be classified into three categories: a) events that are more or less of a domestic nature and confined to a single state in the region, b) developments that are mostly influenced by and imported from the surrounding environment to a certain country, and c) incidents that emanate from a regional state with a magnitude that would alter the then existing framework and norms of the international community.

Although it is unlikely that it would bring about changes that could jolter the world, the Middle East in year 2005 is expecting quite a few number of elections and reforms: ranging from Iraq's interim assembly election and ending, probably, with another election in December that would elect a new and full-fledged Iraqi government.

Even with the strong support and commitment by the developed countries to promote democracy in this region under the banner of the so-called Greater Middle East and North Africa Initiative, each and every election would naturally face their own problems, either politically or procedurally. Yet, the insistence and substantial involvement of the US as the only super power would be vital to the entire process.

For those in the region who have hoped for democratic reforms to prevail, the perception of the mass vis-à-vis the US is a critical factor for their success. As long as the US is perceived as, by one reason or another, biased, ill minded, and acting on unilateralism and double standards, the advocators for democracy in the region would be in jeopardy. Revisiting the initial point, hypothetically when the US would move in to launch a 'surgical' strike against Iran, based on their assumption that the latter is covertly developing nuclear weapons, with the kind of material support that they have in hand today, the door would be left open to another interpretation of preemptive measures.

Key words: election, democracy, reform, Greater Middle East and North Africa Initiative

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