



**Governing Arab reform:
governmentality and counter-conduct
in European democracy promotion
in the Arab world**

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1990s promoters of European democracy have sought to further political reform in the Arab world through so-called reform programmes based on notions of equality and local ownership (the ENP, the Barcelona Process, and a host of bilateral reform initiatives). European reform managers have attempted to effectively steer the conduct of local actors towards political reform. Supposedly they have done so without the use of overt power and coercion. Political reform, it is often stressed, cannot be forced from outside but must come from within. How power is involved in these initiatives which claim to work from within the freedom of local subjects has been largely left untouched. Based on a Foucauldian perspective of governmentality, this article proposes to show how European reform initiatives are indeed enmeshed in relations of power that work through liberal technologies of contractualisation and partnership. However, these relations of power are far from a one-sided relationship between a passive and suppressed Arab object and an all-powerful European subject. In a second move, the article develops the concept of counter-conduct further, showing how European reform programmes have been resisted, not by being 'against', but by using the liberal assumptions of 'invitation', 'ownership' and 'gradualism' inherent in European reform programmes to i) select entry, ii) set conditions and iii) simulate reform.

INTRODUCTION

Long before the Arab Spring, European reform governors were seeking to promote 'political reform' in the Middle East and North Africa. Already in the 1990s human rights and democracy promotion constituted one of the main aims of the Euro-Mediterranean framework and, in the wake of Eastern enlargement and the 9/11 attacks, several additional initiatives were launched to advance political change in the Arab world (notably the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Bilateral reform programmes were also put forward by individual European governments, such as the Danish Partnership for Progress and Reform (2002) and the Dutch MATRA programme (2004).

Common to these initiatives – which have all carried on after the Arab Spring – is that they explicitly argue against external actors using power and imposition to pursue the goal of political reform. Instead, these European reform programmes presumably seek to assist and actualise a local willingness to reform, deemed always already to be present in the Arab subject state. These propositions are often echoed in the predominantly policy-oriented and liberalist literature on democracy promotion, which tends to take the liberal self-legitimation of European reform programmes for granted, while eschewing questions of power (see e.g. Carothers 2009, 1999, 2005, Ottaway, Demmelhuber, 2009, Betham, 2009, Youngs, 2003, 2004).

This article, in contrast, suggests that European reform programmes in the Arab world are indeed enmeshed in relations of power, yet of a special liberal kind. Drawing on Foucault's analysis of liberal governmentality understood as a specific type of liberal power, this article will show just how liberal technologies and ra-

tionalities are used to steer the conduct of Arab governments and civil societies, and how these technologies in turn produce very specific subject positions and codes of conduct (Foucault 1988; and Dean 1999).

Yet whereas studies of governmentality until recently have tended to ignore that governmentality (as the conduct of conduct) is never completely successful, and that there are always ways of resistance and types of counter-conduct, this article will add to the newly emerging literature on counter-conduct. The aim is, in particular, to broaden the rather narrow and taken-for-granted character of counter-conduct; including less obvious and direct forms of resistance than those studied in recent work (see Odysseos 2011; and Death 2011). On the basis of theoretical insights drawn from Derrida and Baudrillard on hospitality and simulation, three main analytical categories will be developed in order to understand how Arab governments subtly resist liberal technologies, not by being explicitly against, but in fact by embracing political reform by i) selecting who gains entry, ii) setting domestic rules, and iii) simulating political reform.

The remainder of the article is structured in the following way. The first part argues for the relevance of a governmentality perspective and introduces the main analytical concepts (technology, rationality and counter-conduct). In the second part the article turns to the empirical analysis, zooming in on how European reform programmes are rationalised, how they make use of what the article conceptualises as a technology of 'contractualisation' and a technology of 'partnership', and how these technologies are used to steer the conduct of Arab governments and societies. The third part reverses the perspective, analysing how the technologies of European reform programmers are countered and resisted.

Governmentality and the introduction of counter-conduct

European initiatives for political reform in the Arab world have, from the beginning, been represented as voluntary partnership programmes, uninvolved with brute power and imposition. Based on notions of ownership, willingness and local demand, these initiatives seemingly merely assist and help local processes already underway. This article seeks on one hand to question this liberal presumption of freedom and voluntarism by showing how European reform programmes powerfully serve to produce and regulate Arab subjects as reform-willing/reform-reluctant, who need to have reform priorities and engage in capacity building. On the other hand – and in contrast to the more realist-leaning literature – this article also wishes to take this liberal claim seriously, insofar as European reform initiatives indeed operate through ideas of freedom, consent and self-regulation (see e.g. Burnell, 2005, 2004, Heydemann, 2007, Kurki & Hobson, 2009).

Foucault's concept of governmentality, as a specific type of power, allows us to analyse just how the liberal mode of power works through presumptions of free subjects, and yet how this freedom is also the very condition of possibility for the production of subjectivities and their regulation. In contrast to Foucault's two other modes of power – those of sovereignty and discipline which rule through law and imposition, producing mere docile bodies to be corrected and disciplined – governmentality rules through and produces subjects as free and responsible agent (Foucault 1991: 102). Governmentality seeks to regulate and steer the actions of specific target groups towards certain goals, yet doing so through ideas of responsible and consenting subjectivities. Based on the liberal problematisation of (interventionist) power, governmentality works as a self-limiting form of power, which is ever conscious of the counter-productive effects of

imposition, and therefore ever in pursuit of the 'involvement', 'co-ownership' and 'willingness' of those it seeks to rule.

From the perspective of this article, it is particularly at the level of technologies that governmentality becomes analytically acute, insofar as it allows a study of those meticulous procedures and techniques employed by European reform managers to steer Arab government and societies, techniques which are often hidden from larger debates over power and neo-colonialism in the Arab world, or readily co-produced by liberal policy and governance studies engaged in 'finding the right strategy', evaluating 'impact', furnishing better 'benchmarks', or improving EU action plans (see for e.g. Youngs 2010; Carothers 2009; and Schumacher & del Sarto 2005). Governmentality makes us sensitive to the productive powers in the mundane, trivial and day-to-day bureaucratic practices, and shifts our attention away from the seemingly obvious, grand and exceptional in international political discourse (see also Salter 2007; Bigo 2002) or, as Foucault puts it, "to the humble modalities, and minor procedures, as compared with the majestic rituals of sovereignty or the great apparatuses of state" (Foucault 1977: 170).

