

The Rising Conflict for Democracy in the Arab World

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“Operation Freedom” in Iraq has started what could be called the “fourth wave of democracy”, a process that happens when success of democracy in one country causes other countries to democratize. Since democracy plays such an important role in the Arab world, it is important to understand how far democracy has come in the Arab world. This paper examines whether or not democracy currently exists, the current progression of democratization, and the Arab peoples call for democratic change. The paper examines authoritarian regimes’ arguments of legitimacy and freedom of elections, the regime as a source of stability in the region, and the encouragement of democratic reforms.

This study reviews research from the past three decades. This study examines Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia with the intent of evaluating progressive democratization. Preliminary findings indicate that Arab peoples are challenging current systems and calling for democratic change. These results are important to acknowledge because they indicated the beginnings of a democratic revolution in the region, proving that Arab peoples have a better sense of what changes can be made to help them become more democratic.

The Arab world is in need of true democracy, which is described as competitive and free elections, and civilian control of the military, the principle of equal rights, majority rule, and equality before the law, due process, civil liberties, human rights, and political pluralism. This is a realistic goal that can be achieved, but how far are Arab peoples from genuine democracy? The primary obstacle to their democratic state is that the autocratic regimes in the region do not recognize the need for democratic reforms.

They matter of factly espouse that they assumed power legitimately while claiming to be establishing democratic institutions, yet the fact is, a majority are in power for decades. The difficulty the Arab people are having in removing these authoritarian rulers is that it is nearly impossible because of the exceedingly influential control the heads of state have over military and intelligence powers. The ‘Third wave of democracy’ is known as the process that happens when the success of democracy in one country causes other countries to democratize (Huntington, 1993). The third wave of democracy has not altered the dictatorial system in the

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Arab world, in contrast to the transformations seen in Eastern European or Latin American countries. This makes the goal of true democracy important, because of the rising voices of the Arab peoples calling for free elections, limited presidential terms, and pressing political, economic, and financial reforms. Due to the influential invasion of mass media, globalization, and the improved education of the masses, the people of the Arab world are not the same as they were twenty years ago. Today they look at the transformations other countries have undertaken, and see the benefits to having respect for human rights, the people's right to vote, and attention to women's issues. These are things they desire to adopt.

"Operation Iraqi Freedom" in Iraq started what could be called the 'fourth wave of democracy'. Democracy does not exist, as claimed by the authoritarian rulers, though changes are being made, many countries have come to a stand-still or have not made a great deal of progress. Arab peoples are looking forward to democratic change; their culture and religion does not hinder furthering the cause for democracy, but their rulers do. Many regimes argue that their elections are legitimate and free, that they are a source of stability in the region, and that they encourage democratic reforms. However, this is not the reality.

This paper is divided into sections that cover the major issues that surround the topic and answer the following questions: Can democracy be achieved in the Arab world? In what ways have the authoritarian rulers given the impression that they are providing their people with the democracy they seek? Why do these rulers refuse to change in an ever changing world? How do they manage to maintain control without threat of removal? Are the people tolerant of bad government and corruption? What influence does Islam have on democracy? Is there a need to incorporate Western ideas of democracy? What are the barriers to democracy? Is it plausible to introduce democracy into the Middle East by means of military force? These and other questions guide the research in this paper.

Literature Review

Critics who say that the Middle East and Muslim societies have always been ruled by tyrannical authoritarian regimes have misread history. In fact, the principles of equality and consultation and the duty to depose unjust authority have been part of the Islamic tradition since the religion was founded in the seventh century. Regimes like those of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein are alien to Islamic traditions and have resulted from the influence of Western modernization, German Nazism, and Soviet communism. Leaders of Middle Eastern countries can draw from Islamic traditions to construct democratic Governments (Lewis, B., 2006). In light of this history of misjudging the readiness of Arabs for democracy, how much weight should be given today to analyses that find something in Islamic culture that does not mesh with democracy? Only nine, twenty percent, of the predominately Muslim countries have elected governments. Still, these nine Turkey, Albania, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Niger, Djibouti, prove that democracy is possible in a majority Muslim country (Muravchik, J., 2004).

After decades of being mired in a culture of tyranny and oppression, the people of the Middle East are becoming receptive to the idea of freedom. The revolutionary message brought to them by US president George W. Bush that the Arab and Muslim world can achieve freedom and democracy has created a new impetus for democratic change (Ajami, F., 2006). Arab civil society also had a voice in the demand for political and economic reform. In March 2004, the Alexandria Statement on "Issues of Reform in the Arab World" proposed a "Home-Grown" agenda for political and economic reform. The clear message at the heart of these proposals is

that the agenda of Arab political reform has to be dictated by regional interests and demands, shaped by voices within, and lead by regional actors. At the same time, Arab initiatives for reform welcomed collaboration with, and learning from, the experiences of developed democracies (Al-Nashif, N., 2006). One might say that the Middle East is reviving some form of democratic practices or trends. There are only emerging or nascent democracies; there is no mature democracy yet. True democracy is a process, not an event. Today the democratic practices in the Middle East are still only events. The voters go to cast their votes, maybe in relatively free elections, and go home until the next round. Nevertheless, democratic practices or tendencies are there to stay. The waves of democratization, no matter how slow or deficient they may be, are irreversible (Al-Erayni, A., 2006).

Political History of the Arab World

Colonial History

Colonialism, the practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another, is a cultural phenomenon that traces back hundreds of years and has affected nearly every region in the world. The countries of the Arab world have been significantly affected by the results of colonialism.

“The starting point for an analysis of the emergence of Arab regimes is the colonial period. Political and economic domination by colonial powers created a particular legacy that shaped the trajectory of state development within the Arab region. Colonial domination, in most cases, created the system of nation-states that exist today in the region” (Pratt, 2007, p. 5).