Focussing in particular on the technologies used to steer Arab governments and civil societies respectively towards political reform, this article argues that European reform managers make use of techniques already well known from other sites and target groups of (New) Public Management, such as action plans, benchmarking and appreciation interviews; techniques which for more than a decade have been used to steer the conduct of so-called 'social clients' 'the unemployed' 'state employees' or 'unruly children' at schools. Drawing on previous work within critical management studies, in particular on the work of Åkerstrøm Andersen on citizen contracts (Andersen 2007; 2008), I call the technology directed at

the conduct of Arab governments a Technology of Contractualisation and the technology used to direct the conduct of Arab civil society groups a Technology of Partnership and probe into how these two technologies are rationalised and work to subjectify.

While the technologies of ‘contractualisation’ and ‘partnership’ produce distinct forms of rationalities, subjectification and means of selecting, evaluating and steering target groups, these technologies are not necessarily met by mere abiding and docile conduct. Or to put it differently, these technologies do not operate without resistance, reversals and counter-conduct. Counter-conduct in international studies has until recently received only scant attention, and this attention has often been rooted in perspectives influenced by post-Marxist or ideology-critique assumption, even in the case of Foucauldian inspired studies (see e.g. Mosse 2005, Gould 2005). As Death and Odysseos point out, studies of resistance tend to positively valorise dissent and encumber resistance with ideas of liberation and emancipation of an already pre-existing subject (Death 2011: 427). However, resistance is not the binary opposite to power. Neither does it work for freedom. Rather resistance is intimately connected with and relies on the strategies, techniques and relations of subjectivity already present within government (Foucault 2007). Counter-conduct, as Foucault sometimes terms it, “is a struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others” (Foucault, *ibid*). Struggles “not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them” (Foucault quoted in Death 2011: 428). Rather than a transcendence of government, resistance is implicated in the very relationships of power it opposes. Subjects therefore do not cease to be governed when they resist, but are an intimate part of the interplay be-

tween the art of governing and the practices of resistance (Odysseos 2011: 440). Death, for instance, shows how the Johannesburg summit protesters in 2002 worked both to resist and to reinforce power relations, inasmuch as protesters unwittingly helped to reaffirm summits “as the peak of politics at the highest level” and contributed to normalising a range of security practices, such as individual screening procedures, thereby enhancing rather than eroding coercive state powers (Death 2011: 432).

The types of counter-conduct, this article investigates are however somewhat different from the ones analysed by Death and Odysseos (Death 2011, Odysseos 2011) and, in part, different also from Foucault’s counter-conduct. With the former, resistance is implicitly conceptualised as explicit or self-proclaimed dissent, where the governed articulate open forms of counter-subjectivities such as, for instance, protesters, demonstrators and occupiers. Resistance takes on a character of being explicitly against certain power relations and shouting this, as it were, from the rooftops. It is resistance in its obvious and overt form (anti-globalisation, occupy Wall Street, indigenous rights). The types of counter-conduct analysed within this article are, however, neither intentional nor self-proclaimed. Arab governments are not (openly) counter to the goals of political reform, rather they resist in part by working inside European technologies and discourses; resisting not by being ‘against’, but by making use the very discourse of ‘invitation’ and ‘ownership’ employed by European reform initiatives. This is not to be understood in an intentional or cynical way. Arab governments are not masterminding European reform programmes. Rather one might argue that the liberal way of governing conditions specific possibilities for reversals and counter-bindings between governors and governed. Drawing on Derrida’s analysis of the host–guest relationship and Baudrillard’s analysis of hyperreality,

I develop three analytical categories through which to analyse how Arab governments counter governmentality, through i) selecting entry, ii) setting conditions, and iii) simulating reform.

Before proceeding to the empirical analysis, a brief note on the use of sources and terminology: Throughout the article I use the term ‘European reform managers’, inspired by Bigo’s “Managers of unease” (2002). This term allows us to appreciate that it is in the everyday bureaucratic practices of a network of professional managers of reform – ranging from the diplomats in the MENA offices, to the private consultants and advisors reviewing reform initiatives and proposing new projects, to the action plan working groups of the EU Commission, to the professionals working in ‘Arab’ Dialogue and Cultural institutes in the region, to the NGO’s enrolled into European reform initiatives – that liberal governmentality unfolds, rather than just at the level of government or ‘political discourse’ (Bigo 2002: 74, see also Neumann & Sending 2006). It is within this network of professional managers that political reform initiatives are administered, overseen, reviewed and revised. The article zooms in on three ‘European political reform’ initiatives in particular, namely the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the Danish Partnership for Progress and Reform. This also means that this article is partly based on the author’s own interviews and private conversations with European reform managers (civil servants as well as NGOs) in addition to over 200 public documents, including policy documents and speeches made by government representatives and civil servants, official reviews of the various initiatives, guidelines for funding, self-descriptions and public relations documents such as brochures, websites and leaflets, covering the period from 1995 until today (post-uprisings). An implicit argument in the article is hence also that Eu-

ropean reform managers take use of the same liberal technologies and discourses as prior to the Arab uprisings.

Rationalising European reform initiatives

Rationalising European reform initiatives involves a specification of their purposes and goals, of their means and techniques, and the representation of a certain problematique to be solved (see also Dean 1999). Founded on a liberal problematique of (interventionist) power, European reform programmes on one hand aim to steer Arab states towards the objective of political reform, yet on the other hand these programmes are almost painfully aware that if a reform process is to be lasting and effective, it cannot be imposed or ‘driven’ by outsiders. Coerced reform will allegedly lead to failure, producing only short-term results which are difficult to sustain once donors and outside powers have left. But if outside power, or too much power, is an impediment to genuine reform, how can reform programmes be rationalised and sustained in the first instance? As we will see below, most reform initiatives assume and give voice to an already present ‘reform will’, while being blind to how this assumption works to construct what it assumes.

Our initiative has to be demand-driven, we support local processes and do not attempt to deliver our own ready-made solutions to the Arab world; we develop projects on the basis of mutual and equal partnerships (Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Per Stig Møller, 24/5/2006 to the Danish Parliament, author’s own translation).