The 1800’s were known as the “colonial era,” the time when most of the occupation in the Middle East took place. While we are theoretically living in the days of “post colonialism,” there are still signs of colonization apparent in the Arab world today. In these post-colonial times, to maintain superiority, control, and influence over the region, the West has helped place corrupt Arab leaders into positions of power, supporting the overthrow of those that are not seen as favorable to Western interests in the region. This has also served to keep their populations at bay, in return for militarization, power and personal wealth of the elite. At times this has been done in the name of fighting communism or terrorism, but the common underlying theme has been the struggle to control access to important resources such as oil.

“The political failure of the modern Arab world has its origins in the time it was created at the end of the First World War. Some of the more secular nationalists had been hoping for independence and unity, but what they got instead was division, colonial rule, and the imposition of kings they did not want” (Field, 1995, p. 25).

The roots of all these problems go back to the settlement imposed on the Arab world at the beginning of the First World War, which was partly under European rule. In his article

Democracy in the Arab World, former Prime minister of Yemen, Abdul Karim Al-Eryani stated that:

“By the end of World War Two in 1945, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq had become independent nations with emerging democracies under multiparty systems. But in the 1950s, an army-led revolution took place in Egypt. Political parties were banned; their leaders were either jailed or put under house arrest. Privately owned newspapers and magazines were nationalized. Thus, the 1952 revolution in Egypt set the stage for establishing strong undemocratic regimes in the region” (Al-Eryani, 2006, p. 67).

As these examples make clear, democracy had a history in the Arab World. It is not a new invention nor is it a recent introduction to the region. However, the effects ‘Western’ democracy had on the region distorted the concept of the democratic system within the Arab world. During the beginning years of the rule of Gamal Abdul Nasser, of Egypt, he acknowledged a disregard for political parties and the democracy they bring about, as he publicly stated:

“Can I ask you a question?: what is democracy? We were suppose to have a democratic system during the period of 1923-1953. But what good was this democracy to our people? I will tell you. Landowners and Pasha.... Use this kind of democracy as an easy tool for the benefits of a feudal system... the peasants would cast their votes according to the instructions of their masters... I want to liberate the peasants and workers both socially and economically... I want the peasants and workers to say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ without any of this affecting their livelihood or daily bread. This in my view is the basis of freedom and democracy” (Kassem, 2004, pp. 50-51).

European colonialism left a lasting impression on the Arab world, which has consolidated the power of those who have followed. According to Pratt, this infamous heritage expanded post independent regime’s powers to include all governmental institutions; allowing a firm grip on the police and military and the ability to exercise full control over the state’s economic projects.

“The legacy of European domination created an impetus for the expansion of post-independence state institutions including the police, the military, economic enterprises, and the bureaucracy. In turn, state expansion acted to concentrate resources and, consequently, power in the hands of the regimes that control the state, thereby paving the way for authoritarianism” (Pratt, 2007, pp. 5-6).

Colonial rule, while not initiating the process, certainly increased the pace of the incorporation of the region into the global capitalist system and cemented its subordinate

position within this system. This subordination also constitutes a major factor in the development of authoritarianism.

The Transition to an Authoritarian Rule

Authoritarianism denotes any political system that concentrates power in the hands of a leader or small elite who are not constitutionally responsible to the body of the people. Authoritarian leaders often exercise power arbitrarily and without regard to existing bodies of law. They usually cannot be replaced by citizens choosing freely among various competitors in elections. The freedom to create political parties in opposition to the regime or other alternative political groupings which compete with the ruling group is either limited or nonexistent in authoritarian regimes.

Many of the current regimes argue that their countries hold fair and free elections, elections in which care is taken to prevent any explicit or hidden structural bias towards any one candidate; and that these United Nations supervised elections, result in a legitimately elected leader. Some go as far as saying that stability is more important than democracy. The regimes of Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia, have all been at one time or another dominated by a single party. In Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, and Jordan they claim to hold open and free elections and to support political pluralism. However, Hosni Mubarak, of Egypt, was elected for the fourth time after twenty-four years in office, Zain El-Abdeen Bin Ali, of Tunisia, for the second time after seventeen years in office, and Ali Abdulla Saleh, of Yemen, for the fourth time after twenty-eight years in office.

“Mubarak ran unopposed, while Saleh faced just one candidate from within his own party. In Tunisia the two contenders allowed to run came from minor opposition parties and got barely 0.6 percent of the vote. In Algeria, all six opposition candidates planning to run in the April 1999 elections against the Army’s Candidate, Abdul Aziz Boutefliqa, quit the race in protest against the government’s strong arm tactics against their activists. Election fraud, a common occurrence in the Middle East, is less blatant but is still alive and well” (Sivan, 2003).

Since the number of countries in the Arab region make it impractical to look at each country’s electoral process individually and thoroughly, this paper will look at the electoral outcomes of eight countries in the region. Due to limitations on the size of this paper, it was not possible to conduct in-depth research on the electoral process or outcomes of each country in the region. Therefore, this paper will attempt to give a brief analysis of the recent results of elections in these eight authoritarian states.

Algeria

In 1999, Boutefliqa ran for President as an independent candidate, supported by the military. He was elected with 74% of the votes, according to the official count. All other candidates withdrew from the election prior to the vote, citing fraud concerns. Presidential elections took place in April 2004 and returned President Boutefliqa to office with 84.99% of the vote (US Department of state, Algeria, 2007). The next presidential elections are scheduled for

2009. Bouteflika appointed a new Prime Minister, Abdelaziz Belkhadem, in 2006. Belkhadem announced plans to amend the Algerian Constitution, an issue heavily opposed by the Algerian people. The topics for the argument were to allow the President to run for office indefinitely and to increase presidential powers. Observers see this amendment as a ploy to cancel the two-term limit.

Bouteflika has held on to his position through the absence of opposing candidates, either within his own party or others; and the support of the army.