We remain convinced that engagement should be based on partnership and acknowledgement of the importance of local

ownership. In order to be successful and lasting, reform must come from within the countries concerned and cannot be imposed from outside (EU–US declaration, 26.06.2004)

The pre-existing ‘will’ thus functions as the very condition of possibility for reform initiatives; enabling a discourse on ‘help’ and ‘self-help’, rather than ‘pressure’ and ‘imposition’. The ‘will to reform’, or as it is often called, ‘ownership to reform’ presumably resides within the subject country in advance, and cannot appear to be induced or created from the outside; if so the whole problematique of power re-emerges. As one of the leading diplomats in the Danish Middle East section argued, when I interviewed her on how the Danish Partnership for Progress and Reform tries to sustain ownership: “They must have ownership in advance ... it (ownership) is either there or it is not. It is not something that we can create or ensure” (interview with Danish diplomat, 05.09.09). Conversely the absence of a detectable will to reform, in fact means that the country in question will not be selected for assistance. The Danish Partnership for Progress and Reform initiative officially selects ‘programme countries’ on the basis of a detectable reform will, just as one of the key indicators of progress within the European Neighbourhood initiative is willingness and commitment to reform in the subject country (Principles for the Implementation of a Governance Facility under ENPI, 2008:2). Similarly, the Danish Partnership for Progress and Reform Initiative is called ‘The Arab Initiative’ in Danish, signalling that it was somehow the Arab world, which took the first initiative to reform and engaged in partnership with Denmark to bring it about, rather than the Danish government. However, any attempt to detect true inner will is, of course, going to be afflicted with epistemological difficulties. Since under what con-

ditions can the managers of reform ever know that an apparent reform will is genuine? How can the reform managers safely establish that behind the apparent surface of good intentions, they will not, in the end, find a mere calculated response only meant to extract donor money or international goodwill? European reform managers are confronted by a dilemma about the conditions of truth. On one hand it is the subject governments themselves that hold the truth about themselves. But on the other hand it is not the subject governments who are the final arbiters of truth about themselves, but indeed the European reform managers themselves (see also Salter, 2007: 53).

As Carstens has shown in the context of citizen contracts, this dilemma of truth can, for instance, be tackled (but not solved) by testing the will to reform in target subjects. Social workers who are negotiating citizen contracts are, just as the European managers of reform initiatives, interested in clients who are “guided by an autonomous will, by a drive of their own, who are in the jargon of New Public Management motivated, flexible, responsible and capable of responding to offers of help as occasions of self-help” (Carstens quoted from Andersen 2008: 77). However, clients must not be too eager or too keen on exercising self-reform, because this apparently shows either that the client is insincere and calculating, merely trying to receive resources from the welfare state, or that the client is solely adapting to the will of the social worker. As Andersen explains, the social services departments therefore distinguish between will and mere willingness:

Whereas will is inner, and hence invisible, willingness is external and therefore has observable qualities. Willingness is a question of adaptation, whereby the client visibly bends to the will of the social worker; will is a question of inner inclination

where, we might say, the client invisibly bends to the will of the social worker. Coerced will is no will. It is merely adaptation.

A similar type of test is used by European reform managers. European managers of reform try to detect, or test, the sincerity of will, and 'client countries' in turn have to display the right balance between active and sincere commitment to self-reform on one side (the will to will) and not being too eager or calculating, on the other side; just bending and adapting to the will and demands of external donors (mere willingness). In one of the Danish MFA's initial fact finding missions to a country in the Maghreb, the Head of Mission was thus to a certain extent pleased with the fact that a local human rights organisation turned down a proposal to work in partnership with a Danish human rights' organisation on the grounds that the Danish organisation did not offer what they needed to take their own local reform processes further. This self-reflective refusal proved to the Head of Mission that this was a serious and responsible organisation, who themselves took ownership of the reform process. They knew what kind of help to (self-) help they needed, and were obviously not just adapting to the likings of external donors in order to extract donor money. Conversely, the Head of the Mission's suspicions were raised when local authorities, in accordance with the idea of ownership, were asked to suggest possible reform projects and asked for Danish support to expand their prison facilities. By this response the Head of Mission deduced a lack of commitment to reform. It appeared a calculated response, expressing a lack of ownership to self-reform. The Head of Mission declined the proposal, yet asked the authorities in question to propose new potential projects.

In this sense there is indeed a Double Bind at play in European reform programmes (Der-

rida 1976). European reform managers ask Arab governments to, 'be reform-willing in a genuine way' and, as other double binds, 'be spontaneous' or 'don't obey me all the time'. This opens an 'indecidability', insofar as it becomes impossible for the subject in question to choose obedience as well as disobedience (see also Culler, 1983: 81). Yet the double bind also opens up an indecidability on the part of European reform programmes that risk either working with Arab subject governments who are not genuine, or governments who are not reform-willing. As will be specified further below, this double bind does indeed lay the conditions of possibility for counter-conduct.

Technologies of contractualisation and partnership

Reform initiatives require already committed and willing subject countries. Yet even in the best cases of self-reflective and active subject governments, European reform initiatives inevitably assume that these governments have a problem with their self-regulation. Since if Arab subject governments were entirely willing and capable of carrying out democratic reforms, they would already have done so by themselves, and would not need outside help to do so (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2007: 130). The problem which European reform initiatives identify and seek to help is hence not so much a lack of democratic reform as such, but rather a target country's lack of sufficient willingness and/or capability to engage in self-reform.

Which types of technologies do Western reformers then apply in order to help subject governments with their self-help, and what kind of subjectification processes do they entail? This section will describe two such technologies, one which I call a technology of contractualisation and the other a technology of partnership inspired by recent work within crit-

ical management studies (in particular Åkerstrøm Andersen). The first can be said primarily to address the problem of willingness, the second the problem of capability. Moreover, whereas the first technology is primarily directed at Arab governments, the second will often be targeted primarily at civil society groups.