Egypt

Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt since October 14, 1981, has been re-elected by a majority of votes, using a referendum for successive terms, on four occasions: in 1987, 1993, 1999, and 2005. The results of the referendums are of questionable validity. No one runs against the President due to a restriction in the Egyptian constitution in which the People's Assembly plays the main role in electing the President of the Republic. On July 28, 2005, Mubarak announced his candidacy, as had been expected. The election scheduled for September 7, 2005 involved mass rigging activities, according to civil organizations that observed the elections (Kassem, 2004, pp. 26-28). Reports have shown that Mubarak's party used government vehicles to take public employees to vote for him. Votes were bought for Mubarak in poor suburbs and rural areas. It was also reported that thousands of illegal votes were allowed for Mubarak from citizens who were not registered to vote.

Libya

Al-Qaddafi the longest serving head of government, staged a coup against King Idris As-Sinousi, in 1969. Revolutionary officers abolished the monarchy, and proclaimed the new Libyan Arab Republic. Gaddafi was, and is to this day, referred to as the "Brother Leader and Guide of the Revolution" (US Department of State, Libya, 2007). The historical revolutionary leader was not freely elected and cannot be voted out of office. He is in power by virtue of his involvement in the revolution.

Mauritania

After holding various positions in the military, Walid Daya was appointed Chief of Staff of the Army in January 1981, during the rule of military head of state Mohamed Khouna Walid Haidalla. In the aftermath of a failed coup against Walid Haidalla in March 1981, Walid Daya was appointed Prime Minister on the 25th of April 1981, replacing civilian Prime Minister Sayed Ahmed Walid Bnejara. He held this office until 8th of March 1984, when Walid Haidalla, who was still head of state, took over the post. On December 12th 1984, while Walid Haidalla was out of the country, Walid Daya seized power and declared himself Chairman of the Military Committee for National Salvation. Walid Daya's regime began a transition to civilian, multiparty government in 1991. A new constitution was approved by referendum in July. The first multiparty presidential elections were held in January 1992. Walid Daya, candidate of the newly formed Democratic and Social Republican Party (PRDS), received nearly 63% of the vote amid opposition claims of serious irregularities and fraud (African Elections Database, 2007). He won slightly more than 90% of the vote in the December 12th 1997 presidential election, which was

boycotted by major opposition political parties, anticipating fraud, they said that this would make their participation futile.

The first fully democratic Presidential election since 1960 occurred on March 11th, 2007. The election is the final transfer from military to civilian rule following the military coup in 2005. This is the first time the president has been selected in a multi-candidate election in the country's post-independence history (BBC, 2007).

Saudi Arabia

The central institution of the Saudi Arabian government is the Saudi monarchy. In 1932, having conquered most of the Peninsula, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud proclaimed himself King of Saudi Arabia. The *Basic Law of Government*, adopted in 1992, declared that Saudi Arabia is only to be ruled by the sons and grandsons of the first king. The current king, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, is the sixth in the ruling dynasty. In October 2006, King Abdullah announced the creation of the Bay'ah Council, Pledge Council, made up of the sons and senior grandsons of the Kingdom's founder. The Council's function is to ensure the smooth transition of power in the event of the King's, and Crown Princes', incapacitation or death and the selection of an heir. In the early 1990s, Saudi Arabia began a program of political reform, establishing the appointed Majlis al-Shura, Consultative Council. Nevertheless, this step did not lead to a significant shift in authority or more democratic institutions. In 2005, half of the council seats were open for election, and the other half were appointed by the monarchy (Champion, 2003, 60-73).

Syria

In Syria the former president Hafiz Al-Asad had designated his son, Bashar Al-Asad, as his successor, though the Syrian constitution only allowed those who are forty years old or older to become president, the National Assembly amended the constitution to permit the thirty-four year old Bashar the candidacy of his late father's office. "In a July 10th referendum, in which virtually the entire Syrian electorate took part, 97.3 percent of the voters affirmed Bashar's candidacy. A week later, on July 17th, the new president was inaugurated" (Leverett, 2005). The Arab Republic of Syria has a long way to go, in terms of democratic reforms. The Arab Syrian people look forward to the day they can go to the polling stations and be able to vote freely.

Tunisia

Tunisia is a republic with a strong presidential system dominated by a single political party, the ruling party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), has been the sole legal party for the past 25 years. President Zain El-Abdeen Bin Ali has been in office since 1987, the year he deposed Habib Bourguiba in a bloodless coup. The constitution has been changed twice to allow Bin Ali to remain in power; initially from two to three terms, then from three to five. In 1999, though two alternative candidates were permitted to stand in the presidential elections, Bin Ali was reelected with 99.66 percent of the vote. He was again reelected on the 24th of October 2004, officially taking 94.48 percent of the vote, after a controversial constitutional referendum in 2002, which allowed him to seek reelection (Freedom House, 2007).

Yemen

Ali Abdullah Saleh, Yemen's second directly elected president, holding office since 1978, won 91.2 percent of the vote in 1999 (Dresch, 2000, p 184). Saleh announced in July 2002 that he would "not contest the presidential elections". However, in June 2006 Saleh changed his mind and accepted his party's nomination as the presidential candidate of the General Peoples Congress, saying that when he initially decided not to contest the elections his aim was "to establish ground for a peaceful transfer of power" but that he was now bowing to the "popular pressure and appeals of the Yemeni people." (IRIN, 2008)

Democratic Transformations

Claims of Change

In the face of drastic transformations all over the world, authoritarian rulers are approving insignificant changes; however, after a time, they are back to square one, and no actual advancement has been made. Some claim that significant changes have been made to their constitutions, that economic policies, civil liberties, and human rights improvements have been put into practice.

"Arab governments are under pressure to reform, they have not been converted to the principle of democracy, they are reforming because they have to. The challenge for these governments is to maintain some momentum toward greater freedom and democracy, enough to give the people a feeling of gradual improvement, yet at the same time keep control" (Field, 1995, p. 272).

In her book, *Barriers to Democracy*, Amani Jamal, shows pessimism toward the claims of democratic developments by authoritarian rulers, stating:

"Developments across the Middle East, especially with the international community's demands for greater democratization, leave some room for optimism. Nevertheless, while the regimes have progressed with promises of democratization, they are in fact simultaneously moving their civil and political liberties backward" (Jamal, 2007, pp. 125-126).