Technology of contractualisation

A key component in the European Union's reform initiative for the Arab countries is the so-called 'action plan'. Since 2004 the EU has worked to negotiate bilateral agreements in the form of action plans with several Arab/Mediterranean governments, and currently Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Lebanon have signed such plans. While the action plan is a new and little-known policy tool in terms of promoting political reform in the Arab world, it has become a widely used tool within other sectors of public administration in the Western world. With the wave of 'new public management' in the early 1990s, the state has increasingly 'contractualised' relations between citizens and authorities by, for instance, designing plans of action for juveniles, jobseekers, students, or parents. Action plans are typically set up as joint agreements or contracts between the authorities and a given subject, which both parties supposedly agree to and sign. As plans for the future, they set priorities and targets for the subject and are subsequently used to evaluate the subject's progress against the agreed targets. Parents with troubled children, for instance, commit themselves to becoming responsible parents, e.g. agreeing not to let their children be out after 10pm and to share one meal a day in the family (Andersen 2007: 135). In the case of the EU/Arab action plans, Arab governments commit themselves to political reform, agreeing to e.g. "strengthen participation in political life ... strengthen the culture of respect for human rights ..." or "initiate a

review of laws and regulations dealing with pre-trial and administrative detention system" (EU-Egypt European Neighbourhood Action Plan, 2007: 5–7).

However, the importance of the action plan does not solely derive from the specific targets that it stipulates, but in particular from the self-reflective process it supposedly sets in motion (Born & Jensen 2001). The action plan is seen as an opportunity, or platform, for dialogue; a means whereby the subject in question comes to reflect upon and articulate his/her own desires and wishes for change. The action plan is an instrument that assists the subject with his/her process of self-regulation and commits the subject to the reform process. Thus, according to the EU, the ENP action plans "help partners to forge a detailed reform agenda...and are important building blocks of the partners' own domestic reform agendas" (GAERC 18/19 June 2007, Presidency Report: 1-3). A crucial element of the action plan is accordingly the very dialogue about reform, which is supposed to take place between the EU and the Arab government in question during the process of drafting and writing up the Plan. It is not the EU that beforehand dictates certain reform goals. Rather the government in question is asked to present its own priorities for reform. The EU Commission then writes up a first draft, which is jointly discussed and commented upon in a reiterated process, until a final version is signed by the two parties. Hereafter the agreed reform goals are further specified during regular meetings in nine so-called joint sub-committees. In these joint committees the EU and the subject country discuss how far the country has progressed with respect to the goals that have been jointly stipulated, and where improvement might be needed.

This technology of contractualisation powerfully works to make the subject country start a dialogue about itself as an object of reform.

The subject country is made to have reform priorities for itself, evaluate its own progress, and in this way distance itself from itself; treating its self as an object to be changed, discussed and evaluated. In this sense it is not possible not to wish to change oneself, not to have reform goals. If the subject government does not have very clear or specific goals, the action plan and the dialogue surrounding the action plan is exactly seen as an instrument to assist the subject government with formulating such reform goals for itself, as an occasion for self-help (GAERC 18/19 June 2007, Presidency Report: 1-3).

It [the action plan] is neither an abstract concept nor an imposed framework, but a policy of encouragement and support. Our partner countries should therefore continue to demonstrate political determination and make headway along their reform agendas, which they need to embrace as their own (GAERC 18/19 June 2007, Presidency Report: 5).

While the individual Arab government takes part in the evaluation mechanisms of the sub-committees it is, however, the European Commission alone who, in a yearly so-called 'progress report', finally evaluates what kind of achievements the specific subject country has made, and what degree of commitment it has shown to the reform process. This progress report is subsequently made public and can be discussed in the European Parliament and Council. However, according to the Commission, the purpose of the progress report is not to shame the country in question, rather the report is to work as an incentive and encouragement for the subject government "to advance further on its path of reform". In terms of future progress reports, the Commission indeed recommends focussing especially on the positive steps that have been taken by the coun-

try in question, rather than possible negative setbacks (Principles for the Implementation of a Governance Facility under ENPI 2007: 8). In Egypt's country report from 2009, for instance, one will thus find that Egypt has shown "commitment to its Action Plan", it has proved to be an 'active partner' and has "started the process in earnest" (EU SEC 2009 523/2: 1). One will also find that Egypt has apparently shown a "certain determination to tackle the widespread practice of torture" or that Egypt has made 'good progress' or 'limited progress' in various areas of political reform, but one will not find any emphasis on decisive setbacks or backlashes.

Indeed, much of Egypt's progress report in fact reads like a modern teacher's positive and encouraging evaluation of a pupil. The teacher (EU) evaluates the pupil (Egypt's) efforts over the past year, stressing in particular the positive aspects in order to motivate the pupil and keep them committed to improving themselves. Although the Arab governments not are given an explicit mark in the progress report, they are, however, respectively rewarded or punished for their efforts (or lack of) and commitment (or lack of). If the EU estimates that the subject government has progressed according to their action plan, the subject will gain improved access to the EU internal market, e.g. in terms of enhanced free trade agreements and the possibility of exporting e.g. agricultural and fisheries products to the EU (Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, Presidency Progress Report, GAERC, 18/19 June 2007: 6-7). Moreover, subject countries who "have made the most progress in implementing the agreed reform agenda set out in their Action Plan" will be given an extra allocation on top of the normal country allocation to "acknowledge and support their good work" (Principles for the Implementation of a Governance Facility under ENPI 2007: 1). Best performing countries will, in other words, be given a financial

reward or bonus. These mechanisms of reward and punishment are an equally central part of the New Neighbourhood Policy (A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood, Com 303, 2011).

In the Commission's working document on the principles for this extra financial allocation, the Commission spends considerable time discussing the evaluation criteria for the yearly selection of the best performing country. The Commission strongly emphasises that the evaluation should not be a "mechanical ticking-off exercise" (Ibid: 3). Subjective and qualitative elements must be included in order to take account of the subject country's commitment and will to reform. It is not sufficient merely to count the number of reform objectives a country has achieved, or has not achieved, according to their action plan, since some countries are highly reluctant to reform, yet might get a high quantitative score (Ibid: 4). A mere quantitative exercise would apparently not reveal the true level of ambition and will to reform in the subject country. Even small progress in the direction of reform in one country might constitute a big relative change in that country's commitment to reform, while in another country it might not constitute any change at all (Ibid). Absolute change is less important than relative change, and actual reform less important than reform in the subject country's inner attitude. In accordance with the idea that it is in the latter instance that the subject's inner will to enact self-reform that is to be regulated and managed, what the Commission seek to reward is those subject governments who have a certain mindset, and who are active, committed and ambitious in their reform work (Principles for the Implementation of a Governance Facility under ENPI 2007: 3).