Every Arab regime is classified, according to certain characteristics, into either a radical single party, such as in Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, and Syria, or a conservative family rule, such as in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. Within these regimes there has been little room for political or civil society activity independent of the regime, thereby concentrating formal political power in the hands of the regime.

Absolute Monarchies

Absolute monarchy is more common in the Middle East than elsewhere. Even a number of kingdoms with parliaments have been claimed to fall broadly under this category. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Qatar are all considered absolute monarchies.

Under the late King Hussein, Jordan began an experiment with democratization. This experiment began in 1989, after a series of riots in reaction to the elimination of governmental subsidies. Although the early openings were quite promising, the withdrawal began in 1994 when Jordan signed a peace agreement with Israel. Since then, civil and political rights guaranteed to Jordanians in the constitution and the National Charter have been gradually, but steadily revoked. 'Free and fair' elections are controlled through modifications of electoral laws and civil society organizations are pressured to avoid talking about 'sensitive' topics such as human rights, sanctions against Iraq, press freedoms, and tensions between Jordan's majority Palestinian population and the East Bank tribes. Severe press restrictions forced more than a dozen newspapers to close. These actions were constitutionally possible because the parliament had been dissolved before finishing its regular term. Even under the new King, Abdullah II, the situation has not improved.

"Since the beginning of his reign in 1999 King Abdullah has adopted a slate of emergency laws that have effectively reversed much of the democratic advancement. In 2002, the government limited freedom of speech, expression, and assembly. The Jordanian monarchy remains authoritarian. In a 2002 document on political conditions in Jordan, Freedom House reported:

'The King has long been the center of political authority in this country... While organized political activity is actively encouraged in Jordan, the government continues to use its institutional powers, as well as sporadic instances of fraud and intimidation to weaken opposition to the king and his policies.'

The Jordanian monarchy continues to monitor all facets of political society. It allows associations to form, but they can not be political" (Jamal, 2007, p. 116).

In Kuwait, formal political parties are banned, but political groupings, such as parliamentary blocs, have been allowed to emerge. In 2005, a group of Kuwaiti Islamists announced the formation of the Umma Party (The Nation Party), but like other political groupings, it was not granted a permit by the government. After the Umma Party announced its formation, the government imposed a travel ban on 15 of its top members and interrogated several of the party's leaders. The state maintains a significant presence in the broadcast media. In 2002, the government shuttered the local office of Qatar-based satellite television station Al-Jazeera over objections to its editorial positions, which were deemed anti-Kuwaiti, and during the June 2006 parliamentary elections, the government sought to shut down satellite stations for airing allegedly biased content. Kuwaitis have access to the internet, though the government has directed internet service providers to block certain sites for political or moral reasons. The government imposes restrictions on freedoms of assembly and association, although those rights are provided for by law. Kuwaitis must notify authorities of a public meeting or protest, but no

longer need a permit. The government routinely restricts the registration and licensing of associations and nongovernmental organizations, forcing dozens of groups to operate without legal standing or state assistance.

According to the *The Economist's Democracy Index*, the Saudi government is the ninth most authoritarian regime in the world. There are no recognized political parties or national elections, except the local elections that were held in 2005, and even then participation was reserved for male citizens only. The leading members of the royal family choose the king from among themselves with the subsequent approval of the ulema, scholars. A 150-member Consultative Assembly, appointed by the King, that has limited legislative rights. The king acts as the highest court of appeal and has the power to pardon. Several international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations Human Rights Committee have issued reports critical of the Saudi legal system and its human rights record in various political, legal, and social areas, especially its severe limitations on the rights of women. Saudis do not enjoy the freedom of association or assembly. The government frequently arrests and detains political activists who stage demonstrations or engage in other civic advocacy. The government does not allow women to participate in municipal elections.

The puzzle of monarchial persistence reveals the need for an understanding of the institutions of monarchism in the Arab world. The survival of monarchism is not necessarily a postponement of revolution, but instead offers the prospect of a gradual transition to a more liberal political order. The survival of Arab monarchies into the twenty-first century raises questions about the capacity of traditional political institutions to adapt to the modern world.

Single Party Republican Regimes

A number of republics embrace Arab Socialism, Syria, Tunisia, and Egypt regularly hold elections, but are single-party states, not multi-party systems, denying citizens a choice between different candidates for presidential election.

Freedom House (2007) rated political rights in Egypt as “6”, 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free rating, civil liberties as “5” and gave it the freedom rating of “Not Free”. In 2007, human rights group Amnesty International released a report criticizing Egypt for torture and illegal detention. The report alleges that Egypt has become an international center for torture, where other nations send suspects for interrogation, often as part of the ‘War on Terror’. The report calls on Egypt to bring its anti-terrorism laws into accordance with international human rights statutes and on other nations to stop sending their detainees to Egypt. Egyptians have been living under an Emergency Law since 1967, except for an 18-month period in 1980. The emergency was imposed during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and re-imposed following the assassination of President Anwar Al-Sadat. The law has been continuously extended every three years since 1981. Under the law, police powers are extended, constitutional rights suspended and censorship is legalized. The law sharply limits any non-governmental political activity; street demonstrations, non-approved political organizations, and unregistered financial donations are formally banned.

“Emergency law allows the government ‘The right to censor, seize, or confiscate letters, newspapers, newsletters, publications, and all other means of expression and advertising before they are published.’ It also provides the government with ‘broad powers to disregard the provisions set forth in the Criminal Procedure Code regarding those accused

as well as allowing for the immediate arrest of those who disobey the orders issued according to the emergency law or those who commit any of the crimes described by it.' While President Mubarak has argued that the renewal of Emergency Law is necessary 'In order to confront terrorism and protect democracy and stability,' the law is used to contain and control not just terrorism but also legitimate political activities. Indicative of this is the manner in which the restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly are applied during legislative election campaigns" (Kassem, 2004, pp. 55-56).