Technology of Partnership

As argued above, the technology of contractualisation seeks to address the reluctance or lack of sufficient will to reform in Arab governments by obliging governments to have reform priorities and to work on themselves. The technology of partnership, in turn, seeks to remedy and correct a so-called lack of capacity of civil society groups in the Arab world.

The notion of partnership emerged within Western donor communities in the 1990s. This was in part a response to widespread criticism of the harsh donor practices of the 1980s that were widely seen as imposing a neoliberal economic order on developing countries, using excessively austere measures from above to achieve that end (see e.g. Mosse 2005). Partnership projects between donor organisations in the North and locally-based institutions in the South were now created to tackle head-on the problem of inherent inequalities and asymmetric structures in aid relations. Partnerships between civil society organisations in the North and South were to drag the power out of the relationship between donor and recipient; ensuring a relationship based on equality, consultation and shared interest between the two parties.

NGO's and Western governments alike have overwhelmingly embraced the idea and ideals of partnerships (Mosse 2005), and initiatives for reform in the Arab world today must necessarily adhere to the partnership ideal. The EU's initiative is thus called 'the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership'; the US State Department initiative is named 'the Middle East Partnership Initiative', just as the Danish initiative is called 'Partnership for Progress and Reform'. As Dahl points out, 'partnership' has become an unquestioned normative ideal, not least because it has succeeded in combining two competing positions within the international development discourse: the left's ideal of equality with the neoliberal ideal of respon-

sibility. “Partnership is a complex and clever signifier that conveys the radical idea of solidarity and equality while also meeting a neo-liberal demand for contract, responsibility and self-interest” (Dahl 2001: 13).

Partnerships are, however, a means to ensure a specific end. Partnership cooperation between Arab and European civil society organisations allegedly takes place on the basis of equality, mutual interest and in continuous dialogue, but these partnership mechanisms are carried out in order to ensure that organisations in the Arab world feel the greatest responsibility possible for succeeding with specific democratic reform projects. As above, it is a technique to ensure that Arab civil society organisations have, as it were, ‘internalised’ the reform project. Just as ownership by Arab governments was thought to give the best efficacy by ensuring commitment and sustainability, partnership is likewise thought to ensure the best efficacy and sustainability by bringing civil society ‘partners’ in the Arab world a feeling of being included and on an equal footing with their European sister organisations. Partnership is simply a technology to govern more effectively.

In order to achieve the partnership ideal of mutual interest, European reform initiatives will typically seek to bring together organisations, which are assumed to be ‘like each other’. This likeness will supposedly help the two partners to find a common purpose and project, and keep them committed and involved throughout. Thus women’s groups in Europe will for instance be paired with women’s groups in the Arab world, youth groups with youth groups, journalists with journalists, and human rights organisations with human rights organisations etc. The partnership ideal of equality is also often sought by keeping an equal numerical representation in steering groups, boards and planning groups, as well as among participating actors. Thus for instance,

the EU’s Anna Lindh Foundation stipulates that all projects must encompass two civil society groups from the EU and two from the Southern Mediterranean countries, just as the EuroMeSco think tank network requires that commissioned reports and seminars are co-produced by two think tanks in the EU and two in the Southern Mediterranean countries. Similarly, the location of a partnership event or meeting will also often rotate, so that one event will take place in the North and one in the South, just as partnership projects often have set aside specific budget lines for additional meetings between Southern and Northern coordinators to secure that last minute decisions can be made in common

The problematique which partnership is designed to tackle, and the identity ascribed to civil society actors, are in this sense very different from the subjectifications embedded in the technology of contractualisation. Whereas Arab governments, as we saw above, are articulated as subjects that ultimately have a problem with their will to change and commitment to engage in self-reform, civil society actors are assumed always already to be interested in political change. In fact they are often articulated as agents of change or even as so-called reform agents. The problem to be managed is not that these groups lack sufficient will to change, but what is seen as their lack of sufficient capacity to bring about that change (see e.g. Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity, SWD (2012)121 final; DAI analyse, 2006).

This diagnosis of weakness rather than of reluctance directs partnerships to so-called capacity building and empowerment projects. Partnership projects between European and Arab organisations are typically geared to strengthen the latter, giving Arab organisations better skills and capacity to act politically. So-called capacity building and empowerment are ultimately to enable civil society groups to push more effectively for democratic reforms,

as well as to equip them to participate more actively in (future) democratic political life. Partnership projects might, for instance, aim to teach Arab youth groups or women's groups how to communicate effectively, to advocate their cause in the right way, or the best ways to reach their target audience. Or partnership projects might aim to give Arab civil society groups a stronger organisational or internal capacity, for instance by teaching project management, auditing procedures, and/or democratic decision-making, all with the purpose of strengthening their political reform capacity and actualising their potential as agents of change.

The diagnosis of weakness is however far from innocent. The kind of subjectification, which the notion and practices of capacity building and empowerment produce, unavoidably collides with the ideals of partnership and equality; free from relations of power. Capacity building and empowerment subsume that the Arab partner lacks sufficient capacity and power; that one partner should be trained, given skills and educated; that one side is weak and needs to grow stronger, while the other side already possesses these qualities and helps infuse them into the former. As Cruikshank has argued in her seminal analysis of empowerment programmes in the United States, empowerment builds on the notion that one needs to give power to a weak and passive subject, transforming their subjectivity from powerless to active citizens capable of bringing about their own political change (Cruikshank 1999). Capacity building thereby creates its own hierarchy of authority and expertise, which inherently contradicts the explicit partnership purposes of symmetry.

This asymmetry is equally reproduced in the very selection process of Arab civil society actors. Thus it is European civil society partners who visit, evaluate, and then select the Arab partner, either on the basis of their own

fact-finding missions or on the basis of a prior selection by the Foreign Ministry/ EU Commission. The Arab partner can say 'yes' or 'no' to partnering up, but whether the Arab organisation is asked to partnership in the first place depends on the European partner organisation. This process of selection has, for instance, implied that even moderate Islamist parties and groups were excluded both from the Danish and the European reform initiatives prior to the Arab Spring, despite their strong popular bases in Arab societies and their interest in political change, primarily on the grounds that Islamist groups do not show sufficient democratic commitment (see e.g. Krausch 2009: 6). In one case Hezbollah Youth (which is a political party in Lebanon and part of the coalition government, and not on the EU's terror list), was invited to a seminar between all Danish and Lebanese youth parties in Beirut under the rubric of 'Youth and Democracy'. After much controversy in the Danish media and parliament, an official admonition from the Foreign Ministry followed, and the Danish youth organisation had to officially promise that it would never include Hezbollah Youth in any partnership events again (see DUF, Orientation about Dialogue Activities in Lebanon and Hizbullah Youth, January 2009).