The Libyan regime, by far the worst authoritarian Arab government, is not an electoral democracy. It holds no presidential elections, has no referendums, no parliamentary or local elections, and no civilian electoral participation on any level of political and civil life. Political parties were banned by the 1972 Prohibition of Party Politics Act Number 71. According to the Association Act of 1971, the establishment of non-governmental organizations is allowed; however, because they must conform to the goals of the revolution, they are few in comparison with those in neighboring countries. Trade unions do not exist, but numerous professional associations are integrated into the state structure as a third pillar, along with the People's Congresses and Committees. These associations do not have the right to strike. The government controls both state-run and semi-autonomous media. In cases involving a violation of certain taboos, the private press is censored. According to the U.S. Department of State's annual human rights report for 2004, Libya's authoritarian regime continued to have a poor record in the area of human rights. Numerous and serious abuses on the part of the government include poor prison conditions, arbitrary arrest and detention, prisoners prevented from outside communications, and political prisoners held for many years without charge or trial. The judiciary is controlled by the state, and there is no right to a fair public trial. Libyans do not have the right to change their government. Freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion are restricted. Independent human rights organizations are prohibited. *Freedom House* (2007) rated political rights in Libya as "7", civil liberties as "7" and gave it the freedom rating of "Not Free".

In 2005, Syrian officials repeatedly hinted that sweeping political reforms would be drafted at a major Baath Party conference. According to state media reports, party leaders issued a set of vague recommendations to legalize political parties, reform the electoral system, permit greater press freedom, and relax emergency law, but no substantial measures were undertaken to implement the recommendations. Al-Asad openly stated that there would be no major constitutional reforms or loosening of Baath Party control of the state. In Syria, freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association are restricted. Independent human rights organizations are prohibited. *Freedom House* (2007) rated political rights in Syria as "7", civil liberties as "6" and gave it the freedom rating of "Not Free."

Despite official proclamations, the Tunisian government imposes significant restrictions on freedom of speech and human rights. The fact that the growth of the internet has been a major issue for Tunisia, is the clearest sign of censorship. In Tunisia, internet access is invariably censored. Censorship is targeted at press or chat room commentary that is critical of the government. For example, the Al-Arabiya satellite channel website is officially censored and thereby inaccessible from any computer in Tunisia. There is evidence that nonconformists are regularly arrested, for crimes as minor as viewing banned web sites. There are currently six legal opposition parties all with their own newspapers; however, the Committee to Protect Journalists, in its 2005 country report on Tunisia, points out a record of harassment, persecution,

imprisonment, and physical harm perpetrated on journalists critical of the government. Tunisia is also one of the few Muslim countries that prohibits the hijab in government buildings. By government decree, women that insist on wearing the hijab must quit their job. Dissenters are forced to sign a document admitting to having committed a crime punishable by law and in some cases are jailed.

Ordinary citizens encounter the state at every turn and are made totally dependent on its bureaucracy, as permits are needed for everything. Society is totally supervised and controlled. Under these parties, citizens try to manipulate the system's corruption and their informal networks to gain access to essential channels of influence that lead to all-important permits. This serves as a breeding ground for corruption, favoritism and patronage. Regime leaders try to justify the imposition of a one-party system by many reasons: only a single-party can be a truly representative national organization able to overcome particularistic tendencies. Only a single party can undertake the needed radical modernizing reforms, the equitable distribution of national income, and the long-term economic development needed to ensure national prosperity. Only a single party can keep the military under civilian control, the bureaucracy dedicated, and public opinion mobilized. However, because one-party systems have a tendency to become rigid and unwilling to accept change, this renders them unable to deal with new situations and can result in their collapse.

Recognition of Reform

The invasion of Iraq, demands for reform of Palestinian political institutions, calls for democracy in Egypt, and support for the Lebanese opposition have helped create momentum for change in some Arab countries. Recognizing the need for change, some Gulf countries have embarked upon establishing consultative councils, which never existed before.

“Saudi Arabia’s recent domestic moves are in part a response to mounting regional pressure, with the smaller Gulf States now competing in democratic reforms. Qatar and Oman have enfranchised women and established elected consultative councils, half of which are appointed. Parliamentary elections occur in Kuwait and Bahrain, and there is economic liberalization in the U.A.E. At the end of 2004, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Maktoom, governor of Dubai recognized the full force of the popular desire for participation, declaring that ‘Arab leaders must reform or sink.’ Saudi Arabia currently, appoints the members of the Majlis As-Shurah, or consultative council, entirely male. Women are excluded from the membership of the Majlis, they do not legislate, and they rarely even propose legislation. The Majlis can not debate the budget or military deals, nor can it question the financial allocation to the princes” (Yamani, 2005, pp. 114-115, 117).

There is real pressure for change in the region. The Arab people no longer buy into the ideologies of nationalism, defined as actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve self-determination (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy), and Arabism, defined as a movement for unification among the Arab people and nations of the Middle East; excluding non-Arab countries (Merriam-Webster dictionary), or the focus of those in power on perceived external threats. “After decades of being mired in a culture of tyranny and oppression, the people

of the Middle East are becoming receptive to the idea of freedom” (Ajami, 2006, p. 72). There is no denying that the Arab world wants democratic freedoms. The Arab people are eager for change. The working class, the educated, and the business community are ready for democratic reforms and better economies and ways of life. A Pew Research Center survey found that in most Arab countries large majorities believed that Western-style democracy would work in their countries, and many expressed a favorable view of freedom of expression, freedom of the press, multi-party systems and equal treatment under the law.

“Faced with outside pressures, the global diffusion of democracy and human rights as new standards and legitimators in domestic politics, and cries of economic performance, and of de-legitimacy from the inside, many Arab elites have embarked on previously unthinkable reforms....Opportunities in the Arab world are slowly unfolding for greater participation and contestation” (Sadiki, 2002, p. 71).

Proposals for reform have been introduced in a number of countries. Yemen hosted the fledgling Democracies Forum, in 1999, which led to the establishment of the Community of Democracies. Initiatives put forward by several Arab leaders, in the past few years has increased the momentum for economic and democratic reforms. At the Arab Summit in 2003, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah presented the “Charter to Reform the Arab Stand” initiative. On March 28, 2004, the Qatari initiative for political reforms in the Arab world, was proposed by the Emir of Qatar, Hamad Bin-Khlifa Al-thani. The Sana’a Declaration on Democracy, Human Rights, and the Role of the International Criminal Court was issued on January 10-12, 2004. In 2004, the Tunis Declaration, which outlined the ‘Course for Development and Modernization’, was issued by the Arab Summit in Tunis in May 2004.

Humble Beginnings

Almost every Arab state has been put under pressure by outside democracies, and their people, who have been directly affected by globalization, the mass media, education, and the internet invasion, setting a foundation for promising democratic reforms. Due to the fact that not every Arab state will fall under any of the following issues, each and every state mentioned previously may not be discussed below.

Press, Freedom of Religion and Education

Kuwait has one of the most vocal and transparent media in the Arab World. Though the government funds several leading newspapers and satellite channels, Kuwaiti journalists enjoy greater freedom than their regional counterparts; and though Islam is the state religion, as is in many other Arab Countries, religious minorities are permitted to practice their faiths freely.

“Faced with increased international pressure over its educational system, Saudi Arabia has worked to revise school curriculums. In 2003, the government approved the establishment of the National Human Rights Association (NHRA). Education and

economic rights for Saudi women have improved. Girls were not permitted to attend school until 1964, but now more than half of the country's university students are female" (Freedom House, 2007).

Women's Rights

Pride is developing in young women. In Kuwait women protested and gained the right to vote, and in Saudi Arabia they are going to vote alongside their sons, brothers and fathers. In Kuwait, beginning in the summer of 2006, female candidates were allowed to run for office. One hundred percent of all eligible Kuwaiti women were registered to vote, while only 80% of men eligible to vote actually registered. The appointment of a woman as a cabinet minister was a major breakthrough in the Kuwaiti political system and it makes Kuwait the third country in the conservative Persian Gulf Arab monarchies to have a woman cabinet minister. Tunisian women enjoy many more social freedoms and legal rights than women in other Arab countries, the 1956 Personal Status Code grants women equal rights in divorce.

"In Saudi Arabia, May 2004, women won the right to hold commercial licenses, which opened the door for greater economic participation. In addition, women have generally become more visible in society. In 2005, Saudi state television began using women as newscasters, and two women became the first females elected to Jeddah's chamber of commerce" (Freedom House, 2007).

Despite being traditionally dominated by men, the number of women involved as lawyers in the Jordan legal system has been increasing. As of mid-2006 Jordan had 1,284 female lawyers, out of a total number of 6,915, and 35 female judges from a total of 630. In 2006, the Yemeni Ministry of Human Rights, led by female Huda Al-Ban, was created to observe violations of press, women or minority groups in Yemen, this is considered a revolutionary achievement in the region. And in March 2007, the Yemeni constitution was changed to allow women to hold more governmental positions, and be elected into parliament. Yemen is one of the countries in the Arab world where a high percentage of women line up to vote in general and local elections. To link the voting record with this high percentage, the Yemeni constitution has been amended to give women more positions within different governmental sectors.

Free Elections Enforced

Egyptians are no longer frightened of the scare tactics used to by the Mubarak regime to secure their obedience. In 2002, Egypt enacted a law into the constitution allowing judicial monitoring of legislative and presidential elections, the judiciary is known for its autonomy and fairness. Freedom House (2006) noted that "Egypt witnessed its most transparent and competitive presidential and legislative elections in more than half a century." For the first time in modern history of Egypt, in May 2005, thirty two and a half million voters called for a referendum on a constitutional amendment to allow the people to elect the president directly, and allow contenders to run for the presidency, this was overwhelmingly accepted. In the face of growing internal opposition, in an unprecedented step toward political reform, Presidents Al-Asad of Syria, and Al-Qadafi of Libya, ordered the release of hundreds of opposition political

prisoners. Yemen, in 2007, Tunisia, in 2005, and Egypt, in 2005 approved constitutional amendments to limit presidential tenure to two terms.

Moving toward greater independence, Jordan's parliament has investigated corruption charges against several regime figures and has become the major forum in which differing political views, including those of political Islamists, are expressed.

"In the 2007 Worldwide Press Freedom Index maintained by Reporters Without Borders, Jordan ranked 122nd out of 167 countries, putting it third-best in the Middle East, behind only Israel and Kuwait" (Reporters Without Borders, 2007).

The Palestinian people have voiced their opinions, and freely elected their government. In Lebanon, supporters of democracy are demanding independence from foreign control. Qatar has introduced partial, and Saudi Arabia full, public elections. In Yemen, the parliament passed a law in 2007, allowing for the election of governors, who were typically appointed in the past; Saudi Arabian citizens are insisting that the government become more accountable. In Saudi Arabia, 2006, following the previous year's judicial reform, the government created security, family, traffic, and commercial courts. It also established a Supreme Court in Riyadh and an appeals court in each of the 13 provinces. Jordan's more open political environment has led to the emergence of a variety of political parties. In November 2007, President Saleh called for the return of the leaders of the Yemeni Social Party to participate in the election process, and in the building of a democratic state.