While civil society organisations in Europe are not blind to these power dynamics and relations of inequality, they are however themselves enrolled by European governments into the governing rationales of promoting reform in the Arab world. As a leading member of one of the Danish civil society organisations working within the framework of the Partnership for Progress and Reform explained to me: "Ideally both civil society partners are to gain from the training and empowerment activities. However in practice the focus will necessarily be on the Arab partner, who needs the skills and training [...] Our purpose is, in the last instance, to help reform processes in the Arab

world” (interview with DUF). The purpose of democratic reform and capacity building can only with difficulty be united with the ideals of partnership, insofar as reform always already assumes that one side is lacking and needs to change; that one side needs to grow stronger, while the other side is already strong and complete. Despite what may appear to be the innocent and valuable goals of building up skills and knowledge with the Arab partner, partnerships cannot drag out the hierarchical relations of power.

Counter-conducts

Liberal technologies and rationalities do not just operate on, or through, passive objects. There are always possibilities for and avenues of counter-conduct. As argued in the theoretical section, counter-conduct has until now been a relatively neglected field within Foucauldian and International Relation studies, yet it is an integral part of governing technologies. This section will show how European reform programmes have been resisted and countered not by being explicitly ‘against’, but by using the liberal assumptions of ‘invitation’ ‘ownership’ and ‘gradualism’ inherent to European reform programmes to, i) select entry, ii) set conditions and iii) simulate reform.

Inviting reformers: the logics of (in)hospitality

As we saw above, Arab governments are subjected to a double-bind: ‘be reform-willing!’ On the one hand, European reform managers wish Arab states to willingly take part in the various partnership and reform initiatives. On the other hand they want this participation to derive from a genuine ‘reform will’ from within the subject states themselves. Reform must not be mere blind obedience or a calculated response. While this binds Arab governments to an impossible conduct, of showing reform-will

but not too much, of responding to the call for reform, but not too much; this liberal way of governing also binds the European governors insofar as the latter become dependent on the former’s acceptance of the paradoxical request. European reform programmes are dependent on an initial ‘invitation’ from Arab states. They need Arab governments first to invite European reformers to invite Arab governments to reform. Without this presumed initial initiative from Arab governments, there can be no European reform initiatives. The Arab invitation of the European invitation brings the European reform initiatives into existence.

This reversal of the order of initiative is of course still conditioned on the double bind, yet it creates a reversed relationship where European managers of reform ask ‘please invite us to invite you’. There is thus a certain eagerness on the part of European reform managers to receive an Arab invitation and a certain pride having received one. In the Review of the Danish ‘Arab Partnership and Reform Initiative’ the very first page opens by proudly stating: “It can be argued that there is a significant interest from within the region to participate in the initiative, and Denmark has been invited to cooperate in a number of reform processes, which potentially can contribute to substantial long term reforms” (DAI analyse 2006: 1). Equally, in the EU’s most recent partnership document it is stressed, “In response to the request from the Libyan authorities and in full respect of the principle of Libyan ownership, the EU is [...] working to provide further assistance to the new Libya on democratisation, rule of law and security sector reform ...” (Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity, SWD (2012)121 final. Reversing the sequence of invitation – again it is supposedly the Arab governments who show ‘an interest’ and who invite Denmark/the EU to participate, not the other way around – reform managers become guests, and the governed become hosts. The

Arab state is produced as a 'host-country', and European reform managers as 'invited guests'.

The effects of this reversal of the guest–host relationship are by no means innocent. As Derrida has (in)famously argued, an invitation is an economy of exchange, and one of “the most inhospitable possible” (Derrida, 2000: 364). An invitation is an exercise in self-assertion, in which the host employs the power of hospitality to limit openness to the outside. The host can filter and select at the threshold between inside and outside the home, negotiating what is to be let inside (Derrida, 2000: 24–25). The Latin root of invitation Derrida points out is thus 'incitation' and 'challenge', while the root of guest (*hostis*) is stranger and enemy. As foreigners and indeed as potential enemies, Arab governments can ultimately refuse to invite European reform managers inside. Yet before granting or refusing entry, the host inquires into and makes demands of the potential guest. As Westmoreland points out “The host imposes certain conditions upon the guest. First the host questions and identifies the foreigners, where are you from? What do you want? [...]. Secondly the host sets restrictions: 'As my guest you must agree to act within the limitations I establish. Just don't eat all my food or make a mess' ” (Westmoreland 2008: 2).

And Arab governments have continuously subjected European reform managers to inquiries about their true intentions. European reform managers have been confronted with speculation and questions about their real or underlying reasons for seeking access, and these have often been interpreted as pretexts for more malign actions and security purposes, such as oil, new allies, military outposts, migration control or other types of neo-colonialism; or even as attempts to overthrow the government in power and destabilise the Arab

country in question.¹ At the symbolic doorstep to the Arab host, European reform managers have had immense difficulties convincing Arab governments that they had 'sincere' intentions in mind and that they were not seeking to destabilise or make a political mess; that once they received an invitation to assist in political reform processes, this would not result in regime change or a loss of political power for the host government. Whereas Arab government and civil society organisations had to prove their true 'will to reform' to European reform governors, the latter – now as guests – are subjected to an inverse hermeneutics of suspicion; having to prove that they are genuinely seeking to assist political reform and change, without being motivated by a self-interested foreign agenda or without seeking to destabilise the host country (see also Malmvig 2006).