In a free and fair election, held on September 20th, 2006, for the first time in modern Arab history, Ali Abdullah Saleh won with only 77.2% of the vote, forever changing the typical win of 90%, or more, generally seen by Arab leaders. In 2004, President Bouteflika, of Algeria, was re-elected by 85% of the vote in an election that was praised by the OSCE observers, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, as an example of democracy in the Arab world. In Mauritania, the first fully democratic Presidential election since 1960, was held on March 11th 2007. The election was the final transfer from military to civilian rule following the military coup of 2005. This is the first time the president has been selected in a multi-candidate election in the country's post-independence history. The election was won in a second round of voting by Saydi Walid Sheikh Abdullah, with Ahmed Walid Daddah a close second. Applauded by the Mauritanian people, but cautiously watched by the international community, the military government has organized elections within a promised two year timeline. In a referendum on June 26th 2006, Mauritians overwhelmingly, 97%, approved a new constitution which limited the duration of a president's stay in office. The leader of the junta, Col. Fall, promised to abide by the referendum and relinquish power peacefully. It seems as though Mauritania has set an example for other Arab leaders, showing that they must take the initiative and step down, allowing their people to freely choose, through the election process, who they think will best meet their hopes and expectations.

A Democratic Islamic Nation, A Contradiction in Terms?

Scholars of Islam agree that the principle of shura, consultative decision-making, is the source of democratic ethics in Islam. Is it true that democracy is basically a western concept and

ideology, therefore fundamentally at odds with the values and principles of Islam? The answer is, no, otherwise the Muslim world, consisting of 57 countries populated by more than 1.4 billion people, would have to choose between their religion and democracy. There is no inborn clash between democracy and Islam, many of its teachings support democracy including openness to diverse political ideas, tolerance, and progressive innovation. Islam promotes freedom of religion, equality, justice, freedom of speech, the consent of the majority, and consultation.

The explanation of why so many Muslim countries are not democratic has more to do with historical, political, cultural, and economic factors than with religious ones. Though it is true that the Muslim world lags in respect to democracy, “Only 20% of the predominantly Muslim Countries having elected governments, these nine, Turkey, Albania, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Niger and Djibouti, prove that democracy is possible in a majority Muslim country” (Muravchik, 2004, p. 8).

Across the Muslim world, governments have assumed different degrees of self-representation in response to unique historical circumstances. For example, Turkey is a parliamentary, secular democracy, while Indonesia is one of the world’s largest republics, Iran is a theocratic republic with a growing democratic reform movement, and Iraq is currently in the midst of “nation-building”. All of this is proof there is no one-size-fits-all democracy.

“One can only claim that there is a cultural misfit between Islam and democracy if one ignores Turkey and assumes that Islam is coterminous with the countries of the Arab League, But, three quarters of the world’s Muslims live beyond North Africa, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf, many of them in democracies.... Including Indonesia, India, and Malaysia. There are hints of democracies in, Lebanon, Bahrain, Yemen, and Jordan” (Patten, 1992, p. 42).

In the Arab world, there has been an increasing call for democracy with an Islamic twist. In many countries, Muslims who are not activist Islamists, have participated in electoral processes, and have brought a sense of the need for morality, and Islamic awareness in the political arena. In a time when politics in many countries is becoming “de-secularized”, leaders of Islamic organizations play important roles in electoral political systems that are not explicitly identified as Islamic. The problem with societies that have adopted a more hierarchical preference is the need for cultural reform, to become more in line with the Islamic values of equality, freedom of religion, and respect for the individual. This cultural change is necessary, however, it can not be carried out without appealing to more fundamental values. That’s where Islam comes in. As it is difficult to imagine the modern West without the Reformation in Europe, it is difficult to witness a reformed Middle East without Islam.

“Those who say that the Middle East and Muslim societies have always been ruled by tyrannical authoritarian regimes have misread history... the principles of equality and consultation and the duty to depose unjust authority have been part of the Islamic tradition since the religion was founded... Leaders of Middle Eastern countries can draw from Islamic traditions to construct democratic governments” (Lewis, 2006, p. 55).

The Affects of an Outsiders View

Here is the dilemma. The West feels that its stereotypes add up to 'knowledge' of the Middle East, these common stereotypes are profoundly warped, and are derived largely from the less than 20 percent of Muslims who are Arabs. Though the Bush administration insists that the US War on Terrorism is not a war on Islam, too many Westerners seem to view it that way. George W. Bush, when asked if he had spoken to his father about the invasion of, he said "No, I spoke with a higher father." meaning 'God'. Even more disturbing are the statements of some religious figures in the US; for example, Rev. Franklin Graham, a well known evangelist, said of Islam, "I believe it's a very evil and wicked religion." When Muslims hear this it is like telling them that they are 'evil and wicked'. Any society that feels it is under siege or under attack will become more conservative, and suspicious of change. No Muslim can accept a Western concept of democracy until there is some acceptance, and consideration given to their religion. After all, is it not at the heart of democracy to be able to chose your religion, and not be discriminated against because of it? Is that not one of the basis on which America was founded? This then leads us to the question of whether or not the U.S. should use military force to achieve democracy in the Arab world.

Military Intervention to Achieve Democracy?

Contrary to what many believe the U.S. can not bring democracy to the Arab world through force. "America, the first modern democracy, has been spreading democracy, at its most active, it has done this by force of arms..." (Muravchik, 2004, p. 10). There is strong opposition to U.S. imposed democracy in the Arab world. With the current U.S. war in Iraq, it is likely that the Arab world will become less democratic and more anti-American. A military attack by the United States and the installation of a new government in any country will not promote democratization in the Arab world, but instead will support the view of many that the United States has shifted from its focus of 'War on Terror' to a 'War against Islam and the Muslim world'.

"The Bush administration's assertion that the demand for democracy in various countries of the Middle East is a direct result of the US military intervention in Iraq is nonsense...the recent democratic moves in Lebanon, Egypt and the Palestinian territories have casual roots that long predate U.S. arrival in Iraq" (Clark, 2006, pp. 40, 42).

Democracy can not be built without the common people working for it. It cannot be imposed from the top down or from the outside in. Outsiders may be able to help by applying pressure on dictatorial or authoritarian regimes, but something to keep in mind is that you can not force democracy on anyone. Democracy can not be imposed, it must come from within. The people have a right to shape their society as they see fit.

Very few Arabs directly associate signs of real change with the United States. In a survey conducted last year, by Shibley Telhami, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates:

“The vast majority of Arabs did not believe that American policy in Iraq was motivated by the spread of democracy in the region. Even more troubling, most people believed the Middle East became less democratic after the Iraq war, and that Iraqis were worse off than they had been before the war” (Telhami, 2008).

Most Arabs believe that the United States is pursuing its own national and economic interests in the Arab region, that Arab oil is the only incentive that has lead the superpower to invade these countries; and to depose dictators of the region when they disagree with U.S. policies.

Analysis

Democracy is the choice of the modern age for all peoples of the world and the rescue ship for political regimes particularly in the Arab world. It is the means by which the Arabs can achieve security, stability, development and a better future for their countries. Human rights are tightly connected to democracy and the state of law and order. Therefore, we should remove anything that contradicts this and stand against all forms of discrimination, oppression and exploitation.

During the 1990s, the Arab world witnessed revolutionary transformations towards democratic systems in other regions of the world. Many of the Arab governments started to cope with these changes by trying to preserve the interests of the ruling elites by becoming more intolerant of democracy. Others seemed to search for another way to protect the privileges they had inherited over decades by exploring how making democratic changes could protect their interests. Many things pointed to inevitable democratic reforms, such as a deep rooted concept in the Shura for religious and social values, the link between non-democratic systems of colonialism and underdevelopment that cause an increase in international and regional isolation, the increasing size of the information and communication revolution, trends toward globalization, the growing demand for participation in political decisions through a democratic process, protecting the interests of the regime and prolonging its rule, the growing influence of Islamic movements, and the mounting pressure from the west on the Arab states to apply some form of democratic system.

Current attempt to impose liberal democratic institutions in the Arab world, predominately through US pressure, are counterproductive to democratization. Multi-party elections do not, in and of themselves, constitute a route out of authoritarianism. Within a context in which authoritarianism retains its hegemony, elections may serve to consolidate the power of groups who do not have an interest in supporting the long-term process of democratization. The path toward greater democracy lies in a position against authoritarianism. Toward this end, it is essential that a space is maintained in which civil society actors are able to debate and discuss the future polity, in the hope that this will enable the formulation of a counter hegemonic project in support of democratization.

However, the establishment of a multi-party system and free and fair elections is significant in that it consolidates democracy. Once in place, democratic institutions shape actions in order to maintain democracy. Observation of countries experiencing political transitions

demonstrates that this example applies to only a minority of cases. In most countries, regime splits have not lead to democratization but to a 'grey area' in which countries occupy a diversity of positions between authoritarianism and democracy.

The Arab world has failed to experience a transition to democracy not because civil society actors do not support democracy, but because there does not exist a consensus that challenges the post-independence hegemony underpinning authoritarianism. In order for authoritarianism to be dismantled, it is necessary that civil society create a new consensus that challenges the whole complex of ideological and institutional structures of authoritarianism.

To achieve an Arab democratic regime the Arab world must strive to build and develop a system and mechanism that will provide opportunities for all members of society, regardless of political and social tendencies to submit ideas and opinions and participate in the management of decision making in the state. They must evaluate the work of governments and organizations, approve what will develop the nation, and remove what hinders its advancement. Such trends must work to unify the Arab people and their nation, not divide it, dictatorship governments should not be replaced by dictatorship of law or social groups or parties.

The application of democracy in a proper form, on the basis of freedom for all, with a peaceful transition of power will reduce the opportunity for violence in achieving political objectives, will limit extremist phenomena, direct energies towards construction and ongoing contribution, non-discrimination, and combining community and state programs to unite trends among governments and people towards prosperity and progress. To establish a model for Arab democracy it must be established on the following basic rules: fair, free, and legitimate legislative elections must be carried out, with political pluralism and the right to peaceful transfer of power, the government must be accountable to the people and subjugated to permanent questioning, consideration of general human rights, particularly with regard to the freedoms and rights of citizenship and equality, as sacred matters. Any violation of any of these rights is to be considered an assault on the entire society, development of legislation and regulations to build rules and the foundations of contemporary civil society.

Conclusion

The Arab democratic option is a realistic option in terms of circumstances and the historic development, in terms of compatibility with the values of society and civilization of the Arab nations, and in terms of compatibility with the regional and international transformations. The possibility of achieving democracy in the Arab world is real. The trend towards the acceleration of the process of democratic change in the Arab world preserves the efforts of governments and political forces, and exempts the nation from the internal media and political conflicts. Freedom has become a demand among most Arab social groups. Therefore, the Arab governments of today are invited to: expand the margin of political freedoms, and adopt programs of democratic transformations according to Arab traditions and values.

The Arab world stands at the doors of important strategic shifts in democratic transformations. The big question for ruling regimes and political forces is how they deal with this new phase, will the Arabs succeed in building a model for an Arab democratic system in the twenty-first century? The new generations of government and society in the Arab world must answer this question clearly and accurately, so that the winds of political change can transform the image and history of the Arab world.

This study shows that the future of democracy in the Arab world is surrounded by ambiguities and many questions, nevertheless, the realities of democratic transformation is inevitable. The world is changing rapidly, and the Arab world is receiving these changes with a welcoming attitude toward new ideas of freedom and democracy. Though the Arab authoritarian regimes seem to cling to their powers, this study illustrates the possibility of democracy in the Arab world. It is apparent that there is a new atmosphere being created, one that will prepare the region for radical changes in terms of replacing authoritarian regimes with democratic governments. There are lot of things that are facilitating Arabs citizens in realizing their goals of civil liberty and a democratic process, these factors are the ongoing variables that reside in education, mass media, internet and more importantly globalization. The unchanged leaders of the region can only buy so much time, what they try to sell to their peoples, to ignore their bad government, is no longer bought. The peoples of the Arab world have spoken, their voices demand liberty, and democratic and economic reforms. They will not stop calling for change until they see actual transformations in the peaceful transition of power, with limited terms, civilian control of the army, good records of human rights established, free and fair elections, or an elimination of their dictators and their corrupt ideologies.

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