Inquiring about intentions, the Arab host can negotiate inside and outside and, ultimately, refuse entry or grant an invitation (Derrida 2000). Yet refusing to invite the European guest inside is obviously resistance (or inhospitality) in its most simple and brute form, what Foucault would call 'negative power', or 'saying no to' power. And it will probably involve a form of threatening othering, where the 'guest' is inscribed as a potential enemy or threat (Foucault 1980: 139). It is in this respect characteristic that it has been Libya, Syria and Algeria which – prior to the Arab uprisings – all had strained security relations with the EU, and who were all characterised as 'reluctant partners', who had limited or denied access to European reform managers, whereas the remaining Arab host countries have been 'inviting' European reform manag-

¹ For just a few examples see e.g. Gamil Matt, 2006, Hassan Abou Taleb, 2002, Samar Fatany, 2004)

ers inside. Yet passing the threshold between inside and outside is only a first step. As pointed out above, the host first asks, “what do you want?” And secondly demands: “As my guest you must agree to act within the limitations I establish. Just don’t eat all my food or make a mess” (Westmoreland 2008: 2).

Domestic conditions

Turning to the demands of the host country: Arab governments and bureaucracies have indeed operated with a series of limitations that European reform managers were not to break if they were to continue working within the host country. At a public hearing after the Arab Spring, the former Director of the Middle East Section with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs thus pointed out “We had to operate within the confines established and tolerated by the regimes” and continued, “if we crossed certain red lines, we would be kicked out” (Bo Lidegaard 2011). A similar observation was made by the former Director of the EU’s Anna Lindh Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures in Alexandria, who stressed, for instance, that there could be no approaching or inclusion of civil society groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; if so the whole initiative would risk being closed down by the Egyptian authorities (private conversation with the author). These limitations have not always been openly articulated or they might even be purposely left ambiguous – for instance the degree to which democracy or the role of women could be directly addressed in any given reform programme, or which particular organisations that at any given point in time were considered problematic by the host authorities. Other rules have been more clearly articulated, for instance organising a public seminar in Egypt would always require a permission and security clearing by the Egyptian security services (Tadros 2011). Arab govern-

ments have in this way been able to select between – and sometimes even create – the kind of civil society groups that have been allowed to participate in European reform and partnership projects. NGO activities have been tightly regulated, with the authorities deciding which NGOs could be officially registered as such, which kind of licenses and rights they could hold, and whether they were allowed to receive foreign funding. In Egypt the Mubarak regime’s infamous Law of Association 153 adopted in 2002 laid down that all NGOs had to register with the Ministry of Social Affairs and that all external funding had to be approved by the Ministry. This very effectively restricted the workings and survival of NGOs who were critical of the Mubarak regime, leaving government-initiated ‘NGOs’ as often the only organisations allowed to receive foreign funding (see e.g. Kienle 2001, Grünert 2004, Tadros 2011). In fact, as Tadros points out, it was to a large extent the Egyptian Security Services who managed the NGO laws in practice, also when it came to foreign donors, whose permits could be refused, or who were expected to cooperate in return for favours from the Security Services (Tadros 2011: 92). And this seems to have continued in the post-Mubarak era, where some EU and US funded NGOs have recently been ransacked and investigated by the security services (EU Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity SWD (2012)113 final). Similarly in the monarchies of Jordan or Morocco, where NGOs are still dominated by ‘royal NGOs’, established by royal decree and often run by directors who are politically appointed (Valbjørn & Bank 2010). Thus although European reform managers are likely to select Western-style secular NGOs – as we saw in the sections above – it is not so easy to decide who is actually doing the choosing, European reform manager or Arab governments, insofar as Arab governments have created and preselected the pool of

NGOs from among which European reform managers can choose.

The liberal logic of invitation has thus countered European reform programmes, both by limiting entry and by setting restrictions for European reform managers once they are 'let in', making it difficult for reform managers to steer the conduct of Arab governments in the direction want. But also the very 'reality' of political reform has enabled counter-conduct and made it difficult to govern, as we will see in this last section on counter-conduct below.

Simulating political reform

By employing the concept of political reform, European reform managers have in many ways sought to render themselves immune from the scepticism many local actors have for 'Western style democracy' and the widespread reading of democracy promotion as a new type of neo-colonialism. Political reform has the advantage of appearing as if it were a mere technical and administrative term, removed from politics and/or from specific liberal Western values. And thus European bureaucrats and diplomats have insisted on using terms such as 'partnership for political reform' rather than democracy promotion or democratisation; thereby implying a less interventionist form of power and less demanding form of change. Reform indicates a type of gradual and incremental change, yet it is also a term which connotes an open-ended process, as Arab governments often stress: political reform takes time, it is a bumpy process and setbacks and deadlocks are to be expected. The open-ended and non-linear character of reform has, however, left European reform programmes with another and less direct type of resistance than restricting entry and setting conditions. Insofar as political reform is taken to be an incremental, slow and uneven process, European reform managers have immense difficulties establishing if a given Arab govern-

ment is in a process of genuinely undertaking reform, or if they are, in fact, resisting governing technologies by pretending to undertake reform. Are Arab governments only apparently complying with European reform programmes, in reality using reforms to strengthen their regimes? Are they resisting, not by openly going against reform, but in fact by embracing it? As the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs argues in a Review of the Danish Partnership for Progress and Reform:

Above all it has to be recognised that reforms take time, not least political reforms. In Denmark it took 63 years from the writing of the Constitution to women's suffrage. Moreover, the immediate effects of specific reform initiatives are not given a priori. The establishment of an anti-corruption unit can, for instance, be seen as a step in the direction of enhancing the Rule of Law, but it can also be used by a regime to get rid of political opponents. Elections can equally be manipulated and used to prop up authoritarian regimes. Measures that open up space for civil society organisations can be seen as expressions of a genuine will to further inclusion in society, but they can also be used by a regime to strengthen its own power base by promoting regime-friendly movements. Sometimes it is easy to see through the regime's ulterior motives, but most of the times intentions are ambiguous, and to evaluate whether a given project is contributing to regime persistence or regime transformation will depend on a specific case by case analysis. In some cases only history will tell (DAI Analyse 2006: 7, author's own translation).

In countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Lebanon, governing authorities have 'reformed' for years prior to the

Arab Spring, yet without allowing European reform managers or researchers of Arab democratisation to feel able to decide if reforms really were going in the right direction, or if they were just “transitions to nowhere” meant to keep the incumbent regimes in power, as one renowned democratisation scholar has phrased it (Heydemann 2007). Arab governments have for instance liberalised in one sector, while simultaneously cracking down on another; or they have undertaken reforms at one point in time, only to roll back these very same reforms a few years later; or they have used reforms to maintain confusion and ambiguity about new red lines and new areas of freedom (See Schlumberger, 2010, Heydemann, 2009, Valbjørn & Andre, 2010). In Egypt, President Mubarak promised to abolish the emergency law and allowed for a widening space for political opposition in 2004/2005. Yet, already by 2008, some of these openings had been rolled back. The Mubarak regime cracked down hard both on the secular and the Islamist opposition, the emergency law was extended for another two years, and main opposition leaders were imprisoned. Yet did that mean that Egypt was not undertaking political reforms? That reforms were not real and merely cosmetic, or was Egypt in fact in the middle of a gradual yet bumpy political reform process, which eventually would lead to change? Similarly today, in the post-Arab Spring, countries such as Jordan, Morocco and Algeria are once again undertaking new reforms ‘from above’ changing the constitution, holding elections and widening the space for political opposition, while European reform managers in turn remain uncertain as to the authenticity of reforms. In the European Commission’s review of the Neighbourhood Policy, a distinction is thus drawn between so-called ‘deep reforms’ and ‘superficial reforms’ (A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood, COM, (2011) 303), which apparently is intended to help European reform managers

establish the sincerity and real commitment to reform in any given Arab partner country. But this, of course, only transposes uncertainty to a new level, as reform managers will still only know after the fact if reforms were really deep and genuine, or in fact superficial and fake. Or to put it differently, in themselves elections, greater press freedom, or constitutional changes do not signify a ‘deep’ reform process; it is only with hindsight that they can be interpreted as such, as argued in the quote above.

Perhaps therefore there might be something else at play than the well-known distinction of modernity between ‘surface’ and ‘depth’ suggested by European reform managers as well as by many democratisation scholars. When political reform does not refer to a real signified (such as for instance elections, press freedom, or constitutional change), and reform has no final truth, because neither European reform managers nor Arab governments can prove the authenticity of present reforms, reform becomes a Baudrillardian hyperreal; a simulacrum (Baudrillard 1983). In the simulacrum the distinction between the real and the imaginary has become blurred, or even reversed, so that the imaginary (simulated order) is that which produces the real. Here there is no longer a real world referent, and signs have ceased to refer to a final truth. Instead they endlessly circulate and become self-referential (without a referent and without a truth). Hyperreality constitutes, in this way, a type of third order (neither first order representation, nor second order production), where the indecidability of an event (e.g. war or political reform) makes it open to endless speculation and uncertainty (Baudrillard 1994: 41).

Baudrillard’s famous claim that the Gulf War did not take place, illustrates this order of simulation well. The Gulf War, Baudrillard argues, was a simulated war. It was the endless images and commentaries by experts, generals and intellectuals on CNN and other broad-

casting networks that decided how the war was progressing, and thus even reporters based in the Gulf itself would turn to CNN in order to report back home on the reality of the war. The war became pure speculation, removed from the “real event that it could be or would signify” (Baudrillard 1995: 29), with CNN journalists situated in Jerusalem wearing gas masks reporting on the Gulf War; or American and Iraqi generals apparently using CNN to obtain strategic information about troop movements or defections. In this way even the ‘real parties’ involved in the war used the imaginary as a source of the real. Similarly, one soldier participating in the Gulf War conveyed to a journalist that it was only after she got back to the US and saw the Gulf War on television that she felt she had ‘really’ been in a war (Baudrillard 1995).

Seeing political reform as a simulated and self-referential hyperreality therefore does not imply that it is a fake or distorted reality, underneath or behind which one can discover something more real. This would only re-install the same kind of modernity distinction as that of European reform managers (between surface and depth). There is indeed no intentional or manipulated logic at play. Rather one might argue that Arab governments as well as European reform managers can do nothing other than simulate reform. Reform – as war – has become pure speculation in the sense that its meaning and its referent is uncertain. Political reform is both a process directed towards an end goal, and an end goal in itself. It refers to a range of events – e.g. elections, media freedoms, greater civilian control of the armed forces – but these events may turn out to signify their very opposite, leading to a strengthening rather than weakening of authoritarian control. Political reform indicates a direction, but this direction might also be a transition to nowhere. This inability to prove or even produce a final meaning for reform, leaves Arab

governments as well as European reform managers to perform reform as a self-referring spectacle, a dance of seduction, where the former work to persuade the latter of the reality of an ever-interminable reform process, while the latter work to conceal that they do not have the means to establish the truth of a reform process. Only the reinterpretation of history will tell its truth.

CONCLUSION

The debate over Western Reform and Partnership Initiatives in the Arab world has tended to be locked into two positions: the first Liberalist position overwhelmingly neglects questions of power by accepting the self-proclaimed voluntarism of European democracy promotion strategies. The second and more realist position, while not being blind to power, overwhelmingly eschews how liberal rationality works through presumptions of freedom. Governmentality as a specific mode of liberal power can be said both to challenge and to incorporate elements of these two perspectives. As this paper has shown, European reform initiatives powerfully produce Arab states as ‘reform-willing’ or ‘reform-reluctant’ and engage them in a double bind: ‘be reform-willing, but in a genuine way’. Through the steering techniques of action plans, benchmarking and progress reports, Arab governments are to have ‘dialogues’ with European reform managers about themselves, pursuing an inner process of self-regulation, which is to be rewarded or sanctioned according to their demonstrated willingness to change. Arab civil society groups are, in contrast, articulated as the very agents of change, who presumably have no problem with their willingness to pursue reforms. Yet the assumptions of partnership and equality instead collided with the demands for empowerment and capacity building, exposing how

presumptions of Arab weakness and 'lack' of capacity continue to inform European partnership programmes.

However, Arab governments are far from passive objects of these liberal technologies. There are always possibilities for reversals and counter-conduct. Opening up for more subtle forms of resistance and reversals enabled an analysis of how Arab governments indeed are able to resist by selecting entry, setting conditions and simulating reform. The simulacrum of political reform does however not imply political reform is unreal or merely manipulated. Indeed, European reform managers continue to act as if political reform exists and its truth can be revealed. In this way Arab governments as well as European Reform managers are engaging in a mutual and endless seduction process, persuading us of the reality of political reform.

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